

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part four - Teaching #2154

Sunday, January 9th, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

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WHY THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT TAKE NO ROOT IN SOME PEOPLE'S LIVES

Romans 8:5-6 - “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] To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

1 John 2:15-17 - “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

This is the fourth in a series of teachings that had its birth arising out of the question, “***What is the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian in this present world?***” Are Christians always morally good while non-Christians are morally bad? Are there not **some** non-Christians who are as morally honest and sincere in their actions in this world?

We eventually came around to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:11-14 -
“**For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. [12] Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. [13] And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. [14] The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**”

Paul talks about two kinds of people here. There are “***spiritually minded***” people, and there are “***naturally minded***” people. Placing saving trust in Christ's redeeming work on the cross creates the difference. And we took the last two teachings in this series examining the key differences between those two.

In a nutshell, both are intellectually bright enough to ***read and learn what the Bible says***, and both are even able to ***agree with the doctrines*** they discover there - doctrines about the existence of God, the divine nature of Jesus Christ, the truthfulness of the words of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and His Second Coming.

But the “**spiritual person,**” as Paul calls him, receives these truths with a mixture of both **understanding** and **faith**. He leans on these truths as crucial and precious. He is **impacted** by these truths. He is **affected** by the things he sees from God because the Holy Spirit produces the **mind of God** inside his or her own skin. He adores the saving work of Christ on his behalf. He sees the ugliness of his own sin. He doesn’t **justify** his life by comparing it to friends or the values of the media. He looks to the truths of God’s Word.

This means he sees the sinfulness of his own lack of **love** for God. He sees his own arrogance and pride. He’s **humbled and broken** by the truth of the gospel. He sees, usually at the same time, both the desperate wickedness of his own heart, and the incredible beauty of spiritual truth. He is driven more deeply into Christ the way a parched deer is driven to water.

Listen to the way **Jonathan Edwards** described the impact of divine truth on the spiritual person in a sermon he preached in 1723 in Bolton, Connecticut. The English is dated and foreign to our ears, but I think you can still get his point if you listen and consider these words carefully: “**The Spiritual man hath got such a knowledge of divine things that, ever since, he is become quite another person than he was before. It has exceedingly altered his internal temper and disposition** [Notice - not just a change in **actions**, but a change in internal **appetites** and **affections**].”

“The knowledge that he has is so substantial, so inward, and so affecting, that it has quite transformed the soul and put a new nature into the man, has quite changed his very innermost principles, and has made things otherwise, even from the very foundation, even so that all things are become new to him. Yea, he is a new creature, he is just as if he was not the same, but were born again, created over a second time.”

“That light and knowledge has been let into his soul that has so affected him that he has a new nature, just as if a new spirit were infused into that body; of an angel of darkness has made an angel of light of him; has brought the image of God upon him; has made him of an heavenly temper and an angelical mind; has sweetened and mollified his dispositions; and of an heart of stone hath made a heart of flesh, of bitter has made sweet, and of dark has made light. This is the effect of true and spiritual knowledge of divine things.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Now, the only problem with taking one isolated Edward's quote is it makes this whole process sound almost automatic. Unless you probe carefully in the quoted words of Paul - "....**beholding** the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed....**" - one could get the false impression that this transformation **continues** in **sanctification** as freely and as instantly as it **begins** in **justification**. It can seem like it just happens for some folk and not for others.

That's the subject of today's teaching. It raises this question: ***Why isn't everyone transformed by beholding divine truth?*** Why do some people **struggle** with this whole process of spiritual transformation? And, an even deeper issue, why are some totally **cold and indifferent** to spiritual things?

For some Christians these questions are more of an open and shut issue. They rest their whole case on the sovereign choice of God to give spiritual life to some and not to others. In this theological system, Jesus Christ died on the cross only for the elect - those God sovereignly **chose** before the foundation of the world. Jesus never came to die for **everyone**. He came for those the Father had chosen. Those whom the Father has chosen truly desire to be saved. That very **desire** to come to Christ is given only to the elect. Those whom He has not chosen can do nothing to **create** a desire for Christ. They will never **want** to be saved. They **cannot** want to be saved. They could never be interested in being saved.

While there are many Christians who approach this whole subject from this perspective, I don't think it expresses everything the Bible says on the issue. I **do**, however, share some common ground with them. For example, I too believe that salvation is only possible through God's grace. **No one** is saved by his own effort. No one, on his own, can even **respond** to God's grace. Salvation is **always** of God's initiative and His free, sovereign grace is **always** the only foundation for a regenerate heart.

But I differ with this view on two points. **First**, I believe God has placed in the heart of **all** people, by His sovereign grace, the capacity to respond to His voice. While this isn't the subject of this teaching, I get that concept from Paul's words in **Romans 5:15-21**.

In other words, **everyone, not just some, can** come to the light, and the fact that everyone **can** come is solely by God's grace at work in their heart. Not one person has ever, will ever, or can ever, initiate his or her own salvation. It's simply **not** of our own works.

The **second** point where I would differ is I don't believe God's grace is **coercive - "irresistible"** is the more common and definitive term. It is **sovereign**, in that God alone initiates the process and exercises His will exactly as He chooses. But God, I believe, in His absolute sovereignty, has decreed that people, while **capable** of being **drawn**, will not be **elected** into a loving relationship with Him. After all, a loving relationship where I never **could** love anything **instead** says less about the beauty of the one loved than if the one loved was the option chosen as more worthy of love over a host of other beings and objects.

If God is loved supremely at the top of a very long list of options, then He must be wonderful indeed. If God is loved because, through His irresistible grace, there are absolutely no other options **on** the list, then that's the only reason He's embraced. If God has to **remove all competing desires to win my love**, my love is a more automated response to God's power. In my view, God gets infinitely less glory this way.

Enough of this. My point is I don't think this issue of spiritual mindedness is simply the result of God randomly flipping a coin as to who gets it and who doesn't. God wants new life for everyone. I think - ***I know*** - the New Testament teaches this: **2 Peter 3:9** - "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that **all** should reach repentance."

That word **“all”** must be allowed to stand on its own two feet. All means all. And this **can’t** mean (as some have stated) all of the **elect**. After all, none of the elect can **possibly** perish, as the words of this text indicate - **“....not wishing that any should perish....”**(9). The only people who can **possibly** perish are those who **aren’t** elect. And the text clearly says God is waiting for **them**, delaying the Second Coming, because He isn’t willing for any of **these** - those who are lost - to perish.

So, to get back to our question, ***why doesn’t everyone find spiritual things compelling. Why aren’t we all reached by it in the same way?*** For that matter, ***why don’t we all, even after our conversion, grow to the same spiritual maturity, or at the same rate?*** These are the issues of our two opening texts. I have four thoughts. We’ll look at two of them today and two of them next Sunday:

1) **THE GREAT CONTEST BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS TO SEE WHICH OF THEM CAN MOST EFFECTIVELY DRAW OUT OUR LOVE**

It’s clear from the Scriptures that this is the supreme issue in the mind and teaching of Jesus Christ, God the Son: **Matthew 22:36-38** - **“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”** [37] **And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment.”**

In a sense, the meaning of our world and our lives sits right here before our eyes this morning. ***What do you love most?*** That's it. That's the whole thing. That's the meaning of life.

Let me ask you a question you may have wondered about. ***Why does God still allow Satan to muck things up so badly in this world?*** Isn't that what everyone wants to know? Why does God allow the violence, the hatred, the greed, the sickness - all of this misery that flows from the prince of the power of the air - why does a good, loving God allow it all to continue?

Or to put it a bit differently, ***why doesn't God stop Satan right now?*** After all, God is all-powerful. He could crush Satan like a bug. So why doesn't He just ***show*** that power? Why doesn't He ***use*** that power? What's He waiting for?

I think there is only one good answer to that question. We want God to prove His ***power***. And one day God will. But there's something else God is out to prove right now, and He could never prove it without Satan being alive and well on this earthly scene. God isn't out to prove He is more ***powerful*** than Satan. Power is a non-issue to Almighty God. No. He's out to prove He's more ***desirable*** than Satan.

God's glory is demonstrated every time one of His creatures **freely chooses** Him over any other possible object of affection and allegiance. God gets more glory when I'm not **irresistibly forced** to love and prize Him. His beauty shines more obviously, in my opinion.

That's the only reason for the ongoing spiritual battle unfolding in the history of the world right now. God wants to be glorified by being loved and freely prized while there are still other **competitors** - while my love shows I prize Him more than **anything else** in this world.

Does your life glorify God like that right now? I say it again: the greatest contest between heaven and earth is to see which of them wins the love and loyalty of your heart. It is a battle for your freely devoted love.

See how Jesus highlights this supreme element of free choice as a manifestation of genuine love for God. - **Matthew 6:24** - **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”**

Notice the polar opposites. **Hate** one - **Love** the other. **Be devoted** to one - **despise** the other. Choice is where love is revealed and where love is grown. Love is revealed when competitors are thrown down. Love always has to triumph over idolatry. This leads right into our second and final point:

2) **SPIRITUAL MINDEDNESS IS LOVE FOR GOD, AND THAT CAN'T EXIST IN OUR HEARTS IF WE LOVE THE WORLD**

Remember, spiritual mindedness isn't just **understanding** doctrinal truths. Spiritual mindedness is being **affected** by divine things in a way that draws out our devotion to them.

But clearly, that doesn't happen in everyone. Even in our particular land and culture, where exposure to spiritual truth is massive, many people - perhaps **most** people - remain detached and unmoved by it. They may not **deny** it. But they aren't **affected and directed and transformed** by it. Why is this the case?

1 John 2:15-17 - “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Through the redeeming work of Christ Jesus on the cross we are declared righteous in Christ Jesus. That is where everything starts. That’s where we’re “**born**” of the Spirit, to quote Jesus’ words. Then, as you grow in the Lord, and as the Holy Spirit begins to sharpen and shape your inner life, you will come to understand something very transforming and profound. It’s this: ***your spiritual life is shaped and grown as much by what you refuse to love, as by what you do love.***

Look very carefully at our text from John. Amazingly, there isn’t a word in it telling these people what they **ought** to love. His whole emphasis is on what they must **not** love. John is an old apostle as he writes these words. While Jesus was physically present here on earth John was probably closer to Him than anyone else. He has learned something about spirituality and closeness to the Lord that he wants to pass on. “Here’s the secret,” he says. “It’s all about what you **don’t** allow yourself to fall in love with.”

We do it all differently. Churches all across this continent are working hard to muster up a feeling of love for Jesus. And there *is* a proper place for emphasizing and expressing our love for the Lord. But I think many people are getting tired of trying to manufacture something that isn't *ringing true* in their own souls. Many times they will quit because they feel like hypocrites.

But where does that leave us? Is the cross of Christ a failure? Does it pronounce forgiveness but leave the heart unchanged? No, that's not the problem. The problem is many people miss the *nature of the spiritual battle redeemed people must fight*. Remember this point. *Spiritual mindedness is love for God, and that can't exist in our hearts if we love the world.*

So here's the practical wrap-up. Take this home. Know the mind of your enemy, the devil. He's *not* out to get you and me to deny Christ. He'll let you go to church and read your Bible. That's because he knows he can render all of the spiritual input into your mind and heart useless and fruitless. All he has to do is sow *additional* loves into your mind.

He doesn't have to **remove** the word. He simply renders your mind immune to spiritual transformation by injecting competing loves.

Jesus pleads with us to remember this point - **Matthew 13:22** - **“As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”**

And the reason this plan of Satan works so well is ingenious. We would all spot the wickedness of denying Christ in an instant. But we are made to feel prudish and legalistic when perfectly legitimate interests are flagged by the Holy Spirit as turning our hearts away from the Lord. Remember, there are **no** legitimate loves once Jesus Christ isn't supreme.