

## Can God's Thoughts Be Our Thoughts?

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

The above passage is sometimes cited to affirm that God's thoughts and ways are so far beyond man's as if to make God both completely transcendent and supremely unapproachable.

But is this the real meaning of this passage? Is Isaiah really saying that God is so far beyond man that we can not have any idea as to what, or how, he thinks? Is it really impossible to have *any* understanding of God's ways? Let us consider this passage in a little more detail.

In the opening verses of the chapter God, through Isaiah:

- (1) encourages the children of Israel to focus on what is truly valuable as opposed to what only fills the belly (vs 1);
- (2) tells them that what is truly valuable costs them no money (vs 1);
- (3) instructs them that if they listen to God they will “eat what is good” (in an ultimate, spiritual sense first; but not necessarily excluding physical food) and their souls will delight in abundance (vs 2);
- (4) asks that His children listen and pay attention to Him so that their souls would live (vs 2);
- (5) promises to make a covenant with His people (vs 3);
- (6) instructs them about the “sure mercies of David” (vs 3);
- (7) tells them that David (and his mercies) was given as a witness to God's people (vs 4);
- (8) questions why Israel would call on a foreign nation for help rather than rely on the Holy One of Israel (vs 5);
- (9) commands them to “seek the Lord while He may be found” (vs 6);
- (10) pleads with them to “Call upon Him while he is near” (vs 6);
- (11) orders that the “wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts” (vs 7);
- and (12) promises mercy and pardon to those who return to the Lord (vs 7).

It is after this that God, through Isaiah, says that His thoughts and ways are not Israel's thoughts and ways, but are higher than theirs. But it is *not* because Israel *could not know* God or follow God's will ... rather, it is because they *would not* know God and follow His will. They simply *refused* to do so.

Note that in verse two Isaiah told Israel to listen to God, that verse three instructed Israel to “incline your ear,” that verse six commands them to seek the Lord and call upon him. Note that all of these verses, and others too, enjoin hearing and obedience on the part of Israel. What is hearing and obedience? Is it not making God's thoughts our thoughts (hearing, as well as believing) and making God's ways our ways (obedience).

Rather than proclaiming that God was so distant and transcendent from man, verses eight and nine boldly proclaim that *man can know God's thoughts and ways*. When the unrighteous man forsakes his thoughts, he will begin to think like God thinks (vs 7). When the wicked forsakes his ways, he will begin to act like God wants him to act (vs 7, i.e., by following God's ways).

Furthermore, the closing verses in this chapter reinforce the effectiveness of God's word. It does not go forth from His mouth in vain and it will not return to Him void (vs 11). “(I)t shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (vs 11)

And what exactly does God want His word to accomplish? What was the purpose of sending it? Was it not for man to hear? Was it not for man to obey? If (1) it is God's pleasure to do His will (Is 46:10; Eph 1:5; Phil 2:13; Rev 4:11), and if His will is to save souls (1 Tim 2:3-4; I Tim 4:10; 1 Jn 2:1-2; 2 Pet 3:9; Jn 4:34; Mt 19:10; Lk 18:11), and if (2) souls are only saved when they hear and obey the word of God (Jn 6:44-45; Acts 11:14; Rom 10:8ff; James 1:22ff), then (3) it must be true that we can think as God would have us to think (have God's thoughts) and act like God would have us to act (follow God's ways).

Is this not what we do when we read His word? Do we not have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) when we read the inspired message? Do we not have the mind of Christ when we humbly obey His will (Phil 2:5ff)? Do we not bring every thought captive to Christ, and thus think like God and Christ when we trust and obey (2 Cor 10:4)?

Surely, instead of telling us that God can *never* be known and never be obeyed, God, through Isaiah, is telling us that he *can* be known and he *can* be obeyed.

Let us all strive to learn the word and will of the Father more diligently, and in love and obedience, strive to implement it more fully in our lives. When we do so we “shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; And it shall be to the LORD for a name, For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” (Isaiah 55:12-13)