

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part six - Teaching #2158

Sunday, January 23rd, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

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IDEAS, IMAGES, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

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.”

Psalm 16:8 - “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.”

We're not going to get to these two texts for a little while. We'll get to them at the end of this teaching and all of next week's teaching. Before we get to them we need to examine something more basic and foundational. We need to make the effort to study an issue that will draw out the importance and relevance of these two texts. We need to study something that will help us *treasure* these two texts. And what makes this so challenging for us is these two concepts rarely get even talked about in a church teaching session. Pray that God will keep your mind and heart alert.

In everything to do with our Christian walk our **thoughts** are the place where we can begin the process of change “...**Be transformed by the renewing of your mind....**” The **first steps** toward the spiritual transformation of the **person** take place in the **mind**. That really shouldn't surprise any of us. Just as mankind's **ruin** originated in the deception of the mind of Eve and Adam in the garden, so the road to spiritual **renovation** begins in the same place - the **mind**.

This is not in any way to deny the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit. We can't change ourselves **by** ourselves. God is the sovereign transformer of human nature. So when we say change begins in the mind, we are not bowing to the religion of **positive thinking**. We are simply acknowledging **where** God beings His transforming work. We are establishing the Holy Spirit's **entry point** into our earthly lives.

In fact, the mind is the **central** organ of spiritual formation according to the Scriptures. That's why the mind is frequently equated with the **soul** or **heart** in God's Word - “**For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he**” (Proverbs 23:7 NKJV).

The heart is not usually the organ that pumps blood in the Scriptures. Most frequently it is equated with the part of a person that plans, dreams, loves, prioritizes, and thinks. And that's why the mind is most frequently linked, not as we might expect, with the **head** in the Scriptures, but with the **heart** - the organ most naturally pictured at the very **center** of a person's being.

Now, when all of this is taken into account, it is amazing how rarely we actually stop and **think** about our **thoughts**. What goes on in our minds when we think? How does thinking **happen**? Understanding this has a great deal to do with grasping how the Holy Spirit wants to transform our lives by the renewing of our minds.

1) **THE PROCESS OF THINKING INVOLVES TWO THINGS: IDEAS AND IMAGES**

First, let's look at **ideas**. We sometimes think that ideas are limited to the minds of **intelligent** people, but such is not the case. **All** minds are full of ideas. You don't have to read, or watch the news, or pursue knowledge to have ideas. **Everyone's life is governed by ideas.**

Your ideas are the **assumptions you hold about reality**. They are the way you **interpret** the world around you. They're the things you **assume true** about your life. I say "**assume**" because only very rarely do we actually **process** these life assumptions.

But still, you're not just *in* this world taking space. You **process** the world around you. You **relate** to it. Everyone does. This is true of the Christian and the atheist alike. **Everyone** shapes his or her life by the ideas held about ultimate reality. And **everyone** lives his or her life by the ideas **actually** held to be true. Your religious creed is of little importance if your mind is ruled by a **different** set of ideas. Remember, "**As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.**"

"Well then, why don't people just **change** the ideas they have in their heads, Pastor Don. Then we'd all be much better, much **godlier** people!"

It would be wonderful if it were that simple. But there is a serious problem with the world of ideas. **Ideas, the ideas we live by, unlike images we'll talk about in a minute, aren't usually clearly articulated, even in our own minds.** It is the nature of the ruling ideas of our minds that they are **formed over time, gradually growing in power over our actions.** Many people are governed by ideas they don't even recognize. They are ruled by ideas they don't "**think about**" in a deliberate, systematic, conscious sense.

Our lives **absorb** ideas from many sources every day. That word “**absorb**” is extremely important, and accurate. Most of the ideas that shape your life aren’t consciously **adopted**. They arrive in our minds by **association** with our world more than by **mental exercise**. They arrive and then gain power while you **aren’t** thinking about them at all. But they **still shape your life**. In that sense, your mind is **constantly being shaped and reshaped over and over again**. This has been going on since you were a child, and it will continue until the day you die.

So I want to say it again: **Many people’s lives are controlled by ideas they don’t even identify**. They’ve never actually **thought about these ideas** as such. This is the incredible power of the **world view** that forms in our minds - in our “**hearts**” - as the Bible says. Once those ideas are there, we have very little control over the **power** they will exert over all the details of our actions and destinies. Hence the strong warning:

Proverbs 4:23 - “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

Think for a minute about the ideas people have: ideas about ***fun and pleasure***, ideas about ***sex and marriage***, ideas about ***freedom and happiness***, ideas about ***life and death and eternity***. These ideas matter so much because, as we all know when we stop and consider it, ideas don't just shape our ***present*** life, they shape our ***future***.

Your ***future*** will be determined by the ideas that dominate your mind ***right now***. That's because you ***plan*** your future ***in your mind***. Your mind has this incredible power to ***run ahead of the rest of your life***, to ***time travel into the future*** before the rest of your being gets there. So ideas ***shape your whole life***, not just your ***present life***.

So here's what we've learned so far: ***Ideas shape the whole life***, but for the most part, ***they do this automatically***. That's because the ***ideas that rule your life aren't born in an instant***. They are shaped by our upbringing, the culture in which we immerse ourselves, by the media - ***especially*** by the media - somewhat less so by our formal education, and tremendously by the friendships we cultivate. So look carefully at the friends you spend the most time with. Unless you're extremely careful, that's a picture of where your life is going.

All of this is why our lives are usually so stubbornly hard to change. ***Lives are hard to change because ideas are hard to change. And ideas are very hard to change because it takes a great deal of honesty and self-reflection - what the Bible calls repentance - to accurately identify a world view that has been shaped over time and then confront it as sinful, when it actually feels quite comfortable, and turn from that world view to another.*** Most people can't be bothered to analyze their true inner landscape that honestly or that carefully.

And now we come to the second thing we must remember about how our minds are formed and changed. There's another force that works in our minds besides ideas. Our minds are also dominated by ***images***. And if ***ideas*** are complex and hard to get a handle on, ***images*** are powerful, vivid, and packed with immediate emotion.

Take note - images don't operate on the level of smart or foolish, logical or destructive. Images bypass all of those mental processes. This is what makes images so ***powerful*** and so ***destructive***. Images aim themselves at ***desires***.

That's the most important thing to remember about images. You may **think** your way, even if ever so subtly, to an idea, but you **feel** the unprocessed pull of an image. Images form around, and cater to, the immediate **cravings of our beings**. Images aren't as logical and content-filled as ideas. Images don't form around algebra, physics, or theories of political economics. Images are different. They are all about **coolness, popularity, success, fun, power, gratification**, and the like.

So just as **ideas** attach themselves to the **mind**, **images** attach themselves immediately to **inclinations**. This is what gives them their punch and success in shaping our outward actions. Not everyone likes the discipline of deep thought, but everyone has desires itching to be fulfilled. You will usually see the power of images in things like **advertising, fashion, popular music, fads**, and the kind of **group-think** that craves **acceptance and popularity**.

Then there are images of success and the good life - the right cologne or perfume, the right kind sports car - always pictured with some beautiful babe on a sunny highway somewhere near Maui. All of these images are powerful ***shapers of dreams and actions in our lives***. The actual ***idea*** - the ***world-view*** - is in the background (materialism, the pride of life, the lust of the eyes, the denial of focusing on eternity).

None of these things is ***explicitly said up front***. The ***image*** does the talking and pulls on our ***feelings*** of what we'd like life to be all about.

Now, what does all of this have to do with a Sunday morning sermon to Christian people? Just this - ***nobody will go far in the process of spiritual transformation - spiritual mindedness - until they understand how our lives are formed in the first place***. We need to look diligently at the process of ***formation*** before we can look at the process of ***transformation***. There is a ***process*** that must be recognized.

We were created a certain way. ***Everyone*** is in the process of being formed in ***some*** way - not just Christians. We need to know how this works so we can apply it to the ***renewing of our minds for Christ***.

2) **THE DEVIL USES THIS PROCESS OF SHAPING OUR MINDS AS THE VERY ESSENCE OF HIS SPIRITUAL WARFARE AGAINST OUR SOULS**

Consider this. In the very beginning Satan came to Eve in the garden, the most perfect moral environment available. And remember, he came to a woman who was, at this point, morally innocent and unfallen in nature. Satan wanted to destroy God's creation, beginning with Eve and then Adam. How will he do it? He didn't approach Eve with a **club**. He came to her with an **idea**.

The battle doesn't start in her **body**. It starts in her **mind**. He plants and waters the idea **that she can run her own life better than God can**. This is the foundational idea that makes all other temptations possible in our lives. This is the **idea** Satan plants.

But be very careful to notice something else - something that will reveal the crucial relevance of everything we've been studying in this somewhat involved teaching this morning. This idea of asserting autonomy from God Almighty is never stated in those words. Satan is smart enough to know that if he came to Eve and said, "**You know better than God how to make your life work!**" she would have denied it. And so would you and so would I.

Satan **never** works up front like that. Satan keeps that idea hidden in the **background**. The idea came hidden behind the **image** of the tree and the beautiful fruit - for Eve this was the **image** of freedom and the good life.

This **image** appealed to Eve's **desires** long before the **idea** was carefully processed in her **mind**. In fact, the image is **designed** to work quickly just so people don't take the **time** to wisely analyze how foolish and dangerous the idea is behind it. Sin is **always** foolish if examined honestly and carefully. So the gratifying of desires must work quickly if the temptation to compromise is to be successful.

This is always the way Satan works. He doesn't hold up the **idea** of rejecting God and His ways. He holds up the **image** of a great social life with a handsome, though unsaved boyfriend or girlfriend, who you can probably win to the Lord one day! He doesn't hold up the idea that marriage is unimportant. He holds up the prospect of a fabulous career if priorities are simply rearranged. Satan knows you can **argue** with an idea. But an image merely carries you along with your feelings. The faulty, destructive idea is tucked inside the enticing image.

And there is a twisted genius in the way the Devil works in our minds. Because he's not omnipresent, he can't touch everyone's life directly at once. But he knows he doesn't **have** to if he can encourage and feed an anti-Christian **idea** into our **minds** wrapped up in an **image** that appeals to our immediate **desires**.

And once that anti-Christian world-view is smuggled unnoticed into our minds Satan can nap and take a holiday because, in essence, we begin to do his work **for** him as we carry those ideas around, like an aggressive virus, constantly pumping infection into our attempts to cultivate the Lordship of Jesus Christ into our lives.

Several passages in the New Testament alert us to this danger:

2 Corinthians 10:5 - "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...."

Ephesians 6:10-11 - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

Today there are over 7 billion people on earth. Every one of them is being **formed** through the inner workings of the mind. Spiritual formation, either for good or for evil, is taking shape in every person on earth today. And the mind is the battle ground. God knows it. Satan surely knows it. And very few others see the issue as central as it really is.

So the place to **begin** yielding to the Spirit might be a point where you're just not looking yet. Don't ignore the direction your mind blows. Bring the things that appeal to your mental inclinations with you when you kneel to pray. Ask God specifically why you think more about sports or celebrities, or your best friend's party than the will of the One who created you. See whether you treasure God's instructions more than the praise and acceptance of your circle of friends outside the church. Look at what motivates you to expend more effort to pay off your mortgage than to memorize Scripture.

Remember, Paul tells us very specifically that our thoughts **run wild** if left to themselves. They pull the rest of you after them. **Take them captive**. Don't just teach your **dog** to heel. Make your thoughts kneel before almighty God. Make them the **first** object of repentance, discipline, and diet in your walk with Jesus!

More on this next week.