

# The Christian Mind

## Romans 12:2

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What's this? [Picture of Human Brain] A human brain. You have one too. It weighs between 3 and 4 pounds. We all assume ours weighs more than the people we know. Our brains are an amazing part of our bodies that contains around 14 billion cells. Each cell is connected to 10,000 neighboring cells. It has an amazing capacity! There is more processing capacity in your brain than all the radio and TV stations of the world put together. (Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 71.)

However, just because we have great brain capacity doesn't mean we have a great mind. There's a big difference between a great brain and a great mind. We get a brain. We develop our minds. I am between series and I want to address an area of great importance in the Christian life: The mind; specifically, the Christian mind and how to fulfill Jesus' command to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds.

### Quick Survey of the Mind

#### The smartest man who ever lived

Who is the smartest man who ever lived? Most would pick either Jesus or Solomon. If we can set aside the decided advantage Jesus has as God, the smartest man who ever lived was Adam (Ladies, Eve was right there too!). Other than Jesus, Adam is the only person whose mind thought about the world without the effects of sin. That is our big mind problem.

#### The Fall – Man loses his mind

When Adam and Eve sinned, they literally lost their minds. Or better, they lost their ability to think about the world and reality consistent with God's wisdom. They believed a lie in the temptation. In that moment, their actions were not based on truth but on falsehood. After sinning, they immediately thought differently, selfishly and incompletely. As soon as they sinned, something changed in their thinking. Suddenly it made sense to murder your brother (Genesis 4). By Genesis 14 all kinds of sexual perversion are completely rational to man, and the rest of the story of human history is how sin made sense. Not that everything we do is contrary to God's thinking, but we are fundamentally flawed and that brokenness eventually leads to destructive behavior and attitudes that wreak havoc in all areas of our lives. Perhaps you are here today dealing with the havoc and pain that sin causes.

Here is how Ephesians 4 describes it: *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.* (Ephesians 4:17-18)

Theologians call this the *Noetic effect of the Fall*. Sin corrupted our minds. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, their minds fell. They literally lost their minds; they lost the capacity to think like God thinks about things. Everyone since has inherited this same flaw.

## The Christian Mind

This brings us to where we are today. If you are a Christian, then along with the rest of us, you are in the redemptive process of finding your mind. In redemption, God restores the capacity that Adam had, to think consistent with God's wisdom about all of life; recovering "thinking" that is consistent with truth. This comes as more and more we think like God thinks about everything. The Bible calls the "found" mind, wisdom or "the renewed mind." It is to think Christianly about everything.

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)*

Don't think like the world thinks. (Their thinking doesn't begin with God it begins with man. That's why it's futile.) Seek transformation that comes by thinking Christianly (the renewal of your mind). The result is discernment for life known as wisdom, and even more importantly, thinking that begins with Christ as the great Truth that defines everything else.

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2)*

Where are we going here? God wants to save our souls and he does by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. God wants to save our minds as well and fix what the Fall broke and to once again have our minds filled with truth so that our lives can be lived according to it and be blessed by it. *Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* This leads to the question: *How do we do that? How do we renew our minds? Does it just happen to us like puberty?*

***We renew our minds by intentionally learning God's Truth and applying it to our lives.*** One author says, "Learning is a part of loving." (Author Unknown) When we love something, we want to learn about it. Let me show you. Most of the households here get at least a magazine or two. On the count of three, let's all say out loud the name of a favorite magazine we subscribe to...Why do you get that magazine? Why would I likely hear men shouting, *Field and Stream! Sports Illustrated!* And women shouting, *Martha Stewart Living! Fitness for Women!?* I subscribe to *Golf* magazine and *Consumer Reports*. That says a lot about what I am interested in, doesn't it? *Learning is a part of loving.* You want to grow in your knowledge of what you love.

Do you love God? How intentionally have you tried to grow in your knowledge of God and His truth as seen throughout the universe? *Pastor Steve, I come faithfully on Sunday and listen to the sermons.* Great. Here's what I know. I listen to these sermons three times every Sunday and they alone are not enough for me to achieve a renewed mind (and I am the one preaching them). In saying that, I am NOT downplaying the vital role of sermons! I would simply compare it to any meal you order at a restaurant. You pick the meat and then add the side items for a balanced diet. A church's preaching ministry is like the meat, but everybody needs side item teaching for a balanced diet and for a renewed mind.

## How to Pursue a Renewed Mind

### Attitude → A learner's spirit

- *Wise men store up knowledge...* (Proverbs 10:14)

- *The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.*  
(Proverbs 18:15)

Wise men place a high value on learning. They have a learner's spirit. They prioritize gaining knowledge, especially knowledge of God's truth. All truth is God's truth which is why we want our young people to view going to school as a great privilege to grow in knowledge. It is also why the role of an educator should be held in high esteem because if growing in knowledge is so important, the one who teaches is extremely important. We certainly salute the many in our church who have chosen a career in education. However, education without God is futile and doesn't transform us. We can simply look at the decadence on every major university campus as proof that education alone doesn't produce moral character. Learning must be a part of loving God for it to transform us.

Of all people on earth, Christians should be learners, because of all people, we claim to be lovers of God. Beyond a lack of love for God, the number one hindrance to a learner's spirit among Christians is a lack of humility. To be a learner you have to have a teachable spirit and to have a teachable spirit, you have to have the kind of humility that admits that you don't know it all. It takes humility to take a class; just showing up is admitting you lack something. It takes humility to buy a book to read. You're admitting the author knows more than you. Many of us are uncomfortable with that.

I have observed this over the years in churches. New Christians have no trouble with this. They take every class offered. But if you've been a Christian for a while, too often there seems to be a feeling of pressure to act like you already know it all. Even sermons are merely the opportunity for you to hear what you already know. Yes, I totally understand this! Some people sit and listen to a message and the attitude on their face is, *Tell me something I don't already know.*

So let's clear the air on this one. If you can admit that you don't know it all, would you say with me, *I don't know it all...* If you think that you do know it all, would you say so now... There. We should all feel better now. We've taken a step as a church toward the attitude of a learner.

## **Actions**

### **Listen to sermons like a hound dog**

Let's return to our illustration of a balanced diet. When I go out for a steak, I love the moment it arrives. Just the smell of it gets my juices flowing. Good preaching is like a good steak to the Christian mind. There will be some fat to trim off, but you want to savor every morsel you can. Have you ever seen the way a hound dog eats a piece of meat? He wants all of it. All there is left is the bone. We need to listen to a sermon like a hound dog chews a bone. You want to slobber all over it. Chew it up; and get all the truth you can. Don't just hear it, but let it get into you - into the mind, into the heart. This requires active listening. When I am actively listening I am focusing mentally on what is being said. I don't allow my mind to wander. It takes discipline to focus. Some things that help are a good night of sleep the night before and having a Bible with you so you can read along. I try to take notes when listening. We provide an easy way to do that with our printed sermon notes. Write down the main points and anything God speaks to you. Go back over it later.

Some sermons deserve being heard more than once. I remember when we began our Media Ministry I suggested that we have audio copies available for people after the service. There was confusion on the man's face. *Why? We already heard it.* Good sermons are worth

hearing again and again. I have a sermon in my car that I have listened to possibly a hundred times. (It's not one of my sermons, by the way!) You can buy a CD or listen for free off the website or pod cast. It's like licking the bone. Yum! Make the most of the weekly preaching ministry of the church.

### Ask questions!

We learn by asking questions and a healthy church is comfortable with questions; questions about theology or culture or ministry or Christian marriage or family. Learn by asking questions. Again, this takes humility. Dialogue with friends about spiritual matters. Your Kinship leaders and your elders and your pastors are here to help you grow. We invite your questions about anything and if we don't know the answer, we'll try to point you to a resource.

### Take a class

One reason I am speaking on this is that I don't think we have enough people taking advantage of the wonderful classes we offer here. For example, our elders taught a class on leadership this fall. Around 10 people took the class. I got a note from one of the students saying how fantastic the class was. We have hundreds of people involved in leadership in their lives or businesses. How valuable to study that from a Christian perspective! We have another round of classes beginning next Sunday. Over the year, our classes meet at different days and times. These are short-term classes. You're not signing up for a year or anything. Could I challenge each of you to take at least two classes a year? You will benefit immensely from them.

### Read GOOD Christian literature

Besides regularly reading your Bible, we are so blessed to have hundreds of years of great Christian books that help us understand life and creation and reality from God's perspective. We need to be readers. I cannot tell you the impact and blessing that books have been to me in my life. Some of you say, *I am not really a reader*. Do you read your *Sports Illustrated*? You might ask yourself why particularly when there is so much to be gained spiritually by reading. One thing I have found is that it's always easier to watch TV. That takes no effort, but it produces no benefit either. Many of our homes would immensely benefit by simply limiting TV time.

If reading a book is a struggle, get with someone in your Kinship group and just pick a book to read slowly together. Get together for coffee and discuss the chapter you read. Pick books suitable to your stage of spiritual maturity. You could rush home to read *Calvin's Institutes* but you probably won't get far. Here's some suggested reading:

### Every Home Library

A good translation of the Bible -	NIV, ESV, NASB
A good study Bible -	MacArthur Study Bible, NIV Study Bible
A good overview of theology -	<i>Bible Doctrine</i> by Wayne Grudem <i>Essential Truths of the Christian Faith</i> by R.C. Sproul
A basic Bible commentary -	<i>New Bible Commentary</i> D.A. Carson; Tyndale Series
A good book -	<i>Desiring God</i> by John Piper

## **Getting Going**

<i>Basic Christianity</i>	John Stott
<i>More than a Carpenter</i>	Josh McDowell
<i>Disciplines of a Godly Man</i>	Kent Hughes
<i>Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life</i>	Donald Whitney
<i>The Case for Christ</i>	Lee Strobel
<i>Discipleship</i>	Greg Laurie
<i>The Pursuit of Holiness</i>	Jerry Bridges
<i>Mere Christianity</i>	C.S. Lewis

## **Down the Path**

<i>Knowing God</i>	J.I. Packer
<i>The Weight of Glory</i>	C.S. Lewis
<i>Disciplines of Grace</i>	Jerry Bridges
<i>The Cross of Christ</i>	John Stott
<i>Pilgrim's Progress</i>	John Bunyan
<i>Sin and Temptation</i>	John Owen
<i>The Pleasures of God</i>	John Piper
<i>Can Man Live without God</i>	Ravi Zacharias

This list will all be on our website so you can check it out later. I would also encourage you to not waste your time on books that don't have any meat on their bones. Generally, avoid any book written by somebody on Christian TV. There are some exceptions there, but it's a good rule of thumb. Most Christian fiction also isn't worth your time. I would suggest visiting our Bookstore where you can find books we consider worthy to read.

## **Achievable Goals Toward a Christian Mind**

1. *To listen to sermons like a hound dog, I could \_\_\_\_\_.*
2. *I need/want to read a chapter(+) of the Bible at least \_\_\_\_\_ times a week.*
3. *I should attend at least \_\_\_\_\_ Bethel class(es)/studies a year.*
4. *I'll strive to read at least \_\_\_\_\_ good Christian books this year.*

Let me add a final comment here. We're not just seeking knowledge. Christianity isn't just the head, it is also the heart. It's *both*. The goal is not knowledge itself, but seeking truth as a means to godliness and a greater ability to live in this world filled with lies and deception. Seeking the truth that is found in Jesus Christ *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* (Colossians 2:3)

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