

**RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part eight - Teaching #2162**

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**IDEAS, IMAGES, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT - SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND THE RENEWING OF THE MIND (continued)**

Before we do a bit of a review, I'd like to have you consider with me the importance of the things we *feel* in the process of spiritual formation and discipleship. Consider a very familiar passage from the New Testament:

**Luke 10:30-37 - "Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" [37] He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."**

Jesus makes clear the secret of the Samaritan's success in ministry where the other two failed. Notice His words in **verse 33** - **"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, *he had compassion....*"**

Some translations say he was “***moved with compassion.***” The Samaritan ***felt*** something. And what he ***felt*** compelled him to ***act***. And the way he acted is what makes us refer to him as the “***good***” Samaritan to this day. “***Moved with compassion....***” Perhaps that says it best. His feelings were the ***driving force*** behind his actions. His actions didn’t just spring from nowhere. This was not cold, ***scripted*** righteousness. The whole of his being was set in motion because he was “***moved with compassion.***”

Now we need to ask another question. Was the Samaritan the ***only*** one who was ***feeling*** something as he came to that wounded, broken, needy traveler? I know Jesus says only the Samaritan was moved with ***compassion***, but I would argue that ***all three*** who saw the need felt something. In fact, I would argue that all three were, just like the Samaritan, ***driven and compelled*** by what they felt at that moment.

Perhaps the two religious leaders ***felt anxiety*** because they were late for something else they had to do. Perhaps they ***felt disdain*** for this broken body by the road, as though he must have done something to ***deserve*** such a terrible fate. Or perhaps they ***felt fear*** that if they stopped they too would end up the victims of thieves and thugs. Or perhaps they ***felt worried*** that if they helped this poor victim they wouldn’t have enough money left over to pay their own bills.

My point here is ***all three felt something*** as they came by the wounded victim that day. Also, all three of them ***acted in accordance*** with their feelings at that moment. Whatever the priest and Levite felt, they felt something that moved them ***more*** than the sight of this wretched victim by the roadside.

All things being equal, what we ***feel*** - our passions - our desires - have the greatest potential to move and shape the rest of our beings. Remember the previous teaching in this series? We studied the importance of the ***mind*** (or the ***heart*** in the Scriptures) - ***“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23)***.

Then we saw that the mind works with two things when it thinks. ***Ideas*** and ***images*** are the stuff of thought. They are what make our minds work. ***Ideas*** are more involved and complex. They are shaped over time and take control of our minds ***gradually***. So the growth of your ruling ideas is like the physical growth of your body. It comes cell by cell - bit by bit, over time. Many people are governed by ideas they never take the time to analyze. Bit by bit, we simply accumulate a ***world view*** that become the blueprint for our actions.

**Images** come to the mind with much greater impact than the gradual forming of ideas. Advertising would be a great example of the use of images on our thinking. Images come with an immediate hook to our **feelings**. Images don't **process** the way ideas do. They don't **form** in the same way at all. You don't have to consciously **think** through images the way you do ideas.

Images don't ask you, "True, or false?" You don't actually **agree** or **disagree** with an image. You can **like** or **not like** an image. But that's not the same as dealing with questions of **true or false**. The point is, mental images simply reach your feelings in some way and then carry you along.

This explains why intelligent people can do such silly and even wicked things. A married man doesn't carry on with an affair because he thinks it's **intelligent**. There is nothing that makes **sense** in that kind of activity. He risks throwing away a great deal, even if he's not a Christian. No, he doesn't do it because it's intelligent. He's never worked it out on an **intelligent** level.

In fact, and this is **very, very important**, if he's going to successfully **continue** in this sinful course of action, he's going to have to **avoid** carefully thinking about the consequences of his actions at all. He's operating on a different level entirely. He's operating on the level of **feeling** - not **thinking**.

Now, take those two examples we've been considering together. Think of the **good Samaritan** who was "***moved with compassion***" and won such praise from Jesus, our Lord. Then consider the **immoral husband** who is also ***carried by his feelings*** into cheapness and ruin. I hope you can see how our **feelings** are tremendous engines both for righteousness and for ruin. Certainly, if you're going to look at the spiritual formation of our lives, you must consider the nature and role of our feelings.

1) **THE ESSENCE OF OUR FALLEN STATE IN THIS WORLD IS THE CONFUSING OF FEELINGS WITH REALITY**

This is, without doubt, one of the most important lessons a disciple of Jesus can ever learn.

**James 4:1-4** - "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? ***Is it not this, that your passions*** are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You ***covet*** and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, ***to spend it on your passions***. [4] You adulterous people! Do you not know that ***friendship with the world is enmity with God***? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Take careful note of James' key thought here. He's telling us what friendship with the world *is*. Friendship with the world is identified chiefly by the extent to which the actions of my life are generated by *my passions* rather than *God's revealed will*.

Don't make the mistake of thinking James is only referring to very *twisted* people in this passage. He's writing to *church* people. These people are so motivated and dominated by their own desires and feelings that they would literally rather *fight than change their ways*. So convinced have they become that any course of action is justified in satisfying their *desires*.

And here's what all this means for their Christian faith. James says that even their religious devotion is no longer genuine. Their prayers are useless. By committing to their own feelings and desires they have lined themselves up with the world and against God Almighty - "**You adulterous people!** [Remember our earlier illustration about the unfaithful husband? Same thing.] **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God**"(James 4:4).

***Why are they doing this?*** Remember what we said earlier. This is not a ***rational*** or ***reasonable*** course of action. They aren't operating on that level at all. Their ***feelings*** have created the illusion of ***reality***. They honestly believe they ***have*** to respond the way they are responding to their inner desires. They simply ***must*** give in to their desires.

Please notice something else very important here. There is a danger James is warning about that we are ***all*** capable of falling into. Here it is: ***these people are mistaking their feelings for their wills***. This is how people ***line themselves up with the devil and spiritual ruin***.

This ***is*** worldliness. Worldliness isn't just a matter of possessions, fashion, or entertainment. Worldliness is the condition of mind where ***feelings become reasons for doing things***. Repeat that sentence in your mind. It's the logic behind all same-sex marriage arguments. It's 'the argument behind all trans-gender arguments.

That is the condition James is describing. Principle, reason, self-discipline, goodness - all must bow before the dominant power of desire. And the Bible causes us all pause by saying, "There. That's a ***fool.***"

2) **FEELINGS, WHEN REPEATEDLY CATERED TO, CREATE STRONGHOLDS**

The Scriptures yield another powerful life lesson: while living by the dictates of feelings seems initially to be the ***easiest*** way to live, it is actually the most ***difficult and demanding*** way to live. Paul tells us why:

**Ephesians 4:17-20** - “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the ***futility of their minds***. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] ***They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity***. [20] But that is not the way you learned Christ!”

If a Godly walk is the opposite of the Gentile walk, we need to determine exactly what characterizes an ***ungodly*** walk. Paul says several things:

- a) In the ungodly walk ***the mind has become futile*** - “....that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are ***darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart***.



So the mind no longer functions as it should. This doesn't mean the ungodly are stupid. It doesn't mean they can't read. They may have very high IQ's. But their mind doesn't function ***spiritually*** and ***morally*** as a reliable reference center for their lives.

- b) The ungodly walk ***according to the desires of the senses*** - ***“They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity (4:19b).***

Notice that they have ***“given themselves up”*** to the desires of the senses. These are not just people who ***feel***. We ***all*** feel. These are people who have ***turned the reins of their lives over to their desires and feelings***. They have grown accustomed to seeing their ***feelings*** as their ***wills***.

- c) The ungodly become ***enslaved by the feelings that once gave the greatest pleasure*** - ***“....They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity”(4:19).***

This is the main point that I mentioned initially - **feelings, repeatedly catered to, create strongholds**. Notice how Paul says these people have become “**callous**” (19). There is no feeling in a callous. In fact, some translations even use the words “**past feeling**” rather than callous.

What Paul wants us all to see is the tragic irony in this situation. **The very people who have made their feelings their god end up being calloused and past feeling.**

Do you see it? **Live by your feelings and you end up losing the capacity to truly feeling anything genuine and joy producing!** But that’s not all. Notice how Paul ends that same 19<sup>th</sup> verse. These people are “....**greedy to practice every kind of impurity**”(19).

**Why?** Why do they keep doing this? They are long dead in the feeling department. They are calloused. But they have to keep going. Why? Because when you make your desires your god, **you** don’t determine when the ride is over. **They** determine when the ride is over. Feelings, when repeatedly catered to, produce strongholds. It’s easy to get **in**. It’s almost impossible to get **out**.

Here's what's happening. Gradually, without even processing it, an ungodly worldview is forming. A governing idea - never written down or spoken out loud - is steering the life. The images make their appeal to the desires. The desires, repeatedly given in to, create the idea that personal happiness is impossible on God's terms. This becomes the sinner's operating system without ever changing his religious beliefs.

This is why it's so hard to **reason** with people who are destroying themselves as they follow their deceitful desires into shame and ruin. By virtue of turning themselves over to their desires they have, in Paul's words, become **futile in their thinking**( **Ephesians 4:17**). The mind is **hijacked** by the desires they have given themselves over to. The mind only served to **defend** and **excuse** the stronghold created by the desires.

Now we need to quickly drill down into the precise meaning of one of those boringly repeated religious phrases to give it content and power:

- 3) **DYING TO SELF IN THE SCRIPTURES IS DIRECTED PRIMARILY TOWARD THE FEELINGS AND DESIRES**

Somehow, this whole concept of “**dying to self**” has to be put into a meaningful contemporary concept. I believe we are now, in this message, right at the place where this powerful Biblical demand can be received with its full freight:

**Luke 9:23-24** - "And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. [24] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

**Galatians 5:24** - “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

I can't tell you how many Christians equate the Scriptural injunction to “**die to self**” with a life lived constantly without joy or delight. In other words, they picture the command to die to self with a life lived in a **constant state of unfulfillment**.

In fact, as you can see from the previous point, the exact opposite is the case. A life lived under the dictatorship of the desires and feelings is the life that becomes “**calloused**” and “**past feeling.**” The life lived under the Lordship of Jesus, rather than the lordship of personal desires, is a life that results in “**finding our lives**” in the truest sense, just as Jesus promised.

But this discovery of the freedom and joy in dying to self comes only in stages. At first, in the beginning of the process of spiritual formation, we must make very **conscious** steps to deny our own desires. This is because, from where we **start** our journey toward spiritual mindedness, the substance of our beings, as formed by this fallen world, is automatically ready to act **against Christ's Lordship**, and in **favor of our own desires**.

In other words, all our habits are **wrongly poised**. We all lean in the direction of our own desires. This is our default position in life.

So, especially in the **early stages** of our transformation (remember? "**Be transformed by the renewing of your mind**") we will have to frequently, and at times, very painfully, reject the pre-eminence of what we want, and when we want it.

Thus, in the early part of our quest for spiritual mindedness we will find ourselves focusing on **not wanting to do what we naturally would like to do**, and **choosing to want what we don't naturally want - at least as yet**:

**Romans 7:15 & 19 - "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate....19....For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."**

So all the components of our beings are not transformed at the very same pace. This is OK. In fact, it's how all spiritual transformation begins. And many people miss out on the joy and freedom God intends for them to have simply because they never ***stick with it*** and ***press through*** the earlier phases of discipleship.

However, and this is the important point, there comes a time in our ***apprenticeship*** with Jesus when it is more accurate to talk about our being "***dead to self.***" By this I mean the person has continued with it, by the inward working of the Holy Spirit (remember, building the forms for Godliness so the Holy Spirit can fill them in?) long enough so that the ***natural inclinations*** have been oriented toward the will of Father God.

By this I mean that I will no longer be surprised or offended by the fact that I don't now live my life by what I want. I learn that my desires, on their own, tend to ***shallow out*** my long-term fulfillment and joy. I learn that the fruit of the Spirit is infinitely sweeter than the corrupt lusts of the flesh.

In other words, as I die to self, my *mind* becomes *fruitful* rather than *futile*, as Paul described the ungodly in Ephesians chapter 4. And I begin to *see* and am *affected* by the things of the Spirit. I have a moral compass. My life has a sense of movement, momentum and overall direction. I start to see light and life and blessing in submitting my desires to God's will - **"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome"**(1 John 5:3).

4) **WE CAN ONLY CHANGE OUR FEELINGS INDIRECTLY, NOT DIRECTLY**

The very best a strong willed person can do is *deny* his feelings. We've all seen people do this, at least occasionally. But this is far from the Christian goal. Our goal is not to merely *deny* the feeling level of our lives. Feelings are important. We're not robots, and we weren't *meant* to be. The goal of the Christian is, by the Spirit of God, not to merely *deny* feelings, but to *replace* them with Godly passions.

Like the Good Samaritan, we want to be properly *moved* by the kinds of impulses and feelings that will drive us *into* the path of Godliness rather than *away* from it. This is what the Bible means when it describes the ***joy of the Lord as our strength***.

### ***How does this happen?***

Well, you can't change feelings by a frontal attack. True, wrong desires must be very strenuously denied. But this will not, in itself, **replace** wrong desires with right. Feelings must be changed at another level entirely. And here's the key - ***feelings can only be changed through the renewing of the mind.*** You reach your feelings ***indirectly*** through what you give your mind to.

Again, this is why John tells us that the very first sign of loving God is ***tuning out the world*** - "**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**"(1 John 2:15). Though many Christian don't see it, this is the very first step in changing the desires of the heart. It's very hard at first, but the process will gain momentum as you continue in it. You begin to change the desires and feelings of the heart as you change what you ***put into*** your mind. You ***starve*** false affections and ***feed*** righteous ones.

Again, at first this whole process ***feels*** like sheer will-power. It's all uphill. It takes a great deal of prayer and fellowship and time in the Word to stay with it. The freedom only comes ***later on.***



Listen, you will love what you give your attention to. Crucify the flesh. Diet your mind around the Word and prayer. And sooner than you think you'll find yourself truly "***delighting in the law of the Lord***" (**Psalm 1:2**).

More on this important subject next week.