

**RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part ten - Teaching #2166**

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**THINKING LIKE A CHRISTIAN - The surprising roots to a transformed life - And why “practical teaching” may not bring lasting solutions to your problems**

**Romans 12:1-2 - “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [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.”**

Christianity isn't real at all if there is no transformation of the life by the Spirit of God. This marvelous text rings with the melody of a new life. It is known and loved because Paul makes it seem so obvious and so natural that God transforms people. He doesn't just change their religious beliefs. He doesn't just add some regulations for them to live by. He makes them new. We're going to spend several weeks unfolding ideas from these two verses. They are grand, sweeping words and they are worthy of our time and study and application.

These verses are **for** you and me, and they're **about** you and me. They

bear so directly on the subject of loving God with our minds. Paul makes it clear that being renewed in your mind is the key to everything else about you. This is an ongoing process. Paul is talking about something that is ***begun*** at some specific time but not ***achieved*** at any one point. We are to be constantly engaged in the ***re***-newing of the mind.

So how does this work? Perhaps more specifically, why does this ***not*** seem to work for many people? Why are there Christians - professors of ***new creation*** - who are walking around in ***old lives***? Paul's goal in this great text seems to be to encourage us all to be engaged in renewed minds and transformed life-styles. I want us all to believe this is possible for us because it is near to God's heart and bound up in His plan and power. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. It really is the key to everything.

The two points I will make at the beginning of this teaching are a background to everything else I want to say in the next few weeks. Right at the end of this teaching we'll come directly to some of the specific thoughts from the text. I'm doing this because nothing else Paul says in these two verses will make sense or accomplish the Spirit's purpose until these two background, foundational points are firmly embedded in our understanding:

- 1) **CHRISTIAN CONVERSION BEGINS IN OUR MINDS WITH AN ORGANIC REBIRTH RATHER THAN AN EXTERNAL MORAL ADJUSTMENT**

**Organic** and **external**. Since neither of those words is used in our text I need to explain what I mean. Think about the way we decorate trees at Christmas. The trees come out of storage and we **decorate** them. The ornaments look nice as far as decorations go, but they are hung on the branches **externally**. They dress the tree up. Some good ones even look like they're part of the tree. But they aren't. They actually have nothing to do with the tree itself. The tree isn't involved at all in **growing** them. They're just **on** the tree. Even for those purists who decorate real, living, potted trees, the decorations aren't a part of the tree's life. They're just decorations.

But if you go out to my perennial garden in the summer you will see how God makes things beautiful and fruitful. He doesn't hang fruit and flowers on the branches from the **outside**. He births and grows them, gradually, to be sure, from the **inside**. Unlike the decorations on my Christmas tree, these flowers and fruits aren't just attached or added on. They are there because they are **what the tree really is**. They don't just hang **on** the tree. They **are** the tree. They are what the tree is **organically**.

So remember these two key words - **external** and **organic**. My Christmas lights are **external**. My perennials are **organic**.

Nothing in Romans 12:1 and 2 will make any life changing difference to you until you learn to see the life of the Spirit as we've been describing it. It's unalterably **organic**. You can't **copy** the life of Jesus from someone else. There is no mechanical way of incorporating some religious rules and regulations so you can **be** just like Jesus.

The **WWJD** bracelets are **kind** of true, but not **quite**. **Morality** starts on the **outside** of the life. **Christianity** starts on the **inside** of the life. You can make yourself better **behaved** but that has nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. Apart from the Holy Spirit's work in your mind you can never make yourself **Godly**.

This is so important and so misunderstood that I need to spend more time with it. There is a right approach and a wrong approach to living the Christian life. The wrong approach - the unfruitful approach - starts with particular actions. The person says to himself, "I'll just stop doing this or that bad thing and I will be a Christian. I tell lies and I must not do that. I swear and I must not do that. I cheat and I must not do that. Jesus taught against those things." In other words, they start with the **particular outward action** rather than the **inwardly renewed mind**.

In contrast, Jesus said we live *in* His life the way a branch abides in a vine. This is **organic, inward** life. Particular outward actions are never the **starting point** of spiritual life. There are people who don't swear and would never cheat but they are not Christians. The outward actions are the **fruit** of Christianity, not the **root**. **Not doing something bad will never turn anyone into a Christian.** As I said in the statement of this first point, the Christian experience begins with an **organic** change of heart rather than an **external** change of actions.

True, Christianity **reaches** the actions. The outward life must be transformed - "**How can we who died to sin still live in it? "** (**Romans 6:2**). Well, of course, we can't. A Christian doesn't have the option to continue unrepentantly in sin. That's an obvious truth.

But **how** one approaches the issue of personal sin **as a Christian** is different than many people think. The outward fruit of holiness **grows** on our lives from the **inside**. It's the result of an **inner** transformation. It is not the same thing at all as morality. It is new life. I want to come back to this again at the end of this teaching.

We need now to consider one of the most popular misconceptions about the **kind** of truth our minds need in order for spiritual transformation to take place.

2) **WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHY 'PRACTICAL TEACHING' MAY NOT BRING THE SOLUTION TO PARTICULAR PROBLEMS**

In the first point we saw that the Christian life is ***organic*** rather than ***external***. Each one must, as the apostle Paul commanded, examine his or her heart to see if this change has taken place. Now we are ready to look at another related truth, and it too centers around two important words. The Christian life is ***comprehensive*** rather than ***particular***.

I need to explain those two terms as well. I mean spiritual life and Christian truth doesn't introduce itself to the mind merely as the ***solution to one particular personal need or problem***. This is a very popular approach in the contemporary church and it will never bear long term fruit. The gospel itself gets presented as a solution to some ***particular*** problem.

A person is lonely and Jesus is the friend indeed. A person is living aimlessly, without purpose, and Jesus is the One Who will give life meaning and direction. A person is struggling with sickness and lack and Jesus is presented as the One Who will bring healing and prosperity. But in each case a ***particular problem*** is singled out and that problem is the ***motive*** for the response to Jesus.

The church is shot through with this kind of teaching. It has such broad and quick appeal because it markets itself under the banner of **relevance**. And the problem with it is it can't bear long lasting fruit. Jesus never came to upgrade some segment or portion of your life. He came to claim ownership of **all** of it. That's what I mean when I say that Jesus didn't come to provide **particular** changes to your life but a **comprehensive** change to it. Just like a comprehensive insurance policy covers **everything**, Jesus comes to take ownership of **everything** about you.

There are many examples of this in the New Testament. Here's one:

**1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."**

Some things are obvious in this text. The **command** is right up front - "**Flee from sexual immorality**"(18). In spite of the way the sit comes train us to **laugh** at sexual immorality, we are to "**flee**" - put much distance between ourselves and it - and as quickly as possible. And we all know **why** Paul words the command that way. If we don't flee

**quickly** we probably won't flee **at all**.

So we all know **what** we should do here. But that's not the main point I want to drill down into here. I want to say emphatically that you can **flee** sexual immorality and still not be living like a Christian at all.

There are, believe it or not, **other** people, perhaps in other religions, who flee sexual immorality.

The real issue - the one that determines whether you're thinking like a Christian or not - is the **motivation** for sexual purity. **Why** flee sexual immorality? Or, to put it differently, how does the **Christian mind process the issue of sexual morality?** How can I tell if I'm thinking like a Christian when I'm not just reading my Bible or praying or going to church? This is the important question for the Christian to answer.

Paul's answer is stunning to the careful reader. Do I flee it because I might get AIDS? Do I flee it because I might get someone pregnant? Do I flee it because my parents would be broken-hearted, or I might lose my good standing in the community? The denomination will take my credentials? Is that the way a Christian mind starts to process the issue of sexual immorality?

No. None of those things are the motives for the Christian. Those motives are the motives for people who profess no faith whatsoever in Christ. All of those reasons are just the **small** reasons. They're reasons rooted in tiny parts of my life - **particulars**, if I can say it that way. None of them is the **big picture** for the Christian. None of those reasons has **God** in it, and the Christian **lives** for the glory of God.

That's the **comprehensive** change that has captured the Christian's heart. That's where the new life of Christ shows up so vividly and differently from the mere desire to be a better person. The Christian's driving motive is he's been bought with a price. Paul says he is no longer his own. It has little or nothing to do with keeping rules and regulations. It starts with the **whole**, not the **parts** of the life:

**2 Corinthians 5:17 - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."**

These words must never be taken to mean Paul is claiming total perfection for every Christian. That's not it at all.

But here's what Paul **does** mean. The Christian is a new **creation**. He is new **in whole**, not just in **individual parts**. And he's a new creation **right now** in this sense - every part of his mind and soul has been reached by Christ. The individual hasn't just brought certain **painful issues** to Jesus for a fix. No. He's given over the **whole** of his life. And the key point here is this is the way a genuine Christian **thinks**. This is the way he consistently **considers** his own life.

Here's what that means right now. He may not be perfect yet, but there is only **one motive** in every part of his being, in everything he does. As Paul would say, whether he eats or drinks, he does it all **to** (notice that **directional** word), it's all **thought through - aimed at - to the glory of God**.

Search your heart with this truth. Has Christ made this massive, **comprehensive** difference in your life. Is this new life pushing its way out into everything else about you? Or are you just trying to solve a few stubborn, particular problems, hoping that Jesus will help you out and prop you up as you may need Him from time to time?

I hope I can make this truth clear to you. Let me say it this way. There is a sense in which Jesus wants to reach every external,

particular problem of your life *indirectly* rather than *directly*. This is always the way practical problems are dealt with in the Scriptures.

Think again about Paul's instruction about sexual immorality. He doesn't give a talk about sexuality transmitted diseases, or pregnancy, or personal embarrassment. No. He talks about conversion, the cross, the nature of the atonement, and the indwelling Christ. He focuses on the kind of stuff many churches are abandoning as irrelevant and stuffy. These are *doctrinal* truths. Who would have imagined that sexuality was somehow tied to the study of redemption? Is the contemporary church missing something here?

I talk to people week after week who come looking for a solution for some particular problem. "Pastor, help me with my marriage," or, "Help me with my finances," or, "Help me with my stress." The situations are endless. And usually they see no connection between those things and their lack of understanding or grounding or interest in what they have come to perceive as the drudgery of Christian doctrine.

In fact, they've been *conditioned* by much of the body of Christ to look somewhere else - to something more *practical* - for the solution to their problems. And they're now set on a long, twisted path with a million different voices screaming a million different 'practical solutions' to their problem. They will wear themselves out with that

empty journey.

What we're considering today is foundational in the sense that none of the succeeding steps or efforts made in the walk of discipleship will click until these two principles are right. They're so important that it's worth the humility, repentance, study, and time to go back and make sure the foundation of your faith isn't one that can't possibly hold up the rest of your spiritual efforts. Get this right **before** you move on to anything else, even if you have to humbly back up to do it.

To **continue** right in the renewal of your mind you must **begin** right. If your buttoning up your coat and the get the first button in the wrong hole, you'll be wrong all the way down. Build your life around these two foundational principles. Make sure you've truly begun with the new life of the Spirit of Jesus in your soul. It's **organic**, not **external**. You can't just add Jesus on to the rest of your life. And, second, make sure you understand the principle of **comprehensive** newness and motivation in **all** areas of your life. Jesus will make you new, but He'll never come just to clean up the parts you want to present to him.

There is no other way to start the Christian life. You're either all in or

not in at all. That's why Jesus likened it to a new ***birth***. Birth means no part of you remains in the womb. There's a definite start. And it includes all of your being.