

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Your Mind Matters

“Every person,” wrote Alvin Toffler, “carries in his head a mental model of the world – a subjective representation of external reality.”¹ Unfortunately many Christians have been mentally secularized (in some cases it would be best to describe them as having undergone a complete lobotomy!). Instead of *thinking* like Christians, we have succumbed to the thought patterns and values of our secular society, so much so that there is really nothing distinctively different when it comes to how we actually think. We have made peace with the culture so that, while there may be a Christian ethic, a Christian practice, and even a Christian spirituality, there is no longer a Christian mind.² The mindset of many Christians is more often than not determined by the culture. Matthew 7:1 is quickly becoming the most quoted verse in the Bible, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” – (out of context, I would add).³ This verse is cited by people who operate on the erroneous principle that everyone should be able to act as they choose in private, provided that their acts do not damage other people. Coupled with this assumption is the widely accepted axiom that individuals are entitled to self-fulfillment or self-gratification per se. If it brings me personal happiness, it is ethically okay.⁴ In other words, the criterion that is being used to determine behavior is whether or not the action brings personal happiness. Another example of how the mindset of many Christians is shaped by the culture is evident in how truth and values are seen. Are they absolute or relative? Do you think in terms of absolutes or is life a series of value judgments that vary according to any given situation?⁵ The need for a Christian mind is a lot more than an intellectual concern. It is rooted in the words of Jesus when He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 in response to the question, “What is the greatest commandment?” He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37). What is so significant is the fact that in the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 6:5 the word “mind” does not appear, but is deliberately added by Jesus in all three of the synoptic gospels. Why did Jesus do this? We want to examine in this study the Biblical vocabulary that pertains to the *mind*.

I. OLD TESTAMENT TERMS

When Jesus added the word “*mind*” to Deuteronomy 6:5, it was not because the Old Testament was unconcerned about the mind. “The explanation is that the range of meaning of the Hebrew word translated *heart* had narrowed so much that in Greek two words, *heart* and *mind*, were needed to say what was covered in the Old Testament by the one word *heart*.”⁶

A. Heart

The most common word in Hebrew for heart is LEB (or LEBAB). This refers, not only to the feelings, affections and desires, but also to the will as well as the intellect. In fact this term embraces in Hebrew thought the whole inner man. Wisdom, for example, is located in the heart (Exodus, 31:6; 36:2; II Chronicles 9:23). In Deuteronomy 15:9 we read of the *thoughts of the heart*. When David in Psalm 51:10 prays that God would *create in me a clean heart*, he acknowledges that wicked devices originate in the heart (cf. Genesis 6:5). The heart can be deluded (Isaiah 44:20). Thus the heart in Hebrew is the source of all action and the center of all thought and feeling. It is interesting to note in this connection the very real place for the emotion of *anger* in the Bible. We

are told to *be angry but sin not* (Ephesians 4:26). We have the anger of Jesus as a model here. Throughout the gospels we see that our Lord was often angry, sometimes *extremely* angry, but He did not sin (Mark 3:5; 11:15). Yet there are many Christians who consider it a sin to be angry. In speaking of legitimate anger, we have to bear in mind that it is not simply a loss of one's temper, but a type of *thoughtful* response that demands anger.

II. NEW TESTAMENT TERMS

When we turn to the New Testament we meet with a whole series of concepts that specifically describe and define what the Old Testament meant by the term *heart*.

A. Mind

The word NOUS, which refers to the *understanding*, really has no direct equivalent in English. The word is used in reference to a mental disposition in which a way of thinking is in the forefront (I Corinthians 1:10; Colossians 2:18). Having said that, however, we really have not defined the word completely. There is a moral dimension to this word. "The NOUS is therefore not merely a theoretical capacity, but also the point of departure, the determinative *center* of his acting."⁷ (Cf. Romans 7:23; 14:5). Closely related to this word is NOEO, to perceive (cf. Mark 7:18; 13:14; Romans 1:20; Ephesians 3:4). The intensive form is KATANOEEO, to direct one's mind so as to comprehend (cf. Luke 12:24, 27; Acts 7:31, 32). Another important word is PHRONEO which is mainly a term of the Apostle Paul. This is the word which brings us to our very inmost thoughts. It appears in Romans 8:5, "They that are after the flesh do *mind* the things of the flesh." (Cf. also Philippians 3:19; I Corinthians 13:11). Two verses later (v. 7), Paul declares that to be of this mindset is to be in open hostility to God. "This passage makes it abundantly clear that the way one thinks is intimately related to the way ones lives."⁸ Note how this differs from how we commonly use the word *intellect* or *mind* in reference how we *think* about doctrine or theology, as if this was no different from when we think about solving a math problem, balancing our checkbook, or filling out our tax forms. "In fine," wrote Herman Witsius, "that knowledge of God [theology], which flutters not in the brain only, but *brings forth fruit*, of every good work, *from the day that he hath truly heard and known the grace of God*, is a part of the new man, Col. 1:6, 9, 10."⁹

B. Heart

The New Testament word for heart is KARDIA. Although it does not have the same richness of meaning as the Hebrew LEB, it does denote more than our English word for heart. This word, especially in Paul's writing, preeminently denotes the human ego in its thinking, affections, and aspirations. "Theologically speaking, therefore, *heart* denotes man in his religious-moral quality."¹⁰ (Cf. Philippians 4:7; II Corinthians 3:14ff; Romans 2:5).

III. MIND AND HEART IN HARMONY

When the importance of the mind or intellect is exaggerated to the point that the heart is discredited, then we have fallen into cold *rationalism*. If, on the other hand, we exaggerate the importance of the heart to the point that the mind is discredited, we fall into the snare of blind *mysticism* which, in the words of Warfield, "deliver[s] us over to the deceitfulness of the currents of feelings which flow up and down in our souls. This pathway has been traveled by the mystics, and we have as the result the clash of rival revelations, and the deification of the most morbid of human imaginations."¹¹ It is sad but true to say that in our day spiritual and religious devotion is assumed to be primarily a matter of *feeling*. If we are simply sincere in our feelings, if we can simply unleash our emotions, then and only then are we really worshiping God. So worship in most churches is geared to this end. Music is used to create an emotional atmosphere. The entire service is structured around how people feel. Michael Scott Horton, in response to this mindset, says, "God doesn't want us to worship Him in 'our own way.' We are by nature idolatrous – *that* is our 'own way.' Our imagination is given to creating our own religion based on our opinion, speculation, intuition and experience."¹² Our worship of God and our love for Him must be

more than simply a matter of feeling or emotion. In the words of Jesus, it must involve the *whole* person. “No part of man is emphasized as independent of other parts; not because the various parts are not important, but because the Word of God is concerned precisely with the whole man in his relation to God.”¹³

CONCLUSION: Let me close by quoting Obadiah Sedgwick, one of the Westminster Divines: “If we knew the nature of our Redeemer more, how holy and compassionate and helpful it would be. If we knew the offices of our Savior, how absolute they are in removing our guilt, in conquering our corruptions, in making way for us to the Father, in speeding our suits and requests; if we knew how fully He stands for us, He died for us, He intercedes for us, how willing He is yet to be more applied by us and possessed of us, we would believe more and doubt less. What the Psalmist speaks of God is true of Christ: *They that know Thy name, will put their trust in Thee*. Yet, take a caution in your studying of Christ. Study Him as God reveals Him, otherwise your doubts will stick upon you. If a man studies his sins in his own way, in a natural way, he shall neither rightly see them nor yet be freed from them. So, if men study Christ their own way, if they will have Him to be such a One as their fearful hearts would make Him to be, and not such a Savior as God has manifested him to be, then, not conceiving of Christ as He is, they shall be, and remain still, as they were.”¹⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 155. Some of you may remember how Toffler’s book impacted its readers in the 1970’s. It was one of those books that served as a wake-up call to a society that seemed content with living only for the moment.

² “The Christian mind,” notes Harry Blamires, “has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian history.” *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1978), p. 3.

³ At the 1994 Presbyterian (PCUSA) Women Churchwide Gathering the attendees sang to the tune of Charles Wesley’s “O For a Thousand Tongues” the words, “O for a world where everyone respects each other’s ways...” Cf. *The Presbyterian Layman* (Vol. 27, No. 5, Sept/Oct 1994), p. 1.

⁴ Harry Blamires, in his sequel to the above mentioned book, points out the fallacy that is involved here: “indulging in homosexual practices and heterosexual promiscuity can no longer be said to do no grave damage to others. Infected haemophiliacs, infected wives, and babies infected at birth are evidence of that.” *Recovering the Christian Mind: Meeting the Challenge of Secularism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), p. 142.

⁵ This issue of continuum versus antithesis is clearly set out by Jay E. Adams in his book, *A Call to Discernment: Distinguishing Truth from Error in Today’s Churches* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1987). “According to continuum thinking, the mode of thinking taught outside the church (and largely within), every idea is a shade of gray. There is no right and wrong or true and false, but only shades of right and wrong or true and false spread along a continuum. The poles of this continuum are extended so far out toward the wings that for all practical purposes they are unattainable and therefore worthless. Nothing, then is wholly right or wrong. All is relative; most of it is subjective.” (p. 30).

⁶ Oliver R. Barclay, *The Intellect and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 10.

⁷ H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 118.

⁸ J. Goetzmann, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* II, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 617.

⁹ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* I (rpt. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990), p. 13.

¹⁰ Ridderbos, op. cit., p. 119.

¹¹ *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* II, ed. J.E. Meeter (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 670.

¹² M.S. Horton, “Worshiping In Our Own Way,” *White Horse Inn: The Horse’s Mouth*, (Oct. 1994), p. 1.

¹³ G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Man: the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 200.

¹⁴ Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Doubting Believer: A Puritan Treatise on Assurance* (rpt. Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), p. 61.