

Redesigning our brain

Mental health and mental illness from God's point of view (pt 2)

When God designed the human mind he made it like his own. Our minds, therefore, have the same potential as his mind. But to experience that potential, and truly share the mind of God, the human mind has to be faced with the power and influence of evil, because evil is the most formidable enemy of the mind.

God's mind is not affected by evil at all, of course. It resists evil and wants nothing to do with it. But that wasn't the case with the archangel Lucifer and one third of the angels, who fell under the spell of evil, despite them being with God, watching him in action, knowing his love, and no evil at all being practiced or even thought of anywhere at any time. But amazingly, evil still managed to creep past all those defenses and sneak into their angelic minds where it spread its infectious nastiness, resulting in outright rebellion against God.

Evil had not been seen like that before, but suddenly it was out in the open, revealing the highly disturbing fact that not only does evil exist, it can also pounce with deadly results on an unwary victim at any time. But from the terrible effects of what evil has done to people ever since, we know now what evil's purpose is - to inject its venom into the mind to make that mind hostile to God.

And evil could have affected God's mind like that too, turning God against himself, where Father, Son and Spirit connive against each other and compete, rather than work in total love and cooperation. But God's mind is impervious and immune to the power and influence of evil, and because he made our minds in the image and likeness of his mind, his ultimate plan is to make **our** minds just as impervious and immune to evil too.

But HOW can our minds become impervious to evil if we have no idea why evil is so evil, or what damage evil can do to a mind, or how it can slip so easily past our defenses? How do we come to loath its influence and impact on our minds so much that **we** don't want anything to do with evil forever either, and we willingly and forcefully resist it, just like God does? The question is "How?" Well, the answer in Scripture is that right from the start God lets evil loose on humans, **knowing** what evil will do to us, but clearly it's the only way.

And Scripture's sad story is that all humans fall under the spell of evil in some form or other, either in evil's injection of its venom into our own brains, or injecting its venom into the brains of others who mess our minds up. We see that in a good man like Abel being killed by his venomously evil brother Cain, and Eve getting her husband to eat the forbidden fruit when Adam knew he was being tempted but didn't resist. Evil, in other words, has its ways and means of getting at and into everybody.

And humans seem especially vulnerable, because when evil took aim at the angels to turn their minds against God, it only managed to infect one third of them, whereas with humans evil's success rate is one hundred per cent. Every human being, in one way or another, has been affected, infected - or infected **and** affected - by evil.

No wonder mental illness is such a huge problem today. But now that evil has done its damage, with God's permission, what was the next step in his plan in dealing with evil, since it's obvious that we can't deal with ourselves? And the simple answer from Scripture is: He's **redesigning our brain** to resist evil.

And God can do that, because he made our brains redesignable. This is good news for anyone suffering from mental illness, that God can rewire a damaged mind. The brain can even rewire itself **naturally**, as people who suffer from blindness or brain damage know, that other parts of the brain begin to fill in the gaps, or work round the obstructions, enabling the person to function quite normally. It tells us what God has made possible in our brains, which is good to know, because if God knew what damage evil would do to our brains, he must have a way of **repairing** our brains too, right?

If our brains **couldn't** be repaired, or rewired to work round the damage, what hope would we have? If every time evil managed to control our thoughts and those thoughts became fixed in our brains forever, and there was nothing anyone could do about it, we might as well all commit suicide and get the agony over with. But those working in the mental health community know how the mind responds to the most simple aids - like medication to balance the brain's chemicals, or therapy to talk a person through their troubles, or mental exercises and training to redesign the brain's thought patterns. Psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, and the vast army of mental health workers would all have given up their professions long ago if the human mind **wasn't** flexible, repairable and responsive to help.

But God made it clear from the beginning that evil is our problem, and there is **nothing** we humans can do about that. The only solution is for GOD to redesign our brains so evil can't get through to them, and that's the process he put into action through his Son.

And what a challenge that must be for Jesus, because look what he's been landed with. First of all, it was Israel, who demonstrated beyond all doubt that humans are **incapable** of resisting evil, even when God was with them personally to guide them, protect them, educate them, take care of all their physical needs, and destroy those who wished to harm them. Even when Israel had a sacrificial system and priesthood to annul the damage done by evil and enable the Israelites to function and continue to receive God's mercy and forgiveness, they still fell victim to their fears and lack of trust in hm. And even when God in his anger and frustration threatened them with dire consequences if they continued in their evil ways, and thousands upon thousands of them died in horrible wars, invasions and diseases, it still didn't stop them messing their lives up.

Fortunately, the Bible promises that all those helpless Israelites will be raised from the dead, and God never rejected them, but the brutal fact of their lives is that they were nothing but proof of the power of evil. Nothing worked in preventing evil slipping past their defenses and wrecking their lives. And today it's no different, as many in the mental health community admit, that no matter how well we get to know how the brain works, or what treatments we come up with to aid those seeking help, mental illness continues unabated, causing havoc in the minds of many young people especially, who lose all hope, wonder what the point of life is when it's so much pain, and they want to end it all.

And here we are now, in what we call a civilized society, when we know all too well that civilization is but a thin veneer covering a savage inner self. Supposedly 'good' people do unspeakable acts of evil without warning, and we have no idea why, or what to do about it, other than hit them with medication and therapy, and ship them off to jails and institutions, with little hope of a cure.

When will we humans get the point, therefore, from our own school of hard knocks and brutal experience, that there is something messing up our minds that we have no control or power over? And how much pain and sadness and family tragedies can we take until we turn to God for help, in the hope that since he was the one who made us he's also the one who knows how to **REmake** us?

And what if that's been God's plan all along, to remake, or redesign, our brains?

That's not such a strange concept either, because it's a proven fact that brains can be redesigned. A documentary - actually called *Redesigning my brain* - demonstrated clearly that our fears and weaknesses can be dramatically improved and adjusted by mental exercises and training. Tolerance of pain can be strengthened, fear of heights almost eradicated, stress and impatience can be calmed, and even the heartbeat can be consciously slowed. The ability of the mind to rewire and adjust is remarkable.

And the good news is, that the maker of our remarkable brain is redesigning it, or retraining it, so it can learn to **resist evil** too. The huge problem in telling that to the world, though, is that few people believe evil exists, or that it's our most formidable enemy, or that it's affecting people's minds every day in all sorts of nasty ways. We're also stuck with **2 Corinthians 4:4**, that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Paul is not shy about the actual existence of a powerful "god" in our world wielding enormous influence over people's minds, **and** how this god has a clear purpose and plan, to blind people to "the glory of Christ."

But what exactly is this "glory" Christ has? Paul explains in the last part of verse 4, that Jesus "is the image of God." But why would the god of this age want to blind people to Jesus being the image of God? Because Jesus was - and still is - a human being. Jesus, therefore, is living proof that **human beings** can be in the image of God, meaning humans really can share the same mind God has, and that means **the human mind, like God's mind, can resist evil too.**

Well, no wonder the god of this age wants to hide that little gem, that human minds can, in fact, become impervious to evil, just like God's mind is. It would not only destroy evil's power over humans, it would also wreck the entire system the serpent nurtured from day one through Adam and Eve, of humans depending on human wisdom for answers to their problems. And he doesn't want that to happen because his clever little plan has successfully wasted the potential of the human mind to become like God's mind, by having humans chasing after solutions that Paul says in verse 6, "come to nothing." And Paul's right, because has human wisdom brought us any closer to solving the problem of evil?

No, it hasn't. What the world desperately needs, then, as it stumbles around in the darkness, blinded by the god of this age, is "the light of the gospel," the "light" being the glory of Christ, who as a human in the image of God provides us with clear proof and hope that the human potential to solve the problem of evil by sharing the mind of God is possible.

The world, meanwhile, thinks the problem of evil in the human mind is within its own power to control, and by its own tools it can make minds good and not evil, despite the overwhelming evidence worldwide to the contrary.

You can see, then, why Paul objects so strongly to the whole idea that human wisdom has anything to offer when it comes to the mind. And he's living at a time when Greek philosophy and wisdom is at its height too, that we still hold in the highest regard today as well, but Paul summarizes the lot of it in **1 Corinthians 2:9** that "No one's ever seen or heard, or even so much as imagined, what God has arranged for those who love him."

That's quite a statement, that none of the great minds in the past ever came up with any understanding or grasp of what God has in mind for humans, for the simple reason that they didn't want anything to do with God, or include anything he said in their ideas. And the proof of their resulting ignorance is their conflicting ideas on how the human mind works, and what we're here as humans for.

And Paul isn't done yet with knocking the world's wisdom, either. He exposes exactly why the world's great leaders of thought, the great philosophers, authors and shapers of society through the ages can never get to the heart of what makes humans tick, what the human brain's true potential is, and why evil persists.

He explains why it's all a great fog, reducing humans to going through the motions of living and eating, and at the end of life being no wiser than we are as babies as to what God is doing for us humans. All those years in school and university, all that climbing the ladder at work, all that reading of books and learning from scholars, all that observing in laboratories, all that struggle to make a living and become experts in a trade, all that living and having families and travelling to far off lands - and for what, pray tell, if there's no understanding of what "God destined for our glory before time began" (7)?

Well, Paul says, the reason it's all a dense fog is because "no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God," **1 Corinthians 2:11**.

In other words, we have no way of knowing what is going on in the mind of God, nor do we take any interest in it, without the Spirit. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,” **verse 14**.

That’s another challenging statement to anyone considering a career in mental health and mental illness, that the natural human brain isn’t even able, let alone ready, to accept anything from God or God’s point of view. So here we are talking about mental health and mental illness from God’s point of view, and the only people likely to take any interest or get any meaning out of it are those who accept that God is real. And how many people in the mental health establishment believe that? Who, then, one has to ask, has any real insight into what’s going on inside the human brain?

Well, here’s this chap called Paul who claims he does, because he tells us from his own experience in **Romans 8:2** that “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” And what he means by “the law of sin and death” in **Romans 7:21** is this force that kicks in automatically like the law of gravity, so that every time “I want to do good, EVIL is right there with me,” creating a constant battle between good and evil inside Paul’s head.

Evil was like an unstoppable heartbeat pumping out a constant stream of selfish thoughts and motives, but when Paul suddenly became aware that this was what evil was doing inside his head, he discovered to his horror he couldn’t turn the tap off. It was frozen open, and nothing in his power, not even perfect obedience to God’s commandments, could get that wretched tap to stop flowing.

But then he discovered that the tap had actually **already** been turned off by Christ’s death, meaning he was free at last from the constant drip, drip of evil leaking its venom into his brain. But it didn’t stop there. There was a **reason** for the tap being turned off. It was “in order that,” **Romans 8:4**, “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.” The reason for the tap of evil being turned off in his head was to enable him to turn **another** tap on that would fill his brain with “the righteous requirements of the law” instead. One tap off and one tap on: **The process of redesigning Paul’s brain had begun.**

Paul describes that process too, in **Romans 8:9**, as no longer being “controlled by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”

Paul makes it absolutely clear that the deciding factor in the redesigning of our brains is the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit Jesus' sacrifice is wasted. All it accomplished was turning off the tap pouring evil into our heads. That's amazing in itself, yes, because we couldn't turn the evil tap off ourselves, no matter how hard we hit it with our efforts to obey God, but is that it? The tap's been turned off, but now what? Do we just sit in the bath in silence, no water running, and sort of slosh around in rapidly cooling water waiting to see what happens next?

We don't have to wait, though, because "if the Spirit of God is living in us" **another** tap has been turned on, and what it does is equally amazing, because it starts pouring Christ's mind into us. Where the old tap of evil was pouring its venom into our heads, this new tap of the Spirit is pouring in the perfectly healthy mind of Christ, which explains why Paul calls it "the Spirit of Christ" in verse 9. The Spirit's purpose is to start flooding our brains with the mind and thoughts of Christ, taking us back to 1 Corinthians 2:16 when Paul says "we have the mind of Christ." Well, of course we do, because the Holy Spirit now has the tap full on pouring the mind of Christ into our brains.

And then Paul hits us with **Romans 8:10**, as the most brilliant description of what is now happening inside our heads as a result of Christ's sacrifice turning off the old tap and the Holy Spirit turning on the new tap. Here it is, verse 10: "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness."

Or put in tap terms, if Christ is being poured into our heads, thanks to the Holy Spirit opening up that tap to full pressure, then first of all, take note, it won't make any difference to our bodies. Don't expect our bodies to suddenly fill up with vibrant new health. That's not what the tap is for, to inject new life into our bodies, because our bodies in this life are still subject to death as the irreversible consequence of sin.

Evil still gets its way when it comes to our bodies, therefore, even after we become Christians, because the priority isn't bodies yet, it's brains. Immortal bodies come later. What God's interested in most for now is the redesigning of our brains, because what's the point of an immortal body if it's carrying around a brain for eternity that's only half cooked?

But evil doesn't get its way in the **second** part of verse 10....

Now we get to what's happening in our heads because of the Holy Spirit tap. "If Christ is in you," verse 10, which he is, thanks to "the law of the Spirit of life" (verse 2) pouring the mind of Christ into us, "your spirit is alive because of righteousness."

For the first time in our lives our spirit comes alive. It's like our eyes are suddenly opened to what's going on. We're in a bath with two taps, one with the letter E on it for Evil, and the other with the letter S on it for Spirit. Tap E has a sign over it saying, "Frozen shut by Christ's death. Try other tap." Well, why not, when tap S has a sign over it saying, "For mental health, turn tap full on."

And why does this tap create mental health? Paul's answer in verse 10 is, "because of righteousness." It's because our brain is filling up with righteousness instead. It's righteous, just like the mind of God and the mind of Christ. The actual Greek word for "righteousness" in that verse means "**correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting.**" Because of the Spirit tap, therefore, our brains are being filled with **Christ's** way of thinking, feeling and acting. Our brains, in other words, are being redesigned, rewired, and retrained by the Holy Spirit into new thinking patterns, new ways of acting, and new ways of reacting too. Our emotions aren't running away with us. We aren't loose cannons when sensitive buttons are pushed. Our minds, we discover, are gradually becoming impervious to evil.

Well, doesn't that become the most exciting thing possible? It means we've discovered the key to defending our brains against evil. Evil doesn't slip past our defenses so easily. It can still shoot a fiery dart or two that maybe burns a hole in our peace of mind on occasion, but the wounds don't fester or do any permanent damage. Evil is now shooting arrows at a tank. And wouldn't you then love to tell the world from your own experience that you've discovered the key to mental health, and the antidote to mental illness? The key is becoming impervious to evil, the most formidable enemy of the mind, and it's now possible for that to happen because the Holy Spirit has been redesigning and retraining human minds to think like Christ's mind instead.

Do **we** have a conscious part in this process too, though? Oh yes, says Paul in **Romans 8:12**. "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation."

And in tap terms that obligation is simple: Keep the E tap shut off, and in **verse 13**, keep the S tap full on. And ever since Christ's death and the gift of the Spirit, mental health for us humans is really just as simple as that.

Paul includes the simplicity of both taps in **Ephesians 2:22-24**.

Here's the first tap: "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts." In other words, keep the E tap shut.

And the second tap: "and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." In other words, keep the S tap full on.

Or, as The Message phrases it: "Everything - and I do mean everything - connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it. And then take on an entirely new way of life - a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you."

In other words, God is redesigning our brains, and our part in that is to keep the E tap shut, and the S tap wide open.