

THE ANATOMY OF THINKING

***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
Philippians 2:5***

Recently, listening to and reading the plethora of “opinions” regarding the present ongoing political debates of the “man-on-the-street’s” opinions and supposed insights, I became struck with the realization that “a point of view” is a fascinating thing! Not so much fascinating about *what* people think but rather about *why* they think as they do.

Thinking. Just what is it? Thinking is conscious, and it is active. It is the kind of cognitive process that can make new connections and create meaning. It is dialogic: it has the quality of an internal conversation between different perspectives, and thinking is inner speech.

I find myself constantly amazed as to how some people can possibly hold the opinions they do that, to me, are so obviously skewed. Then, swapping shoes, I wonder if I appear from their perspective to be just as askew. The answer is obvious.

To me, the thinking process of man is an extremely complex subject. “Thoughts” are seldom without history—in other words, they are built from the collected data of one’s experiences, emotions, general and specific learning, etc. This hodgepodge of inputs influences a composite of “thoughts” that continue to be filtered by the same data until we arrive at an “I think that...” response. Whether that “thought” is correct, partially correct (which inversely implies that it is partially incorrect), or totally incorrect depends on the quality or truth of the data from which it was derived. The more truthful the data, the more truthful the thought.

While “thoughts” seem to appear somewhat transient and flexible, “opinions,” on the other hand, appear as much more concrete and settled—perhaps it can be said that opinions are thoughts that have solidified. Therefore they (opinions) hold a level of concern above that of “thoughts.” Since they are more fixed, it is so important that they not be hastily formed but should receive careful examination before molding. We are cautioned that “no other foundation can be laid,” and that foundation is Jesus Christ—BUT “let every man beware HOW he builds thereon.” The correct foundation is a must—and what is built on that foundation MUST derive its strength from the foundation. In other words, “Don’t nail anything down until it correctly fits the foundation.”

We simply must avoid emotional reasoning, which says, "If I feel this way, it must be true." Passionate commitment to a view can motivate a person to think boldly without fear of what others will say, but when "gut feelings" replace clear thinking, the results can be disastrous. Obsessing and having one's mind excessively focused on a single emotion or event hinders the ability to be subjective. This is not merely an unproductive process; it's counterproductive. If one can free themselves from expecting that the outcome must always be in their favor, they will think more productively.

Critical thinking is the ability and willingness to assess claims and make objective judgments based on well-supported facts and reasoning. An inadequate formulation of thoughts can produce misleading or incomplete opinions. All of us are subject to biases, and beliefs that prevent us from being impartial. We must evaluate the assumptions and biases that lie behind arguments, including our own; therefore, examine the evidence and ask, "What evidence supports or refutes this argument and its opposition?" Does my "emotion" outweigh my "evidence?" We would do well to consider other interpretations and then formulate hypotheses that offer reasonable explanations. It is good to lock into proven truths in our thinking while not making concrete our "feelings-logic." False doctrines hold their position not so much by affirmation of scriptural witness but rather by emotional logic.

It is wisdom, believe it or not, to realize that sometimes our possession of available evidence allows us to draw only tentative conclusions causing us to admit that we simply don't know the answer! It is ignorance gone out-of-control to press on with words long after our knowledge reservoir has been drained. The error of pride is its inability to acknowledge its own ignorance.

Let us once again reflect upon Philippians 2:5-11, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."