

Entertaining

Do you like to entertain? You decide to have some friends over. You issue the invitations. Then you make preparations – food, drink, activities – to be sure your guests will feel welcome and have a good time, right? You want them to be comfortable, stay a while, and come back again soon. All good. But the friendly word “entertain” drew me up short when I recently noticed it used in a very different context.

[Jesus] said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat, and go home.” And the man got up and went home. (Matthew 9:2-7, emphasis added)

Jesus didn’t accuse these “teachers of the law” of simply *having* evil thoughts; He said they were *entertaining* them (or “harboring” in another translation). That means the evil thoughts didn’t suddenly barge their way into their minds out of nowhere, unwelcomed. No, they were invited and made to feel at home. By their own self-importance and their jealousy of Jesus, the teachers of the law had made preparations for these obnoxious guests. They had predisposed themselves to receive those evil ideas as friends, to believe them, *to keep and nourish* them in their minds (as one definition of “harbor” puts it).

We often consider our thoughts beyond our control, but that’s not entirely true. We can, by how we choose to occupy our minds and our time, invite some thoughts to come and others to stay away. When a thought shows up on our doorstep, we have the choice to welcome it in or take it as an enemy captive (2 Corinthians 10:5). We can keep and nourish it in our minds or starve it to death. Time to choose which you will entertain: the enemy’s evil lies as reflected in worldly thinking, or God’s peace, truth, and light.

Rejoice in the Lord always... Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. (Philippians 4:4-8)