

SET YOUR MINDS

Colossians 3:1-17

Years ago, Readers Digest ran a series of articles which always began with titles like, “Hi! I’m Joe’s Liver”, (or heart, or eye). The purpose of the series was not only to explain the fascinating structure and function of each organ but also to encourage care for the healthy functioning of the particular organ featured.

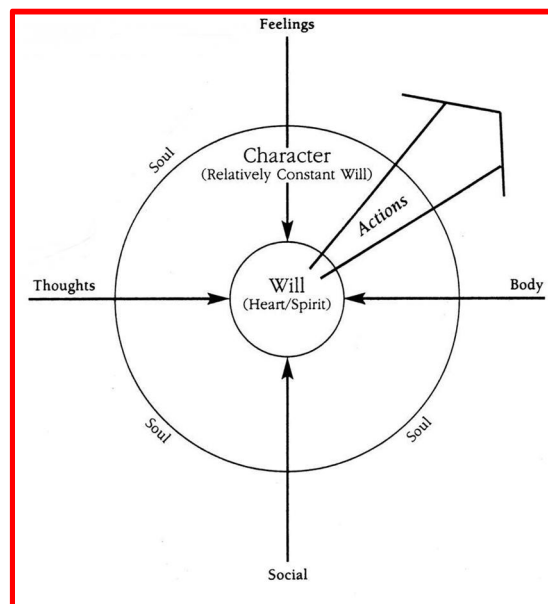
The first part of this study could be titled “Hi! I’m Joe’s Life”, as we consider how we are made, how we are meant to function, and how this applies to becoming like Jesus.

There are six fundamental aspects of a human life.

SIX BASIC ASPECTS OF A HUMAN LIFE¹

Thought / Feeling / Choice / Body / Social Context / Soul

At the center is our heart. It is the seat of our will from which we make our choices. It is called the heart because it is the center of our lives; it is called spirit because it is immaterial; it is not physical. Our heart/will/spirit is continually receiving input from our thoughts, feelings, body, and social context as depicted in this diagram²:



Dallas Willard explains,

¹ Willard, Dallas, *Renovation of the Heart*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Navpress, 2002, p. 30.

² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The God-intended function of the will is to reach out to God in trust. By standing in the correct relation to God through our will, we can receive grace that will properly reorder the soul along with the other five components of the self.³

God intended for these six aspects to function in a specific order of dominance in union with Him.

WITH GOD

God

Spirit (will, heart)

Mind (thoughts/feelings)

Soul

Body

The spirit (will), in union with and subject to God, guides the mind to *seek the things above, to set the mind on the things that are above*. The Godward mind, in turn, brings order and harmony to the soul. The body, energized and guided by a healthy soul, serves the other aspects to accomplish God's will in its social and physical settings.

This order is what the Apostle Paul describes as "the mind set on the Spirit" which is "life and peace". It is important to note that in a life in union with God, the body is subservient to the other five aspects of the self. In a life away from God it is not.

WITHOUT GOD

Body

Soul

Mind (thoughts/feelings)

Spirit (will, heart)

God

In a life without God, the body dominates the other components of the self. The soul, mind, and spirit are made to serve the body and its desires for satisfaction, pleasure, comfort, safety, etc. This is the life the Apostle Paul describes as "the mind set on the flesh" which is "death".

With these two graphs in mind, let's read Romans 8:5-7.

³ Ibid., p. 40.

Romans 8:5-7

We are born separated from God. We are born with the latter order of dominance. This explains why so many of the sins and destructive behaviors with which we struggle are related to our bodies. Sexual sins, violence, verbal abuse, addictions, are the inevitable fruit of bodily domination.

Romans 1:18-32 is the Apostle Paul's analysis of the cause and course of humanity's decline into the evil condition of bodily domination.

Romans 1:18-32

Dallas Willard's commentary on Romans 1:18-32 is so excellent it is worth quoting at length.

Now when the light of the fundamental truth and reality, God, is put out in the heart and the soul, the intellect becomes dysfunctional, trying to devise a "truth" that will be compatible with the basic falsehood that man is god; and the affections (feelings, emotions, even sensations) soon follow along on the path to chaos. "They became futile in their speculations," Paul continued, "and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools." They pretended God was an animal—usually a monstrous animal or a human-like being—of some kind (Romans 1:21–23). But remember, the mind is now uprooted from reality. It is committed to the truth of a falsehood. "Garbage in, garbage out" is an old story, and then the strong desires, or "lusts" (epithumiais), plunge right into the garbage along with thought.

The human body becomes the primary area of pleasure for the person who does not live honestly and interactively with God, and also the primary source of terror, torture, and death. So it is an "obvious" thing to turn to for those who worship and serve "the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25, NRSV). And because bodily enjoyment is what they want, what they choose to pursue, God abandons them to their pursuit of every pleasurable sensation they can wring out of the body—primarily sexual, for that usually gives the greatest "kick," but bodily violence is a close second. This is the spiritual root of obsession with "sex and violence" in decadent societies, whether our own or those of other times and places.

"Free love," as it is euphemistically but falsely called, along with the various forms of perversion, are simply an extension of body worship (verses 26–27)—even the worship of [private parts] witnessed to by both archeology and modern life (and the "abs" and "buns" of today). As logic teaches us, everything logically follows from a falsehood. If what is false is true, then everything is. So anything goes.

But then it turns out that sensuality cannot be satisfied. It is not self-limiting. That is partly because the effect of engaging in the practices of sensuality is to deaden feeling. Then awakens the relentless drive, the desperate need, simply to feel, to feel something. This drive is rooted in basic human nature, as we will discuss below. We have to have feeling, and it needs to be deep and sustained. But if we are not living the great drama of goodness in God's kingdom, sensuality through the body is all that is left under our "kingdom."

Paul observes to the Ephesians that

the Gentiles [those not knowing God] also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (Ephesians 4:17–19)

This is the natural progression in the flight from God.

The drive to self-gratification opens up into a life without boundaries, where nothing is forbidden—if one can “get away” with it. “Why?” is replaced with “Why not?” And because this is what these “gods” want—total license—God abandons them to a worthless or nonfunctional (adokimon) mind—that is, a mind that simply doesn’t work. “As they did not see fit to center their knowledge upon God, God released them into the grip of a nonfunctional mind, to do what is indecent” (Romans 1:28, par).

The outcome is a humanity “filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.” And although they still know of the condemnation of God on such things, “they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:29–32).⁴

Becoming like Jesus is the process of reordering our thoughts, feelings, will, soul, body and social under the wise and loving care of God. And the primary means of that process is found in Colossians 3:2.

Colossians 3:1-2

Renewing our minds is the primary means of becoming like Jesus. Humanities degeneration began with the mind denying our Creator. Our only hope is to be *renewed in knowledge after the likeness of our Creator* (Col. 3:10).

Setting our minds on things that are above is the fundamental, necessary, core practice to become like Jesus. This is encouraging because it is something almost all of us can do; even from a young age.

In our next lesson, we will explore in more depth *setting our minds on the things that are above*.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 52–54.