

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Genesis 3	Title: Ideas & Images	Date: 04.22.18
Website Writeup:			
We begin now looking at how spiritual formation affects change in the 6 different aspects of humanity. We begin this week looking at Thought, and specifically the Ideas & Images which govern us. Are they from God, or do they originate from unredeemed Humanity?			

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

(Title Slide up for introductions)

We've done a lot of work, from this point we'll talk of how spiritual formation affects change in the 6 different aspects of the human personality (thought, feeling, choice, body, social context & soul) realizing each affects the other in a holistic way. We begin with *Thought*, and will be there for a while.

Genesis 3:1 says...Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

This, we know, is the beginning of the account of the Fall - the birth of sin in humanity. When relationship was severed between God & Humankind. Notice the overthrow of humanity was achieved by one short conversation. It wasn't by force. Not loud. Not with physical domination. Since any of that would've sent humanity running back into the embrace of God. It was by simple soft-spoken idea. A question. A doubt. An injection of thought by which we were coaxed out of God's arms. Satan introduced the idea that God was holding out on them, that he wasn't working in their favor. A thought he takes further in the conversation with Eve leading to sin's birth in the adoption of the idea, "God can't be trusted, and we must choose how we will live." Satan shot our spiritual life dead with one thought-bullet.

As Thought set this in motion, it's where we begin in our spiritual transformation; our path of heart renovation. We have freedom & choice in thought, but we're not as free as we'd like to think. Take 10 seven year olds & ask them to draw a house & although there'll be some individuality to their results, most of them will look shockingly similar in the concept of what house-ness means. Revealing our thinking is vastly influenced by each other & thought is passed on. Read Francis Shaeffer's *Escape From Reason*, and you'll see quickly how Western thought's been shaped & formed throughout history with events & voices, and also how tied we are to it's dictations. Read *Crime & Punishment*, by Dostoyevsky, and you'll realize how ideological thought & philosophies drive our actions to commit even the most atrocious acts we normally wouldn't. Read *Of Human Bondage*, by Somerset Maugham, and notice how ideas of self & others keep us in the bondage of insecurity & fear our whole lives.

We see the power of thought in the recent development of Personhood Theory, where the argument for abortion is no longer about the question, "When does life start?"

Everyone now agrees it begins at conception, which you'd think would be a win for Pro-Lifers, but it's not. Since the new question is, "When does personhood begin?" Personhood Theory creates a new category: 'the human non-person'. Since in the postmodern mind bodily matter is unimportant, only personhood matters. As a result, there are certain bioethicists & other voices who claim personhood doesn't even begin until into years after birth. Therefore, they advocate, although a body is a living breathing human, it's not a person until it reaches a certain cognitive level. Therefore, it can be disposed of without any moral quandary. They advocate for not only late term abortions, but aborting life even into the toddler years. Thought is very powerful.

Our thoughts are *all the ways in which we are conscious of things* from memory to belief, from image to idea, from perception to mental picture. They govern everything about us in some way, and are intimately tied to our feelings. Feelings can even be directed by thought. We can choose our thoughts, but not necessarily choose our feelings. Thought enables us to grasp the reality before us, and dip into that which isn't reality yet, but may be in the future. *For instance, if you're a Star Trek fan, you know that many a gadget imagined on that show are now a reality, such as wireless video conferencing. Thought must run ahead in creative ways to plan for the future & see that which isn't there yet become a later reality - very reflective of our Creator God in whose image we're made if you think about it. There are four main factors of thought: ideas, images, information & our ability to think; with the two most powerful being ideas & images. We'll begin with those two today.*

Ideas are the general models, patterns of interpretation of reality, historically developed & socially shared. They're sometimes linked with our beliefs, but not dependent on them - which is why we can live by ideas which are vastly contradictory to our stated beliefs. Thoughts interpret our world. Our system of ideas grow out of the teachings, expectations, and behaviors of family & community around us. We get our ideas together, but they're always changing & shifting without our knowing it. Many feel their ideas concerning America are different than their parents, yet both feel correct in their convictions - no one can pinpoint the exact time of shift in thinking, it just morphed little by little over time & opinions diverge.

Some examples of ideas are: freedom, education, happiness, 'the American Dream', science, progress, death, home, feminine & masculine roles, Christian, Muslim, church, democracy, fairness, justice, family, evolution, God, the secular, etc. What we find is, Satan attacked right at our idea of God. What we think of Him. How we perceive Him. He distorted what, or who God was in our thoughts. It was like a silent bomb going off sending everything on a trajectory out & away from God. No longer are our ideas linked to divinely ordered peace, love & unity sustaining life. Rather it's destructive entropy, leading to death. We're made in the image of God, an image shattered by the Fall, still reflecting Him in some ways, and in others not - only in Jesus is that image restored.

Ideas have a strong hold; we can be so rooted in them we stop thinking. When ideas get challenged in a person like that, the person comes out swinging since they feel their very existence & identity is being threatened. And in conflicting thoughts society splinters off

into different camps. Ideas of safety, justice, true systematic, societal or individual change, or healthy morality can't be implemented & achieved through any political system, our outside organizational control. Those systems only run as well as the character of the people within them. The worlds recourse is only coercion & control. Scripture teaches those concepts are only achieved through the implementation of the gospel on the hearts of people, the kingdom reign of God within people. Internal change - replacing the idea Satan injected in Adam, with the true image of God as found in Christ via the Scriptural story. That & that alone will make for healthy systems. Loving evangelism is always the answer.

Good spiritual formation will recognize the idea systems in us & our culture which drive away from God - and it will transform them to be inline with the Scriptures (Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 15:13) - the pursuit of the Kingdom of God. God's reign reestablished in our thoughts.

As Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Our dilemma was born of evil forces, and is perpetuated by them. Forces which reinforce evil systems of ideas which drive us & the rest of humanity away from the Divine. *Those who've been rescued from the dominion of darkness & been brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col 1:13), are called to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (Php 2:5). Called to be transformed in the renewal of our minds (Rm 12:1-2). Contemplate his glory as we are transformed into his image (2 Cor 3:18). To be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) & overflow hope to the world around us (Rm 15:13).*

But transformation & true change from darkness to light in our thinking is gut wrenching divine work, we can't achieve on our own. It affects people around us; even *Jesus warned*, His message would bring division in relationships. Luke 12:51, ⁵¹ *Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.* Then he goes on to describe the idea that the Gospel will even divide even family relationships.

Jesus' idea of the kingdom of God got him crucified (although death couldn't keep him down). His message was a challenge to the political systems, and of all the thought systems of control which set themselves against the kingdom reign of God. He didn't storm the steps of city hall. He didn't need to, they'd drag him there later for his idea that the kingdom of God was there, among them, in them, and that we're first & foremost in allegiance to God the Father. *As Satan quietly injected his idea, Jesus simply did the same. Satan conquered the world with one conversation, Jesus took it back with one act of sacrifice. The idea of Jesus challenges every aspect of our lives including the relationships we're involved in.*

Another part of thought equally as powerful as Ideas are **Images**. Unlike ideas, they're concrete, specific & heavily laden with feeling. For instance, dreadlocks as an image usually have feelings linked with them (positive or negative) & our thoughts typically go

to free love, Rastafarianism, throwing off convention & smoking weed. But if you know me, I'm the polar opposite of these things. My internal thinking doesn't match the societal image people have ascribed to a man with dreads. Think about baggy pants worn down below the buttocks & the emotional reaction people have to them. What does the image of the American Flag provoke in you? I saw a guy the other day with old sneakers, baggy green sweatpants, an oversized Eagles satin jacket, and an Eagles stocking hat on. I equate that image with Delaware County. Compare the imagery in Six:Eight to Good Shepherd & the emotion we have towards either style of worship & church life.

Jesus himself knew the power of imagery & became one himself by his death on the cross. That image means different things to different people. How do you think the Vikings reacted to the Cross? Or Muslims during the Crusades & now? It means something different to them than it does to me.

Ideas & Images are powerful, they determine how we regard everything in daily life. They control the meanings we assign to things, and can even blind us to something plainly right before our noses. For instance, if my image of women is ungodly, born out of a life of visually ingesting images less than flattering of them, or which only focuses on their bodies for the purposes of satiating my fleshly desires - then I'll not be able to appreciate, learn from, or value their intellect, or opinion. I'll overlook their gifting & not utilize them in certain roles they would thrive in. Ideas & images can be either good or bad. And many are strongholds of evil in this world.

Thought is the primary way in which the Evil One seeks to undermine God's kingdom plans in our lives. The most important thing in our life is our idea or notion of God and the corresponding images which we relate to our idea of Him. AW Tozer once said:

"That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before its finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God.

A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God."

Our image of God is, to all effective purposes, the theology out of which we live, be it correct or incorrect. Which is why it is of utmost importance to willingly put ourselves in the receiving position to have our life's hard disk rewritten. I did a sermon called Palimpsests once. A palimpsest was a tablet in ancient times covered in wax in which

they'd scratch writing. Then somehow print from that. And each time they'd scratch out the old writing to reuse the tablet, often they wouldn't scrape it well enough and the old writing would bleed through in the printing. Our lives are sometimes like that, in that we have that old writing bleeding through. We've not allowed the Word through the Holy Spirit to scrape away fully the lies we believe. We've not rewritten who God is on our hearts which in essence defines who we truly are.

Henri Nouwen noted, *"Success, popularity and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of a much larger temptation of self-rejection. We have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us 'Beloved'. Being the 'Beloved' constitutes the core truth of our existence."* (understand, self-rejection is different than self-denial.)

We see this very thing in the rest of the story of the Fall - what was it's affect? To set the stage, Satan has lied, they've bought it. *And now...the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and ***I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.***" (Ge 3:8-10).*

Our image or idea of God gets twisted, and immediately our view of self is twisted. Shame is the automatic & natural result. Chaos ensues as people search for fulfillment & love in all the wrong places. We live in a time when God is calling to humanity, "Where are you?," and as Christians we're called to not only answer him, "Here I am, I was naked so I hid," but also, "Here is my brother or sister, come meet your Maker." As we do prayer ministry & spiritual counseling with others, we confront wrong images & ideas of God in them, working to loosen their grip on people in order that the Holy Spirit can restore proper image of self to reflect a proper image of God via the Living Word.

Outside of God's initial work of salvation, and constant supply of grace to us, the greatest tools we have are the constant work of building on these good images of Jesus via the Scriptures. It begins with us & overflows to others. This is where our war is mostly waged, in our minds, our thoughts. Taking each one captive to Christ is to match our thoughts with who God really is as he's revealed himself in the Scriptures, and in our lives as we walk those out with the Holy Spirit. We want to increasingly...*see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ* (2 Co 4:4).

We want to realize & practice what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:2-5, *³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

To live in this matter we must admit & submit to what Isaiah said in 55:8-9, ⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” **But we also remember, ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Pe 1:3).**

The transformation of thought can be seen in Paul’s writing to the Colossians in 3:1-17. *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This gives us the mental image of the Old Self as compared to the New. The ideas & images of unredeemed humanity don’t treat all people with Truth & love. Humanity governed by the mind of God does, as it’s unconcerned with racial, cultural or nationalistic differences - all are the one New Humanity in Christ! Since **as 1 Corinthians 2:16b states, “...we have the mind of Christ,”** and **Philippians 2:5 instructs, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...”**

Next week we will explore more of how we see this transformation occur as we explore the other two factors of human thought; information, and our ability to think. We end today by giving our Syrian sisters some good thoughts (Explain).