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Philippians 2:1-11
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MIND OVER MATTER

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in
Christ Jesus."

--Philippians 2:5

Were you to refer to the unabridged dictionary for a definition of the word "mind" you would discover that it merits one complete column in that massive volume. It usually happens that the longer it takes to define a word, the more undefinable the word is. In the case of the word "mind", that is certainly the situation. Webster offers thirteen distinct meanings for the word.

What is mind? As we use it this morning we are not equating mind with brain. Rather we are using mind as meaning the center of being; that which feels, wills, thinks, perceives. In a sense we are equating it with the soul of man, but I hesitate to use a theological term with which some people will immediately associate spirits and ghosts. The mind is not an ethereal or ghostly thing in any sense of the word, for it is the most basic part of a man. The mind of a man is that which really makes him a man; it is his essential self.

It is our thesis this morning, therefore, that you and I ought to feed, to train and to discipline our mind so that it may rule our body, our instincts and passions. There are too many people who let their animal passions rule their body and mind to the detriment of their eternal well being and that of society.

II

The mind is a powerful instrument. Mary Baker Eddy founded a religion on the concept that mind is the Ultimate Reality that can and should have dominion over all that is. There is much to be said for that point of view. The misuse of the mind on the other hand can, and often has, destroyed men.

In a book entitled Man's Presumptuous Brain, a well-trained European scientist points out how the mind can dominate our entire being. The animals have no forebrain such as you and I possess. They have at the top of the spinal column a bundle of nerve cells called the diencephalon. Man still possesses that basic animal brain, the diencephalon. In addition, however, he has developed the forebrain or scanner. The diencephalon is that part of the animal brain which receives and interprets basic emotional impulses such as fear, rage, sexual desires, etc., etc. The animal, having no forebrain, has a very limited number of choices. If the diencephalon tells him he faces danger, he can fight or run. Man, because of his more intricate brain structure, has a larger number of choices, and it is in the making of those choices that he runs into difficulty. If he faces danger, he can like the animal, fight or run. But the forebrain will suddenly whisper to him, "If you run, people may call you a coward." This sets up

conflicts in the mind which can eventually and literally burn out the brain. The brain becomes a victim of its own genius. Dr. Simeons, who authored the book I refer to, attributes many digestive and respiratory diseases to these conflicts set up in the mind of man because he has developed a brain with much more capacity than his mind knows how to use.

Is it not then imperative that we develop and train the mind so that it may master the body and brain, rather than let the body and its desires misuse and abuse the mind until it finally destroys the body and brain?

III

Now I began giving all of this some serious reconsideration a few weeks ago, when, in the early hours of the morning I suddenly developed insomnia. This is not an ordinary occurrence for me, and so perhaps I thought about it more deeply than I might otherwise.

In this case my brain had become my master, and it kept forcing thoughts onto my attention which I really did not want to consider. But the harder I tried, the more difficult it was to sweep them out of my mind and return to sleep. Ordinarily it might have been wiser for me to just forget about the whole thing, get up and mow the lawn. But five o'clock is a bit early for that, so I lay there asking myself, "Why is it that I cannot control and manage my own thoughts?"

What troubled me much more than not being able to sleep was not being able to discipline myself. I was letting my thoughts control me, and I, with the power of my mind, should have been controlling my thoughts. I knew it could be done because I knew there were men who, through the power of mind, could control their sensitivity to pain, could meditate perfectly for hours without distraction, could not be brain-washed by whatever subtle techniques. It could be done; why could I not do it?

Well, the answer of course is lack of discipline and lack of the right kind of training. All of which springs, I am sure, from lack of desire. When we want to do something badly enough we find a way to do it. If the most important thing in our life is to find God we will find Him. If the most important thing in our life is to make money, we usually make it. This, then, is the key: What do you want the most, and what price are you willing to pay?

IV

In the field of biological evolution, which is pretty generally accepted today, we know that progress was not the result of haphazard or accidental choices, but intentional ones. In the same fashion, our mental and spiritual evolution must be conscious and intentional. No man ever became a saint accidentally. No person ever developed a great skill or ability without discipline. To be sure, the world, through the grace of God, is occasionally granted a genius. But even the

talents of a genius are wasted if they are not directed and channeled. We are aware of many highly talented men and women who began with great promise, but who gradually disappeared from view with the great promise unfulfilled.

Whether we have great or small promise, outstanding or mediocre ability, whether we are geniuses or run-of-the-mill, what we have is not nearly as significant as what we do with what we have.

The world today is filled with highly trained, technically well-informed, men and women who have no real purpose or goal. They are a quite different breed from our astronauts, who are perhaps our most highly trained people. They know exactly what they are training for--they are training to go to and live on the moon. But most of us don't know what we are trained for.

We read much today about young college graduates not being attracted to careers in business. It is because they have not been made to see, by business itself, that there are some greater goals in the business world than gold fixtures in the wash room and an executive salary. Our young people, thank God, are becoming interested in more than personal profit, as they consider the confused condition of the world in which they live and the contribution which they would like to make. If business wants to attract these young men and women, it has to find better motivation than it has found to date.

I think of that young man who was a successful soda pop salesman, and whose clergyman wanted him to enter the ministry. He challenged him one day by saying, "Paul, some day you are going to die. When you get to heaven you will find yourself in the company of some mighty fine people--great statesmen, great benefactors of the human race, saints, apostles, martyrs, and all the rest. How are you going to feel when you are asked what you did with your talents and abilities, and are going to have to say, 'I sold red soda pop'?" That challenge was enough to send that young man on to a great ministry. It happens to be a true story.

V

Now it is that inner life of each one of us which is so precious in the sight of God. Most of you don't need to be convinced of that; you already know it. What you need is enough of a challenge to do something about training your mind for the destiny God intended it to have. There's nothing wrong with selling soda pop, but there is something tragically wrong with failing to use the talents and abilities God has given you.

William Lyon Phelps tells of a conversation he had with the Irish dramatist, John Ervine, who had lost a leg in the war. Dr. Phelps asked him which he would prefer, two sound and healthy legs again and not be able to write novels and plays, or be as he was with only one leg but an accomplished man of letters. There was no hesitation. He replied that he would far rather be a one-legged writer than a two-legged something else. "And yet," he murmured thoughtfully, "I do miss that leg."

You see, a man's ultimate satisfaction and happiness is not centered in his leg but in his mind. What you put into your mind, how you train your mind, will ultimately determine your life's contribution and your own sense of well being.

One of the most difficult passages in the New Testament deals with this very thing. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tells his listeners, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

What is he saying? Not that we should mutilate ourselves because we are sinners. No, not at all. He is saying that mind and spirit, that part of you which is made in the image of Almighty God is so important and so central in the sight of God that nothing else can compare with it. Better to be without an arm, without an eye, than to misuse or destroy that most precious gift of God which he gave to man alone.

Your mind is the dwelling place of God. How do you care for it? What do you put into it? How do you use it? Do you have that mind in you that was also in Jesus Christ? It gave to him his power, his courage, his victory over all man's sin and evil.

There is one other passage in the New Testament to which I would call your attention. It is in the story of Jesus curing the demoniac who had been isolated on an island and put in chains. All were afraid of him as well they might have been, until one day he met Jesus. Mark tells of the people approaching Jesus and seeing the former demoniac "sitting with him, clothed and in his right mind."

Some of us are tempted these days to consider the world in which we live as one vast insane asylum. It will never be anything much better until you and I and all men of good will everywhere "have that mind in (us) which was also in Jesus Christ".