

XXXII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Developing a Christian Mind, Part 2”

Acts 17:10–34

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January 31, 2016 – Evening sermon

We are in our second study on developing a Christian mind. Before I get into the study I'd like to recommend some books to you on this subject. Two are from Harry Blamires with the first titled *The Christian Mind* and the second is *Recovering the Christian Mind*. Two others I would recommend are titled *Total Truth* and *Finding Truth* both by Nancy Pearcey. Now I want to give you an illustration that was given to me when I was being challenged to have a Christian world and life view.

The point to me was you are born a sinner therefore everything is distorted so you need to get glasses on. The question is who is going to give you your glasses? Are you going to get the glasses that the world gives to you to conform you to its image or are you going to get the glasses God gives to you? They are those given by the prescription of His Word and are ground to perfection by the Holy Spirit for you. Those are the glasses that you can see clearly from. Remember that even when you get the glasses and you are continually developing clarity and how you view the world through the lens of Scripture, the world is continually attempting to smudge your glasses. I am the world's worst glass smudger of all times. The glasses affect you in that way so you have to have these glasses that are clear through which you see life. We don't live the Christian life by intuition but by Divine revelation that is fashioned systematically into the truth whereby we see life with a renewed mind.

When you come to Jesus He gives you a new perspective, a new heart, a new family, a new home, a new record and a new life but He doesn't give you a new mind. He does give you His mind which is His Word. Paul tells us we have the mind of Christ in the book of Corinthians. He has His mind that He has given you and He has given you His Spirit. His Spirit with His Word can increasingly renew your mind. Romans 12:2 says [2] *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* We are to live life under the eye of God with the wisdom of God from the Word of God by the power of God in the grace of God for the glory of God. It is that new life.

In Romans 8 we have been challenged by this. He calls us to walk according to the Spirit and then how do we do that? Romans 8:5–8 says [5] *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. [6] For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [7] For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

You have been saved by Christ through His Spirit to bring you to Himself and that Spirit of God is within you. The Spirit of God is leading you to a Christ-centered mind. You can be saved, forgiven, adopted, on your way to heaven and still from time to time don't think accurately but think according to the old man which is the mind set on the flesh. That has consequences. You are still forgiven but there are consequences if you live according to the flesh. If you see your wife, children or job the way the world says it then that will have

consequences even though you're a Christian. So you want your mind set (intentional) by the power of the Spirit in a Christ-centered life view so that you're not conformed to the world, that is pressed into its mold but your mind is being transformed and renewed in the power of the Spirit of God.

I think the dominant world view that is with us right now is secular narcissistic humanism but let me give this to you in Christ's own words. When Peter said to Him 'You're not going to the cross to die for me as You just said, God forbid that should happen to You' from Matthew 16, Jesus responded to him by saying 'get behind Me Satan.' So why had Peter become the personification of Satan? Jesus said 'you have set your mind on man's interest and not upon God's interest.'

There are two mind sets with multiple variations. One is a God centered view of life in iterations as you're growing with accuracy. The other is a man centered view of life and it's the world's view that is attempting to conform you to that self-centered view. So there are two basic life views. There is the sovereign self and there is the sovereign God. There are multiple sovereign self isms like humanism, consumerism, materialism, scientism, positivism and so on, but they all come back to the sovereign self. You see it in our society today. The sovereign self, determines what marriage is, what sexual ethics are, what gender they are and it doesn't matter what they are born with biologically. That is what is reigning in secular narcissistic humanism. In opposition to that incoherency is the coherency of the sovereign God.

How do I get to that? Here is the definition that we are working from in these five studies. To live a faithful and effective Christian lifestyle, a Christian must develop a Christ-centered, Bible-framed, Spirit-filled life view, propelled by a Christ-consumed life love, saturated by persistent prayer. In other words, you have a life love where the love of Christ compels me and that leads you to a life view – how you see life because you love Christ. That will ultimately determine your life style. If you're not propelled by the love of Christ you are being propelled by the love of self or some other idolatry in your life. When the love of Christ propels you then you want to think with the mind of Christ so that you can live out the heart of Christ. So I want a Bible-framed, Spirit-filled life view that honors Christ so that my life style is being informed. Here is why I make this decision, here is who I should marry, here is why God gave sex for a whole perspective of a God-centered view of life affects our life style. Here is the basic premise. Your life love directs you to your life view and your life view will be seen in your life style.

In the last study we learned that every life view is an attempt, whether consciously or not, intentionally or not, to answer four framing questions. One is why is there something rather than nothing? Secondly, why are some things right and other things wrong? Why does everyone use those categories of right and wrong? Thirdly, what things are right and what things are wrong? Fourthly, who or what determines the things that are right and the things that are wrong? Then you take those four framing questions and get it right down to our personal lives, our life view. Who am I? Does the sovereign self say who I am or does the sovereign God say who I am? Where did I come from? Am I a cosmic accident of mutated germs? Why am I here? Does the sovereign self, determine the purpose or does God have a purpose? Where am I going?

To answer those four framing questions and then distill them down to our four personal questions, a world and life view has basic essential elements to it. There are five essential elements so that you can answer those questions from God's Word through Divine revelation around all five categories. Number one is creation. The second element of a world and life view is the fall – sin. Thirdly, is redemption or salvation. Fourthly, is providence – the sustaining

presence of God and then the fifth one is consummation – where is everything headed, where did it come from, why is it wrong, how can I be right, why does everything continue when it ought to be falling apart. So as we look at creation we think where did everything come from. When we look at the fall we think why is it broken. In redemption we think how can it be made right. With providence we think how does it keep ticking. In consummation we think where is it headed.

Having given those five, the first and most important that we will look at is creation. I will introduce it in this study and then in the next answer those framing questions around it. So you are not in a Christian culture. Thank God for His blessings to us, in our community and in our state. We have sins to confess but God has been very gracious to us. If you look at the basic western culture and America at the forefront, Christians don't have the home field advantage. We are not in a post Christian culture for we have now gone beyond that. We are where Dr. Schaeffer warned us we would head to. We are in a neo-pagan culture. I will try to describe paganism for you in a moment. We are in a culture that lives in a light of the creature worshipping the creation to worship himself or herself. So how do we live as Christians? How do we communicate to this culture?

Thankfully we have God's Word and this would not take God by surprise. This was birthed in Jerusalem and as it walked out of Jerusalem, an apostate culture, it walked right into a pagan culture, in Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. So how did Paul see this and what did he say to it? How did he embrace and engage that culture? One of the greatest texts in Scripture that shows us how Paul did this is in Acts 17. I don't apologize for getting provoked for paganism and neither does Paul. How do you handle that? You go after the people with the Gospel of grace with saving grace. Because of the sin in the culture Paul went to win the sinners of the culture. He did not back down.

Acts 17:16–34 says [16] Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for

*“In him we live and move and have our being”;
as even some of your own poets have said,*

“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

[29] *Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.* [30] *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,* [31] *because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

[32] *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.”* [33] *So Paul went out from their midst.* [34] *But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.*

Paul goes right in the midst of them and communicates with them with his life view. He talks about creation, the fall where we're sinners and we need to repent, redemption where God has provided a way for us to be saved from our sins, providence where in Him you live, move and have your being and consummation where He has declared a day in which He will judge all of humanity and there will either be the new heavens and the new earth or the judgment of God in a place called hell. His five elements in a world and life view, he communicates to the people here. He uses their own culture where he even quotes some of their philosophers.

Here is what I want you to see in this study and in the next study. The foundational of those five elements is creation and that's where Paul starts. If there is no Creator then there is no fall. If there is no Creator then we have no hope of a Redeemer. If there is no Creator then there is no providence, no sustaining Hand. If there is no Creator then there is no consummation. The Creator and doctrine of creation is foundational. We see this in our Bible because God starts ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ Notice that God takes no time to explain Himself. He explains where you came from. Why is there something rather than nothing? Where did it come from? Why is it here? All of those questions begin to be answered with the doctrine of creation.

I believe that is why the doctrine of creation is attacked. In the next study I will give you five things in the doctrine of creation that we have to hold to. We just can't say ‘I believe God created the heavens and the earth.’ There are five things in the doctrine of creation that cannot be dismissed and I will cover one of them in this study. Through one man it all fell. Do you think Paul believed in the historic Adam and Eve? If you want to know where the fall comes from you have to go back to creation. If you want to know where redemption comes from you have to go back to creation because if in one man it all fell, in another Man, a new Adam it can all be made right. So here Paul is unfolding for us the world and life view and its five elements. The one he starts with and repeats three different times is the God who made you, the God who made the heavens and the earth, this is the God of creation. So there is a creation and if there is a creation that means there is a Creator.

Having said that I want to distill five things out this text that I think you'll find very interesting as you step into this world with your Christian world and life view of creation, fall, redemption, providence and consummation, just like Paul did. There are five things Paul says to them and he doesn't dialogue it but he proclaims it. He has dialogue about it but he proclaims them.

The first thing is that every single person you meet is religious. If you take 20 random kids from 20 random families and put them on an island I guarantee each one will come up with their own religion. You don't meet five year old atheists. They are going to be religious. It doesn't matter how primitive the tribe is we have never found a tribe that wasn't religious. It

doesn't mean their religion is right. On the contrary because of the fall it is going to wrong but they are going to be religious. Paul said 'I perceive that all ya'll are religious' (Acts 17:22).

The second thing is that their religion calls for worship. There are two kinds of worship. There is *latria* which is worship of the true and living God or there is *idolatria* which is false worship. If you don't get your life view right then your worship can't be right.

Thirdly, is that they are all believers. Satan is a believer. Carl Sagan, your famous materialist is a believer. The Greek word for cosmos means 'ordered system' and here is Sagan's confession of faith on this; that's all there is, that's all there was, that's all there ever will be. Sounds familiar doesn't it, except we use that formula for God. Sagan used that formula for space, time and matter. In other words, space, time and matter are Sagan's eternal trinity and if you give space, time and matter long enough – poof – you get this. I have to confess to you that I have to be a Christian because I just don't have that much faith. I can't look at this creation and say 'It was here and think it came from nothing that was actually from something.'

That's like me saying a plane takes off from Seattle, Washington and one takes off from Miami both carrying construction material and they collide over Birmingham, Alabama and low and behold Briarwood Presbyterian was formed from that construction material. I know there was a builder, an architect and thought went into the building of this church. There was purpose to this and I see it and know it. I don't care what your worldview is it always requires a faith commitment.

The fourth thing Paul is abundantly clear about is that you must have a life view. From your religious, worshipping, faith commitment, it will be expressed from some kind of life view.

The fifth thing is that it isn't working. They have so many idols lined up and it still isn't working yet they say 'let's make one to the unknown god.' We make a god for every gap but every god we make for the gap isn't working. It's not working in their life, their mind, their heart or in anything and it doesn't make sense. It says they are always going around thinking of something new because it's not working. So those are the five categories of life views that are built from the sovereign self and what they produce.

Paul brings in a Biblical world and life view of creation which is the most essential element, then he goes to the fall, then redemption, then to providence and then to the consummation. Now let's see how this works out in a very specific way by looking at Romans 1. This is where we'll come back to in the next study to give you the five non-negotiables in the Biblical doctrine of creation. We'll get started by looking at Romans 1 where Paul not only goes to Athens but to Rome where the political, military and economic power of the day is and he goes with the same world and life view. He engages them with this letter to the church at Rome.

Romans 1:18–32 says [18] *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* [19] *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* [20] *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* [21] *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* [22] *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* [23] *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

[24] *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,* [25] *because they exchanged the truth about God*

for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!
Amen.

[26] *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

[28] *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.* In other words, this is cultural codification of irrational sexual immorality and the ungodliness that is there.

Here is your takeaway. The essential foundation to a Christian life view is the Biblical doctrine of creation. Like every element in a Christian world and life view i.e. fall, redemption, providence and consummation, it is a matter of faith but unlike other life views Christians are not just invited to test it, we are commanded and expected to test it. Richard Dawkins says faith is a refusal to look at data and evaluate it. That is not Christian faith. Christian faith demands you to look at the data and evaluate it. John says to test the prophets.

Paul says in I Thessalonians 5:21, [21] *but test everything; hold fast what is good.* When Thomas says to Jesus that he is not sure He is resurrected even though he is looking Him in the face Jesus tells him to test Him by putting his hands out and touching Him. This isn't a ghost, it's a real body. The whole Gospel of John has put Jesus on trial – who He is, what He claims to be and do. All John does throughout this entire Gospel is bring witness after witness after witness.

Paul in I Corinthians 15 gives the appearances of Jesus Christ but he also says this about the Gospel. I Corinthians 15:12–19 says [12] *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* [13] *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* [14] *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.* [15] *We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.* [16] *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.* [17] *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* [18] *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* [19] *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Paul is basically saying if the resurrection isn't test as historical fact then our Gospel is foolishness. You and I are in fact called to test it. So with all due respect to one of the southern icons, Mark Twain who said – faith is believing what you know ain't so. Faith is believing what God has revealed to be true, testing it and finding out instead of being incoherent, inconsistent and irrational, it is rational and supra-rational, it is logical and supra-logical, it is coherent and it works. I don't believe it because it works, I believe it because it's true. Because it's true and you test it, it's coherent, rational, consistent, logical, supra-logical, and supra-rational but never illogical, irrational, or inconsistent. Are there things that are hard to understand? Yes, but they are things that are true.

So what does Paul do in this particular text? The first thing he said in this text is that the evidence for God is accessible to anyone and undeniable to everyone. Romans 1:19–21a says [19] *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* [20] *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* [21a] *For although they knew God...* The knowledge of God for a God-centered world and life view is evidence and accessible to anyone and undeniable to everyone.

It is what one philosophy called the goldilocks syndrome. Who has been sitting in my chair? Who has been eating my porridge? Who has been laying in my bed? When you see this creation you know there is a Creator. Nothing doesn't create something and something can't recreate itself with order and with law. If you have order then there is an orderer. If there is law then there is a lawgiver.

Go ask those who study DNA. They use computer language when they say this body is hardware but coded in the body is the software—the DNA. It is all there from the moment of conception on. It is in every cell and in every molecule. God put it there. The creation is finely tuned. Did you know there are 29 things that have to happen within one second when you cut yourself so that you don't bleed to death? Did you know that we have just enough hydrogen so that we can exist? One percent more and we die. Did you know the Milky Way exists just far enough away from the other galaxies so their gravitational impact would not throw our galaxy into chaos?

Did you know when you look at this Somebody made this a home for somebody? One might think that is a man-centered view of creation but that's a God-centered view of creation and then God made man in His image and told him to enjoy it and use it for My glory. When you do that you'll enjoy Me. So God has ordered this. How do you explain the second law of thermodynamics for this thing ought to be going into chaos which was even stated by a physics teacher my wife had in college. For one who was not a believer he even said there must be something hold it together. I have news for you for it's not something but it's Someone. Here is this creation all for us in this beautiful, precise, protected place from the Creator who has built the hardware and the software all within it.

Secondly, the evidence though irrefutable to anyone, will be suppressed by everyone. Romans 1:18, 21 and 28 says [18] *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* [21] *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* [28] *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*

So I have two questions for you. Why do they suppress it and how do they suppress it? He says simply that they suppress it in unrighteousness. Every time someone I'm counseling comes to me and says 'I don't have Biblical grounds for divorce but I think I'm going to get one anyway' I know what is happening. Whenever we walk apart from the Spirit against God we are suppressing the truth. Our problem is not ignorance. Through the creation we have enough information. The heavens declare the glory of God. Night after night and day after day their speech pours out. It is constantly coming out and shouting the majesty and glory of God. We in the sovereign-self suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We do it because we want the sovereign self and it is our unrighteousness that does it.

How do we suppress the truth? We do it by false worship, idolatry. We worship and serve the creation and the creature. We make our gods because we like to worship ourselves. When I make the god I worship then who am I really worshipping? I am worshipping the sovereign self, no matter how illogical that god is. The books of Psalms, Jeremiah and Isaiah point out that we use a piece of log to cook with and build with but then we carve it and worship it – where is the sense in that? Our idolatry is incoherent, illogical and it is utterly destructive. Our idolatry is not only sinful things but our idolatry can be done with God's good things where we worship a marriage or a spouse or a parent or our children. It is when we use God's good gifts above and beyond Him. This is suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.

Thirdly and finally, the consequences of this suppression are inevitable to anyone and everyone. What are the consequences? The consequences are a distorted mind and a distorted life. If you have the wrong life view then you'll have the wrong life style. If you have the wrong life love then you'll have the wrong life style and life view. The text says **He gave them over** to a debased mind and I think those are some of the most frightening words in the Bible aside from 'depart from Me.' In other words, He says 'professing to be wise they become fools.'

The denial of a God-centered life view secured through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, is a sophisticated, intentional, arduous journey into imbecility. It just doesn't make any sense. It is amazing the IQ of many who embrace it, because the problem is not the IQ. The heart of the problem is the problem with the heart. Suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, where does that lead us? It leads us to a distorted mind which leads to a distorted life – ruthless, liars, murderers.

I'm in an election where sometimes the debate is, 'let's elect the least untrustworthy person' or 'let's elect the one who hasn't told the biggest lies.' I'm not saying that about all the candidates, I'm just saying I hear that kind of conversation between people. It's amazing how distorted our lifestyles get and how we get boiled alive in the kettle of immorality. Where does it lead to? They give hearty approval to sexual immorality, sexual perversion, disobedient to parents, maliciousness, anger, lying and all those things that were listed in the text. In other words, the culture with its life view then codifies and enculturated irrational immorality and they call evil good and good evil.

What is our answer? It is our life love, Jesus. Let it constrain you. It is a God-centered life style—creation, fall, redemption, providence and consummation. Then our life style needs to be increasingly growing in consistency with the life view that is maturing in our life and that people will see the grace and glory of God increasingly from us, even as they hear it from us as we follow men like Paul in Romans 1 and Acts 17. We will continue this in the next study so let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Would You go with us as we serve You and we will give You the praise and glory? Help us not only to think right but to think from our knees, saturated with prayer, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

To live a faithful and effective Christian LifeStyle, a Christian must develop a Christ-centered, Bible-framed, Spirit-filled LifeView propelled by a Christ-consumed LifeLove saturated by persistent prayer.

LifeLove – LifeView – LifeStyle

FOUR FRAMING QUESTIONS

- I. Why is there something rather than nothing?
- II. Why are some things right and other things wrong?
- III. What things are right and what things are wrong?
- IV. Who or What determines the things that are right and the things that are wrong?

FOUR PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- I. Who am I?
- II. Where did I come from?
- III. Why am I here?
- IV. Where am I going?

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Creation–Fall–Redemption–Providence–Consummation

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW - CREATION

Acts 17:10–34

- Everyone you meet is Religious.
- Everyone you meet is a Worshipper.
- Everyone you meet is a Believer.
- Everyone you meet has a LifeView.
- Ultimately the LifeView is incoherent, irrational, and inconsistent and it is not working.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The essential foundation to a Christian LifeView is the Biblical Doctrine of Creation and like every element in a Christian LifeView and like every other LifeView it is a matter of faith but unlike other LifeViews we are not just invited to test it, we are commanded & expected to test it. Not a leap in the dark but a walk in the light.

ROMANS 1:16–34

- I. The evidence for God is accessible to anyone & undeniable to everyone.
 - Creation
 - Humanity
- II. The evidence though irrefutable to anyone is suppressed by everyone.
 - Why?
 - How?
- III. The consequences are inevitable to anyone and everyone.
 - Distorted mind
 - Distorted life