

The Mature Mind

Renewing the Mind Part 2



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A ReVision Resource

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Renewing the Mind Part 2
The Mature Mind
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Welcome to *The Mature Mind*

We who believe in Jesus have the mind of Christ. Do we understand what that means? What power for holy thinking God has given us? When we understand how the mind of Christ works, we can press on to maturity in our thinking.

We must not be content to think like children. Too much is at stake, both for our growth and fruitfulness and for our ministry to others. In this part of study of the mind of Christ, we'll look more closely at how the mature mind works, and what we can do to press on to maturity in our thinking.

This *ReVision* series on "The Mind of Christ" is part of our "Strong Souls" study in which we are working our way through an examination of the components of the soul – heart, mind, and conscience – to discover how our own souls might be strengthened for growth in and service for the Lord.

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 Thinking Like Children?

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. 1 Corinthians 14.20

Use your head!

Has anyone ever said to you – usually in exasperation – “Use your head!”? We don’t hear that so much as adults, but we’ve probably all said that to our kids at one time or another, or may remember having been told that by a parent, teacher, or coach.

The point of this exhortation is, of course, to encourage mature thinking, to move on from childish thinking and living into more useful and fruitful levels of thought and life.

Psychologists tell us that we don’t use anywhere near the full capacity of our brain power. The mind is a powerful agent in the soul; and, since we have the mind of Christ, we ought to be eager to realize as much of His thinking power as possible. A sound mind engaged with a well-kept heart makes for a strong soul. And a strong soul is crucial to being and making disciples, and to glorifying God in every aspect of our lives.

The Corinthians to whom Paul wrote, however, were making an art of wasting their minds. And the apostle felt no compunction about shaming them for doing so.

Paul had already chastised them for being “babes” in Christ; now he suggested that they were “children in their thinking.” They had the mind of Christ, Paul insisted (1 Cor. 2.16), and yet, in so many ways, they were thinking like children, wasting their minds on schism, self-interest, and splashy but shallow spirituality, when they should have been devoting their minds to the hard work of growing in Christ, serving others, making disciples, building the Church, and seeking the Kingdom of the Lord.

The apostle still speaks to churches and believers today. If we’ve settled into a comfortable but childish manner of being disciples, his words will be as relevant to us as they were to the Corinthians. They may sting, but they can also move us to pursue greater maturity in our thinking.

Mind work

The mind is one of the components of the soul, together with the heart and the conscience. While we tend to associate the mind with the brain – and neuroscientists today seem dead-set to confine it there – the mind is a spiritual essence and, with the other components of the soul, inhabits the entirety of a person’s bodily existence.

The mind is that facet of the soul that manages the various activities associated with thinking. We who have come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and King are called to be continually renewed in our minds (Rom. 12.1, 2). We must no longer use our minds like unbelievers do; instead, we must learn to think like Jesus about everything (Eph. 4.17-24). We cannot live the full and abundant life in Christ without increasing engagement and right use of the mind and all its functions. We are called to take every thought captive for Christ, to think His thoughts after Him and like Him in all things (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

To the mind falls the task of gathering, comparing, sorting, and storing all the information that comes our way. The mind creates ideas out of fragments of thought. With our minds, we formulate plans, organize our work, direct our speech, and routinely assess our progress in every facet of life.

The process of thinking includes the varied activities of observing, analyzing, discovering, comparing, combining, revising, refining, improving, cataloguing, and organizing everything we think, say, and do.

The Mature Mind

Further, our minds are continuously active. The mind pursues its God-given functions at all times, no matter the circumstances or conditions. If we're not diligently and faithfully attending to those functions, the world spirit of the age will obligingly squeeze our thinking into its own mold (Rom. 12.1, 2 Phillips version).

As John Stott indicated in an important book by this title, your mind matters, and it matters very much. It is indeed a terrible gift to waste, and, if we find that we're acting like children in our thinking, as the Corinthians were, then we need to take steps to bring the mind of Christ which we possess to higher levels of maturity in serving the Lord and others.

One indication that we might be thinking like children is if we complain about, neglect, or resist improving our mind. What parent has not tussled with children about homework, spending less time on social media or playing video games, reading more, or having an intelligent conversation? *Children* must be compelled to learn. Mature minds learn eagerly, continuously, and joyfully.

The hard work of maturing

But getting to that place is easier said than done. Becoming mature in our thinking is hard work. It's so much easier to think like a child – looking out only for ourselves; latching on to all things frivolous and fun and avoiding anything that might make our brains ache; whining about having to learn new ideas or think things through for ourselves; and being content with games and play and the *status quo*, rather than the hard work of personal transformation and culture change. Yes, that's the easy route; but would the apostle Paul approve?

This is not what mature minds do – minds that function with the vision, focus, resolve, and intellectual clarity and conviction of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Paul urged the Corinthians to get over being children in their thinking, and to start living out of the mature mind of Christ, which was theirs by the anointing of God's Spirit.

We have the mind of Christ. We must not be satisfied with thinking like children, for thinking like children will result in our living a childish Christian life, one centered only on ourselves and our comfort and convenience. It is our duty *and privilege* to use our minds as Jesus would, and to make the most of this great gift for the greater glory of God.

And to that end, let us take up the challenge and mandate issued by the apostle Paul, and begin learning to think with the mature mind of Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. What are some of the characteristics of *childish* thinking? What does childish thinking produce in a person?
2. Why did Paul say the Corinthians were thinking like children? What evidence did he point to in his first epistle to shame them into repentance?
3. What would you say are the marks of *mature* thinking?

Next steps – Preparation: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating you could give, how would you assess your own thoughts and thinking? Are you more toward the childish end of the spectrum (1) or the mature end (10)? Why did you choose the number you did?

2 Empty Yourself

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... Philipians 2.5-7

The mind of Christ!

Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). If you are a Christian, you have the mind of Christ. Functioning from within the vantage point of the mind of Christ is indispensable for a strong soul and a life of consistent obedience and blessing.

You have the mind of Christ! This is astonishing – both a fact and a promise, as well as a challenge and an aspiration. It refers to the fact that the Spirit of Christ, Who dwells in every believer, has begun a new work in our thinking, and is laboring to help us make progress in becoming more like Jesus in how we see, think about, plan our way, and make progress in His Kingdom.

Since we have the mind of Christ, we should want to make the most of that resource for seeing the world and thinking through the many challenges and opportunities that come our way each day. Too many believers, like the Christians in Corinth, are merely children in their thinking when it comes to using the mind of Christ. But the teaching of Scripture is that we can mature in our thinking, so that the mind of Christ we *possess* increasingly becomes the mind through which we *look out* on the world and *conduct our lives*.

Since a *mind* is a terrible thing to waste, wasting *the mind of Christ* is more than terrible. It is sinful, shameful, and inexcusable for those who know they possess it.

Sent to serve

The starting point of the ongoing work of growing to maturity of mind is, as we have seen, in emptying ourselves of all mere self-interest and self-centeredness, taking up instead a mindset of humility and readiness for serving others at every opportunity, in every situation. If we empty our thoughts with respect to what we want or would like someone to do for us, we'll make room for the mind of Christ to take our thoughts captive to think and live like He would.

This was the kind of thinking, as Paul explains, that led the Word of God to set aside His eternal perquisites and power to take upon Himself the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Word became flesh because doing so was consistent with the eternal mind, the unchanging *Logos*, of God. And in so doing He made Himself a servant of sinners, so that through His service and sacrifice He might deliver us from our guilt and sin.

And Jesus said that, as the Father had sent Him to the world, so He is sending us every day (Jn. 20.21). Jesus devoted His mind to serving; so also must we.

Emptying yourself

The Greek of our text says that Jesus “emptied Himself.” He emptied Himself of special privileges, of being first in everything, of His glorious reputation and power, so that He could humble Himself and come among us as a servant.

What is involved in emptying ourselves like this, so that we who have the mind of Christ might realize greater maturity in our thinking?

Paul tells us: First, we need to “esteem others better” than ourselves (Phil. 2.3). To *esteem* others is to regard them in a certain way, not only to *think* about them but to *feel* with admiration, respect, and grace toward them. That is, for our *minds* to function as they should, so that rather than seeking to *be served* by others we make it our business to *serve them* (Mk. 10.42-45). For this to become more consistently our way of living, our

hearts must become re-oriented as well. The way we regard others – our attitudes toward and feelings about them – is a function of our *hearts*, where the affection of love is engaged. If we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, we will regard them more highly than we do ourselves, because this, frankly, is the way we would want them to regard us!

Paul continues in Philippians 2 to explain more practically how to do this: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (v. 4). That is, we want to discover the needs of other people, beginning with the folks we see each day – at home, in the neighborhood and community, at work and church, and so forth. We’ll have to take the initiative to *get to know people* a little better, learning and using their names, taking sincere interest in their lives and concerns, and initiating conversations as we are able. It will help, as we begin looking to the interests of others, if we practice good listening skills (Jms. 1.19). That way we’ll be more likely to hear what others share with us and remember what we’re learning.

In our conversations with the people around us, we’ll begin to discover the things that matter to them, and we can pray for them and their concerns with more focus and consistency. The more you pray for the people to whom God sends you each day, the more your concern and love for them will grow. Then, as opportunities arise to speak a word of encouragement, affirmation, or wisdom, or to offer some gesture of help, or other good work, you will be much more likely to notice those open doors and to go through them.

The focus of a mature mind is *away* from self and *toward others and their concerns*. We will bring more maturity to our thinking when, like Jesus, we empty ourselves of ourselves and go each day into our [Personal Mission Fields](#) looking to serve others.

We have the mind of Christ; therefore, we can learn to think like Jesus, see others as Jesus did, and train our minds to analyze, reason, and plan in such a way that reaching out to others in self-emptying love becomes just who we are in Christ.

But you’ll have to work at it, and if you can work at it with someone else, each of you praying for, challenging, and holding the other accountable, your ability to have the mind of Jesus in all situations will begin to increase noticeably.

For reflection

1. What does it mean for you to “empty” yourself like Jesus did? What does it look like in everyday situations when you are thinking more about others and their concerns than about yourself and yours?
2. What obstacles can keep us from emptying ourselves to serve others? How can believers help one another to recognize and overcome these obstacles?
3. Who are the people God sends you to each day to serve? Have you mapped out your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

Next steps – Preparation: Watch the brief video on Personal Mission Field ([click here](#)). Download the worksheet, and map out your Personal Mission Field.

3 For Edification

Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26

What was He thinking?

Consider the ways most people we meet throughout the week use their tongues: to inform, impress, instruct, advise, entertain, direct, deceive, criticize, complement, or perhaps correct the people with whom they live, work, and otherwise consort.

Or maybe they use their tongues to justify or explain themselves, or to work out something with someone else. And why do they *do* the things they do the *ways* they do – work their jobs, conduct their relationships, manage their activities?

All forms of speech and ways of being-in-the-world require thought. We establish and maintain a particular frame of reference, a peculiar *mindset*, and we resort to certain ways of thinking about others. This determines how we use our tongues and bodies. The problem Paul was addressing in Corinth was that the believers there were operating with *childish* rather than *mature* thinking. They were relating to one another not out of a framework of *maturity* of mind, but of childish self-interest. He scolded them for their self-centered, factious, and frivolous ways, and called them to “grow up” into the mind of Christ, so that they would think more like Jesus and less like their old selves.

What was the Son of God thinking when He took upon Himself the form of a servant and came among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth? In His mind, the whole redemption project was in view, including the salvation of His people, their being built together into the Church and advancing His Kingdom, His preparing an eternal dwelling for them, their being secure with Him forever in the New Heavens and New Earth, and God being glorified in everything. He was thinking all this, all the time. This was the framework within which He came among us and spoke and lived and died as He did.

Everything Jesus did on earth, all His works and words, were focused on gathering, assembling, saving, and edifying His people and, through them, restoring the reconciled world to His Father. If we want to have the mind of Christ, having emptied ourselves of self-interest for the sake of caring for others, we’ll need to think about others as Jesus did, and to learn what is necessary for edifying others.

Three things

This involves three things.

First, we need to know what *edifying others* means. What does someone look like who is being edified in the ways Paul had in mind? Is a person edified simply by letting him do or say or have whatever he wants? Is he edified by being lied to about how others view him? Is a person edified by always getting his way? Or by getting away with trampling on others? What does someone who is being edified look like exactly?

Mere human standards of maturity and edification won’t help us here. We need to understand *God’s* view of what this work involves. What does God consider the ideal edified person?

In God’s view being edified means becoming more like Jesus (2 Cor. 3:12-18; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Jn. 2:1-6). Jesus Himself said, “Follow Me.” God’s plan for people is to become more like Jesus. So we need to make sure we know Jesus well enough to understand what that means. We who have the mind of Christ are called to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20), and disciples are those who *take after* the one they’re following. *Christian* disciples will look like Jesus. Jesus intends to fill *the world* with Himself, and He will do this through the mature thinking and acting of those who know, love, and serve Him with His mind (Eph. 4:8-10), and who work to build others up in His likeness.

Here there is no substitute for regular reading and re-reading of the gospels, meditating deeply on the Man Jesus as we encounter Him there, and contemplating those descriptions of Him, exalted in glory, which we find in the psalms, prophets, and book of Revelation. The more clearly we *see* Jesus, the more the Spirit within us will transform *us* into His image. Then we will understand what's involved in edifying others. The more clearly and consistently *we* see Jesus, the better we will be able to encourage *others* to be like Him.

Second, we'll need to *talk with others* about that ideal, about being a person like Jesus, and encourage them to desire this for themselves. This shouldn't be a huge obstacle. After all, there is much to admire in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. If we are faithfully reading about and meditating on Jesus, seeing and desiring Him for Who He is, we will be naturally more inclined to talk with others about Him.

Just as people love to brag about the exploits of their favorite sports hero, or extol the virtues of some respected person they know, we who are growing closer to Jesus and becoming more intimate with Him will want to encourage others to see His beauty and glory as well. Boasting about Jesus will flow like rivers of living water from our knowing Him more personally and more continuously (2 Cor. 10.13-18; Jn. 7.37-39).

Finally, edifying others to be more like Jesus means we will need to *challenge* people in areas of their lives where they are falling short. Building others up isn't just a matter of passing out "attaboys" to everyone and his brother. It's hard work to help someone begin to know Jesus and desire to be like Him. We must know how to teach, coach, correct, and shape others so that their old selves pass away as the new selves of Jesus Christ begin to gain traction in their soul.

And yes, that's going to take some mature thinking on our part.

But we have the mind of Christ, and as we grow into that mind, and into Christlikeness in all our ways, seeing Jesus and desiring others to be like Him will govern how we relate to them.

Mature thinking seeks edification

Jesus Christ is bent on making others like Him. His mind is devoted to making disciples, and to making Himself the supreme example of beauty, goodness, and truth, even for those who do not believe in Him. He is determined to fill the world with Himself and to enable His people to take all their thoughts captive for Him and His Kingdom.

We are operating out of a mature mind when we see Jesus and when seeing Him formed in us and others defines the way we pursue our relationships. The mature mind of Christ seeks maturity in others, that they might *think* and *live* like Him. We'll be thinking with a mature mind when this is our objective as well.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that Jesus is the standard of goodness and love toward which all people should aspire? Why or why not? Does this mean that *everyone* will want to become more like Jesus? Explain.
2. To mature into Jesus, we must *see* Him more clearly. This means contemplating Jesus as He was, is, and will be in His return. How would you describe the state of such contemplations in your life?
3. Why do you think Christians are so hesitant to talk about Jesus with the people in their Personal Mission Fields?

Next steps – Transformation: What can you do to invest more time and thinking into contemplating Jesus?

4 Grounded in Revelation

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

In the law it is written:

“With men of other tongues and other lips

I will speak to this people;

And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,” *says the Lord.* 1 Corinthians 14.20, 21

Go to the ant, you sluggard!

Consider her ways and be wise... Proverbs 6.6

The whole counsel of God

The mind of Christ, which all believers possess, is the mind of the Word of God, for Jesus is the Word become flesh, crucified, dead, resurrected, and exalted in glory. A sound mind, maturing daily in the mind of Christ, is essential for a strong soul. Paired with a well-kept heart, a sound mind enables us increasingly to become true disciples of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

The Word has set a good portion of His thinking into a permanent form in Scripture: Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life” (Jn. 6.63). “All Scripture,” Paul explained, “*is* given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...” (2 Tim. 3.15-17). Jesus said of God’s Word that it is truth (Jn. 17.17). The Scriptures are the *words* of God about the *Word* of God, Whose mind we possess, and into the maturity of Whose mind we are commanded to grow.

Similarly, the *world*, which the Word of God upholds by His Word (Heb. 1.3), and which all holds together in Him (Col. 1.17), necessarily reflects elements of His thinking, and can yield insight and understanding for those seeking a mature mind.

In our text for today, Paul cites the Law of God to confirm the argument he has been making, and which comes to its conclusion, in verse 20: “in understanding be mature.” If we want to have a mature mind, we will need to *hear* the voice of God; therefore, maturing in our minds requires that we *submit* our minds to the whole counsel of God in Scripture, and begin to *discipline* our minds to think the thoughts of God after Him, as these are made known to us in His Word and His world.

If you have not developed the practice of daily Bible reading and meditation, it is highly unlikely you will get very far into the mind of Christ. Without the Word of God in Scripture to form your thinking, expand your understanding, enlarge your love for God and your neighbor, and counsel and shape you into the kind of moral being who puts others first – without Scripture, I say, you will not make progress in the mind of Christ, and you will always be trapped within the puny confines of your own best ideas or of the best of the thinking of your peers. You will always think and live childishly, and thus will *reinforce* the ways of this unbelieving age, rather than *invite* and *challenge* people to consider Jesus, *believe* in Him, *become more like Him*, and *take every thought captive* for obedience to Him.

A mature mind begins with mature habits of reading and studying God’s Word.

Studying the Word

But *how* shall we study Scripture to gain a mature mind?

Jesus taught that we should devote ourselves about equally to the Old and New Testaments, so that we will have the riches of each to bring to bear on whatever our minds are considering (Matt. 13.52). Here I recommend establishing a pattern of daily Bible reading that takes you through the entirety of the Bible on a regular basis. If you read two chapters of the Old Testament, one of the New Testament, and perhaps one

chapter from a gospel every day, this will get you through the Bible regularly, so that you enrich your treasury of divine revelation for thinking with the mind of Christ.

We should pay special attention to the Law of God, which God gave to Moses, for this is the “core curriculum” of the Spirit (Ezek. 36.26, 27), the key to thinking with His mind (Rom. 8.5-8), and the touchstone for understanding how to train our hearts to love God and our neighbors (Matt. 22.34-40).

And, in the same way, as we have seen, we should meditate daily on Jesus (Col. 3.1-3), since in Him we find the “finished product” of God’s training program for righteousness (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

By establishing a regular program of reading, meditating, and perhaps journaling on the Word of God – Old and New Testaments, Law and gospels – and by finding like-minded friends with whom to discuss your studies, you will begin to absorb more of the mind of Christ, and to make progress in attaining a mature mind of your own. If you already practice this discipline, ask the Lord to help you see with increasing clarity how Jesus makes Himself known through every section of God’s Word (Jn. 5.39). For it is in seeing Jesus that we become like Him – in heart and mind, but also in life.

Studying the world

We should also expect to increase in the mind of Christ as we study to discover His glory in the world around us (Ps. 19.1-4; Prov. 25.2). Solomon gained the wisdom and mind of God by studying as much as he could about the world – flora and fauna, the arts, politics, human relations, and much more. Even though he found it difficult to bring all his studies under the light of God’s revelation in Scripture, so that he could understand things the way God does, he knew this “difficult task” had been appointed to all people as well (Eccl. 1.13).

Gaining a mature mind is hard work. Children, who like only frivolous and easy things, won’t take up the apostle Paul’s call to be mature in their thinking. They won’t follow Solomon’s example in seeking to discover the hidden glory of God in the everyday things of the world. Those who prefer to remain children, rather than to grow to maturity in the mind of Christ, will never make a serious contribution to the Kingdom of God. They’ll spend their Christian life looking for ways to maximize self, even if at the expense of others. As Susie’s beloved Bible teacher, Pat Hunter, used to say, “They will arrive in heaven in the same receiving blanket in which they were born.”

Or perhaps not arrive there at all (2 Cor. 13.5).

Paul says we must no longer be children in our thinking. We must press on to maturity, and that part of *working out* our salvation is no less a struggle than any other aspect of this high and holy calling to become more like Jesus in our *minds*, and in every aspect of our lives (Phil. 2.12; Phil. 3.14).

For reflection

1. Does your reading and study of the Bible reflect the kind of pattern described in this lesson? Can you see any areas where you could improve in this discipline? What might you do?
2. Meditate on Psalm 19.1-4 and 1 Corinthians 10.31. What is the glory of God? How can we glorify God in every aspect of our lives?
3. With which aspects of God’s world are you regularly involved? That is, to what cultural activities, social spaces, parts of creation, and so forth does your Personal Mission Field lead you? Can you see any ways that learning more about these would help you gain a more mature mind for serving others? Explain.

Next steps – Transformation: Decide on one thing you can do to improve your disciplines of reading and studying God’s Word and His world. Begin right away to seek Jesus through this “stereoscopic” approach to the revelation of God.

5 A View to Outcomes

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 1 Corinthians 14.23, 24

Minds in gear

We need to remember that, in the larger context of this passage, Paul is instructing the Corinthians not to be children in their thinking (v. 20), but to be mature, to exercise the mind of Christ which they have because they belong to Him (1 Cor. 2.16).

It is childish to babble on and chatter away, no matter the language you're using, only to hear yourself speak, without regard for edifying others (vv. 2, 3). A person who is mature in his thinking is sensitive to others and knows how to season his words with grace appropriate to every situation or need, so that others will be edified, and not just confused (Col. 4.6; Eph. 4.29).

As we have seen, a mature mind is one that (1) regards the concerns of others as more important than its own and (2) makes plans and takes actions that build others up, so that *real people* benefit in *real ways* from the fruit of such mature thinking.

And, as Paul explained, to have a mature mind, we need (3) to ground our thinking in the whole counsel of God in Scripture – all of Scripture, at ever-deeper levels of understanding and thought, including those parts of Scripture that counsel us in seeking the wisdom of God throughout His world.

Now Paul gives us a fourth characteristic of a mature mind: (4) They are mature in mind who *exercise their mind to understand the outcomes and consequences of any possible course of action*. In other words, a mature mind thinks through whatever might be done in a situation, in order, as much as possible, to *foresee* the results of thinking and acting *before* actually beginning to act.

We're thinking with the mind of Christ when we get our minds in gear before our tongues or actions are engaged.

Realizing the Kingdom

To put this in a clearer light, we might say that we are mature in mind when we operate with a view to realizing the kind of *Kingdom outcomes* which we are learning from God, and which we can envision in their outworking within our sphere of influence, will, and power. This means thinking in terms of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and what these might *look like* as they come to expression in every area of our lives (Rom. 14.17, 18).

Every believer has a "sphere of influence," as Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 10.13-18. That sphere of influence, which we refer to as our Personal Mission Field, defines the social and cultural settings in which we as believers are called to live out our faith. There we encounter and relate to the people to whom God has sent us, like Jesus, to bring near the blessings of His Kingdom. This is where we seek the Kingdom of God, to realize more of its presence, promise, and power.

People thinking with mature minds are always thinking, envisioning, and planning so that what they are learning about Jesus might be seen in all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Right now, parts of our Personal Mission Fields are in disarray – if not in our lives, then in the lives of others. God has blessed us with the mind of Christ so that we can bring His blessings of order, beauty, goodness, and truth into every place and person. The Kingdom of God consists in power for changed lives (1 Cor. 4.20), and the more we think through what that should look like, the more we may expect to realize the Kingdom outcomes we are

planning and desiring.

They who are mature in their thinking can *see* the newness of Christ bringing changes in their lives at home and work, in the community, at church, and in the larger world (cf. Heb. 2.5-9). Such people *study* and *think* about ways to improve their relationships – how to encourage their fellow-believers in their walk with and work for the Lord, and how to present the Good News of Jesus to those who do not yet know Him. And they *plan* for the kind of real-life transformations that refract the glory of God into their everyday experience (1 Cor. 10.31).

The Kingdom of God is realized in increments, usually small and scarcely noticeable. But they don't just happen. Unless we *think* in Kingdom *terms*, we will not be able to realize Kingdom *progress* in how we live.

Two worlds at once

They who are acting out of mature minds thus live in two worlds at once, the one that *is* and the one that *is coming on earth as it is in heaven* (Matt. 6.10), to which they intend to contribute through their service to the Lord. Knowing that they are called to “make the most of every opportunity” for serving the Lord (Eph. 5.15-17), and that seeking the Kingdom of God involves understanding what that Kingdom would look like in its outworking (Matt. 6.33; 5.13-19), those who are mature in their thinking are always seeking to bring the *real* world of their daily experience into line with the *ideal* world of their vision for the Kingdom.

To that end they prayerfully ponder, prepare, plan, and prosecute their daily activities toward the realization of *specific outcomes* in line with the Kingdom of God, across the entire spectrum of their activities, responsibilities, and interests. Everything in their lives is ground to be gained, held, and improved for the Kingdom of God. As citizens and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, believers who are mature in their thinking *think “Kingdom”* into every moment, place, activity, situation, and opportunity.

Here there will always be room for growth and improvement. We'll need to do some more reading, engage in conversations about the Kingdom of God, participate in a course of study, and spend much more time in prayer, thinking about the outcomes we should be seeking as we seek the Kingdom of God in our lives and our Personal Mission Fields.

Obviously, this is not work for children. This is what people with mature minds do, and it's how the Kingdom of God makes progress in our lives and in the world.

For reflection

1. In what specific ways does seeking the Kingdom of God factor into your weekly planning?
2. What are some things we might expect to *see* as the Kingdom comes to fruition in our lives? In our Personal Mission Fields?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to be more “Kingdom-seeking” in their prayers, planning, and daily lives?

Next steps – Demonstration: What opportunities for Kingdom progress are available to you today? What will it look like if the reality of the Kingdom comes to expression in your life in those opportunities? How can you prepare for this right now? What step will you take in the way of Kingdom initiatives today?

6 Minimize Evil

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

1 Corinthians 14.20

Having and using

It turns out, there is a place for thinking like children in the Kingdom of God, even in the minds of those who are maturing into the mind of Christ.

All who believe in Jesus Christ have the mind of Christ. His mind is with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in every believer and is working to transform us into the likeness of Jesus, beginning in how we think about things.

But having the mind of Christ and *using* the mind of Christ are two different things. If we *have* the mind of Christ, but choose not to *use* it, what can we expect? We can expect that, in all our thinking – all our analyzing of situations, making plans, arranging our thoughts, comparing choices, determining courses of action, carrying out plans – all our intellectual and mental activities – we will be operating, to one degree or another, with the *mind of the flesh*.

Now we know a few things about how the mind works that operates in the flesh, that is, according to *my best thoughts and interests* about anything, or whatever I perceive *the spirit of the age* will abide. Paul says, in Romans 8.7, “the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God.” Whoa! That can’t be a good thing, can it? If I’m not using *Christ’s* mind to guide my thinking, I’m using *my* mind, which is only a variation on the carnal mind or the mind of the flesh, to a greater or lesser extent. Consequently, the *outcomes* which issue from my thinking are not likely to be those that honor Christ, benefit others, and advance the Kingdom of God. They will, instead, be outcomes that are only one degree or another of *evil!*

We must not think of evil only in the most horrible of terms. Evil is anything that veers from the path of righteousness and the agenda of Christ into mere self-interest. What comes from thinking with the mind of the flesh cannot please the Lord, because it leads us to outcomes that follow paths of evil rather than those which Jesus walked (1 Jn. 2.1-6). They’ll be more the kind of outcomes characteristic of children who just don’t know how to act responsibly or stay out of trouble.

Overcoming evil

But still, there is a place for thinking like children. Paul tells us to be *mature* in our thinking and *infants* with respect to malice, or evil. Infants, given their limited experience and intellectual abilities, cannot think things through to generate mature outcomes. They must be taught, led, directed, and sometimes even taken in hand along the paths that lead to mature thinking.

Thus, those who are infants in their thinking, rather than mature, can count on the fact that the outcomes of their thoughts and plans will tend more toward the evil end of the spectrum than the good.

At the same time, infants don’t understand the parameters of right and wrong, good and evil, true and false. They lack experience with evil and don’t think about whether evil is evil as such. Infants don’t think about choices as evil, so they don’t plot evil actions or take evil decisions. Not knowingly, at least. So we cut them some slack, and bear with them in their ignorance of such matters.

The more we are like infants respecting malice, evil, falsehood, and wickedness – not entertaining thoughts or plans or notions that lead us away from the path of righteousness – the more we’ll be able to devote our minds to seeking “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report” and whatever is virtuous and

praiseworthy (Phil. 4.8). It's that simple. The mature mind turns a blind eye and deaf ear to evil, as it seeks to maximize Kingdom outcomes in all its thinking.

Or, as Paul put it in Romans 12.21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Maximizing and minimizing

So the mature mind will focus on Kingdom outcomes; at the same time, it will both understand the potential for evil in any situation, and think carefully and clearly about how to *minimize* any evil outcomes. Paul gives us an example of such thinking in 1 Corinthians 14.23-25: If the Corinthians continued their disorderly use of tongues during worship, outsiders might think them strange, and they would not likely join their assemblies. That can't be good, right? So if you follow a more orderly course of action in this matter, you may see some of those outsiders be drawn closer to God., especially as the Word penetrates to the depths of their souls.

So we must learn to think and plan to *maximize* Kingdom outcomes, and think and plan for how to *minimize* evil outcomes. Selfish interests lead to evil outcomes; selfless interests make room for the Spirit to guide and empower us for Christlike outcomes.

This is the way a mature mind works. We can be a good deal more effective in thinking this way if we consider the needs of others carefully, pay attention to the way people respond or how things tend to work out in various situations, consult the Scriptures and wise counselors on matters, and then act in ways that preclude, to the best of our ability, any evil outcomes from showing up.

Which is just another way of saying that the person who has a mature mind carefully weighs and considers the choices, courses of action, and possible outcomes of any contemplated action, and plans carefully and works diligently to overcome any potential evil with whatever good he can do. It's not enough merely to engage our minds toward the good outcomes we seek; we must be aware of the ways evil might try to crash our party, and we must thoughtfully consider how to recognize and overcome it when it does (1 Pet. 5.8, 9).

Just as Jesus, at the very beginning of His public ministry, bound the devil and negated his ability to impede the Lord's redemptive work (Matt. 12.22-29, cf. Matt. 4.1-11), so we need to think and plan carefully, to overcome evil with good works of the Kingdom of God. Be infants in your thinking about evil, and let your mature mind lead you into Christ-honoring outcomes.

For reflection

1. Meditate on Romans 7.7. What role should the Law of God play in helping us to understand evil? How can it play that role in our lives (Rom. 3.31; Ps. 1)?
2. What's involved in being aware of the presence and possibility of evil? How should a mature mind resist temptation and overcome evil with good?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. If we don't make the most of our time for *good*, what is likely to happen to it? Why does this make it important that we continue pressing on toward maturity in our thinking?

Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Proverbs 1.17. Apply this to the day ahead. What can you do right now to prepare to overcome evil with good?

7 Paths to Mature Thinking

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... Philippians 2.5

Getting it to work!

As Christians, we have the mind of Christ – as mature, pure, and Kingdom-oriented a way of thinking as could possibly be. A mature mind is crucial to a strong soul, second only to a well-kept heart in terms of importance.

We have that mind right now, resident in us through the Spirit and Word of God (1 Cor. 2.16). We are called to become mature in our thinking, so that, by denying ourselves, considering the needs of others, planning and envisioning good rather than evil outcomes, and submitting our minds to the revelation of God in all things, we may contribute to the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in our lives and Personal Mission Fields.

We have the mind of Christ. Now we want to *have this mind work* in us so that, as Paul exhorts, we may be mature in our thinking, rather than childish. For when we are mature in our thinking, when every aspect of our thought life is subject to Christ and His Word, focused on the goodness of God (Ps. 27.13), ordered and determined to achieve Kingdom outcomes (Matt. 6.10, 33), and ready to overcome any manifestations of self-interest or fleshly desire (Rom. 12.21), then we will see real progress of Christ's Presence and rule in our lives.

We have the mind of Christ; now let's see what the Scriptures teach concerning how to make His mind operative in our own. What paths shall we travel to realize the mind of Christ at work in our own thinking?

Spiritual disciplines

Let me suggest three parallel paths to mature Christian thinking. We have touched on these previously, but it will be good for us to review them again, so that we walk these paths consistently.

First is the path of *spiritual disciplines*. Have you ever found that the more time you spend with someone, talking, sharing ideas and plans, dialoging about this or that, the more you begin to think like that person? I see this increasingly with Susie. We tend to see things the same way, to add to one another's views, and to respond to situations similarly. Because we spend so much time together, increasingly our thoughts about anything tend to line up well.

The same is true with Jesus. The more time we spend with Him – focused time, dedicated to contemplating Christ in His glory, meditating on His Word, communing with Him in prayer, and worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth – the more time we spend with Jesus in these spiritual disciplines, the more we will begin to think like Him in every aspect of our lives.

The practice of spiritual disciplines takes time, and persevering in these disciplines can be difficult. Jesus wants us to invest this time and effort, but the father of lies does not. Where the practice of spiritual disciplines is concerned, it's not hard to determine whose will we're submitting to at any point. This may be a good time for you to review your use of such disciplines and to refocus them more pointedly on helping to mature your thought life.

Wisdom from others

The second path is that of *wisdom from others*. Lots of people have gone before us in the history of the Church, and many exist today, who have demonstrated uncommon maturity in their thinking. And, in case you were not aware of this, many of them have written down their thoughts and experiences, and many are still doing so today. We would be wise in turning to this multitude of counselors (Prov. 11.14) to *consult* their views on various topics, or *learn* from them how to mature in our thinking. Yes, this means *reading* the works of Christian thinkers, past and present, as well as listening to mature and thoughtful preaching and teaching.

There's one catch: If we're going to make more time for reading the works of wise Christian forebears and contemporaries, we're probably going to have to capture that time from less important and less fruitful activities in which we are currently engaged – such as watching too much TV, playing video games, surfing the web, or trolling around on social media. It all depends on how earnest we are about becoming mature in our thinking.

Christian conversation

Finally, the path of *serious Christian conversation* can lead us to greater maturity in the mind of Christ (Col. 3.16). Seek out some Christian friends with whom you can regularly converse about serious matters – questions about contemporary issues, cultural trends, Scripture and doctrine, and personal applications of truth. If you don't have a group like this, start your own. Tell your friends the goal of this group is to grow in maturity in your thinking, and only those should come who have the objective of increasing in their ability to use the mind of Christ. Read a book together, or do a study of some book of the Bible. Take a course together. Share what you're learning from Scripture and God's world. Talk about issues and events. Think together about ways you might seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in your individual spheres of influence.

And in all these paths, be sure to put into practice the new insights, understandings, visions, ideas, and plans that are coming to light as the mind of Christ in you. Merely thinking the thoughts of Jesus won't make us more like Him. As we increase in the mind of Christ, let us take great delight in what we're learning, and hurry from what we have read to run our race for Jesus more vigorously and fruitfully (Hab. 2.2; Heb. 12.1-3).

Becoming mature in our thinking won't just happen. We'll need to have an open mind, and we're going to have to work at it, and work at it for a lifetime, walking the paths of spiritual discipline, seeking wisdom from others, and conversing with Christian friends, until, increasingly, the mind of Christ *in* us becomes the mind we regularly *use*.

For reflection

1. What hindrances are presently keeping you from pursuing more maturity in using the mind of Christ? What is your plan for overcoming those hindrances?
2. How will you be able to tell when you are increasing in maturity in the mind of Christ?
3. What next steps are you planning to take toward greater maturity in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time in prayer, waiting on the Lord around the question, “What can I do to improve my use of the mind of Christ on each of these three paths?”

The Mature Mind

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “the mind of Christ”? How does the mind of Christ differ from the mind of the flesh?
2. Jesus is the model toward which we aspire in the use of our minds. Explain.
3. The revelation of Jesus in His Word and His world can help us to grow into the mind of Christ. Share some ways you have found this to be true with each of the sources of divine revelation.
4. When we are maturing in the mind of Christ, how should we expect this to affect the way we think? The way we relate to others? How we use our time?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about the mature mind from this study? How are you putting that lesson to use in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.