

A Submissive Trust, A Fixed Imagination, and A Perfect Peace Part I

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Isaiah 26:3

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Everyone wants to have peace. Nobody chooses a life void of peace but it comes with trouble, perplexity, and difficulties. We live in a world where offenses are committed and sometimes we are the ones committing them. We all cherish the concept of peace. World peace, international peace, delegations of peace, these are all terms we hear so often. In a world of war, hatred, and brutality, we crave peace.

Here, the text says that God will keep a man “in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed” on Him, and so the Bible promises that there is the possibility of peace. Even Jesus made that promise to His apostles, His followers, when He said, “My peace I leave with you.” But what does peace mean?

Isaiah is using a Hebrew word that many of you know, *Shalom*. “Shalom” means completion or fulfillment. It is entering into a state of wholeness and unity. We think of peace as the absence of problems but that’s not the biblical definition. It is not the absence of problems but an overall wellbeing and goodness even in the midst of problems. Someone has said that biblical peace “is the way things ought to be.” So, if you’re experiencing peace, internally things are the way they ought to be. Peace is a sense of goodness, a sense of blessing, a sense of the favor of God. “You will keep Him in *perfect favor, wholeness, whose mind is stayed on You.*”

But as we read this text we notice that the promise of peace is conditioned.

I. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

A. God Guards Our Minds.

This is what Isaiah says in verse three. “You will keep him.” *Keep* here doesn’t mean to possess, it’s the idea of a sentry, someone watching guard. God will guard your mind so that you can have

internal wellbeing in spite of the external problem. God guards us. It is God who stands at attention before the mind to watch over it to make sure that internally there's wholeness and unity, not division or clamor or noise that often creates a divided heart. God will guard you.

This is the action of God. You cannot keep your mind and heart in perfect peace. There's too much coming at it. Too much to think about that's often contrary and often very distressing. Isn't that right? Some thoughts come to us involuntarily. We don't ask for it, but the news comes nonetheless and it's not good news. How could you keep your heart and mind in perfect peace? God is standing sentry over your mind watching it. But there's a shared responsibility here, Isaiah says. We have to do something ourselves.

B. We Lean Our Minds Upon God.

We have to keep our minds stayed on the Lord. The word *stayed* is the word for *leaning upon*. You have to take your mind and lean it upon God. It's well that we often sing,

*I'm learning to lean, learning to lean,
Learning to lean on Jesus.
Finding more power than I'd ever dreamed,
I'm learning to lean on Jesus.*

Leaning with the mind in particular is to rest upon, to lie upon God. If I am leaning, I am reclining. I'm putting my weight on it, so the weight is on God. That's what you and I have to do and there's the problem, isn't it? Our minds don't lean one particular direction hardly at all. It's always vacillating. We think one thing and the next moment we're thinking something diametrically opposed to that. Our minds are often in compartments. We have a mind for this and a mind for that and a mind for this and a mind for that. No wonder our hearts are unstable. No wonder our minds are often divided with conflicts and issues. We're trying to reason our way through this world with all of the landmines and pitfalls and all the robbing thoughts that would terrorize our minds. Yet, lean we must. We must lean our minds upon God, if we are to have this perfect peace.

What Isaiah says here is interesting. In the Hebrew, Isaiah is saying "You will guard him in peace peace, whose mind is leaned on You." You heard the word *peace* twice. In your Bible it says, "perfect peace" but really in the Hebrew it is peace peace, double peace. It's the same word, *shalom*.

“You will keep him in *shalom shalom*.” Why does He repeat Himself? This is the way of emphasis. If the word *shalom* means completeness or fullness, then the English translators thought that *perfect* would be the best word to describe this kind of peace. It’s not just peace it’s a perfect, complete peace. We’re not talking about having stability even when you’re kind of trembling. You’re facing your fears and your fears are still there. No, this is a complete sense of wellbeing. “I know where I am, I know who I am, and I know whose I am.” That is perfect peace.

But once again there is a shared responsibility. You’ve got to lean on Him with your mind. What does that mean and how do you do that?

II. FIXED IMAGINATION

If you’re going to have this perfect peace, this double peace, you’re going to have to learn to have an imagination that is fixed or leaning upon God. It must be fixed on Him.

We need to do a little bit of psychology this morning. I hope I can do it in a way that keeps your interest and doesn’t put you to sleep. I remember psychology in college and if it wasn’t for the professor I probably would have had great difficulty. He made it quite interesting. Up until then, psychology was just a bunch of gibberish.

There is a biblical psychology. There are some things that are true in secular psychology textbooks but much of what is taught today as psychology is nothing but gibberish and fanciful arguments of people who don’t really know what they’re talking about. If you’ve ever read any of the writings of Freud, it’s nonsense. He had some huge problems. Yet he thrust his problems on humanity and they were accepted. Carl Jung and some of these other men have done the same and modern psychology departments in prestigious colleges are built on their writings and philosophies.

We ought to clear the deck and go back to the Scriptures because the God who made the mind knows the mind. He is the best psychologist.

I want to give you a definition of the mind that will hopefully help us.

A. The Definition of the Mind.

These are my thoughts after years and years of studying. I've come to the conclusion that when the Bible uses the word *mind* it's not talking technically about the actual process of how we think, rather it's discussing the imagination of the mind. The word *mind* is more than just the logical thought processes of the mind but it is the imagination of the mind. The word *mind* comes from the pottery world meaning *to form something*. The word is used to describe what God did when He created Adam, "And the LORD God **formed** man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). That's the same word in our text. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose *form* is stayed on you." That's literally what the word is.

The same word is used after Noah is released from the Ark and God puts a rainbow in the sky in Genesis 8:21, "And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the **imagination** of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.'"

This word *imagination* is the same word as *form*. Why the word *imagination* here? Why did the translators decide to take the Hebrew word for *form* out of the world of pottery and apply *imagination* here and then in Isaiah give us the word *mind*? Because God wants us to understand it's not just the logical, propositional thoughts that makes a man's mind. When we think of the word *mind* we tend to think about the process of thinking, such as $a + b = c$ or $1 + 1 = 2$. We think about logical deductions, inductive reasoning. But God says the mind is much more than logical propositions, it forms an entirety of thought best described by the word *imagination*. Notice that I said *forms* an entirety of thought.

B. The Power of Imagination.

When you and I use the word *imagination* we think of the fantasy play of a child. Haven't you heard somebody talk about a child, "I've never seen a child with more imagination than he or she has"? What they mean is that when that child is playing they create another world, another reality, as if that world really exists and they're the hero in it. They'll pick up a stick and pretend it's a gun. The slide on the playground becomes a ship or maybe even a spacecraft. The child has this ability with the imagination to impose a reality that seems even real to that child. That's how we normally think of the word *imagination*. Imagination is not fantasy although it creates fantasy as demonstrated in the play of a child. The child's imagination creates a false reality in order for that child to humor itself. The imagination created that, but don't think of imagination just as fantasy.

The imagination is a form of reasoning, hence the word *form* and hence the reason for God using the word *imagination*. Imagination is to take the reasoning powers of your mind and form them into a reality. This is the way you think. You don't think in logical syllogisms. A syllogism is a logical conclusion drawn from at least two assumed propositions.

If it quacks like a duck,
If it walks like a duck,
Then it must be a duck.

That's a syllogism. However, we normally don't think quite like that, although logic is involved in our thought process. What we do is out of the imagination we take what we believe to be true and we form it all together as a reality. This is what Jesus taught us.

For example, in Matthew 15:19 Jesus says, "For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." The word *thoughts* is not the idea of propositional statements such as "I hate him or her." That's a propositional fact. You may say that and come to that conclusion about a person but the mind doesn't quite work that way. The mind perceives, takes in the information, and forms a scenario and the conclusion is you hate that person. You normally don't say, "I will murder him or her," although you may eventually come to that conclusion. But when you see that person you begin to sense certain things about them that are contrary to you and that begins to form in the imagination a scenario or argument or reasoning.

The word is *reasoning* or *speculation*. It is what the imagination does. Your imagination actually argues with you and presents to you scenarios. It plays out in your mind certain circumstances or consequences. In Matthew 15:19, when Jesus said false witnessing, which is lying, proceeds from the heart. You don't think, the word *lie*. You really don't. If you do, you're a very unusual person. No, rather you see in your mind what will happen if you do tell the truth and you decide that image will not work for you. That's how you and I mostly think. We think in images, hence the word *imagination*.

If I say the word *camel* what did you just see in your mind? You had an image of what you think a camel looks like. I'm not going to take the time to ask you if it had one or two humps but you saw something. You did not see the letters C-A-M-E-L. You might have, but you probably saw the image first. Again, if you saw C-A-M-E-L, you're an unusual person. Most people's minds do not work that

way. We work with word pictures and images. In your mind, when you hear something, you see something as you're walking about functioning during the day, your mind is working, your imagination is working, forming scenarios from these images. That's what the imagination does. It works in this way and you make deductions from the images or scenario in the mind. Words take on form.

This is where the battle really is. Let's say you're working a business deal. Your mind, as you're discussing the deal, is looking for words but the words you express are coming from images about how that deal needs to come together. Imagination forms the scenario and the words explain it.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans one and we will see how the imagination, or the mind, forms arguments and reasonings by which we live. What I want to do for the next few moments is explain why you do what you do. This will always work. There is the rhyme and reason behind what you do and it goes back to the imagination, the mind, which forms scenarios and images of how things will play out in your life.

In Romans 1:18 the problem begins,

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.” (Romans 1:18, 19)

Paul is going to show us why the human race is rebelling against God. Why do we sin against God? The problem, he says, is that we've suppressed truth. Where do you suppress the truth? In the mind. Your mind is more important than you give it credit. God intended for you to know Him and serve Him and live for Him and worship Him by a truth-informed mind and that mind informed by the truth was to influence the will. The will is the part of you designed to make decisions, it's like the ram and processor of a computer. The choices you make are decided in the will.

God made Adam perfect and Adam's perfect mind was to inform his will according to the truth, therefore the choices he made were according to the information he had learned from God. But Satan offered different information to Eve and persuaded her to doubt God and believe him. She suppressed the truth she had received from God and believed the lie. When you and I sin it's because we are suppressing the truth and we're not dealing adequately or rightly with it. What could be known of God is suppressed, ignored, and rejected. What happens then?

“because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21)

What does it mean to be futile in your thoughts? It means unsuccessful. Futility is always dealing with failure. So when you suppress truth then you're not thinking correctly and because you're not thinking correctly your heart is dark. The heart and the will are the same thing. The heart is where the issues of life flow; the decisions of life are there made. “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” The heart or the will is being informed by the truth of the mind. But what if the truth is not working in the mind? What if what is believed to be truth is really a lie? What then happens to the heart? It's left in darkness. Darkness is the opposite of light, which would be the opposite of guidance. There's no guidance in the heart to choose correctly according to the statutes of God and His commandments.

So your heart is left to another influence. If you don't have an informed mind according to the truth of God, what's left for your heart to choose from? All that is left are the desires and appetites of our human nature and a mind that thinks wrongly about them. That's all that's left. If your heart is not informed by the Word of God, the heart has no light. But Isaiah is clear, the mind is not just to be informed, but stayed upon God. The problem in our culture is that we think *learning* is the same things as doing. People are deceived into thinking that if they know something to be true that is the same as performing the truth. No, not at all. It's part of it but we need to go beyond just hearing and accepting the truth, we need to lean. This means that I'm now to allow it to form the way I think properly about God and life. It's not just about the information coming to you.

When Adam and Eve fell, they no longer had a mind informed by the truth of God, so they were then subject to the whims and the wants of their fallen human nature. Man is nothing more than a person consumed by desire. That's all we are without a mind that is enlightened by truth. It doesn't matter if you're an intellectual with five PhDs or if you're illiterate. It's all the same. It doesn't matter what occupation, profession or what strata of society that you come from. If you don't have a mind informed with truth, informing the heart, the heart has nothing to choose from except desire. Desire will override even the intellect of the mind. That's why Christians still sin. *I know the truth but right now, desire is weighing a greater influence on my heart than the truth of God.* And when that happens, you'll always sin. The flesh wars against the Spirit.

How many times have you said, "I don't care how much it is. I've got to have that?" Have you ever said that? Have you ever felt that? What's happening in your imagination? The mind and the heart are slaves to your desires. It may not make logical sense, it might not make financial sense but you do it nonetheless because you are ruled by desire. That's the whole problem with addictions. Addictions are a problem of desire outweighing the truth. There's more influence coming from the desire for feelings, for emotions, than for the truth.

It's not just knowing the truth. It's about whether the truth is preeminent; is it ruling over the heart? Is it ruling over your desires?

I've counseled people about marriage and have had to tell some of them, "I don't believe that person is a good match for you. I believe you're going down a wrong path," and they go down the wrong path. In each case I've been proven right. The person has not been motivated by reasoning that's informed by the Scriptures and God's will, they're being informed by nothing more than their appetites, their craving.

When talking about desires you need to know that desires are neither bad nor good. It's not bad to want to eat something. God gave you that appetite and desire. The problem is when that desire to eat overrules the mind and you take in more than you absolutely need. There is nothing wrong with sex given the confines of marriage, but when it goes beyond that it's no longer love, it's always evil desire. When love for God and love for your neighbor is not the motivation of your heart, you are motivated by an evil desire and your captivation becomes a craving that takes over. People with addictions have problems because, while they may have great intellect and information, they don't know how to let the mind and the imagination work in their favor. They're allowing desires to captivate their imagination and inform them.

So what is left for the heart is nothing but darkness. It's a slave to desire. Notice in verse 21, the word for *thoughts*, is translated in the KJV *imaginings*. It is the Greek word *dialogismos*, "the thinking of a man deliberating with himself, deliberation." That's imagination. Just like the little boy who picks up a stick and pretends it's a gun or the little girl with her teacups who believes she's in a palace somewhere as a princess, they're both deliberating within themselves creating this scenario and they play out the scenario. Friends, that's the way God made the mind to work and if the truth of God is not predominantly shaping those scenarios of the imagination then all you're left with is the will being overrun with desire. The foolish heart, the seat of intelligence, affections, and moral choice, is darkened.

What's left for a heart that's darkened?

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,” (Romans 1:24)

Don't look at the word *lusts* and think sexual sin, the word *lust* simply means desire. That's all it means. Strong craving desires, manipulating desires. All that was left were the cravings and that's what motivates. We want what we want when we want it and as much as we want.

In verse 25 Paul shows us again the problem is in the mind and what we do with the truth.

“who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (Romans 1:25)

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;” (Romans 1:28)

The imagination becomes corrupt. God gave you the power of imagination so you could imagine according to sanctified reasoning based upon truth.

It's in the imagination that Satan attacks. The only way he can get to the heart is through the mind. By the way, I know that because that's the way God gets to your heart. It's through the mind to the heart. That's why when preachers tell a lot of sad stories and manipulate people's emotions, well, he can get decisions, but the persons will not be changed. The preacher bypassed the mind completely. That's why we have to be careful even with music. Music is an awesome medium, is it not? It's a wonderful gift given to us by God but if you're not careful the medium will bypass the mind and latch onto the desires of an uninformed heart or will, and the next thing you know is you're acting out what you're hearing.

If you ever read Francis Schaeffer, one of the things you will learn is that art imitates man but at some point man begins to imitate the art and eventually the art is what establishes reality. How? Through the power of imagination. Satan uses your imagination. This is the way the enemy works. He doesn't come and say to you, “Tell the lie.” He doesn't do that. That's not powerful enough. He creates a scenario. “If you tell the truth, you're going to suffer this...” “If you tell the truth,

it's not going to work out well, but if you say this, then it will work out like this..." He always creates a scenario.

Look at the very first temptation. "God knows that if you eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you will be like Him." He created a scenario. He painted a picture, an image.

He doesn't just give propositional statements; he creates with propositional statements an image. He will play out scenario after scenario after scenario in your mind and it will look convincing. In fact, most of us don't really believe the Book. We believe the imaginations.

Let me give you a few examples.

- The imagination is wrong when you think God must punish you for your sins and that He cannot just forgive for Christ's sake.

I know some of you struggle with this. I've struggled with it myself in the past. You just cannot imagine a scenario where after you sin—an ugly sin—and somebody comes and tells you, "If you will confess that sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you and He will cleanse you from that." There's no ifs, ands, or buts. There are no exemption clauses. There are no conditions. It's just hard for the imagination to see that as being real or truthful and so in the imagination we create a different scenario. "Jesus' blood cleanses but I must do *this*. I must do *that*." The imagination is working contrary to the truth. It is that simple.

When your mind is right, the imagination sees your sin as an offense against the God who loves you so. When you see that in your mind, you will confess. No preacher will have to motivate you through a sermon. The Spirit of God will bring you to your knees and you will be all too glad to confess and agree with God that He ought to damn you. But thank God there is an Advocate, seated at His right hand who shed His blood for that ugly sin and that ugly sin does not stand between you and your God, it's been wiped away. How much has it been wiped away? Well, dear friend, if you can find the distance between the East and the West, you'll know how far away it's been removed from you. That's what the Bible says. We must allow that truth of God to form—like pottery—our imaginations.

Imagination can be real or false. Most of us are living by false imaginations rather than biblical, real imaginations.

- The imagination is wrong when you don't believe God loves you because of difficult circumstances.

I shared that about my struggles with this last week. I was literally struggling to believe God loved me because I didn't see success, I didn't see God blessing me like I thought He would if He did love me. Therefore, my imagination said, "Then that can mean only one thing—God really doesn't love you." When you allow those thoughts to begin to form an image in your mind that *God must not love me because He's not helping me, I'm hurting, all I can see is pain and difficulty, that must mean God has abandoned me*. You have taken what you see and formed an image in your mind that God doesn't love you. That's what you really believe. You can quote John 3:16 and it does not matter. You can quote Scripture to yourself and it will not work. Just because we have a memorization program doesn't mean that's going to automatically work. You need to let those truths begin to reshape and form new imaginations, arguments, and reasonings. When those reasonings have informed the heart, then the heart will always choose appropriately.

- The imagination is wrong when you believe it's up to you to right the wrongs committed against you.

You have been wounded and sinned against. If you think you have a right to address this correct the individual who wounded you in order to feel better about yourself, you have a wrong imagination. If you believe you have a right to judge and assess them and use Scripture to support that imagination, well, it's a false imagination. It's not biblically informed reasoning.

- The imagination is wrong when you think the pornographic picture will fulfill you.

Once again, desire has taken over the heart and therefore the mind following along like a defenseless schoolboy.

- The imagination is wrong when you think that to be a Christian simply means you are forgiven.

That's why there are a lot of people in our churches who are lost. That's why there are a lot of people who are saved but immature. That's the imagination that leads the heart. That's what they

see when they think of being a Christian, a person who is forgiven and nothing more. That's an unbiblical, misinformed mind. That's not what Christianity is. Therefore these imaginations become your beliefs.

What must we do if we are to experience the peace of God?

C. Leaning the Imagination Upon God.

The imagination has to be informed with truth.

If we are to overcome the desires and the appetites and the unbiblical affections, we need to inform the mind so the mind is thinking according to the Scripture. This way the Scriptures govern the way we imagine, the way we see, the way we think.

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,”

He's talking about the mind. These imaginations, the way you have reasoned, the way you think, the way you shape your mind can establish strongholds in your life. For example, if you are driving down the road and somebody honks at you because they didn't like the way you were driving, what's the normal tendency? What happens in a flash in a moment? Anger. Where did that come from? You didn't think about getting angry. You didn't have to think about it. Why did it come? It's reflexive.

That's what these imaginations have done. They have so steeped themselves into who you are that it becomes an automatic reflex. That's why, when people start arguing, they say things they sometimes don't even mean and they say it in a way that is very harmful because the nature that has been informed by the desires and misinformed by the imagination that has taken over. We have to renew the mind. Renew the imaginations and reasonings according to the Scriptures so that you can form mental strongholds, which in this case is God Himself who is a sentry, a guard over your mind.

But here Paul is speaking negatively about these strongholds, these imaginations that influence how we react to life. And often we react in an ungodly way. How does Paul deal with them?

“casting down arguments (imagination KJV, this form of thinking that is unbiblical) and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge (the truth) of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

That’s what he means by learning to lean or be stayed on God. “He will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind (his imagination, the form of his thinking) is stayed (leaning, fixed) on Him.” You take control of your mind when you start thinking.

This is why many Christians have struggled year after year after year, because they have not taken seriously their minds. They think if they were to take seriously their minds they would have to become a theologian, they’d have to start reading books about theology and those big words you can’t even pronounce. That’s what you think about when you think about getting ahold of your mind or becoming a thinker. I’ve known men that couldn’t read those big words but they were thinkers about God and His Word and they allowed the Word to reshape their mind’s imagination. They were godly men. They weren’t preachers, they weren’t PhDs, they were not theologians, they were not men in ivory towers, they were men that simply thought about God according to the Scriptures.

Let me give you one example how to do that. I share this not trying to create a law or legalism, but I think you ought to do this first thing in the morning. You need to get into the Word of God because you need to let the Word begin to address those imaginations that will be running wild during the day because you’re going to be faced with things you don’t know about. Isn’t that right? When you get up you don’t know what you’ll be faced with that day and once you get into those scenarios the imagination takes over. It may not work out the way your imagination says it will, and it seldom does. How many times have you worked out a scenario in your own mind and it actually happened that way? Very seldom. So get up in the morning and start soaking the mind in the Word. But don’t just read the words before you, begin to prayerfully think about what you are reading.

For example, our text today,

“You will keep him in perfect peace.”

“You.” That’s You, God. This is about You. You will keep me. Ah, I don’t have to keep me in perfect peace. You do this. But Lord, why aren’t You doing it? I don’t have perfect peace. What’s going on in my life? Why

am I always disturbed? Why am I always feeling like I'm trembling? Why is there such anxiety in my life, if You will keep me in perfect peace?

“...whose mind is stayed on You.”

I see, I'm supposed to do something here. I'm supposed to keep my mind stayed on You. Lord, I really don't know what that means. Show me what that means. Sometime today, Lord, give me this answer. If it's not today or tomorrow, soon, because I want to start doing this. Show me how to start doing this because I don't know what that really means.

And then look for God to answer that prayer sometime that day and if it's not that day then get up the next day and start looking for an answer. One of the reasons you don't hear God is because you're not looking for God to talk to you. This isn't complicated, it's just using Scripture and thinking about it and praying over it. You don't know it, but on a subconscious level the Spirit of God begins to take that truth and dismantle the old imaginations and rebuild biblical, godly imaginations. So the next time somebody honks at you, you can say automatically, “Bless you brother!” You don't have to think about it because you're working from a new mind.

I conclude by saying you're either going to worry or worship. You will either have your mind set on the Lord—and if it is, you're going to worship Him in all things—or the other alternative is no peace, which means nothing but anxiety and worry. It's up to you. God is already there to do what He promised. I know He'll keep His side of the promise. What about you? Are you willing to do the work of renewing the mind so that you can have peace peace, this blessed double peace that God promised, having God watching over your mind and informing you? Amen.