

Attitudes

An *attitude* is a perspective or a combination of beliefs and opinions. Because the way we think affects the way we act, an *attitude* is a mindset that influences behavior. Webster defines attitude as, “a mental position with regard to a fact or state; a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state.”¹ Attitudes can be changed. Feelings can be altered indirectly through changing ones attitude and behavior. Attitudes often stand in the way of solving issues. Negative attitudes may prejudice one person against another, therefore making significant communication and problem solving difficult or even impossible. Sometimes attitudes that trigger bitterness, hatred, anger or fear toward another person must first be replaced with a more loving attitude in order for problem-solving to take place. Attitudes usually involve habits of thought; habitual ways of thinking. Changes in attitude, like changes in behavior patterns, require habit changes that stem from the put off/put on dynamic of Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10.²

In order for attitude and thinking patterns to change, one must discipline him/herself to replace ungodly thought patterns with godly patterns. This is a choice each person must make for him/herself. In the New Testament, the Greek word for discipline is *gymnazo*, which means “to exercise or to train.” In other words, it means to practice it over and over again until you get it right. You may recognize the word “gym” in the Greek word, *gymnazo*. This is where our words *gymnastics* and *gymnasium* are rooted. We know that physical fitness depends on how hard we work at physical exercise. Likewise, godly living depends upon how hard we work at training ourselves in godly discipline. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy “...discipline (*gymnazo*) yourself for the purpose of godliness” (I Timothy 4:7) and he wrote to the church in Rome “Christians are “transformed by the renewing of their minds” (Romans 12:2). As we work at training our minds to think godly thoughts instead of ungodly thoughts, the Holy Spirit supernaturally enables us to think and act in ways that are more pleasing to God and more profitable in our own lives. Eventually the godly response begins to come more automatically as old habits are replaced by new godly ones.³

Changing sinful thoughts and attitudes begins with recognizing thoughts that are selfish, unloving, vengeful, bitter or unbiblical in any way. Once you realize that your thought is wrong, confess it to God (agreeing with God that the thought is sinful). Then “put off” your self-honoring thought and “put on” a God-honoring thought in its place. This is a process that takes work but at the same time, God is at work in your heart, changing your will and your desires to be in line with His (Phil 2:13).⁴

¹ Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Attitude.

² Adapted from *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* by Jay Adams, p. 115.

³ Adapted from *The Excellent Wife* by Martha Peace, p. 23.

⁴ Adapted from *The Excellent Wife* by Martha Peace, p. 25.

In order to help you determine what your attitudes are toward the things that happen in life, the following list of possible attitudes is provided for you. Look over the list and check the attitudes that you think might describe how you think:

- I need to feel happy
- I'm not happy unless I'm comfortable
- I'd be happier if I felt more safe
- My problems are greater than the problems of others
- I need more than "just" biblical counseling; I need an expert to help me
- I'm entitled; you/they owe me
- I'm ugly
- I'm stupid
- I'm more capable than those around me
- Everything is meaningless; my efforts are in vain
- Everything is hopeless; what's the use of trying?
- I could be happy if _____
- Woe is me; I'm so afflicted/victimized
- I'm smarter/better/faster/better looking than most other people
- I have too much to do
- Life is just so hard
- I really must _____
- The expectations that others have on me are just too great
- I can't quit until I'm finished
- If he/she would just _____
- I'm scared to death; I just know something awful is going to happen
- Life has been so unkind to me
- Just leave me alone
- Other people are so much more blessed than I am; it's just not fair
- I'm so tired; I want to give up
- Government could/should fix our problems
- The church is full of hypocrites

- I don't need help; I can do it myself
- My life has already been predetermined/ruined; there's nothing I can do to change it
- Vengeful; they're gonna pay...
- Too bad they don't "get it" like I do
- I'm going to set him/her straight
- If they could only see me now
- I don't care
- I can't do it
- I've always done it this way...
- My way is best
- Procrastinating; I'll do it later
- Anxious; I have to do it before it's too late or before someone beats me to it
- My value is based on my performance
- God loves me only when I'm good
- I always get the short end of the stick
- Oh no, not again!
- My kids are better than other people's kids
- I wish my kids were like their kids
- I can never do enough
- I can't do anything right
- Other people should be helping me more
- It has to be perfect!
- What I have to say is more important than what others have to say
- People are looking at/for my imperfections
- I'm usually right but when I'm wrong, it's about something that is insignificant
- I expect _____
- God should _____
- How come I always have to be the one to _____?
- I need _____

• Other _____

Below is a list of Scripture references. Look up each one and write what it teaches about how God wants His people to think:

Colossians 3:2

Philippians 4:8

Psalm 19:14

2 Corinthians 10:5

Proverbs 23:7

Isaiah 55:8-9

Isaiah 26:3

Romans 12:2

Eph 5:18-21

Colossians 3:23-24

Philippians 2:3-4

I Thess 5:16-18

Ephesians 4:32

Phil 4:4

Phil 4:6

I Corinthians 10:31

In the space below, describe a God-honoring attitude based on the teachings in the verses above.

How do your own attitudes measure up to God's standard? What do you need to change about your attitudes? When and how will you begin to do this?