

# The Gospel Shaped Mind

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of using our minds to serve our hearts in cultivating a white-hot affection for God. It highlights the need for objective thinking, liberation from self-deception, and the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming our hearts through the gospel. The sermon underscores the reciprocal relationship between the mind and heart, urging believers to engage in right thinking to fuel their love for God.*

**Duration:** 48:45

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 4:2, Ephesians 3:4, Romans 10:1, Acts 17:2, Matthew 21:23, 2 Timothy 2:7, Luke 12:54

**Topics:** "Mind and Heart Connection", "Transformative Power of the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, without you, no eternal blessing will come in this room, and so we pause to just plead with you that you not leave me or listeners to our own resources, but rather that you would come and grant that I would speak nothing but the truth, and that my demeanor would be shaped by the truth, that I would be guarded from the evil one and from every sin of the fear of man or pride, and that the listeners would have strength to comprehend with all the saints the truth that is proclaimed. I pray for salvation.

I pray for hope. I pray for reconciliation of alienated people. I pray for courage to come and I pray that exceedingly and abundantly beyond what we ask or think you would work in this room now in Jesus name.

Amen. What an amazing thing that God would raise up in our generation a voice like Tim Keller's. I sat there reveling in those four points, and I want to say them again and show you how they launched this message.

The gospel is news, not advice, of something that's been done for you, outside of you, to which you gladly respond by receiving and believing and enjoying. In fact, if you were to press on me to say what was done

outside of you, I would say that Christ bought a gift for you and the gift he bought for you was Christ for your everlasting enjoyment, which was his fourth point. But number two was yes, the gospel does shape a life better than the law because the gospel not only brings direction, it also brings motivation, which was also given in the fourth point.

And third, there were illustrations of the gospel shaped life, finding its amazing Keller-esque statement between moralism and relativism so wise, so necessary. I just hope New England will be filled with that kind of shrewd insight into the essence of the gospel. And then he ended a point that was his briefest, which will be my two messages.

This is perfect, right? Thank you for letting me have your fourth point. He said, by quoting Thomas Chalmers, an essay, a sermon that I read 30 years ago, the expulsive power of a new affection, which is all I have to say in my Christian hedonism, and he summed it up by saying, how does the gospel change or shape a life? And he said, by worship. Implicit in that very shorthand statement is that the new affection that is expulsive, I don't know if that's a word, pushing out sin and ungodliness and idolatry is an affection for God, which he called worship, to which I say, Amen.

The main point of my two messages is, therefore, that God, if you've noticed the titles, the gospel-shaped mind and the gospel-shaped heart, tonight, mind, that they're all one. The point of my two messages together is that God created you with a mind and with a heart, so that the heart, your heart, when rightly served by the mind, would treasure God with white-hot affection. So that's his fourth point.

I'm arguing now that the ultimate goal of God in giving you a heart and a mind is found in the act of the heart, not the act of the mind, and that the mind exists to serve that act, and when the mind rightly serves the heart, the heart explodes with a new affection, which is profoundly transforming, and it's an affection that is God-ward. It's white-hot for God. Here's a subordinate point.

That's the main point of my two messages. The subordinate point is that, because of sin, neither the heart nor the mind does what it is supposed to do. The mind doesn't serve the heart rightly, and the heart doesn't treasure God with white-hot affection until the gospel saves and shapes the mind and the heart.

So that's the subordinate point of these two messages. Now, implicit in those two points is that the purpose of God in creating you reaches its ultimate end in your heart, namely, in the treasuring of your heart of God. The treasuring of God, above all things, with white-hot affection, and the mind is given to serve that act through the right apprehension of reality.

You apprehended reality for what it really is. Your heart would be ignited with a white-hot affection for the supreme reality, namely, God. Or, to put it several other ways, right thinking about God exists for the sake of right feelings for God, in that order.

Logic exists for the sake of love. Reasoning exists for the sake of rejoicing. Doctrine exists for the sake of delight.

Reflection about God exists for affection for God. The head is meant to serve the heart. Knowing the truth is the basis of admiring the truth.

Both thinking and feeling are essential. They are not coordinate. Rather, thinking serves affection.

The devil has many factually true thoughts, and none of them rightly serve his heart and bring him to love the truth. And therefore, his right thinking is no good. I don't care how right it is, or how factual it is.

It aborts. It fails. It doesn't reach the ultimate goal of people created in God's image, namely, that the heart would explode with white-hot affection for him.

That's why we're made. And the mind, when it's rightly serving the heart, brings that forward. Now, as I say that, I'm aware of Ephesians 4.18. It seems to say the opposite.

I'll read it to you. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due, so we're going down, down, down, down to the bottom, due to their hardness of heart. So here, instead of the mind serving the heart well or poorly, the heart is darkening the mind due to its hardness.

So I'm aware of that. I didn't craft this thesis statement without awareness of that, which seems to say if your heart gets right, your mind will get right. Which is right.

They're not opposites. My point and this point are not opposites. There is a reciprocal, back-and-forth relationship between the function of the mind thinking and the function of the heart right feeling for God.

There's a reciprocal relationship. What I'm arguing is not that it's false, that if the heart ceases to be hard and becomes supple and tender and alive to the sweet value of Jesus, it won't liberate the mind from having to constantly defend deceptive affections. It does liberate the mind from having to constantly work out and manipulate and defend defective affections.

That's what the mind of the flesh is. It's constantly defending defective emotions, and the mind is thus contaminated by the heart. I'm admitting that and saying yes, when we're born again by the Spirit of God, the heart is replaced from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, which is alive to the infinite value of Jesus, and the mind is wonderfully liberated from all of its deceptions.

And then I ask, for what? Have we reached the goal, then, that the mind has now become the pinnacle, so that right thinking about God is what you were made for? And the thesis of this talk is no. In the reciprocal relationship, the mind is set free in order that it might continually throw the kindling and the fuel of truth into the furnace of the heart for the flame of love to God. That's why the mind exists, to serve the white-hot affection of the furnace of your heart for God.

So my point is, when it's freed by the transformation of the heart from hardness to tender sensitivities, it then reciprocally goes about its wonderful work of throwing logs of combustible truth into the furnace of the heart for the sake of enflaming love, affection for God. I'll give you a text that really points strongly for me in this direction. It's a little bit technical, but I'll do it anyway.

Luke's version of the first commandment, spoken by the lawyer, followed by Jesus saying, you are correct. So I'm going to quote him as though Jesus said. Here's what he said.

Differently from the other synoptics, I think in order to draw out my point. Actually, I learned my point from him. It goes like this.

You shall love the Lord your God ex holis cordia su, ex, from your whole heart. And enhole te psuche, with your whole soul, chai enhole te iscua su, with your whole strength, and enhole te adenoian su with your

whole mind. Now, you don't even know what I was saying.

This is gibberish to most of you. The point is, there's one preposition for heart and three of the same prepositions for strength, soul, and mind. Let me paraphrase it like this.

You shall love the Lord your God from your heart with the aid and assistance of strength and mind and soul, serving the heart from which worship of love explodes to God. I think that's what Luke wants us to understand by making the preposition different for heart. So if you would ask me what it means to love God with with all my mind, I would not say think right thoughts about God.

So many people say that. I wouldn't say that. I would say use your mind to stoke your heart with passion for God.

And there is a way to use your mind to stoke your heart with passion for God, and there's a way to waste it. So, my thesis remains, God's purpose for you reaches its ultimate climax, not in right thinking about him, but in right affections for him, and the right thinking about him is a right serving of the heart, which then is the organ of affection for him. Your mind and your heart can only do that.

Your mind can only function in a right service to your heart if it is saved by the gospel and shaped by the gospel. So I'm going to give you three ways your mind is shaped by the gospel and give you some illustrations from the Bible of how crucial dysfunction of the mind serving the heart is. The first way that your mind is shaped by the gospel is this.

Since the gospel involves the objectivity of a God outside of you, and since it involves the historicity of a Christ outside of you in history, and since it involves visible, tangible events like crucifixion and resurrection, and since it involves articulation with sentences that are construable and hearable, like he died for our sins, therefore the gospel demands that the mind not be a creative organ bringing reality out of itself, but that it submit to the objective, historical, visible, hearable, construable realities totally outside itself. That's what your mind is for. This is a passionate plea for you to be objective, not subjective, in your submission to truth.

Very countercultural anywhere on the planet today, and I would guess here as well. That's the first way the gospel shapes your mind. By the very nature of the gospel, having an objective God, and historical Christ, and a visible, touchable crucifixion, and a visible, touchable resurrection, it demands mind deal with that.

And don't just go inside and create it your own reality. Number two, the gospel shapes the mind by liberating the mind from self-deceiving, reality-distorting, bondage, to self-exaltation and self-preservation. In Christ, and here we just repeat Tim's truth, in Christ, all the destructive powers of my badness are over.

I can't be destroyed by my badness if I'm holding fast to Jesus. And the gospel provides an absolutely certain outcome of my final glory. So my badness can't destroy me.

My emerging identity as a new person is guaranteed to be supremely glorious someday, so that if you saw me in the age to come you'd be tempted to worship me. See as Lewis said, rightly. Since that's what the gospel does for us, the mind is wonderfully liberated from having to constantly suppress my badness and create alternative futures for me that make me look good.

Sound like Keller? It's just Bible. It's just wonderful. So the gospel shapes my mind by delivering my mind from all of its need to run away from self-incriminating truth.

And a lot of truth is John Piper incriminating. A lot of it is. And if I don't have a way to solve that other than suppression, my mind is very skilled at defending me.

And that's not the right use of the mind. And therefore it's a glorious liberty that comes for the mind with the gospel. That's number two.

It's the third way that the gospel shapes the mind. The Holy Spirit takes the objective statement of the gospel and makes that gospel mysteriously the instrument of the miracle of regeneration. 1st Peter 1.23 You have been born again through the living and abiding Word of God, which is the gospel which we preach to you.

So, here's this objective, propositionally stated gospel about events in history and a God and a Christ and a transaction on the cross and it is articulated with the mind and with the mouth and the Holy Spirit takes it and creates a new being with it. Here's the point about how that shapes the mind. The mind is engaged as the organ that perceives, construes, and articulates that gospel.

Which then serves regeneration which is the coming alive of a person who is in love with Jesus and doesn't regard in this boring or mythological anymore. So now this third point is my first point way back at the beginning was the mind here by grasping and articulating speaking the gospel is becoming the instrument by which the heart is set on fire through regeneration for an affection for God. So summing up those three ways that the gospel shapes the mind.

One, the gospel makes the mind serve objective reality by being objective reality. Number two, the gospel shapes the mind by making the mind serve truth even when it's self incriminating by freeing me from the need to defend myself since I have an advocate now that can't be improved. And number three, the gospel shapes my mind by forcing it to serve my heart through being the organ of articulating the gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to wake me up to the beauty of God.

Now what I want to do with the rest of the time is give you illustrations from the New Testament of how crucial the mind is in serving the heart and or to use Tim Keller's fourth point serving the new affection or serving worship and I would simply say serving the white hot affection for God that you were made to have in your heart. So I've got about seven of these I think and let's go. Number one, Romans chapter 10 verses 1 & 2. You don't need to look them up.

You're sure welcome to. Sometimes there's time to look them up. Sometimes there's not.

Here's what it says. Romans 10 1 & 2. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them, these Jewish kinsmen, is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

Okay, so here are some hearts of Jewish kinsmen that are passionate for God and they are hell-bound, lost, perishing sinners. You know that because of verse 1. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved because they have a zeal for God but not according to minds that are rightly construing reality. They aren't getting it.

Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, they are seeking to establish their own and they are lost regardless of what passion for God they have. So the point here is if the mind does not serve the heart rightly, the heart can have white-hot affections that are hellish for God. Is that incredible? Tell the Muslims about it.

Jews, Hindus, Buddhists. This is a very religious planet. It always will be.

That's number one. Let your mind serve your zeal by bringing truth concerning the gospel into the furnace of that zeal so that when you have it, it does accord with knowledge rather than according with pride. Here's number two.

2 Timothy 2.7 Think over what I say, Timothy, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. So this is a command from Paul to all of you, me. Think over what I say.

Why? For the Lord will give, give you understanding. That's remarkable because how many people you've met perhaps who say thinking, that's what counts and by thinking you find truth. The text says by thinking he gives truth.

Or others say he gives truth. Fully on all that thinking stuff, it just deadens the heart. There's just a huge cleavage in a lot of churches, in a lot of people's lives, the thinkers and the feelers.

And I've tried to spend most of my life pleading with people not to make that choice because it says think over what I say. For the Lord, yes, the Lord himself in supernatural ways works insight in you through thinking. Don't limit yourself to thinking, that thinking is the key.

It is a path and the key is in heaven and he can shut your mind while you're thinking or open your mind while you're thinking. The Lord gives but doesn't give apart from thinking. If you go yoga on me, I think it's a real sad thing and it's going to offend some of you.

You go to those classes and you think there's no religious dimension to that cross-legged, empty-headed thing. There is a religious dimension to it. Emptying the head is not the way the Lord gives.

It's not. The Lord gives to thinkers who open their Bible and say, oh God, what does this mean? Help me to see what these words mean. I will study with all my might, but I must have you.

That's number two. Number three. Acts 17 verses 2 & 3. Paul, when went into the synagogue as was his custom and on the three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them while this from the scriptures explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.

So Paul's reasoning, explaining, proving, he's engaging the organ of his mind and addressing people with rational content and he knows, because he's the one who taught us, these people I'm talking to are dead. In trespasses and sins. They're dead.

He knows, number two, that the mind of the flesh does not receive the things of the Spirit. He knows, number three, that the God of this age is blinding the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light and the beauty of what he's saying. He knows all that and he keeps on talking with rational arguments and sentences from the Old Testament, trying to reasonably persuade them that the Christ must really suffer and rise from the dead.

Why? Because God has ordained that the mind serve the heart. That's what he has ordained. When Paul, in the previous chapter, approached Lydia, who got saved.

Remember what it said about her conversion? Very important sentence in the Bible. It says, in chapter 16, verse 14, of Acts, the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was spoken by the apostles. It's not, she's dead.

She's got the mind of the flesh. The God of this world is blinding her. There is no point in talking to her.

Zombies don't hear. Oh, yes, they do. Lazarus heard.

The gospel is the power of God into salvation. The gospel looks out on dead people and says, live! In the name of Jesus Christ, rise and walk. And the words, the rational words and the arguments are used by the sovereign Holy Spirit to open hearts, to give heed to that.

The very words become the means by which the dead live. So my point is, the mind, in construing the meaning of history and the cross and the gospel, and then the mind in articulating it in sentences that can be grasped by human brains, becomes the instrument by which the Holy Spirit, in his supernatural power, opens the heart, raises the dead, gives eyes to the blind, digs an ear and saves sinners, so that they have a white-hot affection for Jesus. Number four, Jesus assumes that we will use logic.

Here I'm going to look it up myself. Luke 12, verses 54 to 57 goes like this. This is an argument.

Here's the background for this in my life. I remember going to school in the days when Hebraic thought and Hellenistic thought were opposites. Big conflict.

It was avant-garde to say Hellenistic, bad. Hebraic, good. Platonic, Aristotelian, foreign.

This, indigenous to the Bible. I would listen to this stuff and I'd say, I don't think so. That doesn't make sense to me.

I mean, I didn't know anything about Hellenistic thought, so how could I judge? Well, I just grew up in a Bible-thumping home. I mean, I just, my mom and my dad just read me Bible over and over again. I just smell bad stuff, just... That's just... and then, you know, later on, I began to be able to explain things.

So, listen to this. See if you think this is right. This is Luke 12, 54.

He said to the crowds, when you see a cloud rising in the West, you say at once, shower's coming. So it happens. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, there'll be scorching heat.

And it happens. You hypocrites. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky and the earth.

Why don't you know how to interpret the present time? What's that mean? He's saying, you use Aristotelian logic every day of your life, and you won't bring it to bear on the things that live in that. Aristotelian logic is built on the syllogism, right? All men are mortal. Plato's a man.

Therefore, Plato's mortal. Is that Western? Foreign to the Bible? It's right there. You get up in the morning, red sky.

Premise number one. Premise number two. Red sky means going to be dangerous today.

Going to be a bad windy day. Conclusion, going to be a bad windy day. Because it happens every day when it's red.

This is not Western. This is human. This is God.

This is the brain of God. You got really better shape at these things. You hypocrites.

Drawing down inferences with such clear logic that you know how to go out on the Sea of Galilee when it's safe and not to go out when it's safe. Because when it's red, you got premise one, and you know premise two is all red days are dangerous days. And so this must be a dangerous day, so I'm not going out.

And you won't do that with your brain for the gospel truths all around you. So I don't like it when people dump on thinking as though it were somehow foreign to Christ and to His Word in clear old Aristotelian syllogistic ways. Here's another one that really got Jesus bent out of shape.

This is this is number five, and this is Matthew 21. 21 verses 23 following. You look for how the mind is used in this story.

Boy, is this relevant for our day. When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching and said, By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority? And Jesus answered them. I'll ask you a question.

And if you tell me the answer, I'll tell you about what authority. What's he doing? He's giving them a test to see whether they're the kind of people he's willing to talk to. This is really important.

You want to be the kind of person Jesus is willing to answer your questions? I do. And this is the text that will tell me one of the ways I can be that kind of person. I'll ask you a question.

You tell me. The baptism of John, where he come from, heaven or man? He went off on a little huddle and they discussed it among themselves saying, If we say from heaven, then he'll say, well, why didn't you believe on him? And if we say from man, we're afraid of the crowds because they all hold John to be a prophet. So what what are they doing? They're using their brains.

They're just, you're sharp guys. They're using their brains. They're saying, If we say this, then he'll trap us by saying you didn't believe on him.

And we don't want to be trapped because our ego will be kirked. And the other alternative was getting stoned because the people think he's a prophet. So if we say, it's just, it's human, he's gonna get mad at us.

So we love our flesh and we love our ego. So what are we gonna use our brains to do? This is total politics. We will say, we don't know.

So they answered Jesus, we don't know. And Jesus said, I won't tell you about what I thought. I won't talk to you.

I hate that use of the brain my father gave you. Spin. To protect yourself.

Zero interest in the truth. Zero. Just ego.

Flesh. That's just so long for Christians to be different. If you ever run for office, answer the question.

What a witness. What a witness. If you ask, is there a biblical statement about the alternative to that? That ugly manipulation of truth to escape your ego issues and your danger issues.

There's an alternative. I'll read you a beautiful alternative. I love the Apostle Paul.

Cost him his life to be this kind of man, but let me let me read it to you. This is 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 verse 2. We have renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word.

But by an open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Oh Lord, make it happen in New England. May this room be filled with people like that.

Renouncing all disgraceful, underhanded, cunning ways. Oh, the brain can be misused. Oh, the brain, the brilliant, beautiful gift of God to serve the heart's passion for Jesus can be turned into cunning.

He would not talk to them. And if you want to alienate Jesus, start being cunning. That's number six.

No, that's number five. Here's number six. Two more to go.

In Paul's letters, there are 13 times where he asks the question, do you not know? Remember that question? Do you not know? What's he saying when he asked that? Do you not know? Or do you not know? I'll read them to you. Not all 13, but several. And then you decide what you think he's doing when he says that.

1st Corinthians 3.16. Do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? 6.3. 1st Corinthians 6.3. Do you not know we will judge angels? Do you not know? Still 6.3. To lie with a prostitute is to be one with her. Do you not know a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Do you not know? Unrighteousness will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do you not know your bodies are members of Christ? What's he doing? In the context, a rhetorical question like that usually begins with or, or did you not know? He says something, or did you not know? And the point is, if you knew, you'd know how to act.

If you knew, you'd know how to think. If you knew, it would make a difference in your life. And you're acting as though you didn't know that you're gonna judge angels when you can't even fix a little problem of a dispute in the church, and you go get a pagan judge to work on it.

You shouldn't know something. You shouldn't. The knowing of something is gonna keep you from doing that.

Like, you're gonna judge angels. Isn't that amazing? This is amazing to me that Paul would use knowledge with such force to say, it really does change the way you behave, the way you feel, the way you live. It does.

Because it changes your heart. Thinking rightly and knowing the truth are crucial to valuing the truth and living the truth. And here's my last one, number, number seven.

So obvious, so simple, and so, I think, amazingly profound. The Bible is a book. There it is.

It's a book. We call it, I call it, the Word of God. Objectively, outside of me, containing truth.

Jesus Christ came into the world as the truth. We love that. We learn it here.

But when he was finished with his work and returned, he left behind apostles, prophets, who became the foundation of the church. And what they did in founding the church was write inspired guidance and teaching for the church, which became enshrined in in the second half of our Bible called the New Testament. So now we have one Word of God in a book.

God did not have to do it this way. Could have done it with videos. Could have done with the Internet.

Could have, could have caused the incarnation to happen in our century. He chose to preserve his holy, inspired, inerrant Word in a book. The implications of that historically are simply mind-boggling in terms of how Christian mission is done and what happens when the church takes root in a preliterate culture.

Everything changes. Everything changes over time. Might take centuries.

But it changes. This changes everything. That it's a book changes everything.

Not just what it says. That it must be read to have any influence at all. And to read is to be educated.

To be educated is to learn to think. And to read well is to think well. And here's a verse to show you the connection between what it says and what it is.

This is Ephesians 3, 4. I remember teaching Ephesians about 35 years ago and seeing this for the first time. Chapter 3, verse 4. Paul says, when you read this. And he meant his letter.

When you read this you are able to perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ. You wonder why Christians found schools, raise their kids up by teaching them to read early. When you read this you will be able to perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.

Because the Holy Spirit who inspired the book is jealous to use the book to open our eyes to see the glories of what's in the book. But not without reading. That is thinking.

That is the use of the mind to throw kindling into the furnace of the heart or the flame of affection. Not without thinking. So I'm done.

Here's a summary of what I've tried to do. God created you with a mind and with a heart. An organ of thinking and reflection, pondering, meditating, truth-handling, and a heart.

An organ of affection, emotion, feeling, inclination, and the mind when it's rightly serving the heart, causes the heart to be aflame with Christ as a supreme treasure. So, brothers and sisters, spare no effort to use your mind. Spare no effort to think rightly so that you will then by your mental apprehension of truth wherever it comes from, especially in the Word, by your mind, the right use of it, you will be pouring fuel into the furnace of the heart for the sake of inflaming a white-hot affection for God.

And to that and its power to do what Tim Keller said, I will turn for a drink tomorrow. Father in heaven, thank you for the gospel that shows us that we're not God and we're not creators. We submit to reality.

We don't make reality. Thank you for the gospel that frees our mind from all of its distorting self-justifications and manipulations of reality to escape self-incriminating truth. Thank you.

Thank you. And forgive us for not living up into these freedoms and these gifts. And grant that in this room every person with a mind would engage it.

Nobody here would minimize the sweet gift of thinking. Nobody would overplay it as the goal of life, but make it the servant of all our affections for you. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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