

Text: Various

Title: Think Well

Truth: Sin warps our thinking; God helps us think well.

Date/Location: June 16 and 30, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

Our last two messages were “Think No Evil” and “Think Good.” They focused on the content of our thinking from 1 Corinthians 13:5 and Philippians 4:8. This message is entitled “Think Well.” I am not intending to convey the idea of “thinking well of another person.” That is part of the good content that should fill your thoughts. But I am trying to convey the idea of thinking logically, with careful method, thoroughly, sober-mindedly, humbly, and proportionately.

This is an area where wisdom and skill and discernment are needed. There are no formulas or laws or rules or legislation about this.

I. Proportionately

- A. By proportionately, what I mean is that you think mostly true things that are good versus spending mental cycles on true things that are evil. Some of us tend to be doom-and-gloomers. We spend a lot of time consuming news, even conspiracies. We have succumbed in our thinking to a disproportionate kind of thought, consoling ourselves with the fact that what we are watching is “true” or even “educational.” But is it honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report truth, or is it ugly, unjust, impure truth? If the latter, filling our mind with that much of the time is not good because it changes us.
- B. In addition to proportionate thinking that is balanced toward good instead of evil, we should think of proportion of useless or limited utility versus more utility. Amusement is a form of “a-muse” – not thinking. Of course it means something funny or entertaining, but much of that these days is based on bad premises.
- C. Another kind of proportionality has to do with avoiding making molehills into mountains. Step back and look at things from the big picture. Say you and I believe 95% the same and all the key parts of

the faith. Then some matter arises where we differ, and one of us gets bent out of shape about it, all up in arms, etc. Take a second to think. Stepping back and look at the world helps in a case like this. Travel to other countries. Experiencing real trials. Compare to truly false doctrine which denies the fundamentals of the faith.

II. Logically

Not given to fallacies. Such things are wrong ways of thinking because they are somehow contradictory or do not follow from the premise, or are over-reactions in one or another direction. Many of these were suggested to me by the list of 52 Essential Critical Thinking cards from MindBrainEmotion.¹

1. Recency bias. The most important things happened recently, old stuff is not that important.
2. Old is better, Luke 5:39, Eccl. 7:10.
3. Good-old-days fallacy or “declinism.” A state of decline may or may not be true, but it needs to be evaluated on objective bases.
4. End is near. This is not sober-minded.
5. Persecution complex. Like paranoia...you’re not paranoid if it is indeed true that everyone is out to get you!
6. Blame shifting. Through a number of circumstances that have not turned out well, you feel that everyone else is the problem. Have you considered who is the common person in all those situations? Perhaps?
7. Belief/confirmation bias. We support a conclusion based on false premises just because it is the conclusion we want. We do not look into the truth of the underlying claims. The tendency to favor information that fits with existing belief.
8. Pessimism bias. Murphy’s law kind of thinking. Where is your faith in God?

¹ <https://www.amazon.com/Essential-Critical-Thinking-Skills-Cognitive/dp/B09FYL1Y1V/>

9. Optimism bias. This will turn out well, despite indications to the contrary. Wishful thinking. You need realism.
10. Assumptions – I assume you know more than you do. Stereotyping is me assuming something about you before I know the facts—based on maybe what you look like or where you grew up or whatever.
11. Opposed to change. Wanting change for change’s sake is not good, and people who change things all the time are a problem. Prov. 24:21. Changing laws, for example...Dan. 7:25. But not all change is that way.
12. Visibility bias – a large dispersed problem does not command the attention that a smaller problem with a vocal minority on a very local scale gets. The smaller problem is magnified, catches attention, and may induce governmental policy change, while a more dispersed affect on a larger part of the population gets very little attention.
13. Arrogance bias – Dunning-Kruger Effect – limited competency in an area leads people to overestimate what they can do. Illustration of a businessman critical of a pastor because “it is easy to produce a 30-minute sermon. I do it all the time at work.” A similar kind of example: Deut. 9:4 Israel was tempted to think it was because they were so good that God gave them the land. It was not for that reason at all. See also Deut. 7:7-8.
14. Exposure effect – we like things we have experienced, and do not like things we have not.
15. Blissful ignorance – bad thing X has not happened, so I don’t have to prepare for it, save for it, do something about it, etc.
16. Loss aversion – you don’t get rid of the thing that you have lost on until it is too late and you get nothing for it. This can be an effect of materialism.
17. Illusion of control – things that I do control the outcome of other things that are not really related to what I do. God is in charge.

18. Mechanical retribution theory – the world is not just or “fair” like you want it to be. Sometimes good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people. “God must be punishing you because bad things happened to you.” That is so wrong it is not even funny. You are blind because you don’t have faith. You got into a wreck because you did some sin last week or have had some pattern of sin in your life. We simply cannot know that, and there is no revealed correlation in such specific matters.
19. Ignoring the evidence – Michael Dell did not finish college, and he turned out wealthy and successful. I can do the same thing. Yet thousands of others have found a path to greater earnings and better quality of life through further education of some sort.
20. Not-invented-here. I ran into this phrase almost 30 years ago in college. We did not invent it, so we don’t like it. This is a humility issue.
21. As is the spotlight effect. We think everyone is looking at us. Romans 12:3 could be useful here, with a good dose of humility.
22. Bandwagon effect – everyone is doing it. I think this is a sort of fear of man...a desire to be like everyone else. Similar to consensus bias – most people believe this, so it must be true.
23. Reactance – the more I am asked to do something, less I want to do it. That is simply the flesh.
24. Anti-authority bias. They are in authority, I have to question them, I have to put roadblocks to them, be the contrarian, etc.
25. Appeal to authority. Authorities are not necessarily right. Doctors? Politicians? Scientists? “These people with Ph.D.s believe something is true, so it must be true because they are smart.” Or these so-called experts in a field believe it is true, so it must be true. But those people can be wrong! The only time an appeal to authority really works is when a right reference is made to God, but even that can be botched if you attribute to God something that His word does not say! A form of this occurs when you pit one authority against another and say that the one

is an authority in an area, so the other person has nothing to say about it.

26. False extrapolation. You believe X, so logically you must think Y. Just maybe the person you are criticizing does not see it that way, because they have other factors in mind. A variation of this: “You did X, but you were supposed to do Y, so you must be lying.” Perhaps the person has other factors in mind; or they had a failure due to lack of observation, oversight, etc., but no intentionality to mislead or not do what they were supposed to do.

Some of the above violates the command to love your neighbor as yourself, others violate love for God. Some of the above violates the principle that we must think things that are true.

III. When There is a Failure in Thinking

In myself:

- A. Repent. Confess any sin. Ask God to help you think better in the future, more carefully, more truly, etc.

In others:

- B. Do not treat the failed person with malice, harsh judgement, ill-will, lack of love, lack of mercy, etc.
- C. Love covers a multitude of sins.
- D. Gently ask the person to explain their thinking, and if truly he is not “thinking well” then ask him to amend his ways. If there is a pattern of sin, expose that as a help to the brother or sister so they will break that pattern.
- E. Be quick to forgive.

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