

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: November 1, 2009

Living Consistent With A New Identity: Renewing The Mind

by Dan Trygg

“...but to be renewed in the spirit of your minds”

Ephesians 4:23

"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."

Romans 12:2

As we survey the NT, it is not surprising to find that the apostle Paul repeatedly referred to certain key concepts that he felt were necessary to communicate to the various groups of believers with whom he corresponded. Among these repeated themes is his teaching about our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and how that is to be practically applied in our lives. By comparing and cross-checking his writings, it becomes evident that there are four steps Paul refers to that will help us to implement Jesus into our experience. We have been in the process of examining these during the past several weeks. So far, we have covered:

1.) **Choose to consider yourself to be dead to sin** (i.e., without any need to fulfill its demands) **and alive toward God** (i.e., open, available and ready to do His will). This is the practical result, the realization, of our union with Him in death and resurrection.

2.) **Choose to "put off" or "put distant" the old self, and the behaviors characteristic of your former life.** Do not keep on making yourself available to express the old patterns of life, or to fulfill the desires of sin. In other words, as often as you are conscious of a tendency to do things in the old sinful manner, put that aside and consciously implement a new way of living life.

Of course, **you cannot choose a different course of action unless you are aware of other possibilities**, which leads to the next principle, our topic for today:

3.) **Choose to develop a new way of thinking** - i.e., “be renewed in your mind”.

In Ephesians 4:23, the NASB translates the beginning phrase of the verse as "*and* that you be renewed...". In the Greek, however, the phrase begins with the word "but", i.e., "*but* to be renewed in the spirit of your mind". Our first observation about this verse is that *Paul intended to set at contrast what he is about to say here from the "former manner of life" spoken of in the previous verse.* Verse 22 admonishes us to "put away from ourselves the former manner of life". **In contrast to that old, negative way of living, the apostle now begins to tell us in positive terms how to live life differently.**

The verb form here is a continual, ongoing-action infinitive. Thus, **renewing the mind is a process, not a simple decision.** The understanding we currently have did not develop overnight; neither will our ability to gain a new understanding. **Learning to walk with God by the power of the Spirit is an ongoing developing process.**

Most versions translate the infinitive passively, "to be renewed". The form could also be understood as being in the middle voice, "to renew (for yourselves) in the spirit of the mind/perception of y'all", or even, "to renew (yourselves) in the spirit of your minds". The middle voice would indicate that **we must be intensely involved in this process. Renewing the mind will take our active effort, and will affect us, change us and limit us.**

The word translated as "mind" (*nous*) is the same as that used in verse 17 to describe the lifestyle of unbelievers (Gentiles). They walk about "in the futility of their mind". By using the exact same word (*there* negatively, ...and *now* as the focal point of change), we cannot escape the *emphatic contrast* he is setting up. **The old mind was futile, empty and vain.** It led us in ways that *didn't work*, ways that were *unhealthy* and *destructive*. **It needs to be reprogrammed.**

It is amazing how much of the New Testament teaching is directed to the thinking process, the habitual thought patterns, discernment, deception, world view and self-concept, etc. The Greek word, *nous*, means more than just the organ of the intellect, however. It is also the faculty of perception, attitude, imagination, and discernment. **From the beginning, our encounter with the truth of God demands a change in world view.** The word for "repentance" is *metanoia*, another word from the same root. *Metanoia* literally means to "change your mind, change your perception of reality". **Coming to faith is accepting a paradigm shift,** seeing reality in a way that includes the gospel truth of God, **and choosing to live life according to that new perception.**

From that introduction to a new, drastic shift in the way we see reality, we are to continue in the process of clarifying our understanding and perception of it. There are three aspects to this:

(a.) "...be renewed *in the spirit of your minds*" -- Eph. 4:23. This would seem to address the *attitude or orientation* of the mind (e.g., I Cor. 4:21). This also is a *conscious decision*, which means **we must evaluate whether we have an attitude that is spiritually in tune with God, or not**. If not, we must learn to readjust our focus to see things from the God-perspective. This will change our attitude. The word "spirit" also could literally mean "wind or breath". If you substitute this idea into the phrase, how does the word picture change for you? "Be renewed in the breath of your mind." Doesn't that sound like "take a breath of fresh air", mentally? **Be refreshed, renewed, and invigorated in your minds, ...which have previously been stale, stuffy, and lifeless in their former thought patterns.**

It is interesting that Paul uses a little different word here than in the other passages about renewing the mind. There (e.g., Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10; Tit. 3:5) the apostle used a word meaning "to renew, make-different-again". **Here, the word choice means to renew in the sense of "to-make-young-again"**. This fits the image of "to re-fresh" very well. Our attitude can easily become *jaded* with sarcasm, cynicism, fear, bitterness, etc. due to the painful experiences we may have had to deal with in life, ...or as a result of our exposure to the "spirit of the age" in advertising, movies, television and other media. **We need to recover the innocence and freshness of a youthful spirit in the attitude of our perspective of reality.** Otherwise, we will continue to live in the old, empty perceptions of life, and will have difficulty putting on the new person.

(b.) "*Set your mind on spiritual things*" -- Col. 3:1-3; cf. Rom. 8:5-9. It is interesting to note that Paul uses a different verb to express this thought. The Greek word, *phroneō*, describes more the thinking process than *nous* does, i.e., the thoughts themselves, more than one's total perception or understanding. It describes what you have in your mind, or what you give your conscious attention to. **To set your mind on spiritual things means to think spiritual thoughts. Choose to incorporate the reality of the work of Jesus into your daily life. Think about spiritual concepts and how they relate to you.** Exercise an awareness of God's presence in your life, and expand your horizons to include "the things above". Think about the spiritual warfare going on around you and others, ...and that God wants to use *you* to affect that conflict. This brings a new perspective by which all of life can be reinterpreted.

(c.) *Renew your perception or world view* -- Rom. 12:2; Heb. 5:14. **This component deals with not only the content of our belief-system itself (theology), but also how we see and interpret the world around us.** In practical terms, this is *learning to discern* God's purposes and desires for your life, and, at times, for others as well.

It is important to see that, according to Rom. 12:2, **the change in one's world view (including one's self-concept) is to lead toward the discovery-by-experimentation of God's desire for us** as individuals and as a group. Paul wrote, "transform (for yourselves) by the renewal of your perception *toward-the-end-that* you test-by-experimentation-to-discover-and-approve the will of God..." It is clear that **the change in world view will motivate or enable us to go on the search for better ideas. We only know what we know, and if we don't discover different ways to operate, we will not be able to change.** Where will we find wisdom? We are to *search* for it (Prov. 2). Wisdom has to do with practical skills and guidance. Wherever we find it, *we are to gather it up as hidden treasure*. We should not fear to look beyond the walls of the church community. Many people have discovered wise counsel, even though they may not know God. Truth is truth, wherever it is found. *What is important is that we learn to separate the wheat from the chaff.* **Discernment is a mark of maturity.** We are to "test all things, and hold fast to what is good" (I Thess. 5:21)

The words of Paul, "that you may prove (test-out-by-trial-to-discover) what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable and perfect", **indicate an active, learning-by-doing and trying-different-options to find what works for you. God gives us permission to experiment.** In fact, experimentation is the only way to learn some things, including discovering God's will for your life. **The end result of the process will be a mature, discerning person, one who has trained their faculties of discernment by study, exercise and experimentation to be able to discern good from evil, right from wrong** (Heb. 5:14).

You can see that the process of renewing the mind is a very large, comprehensive endeavor. It will require not only education and informational learning, but also introspection and active experimentation. Because we are on the inside looking out, there is a lot about our attitudes, thoughts and abilities that we simply cannot see clearly (blind spots). That is why these verses are set into the context of community. **We need the interaction and feedback of others to help us in this process. God's plan was that we help one another discover and implement truth in our lives.**