

## TEACHING NOTES

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### 'Anchored in Christ' Part Eight: The Mind: Brainwashed or brain washed?

This week we look at the mind. The key point is that the mind is a spiritual battleground and can only be renewed in Christ and not through our own efforts.

As a philosophy student almost 40 years ago, I was introduced to the mind-brain identity issue. Basically, this differentiates the brain, which is a physical organ, from the mind, which is obviously connected to the brain, but is spiritual in nature. The brain is the seat of mental activity and works through neuro-chemical impulses called synapses. The mind, however, is intimately linked with the spiritual heart, the conscience and the will. The heart and mind work together to shape our inner worlds and define our character and personality.

In **Deuteronomy 6:5** and again much later in both Matthew (**22:37**) and Mark's Gospel (**12:30**), we are told to Love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, which is the greatest commandment. In other words, our whole self is a response to God including the mind. **Proverbs 23:7** makes the connection between heart and mind when it says in the KJV, 'As a man thinketh in his heart ... so is he'. In everyday, practical life we operate as integrated persons: the heart, mind, and conscience combine to shape all our judgements, and then our actions and behaviour.

A good example of this is a person suffering from anorexia, a crippling food disorder. Even though the person keeps losing weight they think of themselves as overweight. The internal distortion of the mind's belief and the heart's conviction tell the person through the internal voice of conscience they are overweight. And what a power that voice has! This is true of course, for any addiction: the heart and mind work in concert and manifest in certain behaviours, the person then repeatedly yields to it, and it quickly gets beyond any attempt to be controlled: alcohol, food, pornography, a desire to clean, or wash our hands until they bleed, or check locks around the house - whatever the behaviour - the spiritual dynamics are the same: the heart and mind are distorted and captive to lying, sometimes demonically-charged voices. As a physical organ, the brain can also malfunction with certain addictions, notably drugs and alcohol and lose its rational ability and cognitive function.

While addictions are very specific problems, the everyday mind refers to how our thoughts are processed in ordinary living. In **Romans 12:1-3** Paul tells us the mind needs to be renewed. And his context is worship and everyday thinking.

A person's mind without Christ is against God. In **Colossians 1:21** Paul reminded the believers that before they came to Christ, they were 'alienated and enemies in [their] mind' to all things relating to the true knowledge of God. And in our main reading he implores the **Philippians** to be united and like-minded in Christ. This is a wonderful passage explaining the work of Christ (**verses 6-11**). Think of a 'U' shape: on the left at the top, is Christ in glory; he comes in his incarnate, human form, and at the bottom is the low point of his earthly suffering, humiliation and crucifixion. Then, however, with the resurrection and ascension (return to heaven) the means of salvation and communion with God has been fully restored back to what it was before Adam's sin (the right-hand side of the 'U' at the top). Christ has fulfilled the entire law and is the fullness of the Old Testament concepts of **prophet, priest,**

and **king**. The prophets foretold the judgement but also the reconciliation of God's people; the High Priest offered sacrifices once a year to take away sin, and the kings had authority and ruled. The ascended Christ however, fulfills all of these roles now and for eternity.

Let's draw some practical points from Paul's theology: Christ was eternally God but assumed human form, and entered our messy, sin-filled world. He modelled perfect submission to God and showed God's love for all people. And Paul calls us to be 'like-minded' but how then can we have the mind of Christ? How is that possible? Short answer: We can't, ever – on our own.

But, as believers we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. Everything he accomplished is ours because we are united to him. We enter into the joy of his resurrection; and yes, also the fellowship of his suffering (**Philippians 3:10**). But all the while God is with us. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ reveals to us what God is like (a prophetic role); Christ is also our mediator, standing in the gap between our sinfulness and God's holiness; offering petitions for us while knowing our weaknesses (the priestly role). His office is also with all authority and power as king of kings and Lord of lords.

So, we can only renew our minds in Christ. When we grasp that the only response to God in worship ('the everyday mind' – Paul's point) is Christ's response; what he has done, we realise it's not our effort. Do we worship? No! Christ worships on our behalf, and if Christ is in us, and we in him, get to participate in Christ's worship which is always righteous and sufficient. He is pouring out praise to the Father and we get to join in. Similarly, it's not our faith that saves us; it is Christ's faith on our behalf, redeeming us back to God and participating in worship that will continue into eternity. The Christian life – including the renewal of the mind – is not that we live a life for Christ, but we let him live his life through us.

In our church meetings, addictions, and everyday struggles we need not strive trying to work our way to God, or wait for a warm feeling of God's presence or acceptance. We simply welcome Christ into our lives to do his on-going work as prophet, priest, and king. His Spirit will reveal to us what areas of our lives need to reflect the mind of Christ; while his mediating role before the Father, lovingly understands our weaknesses and offers prayerful petition as we pray. And as we do, his kingly role has authority over all powers and principalities – including our minds. In him and him only is liberation, joy, and peace.

Our minds are easily brainwashed with the world's false notions of faith and incessant striving to try and please God. Instead our brains need washed with the mind of Christ.

### **Questions to ponder:**

1. The mind's grasp of Christ in us and us in him changes everything. How does this help us in both our church meetings, and our everyday living?
2. The mind's battles (including addictions) simply cannot be mastered in our own strength. Is there an area of your life, or in the life of a loved one or friend, that needs the presence and power of Christ to know his freedom? If so, pray into these needs; hand them over drawing on Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king.