

Ephesians 4:17-24

You Are More Than Your Mind

Introduction (before scripture reading):

- I. Today we will be wrapping up our series on Identity.
 - A. It has been a very challenging and thought-provoking series. . . and I've personally learned a ton about what the Bible teaches on this subject . . . more and more I am impressed just how penetratingly relevant scripture is in our context.
 - B. God's word really does give us a firm and safe foundation to stand on in these confusing times.
- II. Today as we bring this series to a close, I think a good place for us end on would be by looking at that one identity marker that truly makes us unique.
 - A. That is our mind. . . our inner self. . . that unique collection of knowledge, thoughts, memory, desire, affections, reason and our will. . . all combine to form our unique personalities.
 1. The inner-self is so to speak the chief executive at the board table of all of our different identity markers whose job it is to delegate to them certain powers and voices over our identity.
 2. Our minds, that inner-self, is the determiner of what we do with all those various identity markers and factors that make us who we are.
 - a) NT scholar Klyne Snodgrass observes:
 - (1) "The internal self-interpreting, self-directing memory is the most complex, fascinating, enjoyable, and determinative part of identity, and it is the reason Scripture speaks so frequently of the mind." Snodgrass, *Who God Says You Are*, p 108-109.
 3. To be human is to think rationally and to prioritise things. In fact, our rational nature is one of those unique ways we are image-bearers of our rational God.
 - a) To remember, to evaluate, to value, to choose and to assign meaning . . . these are all functions of our minds.

(1) Our mind collects, interprets and prioritises everything and says "This is who I am, therefore I will live in accordance with my identity."

(a) So, for example: go back to your high school self. . .

i) We all sort of identified with some group or activity. . . unless you were a bit of an oddball. . .

(1) Sport. . . art. . . theater. . . or debate. . . chess club. . . tech. . . etc. . . and depending on what group you identified with and how you understood where you fit in that determined how you dressed, who you hung out with and the persona you tried to create . . etc.

(2) But the point is once you had something to grab onto here (pointing to head) then you made choices to adapt and to fit in with that group.

(a) Until we all graduated and worked or studied further and found out how silly that was and we began to develop our unique individual personalities.

III. So, our minds are carrying out a continual process of filtering and evaluating and deciding. . . it is so to speak our executive self.

A. This is the part of us that will be held accountable for the way we lived, the values we made, the priorities we set.

B. Often it is not even a conscious activity. . . and our subconscious is always taking in data a processing it.

IV. So, the bible has a lot to say about our mind. . . about the way we think. . . and how knoweldge of the gospel will also effect our identity and our behavior.

A. One of the particularly fascinating passages is Ephesians 4:17-24, which speaks about our minds growing up in knoweldge towards maturity in Christ. . . and how this relates to our identity.

1. So, lets ope up our bibles to Ephesians 4:17-24.

Introduction (after scripture reading):

V. Pray

VI. "I think therefore I am" Rene Descartes

- A. In the Western world and in our contemporary society, we tend to be overly cerebral. . . we over-emphasise the intellect above the emotions and the will.
- B. In fact, our society has artificially divided the inner self so finely that we assume that the intellect can be detached from our emotions and our will.
 - 1. ANd there is a historical development behind the way things are today.
 - 2. Rene Descartes belonged to the renaissance movement and he kind of encapsulated the modernist movement which aimed at eliminating myths and the idea of the supernatural and dedicated itself to scientific solutions to life's problems.
 - a) **Modernists believe that reliable knowledge can only be had through observing the natural order.**
 - (1) Modernists constructed two levels of truth: objective truth (scientific claims) and subjective truth (morality/values)
 - (2) Francis Schaeffer illustrates this division as 2 stories of a building:
 - (a) **The upper story: empirical science, held to be objectively true and testable.**
 - (b) **The lower story: morality and theology, treated as private/ subjective/relative.**
 - i) And so objective truth was public and subjective truth became relegated to the private sphere.
 - (1) And so we have this artificial divide between the sacred and the secular.
 - ii) But, then at the height of modernism you have two world wars that shattered the modernist dreams of a utopian society built on reason.

C. And so after WW I+II you have a reactionary movement called postmodernism, which claims that the lower story is primary and facts/science are mental constructs. . . not real.

1. The postmodernist would say I feel therefore I am.

(1) That science is deficient and lacks explanatory power and so everyone must create their own truth. . . and so postmodernism turns everything upside down.

(a) So, we have these two philosophical underpinnings to our society:

i) **MODERNISM: Started with the scientific revolution**
→ Enlightenment philosophy: facts and -isms are the primary reality (empiricism, rationalism, materialism, naturalism)

ii) **POSTMODERNISM: The Romantic movement was a reaction against the Enlightenment. sought to keep the lower story of values alive (idealisms, existentialism, Marxism, postmodernism)**

D. As a result of secularism an hanger-on of the enlightenment era:

1. Our society insists that there needs to be a radical split between two different spheres: the private and the public.

a) In the public sphere we have society's great institutions: the state, academia, multinational corporations, the mainstream media, and the like.

b) In the private sphere we have the family, the religion, and personal identity.

(1) We are told that these public institutions are based only on what is scientific and objective.

(2) Meanwhile, the private sphere is composed of all those things that are subjective or based on personal values; we are allowed to have them, but they are less important than the public sphere and must never be allowed to influence it.

(a) I'm sure you have all experienced this tension in the workplace or school where the two arenas theoretically shouldn't mix.

E. So as a result we live in this disjointed society, which has in basically divided our inner self into two levels:

1. The upper story: our mind, the place of reason and emotionally neutral
2. The lower story: our will and emotions, which do not need rational support.

VII. So, in a real sense we have this divided inner-life which contradicts and lives in tension. Between the public and the private, the rationale and the emotional.

A. And that is why our "feelings" are so important for determining our identity in our contemporary context.

B. And why it is so awkward for us to live out our faith in our work places. . . it has been ingrained into our psyche that our faith is a private matter and irrational, feeling based.

VIII. Now here is where our passage this morning can critique and correct our society's artificial division of our inner-being.

A. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.— Ephesians 4:17-19

B. When the NT speaks about the mind, its important for us to realise that the Bible doesn't make such a clean division within the inner life of humans.

1. The bible understands the complexities of our inner being. . . and recognises that our **emotions**, our **mind** and our **will** are interlocking and overlapping and feeding into one another.

2. We cannot so clearly divide our decisions from our emotions. . . or our reasoning from our choices. . . they all inform and depend on the other.

a) Obviously, God our creator knows this, and scripture therefore takes into account the way these three aspects of our inner-life interact.

(1) The bible uses one overarching term to speak of the complexity of mind, will, emotion in our inner-self:

(a) In the Bible all of these dynamic elements are brought together by the term: The Heart.

i) Os Guinness writes this about the Bible's use of the word "heart":

(1) "The biblical understanding of the heart and our modern understanding of the heart are almost opposite. Today, heart is understood to refer to a person's emotions. Biblically, the heart refers to the whole person, including our capacity to think." - OS Guinness

(b) In scripture: Our **mind**. . . our **emotions**. . . and our **will** all spring forth from our heart.

i) The heart is sort of an umbrella term to understand the complex nature of the inner self.

ii) Craig Troxel writes:

(1) The heart includes what we **know** (our knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination), what we **love** (what we want, seek, feel, yearn for), and what we **choose** (whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong whether we will say yes or no.) -Craig Troxel, "With All Your Heart" p. 20

(2) Troxel will go on to explain that consistently in scripture the heart is the governing centre of a person. . . our mind (what we know) our desires (what we love) and our will (what we choose). . . . are all collectively governed by the heart.

(3) The heart is the key to rightly ordering and prioritising all our other identity markers.

- (a) If the heart is corrupt, then everything else will be corrupt. . .but if the heart is renewed, then everything else will be impacted.

IX. When we go back to our Ephesians passage, we can see the connection Paul makes between the mind and the heart. Look at the last part of 17 and vs 18:

A. you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, **due** to their hardness of heart.

1. So, Paul makes a clear line connecting the futility of their minds to the hardness of their heart.
 - a) Their thoughts are futile. . . why? last part of vs 18: “due to”, “on account of” their hard hearts.
 - b) Because their hearts are corrupt their thinking, thier minds, are also corrupt; futile and darkened . . .
 - (1) Just like our sexual feelings are distorted by the fall. . . our thinking is also corrupted by the fall.
 - (a) So that even the most brilliant, logical, reasonable person, if their heart is corrupt, their thoughts will also be corrupt, darkened. . . unable to discern truth from lies.
2. And this connection is taught consistently throughout scripture.
 - a) Jesus, explicitly makes this same connection in Mark 7:19-20
 - (1) 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. — Mark 7:19-20
 - b) And in other passage when Jesus was about to heal the lame man, the Pharisees wonder how Jesus could forgive sins:
 - (1) 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? — Matthew 9:4

- i) You see here again this connection between the heart and the mind.

3. If the heart is corrupt, then everything else will be corrupt.

- a) The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. — Genesis 6:5
- b) Sin has so broken and twisted our hearts, that even our logical capacities are limited and distorted and broken.

(a) Romans 1:21,28

- i) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. . . .
28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. — Romans 1:21,28

4. If the heart is not right with God, not in relationship with God, then even our minds will be incapable of comprehending the gospel.

- a) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. — 2 Cor 4:4

(1) So if our hearts are not right with God then our minds will not be able to resonate with the truth of the Gospel.

(a) This is so key, and so important for us to grasp. . . logic is awesome and God glorifying. . . . but it can also be evil and self-glorifying. . . hitler used logic to deceive a nation.

- i) Which just goes to show that truth and logic do not always equal one-another.

(1) there is such a thing as a logical lie. . .

- ii) For the truth of the gospel, to penetrate our minds, it must resonate with what our hearts know to be true.

X. Jesus points out to his disciples that those who hear the gospel are like those who hear but can't understand the reason is because their hearts are hardened:

A. “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ — Matthew 13:14-5

B. There must be a work done in the heart, so that we can understand and apply the gospel into the rest of our lives.

XI. So, we see that our minds are distorted and twisted because our hearts are fallen.

A. Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.— Ephesians 4:17-19

B. And that is what Paul is reminding the Ephesians in our passage this morning. . . our executive self, our decision making faculties are corrupt and fallen due to a hard and callous heart that leans towards satan.

1. Our mind is held captive by our sinful hearts.

a) And as a result. . . our minds and our emotions and our will, that inner-self, is twisted and broken and so we are in bondage and give into our sinful nature.

XII. BUT. . . Paul does not end there. . . he goes on to tell about the work of Jesus Christ.

A. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.— Ephesians 4:20-24

1. Once we have come to Christ. . . one we know Him. . . “learned Christ”, Paul says here. . . remember that doesn’t mean facts about Christ. . . it means knowing him in a personal relationship.
 - a) Learning Christ is what discipleship is all about. . . the more we know him, the more we grow to become like him.
 - (1) And so learning Christ is also learning a new way of thinking. . . of learning Christ, hearing the truth of the gospel, and begin taught the truth . . our minds are being renewed in Christ.
 - (2) we have put off our old way of thinking and like it says in vs 23, we are now “renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self”.
2. When we come to Christ, our hearts are changed and our minds become renewed.
 - a) When we turn to Christ, our minds are opened up and renewed because our hearts are changed.
3. In 2 Cor 3, Paul speaks about the Jewish people hearing the word of God read sabbath after sabbath in the synagogues and he says:
 - a) 14 But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. — 2 Cor 3:14-17
 - b) When we turn to the Lord, God removes the veil of blindness over our hearts. . .
 - c) God must free the eyes of our heart. . . for our mind to follow and resonate with the truth of gospel. . . the veil covering our hearts must be removed for the renewing of our mind to happen.
 - (1) Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

d) And this is a supernatural work of the H.S.. . .Paul goes in 2 Cor to explain God must shine in our hearts though His holy Spirit, so that our minds can follow.

(1) 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. — 2 Cor 4:6

(a) So if our hearts are right with God then our minds will be able to resonate with the truth of the Gospel. . . who ever turns to Jesus.

XIII. So, we see in our Ephesians passage this morning this contrast between our old self, whose mind is futile and corrupt. . . and our new self, whose mind has been opened and is being renewed.

XIV. So, how does this all relate to our study of identity?

A. Well, as I opened this morning, I pointed out that we all have been given a chief executive in our inner-self. . .and our inner life is a complex unity of our mind, our emotions and our will: all together the bible calls these three our heart.

1. what we know (our minds), what we love (our emotions) and the decisions we make (our will) are all working together to so to speak act like a chief executive at a conference table, where we give power and voice to all of our various identity markers.
2. And what our passage this morning is teaching us is that our inner-self. . . the one making decisions . . . is either corrupt or renewed.

B. Our contemporary culture tells us to disconnect our minds from our hearts.

1. But the Bible says you cannot separate the mind from our hearts, or the hearts from the mind. . . they are bound together.
2. But Jesus has come to destroy that barrier between our mind and heart. . . he has come to shine the light of the gospel into our hearts, so that our minds can be renewed.

C. So, in our search for identity it is key to recognise that once we come to Christ, we have been given a new CEO in our conference room.

1. Where we formally, made decisions about what we thought was best in the futility of our thinking. . . now we have what Paul calls the mind of Christ.

a) 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. . . we have the mind of Christ.— 1 Cor 2:11-13,16

b) When we come to Christ, we are given a brand NEW identity marker. . . one identity marker to rule above all the other identity markers.

c) When the Lord comes into our hearts. . . we now have a new CEO, guiding and directing our inner-life.

(1) We all have that inner-dialogue that inner narrative we speak to ourselves. . . our inner-self is always discerning, processing and speaking words. . . words that we believe and act on and build convictions around.

(2) But now, when the Spirit invades our hearts, we enter in dialogue with the God of the universe. . . everything we do, we do is now in relationship to our creator.

(a) ANd we are not just speaking to ourselves, but we are communing with the one who made us and knows us better than we know ourselves.

d) ANd because he is good and because he made us. . . he is guiding us toward becoming our true self!

(1) but in order for Christ, to sit at the chair, we must relinquish our power, and give him the reigns. . . which means we must let go of old ways of thinking and be open to new.

(a) This is what repentance is turning from our old selves and turning towards Jesus. . . . Learning Jesus and unlearning our old sinful self.

2. Paul says it best in Romans 12:2-3

(1) Do 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 12:2-3

(a) When we come to Christ, we now see the world in a completely different way. . .

(b) To think as a Christian is twofold process. . . on one hand we must not conform to the world's way of thinking and on the other we must be transformed in to God's way of thinking.

i) In other words we are not longer limited by the pattern of thinking of this world. . . we have been free in Jesus Christ to become who he made us to become.

ii) Learning Christ and unlearning our sinful way of thinking.

XV.The NT constantly comes back to our minds. . . if you remember in Col. 3 paul says set you're mind on the things above. . . Paul is always coming back to our minds.

A. Craig Troxel writes,

1. The renewal involves our whole self, but in Romans 12:2, Paul pinpoints the mind. Under the direction of Christ, the Christian's mind is constantly "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Col 3:10; Eph 4:23). There is a constant sharpening, honing, reorienting, and recalibrating of our attitudes, perspectives, goals, and life view. Just as a musical instrument needs to be retuned, a machine needs to be retooled, or a child needs to be reminded, our ability to resist a hostile world and thrive in it will come down to this work of renovation. Craig Troxel, "With All Your Heart", p57

XVI.In our search for our true identity . . . in our journey towards becoming who God made us to really be. . .the key identity question that remains for each of us is: who is sitting at the CEO's spot in the conference table of our heart.

A. The Bible's teach about the heart, teaches us that the decision for Christ is not just about what we think or comprehend up here. . . but rather it is the holistic inner-life.

1. Our minds know. . . what our emotions love. . . and what our will obeys. . . together these form either a regenerated heart in Christ. . . or a hard, calloused heart. .

B. So, the key question in determining our identity is who is sitting at the CEO's spot in the conference table of our heart.

1. You or Jesus?

a) Is Jesus who you know, who you love and who you obey. . . or have taken that spot up yourself.

C. The Christian life is life of becoming. . . becoming that person God uniquely made, divinely made and beautifully made us to be.

1. When we run the show. . . we are simply not capable of doing it. . . but when Jesus is at the helm, we, like the prodigal son, come back to our senses and run home to our fathers house.

2. Where are you today?

a) We either becoming more and more who God created us to be or less and less.

XVII.who is sitting at the CEO's spot in the conference table of our heart.

A. You or Jesus?

B. That is the fundamental question we must ask, in our journey to discover who God says we are.

pray