

Introduction

I'd like to begin by sharing something I think about crime and punishment. I think most criminals should be whipped instead of incarcerated in prisons and jails. Some of you are probably aghast that I'd think such a thing. But I'm only trying to have a Christian mind and that's what I'm preaching about today. Turn in your Bibles to the passages I read earlier – Deuteronomy 19:15-21 and 25:1-3.

The Passages

I start with chapter 19:15 and the phrase "any iniquity or sin." That phrase refers to all the wrongdoings for which an Israelite could be sued civilly or prosecuted criminally. Notice what God says about that. A defendant can't be found liable in a civil case or guilty in a criminal case unless there are at least two eyewitnesses. By "eyewitnesses," I mean that they actually saw and/or heard what the defendant did wrong.

But what if there's only one witness? What happens then? Verses 16-18 tell us. Priests and judges investigate the complaint "thoroughly." They look for any other witnesses or evidence that corroborate the one witness' complaint.

If they discover in the process that the one witness is lying, notice what they do in verse 19. They give him the same punishment the person he lied about would have gotten if he were found liable or guilty. That was the penalty for perjury, lying in a legal proceeding, in ancient Israel.

Verse 21 goes on to give us a defining judicial principle, "**life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**" That is the foundational law of punishment in the Old Testament. The punishment must fit the crime. It must not be too lenient or harsh.

Now look at 25:1-3. In the Old Testament, God sets down three possible punishments for guilty criminal defendants. Two of those are fines and death. The third, in this passage, is whipping. The eye for an eye principle in 19:21 guides how many stripes or lashes can be given.

The more severe the crime, the more that are given, up to forty. Any more than forty degrades the defendant, which God prohibits.

Those then are the passages and I've explained them for a reason. It's because they illustrate and thus enable us to understand the Christian mind.

The Secular Mind

Now, to understand the Christian mind, it's helpful first of all to understand its opposite – the secular mind. So, let's do that.

The secular mind is one that doesn't take God and His word into account in thinking about things. It thinks about things as if His word and He are utterly unrelated to them.

Those things certainly include fields of knowledge like medicine, economics, psychology, sociology, education, law and so on. Take law for example. I had two criminal law classes in law school and can tell you this. Not once did the professors mention God or either of the passages I read. In fact, the only time I ever heard God mentioned in law school was in a contracts class. It had to do with the "Act of God" defense for breach of contract. I never heard any passages in the Bible mentioned. It's clear. My professors had secular minds. They thought and talked as if God and His word are utterly unrelated to law. That's the way it is in all fields of knowledge.

But it isn't just fields of knowledge. It's the everyday issues of life as well, the ones that matter most to people: raising and disciplining children, dating, hunting, selling products or services, planning weddings or funerals, eating, watching television, voting, doing homework, gambling, forgiving, and much more. Suppose we took a survey of hunters and asked them one question. What does God think about hunting? Almost none of them would be able to answer that. That's because they've never even considered that God might actually think something about it. That's the way it is in the everyday issues that matter to people. They have secular minds. They think about them as

if God and His word are utterly unrelated to them.

You now know what the secular mind is. It's one that doesn't take God and His word into account in thinking about things.

The Christian Mind

Now, understanding what the secular mind is helps us understand what the Christian mind is. It's just its opposite. It's a mind that does take God and His word into account in thinking about things. It thinks about all things as if His word and Him are related to them. It "thinks christianly" in other words. That's the term Harry Blamires coins in his book *The Christian Mind* – and I love it. The Christian mind thinks christianly about everything no matter how sacred or secular it is.

Take one of the critical social issues of our day. How should our society punish criminals? Its current punishments are fines, incarceration (jail), and death. But should they be?

Well, I have a Christian mind in that regard. I do know much of what the United States Constitution and the Ohio Revised Code say about the issue. So, those things are important to me as I think about it. But they aren't nearly as important to me as God and His word are. My primary reference point for thinking about the issue isn't the United States Constitution or the Ohio Revised Code. It's something far more vital than that – God and what He says in passages like the ones I read. I think christianly, in other words, about crime and punishment.

How I think about that, you and I should think about everything in our lives. If we're hunters, for instance, we should think christianly about hunting. If we're mothers, we should think christianly about cutting the apron strings. If we're ad men or women, we should think christianly about advertising. If we're terminal patients, we should think christianly about the body and death. If we're Christmas shoppers, we should think christianly about shopping and so on.

We should take God and His word into account in thinking about all those things. We should think about all those things as if His word and

He are related to them. We have Christian minds if we do.

The Christian Mind Secularized

Now that we know what the Christian and secular minds are, there's a question that all of us need to ask and answer. Which one do I have? Is my mind Christian or secular?

If you're like most people, it's secular. The Christian mind is rare today – even in churches. Harry Blamires, whom I mentioned before, says it well: **“There is no longer a Christian mind. As a thinking being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization.”** He's absolutely right about that. It's tragic but true. The minds of most American Christians have been secularized.

What secularized them? It's our popular culture! That culture, in its ways of thinking and acting, is set against God and His word. So constant and repeated exposure to those ways secularizes our minds. We then think about some of the most important matters in human life as secularists do. It's what I call cognitive atheism. We think about things as if God and His word don't even exist.

Let's go back to hunting again. Do Christian hunters take God and His word into account in thinking about it? Some don't. They are cognitive atheists in that regard. They think about it as if God and His word don't exist.

But by definition, to have the mind of Christ means to have a Christian mind. So, let's have just that – a Christian mind. We have that kind of mind by doing two things, both of which I want to explain.

Know God and His Word

First, we have to know God and His word. When I say “know,” I mean “be thoroughly familiar with.”

First, we have to be thoroughly familiar with God. There are certain central activities that make us that familiar with Him: solitude, silence, worship, prayer, and practicing His presence. I've explained those in

detail in the discipleship curriculum we make available to you.

Second, we have to be thoroughly familiar with God's word, the Bible. What I'm talking about here is a practical working knowledge of it. We know it through and through. To know it that way of course requires that we study it. I explained in detail how to do that in our *Word of God Month* in June. I refer you to the two sermons in which I did.

Something happens when we're thoroughly familiar with God and His word. They become our primary reference points. We find ourselves just naturally taking them into account in thinking about things. We don't do it purposely as much as habitually. Someone once asked me what I think about fast foods and I automatically related Scripture to it. Referring to Nehemiah 8:10, I replied: "**I'm all for it – as celebration.**" That's the way it is when we're thoroughly familiar with God and His word. We naturally take them into account in thinking about things.

So that's the first thing we have to do in order to have a Christian mind. Know God and His word.

Apply God and His Word

The second thing that we have to do is apply God and His word. That follows from the first thing. Knowing them makes us want to apply them. Someone once asked me if it's okay to play the lottery and gamble at Mountaineer Park. I gave her two passages of Scripture, Proverbs 6:1-5 and 15:27, and a written explanation of what they mean. I then told her to go home, prayerfully study them, and decide for herself. That's what it means to apply God and His word. We figure out what they say about the things that matters to us.

We're able to do that because God and His word do relate to all things - either directly or indirectly. Directly means that they explicitly address what we're thinking about. They draw conclusions. Indirectly means they implicitly address it. They give principles from which we have to draw conclusions.

But whether it's directly or indirectly, we do the same thing - apply

God and His word. We do that by using what we've learned about information and logic in this sermon series. Using that, we figure out what God and His word say about the things that matter to us.

Let's go back to whipping criminals? God's word addresses that directly – in 25:1-3. So we use information and logic to figure out what it says about that. There are several issues in that regard. First, is it loving and just? We use logic here. God is perfectly and infinitely loving and just. All of His commands, therefore, are loving and just. Whipping criminals is one of His commands. So, whipping criminals is loving and just. Second, does His command still apply? It is in the Old Testament and Israel was a theocracy, meaning church and culture were one. So does it apply in the New Testament and a society like ours? I don't have time to explain, but the answer is that it does. And third, is it effective and humane? I do bring some information to that issue. I know what the Bible teaches about people having personal kingdoms. I also represented 20 criminal defendants as an attorney and know what prison is like. Based on what I know from that, I conclude that whipping is far more effective and humane than incarceration is.

That illustrates what we need to do. Apply God and His word to the things we think about. It also illustrates how we do it. Using knowledge and logic, we figure out what they say about those things.

Those then are the two things we have to do to have a Christian mind. Know God and His word and apply them to everything.

Conclusion

I close out the *Mind of Christ* series with the words of theologian Abraham Kuyper, "**There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus does not cry out, 'This is mine! This belongs to me!'**" He's right about that. Everything does belong to Jesus including your mind and mine. So let's make it just like His: informed, believing, logical, and Christian.