

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### REMEMBERING THE MERCIES OF GOD

One of the most celebrated personalities of the Middle East is Nasreddin Hodja, the endearing holy-man-cum-scholar of Turkish folklore. His famed wisdom is often threatened by his equally famed stupidity. One day, so a particular story goes, the Hodja dropped his ring inside his house. Not finding it there, he went outside and began to look around the doorway. His neighbor passed and asked him what he was looking for. "I have lost my ring," said the Hodja. "Where did you lose it?" asked the neighbor. "In my bedroom," said the Hodja. "Then why are you looking for it out here?" "There's more light out here," the Hodja said. Perhaps the Hodja, in his frankly acknowledged folly, is wiser than most of us in the concealed stupidity of our pretended wisdom. Surely the easiest place to look for what we lost is where we lost it – except that humans characteristically either forget what we lost or look for it anywhere except where it can be found.<sup>1</sup> What the Evangelical Church has lost is a distinctive Christian *mind*, or to put it more bluntly, we lack *wisdom*. Oliver Barclay defines the Christian mind as "the ability to see the true nature of things and how, in the light of that, we should live. In the Book of Proverbs, for instance, it has three main strands: knowledge, understanding, and practical know-how (in the light of the knowledge and understanding.) Words like understanding, insight, and prudence rub shoulders in its definitions with knowledge and instruction on the one hand and with wise dealings, righteousness, and justice on the other. Understanding depends on knowledge, but it has to lead in turn to wise action."<sup>2</sup> Failure to develop a Christian mind will hinder and harm in ways we cannot begin to imagine. In fact, it will lead to foolishness. Our text in Psalms 106:7 illustrates this very point. Failure of memory follows upon a want of understanding. This, in the case of Israel of old, readily led on to the sad consummation of rebellion. Provocation follows upon "FORGETFULNESS," a failure to remember where inward faults displayed themselves in outward offences.

#### **I. WANT OF UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WONDERS IS A SOURCE OF SIN.**

God's great display in bringing Israel out of Egypt – what was the people's response to Moses? One of complaint.

#### **II. WANT OF UNDERSTANDING LEADS TO FAILURE OF MEMORY**

Mercies should be remembered – and multiplied mercies should never be forgotten. How quickly did Israel forget! Note their actions at Marah.

#### **III. GRIEVOUS PROVOCATION FOLLOWED THEIR FORGETFULNESS OF GOD.**

Note they challenged God with an evil intent. How great is the sin when it follows such a great display of mercy! This failing followed *after* a time when they sang of God's great deliverance (cf. Exodus 15:15ff).

#### **IV. THE CALL TO REMEMBRANCE.**

Old Bishop Ryle wisely wrote, "Half our doubts and fears arise from dim perceptions of the real nature of Christ's Gospel...The root of a happy religion is a clear, distinct, well-defined knowledge of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

##### **A. REMEMBER WHO GOD IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE.**

Deut. 8:2 – Remember how the Lord your God led you.

Deut. 24:9 – Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam (leprous disease).

Chron. 16:12 – Remember the wonders He has done; His miracles, and the judgments He pronounced.

Neh. 4:14 – Remember the Lord, who is great.

Job 36:14 – Remember to extol His work.

Psalms 77:11 – I will remember the deeds of the Lord. I will remember your miracles of long ago.

Psalms 105:5 – Remember the wonder He has done.

Psalms 119:55 – In the night I remember your name.

Ecc. 12:1 – Remember your Creator in the day of your youth.

Ecc. 12:6 – Remember Him – before the silver cord is severed or the golden bowl is broken.

Note: Ps. 78:42 – They did not remember His power; Ps. 106:7 – They did not remember your many kindnesses.

##### **B. REMEMBER PAST CONDUCT AND LESSONS OF LIFE**

Lam. 3:19 – I remember my affliction and my wandering.

Luke 12:32 – Remember Lot's wife.

Eph. 2:11, 12 – Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth... remember that as that time you were separate from Christ.

Heb. 10:32 – Remember those earlier days after you had received Light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the fire of suffering.

##### **C. REMEMBER THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE**

Acts 20:31 – Remember that for three years I have never stopped warning each of you day and night with tears.

II Tim. 2:8 – Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead. (Luke 24:6)

Jude 17 – Remember what the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold (about scoffers and false teachers).

I Cor. 11:24, 25 – Do this (Lord's Supper) in remembrance of me.

**CONCLUSION:** "Our walk," said John R.W. Stott, "depends on our mind, our conduct and on our outlook. As a man 'thinketh in his heart (or mind) so is he' (Prov. 23:6 AV) and so he behaves. It is our thoughts, ultimately, which govern our behavior ...It is a question of our preoccupation, the ambitions which compel us and interests which engross us; how we spend our time, money and energy: what we give ourselves up to. That is what we set our minds on."<sup>4</sup> Failure to do so will result in the sin of forgetfulness of God's character and acts. It was the fear of this that prompted the Psalmist to pray, "Give me understanding, and I shall live" (Psalm 119:144). Five times between verses 144 and 159 the theme of *life* is accented. The Hebrew word translated life is CHAYAH. It means not merely staying alive, but enjoying a rich and meaningful life, one that is strong and full of vitality.<sup>5</sup> This thought is echoed in the words of Jesus: "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10.) What is the link between this kind of life and *understanding*? "The understanding," wrote Thomas Manton, "is the great wheel of the soul, and guide of the whole man."<sup>6</sup> It is true that the rest of our faculties follow the dictates and decisions of the understanding. The quality of our life is dependent then on how we think. How do we naturally think?<sup>7</sup> The Bible describes the *natural* condition of the human mind with terms like: *foolish* (Titus 3:3); *ignorant* (I Peter 1:14); *futile* (Ephesians 4:17); *depraved* (Romans 1:28); and likened to *darkness*<sup>8</sup> (Acts 26:18;

Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:13). This language is used to describe how men think in reference to the true God and spiritual realities. It is not simply a question of intelligence, for we recognize that fallen man can use his mind to accomplish anything. John Owen observed: “Be men otherwise and in other things never so wise, knowing, learned, and skillful, in spiritual things they are dark, blind, ignorant, unless they are renewed in the spirit of their minds by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Psalm 10:4 says of the wicked, “in all his thought there is no room for God.” Who are these wicked people? The wicked are unbelievers, which is what we all once were. Wickedness is indeed a harsh word. We tend to think that word is reserved for a special class of people like Hitler or Stalin. If that is the way you think, then perhaps you have never considered how great is the weight of sin.<sup>10</sup> John Howe captured the essence of the matter when he wrote, “a wicked man’s life is nothing else but a continual forsaking of God, of departing from Him.”<sup>11</sup> Having been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13; I Peter 2:9; Eph. 5:8), we are called upon to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2 ; Eph. 4:23).

### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> This illustration is taken from Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What To Do About It* (Baker, 1004) p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Barclay, *The Intellect and Beyond: Developing A Christian Mind* (Zondervan 1985) p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts On the Gospels IV*, (rpt. Zondervan 1955) p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> J.R.W. Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5-8* (Baker, 1984) p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IV*, G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 334.

<sup>6</sup> *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton III* (rpt. Worthington, PA: Maranatha, N.D.)

<sup>7</sup> “The thoughts do most distinguish men’s hearts, because they are the freest acts of the mind, wherein the mind is most itself.” *Works of Thomas Goodwin VI* (rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), p. 476. C.H. Spurgeon warns, “Where there is much traffic of bad thinking, there will be much mire and dirt; every wave of wicked thought adds something to the corruption which rots upon the shore of life. It is dreadful to think, that a vile imagination, once indulged, gets the keys of our minds, and can get in again very easily, whether we will or no, and can so return as to bring seven other spirits with it more wicked than itself; and what may follow, no one knows.” *John Ploughman’s Talks* (Rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Spiritual darkness is spoken of in Scripture, not as a mere passive or negative thing, but as a positive power.” James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (rpt. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966) p. 56

<sup>9</sup> *The Works of John Owen III* (rpt. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966) p. 56

<sup>10</sup> This is actually the response Anselm gave to the question: “Why could God not simply wipe out man’s sin without requiring atonement?” His actual words were ‘Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum.’ *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man). Book 1, Chapter 21.

<sup>11</sup> *The Works of the Reverend John Howe I* (rpt. Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990) p. 422.