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BATTLES FOR THE MIND

By James Crabtree

Introduction

Wherever we turn, we encounter battles for the mind of one sort or another. The role of the Christian church in our country is in many respects a battle for the mind, as many influential and seductive voices seek to win our nation over to a creed which applauds the marginalisation of Christianity and pursues the dismissal or suppression of biblical truth and values in both the public and the private sphere.

Within the church too, battles for the mind are waged on numerous fronts and recent pronouncements from different quarters of the Anglican church have highlighted the current battle for the mind of the church in relation to the nature and purpose of marriage.

As individuals, we face a daily battle to safeguard our own minds as the world, the flesh and the Devil seek to entice us away from walking with Christ in humble dependence on Him alone.

Nearly 50 years ago, in his now famous work, *“The Christian Mind”*, Harry Blamires wrote as follows:

“There is no longer a Christian mind. It is commonplace that the mind of modern man has been secularized...Tragic as this fact is, it would not be so desperately tragic had the Christian mind held out against the secular drift. But unfortunately the Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian history...Everywhere one meets examples of the Church’s abdication of intellectual authority which lies at the back of the modern Christian’s easy descent into mental secularism.” (Harry Blamires, *“The Christian Mind”*, 1963).

In our fallen world, it is hardly surprising that this bleak, general diagnosis remains accurate today. We should, of course, always be thankful for genuine conversions and spiritual growth, ongoing gospel work, Bible teaching, reformed evangelical doctrine and persistent godly living (by way of example). However, it is all too easy to overlook or underestimate the disastrous consequences of the Fall on the human mind. Unregenerate mankind (whether ostensibly within, or outside, the visible church) retains a natural antipathy towards God, His Word and Christian things in general. In addition, although redeemed through God’s grace, Christian people continue in this life to be susceptible to a frailty of mind.

The mind is therefore the major battleground and the encroachments of the secularism Harry Blamires refers to have their roots in the Fall.

CAPTURED by the ENEMY

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden ?”

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked..." (Genesis 3:1-7)

These few, brief verses present us with the shocking simplicity of the Fall : a dangerous dialogue embodying an assault on the human mind and resulting in its swift capture, stolen from serving God, wrenched from obedience to His law and subjected to the evil purposes of a new, satanic master.

The sequence begins with the doubting of God's law ("*Has God indeed said.....?*"), a necessary prerequisite to the deception which follows ("*You will not surely die....your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*"). The success of the deception is seen in the delusion which results ("*...the woman saw that the tree was...desirable to make one wise*") and delusion is quickly succeeded by disobedience ("*...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband...and he ate*"). Having reached the point of disobedience, the sequence does not stop there; disgrace is inevitable : the realisation and certain knowledge of spiritual nakedness ("*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked..*") and in turn, judgment.

A dialogue with the Devil formed the battleground; doubt and deception were the weapons of this war on the human mind; delusion and disobedience the evidence of its success; and disgrace before God, the eventual, tragic outcome.

The ongoing consequences of this need exploring.

THE FUTILITY of the FALLEN MIND

We should have no illusions about the futility of the fallen mind. Our greatest risk is massively to underestimate the breadth and depth of this futility. Scripture provides us with an unvarnished portrayal of the disastrous consequences flowing from mankind's fall and sinful state and leaves us in no doubt about the immense gravity of the problem. The events of Genesis 3 inexorably lead to the verdict expressed in Romans 1 :

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."
(Romans 1: 18-23)

Again, the mind is central in this passage. The root problem is not man's ignorance of a God who fails to reveal Himself; rather, it is man's rejection of the one, true God who has indeed revealed Himself, together with a corresponding disregard for what has been revealed about Him and its implications ("*although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God*").

The refusal to give God the glory due to Him as God is seen by its fruit : a futility of thought, a darkening of foolish hearts, a false profession of wisdom, an inner appropriation of folly and the

worst bargain in history : exchanging the glory of an incorruptible God for images of corruptible man (and of other species). The deceitful promise of Genesis 3 (“*you will be like God, knowing good and evil*”) bears fruit in mankind’s rejection and dethronement of God, embracing evil, rather than good.

Tyndale’s translation of Romans 1 vividly captures the corrupting effect on the human mind of its repudiation of God :

“...when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but waxed full of vanities in their imaginations...”

Rejecting God inexorably leads to detachment from true reality and to minds filled with pride, self-aggrandisement and other vain imaginings, often sinfully distorting or damaging human relationships for selfish gain.

Charles Hodge summarised the consequences in the following way :

“The human intellect is as erring as the human heart. We can no more find truth than holiness, when estranged from God; even as we lose both light and heat, when we depart from the sun. Those, in every age, have sunk deepest into folly, who have relied most on their own understandings” (Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*).

The corruption of the human mind, its vain imaginings and the errors of the intellect, unenlightened by God’s Word, all evidence what in one sense can be described as the “negative success” of the Fall. Successfully captured by the enemy, the human mind is set on a course which leads to futility, folly and spiritual failure. Unsurprisingly, therefore, when later writing on the post-Christian mind, Harry Blamires observed :

“The post-Christian mental world is not a world of structures but a world of fluidity. For all that can issue from the mind bereft of divine affiliation is passing opinion, transient feeling, today’s or tomorrow’s capricious preference. The universal language of reason and morality gives place to a wholly relativistic vocabulary of emotive predilections. The standard articulation of moral judgements in terms of virtues and vices gives place to a strange amalgam of subjectivist concepts such as self-esteem and self-realization.” (Harry Blamires, *“The post-Christian Mind”*, 1999).

Nevertheless, the Christian can rejoice that the once captured, futile mind has become the rescued and restored mind.

THE MIND RESCUED and RESTORED

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...”

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more.” (Hebrews 8:10-12)

The Christian is the direct beneficiary of these remarkable promises. The once rejected law of God is placed into the minds of those whose sins are no longer counted against them; it is written on their hearts.

John Owen wrote :

“The mind is the most secret, inward part or power of the soul....it is the only safe and useful

repository of the laws of God. When they are there laid up, we shall not lose them; neither men nor devils can take them from us....the first real effect of the internal promised grace of the covenant is on the mind, the most spiritual and inward part of the soul.” (John Owen, “Exposition of Hebrews”).

This is the immeasurable privilege of God’s people : minds rescued from futility and vanity and placed under God’s merciful and restorative influence, through the work of His Word. Our frail minds often overlook this. We should, however, be deeply thankful for God’s gracious renewing of our minds. There are also implications, of course, for true Christian unity.

THE GOSPEL NEED for SINGLEMINDED UNITY

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ....standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents...” (Philippians 1: 27-28)

The battle for the mind within the church, indeed, the battle for the mind of the church, is a furious one, evidenced extensively by past and contemporary conflicts over doctrinal and moral issues. The current battle for the church’s mind in relation to the true nature of marriage and issues of human sexuality, is but one set of conflicts originating from a broader and more fundamental war over the authority of Scripture. Warfare in which God’s law is doubted, disobeyed and discarded by many, continues unabated.

Paul’s exhortation to the Philippian church to be of “*one mind*” presupposed that a singleminded unity of purpose was under threat and needed to be safeguarded. However, Paul’s call to be of “*one mind*” does not involve any endorsement of major doctrinal compromise. At the centre of his thinking is “*the faith of the gospel*”, the true content of which has been delivered through divine revelation and is unalterable. It follows that if the church is of “*one mind*” about the nature and content of the gospel, it then has a true basis for godly living (“*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*”), perseverance (“*standing firm in one spirit*”), gospel focussed unity of purpose (“*with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*”) and a courageous defence of Christian truth and living (“*not frightened in anything by your opponents*”).

We should pray for the work of the gospel across our nation, for the rescue of those whose minds have been captured and enslaved for the service of godless ends, for the renewal of the Christian mind within the church and for a church which is truly of “*one mind*” about the gospel and its implications. Church Society stands for these things and so please pray for our ongoing work, in humble dependence on the Lord, for God’s glory and the good of our nation.

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