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Bodybuilders - A Twisted Mind

Proverbs about the Mind

Philippians 2 v 1-5

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2 v 1-5]

Introduction

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he asked them to do one thing to complete his joy. He wanted them to have the same mind. As a church he wanted to see them working together in unity. And this was a command to them. Does that mean there is something we can do to train our mind? To change it from the way it is to the way we want it?

Dr Ryuta Kawashima thought so. He is a Japanese neuroscientist. Not the sort of profession that would normally make you famous, but in 2005 I and around 19 million other people had heard of him, as Nintendo released Dr Kawashima's Brain Training for the Nintendo DS. The game tested you with logic puzzles and gave you a "brain age" evaluation, suggesting that you could exercise your brain and keep it young by training with the game every day. I used to play it on the bus to work every morning.

Did it work?

The Guardian quoted a group of experts, saying there was "no scientific evidence to support a range of manufacturers' claims that the gadgets can help improve memory or stave off the risk of illnesses such as dementia."

Well it might not make our brains younger, but we can train our minds to be better at all sorts of things. So in our final Bodybuilders sermon we're going to do some brain training, and look at what Proverbs tells us about the mind.

A Twisted Mind

A man is commended according to his good sense, but one of twisted mind is despised. [Proverbs 12 v 8]

What does the first verse tell us? Well there are two different states our minds can show: a good sense and a twisted mind. Generally the first of these is admired and approved, while anyone with a twisted mind is likely to be mocked, or even, as the verse says, despised.

So what is a twisted mind? It's a graphic description, isn't it. It makes me think of a straight rod that has been bent out of shape. This is a sight I regularly see when I'm trying to hammer

nails into a piece of wood. Inevitably I will hit one nail off-centre and it will get bent to one side. And you know the problem with a bent nail? It is much harder to hammer it straight again than it is to make it more bent. I think that's true of the mind as well. Once we let our minds warp from the truth in one area, it becomes much easier to accept further deceptions than to try to correct ourselves back to proper alignment. I'm sure you've seen this in action. Someone who tells us a crazy theory that they have, will inevitably follow it up with half a dozen more.

And if a twisted mind was despised back in Solomon's day, imagine how much more it is nowadays. It used to be that if you said something stupid you family would laugh at you. And maybe a few friends. But say something stupid now and you can be laughed at from the other side of the world. So we need to be careful what we say, that it isn't foolishness.

But what of the gospel? Isn't it foolish to those who don't believe it? Paul agrees:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [1 Corinthians 1 v 18]

The gospel is strange! It's not like any of the other major religions. The common idea in most religion is that people will be weighed in the balance, judged against some sort of standard. Those who have achieved the standard will be rewarded and those who fail will be punished. The Bible agrees: God has a standard. However the standard is so high that not a single one of us can even hope to attain it. In fact only one person in the whole of history has been good enough to get a pass. And he was God made flesh. But rather than take his rightful place in heaven and watch us all fail, he sacrificed himself for our sake, so that every one of us could have the chance to share in his righteousness. And it's not the best section of humanity that benefits: it's anyone, even the absolute worst of us. All who repent of their sin and accept the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ are saved. No wonder it seems foolishness to many.

If we are going to preach the gospel and live the gospel, then people will find us foolish. They may laugh at us. They may mock us. They may even despise us. So we must be prepared for that. But let it not be that we are mocked for just bad thinking. This doesn't just bring us no blessing: it damages our witness.

So we have two questions:

1. How do we prevent a twisted mind?
2. How do we fix a twisted mind?

Let's see what else Proverbs can tell us…

A Directed Mind

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. [Proverbs 28 v 26]

How do we prevent a twisted mind? By not trusting our own minds. By walking in the wisdom of the Word of God. Remember as we worked our way through 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul warned Timothy about those who had swerved from the truth? He mentions it a few

times in 1 Timothy, and he names Hymenaeus and Philetus in his second letter, as examples of those who have swerved. And what is Paul's advice to Timothy? To be guided by the lane markings of the scriptures, of the things Paul had taught him, and the example of how he had seen Paul living out his faith.

How do we find this wisdom that we should walk in? Read our Bibles. The Bible is very clear about God's way of living. Also, listen to our preachers. Their teaching should be solid and true. Test it against the Word of God. If you find contradictions then one of them must be wrong. And it's not going to be the Bible. Observe your leaders walk. Is it in agreement with the Word? Then follow in that way.

Sometimes we look at advice in the Bible and we think "that's for young Christians. Us mature Christians know better by now." But I think that this verse is particularly apt for those who are longer-term Christians. It's tempting to think we have properly grasped God's will, and we don't need to check back with his Word. But self-confidence is a dangerous thing, and the proverb warns us, *whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool*. The lane markings on the road are not just for the learners, they're to keep us all in line. And the scriptures are there to guide the newest and the oldest Christian.

A Supported Mind

OK, so what do we do to fix a twisted mind? Another verse in Proverbs gives us some help:

> *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. [Proverbs 19 v 21]*

We have some plants in the garden that grow fast, but they spread out in all directions, and tend to flop down under their own weight. Maybe if you're a gardener you'll know the right thing to do to make them grow up nice and straight. Of course, it's to support them with a stake. Tied to the stake, the plant will be supported and will be trained to grow straight.

We can be like those shrubs: heading off in all directions and not really able to support the weight of our own ambitions. But the purpose of the Lord will stand. If we can be tied to that purpose he can help us to stand also, and train us to reach upwards.

But if we head to the new testament we find an even better picture. Not only does God offer us support and guidance as we grow, but he gives us life itself, as he grafts us into his son. Grafting is the method by which a farmer embeds a young branch into the strong trunk of a plant, binding them together so that they grow into a single plant. The branch produces fruit, but all the nutrients come from the trunk. In John 15 Jesus paints a lovely picture of this process:

> *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If*

anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. [John 15 v 1-8]

Summary

What have we learned? That a twisted mind is something despised by men, and once it's been bent from the straight it is easier to bend further than straighten. But Proverbs has some help: it reminds us that we shouldn't trust in our own minds, but need the guidance of God's Word to keep us on the straight path, and when our many plans would take us here, there and everywhere, then abiding in Christ, being grafted into his very life, supports us and trains us in God's plans.

So let us have this mind among us, which is ours in Christ Jesus. And we will surely flourish.