

**RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part five - Teaching #2156**

Sunday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

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**WHY THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT TAKE NO ROOT IN SOME PEOPLE'S LIVES (continued)**

**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.”**

We're half-way through looking at the issue of our title - ***“Why the things of the Spirit take no root in some people's lives.*** Last week we studied two of four principles. ***First***, the great contest between heaven and earth is to see which of them can most effectively ***draw out our love.*** This, of course, helps explain evil and suffering in this present world. It's not the way God made it. He made it ***“good”*** and wants as many daily reminders of Satan's work of stealing, killing and destroying.

Even with all the evidence of the ugliness of Satan's presence, people still bow at His pleasures. But God allows it all, for now. Only in such a world can we demonstrate the supreme beauty of our God by freely choosing to worship and obey Him. This is how God gets glory before the eyes of this watching world.

**Second**, spiritual mindedness manifests itself as love for God, and that can't exist in our hearts if we love the world. No one can serve, or love, two masters. Now we continue with points three and four.

3) **WE CAN'T CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF OUR LOVE ON OUR OWN, BUT GOD HAS, IN HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE, ENABLED US TO BUILD THE FORMS OF LOVE, WHICH HE WILL FILL IN WITH THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF HIS HOLY SPIRIT**

I know that is almost a sermon in itself, but I couldn't see leaving any of it out, for fear of being misunderstood. I'm not now describing some kind of **human works** spirituality. I've already said we would have absolutely **no** capacity to even respond with these baby steps to truth, were it not for the already present, even if unacknowledged, grace of God at work in our hearts. God redeemed **sinner**s through the cross of Christ, not those who are already **righteous**.

Having said that, it *is* our role, by God's grace, to build the forms of godliness so the Holy Spirit can fill them in with His life and power. And the primary *means* used by the Holy Spirit to transform the life is through a redirected thought life. And that's what this series is all about - ***"Being a Christian means loving God with your mind."***

Let me explain. This process involves both a *negative* step and a *positive* step. And the glaring mistake of much North American Christianity in our time is to try to *manufacture* some kind of spiritual state by emphasizing only the positive step, while excluding the negative.

- a) ***The negative step is to "not love the world, nor the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15).***

Not surprisingly, our *thought life* is ground zero in the battle for *spiritual mindedness*. Whatever we give our *attention* to will eventually draw out our *love*. And what we *love* directs our whole life. Our love causes us to *give ourselves away* as nothing else can. What we love *controls* us.

In other words, as you set your mind on earthly things (I didn't say **wicked** things - just **earthly** things) you will become increasingly **content** to live life without its **spiritual dimension**. You can't avoid this as a matter of course. You may not end up an **immoral** person, or an outwardly **bad** person.

But remember what we've already studied in this series. You can be a **morally good** person and still be, in Paul's words, a **natural** person - a person living life without the power of the Holy Spirit applying sustained **inward renewal and transformation**. Remember it all your life. It takes more than morality to get to heaven.

This issue of "**not loving the world, nor the things that are in the world**" is the key issue of holiness. One of the tragic mistakes people make in the pursuit of holiness is to think of it only in terms of **stopping doing a certain bad thing or things**. And that is **not** the issue of holiness. That is the **fruit** of holiness, but not the **root** of it.

The person who lives his whole life moving from quitting one bad thing, only to have its place taken by something else that will have to be replaced later on, is missing the point. The key issue of holiness is the ***constant direction of the stream of your thought life***. Are you filling your mind with the things of this world? That's where your actions come from. And until this problem is fixed, your actions will never be changed for long. You will fight the same battles over and over again.

- b) ***The positive step is to “set your mind on the things that are above.”***

Paul makes this point perhaps more clearly than any other New Testament author:

**Colossians 3:1-2 - “If then you have been raised with Christ, [been born again] seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”**

**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.”**

The love for this world will not fade away of its own accord in any of our hearts. And the Holy Spirit won't remove it apart from our effort and cooperation. Here's a simple rule: ***to think about anything less you have to think about something else more***. Our lives simply won't tolerate a vacuum.

This is where great care and discipline is needed. It is a terrible mistake to think of ***spiritual*** growth as ***undisciplined*** or ***automatic*** growth, as though because the Holy Spirit was at work, the whole process would simply take care of itself just because Jesus died on the cross. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Even the supreme resting place for saving, sanctifying faith must be fed upon with the mind. We sing about this all the time, perhaps without giving it due thought - ***“When I survey the wondrous Cross....”*** Have you ever seen a ***surveyor*** at work. This is what Paul has in mind in telling us to ***“set our minds on things above.”***

Paul makes this abundantly clear. He says that people who are **“according to the Spirit”** (what a great term!) aren’t just **lucky** or **blessed**. They **“set their mind”** on the things of the Spirit. And, in the passage in Colossians, he makes it clear that this discipline isn’t an automatic one simply because one is born again: **Colossians 3:1-2** - **“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”**

For as long as you live in the present, fallen world, you will have to **“set”** your mind on the things of the Spirit. And those things are, for now, **“above,”** says Paul. He doesn’t mean vertically over your head, like this ceiling. He means they’re **unseen**.

Your mind has a natural affinity for **seen** things - things that can be touched and bought and tasted and placed into 30 second commercials. The spirit of this age works overtime - primarily through the media - to fixate all of us on these things. So if your mind is going to be converted at all, you will have to **set it on things above** regularly.

#### 4) **YOU AND I “WALK IN THE SPIRIT” BY PURSUING DEVOTION**

## **TO HOLINESS THROUGH THE ONGOING EXERCISE OF A HOLY MIND**

Now, I want to be as practical as I can be as I bring this challenging subject to a close today. There are some life-building principles that come out of these considerations that all of us need to remember because they bear directly on how you and I pursue holiness and transformation in day to day living:

- a) ***Anything that loosens my attachment to this world is good for my spiritual development.***

The steps will be different for each individual, according to the needs the Holy Spirit is closing in on at the moment. But for many of us there will come a call, if we are serious about spiritual mindedness, ***away*** from the most ***secularizing influences of our particular time and culture***. There is simply no way to ***drench ourselves in this world and promote spiritual mindedness at the same time***.

- b) ***Any spiritual discipline we pursue to help “set our affection on things above” will require enough of a time and effort commitment until the affections become engaged in it.***

As I said, until we get to heaven, we will have to “**set**” our minds on the things of the Spirit. Especially in the early stages of spiritual mindedness, the pursuit of heavenly affections is hard to **sustain** as our constant, natural inclination. Various layers of bad habit and carnality must be pressed through with great effort and perseverance.

You don’t **see** this battle in the lives of the saints you admire and wish to imitate because it’s an **internal** battle. But even great saints only make spiritual pursuits **look** easy because they’ve learned from rich experience the blessing and reward of following diligently after God.

But, for most of us, there is a need to remember that no spiritual discipline is **immediately attractive** to our fallen and still earth-bound senses. You will always be tired when you set your mind to study the Scriptures. There will always be other things that crowd out prayer. There will always be something else that needs doing just when church is on. Have you noticed how much sicker and fatigued people have to be to stay home from work or the cottage than to stay home from church?

But my point stands as an eternal principle, unobserved by the careless, that there will always be **something** - usually something appealing - that will press itself against spiritual disciplines.

But keep pursuing God. Make yourself. Just do it. Whether you feel it happening or not, you are gradually, with the help of the Holy Spirit, **changing the home address of your mind**. But if you quit too soon, just because you didn't **feel** anything happening yet, you will wrongly assume the process didn't work for you. But it will only be because you gave up, or became distracted before the discipline became engaging and enjoyable to your soul.

It takes time for the Holy Spirit to "**form**" Christ in you. And that's a very Biblical concept - **Galatians 4:19** - "**....my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!**"

Look at those words carefully. Notice that word "**until**." It's a **time** word - or rather, a **time passing** word. Also, remember that these are **born again** people. That's why Paul calls them

his *“little children.”*

But being *born* isn't the whole process. There's a certain *“anguish of childbirth”* Paul was going through teaching and discipling these Christians. And the hard part - the part that was as hard as *labor* - says Paul, was pressing them into the mind-set of having Christ *formed* in them.

Here's why. The hard part of Paul's work in teaching these people stemmed from the fact that while it's the same Spirit *forming Christ* in them as *birthing new life* in them in regeneration, He works these two aspects in different ways. Regeneration is a gift and *nothing but* a gift. The second - having Christ *formed* in them - while still stemming from the cross of Jesus, is a grace worked through the channels of their own thinking habits and disciplines.

*Born* and *formed* are two different things, even though closely related, and both the result of divine grace. And now you're right on the thresh-hold of the great paradox of the Christian life. God freely gives His richest blessings to the most spiritually persistent.

But we're just scratching the surface. This is the starting place for making the most difference you will ever see in your walk with Jesus. More next week on ***how to become a spiritually minded person.***