

Opened Minds

Renewing the Mind Part 3



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A ReVision Resource

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Opened Minds
Renewing the Mind Part 3
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Opened Minds

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Welcome to *Opened Minds*

Only Jesus Christ can open our minds, so that we begin to grow to maturity in *His* mind, filled with *His* Word and Spirit, growing and serving faithfully in the calling to which He has appointed us.

Two sad disciples, trudging the lonely road home, became electrified with new hope, joy, and urgency as the Lord Jesus opened their minds to the truth of the Gospel. Their experience is instructive for us, as we seek to grow to maturity in the mind of Christ, and to lead others to consider and know Him.

Opened Minds is part 3 in our series on *Renewing the Mind*. In this study we will learn to look to Jesus to open our minds as only He can do, and to bring forth in us the fruit of 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 Deceived?

And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24.45

More than enthusiasm

In the 19th century, well-known preacher Charles Spurgeon attracted great crowds to the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. People were enthusiastic about his powerful and eloquent preaching, and his renown as a herald of God's truth spread far and wide.

Spurgeon was one of several preachers in his day who drew many to their services of worship. But Spurgeon was skeptical. He put no stock in numbers. He understood just how easy it can be for people to be deceived into thinking they know the truth, when in fact, their minds *have never been opened* to the Word of God. A person in whom the mind of Christ is operating in a mature manner doesn't just get excited about *hearing* the Word; the mature believer is moved to *act in obedience* on what he hears (cf. Phil. 3.7-15).

As Spurgeon explained to his students, "Thousands are congratulating themselves, and even blessing God that they are devout worshippers, when at the same time they are living in an unregenerate Christless state, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Spurgeon knew that mere enthusiasm for the things of Christ – worship, church, eternal life, the Bible, and all the rest – does not necessarily indicate a mind that is growing to maturity. Only Jesus Christ can open a person's mind to the truth, and only when He does will that person hear the Scriptures and the saving message of the Kingdom of God, so that the mind of Christ is quickened in him, and growth toward maturity begins.

A strong soul requires a well-kept heart and a mature mind which is continuously open and obedient to the things of Christ.

A new world

When Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to understand the teaching of Scripture, theirs became a new and vastly more interesting world. They became new people, with new priorities and power, and a new commitment to pursue eternal horizons stretching out in every direction in their lives.

For three years, the disciples followed Jesus, watching His works and listening to His words; but, in the end, they all abandoned Him. Even after the resurrection they didn't understand the significance of what had happened, and they seemed ready to return to the lives they'd known before following Jesus. We find many of them, in John 21, heading back to their old lives as fishermen, filled with wonder and confusion over the resurrection of Jesus, but clueless as to the real implications of that world-changing event for their lives.

Their minds were full of information, experiences, and fond memories of Jesus; but their minds had not yet been opened to the reality of the Kingdom of God.

Hindrances to obedience

What hinders people from hearing the Word of God so that they are moved not just to *enthusiasm* but to *obedience*? Why do so many remain closed-minded to the Gospel of the Kingdom? And why do so many who claim to be followers of Jesus manifest so little Kingdom evidence (cf. Heb. 11.1)? If we have the mind of Christ and are maturing into His way of thinking, we should expect our minds to be daily renewed and enlarged in the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Lord, so that we eagerly pursue realizing such virtues in our daily lives. Yet we see so little of this kind of thinking among Christians today. Why do we persist in thinking like children and closing our minds to the greater horizons of God's truth?

There are at least three reasons. First, we are *trapped in our experience*. We have a lifetime of experience, developed into firm convictions, about the way the world is and how things are supposed to work. We may confess faith in Jesus, and be very active in our churches, but for the most part, our lives reflect the getting-and-spending lifestyles of our unsaved neighbors. We have become comfortable with this worldview, and are reluctant to rock any boats by following the commands of Christ and stepping out on uncertain waves of obedience. While our “Christian materialist” worldview may not answer all the questions that linger in our minds, still, it’s good enough. Such a worldview can be difficult to set aside. It represents a major obstacle to greater open-mindedness in the things of Christ.

Second, for moral or personal reasons, we may *refuse to hear the call of the Gospel and submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and King*. Even those who profess faith in Jesus may hold back from full obedience because they are reluctant to let go of something they cling to rather than Him. After all, He might require us to change our behavior, and we may not be prepared for that. Besides, the Gospel demands repentance, which is a tacit admission of wrongdoing and a confession of deep spiritual need. In our secular, narcissistic, and relativistic age, such admissions are hardly the norm.

Finally, some people – perhaps most – remain closed to the Gospel or to growing toward maturity in Christ for the simple reason that *they’ve never heard the Good News*, not clearly and with passion and conviction, or not at anything deeper than a superficial level of belief. This is why it is so important that we seek the Lord for maturity in the mind of Christ. For it pleases God to use those who *know* the truth to persuade others to set aside, if only for a moment, their settled way of thinking about life, and to consider the claims and promises of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus came into the world to make known the Good News of the Kingdom of God, so He has sent us, in His Name and by His authority and power, to do the same today.

All who ignore or resist the Word of God are deceived and living in the darkness of unbelief – even many who profess faith in Jesus Christ, as Spurgeon insisted. But when Jesus Christ opens the mind of people, nothing can keep them from seeing the light of truth, so that their hearts burn within them, and they want to know more of this life-changing Good News, and share it eagerly with others. All who have the mind of Christ, and who are pressing on toward maturity in that mind, are called to proclaim to our unbelieving age – and our complacent fellow believers – the full meaning of Christ’s resurrection and the truth of His Kingdom. Let us pray that Jesus will open our minds to the larger, more glorious and more powerful understanding of what it means to believe in and follow Him.

For reflection

1. Do you think it’s possible for someone to profess faith in Jesus and not know Him? Explain.
2. Why are many believers so easily contented with their progress in faith? What keeps people from seeking to grow to maturity in the mind of Christ?
3. Can being enthusiastic about Jesus, church, Bible study, and so forth obscure the fact that we’re not growing in the mind of Christ? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Would you say that you are as fully open in your thinking as you should be about the things of Christ and His Kingdom? Spend some time in prayer meditating on this question.

2 The Right Conditions

Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him... Luke 24.31

The work of the Lord

When Jesus Christ determines to open the mind of a person to the truth of the Gospel, everything changes. There's no magic about how or when He does this, nor is there any formula we can follow to ensure that someone's mind will open to the Lord.

But frequently, certain conditions may be in place that help to make people ready to hear the Gospel, or, if they are believers, to lead them to shake off the constraints of infancy and begin growing toward maturity in the mind of Christ. A strong soul requires a sound mind, and if conditions exist which can help us to realize that, we should understand what they are.

Opening the mind of a deceived sinner or a dull believer is the *sovereign work of our Lord Jesus Christ*; He saves whom He will, and He instructs those He will in His own way and time.

Yet certain conditions may exist in the lives of people – either unbelievers needing to be saved or believers needing to mature in their thinking and faith – that can aid in the reception of the truth when Jesus comes to open the mind. And in all conditions, God can use the winsome, persistent, personal, and persuasive witness of a loving but fearless believer to help bring the clear light of the Gospel through the mists of unbelief or doubt, and to illumine the heart and open the mind of one who is ready to hear.

Three conditions

What are these conditions? There are three.

First, a person is more likely to be open to the truth of God's Word when circumstances have conspired to *upset or challenge his or her settled assumptions about life*. Consider those disciples on the road to Emmaus. They expressed to Jesus, Whom they did not recognize, their disappointment that the One to Whom they'd looked for three years had not proved to be the One they were seeking. All their hopes and expectations were dashed when Jesus died, and they were left to start all over again in trying to make sense out of their lives (Lk. 24.13-24).

Now this is good news, because we are living in a day when the things people hope in, everything solid in their lives, threatens to melt into thin air – to borrow a phrase from Marx. A mood of unsettledness, dissonance, uncertainty, and even seeking something more has crept into the souls of many people. People today are more likely to be open to friendly and loving persuasion about a worldview that makes all things new, because their own worldview has not managed to fill the bill in their lives. This is as true for confessing, but infant, believers as it is for lost and uncertain unbelievers.

The second condition under which Jesus often opens the minds of people is *when the Word of God is being considered*. The Scriptures are alive and powerful, able to penetrate the depths of a person's unsettled soul, and in the hands of the Holy Spirit, perform spiritual surgery that begins a process of healing for the whole of life (Heb. 4.12).

It's a mistake not to talk with our neighbors, or to share with other believers as often as we can, the teachings of God's Word. The Word of God can open the minds of others, but it cannot do this if we hold it in abeyance or keep it in some scabbard of mere reason or enthusiasm, rather than wield it in full vigor. This doesn't mean we need to preach vociferously and pound our Bibles to make our points. Jesus took those two disciples through all of Scripture during that long walk to Emmaus, in casual but Scriptural conversation; and

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they were overwhelmed and overcome by His grasp of the Bible and ability to make it clear to them (vv. 27-32). We can expect to see God open minds through our efforts as well, letting in the bright light of mature thinking, precisely to the extent that we are willing to share God's Word, so that they can do business directly with Him.

The final condition under which Jesus often opens the mind of people is when *He is the primary focus* of the conversation (v. 27). In Scripture, all roads lead to Jesus (Jn. 5.39). He is the "Desire of all Nations" (Hag. 2.7), the One Who satisfies the longings of every human heart. Catch people at a time of reflecting and rebuilding – or lead them there – then open the Scriptures to them, and point them over and over to Jesus, and watch what our mind-opening Savior can do. He Who is so strong, humble, beautiful, wise, courageous, giving, and true can overwhelm every doubt or objection by the power of His mere Presence. Ask Saul of Tarsus.

We will be more likely to persuade people to leave off their failed worldviews, or wake from their stupor of Christian infancy, and help them to a higher plane of life, if we take our time in conversational give-and-take, open the Scriptures abundantly, and keep the Lord Jesus the focus of our conversations, and of our lives.

Primed for maturity

Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. They are made *for* God, to think with *His* mind about their lives, and to follow *His* paths into righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The works of God's Law are written on their hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15); the Spirit of God strives to get their attention (Gen. 6.3), and God Himself holds onto them against their own wills, only reluctantly giving them up to further degrees of distance from Him (Rom. 1.18-32).

Put another way, people are *primed for Jesus to open their minds*, either unto new life through the Gospel, or to greater maturity in their thinking as followers of the Lord. If we understand this, and believe it, we will not hesitate, conditions being right, to urge others into the light of truth, where Jesus can open their minds to greater vistas of new life and eternal truth.

Pray that Jesus will set the conditions for learning Him in place in your life, and in the lives of those you are seeking to encourage to greater maturity of thinking with the mind of Christ.

For reflection

1. Think about your own coming to faith in Christ. What was going on in your life at that time? How did the Lord use those circumstances to turn your thoughts to Him?
2. Why do you think Christians are reluctant to talk with others about the Bible and Jesus? How can we help one another overcome this reticence?
3. Who are the people in your Personal Mission Field to whom God has sent you to help them grow in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Preparation: If you have not yet mapped out your Personal Mission Field, watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet and follow the directions.

3 When the Mind Opens

And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24.32

When Jesus opens a mind

The consistent teaching of Scripture is that, when Jesus opens the mind of a person, things begin to happen.

Multitudes of people in this country sit through countless hours of preaching and Bible teaching every week. Many of them seem content merely to have been in attendance. Some of them, if they heard something interesting, well, that's fine. They'll be back next week for more. Whether any evidence of mature thinking and living will come from their time of being taught, will only be seen during the rest of the week, as they carry out their everyday relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

At any rate, most of those who submit to weekly Bible teaching will consider that they have *heard* the Word of God and understood the teaching, with or without any evidence of a maturing faith. In fact, many of those who are exposed to Biblical teaching have yet to have their minds opened by Christ; and many others would not be able to explain whether their minds had been opened at all.

Many *more* people have never had the opportunity to hear the Word of God or the Good News of the Kingdom, whether through their own choice, or for want of a faithful witness. What will it mean for the Lord to open *their* minds to His Word? What should they expect as evidence that a new perspective on life has been introduced into their experience?

Three evidences

In the experience of the disciples of Jesus in Luke 24, we may discern three convincing evidences that their minds had been opened. In the light of these, it seems presumptuous to conclude that we have *ever* heard the Word of God or *ever* understood the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, unless and until *we* begin to experience these effects as well.

The Word of God is alive and powerful, and when the Lord Jesus, by the inward work of His Spirit, opens our minds to hear and understand it, everything begins to change.

First, the Word of God *overcomes the limitations of our experience or our reason*. Put another way, when our minds are opened, "I've never done that before" and "I don't understand how that can be true" cease to be default responses to our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12).

None of us can claim to have experienced everything that is possible, or to think clearly about every subject. We are finite, limited people; and the more we live within the limits of what we've known and can figure out, the less adventuresome and mature we will be in our approach to life. What we know, what we're familiar with, becomes a comfort zone for thinking and living; and the comfort and familiarity we experience there can keep us from being open-minded about what Jesus wants to do in our lives.

But the Gospel is the *power of God* for salvation – wholeness, renewal, and a life lived toward eternal and glorious horizons. When Jesus opens a mind, our experience is enlarged, and our thinking embraces a new perspective and glimpses new possibilities – like a flash of lightning on a dark night. Suddenly, in the light of the truth of God, everything becomes new and possible and filled with hope.

At the same time, our *settled understandings about life begin to be re-configured*. In other words, "That's what I've always believed" or "That's just what everyone thinks" no longer constrains our thinking about what God

might do in our lives and our world.

Those disciples on the road to Emmaus couldn't get their minds around a man rising from the dead, until that Man opened their minds. They could understand the *idea* of a resurrection, of course, but nothing in their experience or thinking prepared them to believe that such was possible. Then Jesus opened their minds, and the reality of Him risen from the grave burst upon them with new power, and began to reconfigure everything they'd ever known. Thereafter, this became the animating hope of their lives. They became new people, with a new message, and new power to declare this message to one and all.

Since God can raise the dead, what can He *not* do to bring glory to Himself?

Finally, when their minds were opened, the disciples *acquired new affections* – hearts warmed and emboldened and excited about the prospects of living for Jesus in every area of life. New understanding and a new mindset kindled new fervor in their hearts, filling them with joy and making them eager to share what Jesus had taught them. Having walked many miles to get to their home, they turned in their joy, and ran back to Jerusalem to share with their friends the good news that Jesus Christ is alive from the grave.

Seeing life with the mind of Christ not only makes for a sound mind, but it contributes to a well-kept heart and an overall strong soul. And strong souls animate and put into motion willing bodies for knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ.

Eternity unfolding

When Jesus opens the minds of His followers, eternity unfolds before them, everything comes to be seen in a new light, and hope, peace, joy, and eager anticipation become the animating humors of their souls. Suddenly all things take on a new prospect and new possibilities. Those whose minds have been opened by the Lord have seen, if only in outline, the bright, broad horizons of the Kingdom of God, coming on earth as it is in heaven. The truth of Jesus sets them free from the confines of experience, the limits of human reason, and all their old beliefs and views about life.

Those who have once tasted of this mind-opening experience will desire more of the same, and they will press on toward a more mature realization of the mind of Christ and the life of following Jesus.

And the prospect of this happening, whether with our unbelieving neighbors or our infant-minded Christian friends, should move every believer in Jesus to work harder at growing in the sound mind and glorious worldview of the mind of Christ.

For reflection

1. Can you recall a time when you became eager to grow in the things of the Lord? What was going on in your mind? In your affections? What sparked this desire for growth?
2. What role should we expect prayer to play in further opening our minds to becoming mature in Christ? How should we pray for our lost friends? Our Christian friends?
3. Meditate on Hebrews 10.24. How can Christian encourage one another to grow in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Preparation: Consider your own way of thinking about your life as a believer. What evidence do you see that Jesus is opening your mind to the greater possibilities of life in His Kingdom?

4 How Does He Do That?

And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Luke 24.45

The Lord's work

When Jesus opens a person's mind to understand the truth of God, everything begins to change. All the old limitations by which we lived are set aside in the light of the unlimited possibilities for new life that spread out before us. This is true both for those who are just coming to faith in Jesus Christ, as well as those who are eager to press on to maturity in their thinking and lives (cf. Acts 19.1-10).

When Jesus opens a mind, our way of thinking about life – our worldview – starts to take on new dimensions. We feel released from the constraints of experience and narrow rationalism; we become hungry for the Word of God; and we sense a desire to grow and to pursue greater prospects for glorifying God.

As our mind becomes thus engaged, our heart burns within us, so that we are moved to greater love for God and our neighbors. We are excited about knowing the truth with greater scope and power than ever. And we want everyone we know and love to experience what we have come to know. A mind opened by the Lord Jesus inflames a well-kept heart with greater prospects for knowing, loving, and serving the Lord.

The path to a *mature* mind begins when Jesus *opens* our mind to see Him and the world in this way. This is a work that only the Lord Jesus Christ can do; mere reason will not open a person's mind, nor will passionate persuasion. *Jesus* must open the mind, or people will continue to live deceived and unsatisfying lives.

But how does He do that? How does Jesus open the minds of those whom He is preparing to hear the Word of truth, whether for the first time or for a more complete vision of the Christian life?

The Word of God

Typically, the Lord employs *three proven instruments* for opening minds that are darkened in unbelief or deceived and languishing in a merely intellectual faith.

The first of these is *the Word of God*. We cannot revisit this truth often enough. The Scriptures are alive and powerful; the Gospel, which the Scriptures contain, is the power of God for salvation, and for bringing about true spiritual life (Heb. 4.12; Rom. 1.16; Jn. 6.63). Spiritual power attends the Word of God in Scripture, power that can break through years of complacency, deceit, or mere intellectualism, and shine the light of truth on the soul. The more of Scripture we bring to bear on our life – reading, meditating, and studying to see Jesus – the greater is the likelihood that Jesus will open our mind to greater glories of truth.

Further, the more we allow Scripture to speak to *every area of life*, concerning the *good works* appropriate to our lives, the more the light of God's truth will penetrate and flare into the everyday nooks and crannies of life, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (2 Tim. 3.15-17). If we read and study God's Word with a view to understanding *all* of life from the perspective of Scripture, not only will our *own minds* be more fully illuminated with the mind of Christ, but we will have *more* of the mind of Christ for illuminating the minds of others by various means and along various lines of thought.

The Spirit of God

Second, *the Spirit of God* works with that Word. He brings life and light to darkened or complacent minds (Jn. 6.63). As the Word is being read, studied, or explained, the Spirit penetrates to the depths of our soul, exposing sins and causing us to see areas of shallowness and self-deceit. Then He piques us with new possibilities in the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom, and begins to guide us into all truth, a little at a time, step by step leading us to consider the plain teaching of the Bible in new and more expansive ways (Is.

28.9, 10).

The Spirit of God is present as we seek His filling and rest in His power (Eph. 5.18; Acts 1.8). His alone is the power to open a mind, illuminate a heart, and bring new life to those we are seeking to persuade. And He alone can excite, move, and guide us into more of the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must seek His filling and depend on His teaching, both as we press on to maturity in the mind of Christ, and as we hope to be used by the Lord to open the minds of others as well.

Teachers and persuaders

Finally, as in the case of Jesus teaching His disciples, and His disciples teaching others (Matt. 28.18-20), God uses *human teachers and persuaders* to open the minds of those who have not understood the truth that is in Jesus or who have not engaged to greater depths the mind of Christ that is in them. The Spirit of God can give us the words we need to talk with others concerning the truth of the Gospel. But we must be willing and ready to talk, as opportunities arise (1 Pet. 3.15). And He can guide us more deeply into the truth of our Lord Jesus, but we must avail ourselves of teachers who can help us engage more of the mind of Christ.

It is every believer's calling to work at becoming a good listener, an eager learner, a patient explainer, a careful student of the Word, and an unbending witness for the Truth. Jesus can fit us for such a life, and help us know more of His mind at work within us, but we must apply ourselves diligently to His Word, His Spirit, and faithful teachers.

We are called to learn Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24), to increase in the knowledge of Him (2 Pet. 3.18), and to press on beyond mere infancy of mind into levels of maturity that will find us teaching others with the mind of the Lord (Heb. 5.12-14). Jesus will open our minds as we do, and then He will use us as teachers to open the minds of others as well.

For reflection

1. How confident are you that you could explain the Good News of Jesus to another person? What would you say, if the opportunity arose?
2. Is your present approach to reading and studying the Bible sufficient to bring increasing light from God's truth to bear on every area of your life? What might you do to improve in this?
3. Suggest some ways you might use what you are learning from the Scriptures to engage another Christian in conversation? What about a non-Christian?

Next steps – Transformation: What's one thing you could do to improve your reading and study of Scripture, so that you begin growing into the mind of Christ more completely for every area of your life?

5 New Priorities, New Plans

So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Luke 24.33-35

New mind, new life

The changes that begin to occur in a person whose mind the Lord has opened are comprehensive, profound, and sometimes, immediate. Like a light switched on in a dark room, everything looks different. New possibilities appear. Realities take on new significance and meaning. Even our priorities will change.

The opening of a person's mind, whether for the first time, unto new life in Christ, or as an initial step out of infant thinking toward a mature mind in a believer, is a work of the Lord, and empowers the process of making all things new.

When the Spirit of God, working with the Word and careful teachers, breaks through past limitations and reasoning, re-orders existing mental categories, and lights a fire in people's minds, then the mind of Christ kicks in and transforming things begin to occur, in both the inward and the outward person. A person whose mind has been opened to the truth of God embarks on a life-long course of being transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Change of plans

Those disciples hastening back to Jerusalem – a trip of several miles, late in the day – are the picture of the new life God begins to work in those whose minds Christ has opened. Their former priorities, whatever they may have been, paled into insignificance, and they experienced a change of plans for their lives. Returning to Jerusalem, they sought out the company of like-minded individuals, to encourage them in the truth of God; and they gained a new power to live sacrificial lives of loving service to others.

Let's look more closely at each of these effects in those two disciples. First, *their priorities changed dramatically*, and with those priorities, their plans. They had reached their home at the end of a long day, and they might have preferred simply to get something to eat and go to bed. Heading back to Jerusalem so late in the day was hardly convenient. Whatever they had to say or tell to the others could wait until the morning, couldn't it?

No, it could not.

Suddenly the lives of those two disciples took on a new mission and purpose. Whatever they might have been planning for the next day was shelved, as they took on plans and actions more in line with what they had come to know. Forgetting their former priorities and manner of living, they set off again for Jerusalem, the first leg of a life-long journey of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ opens a person's mind to the truth of God, He sheds new light into every nook and cranny of the soul. All the old values, priorities, and aspirations are challenged in the light of eternal truth. We are compelled to look at our lives through a new lens – the lens of God's truth. From that perspective, as Paul noted, "old things pass away, all things become new" (2 Cor. 5.17). The things we previously considered to be so very important – the ways we use our time, spend our money, do our work, think about the world, or relate to others – suddenly take on a new aspect; or, they are exposed as shallow and unimportant in the light of the new reality which has been opened to us. When we become aware of the people in our lives who have yet to learn the truth about Jesus, a *new urgency* emerges in our soul, and *new plans* begin to take shape in our mind.

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On to maturity

Those whose minds Jesus has opened will, like those disciples sitting at table with Jesus, see everything in a new light. They will begin to discover new priorities and values, gain a new and sharper focus on Jesus, and discover new interests; and that will change everything else in their lives. Their minds now opened, they will desire to press on to maturity in their thinking for every area of life.

If you are not being thus transformed, if you are not growing in your faith, or your commitment and ministry to the Lord are merely catch-as-catch-can; if your daily plans are not changing such that you go into your world in the same way Jesus came into His, then you have every reason to wonder whether your mind has been opened to God's truth. The Word of God, once heard and received with an open mind, begins to affect every aspect of our lives, so that our priorities, values, desires, and way of life are transformed, and continue to change throughout the course of our lives. Give thanks to God that He has given you the mind of Christ, then get busy learning to access it.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ makes all things new. When our minds are open to the truth of Jesus Christ, an eternal horizon of Kingdom possibilities begins to stretch out before us – possibilities of what we can become, what we might learn, how we might serve, and what we might be able to do through Jesus Christ.

Before we will become serious about persuading others of the truth that is in Jesus, we'll need to make sure this truth is shaping our own lives. Have we truly seen the Lord? And is He at work within us, making us willing and able to do the good pleasure of God? Has Jesus so affected our minds that we can say with conviction that we are living out of the mind of Christ, rather than our old mind?

When our own minds are opened, and as they open more and more each day, nothing will prevent us from more continuously seeking the Lord and going forth as Kingdom citizens and ambassadors to encourage and persuade others of the truth of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

For reflection

1. In what ways has Jesus been changing your thinking and your way of life? Do you find yourself, like those first disciples, embracing new priorities, and making new plans? Explain.
2. How would you counsel a new believer to get started growing toward a mature mind in the Lord?
3. In what ways are you seeking to grow to greater maturity in the mind of Christ at this time?

Next steps – Transformation: Take a moment to thank God that He is at work within you, willing and doing of His good pleasure, transforming you into the likeness of His own Son (Phil. 2.13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). Let the mind of Christ guide your plans for this day. Go forward into your day committed to glorifying Him in all you do.

6 The Fellowship of the Saints

So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Luke 24.33-35

The company of friends

Their minds suddenly opened to the truth that is in Jesus, the two disciples who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus now saw everything in a new light. They were excited and encouraged as they had never been before. And they were filled with joy. They needed to talk about what they'd experienced, and to share what they had seen and what they were learning with others.

Why didn't they just go next door and talk to their neighbors about their experience of Jesus opening their minds? What was so important back in Jerusalem – several miles distant, at the end of a long day of walking – that they felt they needed to get back there as soon as possible?

What awaited them in Jerusalem, they knew, were others like themselves, with whom they could share their experience, from whom they might learn even more about their Savior, and in whose company they could determine what they should do next. They sought out people who shared the mind of Christ with them, to encourage and learn from them on this new journey of seeing all things being made new.

Here is a second effect of having our minds opened by Jesus Christ: We seek the fellowship of God's people for further growth and mission.

Sharing information and experiences

We note, in the first place, that when they finally arrived in Jerusalem they were first *given more information* about the Lord Jesus: He had risen from the dead and appeared to Simon. This was an important affirmation of their experience and their new thinking. The news that Peter had seen the Lord surely must have encouraged those two disciples. They hadn't imagined this. They had truly met the Lord, but they didn't know anyone else had met Him, though they had heard rumors.

Simon Peter's experience would have confirmed their own, and further bolstered their resolve. Then they shared their experience of being with the Lord on the road. Their story laid a foundation for what would happen when Jesus appeared, later in the chapter (vv. 45, 46), to teach the other disciples as He had taught them.

The disciples from Emmaus were *affirmed and encouraged* by the brethren in Jerusalem, as they learned from them of their experiences of the Lord. They encouraged and affirmed the other disciples as well by sharing eagerly of their own encounter with Him. In the presence of fellow believers, these two disciples were affirmed and stretched in their understanding of what they had come to know.

When those whose minds have been opened by Christ come together to share their insights and experiences, it's like iron sharpening iron, as they build one another up in their most holy faith. The joy and anticipation of those two disciples fueled the same in the other believers, as they wondered together about the larger significance of these events.

Doubtless they must have been thinking about what to do next, when suddenly Jesus arrived and laid out the agenda they would adopt for the rest of their lives. He commissioned them to serve together as witnesses to His suffering and resurrection, and as missionaries to take the Gospel to the nations (Lk. 24.46-48). Whatever else these people had on their plates, it would all now have to be reorganized around this new and more

urgent commission.

That commission has been given to us as well. And we may hope to make progress in that commission, and in all aspects of the mind of Christ, as we join with other believers to share what we're learning and experiencing as we press on toward maturity in our minds and lives.

Strength in numbers

There is strength in numbers when we take up a work for the Lord. Jesus could have commissioned these disciples separately; instead, He waited until they were gathered, sharing eagerly and learning from one another, and then He came into their midst to tell them what they needed to do next.

Their acceptance together of His teaching and mandate would have helped them remain faithful to His calling, and to seek recurrent fellowship with their fellow-believers, to renew their perspective and their labors in the days to come.

They whose minds have been opened by Christ will seek the fellowship of His people to share, learn, and join in mission. That fellowship will be not only with those who are living and nearby, but with those who are distant or perhaps even deceased, but whose works and writings are still available to encourage and equip us.

This is a clear mark of becoming mature in our thinking. Old agendas and priorities fade away, and we long to press on toward greater realization of the mind and mission of Christ (Phil. 3.7-15). We need the fellowship of other believers to help us continue to make progress in the mind of Christ. Together, those first believers became a potent force for persuading timid, uncertain, or infant believers to lay hold on the Kingdom and promises of God with greater boldness, and for leading lost souls to discover the fullness of joy and purpose that come with trusting in Jesus Christ.

We should expect as much for ourselves as well, and prepare for such ministry in the fellowship of other committed believers.

Jesus is ready to meet people as they travel their disappointing journey in life. May it please Him to use us in that growing army of persuaders who, together with His Word and Spirit, are the means whereby God continues opening the minds of many in our day.

For reflection

1. Can you think of any ways other believers have challenged or stimulated you to continue growing in the Lord Jesus?
2. Who are the believers God has placed in your Personal Mission Field? What are some ways you might encourage them in their pursuit of a mature mind of Christ?
3. Do you have a prayer partner, study partner, or soul friend? How might having some people like this in your life help you to keep pressing on toward maturity in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Preparation: Give thanks to God for your fellow believers and for those believers from the past who have helped you in your walk with and work for the Lord. Begin praying daily about the opportunities you will have to encourage other believers each day. Make new plans. Make this a priority in your life. Consider in advance how you might stimulate other believers to growth, love, and good works (Heb. 10.24).

7 A New Power

“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Luke 24.49

Alien presence

It’s amazing how an alien being can affect our lives when it takes up residence in our bodies.

A friend recently endured a bout with the flu. He was listless for weeks, had no appetite, could barely get any work done – all because a microscopic virus found its way into his body and made itself at home. We’ve all known that feeling, caused by something small but potent, which can have powerful effects on our energy and productivity.

Myself, I dread the coming of spring each year – well, *dread* may be a bit strong. Yet spring can be a difficult time for me and others who are allergic to pollen. When those tiny bits of plant-potential lodge in our nose and throat, it can make you long for fall and winter.

If we can be so dramatically affected by microbes, viruses, pollen, and other tiny alien things, what should we expect when the very power of God, His own Holy Spirit, takes up residence within us? When He begins to be at work within us, willing and doing according to God’s good pleasure, exceedingly abundantly above all we ever dared to ask or think (Phil. 2.13; Eph. 3.20)?

Jesus said the power of the Holy Spirit would make witnesses out of the disciples gathered in that upper room (Acts 1.8), because when Jesus opens the mind of a person, He sends His Spirit to convict, instruct, and equip us for ministry (Jn. 16.8-11). Those who understand this, and whose minds are growing in maturity in the Lord, readily welcome and gladly submit to the Spirit’s power for making all things new in their lives.

This is the greatest hallmark, the defining measure, of the one whose mind has been opened by the Lord. As we are maturing in the *mind* of the Lord, we may expect to realize more mature expressions of the *Presence and power* of the Lord as well, as His Spirit works within us according to the pleasure of God.

The work of the Spirit

How should we expect the power of the Holy Spirit to be expressed in our lives?

In general, He changes the way we see the world, and what we choose to look upon. He orients us to a new reality – the exaltation of Jesus Christ – and begins to shape everything we are and do in ways that bear witness to that reality. Using the Word of God, the Spirit brings us to the glory of God and works to transform us into the very image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As He continues this work, we learn to think with the mind of Christ. The glory of Christ radiates from us in even the most casual remark or mundane activity (cf. 1 Cor. 10.31), and we overflow with the life of Christ from the depths of our being (Jn. 7.37-39). All that we are, think, say, and do takes on a new reference and focus. Flowing from our opened minds, fired-up hearts, and renewed consciences, everything about us starts to look like Jesus and to radiate the hope of the Gospel (1 Pet. 3.15).

In four primary ways the Spirit begins to make us more like Jesus Christ. First, He creates in us a *hunger for God’s Word and teaches us the Law of God*, so that we may obey it (Jer. 15.16; Ezek. 36.26, 27). We can know that we’re on a course for maturity in the Lord when time in Scripture is becoming increasingly precious to us, and when we can say with the psalmist, “O, how I love Your Law!” (Ps. 119.97)

Second, He *brings forth the fruit and tokens of love* within us, for obedience to the Law of God always takes the

Opened Minds

form of love for Him and for our neighbors (1 Cor. 13.4-7; Matt. 22.34-40). All growth in the mind of Christ – the fruit of Christian instruction – is aimed at producing greater love for God and neighbors within us (1 Tim. 1.5). The Spirit strives to bring this love to fruition, and we can know that we are maturing in the mind of Christ when such love is more consistently evident in us.

Third, the Spirit begins to *fill us with righteousness, peace, and joy* – the hallmarks of the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17, 18) – and channels those into spiritual gifts for ministering to others (1 Cor. 12.7-11). This is what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6.33), in our lives and throughout our Personal Mission Fields. Those who think and live out of the mind of Christ know that *praying* for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven is just the starting-point for realizing more of that Kingdom's presence, promise, and power. *Living* toward that sought-for objective is our daily calling (1 Thess. 2.12).

Finally, the Spirit opens our mouths to *proclaim the Good News of Jesus* so that others can come to know Him as we do (Acts 1.8). This is the primary reason the Spirit has been given to us. When we are thinking with the mind of Christ and growing in the mind of the Spirit, bearing witness to Jesus through His Spirit will come more readily and effectively to us. We will not be afraid to start a conversation with a view to getting to the Gospel, for we know that the Spirit will give us the words we need, and the Word that goes forth from us will accomplish whatever God intends (Lk. 12.12; Is. 55.10, 11).

Willing and able!

Paul says that the power of God's Spirit is at work within us to make us *willing and able* to do the will of God (Phil. 2.12, 13).

He further says that this power can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think (Eph. 3.20).

If nothing of spiritual significance is happening in our lives, either we are squelching or quenching the Spirit of God, through unbelief or sin, or we have not yet had our minds opened to receive Him and the life mission He brings to all who truly believe in Jesus.

Pray for the filling of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 5.18-21), that Jesus may open your mind wider each day, that you may know more of His Presence, promises, and power at work in your mind, and in all your life.

For reflection

1. In what ways have you seen the Spirit of God at work in your life lately?
2. Meditate on Ephesians 3.20 and Philippians 2.13. How should these verses encourage you each day, as you go out into your Personal Mission Field?
3. Write a prayer that you can use each day to seek the Lord for greater openness to His mind, and to maturing in the mind of Christ.

Next steps – Demonstration: Give God thanks and praise for the Holy Spirit Who dwells within you. Pray that He will open your mind to the riches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that today you will demonstrate more of His Presence, promise, and power in everything you do.

Opened Minds

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the greatest hindrances to someone's having his mind increasingly open to Jesus and His mind?
2. How can we tell in our affections – desires, hopes, interests, and so forth – that Jesus is beginning to open us to greater maturity in His mind? How can we use prayer to seek growth in the mind of Christ?
3. What are some benchmarks we might aim at as we begin to mature in the mind of Christ?
4. What can you do to help others – believers and unbelievers – be more open to Christ and His truth?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your daily 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.