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CHRIST'S MIND AND ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

by Gary North

The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Good judgment. What would a wise man pay to buy good judgment? If we could know just what we ought to do in every situation, what a blessing it would be.

In his letter ("epistle") to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul criticized them for not showing good judgment. They were not willing to punish an evil man in the church who was committing a terrible sin (chapter 5). So Paul wrote this letter to encourage them to exercise better judgment.

He told them that all Christians have "the mind of Christ." Yes, even the spiritually weak Corinthians did. But they were not exercising good judgment. So he told them in chapter three that God will judge all men's works, and He will reward men in terms of that they have accomplished with their lives on earth (verses 10-15). In other words, **God is the heavenly judge.** We do not understand God if we fail to see that He is a judge.

But we have the mind of Christ. That makes Christians judges of earthly things. In fact, Paul wrote, we are going to be judges of spiritual beings, the angels. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge the angels? How much more the things of this life!" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

Paul warned them that they were responsible before God to render Godly judgment. What is Godly judgment? It's the same kind of judgment that Jesus Christ rendered when He walked on earth. So Paul told the Corinthians that they possessed the mind of Christ. They had the ability to render Godly judgment.

"The Mind of Christ"

The Bible speaks about the mind of Christ in several places. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul proclaimed **the riches of God's wisdom.** He made a testimony, what we sometimes call a confession—a confession of faith. Read Paul's words, and don't forget that we have been given the mind of Christ—the same sort of wisdom!

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?"

"Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:33-36).

Well, who has known the mind of the Lord? Jesus Christ, who is the incarnation of God in human form. He is both God and man, meaning **a perfect man.** When people become Christians by having faith in His work on the cross—the only source of salvation for sinful man—they are made new creatures, the Bible says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When men are redeemed ("bought back") by the grace of God, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), they are changed. God **declares** them the possessors of the righteousness of Christ. Instead of looking at our sins, God looks at the perfect work of Jesus Christ, the perfect man, and He announces, in effect, "The righteousness of my Son Jesus Christ is now imparted to this formerly worthless sinner. He is now my adopted son." God changes us. In what way? He changes us **ethically.** He lets us see what is right or wrong **from God's perspective.** This is what is meant by receiving the mind of Christ.

Paul warned members of the church at Rome: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). We can now test God's will for ourselves, not as evil people who hate God and hate His will, but as saved people who have been granted eternal life.

Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). The final word of this verse can be translated "sound mind," or "self-discipline," or even "sober judgment." This is God's gift to us when He saves us.

Self-discipline is what God expects from all people. They are judged by Him in terms of their self-discipline, or lack of it. But we have to ask ourselves: Self-discipline in terms of **what?** Our own ideas? The ideas of some politician? The ideas of our next door neighbor? By the ideals and ethics of J. R. Ewing, the self-disciplined character on the television series, "Dallas"? Self-discipline means controlling ourselves in terms of a standard of right and wrong. **Whose standard?** We are required to make judgments, but **by what standard?**

The Bible is clear: we judge ourselves—our thoughts,

words, and deeds—by God's standards. But we are back to the same old problem: Who has known the mind of God? The answer: Jesus Christ. **And we have been given the mind of Christ.**

To possess the mind of Christ doesn't mean that we get a new set of brains. It doesn't mean that we all become geniuses one afternoon, ten seconds after we profess faith and allegiance to Christ, the King. It means that our minds are **regenerated**, and that our thoughts are now able to receive the ideas and ideals of God's Holy Spirit. Paul wrote: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Then he told them that they had been given the mind of Christ (verse 16). We **can** receive things of the Spirit.

We aren't talking about **brains**; we're talking about **wisdom**. We aren't talking about passing exams in school with higher grades; we're talking about **exercising Godly judgment in terms of God's holy word**. We aren't talking about the wisdom of the world. Paul asked: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20).

Because the "wise men" of this age don't trust God or His holy word, the Bible, they are unable to exercise consistently Godly judgment. They are not interested in bringing the whole world under the reign of Christ, in terms of the commandments of God, as required by the Bible. In other words, **they don't have the mind of Christ.**

Now I have to ask myself: "What is my responsibility as a Christian? I possess the mind of Christ. Because of the work of God's Holy Spirit, who is God Himself, I am now able to respect God's law and God's standards of right and wrong. How am I supposed to exercise good judgment, meaning the kind of judgment Jesus would render if He were in my shoes? How am I supposed to be a faithful servant of my Lord, Jesus Christ? How am I supposed to **think God's thoughts after Him**, as a creature made in God's image, and as a redeemed person, adopted into God's family, and the recipient of the mind of Christ?"

We are required to "think God's thoughts after Him." We are not God, and we can never become God, but we can do our best to conform our thoughts and deeds to God's standards. Problem: God controls everything. Does He have **standards of performance** for Christians in **every area of life**? How can we begin to use "the mind of Christ" that God has given to us through the Holy Spirit and through His word, the Bible?

Does God control the world? Yes, He created it and He controls it. Then we have to ask these questions: Does God have a **total view** of the world? Does God have a **plan** for the whole world? Does God **understand** the whole world? Does God, in short, have a comprehensive ("complete, integrated") world and life view? Of course! He created everything. Therefore, if we have the mind of Christ, shouldn't we also possess a creaturely version of God's comprehensive view, because we are adopted—ethically transformed—children of God?

A Biblical World and Life View

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth concerning the day of judgment, when God will render perfect, total judgment of all things, past and present:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom of God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until

God has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Paul painted a picture of **the total victory of Jesus Christ**. Jesus will reign until **all** His enemies are defeated. Why did Paul believe this? Because Satan and his forces were totally defeated in principle by Christ's death on the cross. The Christian's spiritual and cultural battle against sin and evil forces goes on, but his eternal destiny is already settled. Christ's total victory in the future is assured because Satan's total defeat in the past is over.

Christ announced to His disciples (those under His **discipline**) just after His resurrection from the dead: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20).

These are **strong words**. We do not see Him today, but we know that He has already been given great power. He was victorious over death. This is why Paul could tell the Corinthians that some day death will no longer reign over redeemed mankind. Christ defeated death; as His followers, we also shall be resurrected from the dead, and death will then no longer threaten us. This is the promise of eternal life.

There is no doubt that this is a wonderful promise to those people who trust in Christ for their salvation. Christians have faith that God's wrath against sin was fully drained when He sent His Son to the cross at Calvary to die. They know that the Bible tells them that they have gained for themselves a wrath-free life by trusting in Christ's lordship over them (John 3:36). Christians can therefore work and play in confidence about their eternal future. Calvary settled this eternally.

But what about their earthly future? Can Christians be equally confident? We know that Jesus Christ was victorious over death. He rose from the dead to prove this victory. If we believe in Him as our Savior and as our Lord, we can have a true, valid hope in our own resurrection from the dead. But what about now? Are we protected from wrath?

We are not fully protected from Satan's wrath and the wrath of Satan's followers. Evil men can still bring us earthly grief. Faith in God is not some sort of insurance policy against pain. Faith in Christ is not a drug. It's a way of life that is based on Christ's life and His conquest over death. It's a way of life resting in eternal life, but it's not a pain-free way of life. It's a life which is removed from God's wrath, not Satan's.

Christ told us, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). But He also promised: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). We are to work, but work in faith that our victory over evil and death is sure.

What Did Christ Mean, "All Power"?

Christ said all power had been delivered to Him. This has already taken place. Paul said Christ will defeat all His enemies. That takes place in the future. Question: What comes historically in between Calvary and the final judgment?

What we see today is the defeat of Christ's enemies. When God raised up the church, and sent His disciples out

of Palestine in the days of Nero and the other Roman Emperors. He began a program of **international conquest**. Before Calvary, Satan was in control the whole earth, except for the tiny land of Israel. (Satan even controlled Israel some of the time.) Since Pentecost, the forces of Satan have been under attack all over the world.

A war is in progress. Christ called His people into spiritual battle. It's right against wrong. It's good against evil. It's light against darkness. It's truth against falsehood. This war will go on until Christ delivers up His kingdom to God the Father, at the day of final judgment.

Because Christ calls His people to get involved in a war against evil we probably want to ask ourselves: Where does this war take place?

That's the wrong way to look at the problem. We ought to ask ourselves: Where **doesn't** this war take place?

It takes place everywhere on earth. In churches, families, businesses, schools, hospitals, politics, police departments, and everywhere else. There is no person and no human institution which is not at least partially corrupted by sin (Romans 3:23). But doesn't the Bible teach that Christ will defeat all His enemies? Yes, it does. Does this mean that evil will be swept out of high places, low places, and all places in between? On the day of judgment, yes. But until then, nothing gets swept absolutely clean. Sin still has influence over us. John wrote in his first letter: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

The sweeping process is going on today. It isn't a perfect sweep, meaning a "clean sweep," but it is a steady sweep. The effects of sin are to be progressively removed from our lives by faith in Christ, by confession of sin, and by our willingness to keep His commandments. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Furthermore, "We can be sure we know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4). We can deal with sin.

Think about these words for a moment. Christ wants us to obey Him. He wants us to suppress sin in our lives. But does He really mean every single sin? In every aspect of our lives? Our thoughts? Our hopes? Our daily activities? Does He really mean everything that is sinful?

It's obvious, isn't it? Of course He means everything. Our words: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36). Our thoughts: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Our deeds: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). In other words, we harvest what we plant, we reap what we sow. So Paul wrote: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

Don't give up. It's a big job, but don't give up. How big a job is it? It involves every aspect of life, the Bible says: thoughts, words, and deeds. People are involved in a lot of activities. If everything we think, say, or do comes under the judgment of God, then there must be standards of righteousness for everything men do. In other words, God has a clear idea of what each of us should do, all day long.

What if I'm an artist? Does God have a plan for my life? Of course. But if He has a plan, doesn't this mean that He has expectations concerning my work—artistic expecta-

tions? Of course. Does this mean that the Bible speaks to the world of artistic standards? What else could it mean?

How about business? Does the Bible speak about what businessmen are required to do, or not do? It does, repeatedly.

"Wait a minute," you may be thinking. "This thing is getting out of hand. After all, there are a lot of jobs that people do for a living. Does the Bible really speak to the question of how we're all supposed to work? Does the Bible give me standards of performance in my work?" Yes, it does.

What about economics? Law? Government? Education? What about the family? Does the Bible speak about the standards of performance in these areas, too? Yes, it does.

Whatever men think, act, dream, work, and worry about, the Bible speaks about. If something can become a problem, then the Bible informs us about ways of solving that problem. Remember, God holds each man fully responsible. This means you, and it means me. We are all responsible for our acts. This means that there is something that God wants us to do or not to do. Therefore, we need God's answers to life's problems; so we must begin reading God's word, line by line, to discover exactly what God expects from us. God has spoken; men are required to listen. And when they have heard, they are required to act according to what they have heard from God's word.

Christ will subdue all His enemies. If someone doesn't want to be **subdued eternally** by the judgment of God, he must become **subdued ethically** by Christ before the day of final judgment. A man must exercise judgment beside Christ, judging the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3), or else he will stand beside fallen angels (demons, devils, evil spirits) to be judged with them. We either exercise Godly judgment in terms of Christ's commandments today, or we risk being condemned by Christ tomorrow, or whenever we die, for man "is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). We must use God's word to judge righteously, or else we will be judged righteously by God's word.

Mankind was created by God to subdue the earth. It's our responsibility. We call this God's dominion covenant (assignment):

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves upon the ground." (Genesis 1:28-29).

If we are to exercise dominion, we must rule in terms of God's word. We must conform ourselves to His commandments, in order to rule over the earth. We must become **subordinate to God**, in order to become **rulers over creation**. We must do what God requires, so that the creation will do what we require. If we are to "get our own way," then we had better "do it God's way." The Bible tells us what God's way is, in every area of life, in every area of mankind's personal responsibility.

Business and Economics

A person's occupation is also governed by the God-assigned task of dominion which is associated with the family. God gave Adam a job assignment before He gave him a wife.

God calls a man to serve Him. (We even call a person's job a "vocation," and people take "vocational" education courses. "Vocation" comes from the same root word as "vocal"—a call.) A man's job is one part of his service to God.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). This applies to business. When a man is restrained by the knowledge that He is serving God in his business, he becomes more diligent.

We tell our children, "honesty is the best policy." Why do we believe this? Because we believe in a world that is both moral and orderly, in which good policies produce good results, in which honest hard work eventually pays off. But this faith is truly a faith. Many cultures don't believe in such a moral universe. They believe in cheating, lying, and harming people—if not their neighbors, then at least people outside the local group. And what are the measurable results of such a system? Poverty, sickness, and economic backwardness.

There is a strong relationship between obedience to God's word and blessings, both internal and external. Take a look at the list of blessings in Deuteronomy 3-13. Wonderful! Healthy children, rich harvests, blessings day and night! "The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to" (Deuteronomy 28:8). Again, "The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity" (28:11). Why? To honor His own name and His law by giving us external evidence. "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord" (28:10). By honoring God, men bring blessings to every area of their culture. By honoring God's commandments in our lives and our businesses, we offer faithful testimony:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

God does not give us "burdensome" rules and regulations that produce failure and bankruptcy. How would this honor His own name? No, God has given us moral standards that are in harmony with the world He has made and which He presently sustains. We can trust in Him and the reliability of His word.

What handbook of business success principles is better than the Book of Proverbs? "The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate scales are his delight" (Proverbs 11:1). "The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward" (Proverbs 11:18). And on and on!

Jesus gave us the basic business principle: **prosperity through service**. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28). Men profit when they serve other men. If they serve customers better than other businessmen do, they earn profits. **The basis of business success is service to the market.** Men do not profit from "squeezing" other men, but from giving them the best opportunity available to them.

Western civilization was built on precepts like these. They work because God designed them to fit the world He created.

Who owns this world? God does. "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). Individual men hold their property as a **leasehold**. They control it for as long as they live, or as long as God honors the work of their hands. Men are **stewards** of God's resources.

The better a steward serves his master, the more he gains for his own household. As in the business world, this is a practical application of the Bible's principle of honest service. God gives us great benefits. The United States has been mightily blest, for in past generations, men believed in these precepts and reaped many rewards. But we must never forget Christ's warning: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much will be asked" (Luke 12:48). As the recipients of these blessings, we must seek to serve God by serving other men, and not just economically, but spiritually and charitably.

Conclusion

We have looked very briefly at two examples of God's word in action: business and economy. Many volumes could be written (and have been) on the Bible's specific rules for guiding us through life in many areas. More needs to be written. But more to the point, **people need to begin to obey what they already know**. Service to others is the basis of economic success. Honesty is the best policy. We are stewards of God's wealth, and we owe Him an accounting of how we have administered His property.

These simple principles, and others like them, are the foundation of Western Civilization. It has been a day-to-day walk with God by millions of faithful "little people" which has built this nation. The miracle of the "new birth," coupled with the power provided by the law of God, created a society in which men are free to pursue their occupations before God, disciplining their families in terms of the Bible's standards. Are we thankful? Do we take our responsibilities seriously? If not, God offers us a way to rebuild our lives, and then a way to rebuild our shaky civilization. **First, we confess our total reliance on the saving work of Jesus on the cross.** It is this in which we trust, not our own works. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Second, we confess our sins before God. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

Third, we renew the agreement (covenant) with God which our spiritual parents, Adam and Eve, transgressed. We commit ourselves to the work of subduing the whole earth to the glory of God. **We discipline our renewed minds by a faithful and systematic study of God's word, the Bible.** We must become like the church of Berea, "for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:10-11). We must heed the warning of James: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (James 1:22-24). Let us **search the Scriptures and obey**.

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