

Reformation: Thinking New Thoughts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Col. 3:1, 2; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; 10:3–5; Rom. 12:2, 3; John 10:10; Matt. 5:13–15.*

Memory Text: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Colossians 3:1, 2, NKJV*).

Isaac Watts is credited with more than seven hundred fifty hymns, many of which are sung by thousands of Christians today. On one occasion, a parade was held in London in Watts' honor. People thronged the streets to get a glimpse of this famous man. As his carriage passed under a balcony filled with spectators, one lady was astonished that this short, elderly man now hunched over in old age had written such mighty hymns. She shrieked, “What, you are Isaac Watts?” Watts motioned for the carriage to stop. He stretched himself up to his full frame and exclaimed, “Madame, could I in fancy grasp the poles or hold creation in my span, I would still be measured by my mind, for the mind is the measure of a man.”

Isaac Watts was right. The mind is the measure of a man, and reformation is about our minds. If we have a reformation in our thinking, we will have a reformation in our actions. Reformation occurs as the Holy Spirit brings our thoughts into harmony with Christ's thoughts. When that happens, our actions will follow.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 14.*

The Mind Matters

Our thoughts will ultimately dictate our behavior. The way that we think influences the way that we act. The converse is also true. Repeated actions influence our thoughts. The Christian is a “new creation.” Old thinking patterns have been replaced by new ones (*2 Cor. 5:17*).

When a sailboat embarks on its seaward journey, the sails are set. The set sails give the boat its direction. Throughout the journey, the sails need to be reset in order to maintain the correct course. If the sails are neglected, the boat will veer off course very quickly. Like those sails, our thoughts give direction to our spiritual lives. When the apostle Paul admonishes Christians to “set your mind on things above” (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*), he is urging us to focus our thoughts heavenward. Our minds are shaped by what we put into them. Our thoughts are molded by what we spend our time dwelling upon.

What miracle of grace takes place in our own lives as we behold God’s glory in His Word? *2 Cor. 3:17, 18*.

As we behold Jesus in His Word, we are changed. New thoughts replace old ones. By beholding Him, we become more like Him. “It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 555.

Reformation is all about looking to Jesus. It is about Jesus filling our minds. It is about Jesus shaping our thoughts. It is about Jesus guiding our actions. When we behold Jesus, He will lead us to higher standards than a mere rigidity to rules. We cannot really look to Jesus and remain the same. When we think His thoughts, we have only one desire, and that is to do His will.

What counsel would you give to a person struggling to make Jesus a priority in his or her thinking process? What does the Bible mean when it talks about “beholding” or “looking to Jesus”?

The Mind's Filters

There are some parents who are so concerned about their children's Internet viewing habits that they have installed filters to block out certain sites. Others have done something similar with television. The purpose of these electronic filters is to let some things in while keeping others out. God has provided a "spiritual filter" for our minds. It has been carefully crafted to allow only those things into our minds that will build our spiritual experience with Jesus.

What practical instruction does Paul give to his fellow Christians as a filter designed to guard their minds from the intoxicating influences of evil? How does this counsel apply today to our television, Internet, and movie-viewing habits? *Phil. 4:7, 8; Rom. 12:2.*

Here is one simple reality. It is not possible to develop deeply spiritual thoughts if we feed our minds with violence, immorality, greed, and materialism. Our senses are the gateway to our minds. If our minds are bombarded with the stimulating scenes of Hollywood's entertainment, they will be molded by these sensual experiences rather than by the principles of God's Word. Multiple millions of dollars are spent by media producers to manipulate our emotions, condition our thinking, and shape our values. We can be assured that the basic question that these entertainment gurus ask is not, "How can these productions prepare people for the coming return of Jesus?" The bottom line that motivates them the most is money. Seventh-day Adventist Christians preparing for the second coming of Christ should reflect carefully before sacrificing their souls on the altar of the world's entertainment.

There is a great cathedral with three large wooden entrance doors in Milan, Italy. Etched above the left-hand door are these words: "All that pleases is for a moment." Over the right-hand door, these words stand out in bold relief: "All that troubles is but for a moment." And emblazoned in bold letters over the center door is this poignant phrase: "That alone endures which is eternal." Ask yourself: How often do you think about what's eternal? How do your choices reflect those thoughts?

The Mind's Safeguard

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 4:7, NIV*). This is a wonderful promise but one that we have to actively seek in order to make it real in our lives.

There are many ways in which we can let down our guard. We can let in the cesspool of this world's entertainment. Our minds might be overcome by anger, bitterness, and resentment. They may be submerged in an ocean of intoxicating pleasure or addictive habits. The good news is that Jesus has promised to safeguard our minds—if we let Him.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. When Paul says that the “weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (*NKJV*) but spiritual, what does he mean? What are carnal weapons? What are spiritual weapons? The apostle also talks about “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (*2 Cor. 10:5, NKJV*). What does he mean, and how can it be accomplished?

Billy Graham is quoted as saying, “You cannot stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair.” In other words, thoughts will rush into our minds. There are varying sights, sounds, and smells that stimulate certain thoughts. Different experiences evoke different emotions. We cannot always choose the thoughts that race through our minds. We can choose whether we will dwell upon them and allow them to dominate our thinking. To bring each thought into obedience to Christ is to surrender our minds to Jesus. Carnal thoughts are not banished by merely wishing them away. They are driven out as the mind is filled with something else. The mind focused on the positive principles of God's Word is the mind “safeguarded” and “kept” by God's grace from the wiles of the evil one.

When Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5, NKJV*), what specifically does he mean? How is it possible for us to have the mind of Christ? Where does the word *let*, or *allow*, in the text place responsibility for change?

Mind/Body Relationships

The ancient Greeks taught a form of dualism; that is, they believed that there was a great distinction between our bodies and our souls. In contrast, Scripture teaches that human beings are an integrated unit of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Whatever affects one part of the human frame affects all parts. The disciples taught that physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health were interconnected and could not be separated.

How is this idea reflected in 1 Thessalonians 5:23?

For the New Testament believers, physical, mental, and emotional well-being are indissolubly linked to spiritual well-being. The apostle Paul appealed to believers to “glorify God in their bodies.” He believed that all humanity was bought with a price and we are not our own (*1 Cor. 6:19, 20*). Caring for our bodies by adopting a more healthful lifestyle does much more than add a few more years to our lives; done with the right motives, it can be an act of worship itself.

How do Romans 12:2, 3; John 10:10; and 1 Corinthians 10:31 show the intimate relationship between our physical and spiritual health?

The Holy Spirit does not limit Himself to one aspect of our lives when He convicts us of our need for growth. Reformation is not one-dimensional. The Spirit longs to bring our lives into total conformity to the will of Christ in every area. If there are physical lifestyle practices not in harmony with His will, God invites us to surrender them for His glory. Satan wants to control our minds through our bodies; Jesus longs to control our bodies through our minds. Our bodies are a temple, not a funhouse. By following heaven’s principles, we can live more joy-filled, productive, abundant, healthy lives.

What are the personal experiences that have shown you just how inseparable the link is between our physical and spiritual natures? What choices can you make to help to bring them into more beneficial harmony?

Images of Influence

There are numerous images that Jesus uses to describe Himself and His church. One is “light.” He is “the light of the world” (*John 8:12*). He is also the “true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (*John 1:9, NKJV*). He encourages us to “walk while you have the light” and “believe in the light” (*John 12:35, 36, NKJV*).

Compare Matthew 5:13–15 with Philippians 2:14–16. What is our Lord’s goal for His people in this world? What does that mean in practical terms? How can we be what we are called to be?

The goal of all revival and reformation is to allow the light of Christ’s love, grace, and truth to shine through our lives. Light shines in contrast to darkness. Jesus has called His people to live a lifestyle distinctly different from that which is lived in the world in order to demonstrate the superiority of His way of life. He calls us to be compassionate, caring, and concerned in a world of selfishness, greed, and egotism. He calls us to uphold high standards in entertainment in a society intoxicated with pleasure (*Col. 3:1, 2*). He calls us to healthful living at a time when millions are dying too young from self-inflicted degenerative diseases (*John 10:10*). In the midst of an immodest, sex-centered, jaded generation, Jesus calls us to something different. He calls us to modesty, propriety, and moral purity (*1 Pet. 3:3, 4*).

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah gave a clarion call to Israel for reformation about seven hundred years before Christ. His words speak with relevance to a church waiting for the return of our Lord. “ ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’ ” (*Isa. 55:8, 9, NKJV*). God’s ideal for His church and for us as individuals is higher than what we can imagine. All of heaven longs to reveal His character of love through His people.

Look at the standards that mark your lifestyle. In what ways (if any) do they reveal that you are a follower of Jesus and that your life is set on something other than this fading world?

Further Study: “Many profess to be on the Lord’s side, but they are not; the weight of all their actions is on Satan’s side. By what means shall we determine whose side we are on? Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Upon whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are on the Lord’s side, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. We have no friendship with the world; we have consecrated all that we have and are to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 262.

“It is the privilege of every soul to be a living channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Savior’s love. All heaven is waiting for channels through which can be poured the holy oil to be a joy and blessing to human hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 419.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What terms does Paul use to describe the high calling of God’s people? *2 Cor. 5:18–20; 6:17, 18*. What do these images mean in practical terms? How do our lives show that Paul is talking about us?
- ❷ If we are honest, we can read and claim all the Bible promises we want, but unless we make a conscious choice at the moment of temptation to set our minds on the things that we should, we will succumb to temptation. What principles or practices have you found helpful in controlling your thoughts when tempted?
- ❸ What would you respond to someone who says that, “Yes, my thoughts are not always what they should be, but my actions and lifestyle are above reproach”?
- ❹ Along with the wonderful spiritual and doctrinal truths that we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists, we have the health message, as well. How can we learn to better integrate these principles into our lives and into our outreach and witness? What role should the health message have in revival and reformation?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Colossians 3:1, 2*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Explore the relationship between thoughts and actions as outlined in the New Testament.

Feel: Identify with the New Testament writers in sensing the overwhelming importance of being careful about what enters his or her mind.

Do: Follow Christ's example of living a life of holiness, dedicated solely to pleasing God in every aspect of his or her lifestyle.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Transformed Minds

A What counsel does the New Testament give regarding the preservation of our minds from the unbiblical, non-Christian influences of this world?

B Read Philippians 2:5 regarding Paul's statement on the mind of Christ. What does Paul mean? What positive things can we do to reflect Jesus' mind more fully?

II. Feel: Transformed Feelings

A What basic principle should govern the feelings of a committed Christian?

B What can we do to handle strong desires to indulge in lifestyle practices in the areas of amusement, pleasure, health, and dress that are incompatible with the revealed will of God?

III. Do: Transformed Actions

A Where does all change begin? What roles do prayer, Bible study, and the Holy Spirit play in creating reformatory changes in our lifestyle habits?

B What is our motive in choosing to allow the Holy Spirit to reform our characters?

► **Summary:** Transformed thoughts lead to transformed actions. Our feelings are not safe guides. Our choices to yield to the convictions of the Holy Spirit, in spite of our emotions, and receive Heaven's power for change, are the pathway to transformed characters.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Romans 12:2*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: *As we submit our minds to the influence of the Holy Spirit, He will transform our thinking and our actions. Reflecting the light of Christ’s love to a world consumed with pleasure and imprisoned in the grip of its own self-indulgent habits begins with transformed thoughts.*

Just for Teachers: *Share the story of the hymn “Take Time to Be Holy” with your class in order to stimulate class discussion about the need to spend time in the presence of God and to fill our minds with divine, heavenly thoughts.*

William Dunn Longstaff was a Christian businessman living in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He was extremely successful in his businesses, and he heavily supported his local church. He also made donations to William Booth of the Salvation Army, as well as to the evangelistic efforts of Dwight Moody. One day as he sat in church listening to a missionary from China preach on 1 Peter 1:16, “‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (*NKJV*), something stirred deep within his soul. He sensed that God was leading him to a richer, fuller spiritual experience. He recognized that change—growth in grace—comes to those who spend time with Jesus and choose to allow Him to transform their thinking. So that evening in 1882 he went home and wrote the old familiar hymn that we sing so often: “Take Time to Be Holy.” It is found in our *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 500. The hymn is the heart-cry of a busy Christian businessman who longed to allow God to shape his thinking as he spent time in His presence.

Let’s read the first two verses of the hymn together and then reflect on its application to our own lives.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord; abide in Him always, and feed on His word. Make friends of God’s children, help those who are weak, forgetting in nothing, His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on; spend much time in secret with Jesus alone; by looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be; thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Discuss With the Class: Which phrase of this hymn especially speaks to your heart? What impresses you most about it?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Conformed or Transformed (*Review Romans 12:2 with your class.*)

Each one of us is either being conformed, or fashioned, into the mold of this world, or being transformed into the image of Christ daily. The apostle Paul states it clearly in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (*NKJV*). The J. B. Phillips New Testament translation of this passage puts it this way, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.” The American Standard Version translates it, “And be not fashioned according to this world. . . .”

The opposite of being conformed, fashioned, or squeezed into the mold of this world is being transformed into the image of Christ by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word for “transformed” is the word *metamorphoo*, from which we get the word *metamorphosis*. It is used to describe a butterfly that breaks out of its cocoon and experiences a new life. The Bible uses *metamorphoo* to describe the transformation that takes place in the life of the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit (*2 Cor. 3:18*). Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the new birth—a new way of thinking and living (*John 3:1–21*). This transformation of thought always leads to a transformation of actions. Paul calls it “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (*Titus 3:5, NKJV*). He speaks of the inward man, or our thinking patterns, being renewed day by day (*2 Cor. 4:16*).

Consider This: What we put into our minds will determine whether we are conformed or transformed, whether our thoughts are fashioned after the will of Christ or whether they are squeezed into the mold of this world. What is the Bible’s definition of a transformed life, and how does that take place? What does it mean to be renewed day by day? Why, then, must renewal take place on a daily basis? What happens to our thinking patterns if it does not?

II. Two Minds (*Review Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:5; Colossians 3:1, 2 with your class.*)

The apostle Paul admonishes us to “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5, NKJV*). The word *let* means “to allow” or

“permit.” *The Pulpit Commentary* makes an interesting observation regarding this passage. It translates it as, “Mind . . . the things which the Lord Jesus minded” then adds that Paul encourages us to “love what he [Jesus] loved . . . hate what he hated; the thoughts, desires, motives, of the Christian should be the thoughts, desires, motives, which filled the sacred heart of Jesus Christ our Lord. We must strive to imitate him, to reproduce his image, not only in the outward, but even in the inner life.”—“The Epistle to the Philippians” (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 59.

The Epistle to the Romans continues this theme with the expressions “the flesh” and “the Spirit.” In Romans 8:5, Paul urges the Roman Christians to “set their minds” on the things of the Spirit, not on the things of the flesh. This is similar to his counsel to the church at Colossae when he admonishes Christians to always “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*). The central issue here is threefold: where we set our minds, the tendency of our thoughts, and what we are dwelling upon.

Consider This: We will become like that with which we fill our minds. If we want to think spiritual, Christlike thoughts, then filling our mind with spiritual, Christlike material is critically important. What does the apostle Paul mean when he urges the Roman Christians to set their minds on things above?

III. Preparing for His Return (*Review 1 Thessalonians 5:23 with your class.*)

The Bible does not leave out any aspects of our lives in the light of preparation for the Lord’s return. Paul’s concluding appeal to the Thessalonians is, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely” (*1 Thess. 5:23, NKJV*). The Greek word for “completely” is *holoteles*, which means “complete in all aspects.” Nothing can be held back from Christ, who longs to transform our total thinking, habits, and lifestyle practices. The sinful attitude or practice that we consciously withhold will gradually erode our spirituality. Cherished sin undermines faith.

Consider This: A traveler entering a muddy Alaskan highway some time ago reported seeing this sign: “Consider the rut you will drive in carefully because you will be in it for the next 500 miles.” How does this relate to our lifestyle habits as Christians?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Share a personal testimony in which the Holy Spirit convicted you to surrender some area of your life to Jesus. If it

was difficult for you to surrender that attitude or habit, briefly share your struggle with your class. How did God give you the victory in that area of your life?

Thought Questions:

1 Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind any habit or practice in your life that you are unwilling to surrender completely to Jesus.

2 Why is it such a struggle to surrender some of our cherished attitudes or habits?

Application Question:

1 If the Holy Spirit has impressed you with something specific, why not surrender that thing to Him right now?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: God’s goal for our lives is that we personally experience the joy of knowing Him and rejoice in the wonder of His transforming grace so that we may be “lights” in a world of moral darkness.

Read Philippians 2:14–17 aloud in groups of two or three. What practical counsel does the apostle give to both the Philippians and to us today about the ways in which we can “shine as lights” in a world of darkness? What does the apostle mean that we are to “do all things without complaining and disputing” (*vs. 14, NKJV*)? How can we “[hold] fast the word of life” (*vs. 16, NKJV*)? What does that mean?

What does Paul mean when he talks to the church about being “poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith” (*vs. 17, NKJV*)?

How do each of your responses to the questions above influence the choices you make in each area of your life every day?