

MIND OVER EMOTION

By

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Christian faith is both intellectual and emotional. Jesus stirred deep emotions in those who were confronted by Him. The Pharisees responded with instant hate when his claims opposed their Zionist zeal. The same claims won lasting love from those who were of the good will to recognize truth. In both cases sincere emotions were aroused, some to hatred and enmity and some to love and loyalty.

God's creative purpose was expressed at the beginning: "Man in our own image." God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Fellowship is spiritual. It is mind-to-mind. Fellowship with God is mind-to-mind relationship with the Infinite Mind and requires the very best of our minds which were created for the purpose of thinking God's thoughts — "in His image." The woman at the well (John 4) was impressed because Jesus was able to tell her "all things that ever (she) did." It was Christ's custom to direct the mind to truth, to recall truth already known, to cite Scriptures that pointed to truth fulfilled and to pronounce statements of truth concerning the eternal.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus emphasized the importance of hearing and understanding the Word of truth. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and understands it not, then comes the evil one, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart." Seed (the Word) was sown all over the place, but only that which was understood produced fruit.

The preaching of the apostles was an example of turning minds to God. On Pentecost Peter used the Old Testament Scriptures and logical reasoning from the facts of Christ's death and resurrection to show that Jesus had been exalted as Lord and Christ. The sermon (Acts 2) is a step-by-step presentation of Scripture logically arranged to arrive at a conclusion. It was not a mental exercise but it did require some mental work. One could not sleep through part of it and still get the message. The emotional impact — "They were pricked in their hearts" — was a result of intelligent comprehension of facts which Peter had presented.

Other sermons recorded for us, as well as the appeal in the Epistles, follow the same style, presenting the intelligent mind of God to man and requiring an intelligent (spiritual) response. Other religions may depend upon man's ignorant and blind emotional loyalty, but God requires worship in intelligence (spirit) and truth.

The Good News which forms the basis of true Christian faith sets forth a proposition. It is not good news about the environment nor the nation nor even of one's family. It is good news about one's self, and his very life-existence. Man is in a condition of sin and death, the death being the result of the sin. Sin is not merely wrong-doing, it is a state of disharmony with God, a failure to be in His image. The solution offered by God Himself is that man be restored to harmony with God; that is, the mind-to-mind relationship be restored, then the body be made immortal. The restoring of harmony with God must begin in the realm of thought. Once the thinking actually begins and man starts thinking the truth of God's proposition, then the emotions are stirred, but the emotional impact is effect, **not** cause.

The Gospel, the proposition made by God, is that Christ has paid the penalty for man's sin by his own death. The condemnation to death is lifted for all those who turn their minds back to the Creator, to think His thoughts and thus be in harmony with him, in His image. The body will be restored and made immortal at the resurrection. It is obvious that a person seeking to escape from the death penalty, while failing to seek the mind-to-mind fellowship with God, would fail. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. Yet that is what much of modern religion amounts to. It offers a "heaven" for those who make "decisions" without their having to be brought into spiritual harmony with God. It offers blessings of God (at least man's concept of His blessing) without having to take God in the bargain. The command is to "repent", to turn back to God in one's mind, and to be baptized, which is further response to God's express mind. With fellowship restored there is salvation from the death-penalty and the promise of life. The emotional feeling of sorrow for sins committed against God, the joy of forgiveness and the hope of immortality in His presence, all follow upon hearing God's proposition and believing it.

This does not mean that salvation depends on one's intellectual power or upon the scope of his knowledge of the Bible. Those who trust their intellectual power are missing the meaning of faith. One may be saved who knows no more than the basic proposition of the Gospel. Even so, he must know at least this basic truth or there is no basis for saving faith. Oceans of emotion may move him dramatically, but they will not save.

In Pete's epistles he said, "I stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance" of what the prophets and apostle's had said (II Peter 3:1-2). Much of today's evangelism is not aimed at stirring up sincere minds but at stirring emotions without ever presenting the intelligent revelation of God for the mind to consider. Evangelists procure conversions through well-planned assaults on the emotions. Such tactics are labeled "methods" and defended on grounds that they make the Church to grow. Results are counted only in the number of responses. Responses can be predicted by law of average. The pre-programmed steps which are skillfully designed to maneuver the prospect into the position of saying "yes" — to get him to respond or, as they put it, "make a decision" — are all worked out, not from the position of men applying whatever emotional and psychological pressure is required to get the "decision." The idea seems to be that God is pleased if He can just get a person to say "Yes," even if he isn't sure what he is saying yes to. They say, "God wants to save you," and proceed to persuade you to bow your head and let Jesus come in, or make your confession and be baptized. Some even offer you a pre-programmed prayer, something like: "Jesus, I have messed up my life; I can't make it alone. Will you come and take over?" But this is a far cry from the proposition God offers and the requirements God makes.

Furthermore, in responding to this psychological persuasion one is trusting to a great extent in his own understanding based upon the flesh, and not upon the faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Our faith must be exclusively in God; that which is to form the basis of conversion is the word of God so that faith that saves is faith in what God says, apart from and even in spite of our own reaction to human psychology and emotion. However sincere the evangelist, he may defeat his own purpose by binging people to think they are saved when they do not understand the gospel, but are merely responding to the emotionally-baited human appeal. Given the right atmosphere, a carefully staged appeal and good timing, almost any serious minded but unstable person may be motivated down the aisle.

God's appeal to the mind should not be construed as a recognition of man's power to perfect his own mind. Man used the mind; indeed, is commanded to hear and understand with the mind, but it is God who transforms it. "Be you transformed by the renewing of our mind," writes Paul (Rom. 12:2). He does not say, "Renew your mind" but rather "Be renewed;" that is, by turning it to God and thinking God's thoughts, let it be renewed by God. It is only God who can renew both mind and body, and that is exactly what must take place before we can ever be fit to live with Him in eternity. What God offers is not merely that we may choose between living in heavenly bliss or hellish torture. What He propositions is that we can be saved from the miserable state of sin and its ultimate result — the destruction of body and soul (Matt. 10:28) — and brought into peaceful harmony with Him, with the prospect of having our bodies also transformed into glorious and immortal bodies.

Glen Adams (The Communicatory, 7/75) writes: "modern religion does not center in this process of God to transform the total man. It deals only with the place man is to go (or so it claims he will go, namely heaven) where one can live in sublime happiness." It ignores the fact that there could never be sublime happiness until man himself is transformed both in spirit and body. Modern religious man says, "We will correct our moral and ethical practices and then we shall go to this wonderful place as a result of that correction." God says, "My purpose lies in changing your mind about the whole matter of existence and purpose and destiny; and when it is changed, to change your body into an Eternal Thing so you may dwell with me." Man says it is a place. God says it is the matter of totally making you over. If the former view (the "place to go") were correct, then any kind of emotional or psychological approach — anything to get results — would work. But since it is the total man that God wants to transform and save, then the appeal must first be to the mind, through the intellect, a mind-to-mind confrontation between God and man. "And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that hears the word, and understands it: who verily bears fruit..." (Matt. 13:23).

The fruit of the Word of God, having taken root in the mind of a man and growing to maturity, is a like-mindedness with God. He hates what God hates "with perfect hatred" (Psa. 139:22, 45:7) and loves what God loves. He has deep emotional feelings of joy and sorrow, but they do not control nor form the basis of his judgment, rather they are regulated by the God-mindedness he has attained.

The farther man gets from the mind of God the more carnal and animalistic he becomes. He hates the holiness and righteous laws of God. He loves sin and violence which God condemns. Where God commands man to have dominion over the earth, carnal man is dominated by the ecology. Instead of his emotions being regulated by God, he is governed by his emotions.

Feelings change and deceive. The Word of God is changeless because God's mind is true and eternally perfect. Faith is to believe God's word and bring our minds to meet His.

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