

## THE CALL TO GODLINESS in an AGE OF JUDGEMENT – 4

*“We have the mind of Christ”* 1 Cor.2:16

*“Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus”* Phil.2:5

*“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* Rom. 12:2

*“I will put my laws into their minds”* Heb. 8:10

*“Love the Lord your God with all your ... mind”* Lk 10:27

*“Gird up the loins of your mind”* 1 Pet. 1:13

The scriptures above put a very important focus on our minds or, in other words, on our thought life. Our thought life as Christians needs to be as godly and upright and clean as our actions. Jesus made this very clear when he warned that if a man commits adultery in his heart (a fantasising in his mind) he is as guilty as the one who does so in action. Our minds are our “think tanks” receiving all sorts of information from all sorts of sources and then processing, analysing, collating and storing it all. This data forms the substance of our thinking. Our minds are very good at fantasising and imagining all sorts of actions. When the data is good and helpful the imaginings are very helpful, but when it is evil they are very dangerous. We know that there is not a lot of distance between our thinking and our doing; one leads very quickly to the other! We need, therefore, to watch our thinking and the data that informs it. We are called to *“Love the Lord our God with all our mind (in all our thinking)”* as well as *“with all our strength”*.

There are two aspects to this demand. The first is that God has made ample provision for us to be able to live with a clean and godly mind. This is highlighted in the very remarkable and direct statement of Paul in which he says ***“we have the mind of Christ”***. The mind of Christ certainly did not entertain any thoughts of evil, even though he did know temptation. In fact Satan put temptation in his mind on many occasions, but Jesus immediately rejected them and would not give them any room. We are told we have this *“mind of Christ”*, a mind able and strong enough to rebuff any temptations we may have, able to reject any evil thought patterns and imaginings that might push their way into our minds, a mind constantly focussed on the things of his Father. Paul made this remarkable statement for the benefit of all the Christians in Corinth, not just a special few, and it remains true for all Christians. When he penned it, he was writing to them about the wisdom of God in contrast to the wisdom of men, and saying that the wisdom of God came to them in words and language prompted by the Spirit of God. He went on to say that, unlike the world, they could understand this wisdom because they themselves had received the Spirit of God. As if to emphasise the point he added the thought that they could understand the things of God because they had *“the mind of Christ”*. Paul was simply saying that in receiving the Spirit of God into our lives we receive him into our minds and because the Spirit of God is equally the Spirit of Christ we have the mind of Christ. However, this presence of the mind of Christ is not there only to enable us to understand spiritual truth, but also to motivate us and enable us to live a godly life. This then is our fundamental resource for a clean and godly mind – the indwelling Christ through the Spirit. This is not some fanciful theological statement but an objective reality of which we should have some experience. It is his Spirit in us which *“transforms us by renewing our minds”* (Rom. 12:2), by giving us *“the mind of Christ”*.

The second aspect to the call to “watch our thoughts” has to do with our response to this provision of the Spirit. Paul made another reference to the *“mind of Christ in us”* when writing to the Philippians, *“Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who (though) being in his true nature God .... made himself nothing by taking the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And ... humbled himself, becoming obedient to death”* (Phil

2:6-8). This again illustrates the point made above that the “mind-set” of Christ is a godly mind-set, and in this instance particularly one of humility (he was “humble minded”). But there is also an imperative here, “**Let this mind be in you**”, which constitutes a call for us to actively embrace the mind-set of Jesus. The Spirit of God is our great resource for successful godly living but we all know only too well that as long as we are in the flesh we still have a battle to fight against the impulses of our human flesh and frailty and against the subtle temptations of Satan. Even though we have the Spirit Himself and all the grace of God to help us to victory in this fight, we still have to exert ourselves and overcome. Sanctification is not automatic! Since all depends upon the control of the Spirit over our minds the most important response we can make is to “*keep in step with the Spirit*”, honour His Presence in our lives, neither *quenching* the Spirit nor *grieving* Him, listening to his promptings especially in our conscience.

Paul in Ephesians gives us a good starting point for this: “*Go on being filled with the Spirit ... sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything*” Eph. 5:18ff. Praise and thanksgiving to God are central to a life of godliness since they are central to “*walking in the Spirit*”. But that means more than singing songs; it means a genuine heart attitude informing such songs. Corporate singing and worship is very helpful here, but simple personal worship can be more powerful at times and is something to cultivate. The best of godly songs are always rooted in scripture, especially the Psalms, which seem to capture and express so beautifully what our hearts need to express. And for that reason, in order to “*keep in step with Spirit*” the reading and meditation of Scripture is vital. It is, of course, essentially the Holy Spirit that gives us an appetite for praise, prayer and the scripture; our calling is to indulge that appetite and not to quench it!

Another vital area of our response to God’s provision of the Spirit’s presence and power in our lives and minds is to make sure that we ourselves exercise control over what goes into those minds. Our ears and eyes are crucial here. They are the two parts of our body that feed the mind with thoughts and data. “*Hear no evil, see no evil – think no evil!*” is an old simple adage and very accurate. In the modern world there is little or no restraint on what pours into our ears and eyes. From a very young age there is so much that we hear and see that is evil. In particular films, media, TV etc. bombard us with the most unedifying of scenes in the most graphic and explicit of ways and are perhaps the most potent of all influences producing an unedifying impact on us all. Violence and sex are less and less restrained. At the same time the vast majority of novels quite deliberately titillate our minds and stimulate unwholesome imaginings; sex sells. We should not in any way be deluded by the cry that unedifying visuals can be redeemed by their so-called artistic or “cultural” value. God has much that is beautiful and of aesthetic value without it being polluted by what is unwholesome. And we should have God’s mind-set.

In the light of all this Paul’s words to the Philippians stand out as the most relevant, demanding and necessary of challenges:

**“*Finally, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -if anything is (morally) excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things .... and the God of peace will be with you*”.** Phil 4:8ff.

If we seek to apply this admonition with real intent it will lead to a mind untroubled by wrong thinking and harmful imaginings, and enable us “*to have our minds set not on the flesh but on what the Spirit desires*” (Rom. 8:5). It will also bring a deep peace and satisfaction.