

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Renewing The Mind

by Dan Trygg

“...to put away from you the former self, ...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

“...the new man, the one being renewed unto true knowledge according to the image of the one creating him.”

Colossians 3:10

“We do not lose heart. Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”

II Corinthians 4:16

The NASB translates the beginning of Ephesians 4:23 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”. *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.** The Greek word (*nous*) refers to more than just *thinking*. It refers to *awareness* about something, *understanding*, or “one’s *inner sense toward* an object or situation”, one’s *perception* or *discernment*. It is one’s *roadmap* of the world around them. As such, it also includes one’s *orientation toward* the world around them, including what you might *expect* out of life, and, consequently, one’s *attitude toward* things, people or God.

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. **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 word as “mind” (*nous*). *Metanoia* literally means to “change your mind, change your perception of reality”. This includes your *expectations of* life, and your *emotional orientation toward* life. **Coming to faith is accepting a paradigm shift,** seeing reality in a way that includes the gospel truth of God (the “good news” of His love, sacrifice and commitment toward you), **and choosing to live life according to that new perception.** For example, you are not a “mistake” or an “accident”. God has *purposed* that you exist, and He has shown His love for you in Christ. He has made you in His image. You are capable of love, moral expression and goodness that sets you above all other creatures. He has known of you since your mother’s womb, and desires to make your life a blessing. He has *loved you* with an everlasting love, *chosen you* for Himself, and *has given you gifts and abilities* that enable you to have a positive impact on the world around you. Your life has meaning and purpose. He desires to lead you on an adventure to discover joy and fulfillment in Him, and to show you how you can honor Him and be a positive influence to others.

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 for “spirit” can also mean “wind” or “breath”. If you substitute “breath” into the phrase, that really changes the word picture. “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”, as in

to make *radically new*, ... a mind or perception that is *unprecedented, did not exist before*, and is of a *vastly superior nature*. Those passages talk about gaining an *entirely different perception of reality*. **Here, however, Paul chose a word that 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. Basically, Paul is telling us to “*lighten up*” and “*get an attitude adjustment*”! This is not meant as a slap, however. It is a very *practical precursor* to help us get the most out of our attempts to renew our minds. **If we can allow the freshness, excitement and anticipation of a youthful attitude to direct and orient our approach to learning about our new life in Christ**, we will be more able to recognize and embrace new ideas. **We will pursue growth as an exciting faith-adventure, not a life-less duty or religious ritual**.

(b.) “**Set your mind on spiritual things**” -- Col. 3:1-3; cf. Rom. 8:5-9. Here, Paul introduces a new ingredient. He uses a different verb to draw our minds in a new direction. 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 going on 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 new and 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 requires not only *education and informational learning*, but also *prayerful 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* (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 3:12-17). **We need the interaction and feedback of others to help us in this process**. Opening our hearts to one another, and giving one another permission to respectfully share what they perceive about you, can open wonderful avenues of insight. Just remember, that *our own* perceptions, and those of *others*, are *only partial*. People may not always see things accurately. That’s ok. Listen, then, “eat the meat and spit out the bones”.

God’s purpose is to make us like Jesus. He will use all kinds of people, situations and circumstances to break down old erroneous, harmful ways of thinking and living. **The old is decaying**. The question is, “**Are we willing to embrace and cultivate change, newness and the freshness of life in Christ? If so, we will keep moving from one degree of glory to another in our perception of God, and His expression through us. How exciting!**”