

The Mind of Christ In His Word: Part 1

Renewing the Mind Part 3



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A ReVision Resource

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Mind of Christ in His Word: Part 1
Renewing the Mind Part 4
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Welcome to *The Mind of Christ in His Word: Part 1*

This is first of a two-part study on how to grow to maturity in the mind of Christ by looking to His Word.

The Bible is the Word of Christ. In it He reveals Himself, draws us into the glory of God, and by His Spirit, transforms us into His own image. We need to read the Bible, faithfully and well, so that we can be daily renewed and grow to increasing maturity in the mind of Christ.

In this part of our study we'll look at ways to approach reading the Word of God that can ensure we go deeply into it, even as we allow it to go deeply into us.

The Mind of Christ in His Word: Part 1 is part 4 in our series on *Renewing the Mind*. In this study, we are seeking to grow in the mind of Christ with increasing maturity and consistency.

The studies in this series will encourage and guide you to take a more active, purposeful, and satisfying approach to renewing your mind in the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Read It!

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.14-17

The Word of Christ for the mind of Christ

Believers in Jesus Christ have the mind of Christ, and we are called to press on to maturity in our thinking, looking to the Lord to open our minds so that we may take every thought captive for obedience to our Lord and King (1 Cor. 2.16; Phil. 3.15; 2 Cor. 10.3-5). As we've seen, growing in the mind of Christ, so that our minds are being daily renewed in Him (Rom. 12.1, 2), does not come naturally. We must apply ourselves to the task, working out this aspect of our salvation as crucial for working out all the rest (Phil. 2.12).

We cannot learn to think with the mind of Christ apart from being *with* Christ, listening as He speaks to us from His Word and His world. All Scripture speaks to us of Jesus Christ (Jn. 5.39), but it will be of no value to us unless we avail ourselves of that Word, reading, meditating, searching, applying, and obeying all the Word of Christ, so that we might be renewed in our minds, and live those good works that issue from His thinking and redound to His glory.

Every Christian knows this. But knowing *that* we should read the Bible, and knowing *how* to read it, and *to what ends* – well, that's a different matter. And it is precisely *this* matter I intend to address in this and our next series.

I want to begin with the importance of *reading* the Bible, so that we hear the Word of Christ and are renewed in the mind of the Lord. I need to make three points.

Read regularly

First, we are not going to benefit from the Word of God if we do not spend *regular time* reading and meditating in it. The goal here is to establish and maintain daily time for the Word of God.

Now someone may say, "I don't see how I can do this, given that my daily time is already accounted for by other matters." I recall the sound advice given to me as a new Christian by the man who led me to the Lord: We will do in our lives only and exactly what we *want* to do, and when we *want* to make time for God's Word, we will do so.

We all make time for meals each day. That's because we get hungry, and we enjoy eating, and know that it's important we eat regularly and well. Regular reading of God's Word must become as important to us as our daily meals (Job 23.12). Set up a schedule and work at it until regular, daily reading is the foundation of your spiritual disciplines and your walk with the Lord. If other matters need to be put elsewhere in the schedule, or if you need to recover more time in the day for reading God's Word, then so be it. Keep in mind the promised benefits of spending time in Scripture – teaching, correction, training in righteousness, being equipped for every good work, and growing in the mind of Christ. Once you see these as the valuable assets they are, finding the time for regular,

daily reading of Scripture shouldn't be too big a challenge.

Read it all

Second, set up a schedule for your reading that will find you regularly passing through all the books of the Bible. Remember, *all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for the renewing of our minds unto every good work. Now, not all Scripture is equally interesting or clear. We will naturally gravitate to some parts of the Bible more than to others. However, again, all Scripture is inspired by God, and all Scripture is profitable to equip us for every good work. Therefore, our regimen of reading, meditating, and studying the Word of God must include *all* the counsel of God, all of Scripture.

Guard against merely settling into favorite or familiar books or sections of the Word. Discipline yourself to read it all, read it regularly, and read with a view to gaining the overall perspective. You will be more likely to do this if you set up a schedule or program of reading that takes you through the Bible, again and again, over a set period. Schedules are available online, and even versions of the Bible, for reading through Scripture once a year. That may be a bit too demanding, but taking up such a schedule and pursuing it faithfully, even if you miss a few days here and there, will at least get you through all the Word of Christ regularly.

Read it together

Finally, read Scripture together. Don't read the Bible like a novel, from chapter 1 to the end. Read from both Testaments daily, and include some reading from a gospel. The Spirit of God teaches us the mind of Christ by comparing spiritual truths from throughout the Bible, bringing light from other places to illuminate our reading and study in any passage (1 Cor. 2.12, 13).

In the Word of God, one overarching narrative directs all its various parts, one Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of it all, and the sanctification of God's people for lives of good works is its temporal aim throughout (Jn. 17.17). Thus, in our reading we should bring together the Old Testament with the New, Law with grace, promises with commandments, and mysteries with those parts that are abundantly plain.

Are you reading the Bible regularly? This is crucial for the renewing of our minds in the mind of Christ, so make sure your regimen of Bible reading and meditation is regular, comprehensive, and unified in the Spirit.

For reflection

1. How would you describe your program of Bible reading and study? Can you see ways of improving it?
2. Is your Bible reading regular, comprehensive, and unified in the Spirit? Explain.
3. What are your primary aims in reading the Scriptures? That is, what do you hope to gain from your time reading and studying the Bible?

Next steps – Preparation: Talk with some fellow Christians about their approach to reading and studying God's Word. What can you learn from them to improve your own time in Scripture?

2 Read for the Glory

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.16-18

The joy of reading Scripture

The challenge of reading regularly through the Scriptures as a daily discipline may strike some people as onerous or legalistic. Reading is hard for many people, and reading the Bible can be *especially* hard.

But God intends for us to *enjoy* reading and studying His Word. He wants us to approach the Bible like the prophet Jeremiah, who exclaimed, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer. 15.16). We wouldn’t say that eating three meals a day was onerous or legalistic. We understand the importance of regular eating, and we enjoy the experience.

Reading and studying God’s Word can become just like that. But we will need the Lord’s help both to establish and maintain this discipline, as well as to find the joy in it He intends. And the *joy* of reading Scripture comes from meeting the Lord in His glory.

Seek the Lord

As we come to our daily Bible reading, we must seek the Lord for the joy of meeting Him in His Word. If we will ask Him each day to give us delight in reading and studying Scripture, by showing Himself to us there, this will keep our time in the Word from becoming a duty, something we feel as if we *should* do, rather than something we dearly *want* to do. Our time in the Word can be a source of delight if, rather than hurry through our reading, just to get it done, we will look to the Lord, allow the Spirit to search and teach us, and wait patiently for the Lord to draw us into His glory.

We need to be sure about what to expect as we come to the Word of God each day. Only as we read Scripture for what God has for us there will we know the joy that comes from this discipline. We are reading *wrong* if we read the Scriptures, in the first instance, to “get something” out of them – something to soothe or impress us, or something to share with someone else. These are important byproducts of reading Scripture; they just aren’t what God intends for us *first of all*.

We must learn to read the Word as a way of seeking the Lord in His glory. That is, God is in His Word, which is living and powerful (Heb. 4.12), and He speaks to us from the Bible to reveal Himself and His glory. He is working by His Spirit to make His *glory* known to us, and it is this encounter with God in His glory which alone has power to transform us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ – heart, mind, conscience, and all of life.

Along the way, of course, we will gain many wonderful insights into God’s truth, learn important doctrines, find precious truths to comfort and strengthen our souls, and gain a clearer overall perspective on the divine economy. But as God makes Himself known to us in His glory, we may also find our reading of Scripture to be humbling, indicting, summoning, or impacting us in ways other than we may have come to the Word seeking. Don’t come to the Scriptures with preconceived notions about what you want from the Word of God. Come to Christ, speaking in His Word, and

read to listen, hear, submit, and obey as the Spirit leads.

Read into Jesus

Another way to put this would be, read to grow *into* and *in* Jesus, so that you know and love Him better and are transformed increasingly into His image. We are called to *learn* Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24). Our lives have been hidden *with* Christ *in* God. We look to Scripture for whatever it can show us of Jesus, and to make us more at home with Him and in the Lord. The goal of all reading and study of Scripture is to be conformed in all aspects of life to the image of Jesus Christ. He must increase in us, and we must decrease if our time in God's Word is to be profitable, as He intends (Jn. 3.30).

The story of the Bible is the story of Jesus, and the central role He plays in the divine economy of redemption. The Bible is given by one divine Author, Who breathed His Word into and through His servants, to tell the one grand story of redemption, bringing blessings to men and great glory to God. When we read Scripture, waiting on the Lord to show us His glory, we enter the life and purpose of Scripture, allowing God's Word to mold and shape us, and avoiding the temptation to mold or shape God's Word to suit our preconceived notions or needs. God knows what we need, and what He has prepared for us, to show us of Himself and His glory, as these are revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our attitude, whenever we come to the Bible, must be like those ancient Greeks who insisted, "We would see Jesus!" (Jn. 12.20, 21).

Wherever we are reading in God's Word, we must keep the overarching narrative of Scripture in mind, seeking in every chapter and verse insight to the glory of God in Jesus Christ. All Scripture works to unfold this story, and holds together on it as the central thread of divine revelation. Scripture's purpose is to reveal *God* and to show us His heart and initiate us into His plan. Wherever you are reading in the Word of God, therefore, seek to discern the ways that God is revealing Himself in Jesus Christ, to bring glory to Himself through a people He has redeemed in the Lord.

For reflection

1. Do you think it's possible to "see Jesus" in every part of the Bible? Why or why not?
2. What would be some important questions to keep in mind as we read Scripture to see Jesus and the glory of God?
3. Write a prayer that you can use each day to see Jesus in your time of reading and studying God's Word.

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about this matter of seeing Jesus throughout His Word. Ask them for some examples of how they see Jesus in Scripture. What do they do to keep focused on Him as they're reading the Bible?

3 Read for Your Soul

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom... Colossians 3.16

Living and powerful

Scripture is powerful to penetrate to the depths of a human being's life. Breaking into our souls as we read, the Bible quickens us (Jn. 6.63), revealing the glory of God in Jesus Christ, and working, by His Spirit, to transform us into Jesus' own image (Heb. 4.12; 2 Cor. 3.16-18).

Only as the Bible exerts its power *within* us can that transformation occur which leads to the renewing of our minds and lives for the glory of God. The mind is one component of our inner lives, but it's not the only part of our souls where Christ in His Word is working to make all things new.

Now we must be mindful, first of all, that the temper of our times is entirely opposed to such ideas as the soul, an inner person, or even the mind. The widespread secular and naturalistic thinking of our day insists that only what we can see, feel, hear, taste, or smell is real – only *material* things, in other words. Nothing else exists – no spiritual realities, no soul, and no God. If we allow this agenda to determine our thinking, we will miss the great blessings and promise of reading Scripture, and will end up denying the Lord when push comes to shove in our Personal Mission Fields.

According to the Bible, the human soul bears the image of God. That image has been tarnished and obscured by years of living in sin. However, it is never completely defaced, and if we are to realize the full joy and potential of what it means to be redeemed in Christ, we must allow Christ, speaking in His Word, to illuminate, refurbish, and transform all aspects of our soul. The renewing of our minds may be the place to begin, but unless our hearts and consciences are also renewed in Scripture, we will never fully realize the joy of Christ, or be transformed into His glorious image.

When we read the Bible, therefore, we must read in such a way as to allow the Word of Christ to speak to our minds, hearts, and consciences.

The Word within us

Both the Psalmist (Ps. 119.9-11) and Paul (Colossians 3.16) hold out the idea of the Word of God dwelling within us, becoming a living reality within the various components of our soul. Other passages of Scripture speak of *eating* the Word, or otherwise taking Scripture into our innermost being (Job 23.12; Jer. 15.16; Rev. 10.9-11). Clearly, God intends His Word to *get inside us*, into the very deep recesses of our lives, into our souls.

The soul consists of three interacting and overlapping *spiritual* components – mind, heart, and conscience. The *mind* manages the process and products of thinking. The *heart* is where our affections are lodged and refined. And the *conscience* maintains the values and priorities that guide our thinking and feeling into right action.

When we think of *hiding* the Word in our heart, or letting the Word of Christ *dwell in us richly*, we must think in specific ways about *how* the living and powerful Word of Christ, glowing with His glory, is likely to affect us in our souls. We cannot read the Bible merely for *ideas*, in other words.

The Word of God is truth, as Jesus reminded us (Jn. 17.17), but *truth* is a much larger category of reality than *ideas* alone. Truth includes ideas, but it also includes how we feel, what we value, and how we speak and act. Truth, that is, consists in *Jesus Christ* (Jn. 14.6), and how He becomes increasingly evident *in every aspect of our lives*, beginning in our *souls*.

Reading for your soul

Thus, as we read, we should strive to *understand* the Scriptures, to *nurture the affections* Scripture commends, and to *value* the Word as the guide of our wills.

We want Scripture to shape our thinking. As we read it, therefore, we will listen for the Spirit to *illuminate* our minds concerning all aspects of our thought lives. We want the ideas, views, perspectives, teaching, truths, and thinking of Scripture to outfit our minds for maturity in the mind of Christ. This means reading Scripture to illuminate our minds, revealing more of the mind of Christ, and showing us how to take our thoughts captive for obedience to Him (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

But we will also read the Word to shed light on the state of our *affections* – those attitudes, feelings, desires, and aspirations that have powerful effects on how we think and live. All affections are valid, but only when they are rightly focused and properly nurtured according to the teaching of Scripture. We must let the Bible reveal to us any misguided, deficient, or improper affections, and look to Scripture to reform and refashion our hearts, so that we desire the things of the Lord in the same ways He does.

And we must listen for Scripture to instruct our *consciences* as well, by disclosing, examining, and revaluing our priorities in every area of life. The highest values we can sustain in our consciences is to love God with all our soul and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. All other values and priorities of the conscience – how we use our time, wealth, and strength – must line up behind these. As the Word of God dwells richly in us, it can help us to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ in every facet of our soul.

As you read and study the Bible, listen for the Word of Christ to speak to your inner person. Let the Sword of God pierce deeply into every chamber of your soul, and let His glory cauterize and transform you from the inside-out.

For reflection

1. Can you give an example of how you read the Bible to transform your thinking?
2. Can you give an example of how you read the Bible to renew your affections?
3. Can you give an example of how, by reading the Bible, you have seen your values or priorities transformed?

Next steps – Transformation: Begin right away to read and study your Bible with a view to letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Do you think journaling might be a good way to enhance your time in God's Word?

4 Read for Your Life

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a bearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful bearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. James 1.22-25

The mirror of God's Word

In two places, the Bible refers to itself as a mirror. We look into the Scriptures, and something looks back at us. We've already considered the first of these places – 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. We look intently into the Word of God, waiting on the Spirit to teach and lead us, and in due time, God looks out, in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6), and shows us His glory.

In this respect Scripture shows us not what we *are*, but *what we are to become*. Scripture is a reliable mirror in this regard, in that it shows us consistently the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, and works within us – mind, heart, and conscience – to shape us into that same image.

But our passage suggests another way that Scripture works as a mirror. It shows us *ourselves*, or even, *the times in which we live*. As we read and study the Bible, it brings to light things in us, in human nature generally, or in the culture and conditions of our time, which we might not pay much attention to, were it not that Scripture calls these things to mind.

When this happens, we may experience a variety of responses. We may feel our minds *illuminated*, so that we understand something we never did before, or see something we have always understood one way in an altogether new light. Or, we may feel *conviction*, as we realize that something in us, or in our world, is not what God intends for His glory and our benefit. As the mirror of God's Word reflects Him and us back to us, we may experience *shame, relief, joy, insight*, even a kind of *aha!* feeling, as if suddenly, something we've always wondered about has become crystal clear.

So as we come to Scripture day by day, reading and meditating throughout the Word of God, we want to *see Jesus* in His Word, but we also want to look carefully to *see ourselves and the times in which we live*.

But what do we do then?

Responding to the mirror of ourselves

Scripture, we know, is profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3.15-17). We'll have more to say about why this is important in our next study in this series. Unhappily, it's all too easy to read Scripture only for the sake of "fleshing out" our doctrinal views. This we should do; however, we should also keep in mind *why* doctrine matters. Sound doctrine matters because it is the key to *sound learning* and *real discipleship* (1 Tim. 1.1-5). We must never fall into the practice of reading only, or even primarily, to gain doctrinal understanding. Sound doctrine must always be for the nurture of the *entire soul* and the transformation of the *whole of life*, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

As James puts it, when, in our reading and study of Scripture, we come to see where we *are* against the backdrop of *where we ought to be*, then it's time to take concrete steps to bring our daily reality

more into line with what God wants us to become in Jesus Christ.

We need to be prepared to *act* on what we're learning, to be *doers* of Scripture, and not *hearers* only. So how can we do this effectively?

Right where you are

Typically, whatever we learn about ourselves from Scripture will come from new understandings, improved affections, and new or reinforced priorities – changes in the inner life, within our souls. But these changes are just the first step. Whatever is going on inside us to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ will only come to fruition as that transformation is expressed in *actions* – words and deeds.

Words and deeds are the means by which we carry out the good works for which we have been redeemed (Eph. 2.8-10) and for which God has given us His Word (2 Tim. 3.15-17). So, whatever changes are going to occur in our lives, causing us to look more like Jesus and less like our old selves, they're going to be expressed in the things we say and the things we do.

And *those* will be expressed, not merely in some setting at church – worship, Bible study group, or whatever – but in the normal course of our everyday lives, with the people we see, and in the duties and activities we carry out.

Every day, we are sent by God into specific places, where we encounter the same people over and over. Here, in the everyday situations of our lives, is where God intends for us to *demonstrate* the transformations He is teaching us in His Word and working to achieve in our souls. As we study the Bible, therefore, we need to be thinking ahead to the places we'll go and the people we'll see, asking the Lord to give us wisdom in how to use our time, and to establish the words or works He wants for us in expressing the inward reality of Jesus Christ (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17).

As we come away from the mirror of God's Word each day, we should be equipped with *specific plans* for taking *specific action steps* that will make it possible for Jesus to increase in us at every opportunity. Read Scripture for your *life*, and live your life as a reflection of what God shows you in the mirror of His Word.

For reflection

1. How do you experience this matter of reading Scripture as a mirror? Can you give an example of how this has worked in your life?
2. Meditate on John 20.21. How was Jesus *sent* to the world? How is He *sending* you?
3. What can you do each day to make sure you have some specific action steps from your time of reading God's Word?

Next steps – Preparation: Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field. Watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet and start taking sharper aim at the places and people to which God sends you each day.

5 Read for the Culture

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

Inescapably cultural

Wherever you go in your Personal Mission Field, you are involved in culture. There's no getting away from culture, and no doing without it. Human beings are made for culture, and we make and use culture to define, sustain, and enhance our lives.

Culture is simply the artifacts, institutions, and conventions by which we make our way in the world. The food you eat, clothes you wear, your language, work, and diversions – these are all aspects of culture. So also are the laws that govern us and the institutions that serve us (such as government, schools, the marketplace, and so forth). Everything in our cities, towns, neighborhoods, that we make or use to make our lives easier is culture, and we can't live without it.

But there are certain pitfalls to being creatures of culture, among these, is that culture can be either good and ennobling, or bad and degrading. Knowing which is which can be a challenge sometimes. And beyond that, using even the *good* culture we possess for *good and ennobling* purposes can be difficult. Sometimes even good cultural components can be troublesome, as when we eat too much, watch too much TV or play too many video games, or fill our lives with music and films that misrepresent God's view of what human life should be about.

Culture can mess with our minds, in other words, so if we want to make progress in *renewing* our minds in the mind of Christ, we'll need to know how to *use* culture in ways consistent with His purposes. And that means learning to use all our culture in ways that glorify God.

Glorifying God in culture

We glorify God in the use we make of culture when our cultural lives demonstrate His beauty, goodness, and truth, and when they edify us and others in the image of Jesus Christ. A good bit of the culture we brush up against every day does not do this; in fact, much of contemporary culture is pushing and drawing and wooing us in directions *away* from thinking and living like Jesus. If we are not aware of how culture works, or if we are not *mindful* of the ways we use various aspects of culture, we may find ourselves contributing more to the progress of human sin and rebellion than to the glory of Christ and His Kingdom.

Our goal in using culture – all the way down to such everyday activities as taking a meal – must be to glorify God, to let our cultural activities glisten and glimmer with the radiance and solidity of His beauty, goodness, and truth.

So, how do we do this?

Five cultural roles

As we read and study the Bible, we need to bear in mind our role as creatures of culture. We should ask God to equip us for every good cultural work, by preparing us to function in five roles with respect to culture.

First, we must learn to be *culture critics*. We must let the Word of God equip us for discernment in our use of culture, enabling us to analyze the culture of our times and think through the best ways of using culture for Christ and His Kingdom.

Second, we should strive to be careful *culture consumers*. We're going to use culture every day – to *consume* culture, in all its various forms. As we become more discriminating about the culture of our lives, we'll be in a better position to use culture in ways that manifest the good works for which God sends us into the world each day.

Third, we need to improve our skills as *culture creators*. We all not only *use* culture each day; we *make* it as well – in language, in how we dress, do our work, relate to others, use the Internet, answer messages, and much more. Because we use and make culture in these ways, we create opportunities for culture to touch others with the grace and truth of God. We should expect Scripture to help in equipping us for this good work as well.

Fourth, every one of us is also a *culture conservator*. That is, we pass along culture to others, because we hope to do them good by so doing. Here we should become more discriminating about the kind of culture we recommend to others – books, films, music, websites, and so forth. And there is a vast trove of riches in our Christian cultural heritage that we should begin to discover, enjoy, and share with others.

Finally, we want the Word of God to equip us with the mind of Christ so that we can fulfill the role of *culture conversationalist*. Nothing gives us more opportunities to talk about spiritual things and our Lord Jesus Christ than our mutual involvement with others in culture. Just as Jesus used things like farms, coins, armies, and the like to spring into conversations about spiritual matters, when we're operating with the mature mind of Christ, opened wider each day by His Word, we should expect to do just the same.

So when you read your Bible, and as you meditate in the Word of God, keep in mind the cultural opportunities before you. Read for culture, to equip you to make the most of this inescapable reality for the Kingdom and glory of God.

For reflection

1. Take a few minutes and jot down as many as you can of the artifacts, institutions, or conventions of culture you are involved with in a week.
2. How conscious are you, as you make use of these cultural opportunities, of doing all things for the glory of God?
3. In which of the five roles of culture do you most need to improve?

Next steps – Transformation: For the next several days, make a mental note of each time you have an opportunity to fulfill one of the cultural roles mentioned in this study. Then, as you are reading Scripture, listen for the Lord to equip you in some specific way to be more effective in those roles.

6 Read for the Times

...of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command... 1 Chronicles 12.32

Same God, same history

Sometimes people who read the Bible fall into the mistake of thinking that God operated during the period in which Scripture was being written in a manner different than He does today. They maintain a kind of “That was then; this is now” mentality about much of what they read in the Bible. What they see God having done during the times in which Scripture was given, is not what they expect Him to do in our day.

There is some truth to this. God no longer speaks in an audible voice. He has finished giving the kind of revelation of Himself that we find in Scripture and our Lord Jesus Christ. And it pleases God to pursue His work on earth less dramatically, yet ultimately more powerfully, by His Spirit working in His Church, one person and one day at a time.

However, the God we know today is the same God we read about in Scripture. And the history of which we are part exists within the same space/time continuum as Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul. God is still sovereign over all human affairs; the Lord Jesus still upholds the universe by His Word of power; miracles still do happen; the Kingdom of God is advancing on earth as it is in heaven; and the promises and commandments of God continue to be valid now, just as they were in the days of David, Paul, and John.

We need to read Scripture as though it were written *in* our time and *for* our time, and guard against the tendency to think that we cannot believe God or Scripture to be relevant or powerful for the big events and challenges of our day. He is, and they are.

Ambassadors all

We are God’s ambassadors in a world that desperately needs to hear the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom. It was said of the Lord Jesus Christ that He knew what was in every man (Jn. 2.24, 25). Beyond that, Jesus understood the times in which He lived. He understood the powers that were arrayed against Him – who they were, how they worked, and what He must expect at their hands. He was a Man of His times, and He understood the times, and knew just what He needed to do to bring the salvation of God to the world.

Now He has appointed us His ambassadors, to carry out the mission of His Kingdom in a world fraught with troubles and trials of various sorts, amid a people disconnected from God and His Word by all manner of frivolous, fleeting distractions. No ambassador could ever expect to succeed at his post without a good understanding of the people and culture to which he was sent. Like those ancient sons of Issachar, ambassadors today need to understand the times, to know what to do in representing the interests of their homeland.

This holds true for Kingdom ambassadors as well. We who would grow to maturity in the mind of Christ, so that we might think like Jesus, and know how to carry out Jesus’ plan and agenda, must allow the mind of Christ in Scripture to teach us how to understand the world in which we live and

move and have our being. The Scriptures provide a framework for understanding the times in which we live – all the times of every human being – so that we can think with the mind of God about our times, and prepare daily for serving as His ambassadors.

Our worldview will be formed either by the Spirit of God, speaking in His Word, or the spirit of the age in which we live. We will see the world and our times with the mind of Christ, or we will allow the secular and rationalistic mind of our day to dictate the terms of our experience in the world. When we submit our minds to the mind of Christ, certain fundamental truths about the times in which we live become clear, and can guide our work as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

Three truths

Scripture asserts three truths that can help us in understanding the times in which we live. First is the teaching of Scripture concerning the *two families of human beings*. On the one hand, there are those who have been set free from the lies of the devil, the power of sin, and the tendency for self-deceit, into the liberty of the sons and daughters of God. These are they who, by trusting in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and new life, have been liberated by the truth of God into a life of all things becoming new. On the other hand, there are those who, because they reject the truth of God, and refuse to acknowledge or give thanks to Him, become gods unto themselves, and travel a course of increasing sin, self-interest, and degradation, leading to death (cf. Rom. 1.18-32). In each of our lives are many people who are trapped in the morass of deceit and lies, whose lives are a perpetual whistling through the graveyard, with no hope of escape.

Second, the *Kingdom of God is still advancing* on earth, as it is in heaven (cf. Dan. 2.44, 45; Is. 9.6, 7; 1 Jn. 28). How cruel and disingenuous it would be of our Lord Jesus to teach us to pray this way if He had no intention of hearing and answering the request He commands of us. The flow of human history since the days of Christ bears undeniable evidence, across the board of human life and culture, that beauty, goodness, and truth, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, are advancing on earth in ways and with a permanence unknown prior to the first Christian Pentecost.

Finally, the *Gospel is still the power of God for salvation*, for all who believe (Rom. 1.16, 17). Do not give in to the lie that says people are no longer open to hearing about Jesus. Do not submit to the deception of the devil, who wants us to believe the Kingdom of God is for a far-distant era. And do not yield to the tendency to look with indifference on the lost men and women of your Personal Mission Field. Let the Word of God teach you how to understand the times in which we live. Then you will have the mind of Christ to know what you must do to fulfill your ambassadorship day by day.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Matthew 6.33. What do you understand by this command? How do you seek to fulfill this charge in your daily life?
2. Paul says the Gospel is *power* (Rom. 1.16, 17). What kind of power? How does that power work? To what ends? Where do you fit in the working of that power?
3. What can you do to become a better student of the times, so that, thinking with the mind of Christ, you know what to do each day?

The Mind of Christ in His Word: Part 1

Next steps – Preparation: Review the three truths outlined at the end of today's column. How can you make these more central to your calling as an ambassador of Christ? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

7 Read for the Generations

*I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.* Psalm 78.2-4

A culture of narcissism

When in 1977, Christopher Lasch published his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, the truth of his thesis was not as clear to everyone else. Mr. Lasch explained that a chilling blanket of self-interest was settling over the American landscape, and that narcissism – the fascination with self – was showing signs of becoming epidemic.

Who today doubts that Mr. Lasch was right?

Ours is a generation that lives for the here-and-now, and for maximizing self-interest and self-advancement. The increase of government entitlements, the reduction of education to the promotion of economic self-interest, the insistence everywhere on rights, the tsunami of easy debt, bringing with it the flotsam and jetsam of material goods, the pervasive presence of social media, the plague of abortion, the rising tide of divorce and child abuse, and the power of advertising all bear witness to a condition in which narcissistic self-interest has become the prevailing mood. We are a people who want what we want *now*, and who show little regard for what might be left for the generations to follow.

Even in the Church, our purpose seems increasingly to be to cater to the interests of individuals, to make people feel good about believing and worshipping, rather than to seek the glory and praise of God as the driving force in our lives and congregations – even if this requires sacrifice, self-denial, or death.

The rising tide of narcissism is lifting all boats in the harbors of the world, and that includes members of the believing community. But even the most cursory glance at Scripture, where the mind of Christ beckons us from every page, reveals that this is not the way we should think about our lives.

A faith for the generations

God leads His people by promises. He holds out for them precious and very great promises, which He calls them to believe in, live toward, and pass on to their children, since the promises never come fully to fruition in any single generation. Realizing those promises requires living sacrificially, denying base self-interest and the tendency to squander wealth, strength, and time on frivolous matters, and to work always for the edification of our fellow-believers, and in particular, for those who will succeed us in leading the work of Christ's Kingdom (Ps. 45.17).

The mind of Christ looks to the future, suffers the children to come to Him for blessing, commands

parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, calls us to make disciples for the generations to come, and requires that we deny ourselves as Jesus did, take up whatever our cross may be, and serve others for the sake of Jesus and His Kingdom. The enemy of the Kingdom of God is mere self-interest. And even when that self-interest is cloaked in the garb of Christian spirituality, it is a wolf in sheep's clothing that cares more about the individual and moment than the Kingdom and the generations to come.

If we will let the mind of Christ inform and shape our thinking, we will renounce all self-interest and devote ourselves to seeking His Kingdom and promises now and for the generations to come. Focused on gaining the City to Come, we will follow the example of those heroic saints who have preceded us, and live toward the promises of God for ourselves, our children, and the generations yet to come (Heb. 11).

Some practical suggestions

But what does this entail. Allow me to make four suggestions which we find consistently throughout Scripture concerning our commitment to the generations to come.

First, in our churches and in our own lives, we must encourage and support marriage as God defines it in His Word, and the begetting and raising of children as the highest calling of marriage. And we must equip and support parents to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, giving them a vision of the Kingdom and promises of God in ever-increasing fullness.

Second, we must stop treating the education of our children as a perpetual VBS joy ride, and begin equipping our children for life as ambassadors in the Kingdom of God. Even children have a Personal Mission Field, and we should be teaching them how to serve the Lord there, rather than filling their educational time with frivolous activities and meaningless crafts.

Third, every believer must strive to set an example of Christian worldview living for young people of every age. That is, we must learn to walk circumspectly, making the most of our time as those who are imbued with the wisdom of God, taking every thought and every moment captive for obedience to Jesus Christ.

Finally, we must keep growing in the mind of Christ, so that, increasingly, we mature in seeing the world as He does, and making the kind of choices He would, in your everyday calling to follow Him.

Live this way, and the generations to come will rise up and call you blessed, cherishing the memory of your devotion and your sacrifice, and living for their children as fervently as you did for yours.

For reflection

1. What opportunities exist in your church for you to serve the generations to come?
2. How can you support parents and teachers who are raising and serving the children and young people in your church?
3. What are you planning to do to make sure that you keep increasing toward maturity in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Demonstration: Contact some of the people in your church who raise and serve the children of your church. Find out how you can pray for them, and begin to do so daily.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you describe your present approach to seeking the mind of Christ in His Word? Can you see any ways you might want to improve this?
2. Explain in your own words each of the following:
 - Read for the glory:
 - Read for your soul:
 - Read for your life:
 - Read for the culture:
 - Read for the times:
 - Read for the generations:
3. How can Christians help one another press on toward maturity in the mind of Christ from His Word?
4. How might you expect to be able to tell when you are making progress in the mind of Christ?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.