

Lies That Keep Us Stuck

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Spiritual Growth: How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. Series

Romans 12:2

In many ways, 2007 could be called “The Year of Finishing Second” for us here in Ohio. The Buckeye Football Team, of course, lost to Florida in the National Championship Game. The Buckeye Basketball Team lost to Florida in the National Championship Game. The Buckeye Soccer Team lost to Wake Forest in the National Championship Game. The Cleveland Indians came in second in the American League. Even Mt. Union came in second in the Division 3 National Football Championship game losing to the University of Wisconsin Whitewater. The Columbus Destroyers came in second in the Arena Football League losing to the San Jose Saber-Cats in the national championship game.

In sum, you could say that Ohio sports teams are the Mitt Romneys of the athletic world – we always come in second.

But 2007 also will go down as “The Year of Lying and Cheating” in sports. In college football, 25 Florida State players were suspended from the team because of an academic cheating scandal. In pro-football, the New England Patriots were caught cheating using a video camera that stole signals from the New York Jets in their opening game. In pro-basketball, an NBA referee was caught cheating in the way he officiated games in order to pay off gambling debts. In pro-baseball, dozens of major league baseball players, including Roger Clemmons, were named as cheating through their use of steroids and human growth hormones.

In track and field, Marian Jones was stripped of her Olympic medals because she was found to have been cheating through the use of illegal drugs. There were cheating scandals in NASCAR, cheating in Formula 1 racing, cheating again in the Tours de France, cheating in men’s professional tennis with one Russian player throwing a match in a massive gambling scandal. 2007 will go down in sports history as the year of lying and cheating.

But it’s not just in athletics that we have an epidemic of lying. In recent years, professors and journalists and even Pulitzer Prize winners have been caught lying and cheating. One of the nation’s most respected historians, Stephen Ambrose, plagiarized portions of other historians’ works and then seemed to not even be disturbed by the resulting controversy. Joseph Ellis, who won the Pulitzer Prize for a great book called *Founding Brothers* was caught inventing a Viet Nam war record for himself. The journalist, David Brock, admitted that he made up sordid details about Anita Hill. A few years ago, a NY Times reporter, Jason Blair, was found to have fabricated dozens and dozens of stories in the NY Times.

We find instances of serious lying at the highest reaches of our government, in law, in academic research, among church leaders. It appears that America has become a nation of liars.

The Problem of America: A Nation of Liars

And we human beings are terrible lie detectors. In academic studies, subjects were asked to distinguish truth from lies. We're only slightly better than guessing in figuring out when we're being lied to. Corporations and the government spend millions of dollars in trying to ferret out lies. Companies are marketing functional MRIs in which a person literally gets a brain scan while they are being asked questions. And this brain scan is supposed to be like a super mind-reading device. Scientists tell us that the claims regarding the mind-reading abilities of MRIs are in themselves lies.

One fascinating psychologist, Paul Ekman, who teaches in San Francisco, has been studying lying for the past 40 years. Ekman believes that there is leakage of a person's lies that shows up on their faces. He teaches workshops for the Secret Service and seminars for a number of federal and state judges. Because there are certain facial expressions and things people do with their lips and eyes and facial muscles when they are lying. It is really a fascinating study. I'm not going to tell you what the facial indicators are because I want to know whether or not you are lying to me. Ekman's studies were written about in a book titled "*Blink*" by Malcolm Gladwell. It is a fascinating book about the way we make judgments in the blink of an eye.

I started a series last week on spiritual growth and I said that it is God's intention that if you make a commitment to Christ that you will grow; that more and more you look like Jesus in your attitudes, your speech patterns; that you learn to love like Jesus; that you learn to be generous like Jesus; that you learn to forgive like Jesus; that you learn to pray like Jesus. God's desire for us as Christians is not simply to stamp our ticket for heaven while we live hellish lives here on earth. He wants us to enjoy something of the life of the Kingdom of God right now, something of its peace; something of its joy; something of its blessing right now.

But in order to grow as Christians, you and I are going to have to learn how to distinguish between truth and lies. So we read in Hebrews 5:11-14 these words:

Hebrews 5:11-14

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

We cannot grow unless we learn to discern the lies that dominate our thought lives. Today I'm going to continue in the series that I've titled "How A Christian G.R.O.W.S" which is an acronym for:

G.R.O.W.S.

G=Giving

R=Relationships

O=Outreach

W=Worship

S=Spiritual Disciplines

I've called today's talk, "Lies that Keep Us Stuck."

Let's pray.

Now, the bible says that we human beings were created in God's image.

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Of all of the creatures on earth, however brilliant you feel your dog or cat or parrot or turtle is, only human beings were created in the image of God. We alone have been given a moral conscience to discern right from wrong. And we alone are being held accountable before God in judgment. But the bible says that not only are we made in the image of God, but that the image of God has been distorted and damaged through our sin. We no longer reflect what God is like very accurately. And so God sent his Son Jesus on a rescue mission to restore us to the full image of God. And when you think about what would the image of God look like, if it was fully restored in a human being, the bible answers the fully restored image of God would look like Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:15

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Now, a person becomes a child of God by trusting entirely in Jesus Christ for salvation and receiving Christ into our lives.

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

And when we become children of God, God's intention is that his children all resemble our older brother, Jesus Christ.

Now, how exactly do you and I begin to resemble Jesus? I mean, where do we start? If you were to talk with a brand new Christian, someone who had just this morning made a decision to put their entire trust in Christ for salvation and to receive Christ by his Holy Spirit into their lives so that Christ was taking up residence in their inner person, what would you say to that person regarding how you grow? Where do you start in restoring the damaged image of Christ?

Romans 12 tells us that the starting point for spiritual growth is surrendering our bodies and changing the way we think.

The Starting Point of Spiritual Growth: Changing the way we think

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

You are a new Christian and you want to grow, what do you need to do? First of all, day-by-day and moment-by-moment you need to surrender your body to Christ. Dallas Willard in his wonderful book on spiritual growth called *Renovation of the Heart*, talks about how you surrender your body to Christ. One very simple exercise is that in the morning before you get out of bed, you go down your body from head to toe giving the parts of your body over to Christ. So here you are, lying on your back, and you might start with your eyes saying, "Lord, I surrender my eyes to you this day. Please keep in check what I look at. Remind me, Lord, that you are always watching me. Open my eyes to see what is good. Turn my eyes away from what is evil."

I surrender my mouth to you. Help me with my appetites to honor you. May I say nothing today that would be a lie or that would slander another.

You go down your body from head to toe surrendering each part of your body to the Lordship, the rulership and authority of Jesus Christ. We'll talk about the surrender of the body in future weeks, but today I want to talk about changing the way we think. Again, we read in Romans 12:2 these words:

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The Bible says we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. The Greek word for "transformed" is "metamorphosis."

Transformed = Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is used today to describe the amazing change that occurs when a caterpillar is transformed into becoming a butterfly. This is a beautiful picture of what happens to us spiritually as we allow God to change the way we think because we spiritually grow from the inside out and become more beautiful, more like Jesus, as God directs our thoughts more and more. And when your thoughts are directed more and more by Christ, when your mind is renewed by the Holy Spirit, Paul promises,

Romans 12:2

...Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In other words, you are not going to need an enormous set of rules and regulations to guide you through life. Instead, as your thoughts are renewed more and more by the Holy Spirit's activity, as you get your thinking changed and you are freed up from lies, you will be able to figure out in every and any situation what the will of God is. God's will for your ethical conduct, what's right and wrong, but also God's will for specific decisions. What an incredible promise that you and I could increasingly discern the will of God, God's good, pleasing and perfect will.

We start to grow spiritually by paying attention to what we think about. The apostle Paul tells us this in Philippians 4:8:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

The spiral down for us as human beings away from God begins in our thinking.

Romans 1:21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

The problem that enemies of Christ have lies in what they set their minds on.

Philippians 3:19

Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

And,

Romans 8:5

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

In contrast, people who lived with renewed minds set their minds on what the Spirit desires. What we think about is the place where you and I begin the journey of spiritual growth. We start with what our minds are dwelling on moment-by-moment and day-by-day. If you are unhappy, if you are angry, if you are dominated by lust or anxiety, or have terrible relational patterns, if you regularly make bad decisions about men or women, dating, or sex, if you regularly make terrible decisions about finances, or you get into crazy patterns of relating with your parents, or a brother or sister, or a coworker, the Bible says that to change your life, you must change the way you think.

Rick Warren, in his wonderful book on how to grow as a Christian that he calls *The Purpose Driven Life* (and if you haven't read it and you are looking for a great place to start the spiritual life, I would encourage you to pick up *The Purpose Driven Life*), has a great illustration of our need to change the way we think in order to grow as Christians. He says to imagine you are in a speedboat on a lake which has an automatic pilot set to go east. And if you decide that you want to go west, you have two possible ways to change the boat's direction.

One way would be to grab the steering wheel and physically force the boat to go in the opposite direction from where the autopilot is programmed to go. And by sheer will power and effort, you can overcome the autopilot. But after a while, your arms would get tired of the stress and you would let go of the steering wheel and the boat would go back to where it was headed before. It would go back to where it was internally programmed to go east.

That's what happens when you try to change your life by will power. You say, "I'm going to force myself to eat less; I'm going to force myself in this New Year to go on a diet; or to stop smoking; or to stop looking at pornography. I'm going to change the way I relate to someone where I have a very negative relational pattern." Will power can produce short-term gains. But over a period of time, we tire and revert to our old patterns. The only way to produce long-term change is to change the auto pilot, change the way you think.

So we read in Romans 12:2 these words:

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Change starts first in your minds. The way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel influences the way you are going to act.

Now, the New Testament calls this change in your thinking, repentance. The Greek word for repentance is “metanoia”.

Meta = change
Noia = minds

To repent literally means to change your mind.

Repent = Change your mind

Reverse the direction of your thinking; you repent whenever you change the way you think by adopting the way Christ thinks about things. The way that Christ thinks about you; the way that Christ thinks about your sin; the way that Christ thinks about your sex life; the way that Christ thinks about your relationships; the way that Christ thinks about your money. You take on the mind of Christ. That’s repentance.

I remember how absolutely stunned I was shortly after I came to Christ as an 18-year-old and I discovered that God cared about my thoughts, what was going on in my mind all the time. Before this, I always thought that so long as I didn’t do bad things – I didn’t steal, or physically abuse someone, or tell an outright lie, that I was an OK person. But when Christ came into my life through the Holy Spirit, it was like someone suddenly opened heavy drapes that were in a room that hadn’t been vacuumed or dusted for 20 years. I couldn’t believe as the light of Christ poured into my soul how filthy I was inside.

See, friends, your character and my character are fundamentally issues of what our minds dwell on. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that we are not good people if on the inside we’re full of anger, lust, anxiety, and bitterness. According to Jesus, you are not a good person if you are holding a grudge against someone. You are not a good person, if what’s going on in your mind is a contradiction of what you are saying and doing. Jesus calls this hypocrisy. According to Jesus, our characters are measured by what’s inside of us, not what we show everyone else. It’s what we think about.

And when you start focusing on what you think about, this immediately plunges you and me into the thick of what the Bible calls spiritual warfare, the intense battle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom that is ruled over by Satan.

You know, we Christians often think about spiritual warfare as only dealing with our externals – the pressure that is put on us financially because of cutbacks at work, or the fact that we have all of these unpaid bills. We think of a lot of spiritual warfare going on in our families when person after person in our home is getting sick. We think of spiritual warfare in the realm of relational stress; that we are being misunderstood and mischaracterized by a friend. There is all of this disunity and breakdown in our relationships.

Certainly, spiritual warfare can be played out on a number of fronts. It can be played out in your health, in your family, in your relationships, or in your finances. We need to be mindful of the opposition you and I have from the evil one. But the Bible teaches that one of the major fronts, a major battlefield for spiritual warfare is what is going on in our minds. And if you do not regularly monitor your thoughts, what's happening in your minds, you are missing the battle; you are missing the war.

If you are not in touch with the state of your mind and whether or not you are regularly engaged in transformed, renewed thinking, then you are like a general who is worried about whether the officer's club is well-stocked with good scotch, or whether his uniform has been properly pressed. But the general gets no reports from the field; he doesn't know where the enemy is fighting or positioned; and then wonders why he is losing the war.

Biblically, the major battleground in your life is not your finances. It is not even your relationships; it is not necessarily your health. The major battleground in the bible is what is going on in your mind. Here is what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

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.

The Heart of Spiritual Warfare: Strongholds in our minds

Paul uses the metaphor of a stronghold. A stronghold is a place that's been fortified against attack. It is strongly built. It is actively defended. It is a fortress. Strongholds in our lives are well-defended areas of sin and opposition to God. There are places that the Holy Spirit wants to get at in our lives. He wants to put his finger on certain things. Maybe it is the way you spend money. Maybe it is your sexuality. Maybe it is your appetite. Maybe it is your vanity. Maybe it is the way you relate to the opposite sex, or the same sex. It is your anger. It is your anxiety. There are things that God wants to root out of your life.

But these things, these sins, these oppositions to God are protected, well defended, fortified by what? What is the stronghold that keeps the sin in your life protected against the influence of God?

The apostle Paul tells us. He says in verse 5:

2 Corinthians 10:5

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.

What is an argument and pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God? It is some assertion, some way of reasoning that appears to be true, but is actually false. The stronghold, the fortress that protects sin in your life, is an interlocking series of lies that defends you and me against God's wonderful purpose for our lives. So, over a period of time, the walls around our minds are more and more shaped by our lies rather than the life-giving freedom given, wisdom given, knowledge of God.

And Paul wants to put an end to the rule and reign of falsehood and lies in people's lives. So he goes to war against the lies that keep us stuck. Because if you want to live a good life, you've got to pull down the lies that dominate your minds.

Now, the lies that keep us stuck are as many and varied as we are. The lies vary according to our temperaments and our backgrounds; the way we were raised and trained; the choices we've made in our lives. But I want to finish by focusing on four big lies that have to do with our thinking.

The first big lie is that I don't need to think.

I don't need to think

Back in the late 1960's and early 1970's there was an incredible move of God among young, mainly Caucasian people here in the U.S. called "The Jesus Movement." And the movement was marked by spiritual passion. Young adults were just white-hot in love with Christ. And I was saved during that period of time. There were millions of us who took our Christianity really seriously. We wanted to do Christianity; not just follow old religious patterns. The movement was marked by a rejection of some old religious traditions. It was marked by great informality. People were doing church on the beach and in parks, coffee houses and warehouses.

Along with the passion and informality and anti-traditionalism, was also unfortunately anti-intellectualism. Somehow, thinking – good, hard, critical thinking was viewed as an enemy of spiritual passion and flat out love for Jesus. And so many people in the Jesus Movement unscrewed their heads and left them on the hat rack and became incredibly gullible regarding all kinds of myths and urban legends regarding some supposed conspiracy that was taking place in government against Christians. Myths about when the Lord was going to return.

The apostle Paul says in Philippians 4:8:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Think – it is a command! He is not saying: “Let me suggest some things that you could think about, if you want to be a happy person.” He is saying, “You must think about these things.” It is a command. If you want to be blessed and be a channel of blessing to others, then you have to fill your mind with certain things. The word Paul uses here for thinking is the word from which we derive the word logic. There is an implication here of reasoning, of calculating, of setting your mind on certain things, evaluating, of reckoning.

Paul is coming against the whole passive drift of our minds that most of us live with most of the time where we uncritically go through life absorbing all kinds of images and impressions. We see something and our eyes just follow. We daydream away half the day. We are apt in the Christian world to dismiss good, hard, critical thinking even though this is what God commands of his followers if we want to grow. And some people think good, hard, critical thinking is actually opposed to the Christian faith. Some Christians don't realize that by refusing to think hard and think well that they are actually dishonoring God.

Anti-intellectualism is a horrible heresy. The great spiritual writer and philosopher, Dallas Willard, says that:

“[People who do not wish to think] do not realize they are operating on the same satanic principle that produced the ‘killing fields’ of Cambodia where those with any sign of education – even the wearing of glasses – were killed on the spot or condemned to starvation and murderous labor.”

And this was true in Communist China. It was also true in the Communist Soviet Union under Stalin. Opposition to thinkers and to thought is always demonic.

So we Christians forget that the people who have done the most good for this world were great Christian thinkers – people like the apostle Paul and the apostle John, St. Augustine, Calvin, Wesley. And at the head of the list is Jesus Christ who was and is the greatest thinker this world has ever known.

If your life is not going well, you must stop and think, not just drift with the current. Why are my relationships not working out? Why do I keep getting into destructive relationships with men or women? Why am I experiencing the conflicts I'm having?

Think. We need the very best Christian thinking penetrating every sphere of life in this world, in every academic discipline – in biology and the social sciences, in medicine and law. We need the very best Christian thinking in forming our corporations and in bio-ethics and journalism and government, especially in politics.

Here is lie #2:

I don't need to listen to God or others to think well.

There was a story once about a fighter pilot whose instrument panel was broken. So trusting in the instrument panel, they began a steep decline and crashed into the ground. They didn't know they were flying upside down and that their instrument panel was giving them inaccurate information about the direction they were flying.

Friends, because of the fall, because of our inheritance of sinfulness, you and I have been born with broken instrument panels. Our internal discernment about what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad, what will lead to our happiness or lead to our unhappiness is all goofed up. Our problem, however, is that we regularly trust our internal instrument panel in discerning the good and the bad; the true and the false; the beautiful and the ugly.

Psalm 36:1-4

...I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before their eyes. 2 In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin. 3 The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they have ceased to be wise and to do good. 4 Even on their beds they plot evil; they commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong.

Verses 2-4 depicts our condition of being born with broken instrument panels and what it is like to be spiritually blind. Notice what it says in verse 2:

Psalm 36:2

In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin.

Now, we fallen human beings think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. And we are blinded to the impact of our own sin. We assume that we're thinking clearly, that we're thinking well when our thoughts are totally distorted. And we fallen human beings believe that we can independently decide what will make us happy. And when we disagree with God about what will make us happy, we're probably right and he is probably wrong. Our thoughts are better than God's thoughts.

Spiritual growth begins to take place in your life when you adopt a posture of fundamental distrust regarding your own discernment and your own capacity to determine on your own what will make you happy or unhappy, what is true and what is false, what is good and what is bad. When you adopt a posture of fundamental distrust towards yourself and a posture of fundamental trust towards God and to wise counselors, you begin to grow.

What if some of you said: "Looking back over the course of my life, I see that I have terrible discernment when it comes to dating. I go from one loser to another." So instead of saying "I know what I want," you say, "The instrument panel is broken. My discernment stinks. My thoughts always lead to unhappiness. So I'm going to rely on the wise counsel of mature Christians whose minds have been renewed by the Holy

Spirit and by soaking in God's Word concerning the next relationship I enter, or whether I should take a break on relationships."

Or you look at your life and you say, "You know, my life is a financial wreck." And you begin to adopt a posture of self-suspicion regarding your ability to manage your money. You simply say, "You know, the way I make my financial decisions is totally off. I don't spend wisely. I don't save wisely. I think that I need certain things when I don't really need them. My instrument panel of discernment is broken. And so if I'm ever going to grow in this area of getting my financial, I'm going to need to grow up and rely on the wisdom that is in God's Word and the wisdom that is found in mature Christian brothers and sisters who have renewed minds about finances and who have soaked in God's Word and God's principles of financial success."

And here is lie #3:

I don't need to monitor what I think about.

There is a link between our thoughts – what's going on in our heads – and the way we feel and our moods, and also what we do. Some years ago some psychologists of the more rational and cognitive schools came up with what they called "The ABC's of Mood Control."

Activity → Beliefs → Consequences

Basically, these cognitive psychologists said that most people think that there is an activity and as a result of this activity they have a certain mood. So, for example, your husband is late home from work again and you are angry. Or you fail a test and you therefore are depressed. They said the whole business of some action or activity makes me anxious or angry doesn't accurately communicate what's really going on. Between the action and the consequence is belief – it is a thought. All actions pass through our beliefs. And it is our beliefs, our thoughts that control our moods.

Let me play out a little scene. You talk to a woman named Mary. She says, "I'm really depressed."

You ask, "Why are you depressed?"

"Well, for one reason, I just got a speeding ticket and have to pay \$130. So I'm really bummed."

Getting pulled over for speeding is not what made you depressed, Mary.

What do you mean?

Well, can you remember what you were thinking about after you were pulled over? I mean something was going on in your head. If we could put those thoughts up on a screen, what would the screen say?

Well, I don't remember exactly, but I remember thinking something like, "You're so stupid. You can't do anything right. You can't even drive right. These things always happen to you. Other people aren't pulled over, but you always are pulled over. It seems like you never get a fair break in life. There is no use in even trying because I always blow it.

You see, Mary, it's these thoughts that are creating your mood. What if you had different thoughts? Let's say you were stopped by the police and instead of screaming at yourself, you said, "Lord, forgive me for breaking the law. I know that the Bible tells me to obey the law and therefore it was wrong for me to speed. Please forgive me. But God I'm so glad that I don't have to punish myself, or yell at myself for every wrong that I do because the punishment for my sins was taken care of by Jesus when he hung on the cross. Lord, thanks so much for the Bible verse that says "the Lord has laid on him [on Christ] the iniquity of us all." God, if I had to bear the punishment for every stupid thing I did and every wrong thing I did, I would be so miserable. But I thank you, Lord, for the fact that as I've been pulled over I'm reminded again of how terrible it would be for me if I was judged by the law, rather than by your grace. God, if you nailed me for everything that I did wrong, it would be horrible. Thank you for your grace."

What if, Mary, you began to meditate on the grace of God multiple times during the day? Whenever you make a mistake you say to yourself, "Grace is such a great word. I love the word grace," as you pulled away from the police officer and rolled up your windows. What if you sang Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me... What if your mind was filled with that?

Certainly, if I was singing Amazing Grace I wouldn't be depressed.

Our thoughts not only control our moods, they certainly control our actions. So many of the things we think of as automatic behaviors, or bad habits, are not as automatic as they seem. I've talked with a number of men who have struggled with pornography. They said, "I don't know, from time to time I just find myself in the car and it just starts going in a certain direction and I end up in an adult bookstore; or I went online and I just found myself clicking onto websites that I shouldn't click onto."

Sexual things are like that. People feel that they just have fallen in a hole and they don't understand their own behavior. But in fact, if we focus on what is going on in our minds, we see that there has been a whole series of thoughts, a whole chain of thoughts that were occurring well before the car began to move, or well before you tumbled into bed, or clicked on the wrong website. And if you focused on these thoughts, and you prayed what David prayed in Psalm 19:14:

Psalm 19:14

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

If you monitored your thinking and asked the Holy Spirit to purify your thoughts throughout the day, you would more and more see the grip of lust broken in your life.

The bottom line, the starting point to the beginning to think God's thoughts is the recognition that you currently don't.

And finally, the last lie is this:

I don't need to pay attention to the impact of images on my thoughts.

Michael Medved, the movie critic, talked about one big lie that the entertainment industry regularly promotes whenever it is criticized about the garbage that is showed on TV or in the movies. The big lie is "it's only entertainment. It doesn't influence anyone." Medved appropriately said,

Advertisers wouldn't be paying multiple millions of dollars airing commercials and supporting programs that influenced no one. Networks wouldn't be pulling out all the stops to increase their shows ratings through commercials if images didn't influence anyone and if everything was 'only entertainment.'

We are mammothly impacted by images.

Let me share with you an infomercial that recently was playing on TV. In the first scene there is a man in his early 30's with a depressed, hang-dogged look. His life was not cutting it at all. He wore clothes that looked like he got them out of a thrift store bin. He had dark, puffy circles under his eyes. And he had long thin strands of hair that were combed over the top of his head to unsuccessfully attempt to cover his baldness.

Over the course of the infomercial, we learn that this man was depressed. He talked about how his self-esteem had plummeted in recent years because he lost his hair and his youthful appearance. He hadn't had a date in months. He was a salesman, but business was terrible. He wasn't making any sales, so his workdays were an exercise in frustration. The underlying problem, he said, was his excessive baldness. The clincher was that he used to go to the beach, but he didn't dare go any more because when he came out of the water, he had all these strands of hair running down his face.

They infomercial showed a scene where these ugly strands of hair were hanging over the man's face and women are turning away in disgust at how hideous he looked.

But then the infomercial talked about a new hair growth product. 800 numbers flash across the screen. And in the next scene you see this same man in bright color. The first part was in black and white. Now he is in color and he has a thick mane of hair; it looks like a lion's mane. And the man is now dressed in a great suit. He is giving a

glowing testimony. He now looks like Mr. Hair. He is standing straight up. He is confident. His shoulders are squared. He looks people right in the eye. He said he's never felt better about himself. He's been on a winning streak in sales recently and is in the running for salesman of the year.

Words can't describe how incredible his life is. Instead of avoiding the beach, in the last scene in the infomercial, here is this man running down the beach, tanned and confident. He does not have just one girl on his arm, he has two beautiful women – one on either side in bathing suits running next to him, laughing as they run into the water. All because he discovered this hair-growth product.

The infomercial is a silly example of the way images work. But if you think that you aren't impacted by images, you don't know your own heart. Body image, in particular, impacts women in our society in a much greater way than men. Women are bombarded day and night with voices that say "your looks define you as a person." Pictures peer from every magazine cover; men's magazines teach men what to look for in a woman; and women's magazines tell women what to look like. The image defines your value. And it has an incredibly destructive effect because it is filled with lies.

The Bible tells us the absurdity of serving lying images. The Bible calls them idols. For example, in Isaiah 44:19-20 we read this:

Isaiah 44:19-20

No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" 20 Such people feed on ashes, a deluded heart misleads them; they cannot save themselves, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

The Bible is mocking our bowing down to images. The impact of bowing down to false body images are so many in our culture, they are too many to list. Vanity, fantasy, eating disorders, despair, envy of others, out of control consumer spending, dissatisfaction with yourself, dissatisfaction with your spouse.

The lie of image needs to be exposed. You are not what you look like. You don't have to be dominated by that lie in your thinking. Your mind needs to be changed regarding what God sees as valuable and beautiful and worthwhile. And you need to set your mind and heart on embracing God's views of value and beauty.

So, let's read again 2 Corinthians 10:4-5:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

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.

The bottom line: you cannot grow unless the stronghold of lies and arguments and pretensions are pulled down and every thought that runs through your mind is submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Lies That Keep Us Stuck

Rich Nathan

January 12-13, 2008

How A Christian G.R.O.W.S. Series

Romans 12:2

I. The Problem of America: A Nation of Liars

II. The Starting Point of Spiritual Growth: Changing the way we think* *(Romans 12:2)

III. The Heart of Spiritual Warfare: Strongholds in our minds* *(2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

IV. The Lies That Keep Us Stuck

- A. I don't need to think (Philippians 4:8)
- B. I don't need to listen to God or others to think well (Psalms 36:1-4)
- C. I don't need to monitor what I think about (2 Corinthians 10:5)
- D. I don't need to pay attention to the impact of images on my thoughts
(Isaiah 44:19, 20)