

Perish the Thought!

by Dan S. Shipley

While visiting a local area hospital recently, I was amused at their curb-side signs which read: “**Don't Even THINK About Parking Here!**” Such novel wording reveals an insight into human nature. When the motorist begins to contemplate leaving his car in a no parking zone, he is apt to think, “It’ll only be for a little while,” or “I’m in a hurry,” or “well, everyone else does it, why shouldn’t I?” Those who think thusly are likely to be found parked at the red curb. So, the admonition **not to even think about it** is appropriate – and not only for those tempted to park illegally.

Indeed, the Bible teaches of a serious correlation between our thinking and our temptations. “*For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings...*” (**Matthew 15:19**). It is “*from within*” that all these evil things proceed and defile the man (**Mark 7:21**). As someone has observed, “What we sow in thought, we reap in deed.” How true! **Thinking about it** is the prelude to practically every sin committed. Like the motorist rationalizing about the no-parking zone, most find it easy to mentally “sell” themselves on their temptations – especially, after many weakening thought–rehearsals. What sinner has ever failed to find his own “extenuating circumstances” to minimize or excuse his sin? “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes*” (**Proverbs 21:2**) – even when he does that which he **knows** to be wrong. Maybe he didn’t **plan** to be wrong, but then he didn’t **plan NOT** to either! This is not to say, of course, that all who have evil thoughts will necessarily involve themselves in evil deeds. It largely depends on what is done with the evil thought. If it is dismissed at once (“don’t even **THINK** about it”), it may do no harm. However, if it is nurtured, savored, and rehearsed, it is likely to find expression. As someone has said, “We can’t help it if birds fly overhead, but we need not let them build nests in our hair.” If we fail to control our thoughts, it is not likely that we will control our actions.

For this reason we need more teaching and preaching aimed at the **HEART** of ungodly conduct. True, evil deeds must be condemned, but we must not overlook the heart from which they are launched. If we can eliminate the hate we can eliminate the murder and countless lesser conflicts (**1 John 3:15; Matthew 5:21-24**). Handling lust at the beginning will prove an effective deterrent to fornication and adultery (**Matthew 5:27-28**). When we are able to remove envy, jealousy, and anxiety from the heart, we will have spared the world their troublesome manifestations – not to mention all the misery and heartache associated therewith. How much better off we would all be if we could just remember to **not even think about such things!** “Can’t help it” you say?

Peter evidently thought men could control their thinking. He encourages “*girding up the loins of your mind*” (**1 Peter 1:13**). Paul likewise admonishes “*bringing every thought into captivity to be obedience of Christ*” (**2 Corinthians 10:5**) and to “*think on these things*” (**Philippians 4:8**). Can’t help it? Perish the thought!

Editor’s Note: Dan Shipley was a gospel preacher from Texas who also was an avid golfer. Dan played football for SMU, and later became a gospel preacher associated with Robert F. Turner in the paper they published entitled “Plain Talk.” Dan was a humble man with many wonderful traits. He passed away in 2011 at the age of 82. He was also a personal friend of mine as we worshiped together in gospel meetings and played golf in East Texas. This article was published in July, 1981, but it is still perfectly appropriate today.

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