

Teaching Us To Think (Part One)

Developing the Mind of Christ

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Given 14-Nov-20; Sermon #1570

The COVID-19 crisis has forced a great many families across this nation into teaching their children at home. It has put a great strain on a lot of families; it is not necessarily what they like to do. A fair number of them though, despite that, decided the lockdown was a good excuse to quit public schooling altogether. It was a pretty good move, I think.

Not everyone is cut out to homeschool. But in my opinion it is far superior to the education today that the public schools turn out. The freedom of curriculum that you can teach your children is worth it. Students do not have to be exposed to all that socialist claptrap that is being taught there in the public schools.

My wife and I—and I have to say it was mostly Beth—homeschooled all four of our children for the full 12-year education that they got. We were in homeschool mode for about 25 years (across the four kids), and Beth was an exceptional teacher; all of them have earned, or will earn soon advanced degrees.

To my mind, a good homeschool education puts a student far, far ahead of the curve once they go to college. And there are solid reasons for this:

If a homeschool education is done well, homeschooling is far more efficient in teaching children. They can learn more in a shorter amount of time; a lot of times my kids were done with their school day by about noon.

Another point is that if it is done well, homeschooling expands the students' horizons, because they are free to pursue the interests that they have. If they like farming, they can join a 4H; or if they like sports they could go into that. If they like certain scientific fields they can pursue that, do an in-depth study.

Another reason is that if it is done well, homeschooling plunges children deeper into a subject. But, what I am taking out of this point, is that the children gain understanding, not just knowledge. You know, knowledge can be on the surface. But if you spend a lot of time doing something, you really learn to understand that subject. Then they can make a good educated choice about whether they want to go into that particular field.

Another point is, if it is done well, homeschooling rounds the whole person. Children develop as people, not just learn facts to pass tests. There is a lot more that goes on. The interaction between the child and the parent should be excellent; I would hope. Especially if the house has discipline in it so that the parent does not have to always be behind the kid telling him, "You've got to get this done"; instead, just saying, "Hey, go over there, sit down, read this book, pages 27 through 32," and the kid will do it.

So, you have that working relationship with authority and adults that a lot of kids do not get a lot of. They go to school and they interact with their peers a lot, but not very much with the teacher or with other adults, and so homeschool kids tend to get rounded out a little bit better.

This is not a commercial for homeschooling; I do not mean it in that way. But I believe homeschooling to be far superior to public schooling. It is so much more versatile than public schools—they have one curriculum, and every kid has to go through it. But each family can have its own curriculum and teach it. As a matter of fact, if they wanted to, they can teach each one of their kids a slightly different curriculum based on that kid's personality and ability to learn. It is very much more, to my mind, capable of producing well educated students.

Years ago, we were talking about student-teacher ratios. In a homeschool it never gets over more than like: one to three or four, and usually there is a lot of one on one. Whereas, you have to go to a very expensive private school to get anything close to that. And in public schools, it is 1 to 30, 1 to 35, or more, depending on the school district.

But I have to also say that not every child takes to homeschooling. There are some kids that it is hard to get them to do anything, or they just do not like

the environment, or they do not like whatever it is. They do not take to homeschooling very well. And, frankly, not all parents are up for the challenge, because it is not an easy thing to do. It takes a lot of work for a parent to also homeschool, but it worked out very well for us.

We did one thing that is somewhat unusual even among homeschoolers. Although, doing some reading I find that it is gaining traction in homeschooling circles across the nation. To illustrate what I mean by the difference that we made in our curriculum, I will tell you about a meme I saw on Facebook recently. I will just read to you what the meme said, “A little more than a century ago our children learned Latin and Greek, and now we teach them remedial English in college.”

Beth used bits and pieces of various standard curricula until the kids were about ready to move into high school. So they would get Abeka, or whatever it was that Beth happened to use for history or literature or what have you. And then, by the time that Courtney (our oldest) began to get in toward upper middle school and into not quite into high school, Beth started searching around for something better for those more intensive high school years. And what we ultimately ended up doing was deciding to invent our own curriculum following a more classical model, the Latin and Greek in the meme that I just told you about.

The kids still learned math. They still learned science, literature, history, economics, and government, and that sort of thing. But they also learned art, and logic, and rhetoric, and Latin—not the usual Spanish, French, or German—Latin. Universities (especially the more competitive ones) often require at least two years of a foreign language, even to get into school. You have to have two years of foreign language in high school.

So we went in the classical direction by having our kids take Latin classes. Now we just happened to be in a homeschool group that had a wonderful Latin teacher associated with it and every one of my kids took at least, I believe it was five years of Latin. Started in middle school and went all the way through their high school years. Now, if you would go up to them today and try to say, “Hey, speak Latin to me.” I do not know how far they would

get with telling you anything, because Latin is a very, very hard language to learn. But we did not have them take Latin so that they could learn the language to speak it.

I know Latin is a dead language. There are not any people around that really speak it anymore. You are not going to strike up a conversation with the “centurion” (which is a commanding officer of about 100 men), or a “lanius” (who is a butcher), or a “panifex” (which is a baker), or a “argentarius” (who is a banker). They just are not around, we call them majors, we call them butchers, and bakers, and bankers.

We do not speak Latin anymore. But Latin is still useful in several professions because a lot of the lingo that they use is based in Latin, like the medical field is full of anatomical parts that are Latin based; other scientific fields have a lot of Latin in them. Legal fields; government—a lot of Latin in those. But more than that, not only do Latin words make up about half of our English words, it is the language that teaches a student how to think through a problem.

I would like to read you a paragraph from an advocate of Latin among homeschoolers, her name is Cheryl Low. This is what she says about Latin, and its ability to help students think.

The mind of the student that has been educated in Latin takes on the qualities of Latin: logic, order, discipline, structure. Latin requires and teaches attention to detail, accuracy, patience, precision, and thorough, honest work. Latin will form the minds of your students. Think of the mind like the body. Latin is a mental workout, and Latin is your mental trainer.

I heard once that Latin forces a student to answer about a dozen questions of each word in the sentence. Why? There are six Latin cases and two others that are vestigial cases; five regular declensions, made up of differences among genders, numbers, and cases; and there is also a rarer six declension, for some pronouns and adjectives.

To read a Latin sentence is hard mental work. You have to figure out every little bit that the word is trying to tell you to let you know where it should go

in the sentence. Meaning, if you are going to translate where it would go in an English sentence, because a lot of times in Latin, it does not matter where the word is in a sentence. It is all the suffixes and stuff (the particles that are there) that tell you just what that word is supposed to mean: whether it is an object or a subject, or whether it means it is possessive, or what have you. You have to look at the word and figure out those things by what the Latin spelling is telling you. (If you have ever seen that hilarious impromptu Latin lesson in Monty Python's, "The Life of Brian" you will have some idea of what I mean.)

Anyway, this feature of Latin, which makes it difficult to learn, develops young minds, and it teaches them to solve problems by applying these rules and principles to produce a correct answer. Now, this is not confined just to Latin. You could probably get the same thing in Greek. You could also do it through advanced math, because math makes you think a whole lot of stuff. Even some more advanced forms of music do this and make you really think things through, so you play the right notes.

Now my point is, that children need to be put through the paces. They need to be challenged, to train their minds. Rush Limbaugh calls them, "young skulls full of mush." You have to solidify those minds into something that is usable, and workable, and will help them. So you need, as a father or a mother, to train their minds and mature their thought processes, if they are going to really do well in this world.

But have you ever thought that we too are children? We are all God's children, are we not? We have been specially called to be a child of God and like a good parent, He is also putting us through the paces, and challenging us to train our minds so that we think like He does. Is it not the goal of a good parent to try to help their children think like they do? I mean these days that probably is not kosher, because the people out there in the world, they want kids to think on their own and have what basically is a tolerant mindset. Whereas we want them to have values from an authoritative source like God. So, we want to teach them good things and shape them in the way that they should go.

So that is what God is doing to us. He has called us—and we have been reborn, as it were, and given His Spirit. And now He is in the process of

helping us learn how to think—how to think as He does—and thinking as He does is spiritual maturity. A lot of us are not there yet; we are still learning; we are still growing. We certainly have not reached our potential, any of us, but that is what He is doing—He educates our minds in His way so we will never depart from it. Just like He inspired Solomon to put in Proverbs 22:6 about teaching “a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will never depart from it.” God is looking way beyond that and says, “I’m going to teach My children the way they should go and they will never forget it even though eternity passes.”

My father-in-law has spoken a nugget of wisdom on this subject, he said, “Learning is a painful process.” And so it is; learning is hard—learning *right* is harder. It is this truth that is the reason for many people shunning away from learning. They would rather be ignorant than go through all that it takes to learn.

As I said, learning is hard; learning is a painful process; it is a struggle. We all have brains, but not all of our brains are the same quality. Learning is hard for some people, and even harder for other people. But it is necessary that we all learn. Learning takes discipline, learning takes dedication, learning takes sacrifice—a lot of sacrifice of things you would rather be doing. It takes time—hard work.

Sometimes it takes an awful lot of money to get the right education, to get the right books, to get the right tutors or teachers. It is a lot of hard long hours of reading, of writing things down to coalesce your thoughts about things. It is a lot of thinking; takes a lot of repetition, so that we can get the formulas in our head, or that we can understand definitions, or what have you.

Another thing, this is something that really bugged me a lot when I was growing up: doing seemingly endless and worthless exercises. I remember pages of math problems that we had to do, and I was like, “I understood this after the first problem. Why do I have to do all the odd numbers in this silly book that got 50; so that means I’ve got to do 25 problems here. I understand it, but they want to see all 25.” But that is part of learning—it is part of ingraining this process into your mind.

Learning takes a fair amount of trial and error, because sometimes things are not so cut and dried. You have to learn how to do things one way in one situation, and you might have to change it a little bit in a slightly different situation. You have to have a fixed goal. What do you want to get from this education? Where do you want to be once you are done with it? Where do you want to go? Where do you want to work? And you have to have a whole lot of perseverance to achieve that goal.

There is a lot of undoing of bad habits in a proper education (like my not wanting to do exercises beyond one or two problems), then you have to build new good habits in order to learn the thing that you want to learn. There is even a bit of admitting, or being willing to admit, that you are wrong about things. I have seen a lot of kids do that, just get stubborn and say, “This is right, I know I’m right.” when you, as the parent or the teacher, know that he is wrong. He has not come to admit that you know more than he does. But he is only looking at it from one very narrow perspective, and does not understand that there is a wider principle maybe that he is getting wrong here. But then of course, once you are willing to admit wrong, then you have to repent—if you will—and learn what is right.

A person cannot become a doctor overnight. Those people put in years—not just of practice (you know some of them take, I do not know how many years it is they have to do as a residency, and they have already put in years of schooling)hours, thousands of hours of sitting in a classroom just taking in all the information about the body. In terms of medical doctors they know a lot about drugs and surgery, and all kinds of other things. It is not just that they handed them a diploma and said, “Here you go, be a doctor.”—they put a lot of effort into that.

The same goes for other professions like a lawyer, or a chemist, or an astrophysicist, or an economist, an engineer, an architect, a mechanic, a master carpenter, a writer, a computer programmer, an actuary, or even someone like me, a preacher. I just did not grow up out of the ground here and start speaking. It took years and years of learning to get to this point, where I can give a sermon to you. And I am still learning; learning an awful lot.

Professional certifications take years of hard work and testing. Every person who has traveled such a road toward some kind of personal or professional certification will tell you that nothing was handed to them. They had to work for every step along the way to get that certification. They had to work their tails off to achieve their positions. And in every one of these, there was a certain process that they had to follow, whether there was a strict process or a loose process, it does not matter. But there is always a process in these certifications that they had to follow to get there, to get that certification. There were very few shortcuts that they could take. They had to put in the hours. They had to do so much work. They had to show proficiency in “x, y, z” areas, and so they had to know it.

Please turn with me (finally we will get into the Bible) to Proverbs 10. We will read verses 4 and 5 to start, and then we are going to go further into the book. By the way, one thing I would suggest for your Bible study at some point (whenever you decide to do it) is to go through the proverbs one by one, and mark however you will every proverb that speaks about work. What I do is I use my brown pencil and I put a “w” around the verse number, and it tells me at a glance that this proverb has an overall subject of work. So in my Bible, I have “w” around verses 4 and 5, because that is the overall subject here.

Proverbs 10:4-5 He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a wise son; but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.

As this proverb of Solomon begins here in chapter 10 he is emphasizing that when we go out to do our work, we have to have a diligent hand. We have to go out and really put our whole into it. In Ecclesiastes he tells us, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” That is another way of saying it. He is saying, "Let's be diligent because if we do not, we are going to end up poor and we are going to end up causing our family shame, because we will not produce!" So, when we go out to work, we need to have the hand of a diligent person, and that is going to make us rich. It might not make us wealthy (that kind of rich), but it might give us a very rich life.

A lot of people have worked at jobs that have hardly paid anything, but they feel like they succeeded in their life because this is the kind of work they like to do.

So we have here this admonition that when we work, we need to work diligently. Let us go to chapter 21, verse 5. This is another one that has a “w” by it.

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

A hasty person has not taken the time, perhaps he wants to just get the job done quickly rather than doing it right. But the diligent person—he puts his all into his work, he makes sure it is done right. And God says here, “Truly that person will have enough, and plenty, and abundance.”

Let us go to chapter 24 and verse 3. Another “w” here.

Proverbs 24:3-4 Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

Here again, we have a work being done: the building of a house. It does not necessarily have to be a physical house that he is talking about here. He could be talking about a family, or whatever it is that is the project, and he says that you have to apply wisdom and understanding and knowledge to complete it and fill it with those pleasant things.

This sermon that I am giving right now is about learning to think like God. The sermon begins with this simple instruction about “work.” Nothing good or lasting is built without effort. And sometimes if you want to build something wonderful and good, it takes extreme effort. Nothing good and lasting is built without effort.

It amazes me that Protestants (knowing the Bible as well as they do) believe they will be given heaven (as they think) without work. They have totally stripped “work” out of the gospel message, as it were. But to my mind, it

makes no sense to think that we can be righteous without real change—in thought and word and in speech. And change is hard; it takes work.

Most mainstream Christians in a spiritual sense are more like the “slothful man” in Proverbs 26:13-16, than the “diligent ant” in Proverbs 6:6. The slothful will never build a spiritual house by wisdom, nor will they fill it with precious treasures of truth. It just would not happen. It is just not going to fall from heaven. It takes work to build a house, and fill it with special treasures.

Let us stay here in Proverbs. We will go back to Proverbs 10. This time we are going to look at verse 1 and then verse 16.

Proverbs 10:1 The proverbs of Solomon: [It says] A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.

Mostly I want that first part of the couplet, “A wise son makes a glad father.”

Proverbs 10:16 The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin.

Making a little bit of a change here from physical to spiritual. But notice this, “Yes, a wise child makes the father glad,” it says here. Let us up this to a spiritual level, “A wise child of God makes the Father in heaven glad.” A wise child of God diligently works on the things that lead to life, as it says in verse 16, “The labor of the righteous leads to life.” That is something that pleases God.

The life we are talking about here is not a physical life, we are talking about eternal life. The righteous must take on a lot of work in order to have eternal life. Now, it is not something that they earn; we understand that—they are not earning eternal life. But in order to be ready for eternal life, they have to learn. There is a lot of effort. It is real labor—toil.

So, what does a wise child of God do? He works on himself, that is, labor, mostly on himself. He is always paring off the corruption that he finds in

himself. And then once that is pared off, he adds the character traits of Jesus Christ in their place. He breaks old destructive habits, and builds new ones that will please God.

He thinks about his words to others, and how they affect those others. He also does this with his deeds; how will his deeds help the other person rather than harm them, or offend them. He evaluates what and how he might have said or done those things in a more godly way.

He is constantly evaluating himself and how he puts himself out there. He has to sometimes change positions, try to think in terms of the other person: “How am I coming across to these people? Am I arrogant? Am I boastful or am I humble? Am I willing to serve? Am I opinionated and bowling people over with my stubborn ideas and thoughts and beliefs that may not be thoroughly grounded in the Bible? Or am I willing to listen to the other person's point of view? Can I be more conciliatory? Do I come across as harsh and demanding, or am I kind and considerate?” The child of God will do such things.

He never stops repenting. Repentance is not done just before baptism and no more. Some people seem to think that is the way, and they get plunged into the water and hands laid on them, and they never change again. Yet they still call themselves as Christian. But a true Christian never stops repenting, because he is always finding error in himself—because it is for sure that no man is perfect.

A true Christian always seeks greater perfection in the ways of God, and knows that he is a far, far, far, far, far length from those perfections. A true Christian never rests on his laurels, “Oh, I’ve achieved enough. I’ve got enough of the mind of God in me. I don’t need to do anymore. I don’t need to hear another sermon. I’ve heard everything.”

He *never* takes his salvation for granted. He knows that there are always ways to improve, and hopefully those ways are diminishing as we get older in the church—in conversion. But maybe not! Because the world always interferes; Satan is always trying to trip us up. And sometimes we are pretty lazy, and we regress. But a true child of God will always think: “What can I do better? What can I do that will reflect Jesus Christ in my life?”

Doing all this, and much more—all this labor we are talking about—is “wisdom.” I know you are probably all aware that my dad has defined this for us, very succinctly in the series on the book of Ecclesiastes, “Wisdom is skill in living.” It is taking all that we have learned—all that we have come to understand—and putting it into good skillful practice in the way we live our lives. And we better be doing this. We better be showing this kind of wisdom because our lives are the basis for our judgment. He is not going to judge us for how well we built our physical house. He is not going to judge us on a lot of those areas that we seem to think are so important. He is going to judge us for how we live; how we speak to one another; how we help one another; how we go out of our way to show love for somebody.

So, our Christian lives need to be an intensive process of growth where we are constantly evaluating ourselves, evaluating our approach, evaluating our attitudes, evaluating our responses—and it should not stop there. It needs to go from evaluation to change for the better. To say, “Okay, I have just judged myself that I shouldn’t have put up my fist at the driver, who went by me at 100 miles an hour on I-35.” That is fine, but you have got to, next time that happens, make sure you do not put your fist up in the air.

There has got to be a change. You have got to have a different attitude. Now, maybe that guy deserves it; but he did not see you, he was already 300 yards up the road. So all of that reaction is yours and you have got to own it, and you have got to change—every little thing! Silly illustration, but we are so apt to do those things, because even the most minute little distractions, or what have you, get our human nature to rise up and do something wrong. Get us in a bad attitude. Maybe that guy that was going 100 miles an hour had a woman who was having a baby in the seat next to him, and he was rushing her to a hospital. He might have had a good excuse.

So, how do we react? Are we going to allow things like that to just throw our Christianity out the window? And here we are just as carnal as we were before baptism. So we have got to be growing. We have always got to be thinking. We have always got to be evaluating and changing. This is why Jesus tells us there in Luke 14 that, “If you want to be a disciple of Mine, you have got to commit.” It is going to be hard! You have got to think ahead. You have got to plan. You have got to be willing to lay it all on line for Him.

Let us go to Romans 12, the first two verses. We all know this, could probably recite it. What I would like to see here, look at it from maybe a little bit different perspective, is to notice the order of the acts that Paul commands us to do. Notice how he lays this out for us. He says,

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable [or spiritual] service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

There are 20,000 sermons packed into those two verses. I may be exaggerating a little bit, but there is a lot there that we can unpack. I am not going to go into that much depth. I just want to concentrate for the next few minutes on the order of what Paul tells us to do.

He says first, “Be a living sacrifice.” He tells us, “Give your all in service to God—while you are still alive.” It would be terrible to be a dead sacrifice. I mean, you could do something maybe glorious in death. But a living sacrifice is so much better, because it is the gift that keeps on giving. If you are a living sacrifice you can keep sacrificing over and over (and over, and over again), and do all these wonderful things as a sacrifice—in terms of helping others.

The second thing he tells us to do then in verse 2 is to transform and to renew our minds so that we have God's mind. So that we learn over that process of time—as we are growing in God's mind—to learn His will. So that we can prove His will—that it works, that it produces good fruits.

So, first comes “living sacrifice,” then comes “transforming the mind”—this is the order to the willingness to sacrifice and surrender to whatever God's process of education brings into our lives. We have got to be willing to give up our stuff, our time, our effort, our pleasure, our comfort, or whatever it happens to be—in order to transform our minds. The sacrifice comes first.

Paul writes in II Corinthians 8:10-12 that “if we have a willing mind when a project begins,” the case that he is talking about is the saints there in Corinth had decided that they would give stuff, money, fruits, whatever it was to the church in Jerusalem to help them through a famine. So they had determined that they would do this and they were willing to do it. And so he is saying there in II Corinthians 8:10-12, that if they have this willing mind, then they are more likely to finish what they started. They had a while before said that they would do it, and now Paul is encouraging them and saying, “Okay, if your mind is still willing (which it should be, because you promised), then that will be helpful in bringing it all together and making it ready for the journey back to Jerusalem.”

This “whatever it takes attitude,” this “willingness to sacrifice,” the hard work, the difficult situations, the setbacks, and the failures, are easier to bear if we are already determined that we are going to give our all. Then those things, well, we could take them in stride. “Oh, yeah, I’m willing to give my life for this, so the hard work part of it is just the way it happens, just the way it works. Trials? Ha! We knew they were coming. I’m willing to work with them and overcome them. Failures? Oh, yeah, lots of those. Still sin quite a bit. And okay, we know that we are going to have to cut this out. We are going to have to rethink this. We are going to have to have a better attitude and approach, and we are going to have to prioritize more. That’s how we’re going to overcome that sin.”

So if we have this sacrificial attitude first (which by the way, sacrifice is the essence of godly love), then we are going to have a whole lot more success in learning the mind of God. Because He functions exclusively on this idea of love, and He is constantly sacrificing. He is constantly doing things for us, giving things to us, helping us along, when we really probably do not deserve it! And that is the kind of attitude we will have if we commit to being a living sacrifice. The work becomes easier actually, because we basically told ourselves that “I don’t care what happens to me” (of course we do); but we have the attitude of saying, “I’ll throw myself into the pile” in order to whatever goal it is that we are trying to achieve, if that is what it takes.

Now, the second part in verse 2 is the process of change. So we have the willing mind, now we have to come to the nitty-gritty of changing. What he talks about here in chapter 12, verse 2 is throwing off our conformity to this world (which we have all done) and transforming our minds—renewing them—into the mind of God. So this process of change goes from worldly to godly, from sinful to righteous, from carnal to spiritual, from total impurity (Paul says, “Wretched man that I am,” that is the way we all are) to holiness.

Those are opposite ends of the spectrum, and we have to make the journey from one end to the other—not easy. That is why it takes that sacrificial attitude in verse 1 in order to make the leap from one end to the other—from impure to holy. What I am describing is a wrenching turnabout of our lives. It is not easy, and as a matter of fact it is impossible on our own. There is no one that has ever gone from carnal to spiritual on his own, it is an absolute impossibility.

This turnabout that we are talking about is so contrary to our selfish human nature, and the desires of our flesh that are constantly rearing up and telling us, “We should do this or that, or say this or that, or think this or that,” that it is absolutely impossible to do without God's Spirit. Jesus said (we have heard this a lot lately) John 15:5, “Without Me you can do nothing [spiritually].”

Jesus Christ has to be in us to make this happen. It takes the combined efforts of us and God to make it work. That is the gist of what Paul is saying in Philippians 2:12-13, he says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” And he means, “Work! Put the effort into it and the time.” Then he says in verse 13, “And God will work in you to make it happen.” But he wants to see us working. He is not just going to give it to us because, as Mr. Armstrong said many times, “God cannot create holy righteous character by fiat.” He cannot just snap His fingers and we are righteous.

At the beginning of our conversion, He places Christ's righteousness upon us by His shed blood so that we can appear before the throne of God. But God does not want us to stay in that condition. He wants us to start having our own righteousness based on Christ's righteousness; He wants us to *grow* in righteousness. So the imputed righteousness that He gives us is wonderful,

and it opens up so many things to us—allows us to have a relationship with God. But it should not stay there—just with imputed righteousness.

Let us go to Galatians 5. Now, when I say Galatians 5, many of you probably think, “Oh, the fruit of the Spirit, the works of the flesh. That is where all that is found.” And you are right! We often come to Galatians 5 to read of those things. But do we understand the context in which Paul mentions them? Really, that context is the subject of the sermon. Let us just go ahead and read verses 16 and 17. We are actually not going to read “the works of the flesh” or “the fruit of the Spirit”; we are going to read what comes before them and what comes after them.

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Let us just go down to verses 24-25, after the fruit of the Spirit. He says:

Galatians 5:24-25 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

This is the context of these two lists: the bad things, the works of the flesh, and the good things, the fruit of the Spirit. And he is giving us then what the flesh produces—those carnal works of the flesh. And what the Spirit produces—those godly things of the Spirit, godly fruits. Paul tells us that these two entities (let us call them) are at war inside every Christian. There is a war going on inside each one of us: it is flesh against Spirit; it is human nature against God's nature; it is carnality versus spirituality—and they are engaged in World War III inside your minds.

Let me tell you, the carnal mind has its finger on the red nuclear button constantly, it is willing to go to whatever extreme it can to get you to do what it wants. Verse 17 should read: “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.” That is what you find in the English Standard Version. Or if you have a Lexham English Bible, it will read: “The flesh desires against the Spirit.” This is the war that is going on. The desires of the flesh are so

contrary to what the Spirit wants you to do, that it is total conflict. They are pulled apart.

Remember the spectrum we talked about that we are supposed to flip from one end of the spectrum to the other—from the carnal to the godly? Well, that is how far apart they are; they are farther apart than Democrats and Republicans right now. And they are not fighting over Trump, they are fighting over you and your mind. The flesh wants you to sin because it wants you to enjoy all the pleasures of your body (whatever they happen to be) and your carnal mind. On the spiritual side of it, God's Holy Spirit is trying to get you to control those urges, and do what is godly and right. And they are so far apart they are totally opposite, totally contrary to one another, and they can do nothing but clash—and that is inside your head. Most of us tend to be only moderately aware of it because we are going blithely along in our lives, and we are not thinking about that sort of thing.

But we need to always be aware that our human nature is trying its best to get its way and the Spirit is always trying to hold it off; and make you stop and think; to resolve to do what is right. So, the two are bitter enemies; each one wants to be the dominant influence on your mind. The carnal one leads us down the road of selfishness to perdition, as it says in the Bible. The spiritual one, the Holy Spirit, leads us along the path of righteousness to the Kingdom of God.

So we have to resolve: “Which one do we want?” Now, of course I am going to say, “You want the Kingdom of God!” and most of us will say that. But on the other hand, we frequently give in to the other side. Which makes me question, and it should make us question: Which do we actually want? But that is only because our flesh is so strong in terms of its influence on us. And we tend to be weak and lily-livered, and we run from the confrontation, and we give in rather than standing strong for what we know to be right—allowing God's Spirit to strengthen us, and actually do what is right. To put that human nature down and say, “No! I’m going to do what is right and good.” Because it is far easier to do what the flesh wants than what the Spirit wants. But that is the approach that we have to have.

Now, this second pair of verses (24 and 25) informs us that if we are real Christians, if we are truly converted, we have put the flesh—the carnal mind,

our human nature—to death. Have you put it to death? It is a sad thing to think about, that we maybe feel like we are in the process of putting it to death, but we have not really done the killing blow. Paul says here that Christians—those who are Christ's—"Have executed it like it is an inveterate criminal with a rap sheet that is 20 feet long."

Like I said, we like to think that we have done it, that we have executed the carnal mind within us, but we have not—not fully. There are places, there are areas in our life that we still lean very heavily toward our carnal side. But that is our goal; our goal is to kill it, mortify it, put it to death, execute it. We are supposed to overcome it—prevail against it—so that it no longer dominates us. We no longer give in to its wrong urges, to all the emotion that it puts up there, and all the illegitimate desires that it flashes before our eyes. We say, "Oh, that would be nice," before we catch ourselves. A true Christian—one who is Christ's—follows God's commands, and the promptings of His Spirit, rather than those urges that the flesh always rolls out at us like a barrel coming out of the back of a truck on the freeway make us wreck.

Verse 25 puts the last nail in the coffin here: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Paul says here, basically, that if we have truly accepted Christ, and truly accepted all the principles of God's way of life, that our walk, our conduct had better reflect it. There can be no disconnect between belief and conduct, between principles and walk. They are not supposed to be just in our head, and we say, "Oh, yeah, I agree with that." No, they are supposed to come out in how we think, how we speak, how we conduct ourselves, behave ourselves with other people, and when we are alone!

Now we know that our behavior, our conduct in God's way will just naturally lag a little behind our belief and acceptance of God's way. It takes a little bit of time for it to work through from belief and acceptance into actual works that we do. But it should follow soon; it should follow at some point. It cannot just be an intellectual acceptance; it has got to come out in acts—works on the ground. Until then our Christian growth is incomplete.

True Christianity must, *must* make the leap from head and heart into behaviors and works. It cannot stop just in the head and the heart. It is got to

come out in behaviors and works or it remains unfulfilled—we become unprofitable servants. Remember the parable in Matthew 25, The Parable of the Talents? Two guys went and they did something with the talent that they got, but the one who hid it in a napkin and dug a hole in the ground and buried it, Christ called an “unprofitable servant.” Even though he had been given the talent, he did not do anything with it. He might have accepted intellectually that Christ was his boss, but he did not do anything with it. And that is how it is with us if it does not go from head and heart to behavior and conduct and works.

Now, let us get into this just for a little bit about “teaching us to think.” If we do a survey of the times that a Greek word is translated as “think” in the New Testament, we will find that (with just a few exceptions) the word implies “forming an opinion.” Several times it appears in the question, “Well, what do you think?” So whoever it is, whatever the teaching was that had just gone on, Jesus says this several times, and turns to somebody and says, “What do you think?”

More often, the kind of thinking as God thinks, is found in verses that speak about the mind, not in verses that speak about thinking, but talking about the mind. For instance, I Corinthians 2:16, “We have the mind of Christ” Paul says, because we have the Spirit of God in us. Also Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Another place where it is found is in those instances, those verses that speak about repentance. Now, why repentance? Why is our understanding of “how to come to think like Christ” occur in passages about repentance? You may know that the Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*. This word is actually a combination of two words put together, two parts: *meta* and *noia*. *Meta* means “change” and *noia* means “mind.” Repentance then, in its most basic meaning suggests changing the mind (*metanoia*).

This makes perfect sense because the mind must change first before behavior can change. The mind controls conduct; your body just does not do what it does without your mind being in control. So when somebody sins, they just do not sin, they *choose* to sin! Their mind went along with it. They followed

the flesh when they should be stopping the flesh from doing the sin. But the mind gives it a path, and sin occurs. So, this makes perfect sense, the mind must change first before behavior can change.

Once we determine (by thought processes) that a thing is sin, and we decide, choose (another process of the mind) not to do that thing, then halting the sinful conduct can happen. That is the process of repentance: we change our mind, we choose not to do what is wrong, and we change our lifestyle (we change what we do).

In short then, *repentance is a complete change in the orientation of the mind*. Please get that! It is a conscious turning from following human nature, the influence of the world, and the deceptions of Satan the Devil, toward following God and His Word. It is conscious.

Let us go to Mark 1. This is a passage Mr. Armstrong went to a lot.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."

So what is the first thing out of Jesus' mouth when He opened His ministry here? "The kingdom of God is at hand, reorient your minds and believe in the gospel." First thing: "Change your mind!" It is amazing how consistent this is. What did Peter say at the beginning of his ministry? "Reorient your mind," he said, "and let everyone be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

We have it in our Bible as repent. But I am going to do this with several other verses where I say, "Reorient your mind" rather than "Repent." That is in Acts 2:38; later in Acts 3:19, he says, "Reorient your minds therefore, and be converted." You have got to change your thinking! He tells Simon Magus after he tried to buy the Holy Spirit. He says, "Reorient your mind of this your wickedness" (Acts 8:22). "You have got to change your approach Simon."

When the household of Cornelius was converted, the apostles (who met in Judea hearing about what Peter had done there) said, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles the reorientation of mind to life.” They recognized that these Gentiles had changed their minds—changed the way they oriented their minds—from this world to God, and the proof was in the Holy Spirit.

Paul, at the area of Pegasus and Athens, preached, “God now commands all men everywhere to reorient their minds” (Acts 17:30). He tells the Ephesian elders when he was leaving them that he had testified to Jews and Greeks, the reorienting of the mind toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

So, the work of God in us is all about changing our thinking, transforming our minds, rewiring our thought processes—so that we will follow Jesus Christ in faith. Because we have got to do that. We have got to change our mind so that we put Christ first and not our own flesh.

Let us conclude in Romans 8. We often read verse 7.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

We often do not read the verses that come before that, but here are verses 5 and 6.

Romans 8:5-6 For those who live according to the flesh [according to their carnality] set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit [set their minds on], the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

There is the benefit, the reward for reorienting the mind toward Christ. By His own admission, Christ came to give us life more abundantly. And Paul here in Romans 8, tells us how it happens. It happens by the transformation of our minds from carnal to spiritual—that is how you live the abundant life. Do you want to live more abundantly? Everybody does. So what is the answer?

Grow in the mind of Christ. He lived the most abundant life there ever was. God is teaching us how to think as He does, that is His job right now. God is teaching us to think as He does, and it is past time for us to knuckle down, and learn what He has to teach us.