

Community Groups & College Ministry

If you are a Covenant Member of City Church, you received a letter recently from me about the next season of our church. In short- beginning on September 25th- I am going to preach the first of a series of sermons on Sex, Gender, and Spiritual Renewal which we're praying leads to revival in this church and City. I'm expectant of confession, repentance, faith, and some hard but beautiful moments of forgiveness and reconciliation. City Church, I hope you're praying with me to that end.

This series is going to be different for a couple of reasons. Mainly because...

It won't be in consecutive Sundays. We're leaving multiple weeks worth of space between most of these sermons. So I'll preach a message on Sex, Gender, & Spiritual Renewal- and then I'll preach a few sermons on a book of the Bible or another topic. This way- we have some time to process. I expect that during this series, some wounds- long ignored and buried- will be uncovered and exposed. That will hurt- but applying the medicine of Jesus' deep love and grace directly to that wound with people who are safe- is going to be the source of your healing- and that takes time.

another reason this series is going to be different- is what's happening today and for the next 3 Sundays.

Our prevalent cultural understanding of sex and gender didn't come from thin air. When we talk about what we think about when we think about sex- we need to understand where those ideas come from.

Series Slide

So, today and for the next few weeks- we're going set a foundation for the Sex/ Gender/ Spiritual Renewal series- in a 4 week series we're calling "**The Mind of Christ**". We're going to talk about why we think the things we think- and what the Scripture says about how and why we think what we think.

Moment of Silence

Since we're talking about thinking- let's hear from one of history's most revered philosophers on the subject of thinking.

Socrates lived about 400 years before Jesus- and really the only waiting we have from him are quotes from other philosophers that learned from him, particularly his protegee- Plato. Why did Socrates have multi-colored spots all ground into his carpet? Because he shaped Plato.

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.”- Socrates

Socrates is saying- to really know anything- you have to have the humility to admit you could be wrong. When we come together to think- we come in pursuit of the truth. Not in advancing our agenda. So- as we begin to think about what we think together- to seek the wisdom of God- neither me nor any of you should come at this as a know-it-all. Rather, humbly. Or like we talked about last week in Ecclesiastes- with a fear of God.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”- Socrates

Remember the Philosopher- or Qoheleth- from the book of Ecclesiastes that we covered this summer? Socrates agrees with him. Any life worth living stands up to scrutiny. In other words- don't just fall into a day to day- rat race. Think about who you are, what you are doing, why you are doing it- and allow other people to examine those things about you. Often- we're defensive about taking a close look at what we think and the way we live, because we know there is something deeply inconsistent there... something off...something that is going to require change, repentance. And we just don't have time for that...so we pretend life is about stacking up cash, or its about having kids and leaving a legacy, or its about experiencing as much pleasure as we can. But all of that is avoidance of the central question- WHY should you live the way you live?

“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think”- Socrates

Here's what I love about this last one. Its an admission that I can't MAKE you believe what I want you to believe. But what I can do is help you discover it for yourself. And that's exactly what I aim to do for the next 4 Sundays.

Title Slide “Socrates & the Mind of Christ: How God Makes Us Think”- 1 Corinthians 2 & Romans 12:2

Now lets look at a couple of things the Scripture says about thinking- then the idea we're going to examine today- Freedom.

1 Cor 2:6-16 We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age knew

this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written,

What no eye has seen, no ear has heard,

and no human heart has conceived —

God has prepared these things for those who love him.

10 Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. 13 We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. 14 But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. 15 The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. 16 For

who has known the Lord's mind,

that he may instruct him?

But we have the mind of Christ.

Romans 12:2-Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Transition: Today- I want to show you some things the Scripture says about how we think.

1) We all about not being conformed, its the “transformed” part we resist.

Socrates’ would not have fit in very well in 21st century America. Although if you’ve seen Bill & Ted’s Excellent adventure- he didn’t do so bad in 1988. The reason is we have hard time today admitting what we don’t know- and an even harder time examining our own lives.

Meanwhile Socrates said- “The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing” and that “The unexamined life is not worth living”

But our philosophy today is at least to act like we are experts on everything and tell others about it- meanwhile completely ignoring our blindspots and cutting every one out of our life who ever calls us to slow down and take a look at our life for a second.

Romans 12:2

But when the Apostle Paul writes to the Roman church- he tells them Don’t be conformed to this AGE- and Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

When he says “Don’t be conformed”- that means- don’t let your mind be shaped.

When he says “to this age” he is talking about the current philosophies and patterns of thought that are prevalent in the world.

In other words- there are two ways to think- God’s way- and everyone else’s.

Ideas have consequences. They bleed into and then eventually shape how we live our lives- and who we are as a people together. They change our values and the stories we tell each other about what life is really about deep down.

And- there is definitely some agreement in 21st century America with the idea of “Not being conformed”. How do these phrases sound to you? “Think for yourself” “Don’t let anyone brainwash you”- Those are all sort of American ideals right?

But the problem is- the ideas- the patterns of thought- that undergird “Not being conformed” are themselves ideas to which we are all conforming.

Just take those two phrases- “Think for yourself” or “Don’t get brainwashed”. Both of those phrases assume something. Those ideas assume that you are just a neutral person that has never been shaped by any ideas- and you should completely trust the way you think right now.

So is that case? I mean- when it is that you- alone- have never been shaped by outside ideas? The answer is never. You have always been shaped by outside ideas.

From the womb- you are shaped by the experience you had in the womb. Babies can sense stress. They can sense when their mother is fighting, or angry. They can hear music inside the womb. And they are shaped by that.

And yet, in the 21st century American version of “Don’t be conformed” there is this idea that whatever we trust inside ourselves in the moment- is just sort of innate in us- and we should listen to that inner voice and completely cut out anyone or idea outside of us that challenges it.

In other words- we are an Individualist culture. We value the individual over the community. A culture of “I am who I am- and don’t you try to change me.” A culture that insists on not conforming- but at the same time- insists on not being transformed.

Let me show you two of those prevalent ideas.

The first one is what I’m going call for our purposes, the “Competitive” understanding of individualism.

Competitive Individualism- “We are independent people competing for resources and status in a race to conform the people around us to serve the Almighty Me.”

Rather than seeing ourselves as God created us- dependent beings that work together with each other and God to make the world a better place.

There are the haves & the have nots. Somebody is going to be the boss- and somebody is going to be the low-level employee. My aim is to get ahead of you, to use my relationships not to serve, but to be served. 2nd place is first loser. And I’m only going to care about the people who can help me get my piece of the pie. I don’t need anybody holding me back or dragging me down.

This philosophy is sure that there are only so many jobs, only so much money, only so many positions of honor- and if don’t push other people down or use other people- I’ll be left out in the cold.

This is contrary to the Biblical idea that God has created a world where we are dependent beings- on him, and on each other. And that we are made to be sharers-

generous people who live not with a spirit of scarcity, but a spirit of abundance. God is our provider- and life is not about using people- but knowing and being known in relationship. We're made for cooperation. Not competition.

But for a Competitive Individualist- they will not be conformed! Instead- the race is own to conform YOU to serve THEM! And any call to lay that aside and be transformed by the renewing of the way they think- well- its not to be trusted. Because likely- its just somebody trying to manipulate me and gain an advantage.

Honestly- this is probably an easy thing to think about me right now. I'm standing up here- and you might be thinking right now- this guy just wants me to be a sheep- to do what he says- so he can get my money- or have his power trip.

That would be Competitive Individualism rearing its ugly head in your life. Here's what I'd like to ask you. Is it worth your time- to examine your life? According to Socrates it is. And according to this ancient wisdom from the Apostle Paul it is. He says you need a renewing of the mind. You have been conformed to an idea that over and over and over has completely let people down. How can you explain the thousands of people that killed themselves during the recession and market crash of 2008. They scrapped and clawed to get on top- and when the money disappeared- they saw themselves on the bottom. And they had nothing to fall on. No way to cope. Because many of them had manipulated and neglected others on their way up the ladder.

Its lonely at the top when you've stepped all over people to get there.

Examine your life- is it the kind of life that is worth living- or is time to be transformed by the renewing of your mind?

Here's the second popular brand of individualism

Expressive Individualism. "Everyone is beautiful just like they are. The deepest truth you can know is inside of you. Don't let anyone tell you whats true about you, except you. There are 2 great sins- suppressing the real you that only you can know- or telling someone that what they feel on the inside is not the truest thing about them."

The virtue in Expressive Individualism is expressing yourself. Find your truth inside of you..and then tell the world- live loud.

So this philosophy sort of tries to correct the Competitive Individualist by saying, "Lets not compete. Lets be diverse. Everybody be their own individual and we can all celebrate each person as a unique individual."

One problem with this philosophy of life- is that is completely and utterly unlivable. Because there are clearly for all of us- ways that people feel about themselves that we don't want to celebrate. So- whats the problem? If my truest self inside of me is telling me that your truest self inside of you is not the truest thing about you, then I commit the sin of not listening to my truest self inside of me if I celebrate your truest self inside of you. OR- if I remain true to my truest self inside of me and tell you what I think- now I've committed the other sin- I've tried to stop you from being your truest self.

The truth is- we have boundaries around what people are allowed to express. Religious and Irreligious. Conservative and Progressive. There are ways that both of these ideas are lived out and embraced.

And In both of these way of thinking- we think we decide meaning for ourselves. I get to say what is and isn't important. Look at this ancient wisdom from the book of Proverbs- and how relevant it is to those individualistic ways we think today.

Proverbs 18:1-2

One who isolates himself pursues selfish desires;

he rebels against all sound wisdom.

2 A fool does not delight in understanding,

but only wants to show off his opinions.

Now look back at the passage from Romans.

Romans 12:2

Its GOD's will- that determines what is important. The renewed mind discerns wisdom not from inside of us- but from God. Outside of us.

The Renewed mind is not seeking to serve itself- but to please God. And in so doing- in the deep and beautiful and timeless wisdom of God- we ourselves experience joy.

Imagine if he God loved us. Then his will WOULD be the best thing for us.

Back to 1)

What if you didn't look skeptically at God or the church- through a competitive individualist point of view?

What if you didn't resist the call Jesus makes to all of us, to drop our Expressive Individual agendas- and come follow him.

It starts with those first 2 statements from Socrates. Admitting you don't know anything- and then taking the first step to stop ignoring the big questions- who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? And if keep going with the way I'm living my life- who will i ultimately become?

TRANSITION: That's where Jesus comes in with an in an invitation. Be Transformed!

2) A renewed mind sees through the wisdom of the cross.

"I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think."- Socrates

Again- what he is getting at is two-fold. On one hand- if you don't discover the truth outside of you for yourself- it won't have the impact it has.

Parents- you ever tell your kid not to jump on the bed- then they do it and fall off and they're screaming and crying- and you both comfort them at they same time you tell them- "I told you not to do that- now you have experienced WHY I told you not to do that."

In that moment- that kid DISCOVERED truth. and it had an impact.

My Dad and mom taught me when I was a pre-teen about debt. They cautioned me and my brothers regarding credit cards...at the same time- they got us a credit card with a \$500 limit when we turned 16 to use in emergencies...like if our car broke down or something.

Well, my oldest brother was the first to get his- and it wasn't a month that he had the thing before he fell victim to a telemarketer scheme where he got a box of knock-off designer colognes and a fake opal necklace in the mail and was promised that he would have the chance to win a brand new car.

But the Price was Wrong, Bob.

He got taken. And got in massive trouble with my parents. I witnessed the whole thing as a 12 year old. And to this day- I don't have a credit card (not that I'm saying there is anything necessarily wrong with that.) I'm just very careful with financial debt.

The point is- my parents taught us that- but until I experienced it- discovered it- until I sort of had boots on the ground in the thing- It didn't impact me.

The other part of Socrates' teaching here is that one can only teach someone so much. For example, when my parents were raising me- they knew absolutely nothing about Social Media or Smart Phones..

So it would have been impossible for my parents to teach me the exact ethics i needed related to how I should use either of those technologies.

But, what they did do- was expose me to ways of thinking- to values- to what it means to follow Jesus in a general way- so that I could use wisdom in things that there was no way to prepare me for.

Its like the Bible. The Bible is written for us- not to us. Its not a magic book that changes with times. Like I cant open it up and directly tell me who to vote for, or whether or not to buy a car or house, or whether i should update the latest version of operating software on my computer.

Of course not. The bible is a library of books that are written to a particular people in a particular culture. Our job is to understand what God was saying to THEM- and then understand what he is saying FOR US- and then take that and apply it in all the decisions we make.

Back to 2)

In the Scripture- there are timeless commands- yes. But in large part- we get a pattern of thinking- that- as we follow Jesus- we are gifted his Holy Spirit- and we are able to take those ideas- those principles and navigate technology- or how to treat our noisy neighbors.

God gives us wisdom.

And at the heart of that wisdom is the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Look at the start of the verses we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church.

1 cor 2:1-2

Paul says "When I showed up there preaching- i wasn't giving you what the world around you valued. Brilliance of speech and worldly wisdom. In our context, I wasn't telling you to express yourself or to set yourself apart by your accomplishments"... rather, he says, "I wanted you to know nothing but Christ crucified.

Obviously, Paul doesn't mean "THE ONLY THING I SAID OVER AND OVER TO YOU WAS JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED"- rather- he's telling them in teaching them that Jesus

died and for their sin, and resurrected to lead them into a new life and a renewed mind- he was giving them a pattern for what they should value and be transformed into.

1 Cor 2:12-13

The section we read in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is saying that those who know that this fundamental truth- the Gospel- That Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Messiah is Lord- he gives to us the gift of his Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit changes the way we think. He reminds us not only of the truth of the cross and resurrection- that we are fully known and loved and forgiven and have a future with God and each other that we cannot lose— but also of the pattern of the cross. That we sacrifice and give to show that love to bring that same hope into other people's lives.

And that happens not mainly as individuals, but as we as the community, instead of competing or expressing ourselves- we unite as one under one faith, that Jesus is our Lord- that it is his voice that tells us who we are. And that doesn't eliminate our diversity- instead as Paul will elaborate later in this letter- it has us functioning as One Body made up of many parts- all called the body of Christ.

1 Cor 2:15-16

This is remarkable. This is a quote from the OT Prophet Isaiah. The answer to this question is supposed to be NOBODY. Nobody knows the mind of the Lord...but through Jesus- we have the mind of Christ. The equipping and ability to think about the situations we are in and respond as Jesus would have us.

Back to 2)

Church gets bad rap- we overlook when we die to ourselves and put God and others first.

Tell Story of marriage falling apart- diversity of gifts coming around acting as one.

Last night- family in need- just from community group- i had over a \$1000 to give gas and groceries for the week in less than an hour.

But for us to get here, as a church- we have to humble ourselves. We have to be willing to not be conformed- and to be transformed- and that starts with an examined life.

Lamentations 3:40

**40 Let's examine and probe our ways,
and turn back to the Lord.**

Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus invitation is to rest from the rat race of Expressive and Competitive individualism. It is to lose our selves- and find him. It is to die- and find life and purpose. In that same verse where he promises rest- he doesn't say- "Be yourself and follow me" He says "take up my yoke" Walk with me. and take up my teaching, my way. Don't follow your heart- follow mine. All the way to a cross and a resurrection.