

Ephesians Lesson 8 Article

In their two-volume book *The Criminal Personality*, Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow maintain that criminal behavior is the result of warped thinking. Three entire sections (pp. 251–457) are devoted to “The thinking errors of the criminal.” By studying what criminals think, rather than trying to probe their feelings and backgrounds, these researchers use these sections to share their conclusions. “It is remarkable,” they write, “that the criminal often derives as great an impact from his activities during nonarrestable phases as he does from crime. The criminal’s thinking patterns operate everywhere; they are not restricted to crime.” That is a description of the depraved, reprobate mind. “Sociological explanations have been unsatisfactory,” the authors declare. “The idea that a man becomes a criminal because he is corrupted by his environment has proved to be too weak an explanation. We have indicated that criminals come from a broad spectrum of homes, both disadvantaged and privileged within the same neighborhood. Some are violators and most are not. It is not the environment that turns a man into a criminal, it is a series of choices that he makes starting at a very early age.” The researchers also conclude that the criminal mind eventually “will decide that everything is worthless.” “His thinking is illogical,” they affirm in summary.

Because man’s sinfulness flows out of his reprobate mind, the transformation must begin with the mind (v. 23). Christianity is cognitive before it is experiential. It is our thinking that makes us consider the gospel and our thinking that causes us to believe the historic facts and spiritual truths of the gospel and to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. That is why the first step in repentance is a change of mind about oneself, about one’s spiritual condition, and about God.

To the Greeks the mind was all-important. They prided themselves in their great literature, art, philosophy, politics, and science. They were so advanced in their learning that Greek slaves were prized by the Romans and other conquerors as tutors for their children and as managers of their households and businesses. Greeks believed that almost any problem could be reasoned to a solution.

Yet Paul says that spiritually the operation of the natural mind is futile and unproductive. *Mataiotēs* (**futility**) refers to that which fails to produce the desired result, that which never succeeds. It was therefore used as a synonym for empty, because it amounts to nothing. The spiritual thinking and resulting life-style of **the Gentiles**—here representing all the ungodly—is inevitably empty, vain, and void of substance. The life of an unbeliever is bound up in thinking and acting in an arena of ultimate trivia. He consumes himself in the pursuit of goals that are purely selfish, in the accumulation of that which is temporary, and in looking for satisfaction in that which is intrinsically deceptive and disappointing.

The unregenerate person plans and resolves everything on the basis of his own thinking. He becomes his own ultimate authority and he follows his own thinking to its ultimate outcome of futility, aimlessness, and meaninglessness—to the self-centered emptiness that characterizes our age (cf. Ps. 94:8–11; Acts 14:15; Rom. 1:21–22).¹

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1986). *Ephesians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (167–168). Chicago: Moody Press.