



# The Renewing of the Mind

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## The privilege

It is the privilege of every believer to actively pursue conformity to the image of Christ. It is an amazing honor that finite human beings can be recreated to not only be partakers of the divine nature as it says in 2 Peter 1:4, but that we can also put on the image of Christ and reflect it in our lives. Romans 8:29 says we can be conformed to the very image of Christ. How is this accomplished? Paul in Romans 12:2 calls it being renewed in our minds.

You remember Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” This is also repeated in Mark 12:30. In these passages Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, but notice that in the Gospels Jesus adds, “Love God with your mind.” But what does it mean to love God with our mind?

Let’s read Romans 12:1-2: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* As our minds are made new, it is then that we can truly love God with our minds.

The prerequisite for renewing our thoughts is a new birth, a complete yielding of ourselves to God. Notice in Romans 6:6-7 that Paul describes the new birth. He also paints a beautiful word picture in the previous verses (3-5) of how in baptism we are buried symbolically with Christ, and as we come out of the water we are raised to new life.

Then in verses 12-19 the Apostle Paul discusses yielding our “members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” When many people think about yielding themselves to God, they think about their hands, feet, mouth etc., but I believe our minds are the most important part of our members which we need to give to God. These verses in Romans 6 correspond with Romans 12:1, where it says we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Then in verse 2 the Apostle Paul presents the privilege of being transformed, and the next phrase is the topic of this article: the renewing of our minds.

We see from this verse that our transformation (literally, our metamorphosis) is dependent on our thinking being changed. A life that is transformed is the message of Scripture. Proverbs 23:7 says that “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” So we become what we think. In order to obtain this transformation that Paul is talking about, we need to understand practically what renewing our minds really means. Let’s begin considering this matter with the following question: Why do our minds (our thinking) need to be renewed (made new)?

## The problem

Travel with me in your minds all the way back about 6000 years ago to the Garden of Eden where we learn what happened to the human mind. Originally God said in Genesis 1:27: *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* But in chapter 3 we see that Satan tempted Eve with the fruit, and in verse 6 it says Eve saw that it was “a tree to be desired to make one wise.” Eve had a desire for wisdom, but what Eve failed to realize was that God created her with wisdom. In the end, though, Eve traded that wisdom for foolishness. When Adam and Eve sinned, they forfeited their ability to think God’s thoughts. In 1 Corinthians 3:19 it says, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

I think we will all agree that sinners are foolish people. Isaiah says it this way: “all we like sheep have gone astray.” In sin, we are out of the right way; we do foolish things. I am sure we are all shocked at times at what “intelligent” people do and say.

Our family recently visited a zoo. In the building that housed the monkey exhibit, plastered on the walls were many pictures comparing humans and monkeys. The following quote was also written on the walls: “Notice the similarity! How can we not care?” It seems so hard to believe that anyone can be foolish enough to truly believe we came from monkeys. But that is what happens when we do not have the wisdom of God. Someone has said:

Sinful, human thought reverses God's thought!<sup>1</sup>

In following Christ, we need to learn to think in a new way (our minds must be renewed) because in the fall, humanity lost the wisdom of God. Foolishness is the absence of wisdom, just like darkness is the absence of light. The Apostle Paul says it this way in Ephesians 4:17-18: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Notice the words the Apostle used:

- Vain minds
- Veiled or darkened understanding
- Ignorance

### Blindness

This is the condition of the human mind prior to being renewed! And Paul is telling these believers that they should stop living and thinking with empty minds, dark understanding, ignorance, and blindness. He told them, "you haven't learned to live that way in Christ." Then he continues his exhortation by telling them to put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and to put on the new man.

Let's look at a practical example of learning to think in a new way. The Bible is very clear that we should not worry. Apparently many Christians haven't understood that, or at least do not know how to deal with worry in their lives. Recently we were visiting in a church where one of the leaders in the church was relating that he was one who worried a lot. He spoke of a time when his brother came to him and was reprimanding him for his worry. Apparently this church leader made a joke of it and said: "Somebody has to worry." Far too often we blame our problems on personality or some other source, instead of admitting we have a need and then learning how to deal with it.

In these days many of us travel by plane, especially those of us who do mission work. Since September 11, 2001, I've thought many times, while preparing to fly, of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Now, I can choose to worry, wring my hands, be nervous and afraid, or I can recognize that God is in control of my life and that nothing

will happen to me if it is not God's will. And if it is in the will of God for something like that to happen, I can't stop it by worrying. If it is not in the will of God, then I'll just waste my time worrying for nothing. Praise God we do not have to live with the foolish mindset of the world, but God has prepared a way for our thinking to be made new! *Our minds must be renewed!*

What is the new mind like? What is our pattern for change?

### The pattern

Let's look at wisdom. Remember it was the loss of God's wisdom that created the human condition as we know it today. Someone has defined wisdom as "thinking God's thoughts after Him," or "wisdom is seeing and thinking about life from God's perspective."

- Earthly (fleshly) thinking leads to death.

• *For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Ro. 8:6*

- We must leave sinful (earthly) thoughts and begin to think God's thoughts.

• *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are*

*your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Is. 55:6-9*

- In Romans 11:33-36 we have an example of God's wisdom and greatness: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.*



Paul is telling these believers that they should stop living and thinking with empty minds, dark understanding, ignorance, and blindness.

On the continent of Africa there are a lot of ants. Many times I've seen lines of busy ants at work. Sometimes the line can be very long. Those ants are locked into their life. They cannot come up to where I am and see themselves working, and see the line from beginning to end. In the same way, we as humans are locked into time and space. We can't see tomorrow. We even forget details of things that happened a few years ago. We as humans are locked into this bubble we call time. God looks down at us from Eternity, much like we would look down at the ants. He looks at us from outside of time. He is not confined by space or time. He can look down today and see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, at the same time He is looking at us today. All of time, that we call history, is nothing more than a speck to God, who looks at it from eternity.

So the renewed mind is the mind that is learning wisdom and growing in the knowledge of God—learning what God thinks about us and life, and following His pattern.

How is the mind (our thinking) made new?

## The process

I believe there are at least three things we can do that will help us in this area of learning to think in a new way.

### 1. Through purposeful study of the Word of God:

- 1 Peter 2:2: *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.* After the new birth, it is this milk of the Word that is our spiritual food.
- 2 Peter 1:3: says that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. From where does that knowledge come? Of course we know it comes from the Word of God. So as we purposefully study the Word, we learn about God and how to change our thinking.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18: *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* This is a beautiful passage dealing with being changed into the image of God. Notice the word “beholding.”



Living in sin we build bridges in our minds—bridges of wrong habits, attitude, responses, and ways of thinking.

That does not mean a quick glance. No, it means to gaze. So in this verse we see that the Word is a mirror which reflects God and as we gaze into it we are changed into His image. Hallelujah! We must purposefully study the Word with the goal of being changed into God's image.

- Proverbs 2:1-5 (as well as many other passages) emphasizes the importance of diligently, purposefully seeking after God's wisdom.

- 2 Peter 2:7-8 tells us that Lot's soul was vexed because of the wickedness around him. We too will be vexed with the evil around us, and it will be through the Word that our minds and souls will be renewed.

2. By actively controlling our thought life:

- 2 Corinthians 10:5: *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

- 1 Peter 1:13: “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober ...” In this verse the Apostle Peter was alluding to the wearing of robes and how, when needed, the individual would tie up the loose ends of the robe so that it would not get in the way. Peter is saying that we should “tie up” the loose end of our minds, or that we should have our thoughts gathered in and focused on spiritual things. As a side note: notice he also commands us to be sober. This word does not mean sad, long-faced, or serious. In the New Testament the word “sober” means “to be in control of one's mind; to have clear thinking.” So Peter is basically saying that we should be actively controlling our thought life; be focused and think clearly.

3. By a focused effort to replace the old with the new:

- Philippians 2:5: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* If we study the surrounding verses, we see that the “mind” that Christ Jesus had was a mind of humility, obedience, and submission to God and His will. This gets very



practical. We have the responsibility daily, in hundreds of little ways, to choose humility over pride, obedience to God and earthly authority over disobedience, and submission over exerting myself and what I want.

- Ephesians 4:22-24: We mentioned these verses just briefly a little earlier, but what I want to emphasize is the imperative we are given. This putting off the old, being renewed in our minds, and putting on the new is not something that just happens to take place sometime in our Christian life. No! We are to actively pursue replacing the old with the new by renewing our thoughts (the way we think) through the Word of God.
- Right after Romans 12:2, where we are commanded to be renewed in our minds, and basically on through the end of Romans, Paul—through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—gives many practical examples of how we need to think about ourselves, our Christian brothers and sisters, our enemies, the government, the spiritually weak, and etc.

As believers, whether we've been saved for a week or for thirty years, we need to focus our efforts on replacing our erroneous thinking with the thoughts of God.

Sometime ago I read a scientific article on the brain, and because it illustrated so well the process our brains go through in order to have our thoughts renewed, I would like to quote some of it here. The article was written by Dr. David A. DeWitt and was printed in the *Answers in Genesis* magazine. He says the brain "is not a computer, made of solid-state wires and silicon wafers. It is three pounds of living, growing cells that constantly form new connections and change old ones." Later in the article he notes that "the adult brain has around 100 billion neurons, and just one of those neurons can make tens of thousands of connections. Those connections that are repeatedly used become stronger, while those that are unused can be lost in a process called pruning." Near the end of the article Dr. DeWitt's admonition is that "since experience alters the brain in both positive and negative ways, it is all the more important to live a godly life."<sup>2</sup>

What struck me so forcefully was the fact that the things we do actually change the structure of the brain. Habits that develop in our lives are in reality neurons that are connecting repeatedly to form a pathway in our minds. I tell our children when they are learning something new that they are building bridges in their brains.

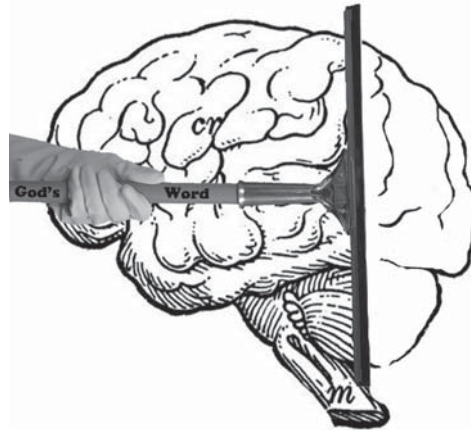
To illustrate this point I like to use the example of a child learning to tie his shoes. At first the job is slow and laborious. In the beginning, a child may attempt to wad all the strings together with the vain hope that they will end up tied. Kind of like the evolutionary theory where there was a "big bang," and all of a sudden the universe appeared. No, life isn't like that. The child slowly learns how to cross the strings, make the loops and finally secure the tie. At each step of the journey the brain is building the bridge it needs in order to make this shoe tying event a habit. Then in years to come, as an adult, tying shoes will be something that is done without even a thought.

Living in sin we build bridges in our minds—bridges of wrong habits, attitude, responses, and ways of thinking. When we repent of our sins and give ourselves to God we must begin the process of building new bridges in our minds (new thought patterns and habits). We do this, of course, by reading God's Word; learning how God views life and what He thinks about us; and then as we conform our thoughts to match His, our minds are renewed. The wonderful part is that as the neurons begin to form new pathways in our minds, the old connections are torn down and that "material" is used to build the new bridge!

A good recipe to follow is found in Philippians 4:8: *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* We truly do become what we think!

I want to leave you with a fairly lengthy quote, but one certainly worth reading:

He loves God with all his mind (intellect) who applies himself only to know God, and His holy will; who receives with submission, gratitude, and pleasure the sacred truths which God has revealed to



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man; who studies no art nor science, but as far as it is necessary for the service of God, and uses it at all times to promote His glory—who forms no projects nor designs, but in reference to God and the interests of mankind; who banishes from his understanding and memory every useless, foolish, and dangerous

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thought, together with every idea which has any tendency to defile his soul, or turn it for a moment from the centre of eternal repose. In a word, he who sees God in all things; thinks of Him at all times; having his mind continually fixed upon God, acknowledging Him in all his ways; who begins, continues, and ends all his thoughts, words, and works to the glory of His name: this is the person who loves God with all his heart, life, strength, and intellect. He is crucified to the world, and the world to him; he lives, yet not he, but Christ lives in him. He beholds as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and is changed into the same image from glory to glory. Simply and constantly looking unto Jesus,

the author and perfecter of his faith, he receives continual supplies of enlightening and sanctifying grace, and is thus fitted for every good word and work!<sup>3</sup>

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. 2 Pe. 3:18 ~

<sup>1</sup> Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Answers, Oct.-Dec. 2009. [www.answersmagazine.com](http://www.answersmagazine.com)

<sup>3</sup> Adam Clarke's commentary on Matthew 22:37