

The Mind

“Test me, O Lord, and try me; examine my heart and my mind . . .” (Psalm 26:2)

I've been thinking a lot the past year or so about the mind. Its origin and function are clearly supernatural.* The mind (somehow) exists in the brain but it transcends the anatomy and physiology of the brain. And it's the chief battleground of spiritual warfare. Let's discuss *the mind*.

The mind of man is an amazing thing. (I say “thing” for want of a better term.) It's when the mind malfunctions (or doesn't function) that one becomes aware of what an extraordinary thing it is. It is the ultimate thing God created. Using physical matter, elements and molecules, God designed and put together something that has amazing supernatural abilities, such as consciousness, memory, thought, willfulness, emotions, creativity, awareness of beauty and moral sensitivity. And more, such as the ability to do mathematical calculation, the ability to interact and communicate with others in society, a deep language structure, and a constant awareness of place and time. And more yet, such as our mood, our desires, hopes, fears, and beliefs. Dreams, fantasies and imaginations spontaneously arise in the mind. All these functions somehow are expressed by the intricately organized networks of cells that make up what we call the central nervous system. And not just the cells and the organization of cells into complexly interconnected networks, but the host of chemicals, both neurotransmitters and modulators that those cells produce and distribute. Neurocognitive researchers haven't even the most simplistic understanding of the exceedingly complex thing we call “mind.” That's because the mind comes from God and belongs to God.

Something else. A phenomenon that's been observed for more than a century, that always had been referred to simply as a medical curiosity, is now recognized by neurophysiologists as a real entity. Since 2009 this phenomenon has been the subject of many reports in the neuroscience literature. It's called “terminal lucidity.” People who are profoundly demented due to stroke, tumor, infection or Alzheimer's disease can suddenly regain total lucidity. After perhaps months or years of severe brain dysfunction, they become alert and recognize loved family members and speak normally to them. They regain memory, self-awareness and express their own (former) personality. Their mind comes back! This can last for minutes or hours. And then they die, usually within a day or two. This phenomenon has been repeatedly witnessed by careful observers in palliative care centers and long-term or chronic care centers for demented patients. Needless to say, terminal lucidity refutes the materialist hypothesis. It refutes the most basic of atheistic presuppositions, as some atheists now grudgingly acknowledge.

There really is a supernatural thing called “mind.” Mind didn't and couldn't possibly have evolved by Darwinian mechanisms, however many billions or trillions of years are adduced. Such incredibly wonderful supernatural abilities functioning within physical matter is God's fingerprints, His trademark. The evidence of His existence is right before our eyes, if only we think clearly about our own selves.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *leb* occurs over a thousand times, and it is variously translated as “heart” or “mind.” It's the seat of our thoughts, desires and the will, the very characteristics of personhood. In the New Testament, two different Greek words are translated into English as “mind.” Both words refer to our thoughts, understanding, or desires. The mind is also where spiritual awareness resides. Sinful thoughts occur there, but the mind is also where we can know God's will. Minds can be depraved or proud, or the source of wisdom and insight regarding the interpretation of Scripture. With the mind we distinguish what's good and right from what's evil and wrong. Our thoughts, attitudes and values originate in the mind. Let's now consider some Scripture.

Jesus commanded us to **“love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind”** (Matthew 22:37). The mind, the heart, the will and the conscience are all intricately interconnected

faculties. These non-physical entities along with our physical bodies comprise our being. We're to love God with all that we are; God is to be our consuming desire, we're to devote our time on earth to Him, and He is to be in and control all our thoughts. This is the essence of what all Scripture teaches. God expects nothing less. It's why we exist.

The mind is where we grow spiritually. The unbeliever's mind is hostile to God (Ephesians 2:3, Colossians 1:21). But if we're regenerated, it's our minds that transform us into godliness, into Christ-likeness: **"And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ."** (Romans 12:2). This change is our responsibility; being in relationship with the living Christ obliges us to be like Him: **"Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ."** (Philippians 2:5). To fulfill these commands though, involves warfare. **"I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin . . ."** (Romans 7:23). We must know what sin is and hate sin, and know what God's expectation is for us—and live it. We need to honestly and humbly reflect on our own selves to identify where and how we come short and resolve to change. Paul's argument in the next chapter of Romans is that the Spirit of Christ is given to us to enable such transformation. But the maturing process, called sanctification, is synergistic, that is, we're responsible to do it, and we're responsible to submit to the enabling work of the Holy Spirit.

To have the mind of Christ is another way of saying, **"put on the new man,"** (Ephesians 2:15 and 4:24; Colossians 3:10), or be **"a new creation"** (2 Corinthians 5:17), or **"have the Spirit of Christ"** (Romans 8:9). We're to express proleptically in this life the image of Christ, which we'll have when we're glorified (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49b; 1 John 3:2). If we're regenerated and "in Christ," in the future God is going to transform us into exact replicas, images, of the Son—without our actually becoming deity. And so we'll be fit to be in God's presence to enjoy Him forever. Paul's burden in his letters is that, in anticipation of this future glory, we now in this present life express what we will be. We are to live this life as if we're already in the future. (See Philippians 3:16 and Colossians 3:1-2.) This is the (or a) purpose of sanctification.

Allow a brief but necessary digression here. In Judges 2:21-23 we read God's amazing statement: **"I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it . . ."** The Lord was deliberately leaving some pagan, idolatrous, wicked Canaanite people in the Land to oppose Israel—as a test! Although regenerated at conversion, our sin nature remains in us while we are still here in this world—as a test. Although defeated by Christ on Calvary, Satan is still here to oppose us—as a test. God tests us! From Genesis 2 (the two trees, the Serpent's lies) on all thru the entire Bible, there's this theme of testing. We're all being tested, like it or not.** And all testing is in the domain of the mind (in the sense that the "mind" includes our desires and our will). The outcome of all spiritual battles is decided in the mind.

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 is, if we have the mind of Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals to us God's thoughts. Paul had that mind, and his letters to the Churches (our Scriptures) convey God's thoughts to us. After Jesus rose He appeared to His disciples and **"then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"** (Luke 24:45). Believers have the gift of the Word, provided for us by the Apostles, and the Spirit to know God's will. It's our responsibility to not only know but to live out the Word of God, the thoughts of God, the will of God. **"Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth"** (Ephesians 4:23-24). We're not just to be better persons than our unbelieving neighbors. What God wills for us is so radical that Paul refers to it as being a totally new creation.

Our world today is saturated with speculations and ideas and beliefs, but they're not for us believers. They're for unbelievers who know nothing of God. Paul wrote, **"We destroy speculations and every lofty**

thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), intending for us to do the same. Every thought! **If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth** (Colossians 3:1-2). Sanctification—indeed, all growth into maturity—occurs first in the mind. To be sanctified, however, we must—must—know the Word of God, **Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires** (Romans 8:5b).

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Jesus lived to honor God. He was humble. He was purposeful. He knew what righteousness is and was committed to doing it. He was self-sacrificing in His love for others, expecting nothing in return. He was determined to obey God despite its consequences of humiliation, pain and loss of life. And we are to have the mind of Christ. We're to think like Him. We're to have His values, His worldview, His attitudes and desires and will. We're to be like Him, miniature Christ's, clones of Christ, serving Him in the power of His Spirit, reflecting His beauty and His perfections to the world and continuing His mission of gathering more like-minded people into the Kingdom. That's why we're here.

* Since antiquity, secular philosophers have attempted to understand the mind. Of course, they can't do that. More recently, psychologists try to understand the mind; they're self-deceived. All that they can do is make certain observations but they're totally in the dark as to the cause or meaning of the data. The reason for this is, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 2, that it's the Holy Spirit who bears witness to spiritual truths, and mind, having its origin in God and belonging to God, is just that kind of truth. The mind is not susceptible to scientific or philosophic study or explanation. Secular philosophy and secular psychology are immense bodies of pretense. The experts in these fields don't even know what it is that they seek to know! Both philosophy and psychology today are suffused with materialism; both reject Descartes' (biblical) view of an immaterial mind existing in and joined to a physical body. (Their rationale for rejecting the mind as immaterial and insisting on it being solely a manifestation of biological processes is this: If all the matter in the universe vanished, so would the mind; therefore, the mind is material. The logical fallacy of this argument is, it assumes the consequent.)

Most materialists believe that there is no such thing as "mind." To a materialist, all that exists has a natural or physical origin and a natural explanation (hence, "naturalism" or "physicalism"). So to a materialist, the mind's functions are nothing more than the interaction of neurons and neurotransmitters in the brain. But, I would argue, even if it could be demonstrated that a mechanism such as continuous discharges in a network of closed loops of neurons in the brainstem accounts for consciousness, mind has not been explained. The whole materialist hypothesis is crass rebellion against God cloaked in fancy rhetoric.

A few philosophers now readily admit that the mind-body problem is a deep puzzle that is probably insoluble. And they're right! God made it that way. *The existence of mind is irrefutable proof of His existence*

** Although mostly unrecognized, testing is a necessary and essential aspect of life on earth. The circumstances of existence, such as old age, infirmities and natural calamities, test us. The ungodly world system tests us. Strained relationships with others and the violent situations that may come upon us also test us. So does persecution and its opposite, comforts and wealth and prosperity. Our political freedoms test us. Even Christ Jesus, as the embodiment of humanity, of Israel, had to be tested! Why all this testing? Answer: First, justice demands testing, as does love. That's because God deliberately made us with a (measure of) free will and with that freedom comes responsibility; and there's no such thing as responsibility unless it's tested. Second, testing is to prove the sincerity or genuineness of our faithfulness to God, viz, our obedience to His Word (which honors God), our trust in the wisdom, goodness and truth of His teachings and His promises, and our commitment to good (as opposed to evil). Testing is not so that God can learn something about us but, as the Book of Job teaches, so that our faith exalts God. (See, for example, James 1:3; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 Corinthians 3:13; and Revelation 2:23. And let's observe that Abraham was justified by faith in God in Chapter 15, and *then* that faith was tested in Chapter 22). Testing demonstrates whether our commitment, our trust, our love, our desire for God is real. Or not.