

THE MIND OF CHRIST

by Ray C. Stedman

Last week my wife and I were privileged to be in Portland, Oregon, for the inauguration of young Joe Aldrich to succeed his father, Dr. Willard Aldrich, as President of Multnomah School of the Bible. We enjoyed very much the opportunity to be there, and to participate in what was a very moving experience. In a luncheon held on Friday for the delegates who came in from the various parts of the country, Dr. Joe Aldrich gave a response to their greetings in a very modest and unassuming way, and one of the things he said stuck in my mind. He said: "The main thing is to see that the main thing remains the main thing."

I think that is a very self-evident truth, and yet a very important one. It raises the question of just what is "the main thing" in Christianity. Is it our view of man, the unity of humanity as one race here in the world under God? Is it the ethical demands that Christianity raises, the moral standards we hear of these days? Is it the emphasis on marriage and the family which is central to all of life? What is it that is the central thing about Christian faith? Is it our hope in the hour of death and in overcoming the great enemy of mankind when we come to the end of life?

Well, the answer of Scripture, of course, is very clear. Both the Old and New Testaments indicate that the "main thing" about Christianity is Jesus Christ himself. He is the center of our faith, not even the Word about him, but he himself as a living Being who imparts to us new life by faith in his name. His life, his death, and his resurrection are the central themes around which all truth gathers. All truth, whether of a religious, a scientific, a moral or a polemic or political nature, whatever it may be, all truth must center around that. That is the central truth of Christianity. Therefore, the fundamental question of life from the Bible's point of view is, "What is your relationship with Jesus? What do you think about Jesus?" Our Lord himself put it in those terms when he said to the people of his day, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" {Matt 22:42a KJV}. The fundamental division of all humanity, therefore, comes right at that point. Are you related to Christ, or do you not yet know him? Are you regenerated by faith in Christ, or are you still on the way, perhaps yet to come to that encounter with him which will make the transformation in your life.

Those are the two divisions which the Apostle Paul is describing for us in the second chapter of First Corinthians, where we begin today. Verses 14, 15, and 16 in this chapter are the conclusion of his discussion on the wisdom of the world versus that secret and hidden wisdom of God which he has been talking about throughout this whole chapter.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ. {1 Cor 2:14-16 RSV}

In Verse 14 the translation, "the unspiritual man," is not a very accurate rendering. The margin says "the natural man," and I think that is a much better translation, because what Paul is talking about here is man as he is born, as he is by nature. We were all of us, without exception, born natural men and women. We just had a baby dedication here today, and I held in my arms these three infants, two boys and a girl, who were dedicated. They all three behaved themselves wonderfully, but they are "natural" children. They are not yet "spiritual" men and women, or even boys and girls; they are "natural" men and women, boys and girls. They are born into the world as all of us were, according to nature.

Paul uses a very descriptive and helpful word to understand what that is. The word translated "unspiritual" here is really the word *psychikos*, which derives from the root *psyche*, which means, of course, the soul. What Paul means is that the one who enters this world according to nature is operating from the basis of his soul and not his spirit. As God made man in the beginning, he was intended to be a three-fold being: body,

soul, and spirit, with the spirit as the highest center of his life, the center of the operations of his life, open to the revelation of God himself directly. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were both spiritual men and women operating by the spirit's contact with the living God who walked with them and talked with them. As somebody has described it, when the Fall came, that spirit, that upper room, fell down into the basement, and man has been operating at the level of the second floor ever since. He is a second story man, in every sense of the word, and that is the highest center of human functioning today.

The soul has several functions, but it has largely a threefold function:

The first and most notable quality about it is that it has the power to choose. It has a will, and we all recognize that. Even those babies, young as they are, who were dedicated here today have their own will. (Their parents, I am sure, have become aware of that.) They exercise that will sometimes at the most inopportune times and they will do things that their parents do not want them to do already, simply because they have the power of choice -- one of the highest dignities accorded to mankind.

But that choice, that exercise of will, is made on the basis of two other functions of the soul: One is the ability to feel, the emotional capacity to have moods, to have urges, desires that are felt, and this governs much of the choice of the will in the natural man. This is what is reflected in many ways today. We have all seen the bumper sticker that says, "If it feels good, do it!" That is a reflection of this natural philosophy which says to make your choice on the basis of your mood, your desire, your feeling, how you are at the moment, how you sense things really are. Much of life exists on that basis so that people are controlled by their moods, their desires, and their urges that they feel within.

There is another capacity, however, and that is the reason. Some people pride themselves that they do not make decisions on the basis of feeling. They think of themselves as logical, coldly reasonable people who decide on the basis of the facts. They sometimes feel very superior to all those poor people who simply "emote" as they go through life, and make decisions on that basis. But again, the Word of God tells us that they need not feel so proud of themselves, because their reasoning power is limited. It functions only between two very clearly marked dividers: that of birth and that of death -- only in the realm of existence between those two poles. Therefore, everything the reasoning man sees is related to this life. His logical choices are made on the basis of goals centering around this life, goals such as personal success, fame, wealth, power, personal pleasure, etc. People who live like this are what we call men and women of the world. Their viewpoint is natural; it is instinctive with them; it is from birth. This is what Paul describes here as the natural man, the man who sees nothing beyond this life worth considering or doing much about.

As someone who has well put it:

**Into this world to eat and to sleep,
And to know no reason why he was born,
Save to consume the corn,
Devour the cattle, flock and fish,
And leave behind an empty dish.**

That is life; that is the natural man.

But according to this passage, the natural man has some severe limitations. Verse 14:

The natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. {1 Cor 2:13 RSV}

Three things limit the natural mind:

First, it is shut away from all the things of God -- not the gifts of God. Paul is not talking about spiritual gifts at this point; he is talking about the things that concern God, the whole realm of the secret and hidden wisdom of God that Paul has been describing. The natural man does not even know this exists. He thinks that all the

bases on which he must make his choices are present before him now, in terms of his reasoning power, his emotions, and his ability to assess and evaluate life as he sees it. He is ignorant of the fact that there is a vast realm of information about us, about God, about the world and the way it functions, about the purpose of life, about the end toward which all things are heading, that he knows nothing about nor ever takes into his thinking, and this marks his limitation. For this reason, as we have already seen, he misunderstands much about life.

It is evident that he misunderstands marriage. He does not see it as a union designed to take two very different types of people and blend them together through a long process, sometimes involving much struggle and much heartache, until a whole new being is formed that is to the glory and honor of God. To the worldly man, the natural view of marriage is that it is for his personal pleasure, so that another person might satisfy his needs. When that no longer happens, there is no reason to maintain the marriage. Many Christians are falling heir to this kind of thinking and even breaking up their marriages because they have allowed themselves to be seduced by the natural view of marriage. That is why we have the rising divorce rates on every side today. We have lost track of these secrets about life and about marriage that God reveals to us. These are realities we no longer reckon with in the natural view.

This is why the natural man misunderstands the power and purpose of sex. As you know, this very week the Presbyterian Church in this country is debating whether they should ordain to the Presbyterian ministry a man or a woman -- particularly a man -- who has been and is an avowed, practicing homosexual. The only reason they are debating this thing is because they have forsaken to some considerable degree the revelation of the secret and hidden wisdom of God. Otherwise, it would not even be subject of debate, for the wisdom of God makes very clear that homosexuality is a violation of God's intent for mankind and a destructive force let loose in our society that tears down the very fabric of society by which we exist. For a great church to debate that issue is in itself a revelation of how far it has drifted from its moorings in the Scriptures. I personally believe the strength of the Presbyterian Church is enough that this measure will be soundly defeated, and give testimony to the world that there is still a tremendous sense of commitment to the great truths that Scripture teaches in this regard.

Last week some of you, perhaps, saw in the paper the article by a prominent woman psychiatrist advocating openly and without shame that children ought to indulge in sex at an age as early as four or five years. And further, that incest between a father and a daughter is a good thing. Now where do those kinds of abominable ideas come from? Well, they arise from a failure to understand the secret and hidden wisdom of God, and a failure on the part of the church to adequately teach this so that it infiltrates society and affects the secular world around. Those kinds of abominations take root in our culture only when the people of God begin to drift away from their moorings in the secret and hidden wisdom which God has given to us by revelation in the Scriptures.

This is why the world misunderstands adversity. It does not see it as God's training ground. Trouble is regarded as an invasion of rights, as an alien invader that has no right to be there. The natural man's attitude toward God, when trouble strikes, is that of anger and hostility and resentment, and too often that is part of the Christian's attitude too, because we have failed to hang on to those wonderful, secret and hidden revelations of God by the Spirit in his Word.

Furthermore, Paul says, not only is the natural man shut away from this, but the apostle goes a step further. He says the natural man is unable to understand these things -- they do not make sense to him. It is only as they permeate society by means of Christians living on this basis that he is able to see or accept them at all. But if that is absent, he sees no reason whatsoever for these things. He cannot understand the things of God.

I have a neighbor who is not a Christian and some time ago, because of pressures in his marriage, he became open, at least outwardly, to his own personal need. I was able to give him a book which he accepted from me that I thought would help him understand what God was doing in the world and where his position was. It was Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' wonderful little book, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*. I gave it to him because it is a very thin book, easy to read, and very clear and powerful in its statement of the Biblical view of life. But when he handed it back to me, he said, "I could not make head nor tail out of this." It was to me a fascinating book, but he found it dull and boring and was totally unable to comprehend it.

This is why, to the natural mind, things like euthanasia; putting older people to death when they are no longer able to function quite as well as they once did, is regarded as the logical thing, the sensible thing to do -- "Get them out of the way, they only clutter up the landscape." This is why abortion is so widely practiced and accepted in our day, because it is no longer seen to be what the Word of God clearly declares it to be -- a taking of human life, a form of murder. But the natural mind does not see that. To the natural mind it seems to be logical and reasonable. This is ultimately, of course, what produces the macabre theology of Nazism that is able to take a whole race of people and commit them to the gas-chambers. That kind of thinking is because the natural mind does not understand the things of God.

The reason, Paul says, is very clear. It is because these things are spiritually discerned, i.e., it is necessary to have the Spirit of God indwelling you in order to see and understand fully that these things are true. The natural man does not yet have the Spirit, and that is why the message the world needs, and the only point of release for the natural mind at this point, is to confront him with the person of Jesus. "What we preach is not ourselves," Paul says, "but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake," (2 Cor 4:5 {RSV}). That is where the world can be helped, for it is only by faith in Jesus that the Spirit of God enters the human heart. If there is no faith in Jesus, if there is no acceptance of him as Lord, the mind remains darkened. Although it may accept, because of popular pressure, the standards of Christian life, it never fully is convinced that they are right until the heart is open to the Spirit of God by faith in Jesus. This is the difference in society. You can see how relevant this whole subject is to all the things we struggle with every day. Without this equipment of the Spirit the mind is unable to grasp what God wants to say to us.

We know right now, for instance, that this auditorium is filled with pictures and music and people's voices. The whole atmosphere here is charged with these. The reason we do not see or hear them is because we lack for the moment the necessary equipment, but if we had a radio or a television set we could immediately pick up these sound and picture waves right out of the air as they are passing through this room. We need the necessary equipment; that is the problem with the men and women of the world. Without the presence of the Spirit they lack the equipment to see reason and logic and a basis for acceptance for some of the many things that Christianity says. That is why it is foolish to try to argue with people beyond a certain point; they do not see any basis or reason for it.

Now, in contrast, Paul deals with the spiritual man. Verse 15:

**The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.
{1 Cor 2:15-16 RSV}**

Here the apostle uses another word, not *psychikos*, soulish, but *pneumatikos*, spiritual, of the spirit, from the word, *pneuma*, which means "the spirit." In the widest sense, Paul is talking about all Christians -- anyone who possesses the Spirit of God. In the book of Romans, the apostle says that if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ he is none of his {cf, Rom 8:9b} -- he is not a Christian, and yet, if we are led by the Spirit of God, we are the sons of God, {cf, Rom 8:14}. Therefore, the presence of the Spirit of God in the individual life is what marks the difference between a true Christian and one who is not, and those who have the Spirit are spiritual men and women in that widest sense.

However, as Paul will go on to show in Chapter 3, which we will take next Sunday, it is possible to have the Spirit of God but not always to obey him. Then another condition comes in, called the "carnal Christian," one who has the Spirit but does not walk by the Spirit. In a narrower sense, this is what Paul is speaking of here. To all who are open to the Spirit, who obey the Spirit, who are led by the Spirit, these three great possibilities are true:

First, they are morally able to judge all things. That is a very remarkable statement, because when Paul says all things, he means all things. He means Christians who understand the revelation of God in the Scriptures by the Spirit thoroughly and devotedly are rendered able to pronounce a moral or ethical judgment in any area of life about anything. That does not mean, by far, that a Christian knows everything. Christians do not understand all knowledge, all scientific knowledge, all physical or musical knowledge, etc. If you think that by

being a Christian you are able to know everything, somebody will quickly disabuse you of that. What it means is, everything has an ethical or moral dimension about it. Everything can be used rightly or wrongly, and it is the task of the Christian, indeed the privilege of the Christian, to point out to himself and to the world around what is the right and the wrong way to use things. Thus, he is the judge of all things in that realm. He must, therefore, pronounce the final ethical judgment in these areas.

Now, notice, this is not something automatically yours because you are a Christian. There are thousands and millions of Christians who are not fit to judge ethics or morals because they do not obey the Spirit, or even know all that the Spirit has said. They do not study their Bibles, they do not understand their Bibles, they do not realize what is the secret and hidden wisdom of God. Therefore, they are not rendered able to judge in this area. Nor does it mean that you need to quote only one or two verses of Scripture to prove that something is right or wrong. That is called "proof-texting," and it is one of the most abominable practices in the world today. It is what gives rise to the popular idea that anything can be proved by the Bible -- which is true. If you merely take a verse here or a verse there to support some particular cause by a single verse or passage, you can prove almost anything by the Bible. But that is a terrible abuse of Scripture.

The spiritual man is the man who has thoroughly studied the mind of the Spirit as he has spoken in the Old and the New Testaments. He is, furthermore, willing to be taught by the Spirit. He prays, he searches diligently and waits before God for an understanding, an illumination of his mind by it; he tries to understand the problem before him, and only then makes a pronouncement that could be called the judgment of the Lord.

It is this ability to judge all things in an ethical dimension that makes it possible for Christians, when the whole world is saying abortion is right, to stand up and say it is wrong. It is this ability that makes a Christian able to declare that homosexuality is wrong, no matter how many laws are passed. You can pass laws that make it legal, but you will never pass any that will make it moral. It is this ability that enables a Christian to stand up and say so, no matter what impressive worldly authorities are listed in favor of the other view. It is this ability to judge all things in an ethical dimension also that makes it possible for a Christian, in fact, makes it *necessary* for a Christian, to say that heavy-handed materialistic greed is wrong, that conniving and wheeling and dealing in order to manipulate people to get them to do in business what you want is wrong, and that social oppression is wrong, and bigotry of every type is wrong. It is the Christian, who is to say that, based not upon the wisdom and thinking of the world, but on the secret and hidden wisdom of God.

The second thing Paul says about the spiritual man is that he is not subject to judgment himself. This means, of course, that there are times and occasions when he will be beyond and above the law. Now if you think that means all law, and you go out and try to live on that basis, you soon will have plenty of time to think it over, and no one will bother you during the process. But there will come times when even the Christian must act against the law. This raises the whole civil disobedience question, and that is discussed in the Scriptures in various places. There are times when the laws of a land become oppressive, anti-Christian. Then there is a Christian way of response. It is not demonstration, it is not violent protest of any sort, but it is that quiet insistence that says that his conscience must be taught and instructed by the Word of God or nothing will move it.

You see it in Martin Luther as he stood before the Diet of Worms at the great cathedral on the Rhine with the authorities of all of Europe assembled there, including the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Luther stood and said, "Unless my conscience be taught and corrected by the Word of God, I will not change or recant anything that I have written. Here I stand: I can do no other, God help me."

Now that is the Christian who is no longer subject to the judgment of the world, when he acts on the basis of the wisdom and knowledge of God. And Paul supports this. He says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" Wisdom from this source is beyond challenge, for it comes from God himself who is the ultimate realist, who sees life exactly the way it really is.

Then the apostle concludes by saying probably the most daring thing that has been said in the Bible: "But we have the mind of Christ."

We have the very way of thinking about life that Jesus himself had, with that keen ability to observe what was

going on around him, that ability to evaluate the changing standards of men and to come right through to the very heart of the thing. That is the mind of Christ, the ability to know what was in man. He needed no one to tell him because he understood men. That is the mind of Christ.

The mark of it, of course, is that we will behave as Jesus did. In the midst of this present world we will be compassionate when others are severe; we will be severe when others are tolerant; we will be kind to the ugly, the poor, the obscure, the people of no ability or power, but we will be frank with the rich and the powerful and the mighty. That is the mind of Christ.

I submit to you there never was a more radical proposal to change the world than that brief statement -- to act according to the mind of Christ. Here is the true way to radically affect the world of our day. That is what God sends us out to do.

I freely admit to you that there are very few of us who in any degree manifest this consistently. We are all in the process of learning, and nobody can hold himself up and say that he always operates this way. But to the degree that we are learning to fashion our lives according to the revelation of the secret and hidden wisdom of God -- these mysteries of God which are revealed in the Scriptures about ourselves, and humanity, and life -- to that degree we are letting lose in this world the mind of Christ.

What a radical, powerful effect it will have upon society!

This is the privilege of the spiritual man, who is able to operate in the midst of the confusion of life today in such a way as to call men back to reality, away from the confusion and the illusion and the delusions and the fantasies by which the world lives, to the realities of life as it is in Christ.

What a privilege!

Prayer

Our Father, we are awed by this declaration of the apostle that we possess the mind of Christ when we are open to the teaching of the Spirit of God. We thank you for this hidden source of wisdom and knowledge which is greater than that of men and which operates in far different ways than the world around us functions. Lord, help us to be ready to believe you and turn us from believing the lies that are so abundant around us -- lies about ourselves, lies about our relationships, about what is important in life, about how to handle our drives and moods and feelings. Lord, teach us to be led in these things by your Spirit, that we may be men and women who, in this place, in this time of history, release in this generation the awesome power of the mind of Christ. We ask in his name, Amen.

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