

TheoCritical Thinking

by Dr. Paul T. Criss, Dean of Faculty – Memphis/DeSoto Campuses

We talk a lot about the Christian Worldview and it is important that we do. What we sometimes forget is how our thinking is to impact our lives; specifically, how thinking about Scripture is meant to transform not only what we think but how we think, as well. Romans tells us, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect” (Romans 12:4, English Standard Version). From this passage we can see that our thinking is not only meant to inform, but most importantly it is meant to transform. In critical thinking, we do not simply criticize to be critical, we allow the Holy Spirit (through God’s Word, Christian Professors and Institutions, group experiences, etc.) to develop our mind so that we can be finely honed instruments of cultural transformation.

Look at some of these powerful verses that talk about the importance of *what* we think and *how* think:

- *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (Proverbs 9:10 New International Version)
- *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...* (Hosea 4:6 English Standard Version)
- *...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Philippians 4:8 English Standard Version)

It is very telling that our current culture wants us to compartmentalize our faith for Sundays only and take on a post-modern humanistic approach to life Monday through Saturday. The trend in the current culture is that we be “spiritual” but that our faith life should not be a part of our real life; however, Scripture points us in a different perspective. One of my foundational verses is found in Colossians:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4 New International Version)

This verse directs our minds and our hearts to be centered on Christ. That verse, “set your minds on things above” is not about being “so heavenly minded, we are of no earthly good;” rather, it is the opposite – it is about letting God and His thoughts, provided in His Word, not only inform us, but conform and transform us and the culture as well.

The Bible constantly encourages us to think through our faith so that we can apply our faith in a manner pleasing to God. I remember when the phrase “what would Jesus do?” was very popular. What I discovered was that many did not know what Jesus *would do* because they did not know what Jesus *did*. This is evidence of the importance of God’s Word being the informing/transforming catalytic agent on our way of thinking.

The culture of our world would want us not to apply the truth of God’s Word to everyday occurrences; it acts as if faith and life are two separate worlds, but the Bible encourages a unified worldview. After all, God says over and over again “the righteous shall live by faith” and living includes our way of thinking (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:20; 3:11-12). Our faith in Christ is the only hope for this world; therefore, it is mission-critical that we grasp the goal to which God calls us.

Thinking through our faith is more than just thinking through what you do or do not believe. The Christian faith is analogous to a sieve through which all of life, including the manner in which we conduct our thinking process, is filtered or sifted. It is here we come to the heart of the matter.

This is what the Christian Worldview curriculum is all about. I call it *Theocritical* thinking. It is thinking with the mind of Christ (remember: “set your mind on things above”). You have likely heard the phrase “you can set your watch by it.” Well, the same idea is conveyed when Paul states “set your mind on things above” – we need to set our minds by the Word of God.

The word “theocritical” can be broken down into *theos*, the Greek word meaning “God,” and *criticism*, which can be defined as the art of evaluating the quality of something. This is so needed in our lives today. Many practice “critical thinking” and believe they are accomplishing this when they criticize something; however, critical thinking should be value-added. In other words, it is not about simply tearing something apart, it is about learning from something, whether positive or negative. We can learn from positive examples what to do and how to think and from negative examples we can learn what not to do or how not to think. Theocritical thinking proposes a framework that brings human knowledge to a higher plane and propels us to another level of greater understanding.

In the practice of theocritical thinking, the goal is to discover and apply what God thinks about a subject: “What does God think about this? How does God’s Word evaluate it?” Literally, we want to think the same thing God thinks about a topic or idea by thinking God’s thoughts after him and approaching everything with the mind of Christ. This is why every course taught has the Christian Worldview as its centerpiece including a minimum of fifteen Scriptures to undergird what is being taught.

The Christian Worldview is not only meant to impact the lives, families, work, and recreation of others, it is meant to transform us as well. This is the only way that we can adequately model what we want those watching us to receive and take with them; it is being an authentic ambassador of Christ. According to Jesus, a student, when mature will be like his or her teacher (Luke 6:40); therefore, we must take this seriously as Christians who are called to be disciple-makers, as we invest our lives into the men and women God places in our sphere of influence and those under our care. We have a high calling, for the Apostle Paul even encourages, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:9 English Standard Version)

May you experience grace, truth, and peace – the kind of peace only Christ can provide (Philippians 4:7).

Per aspera ad astra – “through adversity to the stars” – Godspeed!