

Romans: The Good News of God

A Christian Mind (Part 2)

Romans 12:2b

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Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying Romans 12:1-2. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, “In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?”

So, let’s carefully examine each phrase in Romans 12:1-2.

Let’s read Romans 12:1-2:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Introduction

I actually started part one of this message about a month ago (before I went to General Assembly and took some vacation). It is unfortunate that I had to split this message over such a long break, but today I would like to continue with part two of this message.

You may remember that I said that in 1963 Harry Blamires, an Englishman who had been a student of C. S. Lewis, wrote an important book titled, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?*² His book’s main thesis, repeated over and over in chapter 1, is that “there is no longer a Christian mind,” meaning

¹ Much of this material is taken from James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995).

² Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978). Original edition 1963.

that there is no longer a distinctly Christian way of thinking.

Two days ago we celebrated the 500th birthday of John Calvin, who was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, France. Calvin went into self-exile in Geneva because France was opposed to the Reformation. The reason I mention this is because of the remarkable work that Calvin did in Geneva. Biographer Herman J. Selderhuis notes that Geneva “had already decided to purify itself . . . as its norm when Calvin was still many miles away, and in fact still a student.”³ Although Calvin encountered opposition and difficulty in Geneva—at one point even being banished from Geneva for about 3 years—by the end of his life Geneva was a city filled with people who had a Christian worldview.

Today, however, not only is there little or no genuine Christian thinking, there is very little thinking of any kind. Our world is well on its way to becoming what pastor James Montgomery Boice frequently called a “mindlessness.”⁴

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that Christians are called to mind renewal. He says in Romans 12:2a-b, “Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . . .**” Mindlessness is being conformed to this world. But Christians are called to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. In other words, Christians are called to develop a “Christian mind,” or, what is also called a “Christian worldview.”

Review

Last time we started examining a Christian worldview so that we can understand what constitutes a Christian mind. Let me briefly review what we covered in that message.

I. A Christian Mind Understands Who God Is

First, a Christian mind understands who God is.

³ Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 64.

⁴ Boice, 84.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of God helps us to respond to the worldviews of secularism and of atheism. Secularism is best summarized by a statement of Carl Sagan in his television series titled “Cosmos.” Sagan was pictured standing before a spectacular view of the heavens with its many swirling galaxies, saying in a hushed, almost reverential tone of voice, “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” That is bold-faced secularism.⁵ And atheism, of course, asserts that God doesn’t exist.

This past fall, on October 21, 2008, the world’s foremost proponent of new atheism, Richard Dawkins, debated John Lennox, a Christian, at Oxford University’s Museum of Natural History. Dawkins made a monumental admission early in the debate when he said, “A serious case could be made for a deistic God.” When that statement made front-page news—much to Dawkins’ surprise—he denied that he said it. After he was shown the transcript from the debate, he then further backtracked and tried to reinterpret what he had said. And, as I understand it, he has been on the defensive ever since that time regarding that statement.⁶

A Christian mind understands that God is the inevitable, self-existent, uncaused first cause who stands behind everything, for as the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:19-20, “For what can be known about God is plain to [people], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

So, a Christian mind understands who God is.

II. A Christian Mind Understands God’s Self-Revelation

Second, a Christian mind understands God’s self-revelation.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of revelation helps us

⁵ Boice, 74.

⁶ Melanie Phillips, “Is Richard Dawkins Still Evolving?” in <http://www.spectator.co.uk/melaniephillips/2543431/is-richard-dawkins-still-evolving.thtml>.

to respond to the worldview of relativism. Relativism is the worldview that says, “True for you but not for me.”

The God who exists has revealed himself. He has revealed himself—in nature, in history, and especially in the Scriptures. And since God is truth, what he reveals is true—and truth is thus not relative.

David says in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

And Paul says of the Scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Christians believe that God not only exists but also that he has revealed himself. God’s revelation of himself to us in his Word is to be trusted. Throughout the ages God’s Word has been challenged with disastrous results, beginning with Eve doubting the Word of God in the Garden of Eden.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, and God’s self-revelation.

III. A Christian Mind Understands the Creation of the World

Third, a Christian mind understands the creation of the world.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of creation helps us to respond to the worldview of evolution. Evolution asserts that “the earth’s species have changed and diversified through time under the influence of natural selection.”⁷

The opening sentence in the Bible asserts, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

A Christian worldview asserts that God created this world. He also created everything in it. The Bible describes God’s creation of the world, and if science is in conflict with the Bible, then

⁷ evolution. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/evolution> (accessed: June 13, 2009).

we assert the authority of God's Word over science, not vice versa.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God's self-revelation, and the creation of the world.

IV. A Christian Mind Understands the Creation of Man

Fourth, a Christian mind understands the creation of man.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of man helps us to respond to the worldview of humanism. Humanism asserts that you are your own god. Humanism says that you are the master of your own fate, the determiner of your own destiny. Not only does humanism not understand who God is, humanism completely misunderstands the true nature of man.

John Calvin begins his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a classic statement, "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."⁸

The Bible has two interesting things to say regarding man. First, man is a uniquely valuable being, far more important than humanists imagine him to be. But, second, in his fallen condition man is much worse than humanists suppose.

Let's take the fact that man is far more valuable than humanists imagine first. The Bible teaches this at the very beginning of Genesis when it reports God as saying, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26a). We are then told in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Because man was created in the image of God, man thus has personality, morality, and spirituality.

After God created Adam and Eve, he said, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31a).

⁸ Calvin, J. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis*.; Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. (I, i, 1). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God's self-revelation, the creation of the world, and the creation of man.

Lesson

In today's lesson, let's continue examining the Christian worldview so we understand what constitutes a Christian mind.

V. A Christian Mind Understands the Fall of Man

Fifth, a Christian mind understands the fall of man.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of man helps us to respond to the worldview of humanism. Humanism asserts that you are your own god, the master of your own fate, and the determiner of your own destiny. Humanism does not understand who God is, and completely misunderstands the true nature of man.

I mentioned earlier that the Bible has two interesting things to say regarding man. First, man is a uniquely valuable being, far more important than humanists imagine him to be. But, second, in his fallen condition man is much worse than humanists suppose.

Let's deal now with the second point: man in his fallen condition is much worse than humanists suppose.

The Bible says that God created man in his own image (Genesis 1:27), and God declared that his creation of man was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But what happened?

Sin entered into the world. Adam fell, and all of Adam's posterity fell in him. Paul says in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

Many people, including humanists, either deny the presence of sin or misunderstand its severity. But our world just does not make sense if we do not understand that we are sinful, fallen creatures living in a sinful, fallen world. Pride, envy, jealousy, gossip, theft, murder, and so on are all directly the result of sin.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God's self-

revelation, the creation of the world, the creation of man, and the fall of man.

VI. A Christian Mind Understands the Incarnation of Jesus Christ

Sixth, a Christian mind understands the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ helps to respond to the worldview of atheism.

In the debate between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox on October 21, 2008, Lennox referenced the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a pivotal event in the history of the world. Dawkins' galling response was, "The incarnation of Christ is so petty."⁹

Petty? Was it petty that Jesus Christ "became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)?

Petty? Was it petty that Jesus Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:6-11)?

Christianity teaches that God has come to us in human form, in the person of his Son. The entire world has been changed because of Jesus Christ. No one else has influenced the world as much as Jesus.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God's self-revelation, the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of

⁹ Debate titled "Has Science Buried God?" between Prof. Richard Dawkins and Prof. John Lennox on October 21, 2008 at the Oxford Museum of Natural History.

man, and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

VII. A Christian Mind Understands Redemption

Seventh, a Christian mind understands redemption.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of redemption helps us to respond to the worldview of all other religions.

Christianity is the only religion in which God comes to man. In all other religions man tries to make his way to God. But only a Christian worldview teaches that God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

The reason Jesus came was to reconcile sinful men and women with God.

Jesus himself said in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

And how do we come into a right relationship with God the Father? Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Bible teaches, and Paul especially makes this clear in his letter to the Romans, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God’s self-revelation, the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of man, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and redemption.

VIII. A Christian Mind Understands the Kingdom of God

Eighth, a Christian mind understands the kingdom of God.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of kingdom of God helps us to respond to the worldview of secularism. Secularism teaches that this universe is all that there is.

But the Christian worldview teaches that there is another kingdom besides the kingdoms of this world. In fact, when Jesus was standing before Pilate after his arrest in the Garden of Geth-

semane, he was asked, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” (John 18:33-36).

So, what is the kingdom that Jesus is building? The kingdom can be simply defined as the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus successfully completed his mission of redemption, he rules as the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). But he also rules in the heart of every Christian believer.

The kingdom of God is spreading throughout the entire world. Jesus will not return until the gospel has been proclaimed to all nations, for he said in Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Several years ago I was asked to speak at the Vespers Service at the Quarryville Retirement Community on Sunday, July 4. Since it was our Independence Day celebration, I decided to talk about the fact that all people belong to two kingdoms. All people belong to an earthly kingdom (like the USA), and all people also belong either to the kingdom of Satan or to the kingdom of God.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God’s self-revelation, the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of man, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, redemption, and the kingdom of God.

IX. A Christian Mind Understands That History Has a Goal

And ninth, a Christian mind understands that history has a goal.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of eschatology helps

us to respond to the worldview of humanism. The humanist view of history can be summed up in the statement by Edward Gibbon, “History is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.”¹⁰

But history is far more than that. History has a goal. The New Testament repeatedly announces that Jesus Christ will one day return to earth. This will be his “royal visit,” his “appearing” and “coming” (Greek: *parousia*). Christ will return to this world in glory. The Savior’s second advent will be personal and physical (Matthew 24:44; Acts 1:11; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 9:28), visible and triumphant (Mark 8:38; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 1:7). Jesus will come to end history, to raise the dead and judge the world (John 5:28-29), to impart to God’s children their final glory (Romans 8:17-18; Colossians 3:4), and to usher in a reconstructed universe (Romans 8:19-21; 2 Peter 3:10-13).¹¹

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God’s self-revelation, the creation of the world, the creation of man, the fall of man, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, redemption, the kingdom of God, and that history has a goal.

Conclusion

Let me encourage you to develop a Christian worldview. The best way to do that is by studying God’s Word so that you can grow in your understanding of a Christian worldview.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that Christians are called to mind renewal. He says in Romans 12:2a-b, “Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . . .**” May God help each one of us to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. Amen.

¹⁰ David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 725.

¹¹ Packer, J. I. (1995, c1993). *Concise theology: A guide to historic Christian beliefs*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

On this Sunday closest to John Calvin’s 500th birthday, let me share with you the story of John Calvin’s seal and motto:



Calvin wrote in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms that when he was a young man, perhaps around twenty-one years old, God “turned my course in another direction.” By an unexpected or sudden conversion God subdued and “tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years.” Calvin’s wholehearted commitment to God was symbolized by the seal he adopted for himself: a flaming heart on the palm of an extended open hand and the

words—“My heart, I give you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.” That became for Calvin more than a seal, more than a motto; it set the direction for the rest of his life.¹²

So, let us pray, using Calvin’s simple prayer:

My heart, I give you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.
And this I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

¹² <http://www.pcahistory.org/logo/LogoInsert.pdf>.