

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Christian Graduate* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_christian-graduate_01.php

CHRISTIAN — USE YOUR MIND

By the Rev. GORDON BRIDGER, M.A.
Round Church, Cambridge

A SCRIBE once asked Jesus, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and 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' (Mk. xii. 29, 30, RSV). Here our Lord quotes the summary of the law contained in Deuteronomy vi. 4 f., and endorses the view that God demands nothing less than the response of our whole personality — including the mind — if we are to love Him truly.

In these Old Testament verses, the word 'mind' is not included in the Hebrew. But in Hebrew thought the word for heart (*leb*) often referred to the mind and intellectual activities, e.g. Exodus vii. 23; Deuteronomy vii. 17; 1 Kings iii. 9. In the New Testament also the heart (*kardia*) can sometimes refer to the seat of the will (Mk. iii. 5), of the intellect (Mk. ii. 6, 8) and of feeling (Lk. xxiv. 32). It is because the word for heart in Hebrew and Greek thought often has the meaning of 'the whole personality' that it is sometimes suggested that the first great commandment means 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart — that is, with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength'.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MIND

The importance of the mind as part of this total response is underlined by the words of Jesus in Mark xii. 34, 'And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely (*nounechōs* — sensibly, intelligently, as one using his reason), he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"'. These words must surely be taken as words of encouragement. The lawyer had seen the superiority of moral over ritual obligations (verse 33). He had grasped one of the fundamental principles of the kingdom. To this extent he was 'not far from the kingdom'. Jesus had no time for triflers (Lk. xxiii. 8 f.); He was saddened when His disciples failed to understand what He was teaching them (Mt. xv. 16; Mk. vii. 18). Here He is prepared to encourage a man who is seriously thinking about the kingdom. It is valuable to compare the practice of the early Christian preachers who argued and reasoned with their hearers in proclaiming the gospel, and so implied that they also took the minds of men seriously. (See Acts xvii. 2, xviii. 4, 19, xxiv. 25.)

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE MIND

The lawyer is not far from the kingdom, but he is not in it. His intellectual understanding of his moral obligations to God and his neighbour have not gained him entrance into the kingdom. Why is this? Some commentators suggest that as the love of money prevented the rich young ruler from entering the kingdom, though he seemed to be so near, so it was *intellectual pride* that hindered this lawyer. Certainly Jesus taught that humility of mind was necessary for entrance into His kingdom; that it pleased the Father to reveal spiritual truths to 'babes' and not to 'the wise and prudent' (Lk. x. 21), i.e. to those who were trusting in human reason rather

than in divine revelation (see 1 Cor. i. 21). But whether or not intellectual pride is to be seen in this man, the root cause of his trouble is *the sin of his heart*. He may have understood better than others what response he had to make, but a change of heart was needed if he was to have the power to make it (cf. Je. xxiv. 7; Ezk. xi. 19; Jn. iii). Jesus Himself taught that 'from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a man' (Mk. vii. 21-23, rsv). Here the heart (*kardia*) is clearly regarded as the seat of the reason and of the will. The natural or unregenerate man is not able to love God with all his mind, for his thinking is defiled. The divine image in man has been marred by the fall. This is further emphasized in St. Paul's teaching in Romans i. 28-32 where he describes those whom God has given up 'to a base mind' (rsv); or in Ephesians iv. 17-24 where the unregenerate Gentiles are described as living 'in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart' (rsv). The unregenerate man follows not only the desires of the body but of the mind, 'and so', says Paul, 'we were by nature the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind' (Eph. ii. 3, rsv).

So, without the illumination of the Spirit of God (cf. Col. i. 21 and 1 Jn. v. 20) and obedience to the truth, man is in danger of intellectual pride (1 Tim. vi. 3-5) and is in fact spiritually blind (cf. 2 Cor. iii. 14 f. where St. Paul speaks of the spiritual blindness of Israel 'their minds were hardened . . .', 'a veil lies over their minds . . .' (rsv); and 2 Cor. iv. 4, 'the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers' (rsv)).

Thus we see something of the limitations of the human mind, and the utter impossibility of entrance into God's kingdom, and the understanding of spiritual truths by the natural man's unaided reason. Jesus opened the minds of the two disciples on the Emmaus road that they might understand in 'all the scriptures the things concerning himself'. He still needs to do that. The lawyer needed a new heart to enter the kingdom and to fulfil the commandment. Or, to use the language of Paul, it is necessary that Christ should 'dwell in (our) hearts by faith' that we might have 'power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge' (Eph. iii. 17-19, rsv).

The regenerate man, however, can enter the kingdom (cf. Jn. iii); he no longer lives according to the mind of the flesh (Col. ii. 18), but he has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. ii. 16). (Cf. Heb. viii. 10, 'I will put my laws into their mind' (*dianoia*) — the writer quotes Je. xxxi. 31-34 and translates the Hebrew word for 'heart' by the Greek word for 'mind'.)

THE CHALLENGE TO THE MIND

Now God's command that we should love Him with all our minds comes with new meaning to the man who is regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. iv. 23). God has graciously given to us an objective revelation of the truth (cf. Jn. viii. 32; Rom. ii. 8; 2 Thes. ii. 12, 13; 1 Tim. ii. 4, iv. 3; 2 Tim. ii. 25; Tit. i. 1; 1 Pet. i. 22; 1 Jn. ii. 21, where we find the phrases 'to obey the truth', 'to believe the truth', 'to acknowledge and come to know the truth', etc.) and the subjective illumination of His Holy Spirit. (N.B. The natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 14); but 'what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for them who love him. God has revealed to us through the Spirit', 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, rsv.)

But having acknowledged the sinfulness and the limitations of our mind;

and being dependent upon God's revelation and illumination, the Christian is challenged in the New Testament to love God with all his mind, by considering the truths of God, by thinking out his faith, and by relating these considerations to practical holiness of living (cf. Jn. xiv. 15, where we are reminded that to love God is to obey Him). St. Paul, for example, frequently challenges Christians to use their minds and to think, as the oft-repeated phrases 'I would not have you ignorant, brethren' or 'Do you not know, brethren?' bear record. Here are some further New Testament examples of how the Christian is challenged to love God with all his mind.

In the process of sanctification

If controlled by the Holy Spirit, the mind displays the right attitude to God (cf. Rom. xii. 2) and to others (cf. 1 Cor. i. 10); but that is not to deny the battle that often rages within the believer. The fallen nature still contends within the regenerate man, and this is sometimes described as a conflict between the mind and the flesh. In Romans vii. 21-23 Paul says, 'So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members' and in verse 25 'so then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin'. Colossians ii. 18 suggests that even the mind of the believer may sometimes be controlled by the flesh, and so he is frequently exhorted to set his mind on doing God's will — that he may experience deliverance and victory in this battle through the power of Christ (Rom. vii. 24, 25, cf. Rom. viii. 5-8). Note also in 1 Peter i. 13 the exhortation to 'gird up the loins of your mind' means to get down to some hard thinking and to consider certain truths; and this precedes the command 'do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance . . .' (verse 14). Peter sums this up by saying in verse 22 that they have purified their souls by 'obedience to the truth' (cf. 1 Peter iv. 1). In Philippians iv. 7 Paul notes that the mind (*noēmata* — thoughts) of the anxious, worried man can be garrisoned by the peace of God after prayer and thanksgiving; and no doubt positive thinking (Phil. iv. 8) contributes to this.

In a call to worship and consecration

In Romans xii. 1-3 Paul is appealing for the worship and devotion of our whole personality to God. It is interesting to note how largely this appeal is made to the mind. 'I appeal to you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God' (verse 1, RSV). The word 'therefore' reminds us that Paul is appealing to the argument concerning the 'mercies of God' which he has brought before the Christians at Rome earlier in his letter. It is when they *consider* the mercies of God that they will see that such worship is 'reasonable' (AV) or 'spiritual' (RSV). The Greek word (*logikos*) literally means 'rational' or 'pertaining to the reason'. Possibly Paul has in mind the contrast between the sacrifices of the old and new dispensations. Formerly animals destitute of reason were offered unto God, but now men possessed of a natural soul. Animal sacrifices were to be replaced by spiritual sacrifices. But surely he is also insisting that the spiritual sacrifice involved in the complete offering of ourselves to God is by no means contrary to reason *after consideration of the mercies of God*. This appeal is a challenge to the whole personality of man — but it is addressed to the mind. Is not this the way to love God with all our mind? (Compare Paul's reference to *praying and singing* with 'the understanding' in 1 Corinthians xiv. 13-15, as an example of the challenge to the use of the mind in the more limited sense of worship in church.)

In problems of guidance

'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. xii. 2, RSV).

The renewal of the mind of which Paul speaks is the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Tit. iii. 5; 2 Cor. iv. 16), and it enables us to prove what is the will of God. But we have our part to play, and this is where our mind is challenged. We prove God's will by using the mind that the Holy Spirit is renewing. For example, if we are considering the work that God would have us do, as a member of His Body, the Church (verse 4), we can begin to prove God's will by *thinking* soberly about ourselves (verse 3), assessing the gifts God has given us (verses 5, 6) and then using them (verse 6, RSV). Ephesians v. 17 (RSV) has the same thought: 'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.'

In matters of conscience

God's challenge to man to use his mind should affect his conscience. If he does what he thinks to be right before God, he has the approval of a good or 'pure' conscience (see Acts xxiii. 1; 1 Tim. i. 5, 19, iii. 9; 2 Tim. i. 3; Heb. xiii. 18; 1 Pet. iii. 16, 21). And if he does what he *thinks* to be wrong, he has the disapproval of an 'evil conscience' (Heb. x. 22). Persistent sin brings a staining of mind and conscience (Tit. i. 15). But man's conscience is not infallible. For what one man's conscience may allow, another's conscience will forbid (1 Cor. viii. 7). Such differences arise in part from differences in *knowledge* and *insight*. There were Christians in Paul's day, for example, who perceived that since 'the earth is the Lord's, no meats offered to idols could thereby be unclean; there were other Christians of 'weak conscience' to whom to eat such meat was sin (1 Cor. viii. 7-13, x. 23-33). In issues of this kind the Christian is exhorted to use his mind, renewed by the Holy Spirit, to think out his own attitude to such matters; and he is not only to ask himself the question 'what is right for me?', but also 'what effect will my action have on others?'. In other words, a man of strong conscience will not always insist on following it — for in doing this he may make his weak brother to stumble (1 Cor. x. 32). To love God with all our *minds* includes using our mind to think out such problems. On these matters of conscience 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind' (Rom. xiv. 5).

The Christian then recognizes that the mind has an important part to play in man's response to God. Man is called to love God with all his *mind*. At the same time he realizes that man cannot fulfil this command by himself, for the natural mind is 'the mind of the flesh', and needs to be renewed by the Spirit. Finally, he acknowledges that it is a sign of spiritual immaturity not to use his mind (Eph. iv. 11-15) or to fail to grow in the knowledge of the truth, or to have a reason for the hope that is in him (1 Pet. iii. 15). For to love God with all our heart includes a challenge to the use of our minds, which by His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to say, in some measure, with Paul, 'We have the mind of Christ'.

A Guide to Christian Reading

A classified list of selected books revised and edited by

A. F. WALLS, M.A., B.Litt.

Published by the Inter-Varsity Fellowship.

160pp. 6s. 6d.