

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Number:	155		Gary L.W. Johnson
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Anorexia Religiosa and the Need for Mind Renewal

We have looked intently during our study of this epistle at how this present age seeks to conform the Christian to the pattern of this world. This has taken us into a critical examination of how the culture of today has influenced the Evangelical church at large. We do indeed live in a mindless age, but that is not the only reason we stand in need of mind renewal. Christians stand in need of a continuing renewal because of the NOETIC effects of the Fall. Sin not only makes man guilty before God, the Fall has entirely corrupted man. Thus when the Bible speaks of sin, it speaks of both the *guilt* of sin and the *pollution* of sin. “Guilt is liability to punishment for Adam’s sin; pollution is the corruption which is extended over the whole man. Pollution flows from guilt.”¹ How has sin affected us?

I. THE NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN

The word *noetic* is derived from NOUS, mind, reason (it is the word Paul uses in 12:2). It is equivalent to cognitive. The noetic effects of sin refer to those effects which Adam’s Fall wrought upon the reason and knowledge of man. “Unregenerate persons, as St. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, are plagued by *the futility of their minds*, because, *alienated from the life of God, they are darkened in their understanding*. Consequently, there is a fundamental need for them to *be renewed in the spirit of their minds* and to *put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*. (Ephesians 4:17f., 23f.)”² Sin has had, not a partial effect on the man, but a *total* effect. The *whole* man, his mind, his conscience, his emotions (affections or desires) and his will have all been *pervasively* affected by sin.

A. Sin and the Mind

Paul tells us in Colossians 2:18 of the *unspiritual mind* (NIV). The actual expression, TOU NOOTES SARKOS AUTOU, means *the mind of his flesh*. The operative word here is *flesh*, which means, not the physical flesh, but that which is characteristic of the old nature, dominated by sin.³ (Cf. also Romans 1:28; 8:23). DECEITFULNESS: Hebrews 3:13 speaks of the *deceitfulness of sin* (cf. Romans 7:11). Deceit properly affects the *mind*. What is the distinctive nature of deceit? It *hides* or conceals the truth. This was the serpent ploy with Eve in Genesis 3:4, 5. Listen to the Puritan John Owen, “When sin attempts any other way of entrance into the soul, as by the affections, the mind, retaining its right and sovereignty, is able to give check and control unto it. But where the mind is tainted, the prevalency must be great; for the mind or understanding is the leading faculty of the soul, and what that fixes on, the will and affections rush after, being capable of no consideration but what present unto them. Hence it is, that though the entanglement of the affections unto sin be oftentimes most troublesome, yet the deceit of the mind is always most dangerous, and that because of the place that it possesseth in the soul as unto all its operations. Its office is to guide, direct, choose, and lead; and *if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!*”⁴ Fallen man *exchanges the truth of God for a lie* (Romans 1:25). He no longer has God for his reference point, but now thinks *independently* or *autonomously* with only himself as a reference point. His mind is hostile to God (Romans 8:7).

B. Sin and the Conscience

In Ephesians 4:19, Paul declares that one of the natural conditions of fallen man is a lack of sensitivity (*past feeling* in the KJV). In I Timothy 4:2 we read of those whose *consciences have been seared as with a hot iron*. The conscience is “that principle in us which convinceth that we ought to do a thing.”⁵ (Cf. Acts 23:1; 26:9). By the custom of sinning, the conscience can be silenced to the point that it no longer serves to alarm.

C. Sin and the Emotions

Fallen mankind operates, in the words of Calvin, “by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity.”⁶ This darkness of the mind is not merely intellectual, it is also moral. Fallen man follows his own way and rejects God’s character as the standard for morals. Jesus said in Matthew 15:14 that the heart, the inner spring is the source for evil thoughts, words and deeds. Jeremiah 17:9 declares that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Sin in the heart makes the creature wish that there were no Holy God (Romans 1:30). “It goes about,” wrote Ralph Venning, “to ungod God, and is by some of the ancients called DEICIDIUM, God-murder or God-killing.”⁷

D. Sin and the Will

Fallen man rejects God’s will and His way as the purpose and meaning of life. Man’s will is set in opposition to the will of God. The will is enslaved to sin.

NOTE: When sin captures the *mind*, it takes with it the *conduct* and with the conduct it shapes the *character*. What word best describes this dreadful situation? LOST. Fallen man is lost and does not know it. What an awful predicament.

CONCLUSION: You do not need the Bible to convince you that something is desperately wrong with the human race. Humanity is so corrupted by the taint of evil that very few people would argue otherwise. When we do turn to the Bible, we find that our situation as sinners is actually far worse than we imagine. What happens when churches actually being catering to the mindset of the fallen world? What happens when the culture sets the church’s agenda? “By preaching to *felt needs* we are often preaching to selfish and idolatrous cravings. What will be the *felt needs* of people who love themselves, money and pleasure? Our job is not to preach to felt needs, but to expose such felt needs as sinful cravings that must be supplanted by Christ. Only in this way can unbelievers see their truest, deepest need for the One whose absence these distractions have sought to soothe.”⁸ It is our business to be having our minds transformed and renewed, and if not, what will be our lot? “We cannot make sense of adult life with the mental equipment of the child. We cannot afford to carry into adult life a Christian consciousness so under-nourished and anaemic that we slide into accepting faddish convenience recipes for worldly well-being as our daily diet. The evidence is that when the time comes for getting to grips with the Christian faith as adults and not as children, many of our contemporaries abandon their faith. They were early spoon-fed on the milk of the Word, but in adulthood they discard the nourishment as babyish, and assume that there is not more to be said. Meanwhile, professing believers, men and women who perhaps make great steps forward in other spheres of life, all too often succumb to the epidemic of *anorexia religiosa* which destroys all appetite for progress in Christian understanding and commitment.”⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ G.H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics: A Systematic Treatment of Reformed Doctrine I* (Netherlands Reformed Book & Publishing Co., 1980), p. 217.

² P.E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 117.

³ “By ‘flesh’ here Paul does not mean the body, but rather the tendency within fallen man to disobey God in every area of life – with the mind as well as with the body. ‘Flesh’ in this sense is roughly equivalent to ‘indwelling sin.’” A.A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 108.

⁴ *The Works of John Owen*, VI (rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 213.

⁵ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of the Holy Spirit in Our Salvation* (rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 240.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chap. 2, sec. 2. “Man’s depravity seduces his mind from rightly seeking God.”

⁷ Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues* (rpt. London: The Banner of Truth, 1965), p. 30.

⁸ M.S. Horton, *Modern Reformation* (March/April 1993), p. 23.

⁹ Harry Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), p. 9.