

RENEWING OF OUR MIND

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Recently I wrote an article for the Sharon Star in which I discussed how God created man as a three-part being; body, soul, and spirit. *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (soul)"* (Genesis 2:7). God formed man's physical body from the dust on the ground. He breathed man's spirit into him through his nostrils, and man became a living person with a mind, a will, and the ability to have emotions and feelings. Through his spirit, man could commune with God and receive revelation from God. With his mind, he could think about and reason through the things revealed to him through his spirit and come to a place of understanding so that the revealed truths could be practically applied to his life. Using his will he could choose what to do with the information that he now had, and through his body, he could carry out the decisions of his will.

God has a unique and wonderful plan to save man to the

uttermost or completely. *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25). *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). At the time of our salvation or regeneration, our spirit that was dead to God because of sin was resurrected and came into a state of eternal life through the impartation of the Holy Spirit into our being. I, for one, cannot fathom all that takes place when we are regenerated. However, we know that something wonderful and supernatural takes place *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Book of Romans is often called the greatest treatise on the Christian life ever written. In his letter to the

Romans, chapters 1-8, Paul describes the foundational principle of salvation by the grace of God, the breaking of the power of sin through our co-crucifixion with Christ, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to empower a walk of righteousness. Romans 8:4 says, *“that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* God’s providential plan for His saved elect is for us to be living, breathing, walking demonstrations of the righteous requirements of the law. He accomplishes this by removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a soft, moldable heart of flesh. He puts the Spirit of Christ in us who writes His laws on our hearts such that we come to love what He loves and hate what He hates and where His desires become our desires. God’s objective for us is a total transformation.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul begins to tell us how this transformation takes place, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”* Paul is saying that considering all that God has done for us, there is a reasonable act of worship that He has every right to expect and that is that we will refuse to follow the ways of the world but will allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds from within.

Returning to Romans 8:5 (NRSV) we read, *“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.”* The Greek word for “mind” is *phroneo*. The Strong’s Concordance states the following, “This word essentially equates to personal opinion fleshing itself out in action. This idea is difficult to translate into English because it combines the visceral and cognitive aspects of thinking.” In other words, our minds are not just computer-like organs that accumulate facts that are used to make decisions. Our minds have an attitude, a bent, a frame, a mindset that we inherited from Adam. It is this mindset that must be renewed. It is not just about what we think but also the attitude and mindset that leads to our thoughts. In fact, it is a matter of life and death. *“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”* (Romans 8:6).

In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 we read, *“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is*

the image of God, should shine on them.” We see the effects of this blinding all around us in the world today. By captivating the minds of unbelievers, Satan can exercise great influence on ethics, philosophy, literature, entertainment, morality, and the whole social fabric of society. In Romans 12:2 (J.B. Phillips), we hear Paul’s warnings to Christians, *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold but let God remold your minds from within...”* In 2 Corinthians 11:2 (NIV), Paul also has this warning to Christians, *“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the snake’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”* As Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers, he can also deceive the minds of Christians if we are careless about our walk. *“Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices”* (2 Corinthians 2:11).

We have established that there is a difference between the spirit of man and the soul of man. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). Our mind or *phroneo* (Greek) is part of our soul or inner man, but it is also the part of our soul that is the closest to our spirit. Listen to what Paul tells us about this relationship in Ephesians 1:17-18, *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”* In verse 17, Paul is praying that God will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. In other words he is praying that our spirit would be able to receive the wisdom and revelation of the truth of God by intuition through the Holy Spirit. Then in verse 18, he prays that the eyes of our understanding will be enlightened. In other words, he prays that our minds will be able to understand what has been revealed to our spirit such that it can have practical application in our lives. By this, we can understand that our minds and particularly our mindset is critical in our sanctification and why God wants to renew it.

In Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul again describes the mind of an unbeliever. *“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of*

God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” He then says to believers, “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:20-24). Notice that between the “put off” and “put on” in verses 22 and 24 respectively, is verse 23, “and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Paul is teaching by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that it is not sufficient to just replace bad thoughts with good thoughts but that we undergo a renewal, a transformation, a metamorphosis of our Phroneo. In Romans 12:2, the phrase “be transformed” is in the passive tense. It means the transformation is not something we can make happen. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish that work. Paul tells us to “put off.... the old man” (Ephesians 4:22). He says basically the same thing in Romans 6:11, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” These are things we are expected to do. However, it seems that the “putting on of the new man” in Ephesians 4:24 is dependent upon our being renewed in the spirit of our mind.

How does this renewal occur? 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” So we can see that this transformation, unlike the regeneration of our spirit, is not instantaneous but rather a process that goes on continuously. What facilitates the process? Psalms 19:7-11 provides some insight into this question. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.” It becomes clear from this passage that renewal of our mindset comes by meditating on and becoming practitioners of the word of God. Just this morning, I read this passage of scripture from Luke 11:27-28, “And it happened, as he spoke these things, that a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is

the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!’ But He said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’”

One of the most direct scriptures concerning the mindset of Christ is found in Philippians 2:5-8, “Let this mind (phroneo) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

The instruction to us is crystal clear. Adopt the same mindset, attitude, bent, philosophy as Christ. His mindset was characterized by humility, obedience, and with no concern for His own reputation. When we allow pride to prevent the extending of forgiveness and reputation to prevent us from being ministers of reconciliation we have not allowed the mindset of Christ to be our mindset. “And he said to them all, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?’” (Luke 9:23-25)? It is interesting to note that in this passage, the Greek word for “life” is *psychen* which is also translated “soul.” The saving of our soul, of which our mind is such a significant part, is a process of allowing the cross to work every day on its renewal. We must read or hear the word of God taught daily and cry out to the Holy Spirit to help us to become “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22, KJV).

How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His work to renew our minds? Hebrews 4:12 goes a long way in answering that question; “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” As we read and meditate on the word of God, we must ask the Holy Spirit to allow the word to discern the attitude or mindset of our own heart. If we truly want to attain unto the maturity of sonship, we must welcome the Spirit’s uncovering of those things that are part of the carnal mindset so that we can repent of them. This facilitates the renewal process and puts us in an attitude where we can put on the new man made in the image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3-5 says, “For though we walk in the flesh,

we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." This admonition covers more than just our random thoughts, although they often need to be taken captive also, even more so, we need to examine our mindset, attitude and bent that influences our thoughts. The Greek word for "thought" in this passage is *noema* that, according to Strong's Concordance, means "the personal verdict that comes out of using the mind." We are not just to take the thought captive but also the attitude and mindset, that results in the thought and take it captive to the obedience of Christ.

I read something which I thought was a reasonably good natural analogy to the spiritual truth of how we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process of renewing our minds. It is like a computer into which a new operating system is installed. In order for it to deliver the new and improved operational results, the old programs must be deleted from the hard drive and new programs must be loaded. The "junk" that has accumulated on the hard drive must be cleaned out. When we came to Jesus, God gave us a new "operating system" so to speak. When we came to Christ, we received the seed of eternal life through the Holy Spirit. God gave us His Word for us to "load" into our minds such that as new beings we might be conformed to the very image of Christ through the renewing of our minds. We must "*put off the old man*" just as we would delete old programs from a computer. God has given us His word, but we must expose our minds to it and allow it to discern the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. This is not always a pleasant process, but an absolutely necessary one if we are to be transformed on the inside and not just "dressed up" on the outside.

Do we want to love what God loves and hate what God hates? Do we want to think with the mind of Christ? Do we want our desires to be the desires of Christ? That is what it means to be transformed. If that is our desire, it means we will "put off" pride-filled opinions and "put on" the desire for unity at whatever cost to our self-nature. We will "put off" self-promotion and "put on" authentic humility that views others as more important than ourselves. We will "put off" selfishness and "put on" the attitude of a servant. We will "put off" the focus on our own interests and "put on" an interest in what matters to others. We must consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let Christ's mindset become our motivation (see Philippians 2:2-5, The Passion Translation). In between every one of these "put offs" and "put ons" there must be a renewal in "the spirit of our mind." If you were to ask me to explain how that actually happens, I would tell you, "I know not how." It is a work of the Holy Spirit alone and known only to Him. However, by the measure of faith that God has given to us, we can believe that as we purposefully, and with a deep desire, allow the word of God to penetrate even to the dividing of soul and spirit and to the discerning of our thoughts and attitudes, we will be miraculously transformed by the renewing of our minds. As the renewal process proceeds, we will experience more and more that indeed the old things are passed away and behold, all things have become new.

"For as he (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he...." (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). ✚

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