

Equipped to think correctly

"I can't help feeling guilty"; "But what if...?"; "She makes me mad!"

Have you ever heard people talk like this? Maybe you've even spoken this way yourself - I know I have. But how accurate is the thinking behind these kinds of statements? For those of us who've said, "I can't help feeling guilty", there's good news - we can! There is freedom from crushing guilt and the despair that sometimes accompanies it. We don't have to live the rest of our lives with an "I can't" outlook. Instead, we can say with the apostle Paul, *"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need"*¹ - and that includes coming to grips with guilt.

What about the next one: "But what if...?" I reckon all of us have probably started a sentence in this way, and it suggests an underlying doubt, a fear, an anxiety that things might not turn out well. Many of our fears have no real basis in fact, yet they can have such a hold on us. Perhaps we should pay more attention to this verse: *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done."*²

When we feel angry, are we right to think, "She makes me mad"? By thinking like this, we're giving power to another person to influence how we feel when, really, no one else has this authority. The power to respond in anger or with self-control lies with us - it's our choice. *"A fool gives full vent to anger, but a wise person quietly holds it back."*³

The Bible talks about letting God transform us into a new person by changing the way we think⁴ and emphasizes the necessity of our thoughts and attitudes being renewed.⁵ One of the reasons for this is that our thinking is often based on faulty beliefs. This can lead to a false view of God, ourselves, other people, and circumstances.

Our thinking influences our feelings and behaviour much more than we realize and this is one reason why it's such a big deal to pay careful attention to what we allow ourselves to think. By learning to think biblically, we can use the truths of God's word to shape our thoughts.

In *The Holy War* by John Bunyan, our enemy, the devil, is asked by his demons how best to attack the human mind. He replies that they need to get people to accept lies as the truth. All too often we find ourselves doing just that. We allow our thinking to go beyond the boundaries of what we know to be true, and we end up believing lies. This, in turn, influences our attitudes and emotional responses.

We need to be aware of what we're thinking and how this impacts the way we respond to people and situations. Over the next few days, listen to your thoughts and work out if they are true or untrue. If you find yourself thinking things that might not be true, then replace these thoughts with what you know to be true. For example, the thought "I'm a complete failure" probably isn't true, so you might want to replace it with "I've failed in this particular area, but this doesn't mean I have to view myself as a failure in every part of my life."

Why not join me in getting serious about our thinking? Let's have fresh confidence in the power of the word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us change our thinking whenever necessary. It won't happen overnight, but let's hang in there! It will be worth it in the end.

¹ Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

² Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

³ Proverbs 29:11 (NLT)

⁴ Romans 12:2

⁵ Ephesians 4:23