

The Role of the Mind in Service of God

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Although the author of this book is a Christian, the approach of this book is based on the fact that man is a conscious, rational, intelligent being, and that his creator holds him responsible for using that intelligence, whether he has even heard of God or not, or knows anything about the Bible. In Mt. 22.37-40, Jesus said:

...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This basic command of the Mosaic Law is one all must obey. It's more basic than becoming a Christian. Many have become Christians without obeying this command. Baptism isn't the most basic command. Many have been baptized, but still displease God because they haven't obeyed this command. Attending services of a local church isn't the basic commandment, and many attend faithfully but still haven't obeyed the command to love God with all their heart. Living a moral life is extremely important, but living such a life isn't the basic command. Many Christians live moral lives but haven't obeyed this command. If we obey it, we will please God and be in fellowship with him, and if we fail to obey it, we will displease God and not be in fellowship with him. In Scripture, the heart, soul, and mind of man is used (respectively) of his emotional knowledge, his worldly knowledge, or his pure intellect, or perhaps, for emphasis, of all

three. In a classic example of Hebrew parallelism (which rhymes in thought rather than phonetically), God spoke of his New Covenant people through Jeremiah in Heb. 8.10:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel After those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their *mind*, And on their *heart* also will I write them: And I will be to them a God, And they shall be to me a people:

Here Jeremiah speaks of God writing his laws on the heart and mind of his people, using the heart interchangeably with the mind. Thus, when God commanded his people to love their God with all their heart, he was doing nothing more than commanding them to serve him with all the mind, their intellect. This fundamental law of God is the subject of this volume—how God’s people are to use their intellect wholeheartedly in their service of him.

Only Man Can Obey This Commandment

When God uses the word heart synonymously with mind, he’s certainly not speaking of “the central blood pump situated in the thorax, Webster’s definition of heart. Animals have such a blood pump, yet they do not have the intellectual center that man has. In Hos. 7.11, Hosea spoke of Old Covenant Israel as:

Ephraim has become as a silly dove, without heart...

Of course, a dove has a central blood pump in its thorax, but it doesn’t have the Bible heart, or mind. In II Pet. 2.12, Peter speaks of certain false teachers as...

But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed...

Again, an animal has a blood pump in its thorax, yet it doesn’t have the Bible heart or mind, as he is without the ability to reason. Only man has that capability, and only man has the obligation to serve God with all his heart, soul, and mind.

Everyone seeking to please God needs to put himself to the test: do I serve God with all my mind? Do I use the mental capabilities he gave only human beings to serve God the way he desires? The Bible has quite a bit to say about our intellectual service of God, and we’ll

consider much of it in this volume. In this chapter, we'll notice several things we'll accomplish if we use our intellect as God would have us to do.

If We Never Hear the Gospel, We'll Still Believe in God

In Rom. 1.20, Paul speaks of what God holds Gentiles responsible for knowing just from creation, whether they ever hear of God or the Bible:

For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse:

Thus, these Gentiles, non-covenant people unlike the Jews who were in covenant relationship with God, were still responsible for noticing in nature unseen qualities about God, his everlasting power and divinity. In Chapter Two, "The Existence of God," we'll notice some facts of nature that drive an intellectually honest person to realize that God's existence and creative power are exhibited. Likewise, in Ps. 8.3-6, David says:

3 When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; 4 What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? 5 Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, And dost crown him with glory and majesty! 6 Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet...

Notice that as David is so impressed by the majesty of God's creation, he refers to it as "the work of Thy fingers," the way that we might refer to a dainty doily as the work of her fingers. We don't view that doily as a product of great backbreaking effort. It's just the work of her fingers. The same is true of God's creation. On his part, it was just the work of his fingers, yet the majesty of creation drove David to the conclusion that it didn't come from nothing, but rather the limitless power of God.

Similarly in Ps. 19.1-4, where David again comments:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. 2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. 4 Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world.

David notes that the creation declares the work of God's hands; their decree is, "How great God is!" Similarly, in Ac. 14.7, Paul declared of God at Lystra:

...who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 And yet He left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness.

Paul is teaching the same thing here he taught in Rom. 1.20: God didn't leave himself without testimony. In the creation, God left plenty sufficient evidence of his everlasting power and divinity, and he holds all men responsible, to the headhunter in Borneo who's never heard of God, for seeing this evidence and coming to the proper conclusion. If a man doesn't use his intellect to come to that conclusion, he cannot please God because he didn't use his mind!

When A Person Uses His Mind, He Will Obtain Faith in Christ

In Jn. 6.44-45, Jesus said:

No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me.

Christians are disciples. Disciples are learners or students, who adhere to Christ's teaching (Jn. 8.31) above all else (Lk. 14.26). With their ability to reason with their intellect, they are well-equipped to develop faith in Christ.

As we'll see in Chapter 1, "Faith, The Least Understood Subject in the Bible," Bible faith is the product of man's intellect. It's produced by authentic evidence. We see this in the very definition of faith in Heb. 11.1, 3:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... 3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (KJV)

The author of Hebrews affirms the same thing David did in the Psalms and Paul did in Rom. 1.20. Biblical faith is produced by evidence contained in the physical creation. We see the creation and deduce unseen things, God's everlasting power and divinity.

As Paul said in Rom. 10.10,

...with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Here again we see the role of the heart or mind of man. Man uses his intellect to examine the evidence in creation of God's existence. He uses his mind to develop faith in Christ. He uses his mind to be a student of the teaching of Christ. Numerous examples illustrate this process. In Ac. 14.1, we read:

And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed.

In Ac. 15.7, we have another example of disciples in Jerusalem using their intelligence to hear the gospel and let it produce faith:

And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

Similarly, in Ac. 17.1-4:

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2 and Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them, and for three sabbath days *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, 3 opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, (said he,) I proclaim unto you, is the Christ. 4 And some of them were *persuaded*, and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Paul's preaching was designed to appeal to the reason of these disciples, and they were persuaded to faith in Christ. In Ac. 18.8, we have another example:

And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

These examples could be multiplied, and in every case, the gospel was used to appeal to the reason of the hearers, to supply evidence that would produce the required faith in Christ, and they became Christians. Any person who examines the evidence God supplies, whether in nature, or in teaching, will become a Christian. If one doesn't, he's not using his mind properly.

When One Becomes a Christian, He Must Obey The Same Commandment

In Mt. 28.19-20, we see the pattern of teaching the gospel, baptizing those disciples, and then teaching them to do the same thing:

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: 20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you:

Thus, the very intellect that caused disciples to use their intelligence is required of them after they obey the gospel, to continue to learn and teach others.

Perhaps the greatest duty Christians have is to examine everything that is proposed for their belief. In I Thes. 5.21f, Paul commands the Thessalonian Christians:

...prove all things; hold fast that which is good; 22
abstain from every form of evil.

The word prove here means to try, to put something to the test, and it's perhaps the most difficult duty a Christian has, one that never ends. With so much false religious teaching extant, it is demanded of a Christian student to constantly test everything that is proposed for his belief. It would be nice indeed if we could trust a favorite preacher, or elder, to carry out that responsibility for us. However, it's not possible, for this constant examination of what is taught is not negotiable to anyone else.

In I Jn. 4.1, John reminded his readers of this responsibility:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Notice John's use of the word "prove" again. Because of the prevalence of false religious teaching, Christians must always test anything proposed for their belief, and every action one enters into fellowship with in a local church.

A favorite quotation of mine relates to this responsibility:

We do not start our Christian lives by working out our faith for ourselves; it is mediated to us by Christian tradition, in the form of sermons, books and established patterns of church life and fellowship. We read our Bibles in the light of what we have learned from these sources; we approach Scripture with minds already formed by the mass of accepted opinions and viewpoints with which we have come into contact, in both the Church and the world. . . . It is easy to be unaware that it has happened; it is hard even to begin to realize how profoundly tradition in this sense has moulded us. But we are forbidden to become enslaved to human tradition, either secular or Christian, whether it be 'catholic' tradition, or 'critical' tradition., or 'ecumenical' tradition. We

may never assume the complete rightness of our own established ways of thought and practice and excuse ourselves the duty of testing and reforming them by Scriptures. (J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958, pp. 69-70.)

Packer is speaking words of truth here. After disciples learn the gospel, their intellectual activity is just beginning, perhaps to the greatest degree in carrying out these instructions to constantly examine what they're taught, what they're teaching themselves, and what they're doing in their service of Christ. We must always have divine authority for what we do, based on our examination of Scripture. We can never rest on "what we've always done," or "what the preacher says," "what the majority of the congregation" believes, nor "what all the preachers" of our acquaintance believe.

This intellectual activity progresses as we develop our abilities to teach our fellow man. In Heb. 5.11-14, the author admonishes Christians who weren't progressing in this mental activity:

11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard of interpretation, seeing ye are become dull of hearing. 12 For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. 13 For every one that partaketh of milk is without experience of the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.

Note again that Christians who use their intellect to ascertain the difference between good and evil. It's hard work to be a disciple of Christ, and it never ends. If Christians who have absorbed a great deal of teaching aren't putting that knowledge to use by teaching themselves, they're likely to cause many problems.

The Payoff

Christians who progress from initial students of God's word, who become believers and adherents to it's teaching, above all else, achieve a great benefit: such Christians are the most mentally alert people on earth. To illustrate. We say that there are three ways the Bible teaches: direct statement, examples, and inescapable implications. Some think these three ways of teaching is peculiar to the Bible, yet it's not true. The Sears catalog teach in these same three ways. Algebra is taught in these three ways, as is English, wood-working, computer skills, cooking, electronics, and every other field of learning. Christians should also be adept at world history, as they learn of the world's great empires that he studies in God's word. He's adept at understanding world events in the present. I personally know Christian teachers, who, were they not Christians, wouldn't be mentally capable at all, yet because they've used their intellect in their service of God, have become extremely learned in the Bible, and in their abilities to teach others.

Conclusion

We've seen in this chapter that there's one command all must obey, whether we've even heard of God or the Bible: we must use our whole heart to examine evidence, whether it's evidence in nature which will lead us to deduce God's existence, divinity, and morality, or whether it's evidence in Scripture which will lead us to faith in Christ, or examining all doctrine we're exposed to, or finally in developing our abilities to teach others.

Do you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? If you don't believe in God, you're not using your heart properly. If you don't believe in Christ, you aren't. If you believe in Christ but not a serious student of his word, you aren't. If you are in Christ but not examining everything proposed for your belief, you aren't. Likewise, if you're a mature Christian and not developing your abilities to teach, you aren't.