

THE SEDUCTION OF THE CHRISTIAN MIND

Philippians 2:5-11

Tom Cowan - August 8, 2021

Nice to be back at Central this morning. I appreciated my time here several years ago. Appreciated you as a congregation and also the staff. Nice to meet Phil Horton again.

A couple of years ago – speaking at a funeral of a dear friend on Quadra Island – Alf Bayne and his wife had started Camp Homewood about 1944 -- he was over 100 years old - I could speak about the legacy of his life and his passion for ministry – afterwards someone came up and said to me – it was nice to have someone as old as you speak today – then continued -- how long do you think you’ll be able to speak before you have to quit – Harriet stepped forward – when its time for Tom to quit – I’ll tell him!

Hopefully this is not my last Sunday – I am supposed to be back next week.

In 1963 I was enrolled as a student at the Baptist Seminary in Glasgow, Scotland – and I was also starting my first year at the University of Glasgow – working on an MA in English and Philosophy prior to studying theology. That same year – 1963 - a small book was published by a man called Harry Blamires. It was called THE CHRISTIAN MIND. It was a book that changed by life – started me on a quest – I have purchased a number of books that followed the same theme of the Christian Mind – here are a few from that section on my shelves –

So this Sunday and next – would like to unpack some issues involved in this critical idea of Christian thinking – **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 01)** I believe it is crucial to our lives as Christians. These are what I often call – broad brush strokes.

Start with a definition – from Blamires -

(SHOW SLIDE 02) The Christian mind – is a mind trained informed equipped to handle data of a secular controversy within a framework of reference which is constructed of Christian presuppositions.

(SHOW SLIDE 03) The Christian mind is the prerequisite of Christian thinking – and Christian thinking is the perquisite of Christian action.

(SHOW SLIDE 04) The Christian mind see all of human life and history held in the hands of God – it sees the whole of the universe sustained by his power and his love.

It is critical as Christians that we understand the difference between **thinking secularly**, which is to keep our lives rooted in this world – and **thinking Christianly**, which means to keep all things related directly or indirectly to our redeemed eternal destiny. Thinking is the hardest work we can ever do and it is the most important.

But it is his opening sentence that stops you in your tracks.

(SHOW SLIDE 05) He says – **there is no longer a Christian mind.** We need to stop and think about that. Remember in 2 Chronicles a group of people called the sons of Issachar – only thing we are told about them is this – they understood the times in which they lived.

(SHOW SLIDE 06) **We need to understand the times in which we live.**

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 07) Whether we like it not – we need to acknowledge that Christendom is dead – I did not say Christianity is dead – but Christendom is dead.

The age and time in which the church had some special status and cultural privilege is over. In the past 50 years or so – the church has lost its role as the cornerstone of society which started about 300 AD with the Emperor Constantine. Today the church has been replaced by the mall. Harriet was reading an article to me recently – that clergy should lose their tax exempt status on some things such as houses – there is also a movement to end tax exempt status on church buildings. Each Christmas season there are objections to Christmas carols in our public settings here in Victoria.

What is behind all that is the death of Christendom.

I call this a seduction – and it has been like a deadly fog slowly creeping over our culture silently enveloping us.

It comes from a number of movements that often started as ideas, often debated in universities then moved into the mainstream of life.

Here are some headings to help us understand this denial of the spiritual climate in which we live.

(SHOW SLIDE 08) **PRAGMATISM** - sees truth as whatever works. In pragmatism truth inevitably becomes relative – there is no absolute truth. We assign a positive value to whatever works - and whatever works is better and therefore right. It is a kind of moral and ethical Darwinism – the survival of the fittest.

You hear people today talk about what is truth for you and what is truth for me. We each pick our own truth.

The real crucial conflict between Christianity and pragmatism is a conflict between on the one hand what is right and true – and on the other hand what is simply expedient – what works. The principle spokesman for pragmatism is a man in the Gospels called Caiaphas - he said “it is expedient [pragmatic] for one man to die for the good of the nation.” The issue of right and wrong was not considered - just do what the job demands - and forget about the ethics.

(SHOW SLIDE 09) PLURALISM – Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms - Canada defines itself as a pluralistic nation - a mosaic of cultures and religions in which one should not be allowed to impose one set of beliefs over others. Truth is seen as a smorgasbord, a kind of religious cafeteria.

So no single truth that overarches everything - rather there many truths - some of them conflicting with each other – they jostle and bump against each other - and yet try to manage to live together under the same roof.

Yet within this pluralistic mosaic - there are tendencies that run counter to the current of true pluralism. There is a strong urging towards a monolithic culture which is one of uniformity and neutrality.

So in pluralism, absolutes are a threat because they present convictions. Convictions are quickly equated with prejudices. Prejudices are seen as absolutes. Facing this pressure, Christian distinctives are forced to conform and fit into a religious neutrality.

This double sided-emphasis of both diversity and uniformity means that the Christian truth no longer has a place of privilege in culture - it has to find its feet in the rough and tumble of the market place of ideas.

So the Christian gospel is seen as just one of many voices, its message is part of the religious cafeteria that people visit.

(SHOW SLIDE 10) MODERNISM is a period in history - running perhaps about 200 years from 1750 to 1950. Science and knowledge became supreme. It gave birth to the spirit of

humanism, in which people could live without God and without the reality of the spiritual universe. Reality was whatever you would prove - see - touch - examine. Humanism has little or no place for the world of the spiritual or the supernatural. Humanism gave us what Os Guinness called a striptease - it offered us everything and gave us nothing - its drive for economic satisfaction and material happiness did not satisfy quest of the human heart for a spiritual reality.

But we have moved out of modernism into a different climate - the mood of postmodernism – which simply means after-modernism.

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 11) The good news is that today we seem to be finding a new interest in spirituality. Spirituality is not only permissible - it is popular -- and spirituality is a big seller - it makes money - its sells books - it welcomes guests on Oprah. It makes best-sellers out of people like Deepak Chopra.

It seems that spiritually hungry people look for anyone who has something new or fresh to say. This new spiritual hunger is good news. It is also bad news.

With the demise of Christendom, the objective data that people used to have to determine and evaluate truth has changed. Truth is now shaped decided and determined on the basis of pragmatism, relativism and pluralism – and a kind of popular Gallop poll. 1st John tells us to test the spirits see whether they are from God. The issue is – what criteria shall we use to test.

In the demise of Christendom, the steady abandonment of the Christian faith as the moorings of society has left people with empty and hungry spirits.

G K Chesterton said

“When man stops believing in God, he no longer believes in nothing, he now believes in anything.”

(SHOW SLIDE 12) CONSUMERISM – we are a culture that defines success by what we have – what we can buy – and how we can buy more than others. Contemporary culture seems plagued with the passion to possess.

We define ourselves in terms of what we have and what we do rather than who we are made in image of God (will come to that in a moment) we ask – tell me what you do – we do not know how to ask tell me who you are.

We need to take some of the responsibility for this as Christians for two reasons –

1. **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Christians have often succumbed to a lazy attitude towards the faith. Our knowledge of our faith is often fuzzy and less than it should be. Christians cannot afford to be intellectually lazy!

A Gallup Poll (in 2000) asked people questions about the Bible – here are a few of their responses.

When asked who preached the Sermon on the Mount – only half of the people knew – others suggested it was Billy Graham – some others said Martin Luther King.

75% of the people said the saying - God helps those who help themselves – was in the Bible.

10% said that Noah's wife was called Joan of Arc.

8% said that Moses was one of the 12 apostles.

2. **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Also – we have to confess that orthodox doctrine and good biblical teaching has not always led to Christians living changed lives in the power of the Spirit. We have not always seen the marriage of the truth of God and the transforming power of God in our lives. Christian ethics are sadly often no different than anyone else's middle class ethics.

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 15) Our challenge is not only to win souls but to save minds. If we win the whole world but lose the mind of the world we will soon discover that we have not won the world – in fact we may have lost the world.

Remember that Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our MIND and all our strength.

So to think like a Christian means that we think Christianly across the whole spectrum of learning – including economics, politics – history – philosophy – music – business – art.

(SHOW SLIDE 16) SENSUALISM -- One area in which I think we have been seduced – lies in the twin areas of identity and sexuality. Today’s generation of young adults is paying a terrible price for this.

(SHOW SLIDE 17) Genesis 1:27 says to us.

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Our problem is that our anthropology is Greek – our understanding of humanness is shaped by Plato - who defined us as separate bodies and souls – rather than a seamless tapestry of the physical and the spiritual woven by the hand of God. That is a Hebrew anthropology.

In Imago Dei – the image of God - we find our identity and understand who we are. But our culture has disconnected itself from that truth – and so we seem to be confused about who we are – and the essential identity of maleness and femaleness. These characteristics are now regarded as interchangeable - as though we are bits of Lego and you can just change the parts.

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 18) Next Sunday – we will excavate/dig into Romans 12:2 –

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We will also ask - How do we renew and rebuild Christian minds

Remember thinking comes before living.

Let me finish this morning with asking – **(SHOW SLIDE 19) how do we think Christianly in the times in which we live?** Here are some ideas – again what I call Broad brush strokes. I realize that they do not allow for a detailed Christian response – and they leave much for further discussion.

(SHOW SLIDE 20) In an age of pluralism – we will need to think wisely about how to present the Gospel.

Let's agree that we are unapologetic about our call to follow Christ and share the Gospel.

Romans 1:16 –

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

The cross is non-negotiable - I believe that churches that lose the centrality of the cross in both message and ministry will find themselves impotent. They will end up with nothing to declare. As Christians living in pluralistic society we can and must be clear voices for Christ.

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 21) However we must recognize that the Christian voice is not the only voice in society. In the cafeteria of truths that people are offered today, what will help them to select Jesus as The Way – the truth – the life.

We are one of a number of competing voices in society. We will not be heard just because we sing louder or preach longer. We will need to find a new starting point for the Gospel. Personal authenticity flows from our spiritual and moral values – not from our conditions and circumstances. We will be honest and fair with all people – at all times and in all circumstances.

We must create and live in a climate of personal and corporate authenticity in all circumstances – otherwise our message has no authenticity.

The prelude to the Gospel will also come from serving our city. You do that as you provide groceries and make food available to our city – support Mustard Seed Church and so on.

(SHOW SLIDE 22) In an age of sensualism we must think deeply about our moral lives.

I have a growing sense that we need to think and understand more deeply than ever before what it means to be a Christian as evidenced by our moral lives.

(SHOW SLIDE 23) Romans 13

“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 24) No matter what the sensuous voices in our culture say - We need to create the courage for our singles that declares – waiting is worth it - virginity is worth it – this is the one unique gift that I bring to my lover on our wedding night. In The Song of Songs we find a picture of biblical sexuality which is passion without pornography and love without lust.

In story of Joseph in Potiphar’s house – warm day – no one else home – the wife says to Joseph – let’s go to bed. That is recreational sex – no commitment – he says no – flees – time to run from temptation – ends up with 13 years in prison. Hebrew and Greek – to know.

I don’t know how many times I meet people and one of them introduces the other and says – this is my partner. I am always always proud to introduce Harriet and say – this is my wife.

The church needs to declare without embarrassment the message that sexuality is a gift from God – not the result of the fall. It will need to let people know that sex is not something you do – rather it is who we are as we bring ourselves to know another person in a life of commitment.

I am aware that both Pastor Barton and Central Baptist have addressed issues such as homosexuality and gender roles in the past and you also hosted a conference on gender and sexuality with Sam Allberry. May I refer you back to them in the development of a Christian mind in this area of gender.

We will also need to find gracious and gentle ways of seeing how we will welcome back the victims of our sexual revolution. That means those who have had abortions – or where same sex marriages have failed. Grace meets all of us where we have failed. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

So I will have to think like a Christian - when I want to behave like a Christian,

(SHOW SLIDE 25) In the age of individualism we will need to think deeply about authority so that God will be honored.

Think about this last year – in both Canada and the U.S. with Covid -19 Some churches refused to follow the governments orders to close services. One of the marks of secular thinking is individualism. We demand the freedom to do our own thing.

One of the marks of Christian thinking is its acceptance of authority. Now -- There may be a few occasions when -- for the cause of the Gospel -- and only for that cause - we cannot accept authority -- and the most powerful activity of the church in our culture will not be protest -- but the proclamation of truth.

(SHOW SLIDE 25) Romans 13:

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”

Remember that Paul was writing about Roman authority was anything but Christian. Peter says the same thing in his letter.

(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 27) We will deal with this more next week. Remember the line from Judges -- and every man -- every person did that which was right in his own sight.

The point is that when Christians submit to the societal rules for law and order -- realizing that the government does not have absolute power -- only God has that -- they give an opportunity for the glory of God to be revealed and for the cause of God to be honored in the city.

We are fast to complain about the government -- but not so good at encouraging and thanking -- and in 1st Timothy we are COMMANDED to pray for them.

There are 87 MLA's in BC. What if we began to pray for them -- their spouses and families -- it does not matter who they are or what party they are in -- who cares -- We need to remember that Jacques Ellul says that politics does not change anything -- only the kingdom of God changes things.

What if all the Christians in this capital city began to do that -- divided up their names and started to pray for them and their families -- not just once -- but day after day.

That is the start of Christian thinking which leads to Christian action. We don't need committee or budgets or anything else to pray for the MLA's – in fact we are commanded to.

Thinking like a Christian is an expression of loving God. Every time we pray or sing – we want to be more like Jesus – we are asking and praying – we are desiring - to think like Jesus – and so to act more like him.

An old hymn that we don't sing much anymore.

**May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day
By his love and power controlling
All I do and say.**

We finish with our reading this morning – Philippians 2

(SHOW LOWER 3rds for scripture reading).

⁵ in every thing you do -- have the same mind as Christ Jesus: think like Jesus --

**⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;**

**⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

**⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!**

**Invite People to stand –
Worship team move up**

**⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place - it literally says – hyper-exalted him –
super-exalted him --**

**and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,**

**in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Closing Song.