

# OpenTheo

## The Mind - Part 2

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott shows us how we need to use our minds in order to worship God. He also shows us that using our mind is necessary when we place our faith in Him for salvation and encourages us to repent of 'anti-intellectualism' in our Christian life.

### **Transcript**

[Music] Anti-intellectualism is an insult to God who has made us rational. It is an impoverishment of our own lives. And in addition, it weakens our Christian testimony.

The true and the proper use of our minds in submission, description, and dependence on the spirit of truth. Glorifies God in riches arts and strengthens our witness in the world.

[Music] Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stott.

During his lifetime he impacted the evangelical church on every continent, but for all his global influence. He had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a gallerge of a rectory in London. Indeed, the rectory of all souls laying in place which was his home church for almost 60 years.

We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching.

[Music] Last week John Stottt brought us the first part of a message where we learned that what we believe and how we behave must be the same. It's what John calls being an integrated Christian involving our mind, our will, our emotions, and our conscience.

Last week we looked at the mind in which John introduced us to the topic of worship which he continues today by asking this question. I wonder how you would define worship. The best definition in the Bible that I know is in Psalm 105 verse 3. It goes like this, that to worship is to glory in God's holy name.

To glory in his holy name. To revel in the unique being that he has revealed himself to

be, but you cannot revel in God. If you don't know the kind of God he is and don't meditate upon the greatness and the glory of the God that we are to worship.

Sir, we need to descend from that worshiper who said he complained to the preacher about having been made to think in the sermon. He said, "When I go to a worship service, I feel like unscrewing my head and putting it under the seat. Because he said in a worship service, I have no use for anything above my collar button.

In other words, all he wanted when he came to worship was a gooey feeling in the pit of his stomach. He didn't want to be made to think in order to glorify God with his mind. Not only misunderstand me, to be sure immersion is involved in worship.

And sometimes in public or private worship, we are transported out of ourselves and beyond ourselves in the contemplation of the glory and the beauty of God. But even then our minds are active. All worship that is pleasing to God is worship in which we love the Lord our God with all our being.

Our mind and heart and soul and strength. So you must use your mind in worship. Otherwise our worship is not pleasing to God.

My next example is faith. It's extraordinary how many people imagine that faith and the mind or reason are incompatible with one another. Do you know that they are never set over against one another in scripture? Never.

Faith and sight are set over against each other. We walk by faith, not by sight, but not faith and reason on the contrary. So what is faith? Faith is not a synonym for credulity.

Faith is not a synonym for superstition. Faith is not an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable. As Rachel Menken, the American journalist between the wars, once defined it, "No faith is a reasoning trust." That is very clear from the Bible.

You think of Psalm 9 verse 10. Those who know your name put their trust in you. And they trust because they know that your name is trustworthy.

But without that knowledge of God and of the character of God and the covenant of God and the promises of God, faith is impossible. Faith is a reasoning trust and the more we meditate upon God, the more reasonable our faith becomes. There is no body that it is more reasonable to trust than God because he is absolutely trust worthy.

So if you want to grow in faith, you've got to use your mind in meditating upon the God you are invited to put your trust in. And my third example is guidance. There are too many Christian people who think that divine guidance is a convenient alternative to human thought.

They imagine that divine guidance is a device, a rather convenient device for saving us

the bother of thinking. So they expect God to flash answers to their questions onto the screen of their mind. Or they expect him to flash solutions to their problems without their needing to think about it.

Now I don't doubt of course that God is free and sovereign and sometimes condescends to our weakness and sometimes guides in irrational ways. But God's normal guidance, I have no hesitation in affirming from Scripture, is through the mental processes that he has established. One of the main biblical warrants for this is another Psalm, Psalm 32 verses 8 and 9. Psalm 32 of verses 8 is a marvelous promise of divine guidance, three times repeated.

I will instruct you the way you shall go, I will teach you, and I will guide you with my eye upon you. I will instruct you, I will teach you, I will guide you, three times he promises to guide us. But then in the beautiful balance of the Bible he goes on with the warning of verse 9, "Don't spill like a horse or mule that has no understanding whose mouth needs to be held with bitter bridle, or it will not stand near you." In other words, putting those two verses together, I will guide you.

I promise that I will guide you. But don't expect me to guide you as you guide horses and mules for the simple reason that you're not a horse or a mule. They lack understanding in their rudimentary brain.

But you have understanding, you've been created in the image of God. So although you have to pray and to surrender and search the scriptures and look to the Holy Spirit and so on, ultimately you have to make up your own mind by weighing up the present cons in every situation. And God will guide you through your mental processes.

So you see worship, faith and guidance are three spheres in which it is essential to you as our minds. And a proper use of the mind in these spheres enriches our Christian discipleship. Now thirdly, a proper use of the mind strengthens our evangelistic witness.

I believe that one of the major reasons why men and women often reject the gospel we present to them is not because they perceive it to be false, but because they perceive it to be trivial. And then I desire to simplify the gospel, which is a good desire of course, but then I desire to simplify the gospel, we sometimes trivialize it instead. Then it doesn't appear to be adequate for the complex modern world in which men and women are called to live out their Christian discipleship today.

The apostles of Jesus Christ did not make that mistake. The apostles who are our examples are exemplars in evangelism. The apostles were not afraid to use their minds in developing arguments for the truth of the gospel.

On the contrary, Paul defined his evangelistic ministry in 2 Corinthians 5, 11 in the words, "We persuade people." Now you cannot persuade people if you don't employ

arguments. You are persuading people with arguments in order to convince them of the truth. Now don't misunderstand me.

I'm not setting that over against his trust in the Holy Spirit. We know that the apostle Paul put his trust in the Holy Spirit, but listen carefully. The Holy Spirit in whom Paul trusted is the Spirit of truth.

And what the Holy Spirit does when he brings us to Jesus Christ is not to bring us to Christ in spite of the evidence. But to bring us to Christ, because of the evidence when he opens our minds to attend to it. I wonder if you and I who seek to be evangelists today or witnesses and bring people to Christ, I wonder if we could echo what Paul said to Thestis.

He said to him, "What I am saying to you, most excellent Thestis is true and reasonable." And the reason we want people to believe the gospel and accept it is because it is true. We need to demonstrate its truth and its reasonableness. So, before I conclude for another few minutes, let me exhort you, Thestis and brothers, with myself.

Let us repent of any residual anti-intellectualism of which we may be guilty, and which is a positive scourge in the Church of Jesus Christ today. Let us repent of the cult of mindlessness. Let us repent of our intellectual laziness, that we don't study the Bible as we do.

We don't read Christian books as we should. We don't think about the problems that perplex us, and join a study group or a fellowship group in order to study the Bible together. Let's repent of those things.

I tell you that anti-intellectualism is a negative, cramping, damaging and destructive thing. Anti-intellectualism is an insult to God, who is made as rational. It is an impoverishment of our own lives, and in addition, it weakens our Christian testimony.

But as a true and a proper use of our minds, in submission to Scripture, in dependence on the Spirit of Truth, glorifies God, enriches us, and strengthens our witness in the world. Now, because I think I may guess what some of you are thinking, I don't know, I can't read your minds, but if I were in your position and were listening to this sermon, these are the questions that I would have, I want to anticipate a couple of objections you may have and seek to disarm your criticisms. One, some of you may be saying, "But doesn't this emphasis on the mind restrict Christianity to a small minority, an intellectual elite of graduates of the universities of Cambridge and lesser universities than them?" [laughter] Does not this emphasis on the mind disenfranchise the great majority of Christian men and women, who have never been to secondary school, let alone to university, well, no, emphatically, it does not.

To be sure, formal education in school and university is valuable, and Christians have

always been in the forefront of campaigns for literacy, improving standards of education, and making formal education increasingly available to the great majority of mankind. But it is not necessary to go to school in order to learn how to think. All human beings are rational, made in the image of God whether they've been to school or not.

I remember very well, I was talking to a group of clergy in Liverpool three or four years ago, and during my address I'd said something somewhat similar to what I've said to you today about the importance of thinking. Using our God-given minds, and as soon as I'd finished, one clergyman got up and objected. He said, "You are limiting Christianity to intellectuals and university graduates, whereas I, he says, am working among the industrial masses and the working classes and what you say is irrelevant to them." I did not need to answer him, because immediately three others were on their feet flushed with anger.

And they said to this brother who'd objected to what I'd said, they said to him, "You are insulting the working classes, among whom we also work." They said, "They may not have had much formal education, but they're just as intelligent as you are." They said, and they're just as able to think. But that is true. They are.

Every human being has a mind and is able to think and know that causes have effects and effects have causes and so on. You should hear them arguing with one another. So I am not limiting Christianity to those who've had a university education, but saying that all human beings ought to use their God-given minds.

Secondly, somebody says, "Is not this emphasis on the mind making Christianity too sorrow-brought?" Or for the sake of American friends who pronounce it differently, "Sere-brought." Am I not forgetting that human beings have emotions as well as minds? No, I rarely am not. And in urging us to use our minds, I am not urging you to suppress our emotions. Indeed, that is my subject next Sunday morning, when I move from the mind to the emotions, and we'll attempt to talk about the relations of the one to the other.

But meanwhile, I will anticipate for just a moment or two what I'm going to say. At the London Institute, I'm not infrequently say to the students that we at the Institute are not in the business of reading tadpoles. You know what a tadpole is, don't you? It's a creature with a huge head and nothing much else besides.

And there are lots of Christian tadpoles swimming around in the ocean of the church. Their minds are bulging with biblical theology, but there isn't very much else to them. They're all brain and theology.

Heaven deliver us from Christian tadpoles. I'm not urging that at all. And at the London Institute, and here it all sells, we're anxious to develop integrated Christian men and women who have a Christian mind and a Christian heart and a Christian spirit and a Christian conscience and a Christian will so that every part of their humanness is

integrated under the lordship of Jesus.

So I finish with just an illustration. Some of you I hope have either seen the movie or read the book by that well-known contemporary Jewish writer, Heim Potok, which is called *The Chosen*. Let me tell you briefly about it.

It's a story about two Jewish youths in Brooklyn, New York, during and after World War II, Danny Saunders, whose father was a strict Hasidic rabbi, and Reuben Malta, whose father was a writer in the liberal Jewish tradition. And these two Jewish traditions came into collision in the friendship that developed between the two young men. Now the rabbi, Rabbi Saunders, was trapped in his own religious traditions.

And we are astonished at the beginning of the book and the beginning of the film that he never talks to his son, Danny, unless he is teaching him out of the Talmud. And apart from their teaching sessions, he maintains with his son a weird and ugly silence. And yet the rabbi seems a very human being, so how on earth does he impose this silence between himself and his boy? Well, not till the end of the book and the film is the mystery explained.

Rabbi Saunders says that God had blessed him in Danny with a brilliant son, a boy he says with a mind like a jewel. When Danny was only four years old, his father watched him reading a book and with frightened. Because he said he didn't read it, he swallowed it.

Well, you'd think he'd be proud of having a four-year-old boy who could swallow books. But the problem is that the book was about the sufferings of a poor Jew. Danny enjoyed the book and had no feelings.

And his father said there was no soul in my Daniel. There was only his mind. He was a mind and a body without his soul.

So the rabbi cried to God, what have you done to me? A mind? A need like this for a son? A heart? A need for a son? A soul? A need for a son? Compassion, mercy, strength to suffer and carry pain that I want from my son. Not a mind without a soul. So the rabbi followed an ancient Hasidic tradition and brought the boy up in silence.

In order, he said, in the silence between us, he began to hear the world crying. And in the film's touching scene of reconciliation between the father and the son, the rabbi says that Danny had to learn through the wisdom and the pain of silence. That a mind without a heart is nothing.

So God give us a Christian mind, but God also give us a Christian heart. We'll spend a moment in silence and bring our God-given minds to their Creator. Let us thank God that he's made us rational, given us the capacity to understand the revelation of himself that he has given us in the universe and in the Bible.

And let us pray that he will give us grace to use our minds more effectively, more diligently, in his service. Let us pray. We ask your forgiveness, our Heavenly Father, for times we have neglected our minds, been intellectually lazy, not studied your word or read books as we should and could.

We need your forgiveness. And we ask that you will help us to remember that the rationality that you have given us is part of the divine image in which you have made us. Help us to use it in submission to your word and dependence on your spirit.

In the fellowship of your church, we may grow in grace and in our understanding of you and of your purposes for us. Here are our prayers, Heavenly Father, for the glory of your great and worthy name. Amen.

You've been listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on the Mind, which is part of a series that shows us what it means to be an integrated Christian, where what we believe and how we behave must be the same. Next week we'll hear another message from this fascinating series on our conscience. Each week we highlight a book that ties in with our message and the title of today's recommendation is "Your Mind Matters." It's one of over 50 books by John Stott and you can find more details on our website, at [www.tremiacrestonradio.com/JohnStott](http://www.tremiacrestonradio.com/JohnStott). The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide past a training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this at other ministries, John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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