



What kinds of punishments or consequences are given when you break a commandment only by what you think in your mind?

An excellent question that came up after a study of the commandments - particularly commandments five and six (murder and adultery). When we are tempted to prideful boast that we have never broken these commandments, Jesus comes along and tells us in Matthew 5 that if we've thought bad thoughts about another person or so much as looked at another person lustfully, then we have broken them.

We highlighted the fact that Jesus gave the commandments because he loves us and doesn't want us to be hurt or to hurt someone else. We all pretty much know that when we sin against the commandment in our deeds, there are consequences that are hurtful to us. But how are we hurt when we just sin in our thoughts? It would seem that our thoughts are pretty harmless.

1. First, and probably most important, is the fact that sinful thoughts lead us away from God and his will. That in itself is punishment - the worst.

2. Second comes the guilt that we feel knowing that we have gone against God's will. Guilt that can only be removed by admitting our sin and receiving God's forgiveness. All consequences of sin are designed to lead us to repentance and to teach us not to commit that sin again. Feeling guilt is a consequence that God gives just as much with sins of thought as with sins of action.

3. Lastly, what do our thoughts eventually lead to? Actions. Hateful thoughts lead us - at a minimum - to break the eighth commandment (false witness) by saying things that hurt others - and ultimately ourselves. Lustful thoughts lead to all sorts of sexual sins from using pornography to abuse to sex outside of marriage.

Jesus knows that Satan gets us to sin in our actions by first getting us to think thoughts that lead to those sins. A mind that stays focused on Jesus and on pleasing him results in a life that is much happier than when our mind says "It won't hurt just to think about it."

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to <mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net>