

Breadth of Mind and the Bible - Spiritually

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In my first two articles on breadth of mind and the Bible, I deliberately glossed over *the spiritual* breadth of mind the Christian is called upon to gain. Well, here we are. While I do hope you will take the time to read all four Articles on this topic, this is not required as each Article is intended to stand on its own. So, what is this “*spiritual breadth of mind*” and how is it gained?

The Starting Line

Every accountable person is ... outside of Christ. The Creator alone determines the exact instant one is accountable for knowing the difference between right and wrong. Unfortunately, that is the moment of demise. Everyone is “*under sin; as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become useless. There is none who does good ... not even one’*” (Ro 3:9-12). Being outside of Christ has many negative realities. Here is one. Since Jesus Christ is declared as God’s mystery “*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Col 2:3), then all outside theologies and philosophies contain **no** ultimately substantive life saving spiritual knowledge. When James was addressing professing Christians in his letter he said, “*You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe ... and shudder*” (Ja 2:19). It’s possible these treasures are not hidden from the fallen angels – they just reject it. And as we share these treasures with unbelievers, it is then no longer hidden to them and the hope is they will receive it.

Biblically, the one outside is called the “*natural man.*” That man “*does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them ...*” (1Cor 2:14). Indeed, the natural man is both “*alienated and hostile in mind*” (Col 1:21). That is why God creates a “*new man*” inside an unbeliever that starts with one being “*born again*” (2Cor 5:17, Col 3:10-11 and Jn 3:3-7). Being separated from God’s knowledge, wisdom and understandings automatically results in a narrowed mind. This is either true - or false. Absent His resurrection, I would pay this claim no mind.

“Your Sin Remains”

The Author of the Bible often uses a physical incident to illustrate a spiritual truth. In the Gospel of John, there is an account of Jesus healing a man who had been born blind. After a tremendous altercation with the Jewish religious leaders (Jn 9:1-38), this formally blind man found Jesus and fell in worship before Him. Jesus accepted his worship and announced, “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and those who see may become blind.*” Some Pharisees heard this and sarcastically said, “*We are not blind too are we?*” He responded, “*If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see’; your sin remains*” (Jn 9:39-41). The natural man is spiritually blind. To come to Jesus, saying “*I see!*” is the sure way to walk away still being blind ... “*your sin remains.*”

This means ... the most learned Christian scholar, who has amassed a mountain of genuine, accurate spiritual material from the living Creator, will be the first to tell the new convert, “*I started out just like you ... blind - knowing nothing.*” The second most learned saint will say the same thing. The third most learned will offer the same refrain. And so will the fourth, fifth, sixth ... in fact, you will hear this from every single, genuinely-in-God, spiritual person who

has ever been, is, or will be. Different faces, different places, different ages, but the same refrain. Speaking of refrains, these lyrics from my song, "**Listen To Him**" summarize this point.

*"Every single Christian starts out just the same -
A total fool - blinded - and dead, in his own name.
He has nothing to offer anyone except stupidity and shame.
That's his only claim to fame."*

This is fantastic news for one who now seeks God. "*He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him **freely** give us all things?*" (Ro 8:32). The scholar knows that a rhetorical question in Koine Greek is a literary device for the strongest form of statement. This is an assertion that God holds nothing back from those who are willing to learn from Him. "*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, **buy** wine and milk without money and without cost Listen carefully to Me and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.*" (Isa 55:1-2). A genuine spiritual Christian "*giant*" will never place a money barrier between a person - and the knowledge, wisdom or understandings of God because ... God doesn't.

We Are Not to Remain at the Starting Line

When we reach this starting line, having called upon the Lord with something akin to the plea of the grief-stricken Publican, "*God, be merciful to me, the sinner*" (Lk 18:13,14) ... the Starter's pistol fires. The race is on. The windows of heaven are thrown wide open! One can go - and grow - into a spiritual breadth of mind as far as one is willing to go. The only cost is ... the flesh. That explains ...

Why Christians Stumble Around the Starting Line and Some Barely Grow

When God says, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways My ways*" (Isa 55:8), what He means is, "*My thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways My ways.*" He then illustrates this by saying, "*Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isa 55:9). As we start the race, we know very little of His will, ways, thoughts, priorities, agenda, goals and emotions. The starting line is just that ... the starting line.

The length of the race equals how long one is in this age post-conversion. Whether long or short, since, "*I, the Lord, do not change*" and He is "*the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Mal 3:6 and Heb 13:8) ... guess who is slated for change? One would do well to imitate Habakkuk's posture early in the race. "*I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me and how I may reply when I am reproved*" (Hab 2:1). Christians who choose otherwise quit growing. Many don't even realize it ... yet.

So, the degree one abandons his/her way - in action and thought - will determine how far that person actually progresses in a spiritual breadth of mind. God lets His own know, as they go along, what dead meat He wants excised. "*(If) by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live - for all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*" (Ro 8:13,14). And in a consistency all His own, God is extremely gracious in these transactions. One exchanges a pound of flesh ... for a ton of truth. But, the catch is ... that pound of flesh *must be killed*. In this, I am an adamant free-will advocate. And many Christians ... **will ... not**.

Good or bad, right or wrong, God has determined that Christians ultimately will grow -

mature - into His thinking. As Father toward His children, He has many tools at His disposal in achieving this. And He also knows that even the most zealous of His children will make blunders along the way. It would be great if this was not so ... but it is so. Part of the problem is that we are still infested with a corrupt old nature that regularly rears its head. We are admonished to *“lay aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit”* (Eph 4:22). It's quite possible our *“old man”* is *“maturing”* inside of us as well, and can become more crafty with our life experience – and must be, at key times, acknowledged and attacked. Any other tact leads to trouble ... as our old man and our lusts are crafty. *“If anyone thinks he is something - being nothing - he deceives himself”* (Gal 6:3). Oh, how the Lord flatters us. I do not know why God has decided on such a messy growth process. Maybe it is to humble us. *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... in your thinking be mature ... solid food is for the mature who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil”* (2Pet 3:18, 1Cor 14:20, and He 5:14). One must be willing to lay all arguments, resistance and opinions before Him - for scrutiny, confrontation and often demolition. *“There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord”* (Pr 21:30). None that prevails anyway.

The Challenges In Gaining Spiritual Breadth of Mind

There are several powers working to retard a Christian's growth from a spiritual breadth of mind. Here is a quick list. You may come up with more. Some overlap.

Retardant 1: One's Own Flesh

There is almost no end to this category. It includes *“jealousy and strife”* (1Cor 3:3), *“selfish ambition”* and *“arrogance”* (Ja 3:14), *“partiality”* (1Ti 5:21 and Ja 2:9), a seemingly endless parade of *“fleshly lusts”* (1Pe 2:11), and even just being *“forgetful hearers”* (Ja 1:25). James may have summed it up best when he explained why prayers are unanswered. *“You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures”* (Ja 4:3). Even as a Christian, one can still deceive his/her own heart (Ja 1:26). Fortunately, God knows our heart and has ways of exposing it to us (Lk 16:15, Ro 8:27 and 1Jn 3:20). This forms the base of our **primary ministry** in this age - one God is exceedingly interested in ... the ministry of *“putting to death the deeds of the body”* with the promise, *“you will live”* (Ro 8:13) ... and, by extension, gain breadth in mind.

Retardant 2: Hero Worship

When working with the fleshly Corinthians, Paul said, *“each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I am of Apollos,’ and ‘I am of Cephas,’ and ‘I am of Christ.’ Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? ... I, brethren could not speak to you as spiritual men, but as to **men of flesh**, as to babes in Christ.”* Because of hero worship, they were still stumbling around the starting line. *“I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able”* (1Cor 1:12,13 and 3:1,2). Some of them never progressed past stumbling around the starting line before exiting this age. Read 1Corinthians 11:17-34, particularly verses 29-32.

For decades, I have done a lot of work, and soul searching, on church organization (polity) and denominationalism. My formal Christian academic experience spanned three conservative factions (Presbyterian Church of America, Southern Baptist, and the Independent Christian Church). I graduated from two (the other closed ... I needed one more year). All three had an emphasis on Church History and their own development in the current sectarian menagerie. While there are a few legitimately thorny issues (baptism's meaning and mode being

the toughest for consensus through the millennia), most other divisions are the product of man. Without a full rehash here, I am of the persuasion that the bulk (maybe almost all) of the present denominational separations are the matured adults of babies spawned in the Corinthian Church. Paul still worked with the Corinthians as Christians, but their choices for unauthorized-by-God divisions retarded their growth - restricting their spiritual breadth of mind - and kept them ... babies.

Let me give you one tiny example of how hero worship has weakened the Church. The particulars of this are not what is important. The dynamic at play is the point. It is repeated in differing ways and issues in all the sects, but the final outcome has the same net result and effect on the Church as a whole.

As a young Christian, I was on staff at a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center. One recovering client came to me - challenging our imposed, ministry-wide, Sabbath keeping policy. He confronted me with this passage: "*Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; the body of Christ*" (Col 2:16,17). The preacher who was doctrinally behind this rehabilitation ministry was a "giant" in the faith - Dr. D. James Kennedy. Thousands flocked to his church every week, he founded the worldwide Evangelism Explosion program, built a church in the shape of the "*ichthus*" (the sign of the fish for those flying over) with a cross-topped steeple that was the highest point in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He had a radio and television ministry and often spoke memorized Koine Greek from the pulpit. And a recovering drunk, who soon returned to his debauchery, was challenging this giant and scholar and hero of the denomination? Was I to believe this drunk - or the heralded, acclaimed, seminary trained scholar? The answer is ... **neither**. The challenge set before me was the same it has always been and always will be ... search the scriptures and "*examine everything carefully holding fast to the good*" (1Thess 5:21). In this instance, the soon-to-relapse drunk, was handling the Scriptures accurately. In fact, that entire denomination is in grave error on the entire Mosaic Law and its place and purpose post-cross. Thanks, Kenny. I hope you have been able to avail victorious power from the One who walked out of His tomb.

One problem with being a denominational loyalist (or worshiping a hero within it), is that the sect is maiming itself to some degree. It cuts off members of the Body of Christ who cannot adhere to, or propagate, some errant sectarian feature of the group. In the example above, the PCA is accurate on many subjects, but concerning the Law as given to Moses - they promote tremendous error. But, as this error has been institutionalized, scriptural debate has ended. Those Christians who could correct this are not allowed the opportunity. They might be allowed to attend or give money, but not challenge the distinctives of the denominational doctrine or practice. All denominations fall into this to some degree. The degree of culpability by the individual sectarian (as determined by the Boss of the Church) probably determines the spiritual breadth of mind the sectarian will be able to achieve in this age.

All Christians remain disciples (learners) for the entirety of their stay in this age. As perpetual students, "*One is your Teacher ... One is your Leader, even Christ*" (Mt 23:8,10). In this denominational problem, it should be noted, there is a difference between a simple *attendee* who is seeking God for accurate scriptural understandings, versus the one who, for reasons known to God, has *rationalized* why he/she is a denominational loyalist above all things. These often claim to be Christians *first*, but their deeds, particularly when pressed - find them committed to the denomination *first*. If a student, at any point along the learning journey, refuses the Teacher's instruction, is the Teacher going to overlook that obstinacy and then impart deeper, precious treasure? I know many Christians stunt their growth right at this point.

Retardant 3: Hiring Out The Work

When Paul brought his message to Berea, we are told they “*were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily*” to see if Paul’s assertions were accurate (Ac17:11). This required **work** ... work in the Bible. Far too many professing Christians ... **will** ... **not**. They fall back on those they have hired to tell them what to believe. After all, that is a big reason they have been hired. Besides, “*there are just so many interpretations on everything.*” This is an excuse for laziness. This will not lead a Christian into a spiritual breadth of mind. The learning experience of these Christians is more “parroting” than internal digest and process. And when Satanic challenge comes (and come it will) through trial, temptation or persecution, a fall lies ahead – and possibly shipwreck (1Tim 1:19).

Retardant 4: False Prophets / False Teachers

“*The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My Name. I have neither sent them, nor commanded them, nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility, and the deception of their own minds*” (Jer 14:14). In this passage, four springs are listed from which these false messages arise. But, for our purpose here, the sources are irrelevant - the reality is all that matters. Their message is error. In the New Testament, we are warned, “*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be **false teachers** among you ...*” (2Pet 2:1). This is a promise. Again, names, titles, style, “*letters of commendation*” (2Cor 3:1) - all of these things are barnacles that must be scraped off - and **the content** of the message weighed. The content is all that matters. The Bereans could have cared less who Paul said he was, or who others said he was, or the style (or lack thereof) by which the information was delivered. And Paul, if in the Spirit, was pleased by this mind-set of the Bereans.

Retardant 5: Satan and Teachings of Demons

There are very systematic presentations about God - from fallen angels - to man. The goal is singular: to keep one *away* from an accurate understanding of who the real Jesus is - what He did - and what the proper response to Him should be. “*But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits, even **teachings of demons** ... for even Satan disguises himself as angel (messenger) of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*” (1Ti 4:1 and 2Cor 11:14,15). The phrase translated, “*fall away from*” is from a compound Koine Greek word, “*aphistemi*.” The components are, “*apo*,” (motion away from, having never been in), and “*histemi*,” (to stand). So, the Timothy passage is describing people who are **standing and moving away** from the Christian faith - *having never been in it*.

Also what is usually translated “*angel of light*” should here be translated, “*messenger of light*” as Satan is *disguised* and the word, “*angelos*” means, “*a messenger*” and is from “*angelo*” - to deliver a message. To maintain a Christian cannot be theologically deceived by demons (for a season) is, in my estimation, an underestimation of these demons. Satan even attacked Jesus with Scripture misapplied (Mt 4:6) ... so, who do we think we are? I am of the conviction that many demons are silver-tongued, seasoned pros with cumulative knowledge and are able to launch very tight and targeted attacks. Many times they will work through vessels that outwardly appear righteous. This is the whole, “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*” dynamic (Mt 7:15 and Ac 20:29).

The way to avoid falling prey to some false message in this rainbow of deception is

simple ... not easy, but simple. The first step is earnest petition to God for an opened mind and teachable spirit. *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (Ja 1:5). Accurate learning, and then doing (obedience) is what secures one from deception. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God ... handling accurately the word of truth ... examine all things carefully, holding fast to the good”* (2Tim 2:15 and 1Thes 5:21). You can't beat learning and then doing.

Additionally, God wants the saint to be able to destroy *“speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”* (2Cor 10:5). That includes false religion and the various *“philosophy and empty deception”* of man's traditions (Col 2:8). All error, whether from man or demon, the Christian is to be able to field and refute. Opposing materials are to be accurately heard, dismantled, and dispatched. The word, *“Christian”* and the phrase, *“breadth of mind”* are to be synonyms.

Conclusion

Each point above could be expanded exponentially. Jesus once told the disciples the Spirit would take of His things *“and disclose it to you”* (Jn 16:14). Then, after rising from the dead, He *“opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”* (Lk 24:45). The Author of the Bible is the One who enables one to accurately understand, and integrate, His knowledge into one's own thinking and behavior. This is activity initiated by God – and is owed to no one. But once initiated, there is no end to the breadth of mind a Christian can attain. Go get it.

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