

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Leading a Secret Thought Life

Unedited Transcript

Romans 7:15-25, Mark 7:21-22, Jeremiah 23:24, Romans 8:5-6, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Psalm 139:23-24

Good morning, men! Please open your bibles to Romans, chapter seven; Romans chapter seven. We're in a series on the book, The Man in the Mirror, Solving the 24 Problems men Face. Let's start today with a shout-out. Today we're going to give a shout-out to Fairhaven Baptist Church in Demopolis, AL. 10 men who meet at the church on Saturdays at 7:00am using the Video Bible Study. They are led by Larry Barnes and we are looking for a man to join our Field Staff in the Demopolis, AL area. I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm Man in the Mirror welcome to the Fairhaven Baptist Church men. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

The Battle for Our Private Thoughts

Today, we're going to talk about leading the secret thought life. You saw some thoughts about this in the open video. We want to begin this morning by talking about the battle for our private thoughts. Here is our predicament. You and I want to do what is right, while at the same time, there is part of us that wants to do what is not right. If you are a believer, you have the Holy Spirit. You have all the resources of God available to you any time you want to turn the switch on. If you've for some reason gotten unplugged, plug yourself back in. You have the power of God himself, all of his resources, all of his omnipotence, all of his omniscience, all of his omnipresence, all of his omni-benevolence, available to you right now.

You also have a sinful nature. It would have been so cool of God, if when I became a Christian, he would have changed out my nature 100%. He is going to do that someday. I don't know why he didn't, I think when I get to Heaven, I really want to grill God why he didn't do that. Of course, I know that when I get to Heaven, that's the last thing I'm going to want to do. What I'm going to want to do is fall down on my face in the presence of the holiness of God. Right now, I would like to know, "Why didn't you just take the old part out and put the new part in? Why did you leave the broken part in the machine?"

This is our predicament, but this is the way that God has done it and wants this. God is good. God chose to leave us with this brokenness inside of us and therefore this brokenness is good. That is a perfect syllogism. Deductively, logically, this absolutely makes complete sense. That's the only way it makes complete sense to me. We will never lose the sinful nature, sometimes called, "the flesh," or "the carnal nature." We will never completely be rid of it in this world.

You and I live in two worlds. We live in a world that is coming, the Kingdom of God, and we live in the world that is passing away, the one that is going. We live in the coming world, but we also live in the going world. With that in mind, let's read Romans chapter seven, starting at verse fifteen. This is Paul.

This is the theologian of the Christian church, and he writes this, and he is writing about himself. He says, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do. And, if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good."

What law is that? That's the law of love. I'm going to have you stay right there, but just let me read to you, and you might want to write down the address, Galatians chapter five, verse fourteen, "The entire law is summed up in a single command. Love your neighbor as yourself." That's the law he's talking about.

"I agree that this law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." That is, it's the sinful nature, it's this old, broken part that didn't get changed out. "I know that nothing good lives in me." That is, in my sinful nature. I know that. "For I have the desire to do what is good." You have that. You have that. Paul says, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do. No, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing."

"Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." I find this law at work. When I want to do good, you want to do good, I want to do good. We're out there, wanting to do good. "When I want to do good," watch this, watch this, "evil is right there with me."

Now, I will say this however, that evil is right there with me in a different way today than evil was right there with me many years ago. Because many years ago, evil was right there with me when I was walking very close, I was walking past that neighborhood. I was walking on the same street where that neighborhood is, you see. Now, today, I don't walk that neighborhood anymore. I've moved as I've become more spiritually mature, as the Holy Spirit has changed me. I honestly, I really haven't done much to change myself, but the Holy Spirit has worked on me a lot, so I've moved. When I say today that evil is right there with me, it's like "right here with me, over there." For many of you, that's the case. For a lot of you, though, you're still walking on the same street that divides the neighborhoods.

I'm deep in the other neighborhood now, but some of you are living on the street that separates the two neighborhoods. By the way, some of us in our thought lives actually go into the old neighborhood. That's what a secret thought life is all about. It's going back into the old neighborhood. Hopefully, you just keep it in your thought life. But, are thoughts sins?

Thoughts are not sins, necessarily, unless you turn a normal thought into a preoccupation. Secret thoughts are normal. Sexual attraction is not something that is abnormal. This is something that God built into creation for the propagation, procreation of the species. Men, and women too, but men know a little different, men have sexual attraction to women who are not their wives. Is that a sin? Absolutely not. That's normal to have an attraction to certain women. What is sin is to do something about that the wrong way. The right way to handle that is to thank God for having made beautiful women. Appreciate the fact that this woman is attractive and then thank God for your woman and move on. Has a sin occurred if you do that? Absolutely not! I don't want to spend the whole time on sexual sin. Back to Paul.

"Evil is right there with me, for in my inner being, I delight in God's law." Don't you do that? When you read the scriptures, don't you just delight in the law of God? Don't you have moments where you just feel like you're about to explode, you're so ecstatic with the joy and the insight that you get from the scriptures? Hopefully, you are. "I delight in God's law but I see another law at work in the members of

my body." That's what we're talking about. "Waging war against the law of my mind, my thoughts. Waging war against the law of my thoughts and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man am I! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul asks.

Why does this happen? What is really going on here? We've talked about it quite a bit already, but Jeremiah seventeen, verse nine, "The heart is desperately wicked and beyond cure." This is the sinful nature.

Turn with me to Mark, chapter seven, verse twenty-one. In the Proverbs it says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Mark, chapter seven, verse twenty-one: "For from within, and out of men's hearts," or their thoughts, if you want to say it that way, it says, "come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All of these evils come from inside and make a man unclean." There's another list, this is just a list, it's not a comprehensive list, it's a representative list. There are other things, too. You can find more in Galatians chapter five.

What's really going on is that we have this nature that needs to be brought under the tutelage and the supervision of the power of God. What's really the problem here, probably even more so than the fact that we have this nature, is the fact that there are no secret thoughts. There are no secret thoughts. Jeremiah, chapter twenty-three, twenty-four, talks about it, and you can look that up later, but I found a better verse I want to read with you. Psalm, chapter 139 if you turn there with me, and beginning at verse one. "Oh, Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I stand. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely." There are no secret thoughts.

Some examples of these secret thoughts could be what? For Paul, what might it have been? Who knows? But it could possibly have been a sense of pride, "Because of the surpassingly great revelations that have been given to me, I have been given a thorn in the flesh," he said. It's very possible that a pride of life would have been something. I find myself, and I'm sure you do, too, tempted with a pride of life. When you actually do know more than somebody else. When you really do know more than somebody else and they question you, what's your reaction to that? "Who does this guy think he is, anyway?" Now those are all secret thoughts, what we really say is, "I'm so glad that you think that." But what we're really thinking is, "You idiot. Don't you know who I am?"

I used to have a lot of money, back in the day, and I knew a lot of people that had a lot of money. For some reason, I occasionally still get invited to things where there are people that have a lot of money, even though I don't have a lot of money. Yesterday, I had one of those things. NCF, the National Christian Foundation had a meeting and about fifty people were there. It's so interesting because I find this desire to, in my secret thoughts, welling up to fake it, to pretend that I'm still somebody when I'm no longer that person. No matter what your profession is, or has been, you know the feeling that you want to be respected by your peers and so on. I was going through all that thing in my secret thoughts yesterday. I've been walking with the Lord a long time. I'm sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Yesterday, I was clearly having private thoughts, I was having a battle in my private thoughts over that very thing.

There are all kinds of things like this. It could be a fantasy that you live out every day of being a powerful person or a very successful person or a more successful person than you are. It could be in this whole sexual area. In my gym, it would be pretty easy to have these kinds of things going on. I don't think we

have any see-through yoga pants, but we have pants that look just as good as that, I'm sure. It's very possible.

What is the solution to this battle for our private thoughts? It's to bring our thoughts into sync with God's thoughts. Here's the big idea for the day. It's something that I adopted longer ago than I need to mention, decades ago. **I will make it my ambition to live "one life, one way."** One life, one way. I will make it my ambition. I can't do it. I am not Jesus. Jesus is the one who can do it. I don't have the power to do it on my own. But I will make it my ambition. One life, one way. In other words, the public path and the private path I want to be the same path. That is for, I'm going to go ahead and say it, forty years. That has been my ambition, is that I would lead one life, one way.

I could give you my computer. I give that man there my computer all the time. There's absolutely nothing on my computer that I would be embarrassed about. There's nothing on my computer that I would be embarrassed for you to see. Now, there's some private information on there that you don't have a right to see, and you don't need to see. The point is, is that if somebody were to accidentally see it, I'm okay. You could go into my Google search history, and I'm okay with that. You can go into my Netflix search history, if there is such a thing, and look at the things that I've looked at on Netflix, and I'm okay with that. You'll see a couple things in there that shouldn't be in there, but you'll also see I bailed out after about five minutes.

That's what I want for you, too. For many of you, it's already that way. If it's not, this is a great idea, to make it your ambition. To make it my ambition to live one life, one way. The public and the private person, one person; the out-loud person and the private thought person, one person.

How does God provide for us to win this battle?

Let's talk about, "How does God provide for us to win this battle, to have this "one life, one way" kind of thing going on?" Turn with me if you would back to Romans seven, verse twenty-five. The next verse in Paul's text. He's finished, he said, "What a wretched man am I. Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" And then he gives the answer, verse twenty-five, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

What I want to do is read to you from the end of that chapter on leading a secret thought life in The Man in the Mirror. "Of course, you already know you don't have enough willpower to make this happen. You already know this. But Christ in you does. When Christ is in control of our lives, the Holy Spirit is in power. When we let the old man, the sinful nature, the flesh be in control, then the spirit is quenched. The solution is to take every thought captive and if we find we have sinned, to confess it and ask Christ to again take control. That's the essence of living by the power of the Holy Spirit." Now I'm going to show you how to do that before we're done here today.

Reading on after Romans seven, beginning in chapter eight, I would encourage you to read the verses we're not going to read. Get down to verse four or five. "Those who live according to the sinful nature," in other words, according to these private thoughts that have you wandering into the old neighborhood. "Those who live according to that mind, they 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." If you let your thoughts go to the old neighborhood, then you find that you are controlled by the sinful nature. But if you direct your thoughts over to the new neighborhood and maybe even deeper, one or two streets beyond where you even live now, your current address, and just keep probing the new

neighborhood, then what happens? What happens is what it says right here. Your mind is set on what the spirit desires.

In the old neighborhood, that's what we call the world. There's two kinds of worlds. There's God's created world, but then there's the secular world. First John, chapter five, verses fifteen to seventeen tell us not to desire the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. How do you do that? How do you do that? You do that by making it your ambition, to bring your thought life into sync with God's thought lives. Or, say it this way, "I will make it my ambition to live one life, one way." One life, one way. I actually had this in a newspaper article written about me. I remember that was the big thing that they took away in the article, that I said, "Hey, look. This my credo. One life, one way. I want to be the same person in public as I am in private." It's a great way to think!

How can we sync our thoughts to God's?

How do we do this? How do we sync our thoughts then, to God's thoughts? This is the practical piece of it. There is a moment of surrender, when you surrender your life to Jesus Christ. But there is also a process of surrender. It's an ongoing process. That's why Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." You surrender your life, you take up your cross, and then sometime during the day, most of us lay it back down again. The idea is to do that each day, and increasingly surrender our lives. I've told you before. I'll tell you again in case you weren't here that day. Each morning, give me a little grace on this, each morning though, I make a prayer, "Lord Jesus, I make a full, total, complete surrender of my life to your lordship." That's the deal, the fully surrendered life. But it's a process and that's why I need to do it every day.

As I continue to do that and hopefully as you've continued to do it, do you not find this at work? You have an increased sensitivity to the spirit. When you have a private thought or a secret thought, the spirit, if you're living deep in the old neighborhood, the spirit has to, there's a lot of interference between his voice and your mental ears. But if you're close to the spirit, sometimes all he has to do is just do a little whisper and you hear him.

Yesterday at this luncheon that I mentioned earlier, with all these gazillionaires, they had a really fantastic dessert. It was so good, that I have become addicted to dessert. I don't know how. Actually, I know exactly how it happens, but I'm not going to talk about it now. For the last three or four years, I have developed a mega sweet tooth. The dessert was so good and it was at a catered event, so I went back to the caterer after the event and I said, "Do you have any more of those desserts left over?" They had about six of them left over. I said, "I tell you what, you're going to be tossing all this anyway, why don't you put those six desserts in a container for me and I'm going to take it with me for my wife?" I didn't say, "for my wife." This was for me.

Then on the way out, somebody said to me, "I see you're taking a little bit home." I said, "Yeah." And he said something about, "I guess they just give all this to the food bank or something like that anyway." Well, they didn't have dessert last night. I was so convicted by that all afternoon. And then again this morning, I could barely finish my preparations. A long time ago, I wouldn't have even thought about that because I was so callous, because there were so many other pieces of interference between me and the Holy Spirit. I wouldn't have heard him anyway. But I take it on faith that he's the one that's telling me that I need to, and I'm going to apologize for this error in judgement on my part. I don't want to, but I'm going to.

Back to Psalm 139. I tell you these stories because I know you guys never have anything like this happen in your lives ... How does this process work in practice? First thing is through prayer. Examine yourself through prayer. Psalm 139, verses twenty-three and twenty-four. I pray this prayer all the time, "Search me oh God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious," what? Thoughts. My private thoughts. My secret thought life. "Test me now in this, and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in your everlasting way." Examine yourself through prayer. The more Christian you become, the more you should be delving into the little things that you used to just wink at. Instead of thinking you're becoming a spiritual giant, you should continue to see yourself as increasingly in need of a savior.

The second thing is, try to develop a running conversation with the Lord. Everybody talks to themselves all day long. All day long we are in our thought lives, we're talking to ourselves. Try sometime to, instead of having this conversation with yourself, have the conversation with the Lord. Have a running conversation with the Lord. I'm at a point where a lot of my day is a running conversation with myself, but a lot of my day is a running conversation with the Lord. It's just really another form of prayer. The point is that the more that you are sensitive to what the Lord is doing all around you and praising him, giving him glory, thanking him, asking him for direction, asking him for guidance... I'm one of those idiots who prays for parking spaces, but guess what? I'm a lucky idiot, I guess, because I always seem to get them. Little things, big things that it seems stupid, praying for a parking place, but it's just representative of talking to him about everything.

Finally, just guard your heart. Proverbs four, twenty-three: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." Second Corinthians, ten, five says, "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

There is this fable about a scorpion and a frog. They're at a riverbank and the scorpion says to the frog, "I can't swim. Will you give me a ride across the river?" The frog said, "Why would I do that? We're going to get halfway across the river and you're going to sting me and I'm going to die." The scorpion says, "Why would I do that? That defies all logic because if you drown, I drown, too." So the frog said, "Okay. I guess that makes sense." The scorpion climbed on the back of the frog and halfway across the river, the scorpion stung the frog and the frog began to die and they both began to sink. As they were sinking, the frog said to the scorpion, "Why did you do that? Like you said, that defies all logic. Why would you do that?" The scorpion said, "It has nothing to do with logic, it's just my nature."

You have a sinful nature and no matter what you do to try to manage or superintend that nature, or pretend it doesn't exist, guess what? It will sting you. It will sting you if it gets the opportunity. The way around this is the Big Idea. It's to live one life, one way. To have those ideas that can sting you. To turn them over to the power of the Holy Spirit. I will make it my ambition to live one life, one way. Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Our dearest father, Lord, we all have secret thoughts, private thoughts that we would be embarrassed for others to know about, but thoughts are not sins, Lord. As we have these thoughts, these desires maybe even, to do that which is sinful, we pray that you would help us to be men whose ambition is to live one life, one way and that you would give us the power of your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.