

# Renewing the mind

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rm 12:1-2

## Introduction

Many have written on this subject and approached it in a completely rational manner. But this subject is far from mere rationality. It is a spiritual matter that is in view which involves the doctrine of identification (Rm 6).

We don't just have to think the right things, we need a new mind – the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). We don't marshal our thoughts to follow doctrinal patterns but we need to be in Christ and think his thoughts.

Just as the character has to become Christ, and this is what the fruit of the Spirit is all about – being like Christ, so the mind must be renewed so that we think as Christ. Thus together we think like Christ (renewal) and act like Christ (fruit).

With a renewed mind all the saints think the same way. Indeed this is an apostolic command:

That you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rm 15:6

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1 Cor 1:10

Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind. Phil 1:27

Now I have heard many teachers claim that this is impossible and that we must all be allowed to think differently. This is not a Biblical characteristic. If we are united in Christ and have the mind of Christ, then we will all think the same way; Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13).

In the glory we will all think the same thing; we ought to get our heads around to doing that now in this world. If we all concentrate on being in Christ and obeying God, then we should think the same way.

We don't follow some pattern of doctrine established by men through strength of will (though standards can be helpful, but they are all flawed and of their time). We need to put on the new man and abide in Christ. Our focus must always be on Christ and not abstract things.

We need to examine what the renewal of the mind involves.

## Context One: Worship

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. Rm 12:1

The first background to the renewing of the mind is reasonable worship based upon presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice.

The beginning of the renewal of the mind is having the attitude of a burnt offering sacrifice. This means a complete giving up of everything to be burned and committed to God for his good pleasure; total consecration.

### **The burnt offering law**

The burnt offering was the only sacrifice that was entirely burned. The whole animal was given to God as a sweet smelling aroma (Ex 29:18; Lev 1:9, 13). None of it was cast out or given to the priests for food.

There was to be a continual burnt offering at the door of the tabernacle for all time (Ex 29:42).

This offering is symbolic of the complete consecration of the believer to God. It is a presentation of the whole life of the believer as a gift to God, to be burned up in spiritual service as God sees fit. Nothing in our life is to be left out of being presented to God for his use. It is total commitment to the will of God.

Paul is saying here, 'present your bodies as a burnt offering to God'.

### **Service is worship**

'Reasonable service' is really 'rational worship'. 'Reasonable' is *logikos*; pertaining to reason or logic. 'Service' is *latreia*; the service and worship of God, spiritual service (Jn 16:2; Rm 9:4; Heb 9:1, 6).

Worship of God is not just by thoughts and words but by deeds. True worship is the giving of the body completely up to the service of God.

## Context Two: not of this world

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rm 12:2

The second background is not being conformed to this world. This means that the renewal of the mind has nothing to do with the processes of this world.

### **We must shun worldly systems**

A real problem in the church is the temptation to think like the world. People can forbid dancing and the cinema and yet be totally worldly in the way that they think in the church.

Now following the world is not just dealing with external things like playing cards, gambling or watching the television. The problem with the world is that it gets into your mind and dominates the way that you see things.

When church leaders set up authoritarian hierarchies in church leadership structures, they are following the world.

The great danger in this is that following the world is really following Satan. Worldliness is really Satanism because Satan dominates the world (Jn 12:31; Eph 2:2). This is why being a friend with the world makes one an enemy of God (Jm 4:4).

Thus not being confirmed to the world involves a renewed mind. It is not just thinking better, it is a new mind – the mind of Christ.

### **Example: theological seminaries**

No one in the early church went to a theological seminary before they became a pastor. Such were available if desired; there were many precedents. The Jews had rabbinical schools. The Greeks and Romans had philosophical schools. There were schools of oratory and homiletics. There were also schools of religious law (such as for Jewish Halakha). This is the world's way of training.

Just as the early church could have rented buildings for church gatherings but chose not to, so also it could have set up seminaries, but chose not to. The precedent set by Jesus and the apostles was on-the-job training as a disciple working with a mentor. Religious training was practical as well as didactic.

Now if a young man chooses to spend two or three years of intense training in a seminary to study doctrine, there is nothing wrong with that. Though I could argue that the time could be better spent. What is wrong, however, is the idea that a person can choose of his own volition to go to seminary and then presume that he can automatically be selected for ministry as a pastor. A seminary education does not automatically qualify anyone for church ministry. I have seen many people so educated and yet they were completely unqualified for ministry.

Another great danger of seminaries is that if the teachers in these institutions can be perverted (as indeed many have been) then Satan can influence and control generations of leaders that come out of such places. This is how to destroy the church by stealth. Just as Cultural Marxists took over the national education institutions to create the current social dismantling, or just as Rockefeller took over the medical colleges after 1910 to create Big Pharma, so also Satan corrupted seminaries long ago so that they churned out compromised church leaders.

The church is led by elders and no one else. There is no senior pastor. The choosing of elders is by the consensus of the local church based on understanding of whom God has gifted in the word and wisdom. In the early church, apostles would go back to a planted church and observe who had risen up to minister and then confirm what everyone knew.

Paul lays out the qualifications for being an elder (bishop, overseer) and these are to do with morals and gifting in the word in Titus 1 and 1 Tim 3. These resolve into the following:

- Blameless.
- The husband of one wife, having faithful, submissive children.
- Not accused of dissipation or insubordination.
- Not self-willed,

- Not quick-tempered, not quarrelsome.
- Not given to wine; temperate.
- Not violent.
- Not greedy for money.
- Hospitable.
- A lover of what is good.
- Sober-minded.
- Just.
- Holy.
- Self-controlled.
- Gentle.
- Not covetous.
- Not a novice.
- Able to teach; holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.
- He must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

As you can see, the majority of these qualifications are ethical. A seminary cannot teach people how to be of such high moral standards, only the Spirit can do that in the discipline of a person's life – usually through suffering. It is suffering that really trains a person to be spiritual and useful to God.

And He [the Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 2 Cor 12:9

Being an elder is being like Jesus. It is caring for a flock of people and shepherding them with care and attention. It is not based on understanding what supralapsarianism is and being able to prepare a good sermon; it is defending the sheep from wolves and feeding them when they are hungry. It involves sleepless nights, commitment to help in awkward times, and much self-sacrifice. There are no days off for a true elder (unlike most pastors who get Monday off; unlike their flock who don't).

Church leadership is spiritual and moral, not intellectual.

Using theological seminaries as the default option for training ministers is thinking like the world.

## The renewal of the mind

In Rm 12:2 'Renewing' means what it says; it is a complete change, not an improvement of the old mind. This is why Paul says, 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind'. Transformed means 'to change into another form' and is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. We need a metamorphosis by renewing the mind. We need to change into something different.

Renewing has nothing to do with improving, helping, educating and such like. It is a new mind. Renewing is like changing from a caterpillar into a butterfly.

‘Mind’ in Rm 12:2 is *nous*. This is the higher mind, the spiritual mind, the higher intellect; the mind that relates to God. It is not the day-to-day mind that deals with ordinary issues of (such as *dianoia* [good or bad thoughts] or *phroneo* [understanding, opinion, direction of mind to practical things]). It is closely connected to the conscience in the heart (Titus 1:15).

It is the faculty of intelligence, understanding and intellect (1 Cor 14.15a). It is the faculty of moral perception, reason, insight and awareness (Rm 7.25); the inner orientation or moral attitude of thinking or disposition (Rm 1.28). It is the result of mental activity, thought, judgment, resolve and discernment (Rm 14.5).

The word ‘mind’ is not associated with Jesus in the Gospels, though there are references to him thinking. But when the specific mind of Christ is mentioned by Paul, he uses *nous* twice (1 Cor 2:16).

It is the higher mind that must be renewed. This only occurs with putting on the new man, which is putting on Christ. When we cast off our old man and the fleshly way of doing things, we also cast off our old way of thinking. We do not follow the set paths of thought that we grew up with in the flesh. In the new man we think anew by thinking like Jesus.

In the spiritual armour, the helmet represents the mind and this is tied to salvation (Eph 6:17; 1 Thess 5:8). Salvation is being in Christ, being a new creation, and this salvation gives us a new mind just as it gives us a new heart (where the *nous* is situated).

As adopted sons that share in the inheritance of Christ we must think like our Father. We do this by thinking the thoughts of Christ, putting on the new man.

Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind [*nous*], and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:22-24

Here Paul categorically links the renewal of the mind both to a spiritual function and to putting on the new man.

### **Godly truth not worldly wisdom**

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent’. Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 1 Cor 1:18-21

God spells out what the renewal of the mind involves by explaining that it does not involve human wisdom. It is a spiritual function not a soulish function.

The world’s wisdom acts on the level of the soul: understanding to do practical things; the intellect necessary for the body to function. Even this can reach high levels when purified,

as exemplified by the Greek philosophers. Which is why Paul emphasised the mind of Christ to the Corinthians who were Greeks.

The wisdom of the world is not spiritual; it cannot reach God, 'the world through wisdom did not know God'. Human wisdom is the highest attainment of the soul but it cannot even scratch the surface of spiritual, godly knowledge. The Gospel is foolishness to the wise of this world but this foolishness is greater than all the wisdom of the world because it brings the power of salvation; the power of God shown in grace (Rm 1:16). When Paul preached the Gospel, it was not with words of wisdom (1 Cor 2:1, 4).

When we are saved, truth is imparted into the mind that enables faith and repentance, a new way of thinking. This truth is the word of God. Sadly, because we have an old nature that fights against the new nature we too soon go back to thinking like the world. This is why the mind must be renewed.

We must gradually learn to discard the paths of thinking in the flesh and learn, by the Holy Spirit, how to think like Christ.

Thus the renewing of the mind is synonymous with putting on the new man. The new man, created in the image of Christ (Eph 4:24),<sup>1</sup> thinks spiritual thoughts. When we put on the new nature, we are renewing the mind.

### **The renewed mind understands spiritual things**

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 1 Cor 2:6-15

As there is human wisdom, so there is also spiritual or godly wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness'. Heb 1:3, 'who [Jesus] being the brightness of His [God] glory and the express image of His person'.

This thinking is given by the Holy Spirit; it is spiritual knowledge, 'God has revealed them to us through His Spirit'. The Spirit brings the things of God and also the things of Christ.

No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 1 Cor 2:11

The Spirit of truth ... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you. Jn 16:13-15

This is not learned wisdom it is revealed wisdom: 'God has revealed them to us through His Spirit'. The renewed mind involves revelation and enlightenment, not human education: 'the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God' and 'These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual'. This is spiritual discernment, 'they are spiritually discerned'.

The renewed mind receives revelation of God and Jesus Christ by spiritual intuition and communion within the human spirit. This is a spiritual operation not a mental, soulish one.

How did unlearned, poorly educated fishermen become apostles that changed the Roman world?<sup>2</sup> It was not by cleverness but by spiritual intuition from a renewed mind.

The focus of this revelation is to understand grace: 'that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God'. It is to understand the things that God has given us in Christ so that we can be filled with power to serve and understand God's will with clarity.

The education of the renewed mind is by the Holy Spirit: 'the Holy Spirit teaches'. This is in accordance with Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will always be alongside us (*paraklete*) and will guide us into all truth;<sup>3</sup> 'He will guide you into all truth' (Jn 16:13).

The Spirit is our teacher. He brings the things of Christ to us and teaches us spiritual matters. Everybody can access this spiritual knowledge because it comes by faith. The more you trust human knowledge and training, the less you will understand spiritual issues. As we trust in the work of the Spirit, we learn from God.

We should, therefore, pray everyday to be filled with the Spirit and to learn from the Spirit. How will you receive if you do not ask (Jm 4:2).

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<sup>2</sup> Some apostles were educated, like Matthew, but most were not. Matthew was chosen so that he could write a Gospel with educated clarity to present truth to Jewish listeners used to rabbinical learning. Mark's Gospel was written under the tutelage of Peter, who did not even write his own Gospel and this is without literary flourishes or nuance but is immediate and simple.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 14:16-17, 'And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth'. 'Helper' is *parakletos*, one who draws alongside; an advocate.

## Union and communion not pedagogy<sup>4</sup>

I have affirmed many times that the Godhead functions as a holy, loving community of Persons in unity. I have also attested that the church is meant to be a reflection of this community in the way it functions and exists. Most churches utterly fail in this regard.

The way we relate to Christ our Head, by the Holy Spirit, is in union and communion.

Union is the fact of our being united in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ and are united to God in Christ. Thus we are God's sons. This sonship is maintained by the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:14) who brought us into this union (1 Cor 12:13). We first need to understand and trust in this union. Living by faith is trusting that you are in Christ.

Communion is the fellowship of the believer with Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is sharing in the things of Christ as the Spirit reveals them to us. This is a sharing of the mind of God.

God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship [*koinonia*] of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor 1:9

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen. 2 Cor 13:14

### Being spiritually minded

[Those] do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Rm 8:4-8

There is a fleshly mind and a spiritual mind just as there is an old nature and a new nature.

The fleshly mind is actually the enemy of God because it lives in the world. Thus no amount of fleshly learning can help a believer please God. The fleshly mind operates at the level of the soul; it is a function within the soul. Those who trust in the fleshly mind will walk according to the flesh and manifest death. What is the flesh? It is the neutral soul<sup>5</sup> given over to the old nature.

How do we walk according to God's law? By having a renewed spiritual mind that is subject to God's law. How do we gain life and peace? By being spiritually minded. If we want to walk in the Spirit, then we must begin with a renewed mind.

The renewed mind leads to one walking in the Spirit. The life then becomes a reflection of the character of Christ; a manifestation of eternal life.

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<sup>4</sup> The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.

<sup>5</sup> The soul is a vessel intended for God's use; the executive of the person. It can be used for good or bad. When the old nature dominates the soul by the carnal (fleshly) mind and directs it towards sin, it becomes flesh. It is then just like any Adamic person.

This knowledge is nothing like the learning of the world (pedagogy). It is completely wrong to apply the world's methods of learning to teaching the believer about spiritual matters. It is an impossible task. Yet so many church leaders do exactly that and wonder why, after many years, people are so dull about spiritual matters and so needy in their lives. A renewed mind brings maturity and growth in Christ. Through spiritual knowledge a believer becomes strong and a weapon in God's hands.

This is why Satan does all he can to stop churches from properly teaching God's children. He is terrified of believers with a renewed mind.

### **Christ: the wisdom of God**

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Cor 1:24

Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 1 Cor 1:30

The Christian is called to represent Christ in this world. We are lights in this world, a city on a hill. Our life is to be a testimony to Christ.

This means that we must think as Christ thinks. How can we act right if we don't think right?

Our wisdom must be the wisdom of God mediated through Christ. Having intellectual knowledge about Christ or about doctrine is not good enough. We must think like Christ.

We gain this wisdom of God as we renew our minds.

## **Practical issues in renewing the mind**

The Holy Spirit uses means for the purpose of renewing our minds. He acts upon certain disciplines in our daily lives; the spiritual exercises of true religion. We can list some of these as:

- Bible reading.
- Meditation.
- Prayer.
- Communion and worship.
- The didactic teaching of the word by a godly minister.
- The grace of church fellowship; mutual edification.
- Reading good books.

The result of this is:

- New dispositions and inclinations.
- New sympathies and antipathies.
- The understanding enlightened.
- The conscience sensitised.
- Thoughts set on a straight path.
- The will bowed to the will of God.
- The affections made spiritual and heavenly.

In this way our character is not what it was - old things are passed away, all things are become new. We act from new principles, by new rules, with new designs.<sup>6</sup>

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Cor 3:18

The changes in the mind dominate the whole person. As we are called to become like Christ in all things, the starting point is a renewed mind. If you change the mind you change the character. In a sense this is repentance continued. This is why we are transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. Prov 4:23

[The *nous* is situated in the heart.]

### Paul's example

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Cor 2:1-5

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1 Cor 2:12-13

Paul categorically states that his teaching in the churches was not human wisdom but knowledge gained from the Holy Spirit by a renewed mind.

### Examples of apostles having renewed minds

God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. 1 Cor 2:10

We have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:16

I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 Cor 12:1

Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. 2 Cor 12:7

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<sup>6</sup> Some thoughts came from John Gill and Matthew Henry here.

I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Gal 1:12

I went up by revelation. Gal 2:2

By revelation He made known to me the mystery. Eph 3:3

You may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ). Eph 3:4

Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets. Eph 3:5

The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. Col 1:26

## Ways in which the church fails to use renewed thinking

The church fails and follows human wisdom when it has not learned to trust in the Spirit by renewing the mind. This explains a great deal in church history – men failed to obtain spiritual wisdom because they failed to learn from the Holy Spirit. When you fail to renew the mind, you become conformed to the thinking of the world (‘do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind’). This is why many aspects of modern churches are very worldly.

I have already mentioned some aspects of this failure, but they are worth repeating.

- Hierarchical church leadership.
- Authoritarian church leadership.
- A clergy / laity split.
- Formal liturgies.
- Worship leaders.
- Women church leaders.
- Turning church services into worldly entertainment.
- Centring church services on sinners instead of Christ (‘seeker-sensitive’ meetings).
- Using a dedicated building for church meetings.
- Blindly following a denominational doctrinal standard and not being open to truth.<sup>7</sup>
- Taking money from the world such as in gifts or tax breaks.
- Using advertising to promote church meetings.
- Using market research to determine church policy.
- Establishing a theological seminary to provide candidates for the ministry.
- Giving church leaders a salary.
- Creating an unbiblical position of senior pastor.
- Using vestments.
- Sacramentalism.
- Antinomianism.
- Associating churches into denominations under a central leadership.
- Establishing leadership training based upon popular worldly leadership programmes.
- Adopting earthly philosophies.
- Using musical instruments in churches.

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<sup>7</sup> I accept that creeds, catechisms and confessions have great value - to their limits.

- Utilising psychotherapy in church counselling.
- Teaching self-esteem.
- Failing to give to the poor and needy.
- Using false worldly methods to preach the Gospel (free-willism, dictated prayer, raising a hand / standing up to indicate salvation, getting people to fall in a trance etc.).
- Using worldly occult principles to claim a work of the Spirit (e.g. tongues, false prophecies, trances, extravagant behaviour, mysticism etc.).

This list could be extended ad infinitum, but this is enough. It shows that the church has utterly failed to use renewed thinking and has become false. This is why most evangelical churches fully obeyed illegal government instructions to close down during the Covid fake crisis.<sup>8</sup> It is shameful that some brave Catholic pastors kept their churches open and ended up in prison but evangelicals capitulated without a fight. God will look more kindly on those Catholic pastors than on those evangelicals who sold their birthright for a quiet life.

## Conclusion

Renewing the mind is not absorbing facts about Biblical issues, or even of doctrinal matters. It is not about training the mind to gradually improve the character to be more holy. It is about sharing in the mind of Christ and this is obtained by putting on the new nature and submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and thus walking in the Spirit.

We have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:16

Making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Eph 1:16-17

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<sup>8</sup> As I edit this another Alberta pastor has been arrested but this time it was a godly evangelical Baptist pastor. I applaud him for keeping his church open.