

The Renewed Mind and How to Have It

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being transformed by the renewal of the mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. It delves into the need to shift from conformity to the world to embracing Christ-exalting truth and developing truth-embracing humility. The sermon highlights the significance of gazing at the glory of Jesus Christ for inner transformation and the pursuit of a mindset aligned with God's will.

Scripture: Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Ephesians 4:22, 1 Peter 1:13, Ephesians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Titus 3:5, Romans 1:23

Topics: "Mind Renewal", "Transformation through the Holy Spirit"

Description

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Transcript

Pray with me. If the Son has set us free, Father, we are free indeed. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

For freedom Christ has set you free. Do not be enslaved again to a yoke of bondage. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

So, Father, I pray that you would come and use this truth tonight from your Word to make your people free. Show us what freedom is. Show us the kind of transformed mind.

Indeed, work in us the kind of transformed mind. So that whether we are worshiping Sunday morning or Sunday evening or Saturday evening, there might be a power of the Holy Spirit on this moment. Father, come and renew our minds.

I pray through Christ, Amen. Now, as I've prayed and sought the Lord about these verses, it seems to me that there are two more very large issues that I need to deal with before we go on to verse 3. And we'll deal with one of them tonight, and we'll deal with one of them tomorrow. We'll deal with one of them this morning, and we'll deal with one of them next Saturday and Sunday.

Let me tell you about next week. I want to focus next week on the will of God because it says here that you need to discern, attesting the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect. That's a very common phrase, the will of God.

And I have the sense that often when we use it, we don't know what we're talking about because biblically it can have several meanings, maybe four. It's a spiritually damaging thing to use language and not know what you're saying because over time, it makes you a shell that's empty. It's just got language out here.

And either there's no content or it's wrong content. And you know what the Bible says about empty spaces. They don't stay empty long.

And many alien affections and passions move in where there's emptiness. And so I'm real eager that we not use language emptily, that we not just say the will of God and not know what is that. For example, one meaning of the phrase will of God in the Bible is the sovereign will of God, which always comes to pass no matter what you do.

And then secondly, there's in the Bible the moral will of God, like thou shalt not commit murder. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not lie.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet. And those kinds of things don't happen all the time.

So God's will in one sense happens perfectly all the time, and God's will in another sense is broken all the time. And then there's this whole issue of a life of wisdom in which biblical statements don't apply very clearly and easily to a complex moral situation. And you have to have a spiritual mind to discern just how to put it into practice.

And you can't point exactly to a verse in the Bible that dictates this precise behavior. But is this the will of God or isn't this the will of God? And then fourthly, there's this whole issue of where most of us live all the time, namely spontaneity. Do you know that most of your behavior you don't premeditate? I don't premeditate these gestures.

And I only have a kind of, I don't follow my manuscript real closely. I don't know what's coming out of my mouth. I'm not stopping before every sentence and saying, now is that the will of God? And when I walk through the commons and I say hello or stick out my hand, I'm not doing this big moral assessment of my life.

And you aren't either. You can't. You can't live your life that way.

Which means 95% of your life is spillover from what's there, unpremeditated, and that dictates where most of your energy should go, namely deep transformation, not accumulation of lists. You don't have time to consult them, I promise you. Now, do you know how all those four things fit together and which ones apply to here? Well, that's next Sunday.

And I think it's worth a whole sermon. It's worth ten sermons. But we'd never finish Romans if I gave ten sermons on the second half of verse two.

Tonight, we're going to focus on this one phrase, the renewal of your minds. 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. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

We are perfectly useless as Christ-exalting Christians if all we do is conform to the world. And the key, Paul says here in this verse, to not wasting our lives in that way of prosperity and success is a renewed mind. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So, our goal is transformation that becomes the worship of verse one. Reasonable service of worship as you present your bodies. There's one other place in the Gospels where the word transformation is used that's found here.

It's not translated transformation, it's translated transfiguration. Mark 17, Mark 9, 2. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. That word transfigured is the very word found in Romans 12, 2. Be transformed in the renewing of your mind.

And the reason I draw out that stunning parallel is to stress that transformation is something remarkable, something profound, something glorious. It is not the replacement of a list of bad behaviors with an external list of new, better behaviors so that you can now call yourself transformed because you got yourself a new list and you're now keeping the list. That's not what he's talking about.

Something like this, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. Something spiritually like that has to happen first from the inside out, some profound change, some new shining, and then later, God saves us in stages, later, outside it will happen to us at the resurrection because Jesus says, then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. So he presented himself as transfigured as a kind of foretaste of what would happen to us at the resurrection and what he would look like at his second coming.

But now we begin that transformation internally, morally, mentally, spiritually. Transformation does not mean switching from the to-do list of the flesh to the to-do list of my moral effort. When Jesus ejected, rejected the list, the works of the flesh, he did not replace it with the list of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit.

From the works of the flesh or the law to the works, no, the fruit of the Spirit. Not a new list of moral behaviors instead of a list of immoral behaviors, but a new power, a new power from the Holy Spirit. God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not by letter, but by Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

So transformation is a very profound inner alteration. A Spirit-wrought, blood-bought work of God, which is why, it's very remarkable, Brian, that we sang this song about freedom, because you didn't know what I was going to say, why the Christian life is described in spite of the fact that it is utterly submitted, and even the Bible says enslaved to God and to righteousness, in spite of those two words, submitted and enslaved, the Christian life is called freedom. Galatians 5.1, For freedom Christ has set you free.

Do not be enslaved to a yoke of bondage. Or 2 Corinthians 3.17, For freedom Christ has set us, I'm sorry, now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Here's the reason the Christian life is freedom.

The transformation is a transformation from bondage into freedom. Here's the reason. Freedom is doing what you love to do, if what you love to do is what you ought to do.

And transformation is the change of our hearts so that what we love to do is what we ought to do. The freest of all people in the universe are the people who do exactly what they like to do, and not suffer for it

in hell, but rise with Jesus to ever increasing joy. And that happens through a transformation so that what we love to do is what we ought to do.

And we fall out of love with the sinful things that we ought not to do, but very much love to do when we're not yet transformed. And the Christian life is one long process of crucifying those old desires and experiencing by the power of the Holy Spirit the awakening of new passions, new passions, new desires, so that I can stand at the front of this church like I did a few minutes ago. You didn't hear me, those of you who are watching this Sunday morning, but I said, there is no place on planet earth I would rather be than standing here loving this people, welcoming, preaching, which would not have been the case when I was 15.

God changes. God transforms. So here we are at the phrase the renewal of your mind, because that is what he says is the key to the transformation.

You're sitting there, I hope, by the Holy Spirit at work in this room saying, I don't feel very far along in that process of loving and delighting in what I ought to and hating and finding displeasing what I ought not to do. You better say something practically helpful here, because I need to know how to get changed, which is what this verse says we should do. Be transformed.

And then it says something very weighty, worthy of a whole sermon, namely, by the renewing of your mind. So what is that? And how do you get it? Oh, how crucial this is. If you long to break loose from conformity to the world, if you long to be transformed from the inside out, if you long to be free from duty-driven Christianity and do what you love to do because it's what you ought to do or do what you ought to do because you love to do it, if you long to offer up your body as a living sacrifice so that your whole life becomes worship and displays the glory of Jesus, then just displaying selfishness, living for me, which you know in your deep, dark moments is a lousy way to live, will set you up for a great fall when you stand before the judge of the universe.

If you want that kind of freedom, then pursue with all your might the renewal of your mind. Because Paul says that's where the transformation comes from. Be transformed in or by the renewal of your mind.

So we're going to talk the rest of our time on that. What's wrong with the human mind? Why does it need to be transformed? Why does it need renewing? What does the renewal look like? How can we pursue it and enjoy it? That's what I want to talk about. First, what's wrong with our minds? There are a lot of people, some very noble people, who think that the only problem with the human mind is that it doesn't have all the information it needs.

And therefore, education is their redemption. Get education and we'll fix crime. Get people educated and there won't be the invention of elaborate scams or sophisticated terrorist plots or complex schemes of embezzling or fast-talking, mentally nimble radio rudeness.

Now that list defeats itself. Because we all know those are the most educated people. It didn't do them any good at all.

They're using all their computer savvy, all their skills in the bank, all their verbal, nimble, mental abilities to make another person look stupid. Education got them there. That's where it got them.

It refined the powers of sin. So, you may think education is the redemption of our culture. But if you just think a little longer, everything you see around you will prove that it isn't so.

The most educated sinners do the most damage. The Bible has a very profound analysis that goes way deeper than that. I love the Bible.

It's not a superficial book. It's an absolutely profound book. It is so... I go back to it again and again.

I read all kinds of other books. They just can't compare. Nothing can compare with the analysis of the human condition and its remedy found in the Bible.

There's a phrase that the Apostle Paul, who wrote Romans, uses in Ephesians that shed all kind of light. It sort of dictated where I went with this message. Let me read you the verse from Ephesians 4.22. He says, and I was led here because the verb renew is found here like the noun is in verse 2 of chapter 12.

The verb form of it is found in Ephesians 4.22. Be renewed in the spirit of your minds. That's Ephesians 4.22. What in the world does the phrase spirit of your mind mean? That's a strange phrase. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

What is the spirit of your mind? It means at least this. The human mind is not a sophisticated computer managing objective data, which it then faithfully presents to the heart for appropriate emotional responses. The mind has a spirit to it.

In other words, I think it means the mind has a mindset. There's a good English effort at what's going on here. The mind has a mindset.

Or we could say the mind just doesn't have a view of things. It has a viewpoint. The mind doesn't just perceive.

It has a posture. It doesn't just detect. It has a demeanor to it.

It has a bearing. It has an attitude. It has a bent.

Those are my efforts to get at what Paul means when he says be renewed in the spirit of your mind. The mind's problem, the problem with John Piper's mind is not simply that it is finite and needs more information to process in its computer to deliver up objectively accurate perceptions to my heart, which then can either like them or dislike them. The mind is already a problem before it ever delivers anything to the heart.

It's got a mindset. And we know what that is. It is hostile.

The mind of the flesh is hostile to God, hostile to His absolute supremacy, hostile to His absolute authority, even hostile to His infinite beauty because that competes with mine. And I want to like what I see in the mirror best. I want to like what I make better than what God makes and better than God.

My mind is tilted, bent, has a demeanor, has a viewpoint, has a mindset away from God, hostile to God, embracing alternative things. That's what we saw last week in chapter 1, verse 28. They did not approve of having God in their knowledge and therefore He gave them up to a base, depraved mind.

The mind considered the possibility that God might be glorious, God might be authoritative, God might be good, God might be wise, God might have absolute rights over me, and there rose up in the mind, No! I will not live that way. I will not yield to that. And it suppresses, chapter 1, verse 18 of Romans, it suppresses this truth and does not want to have God in our knowledge.

And we read last week they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man. Romans 1, 23. This is today's front page from the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

Every time the Olympics gets going, I'm all ears. You know why? It's about as close as you get to worship in a secular culture. And the language becomes religious.

Sometimes people will say, Papi, you're always talking about the glory of God, glory of God. Don't you know, nobody knows what you're talking about. That's a religious word.

If it's a religious word, why is it in the headline on the front page of the Minneapolis Star Tribune? If nobody knows what the word glory means, why is it on the front page of the newspaper? Opener ablaze in glory. That's my language. That's my language.

Because everybody does know what glory is. I didn't watch it, but I saw that picture right there. That's pretty impressive.

A lot of firecrackers. You know what I watched? Hurricane Charlie. That's something.

Do any comparing? You're out, Athens. They exchanged the glory of God for images. Athens ablaze with pop, pop, pop.

And Florida devastated with the breeze of His little finger. If God wanted to take this country out, He could take it out in a minute. And we're so impressed with man-made achievements, especially our own.

A hundred-yard dash, a swim. Now mark this. I love to watch the Olympics.

I have my favorites. Gymnastics is as good as it gets. And there's a fine line we walk, right, between that being the object of our worship and that being a little tiny echo of what Christ could do if He did a floor exercise.

Not three backflips. Ten. Nailing it with a perfect ten every time.

And then doing it with His eyes closed. And that's just the beginning of His glory. If the Olympics set you on a quest for glory, go for it! If they make you long, if you come away from watching these remarkable achievements, humanly speaking, set you aflame with, where did that come from? Why am I so drawn to that? Why do I jump up and leap when Mark Spitz's record is surpassed? And eight golds in swimming happens? Why? And then go and say, Bible, tell me why.

Tell me why. And the Bible has all those important answers. It's because we have exchanged the glory of God for the glory of man.

And Hurricane Charlie and Athens exists at God's decree to lead you to Him. So go there and serve the broken in Florida and admire the work of God in Athens. Now before I go to the remedy of this problem of our exchange and our hostile mindset, I want to give you two other diagnoses quickly.

One from Peter and one again from Paul. Listen to these words from 1 Peter 1.13. Listen to the diagnosis of my mind. 1 Peter 1.13 and 1.14. Prepare your minds for action, or literally gird up your minds.

Do not be conformed. Same language, right? Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. That's an amazing statement.

Gird up your minds. Don't be conformed to the passions, desires of your former ignorance. The implication is, if you could reverse this ignorance, if you could turn around the blindness and the deadness and the emptiness and the ignorance of your mind, and you could see God for who He is, the bondage you presently have to passions that are taking you in wrong directions would be broke.

That's why Paul says in 12.2, Be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Because it was a former ignorance that left us in the thrall of passions that made us do stuff we knew we shouldn't be doing. Isn't it amazing? I thought of preaching a message entitled, The Christian Life is Like Bumper Bowling.

You roll a ball down, and it either falls in the gutter on one side because you over-emphasize the mind and you're an intellectual, or it falls in the gutter on the other side because you over-emphasize the emotions and you're an emotionalism person. And the Bible does bumper bowling. Now, some of you don't bowl with kids, so you don't even know what I'm talking about.

But you put these little tubes in the gutter, and the ball can't go in the gutter. It bumps off of it and goes down and knocks down the pins, no matter who rolls it. And that's what the Bible does.

The Bible, all over the place, puts bumpers along our life. So if we start saying, The mind! The mind! The mind is everything! It starts talking emotion language. And if you go over and say, The emotions! The emotions! The emotions are everything! The heart is everything! It's got a bumper over there and sends you back to the mind.

So I just mention that to say, Tonight's message is not the whole message, not the whole truth. This is a mind message, and it's amazing what the New Testament has to say about the renewal of the mind. We could preach another message on the emotions, the heart, the affections, but this one is on the mind.

So Peter analyses it by saying, In your former ignorance, you were in bondage to passions. Now, don't be conformed to those because that's former ignorance. Now you have knowledge and a renewed mind.

Here's the last diagnosis. Ephesians 4.17 You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them.

Now you might expect them to stop right there. You've got three references to the mind. Futility of the mind, darkened in understanding, ignorance that is in them, and then he closes with this devastating root problem.

Because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart. So beneath the mind and all of its futility, and all of its darkness, and all of its ignorance, there's another problem. Namely, a hard heart.

An impenitent heart. That's our deepest disease. The mind suppresses the truth because the heart continues to feed it with hardness.

It won't let us submit to the supremacy of Christ. So now I move towards a conclusion by asking, what's the remedy to the problem of the mind and the heart? Be transformed in the renewal of your mind. How's that going to happen? It's going to happen by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The reason I emphasize the Holy Spirit, even though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in verse 2, is because in Titus 3.5, the word renewal, the noun renewal occurs, and it's the only place in the Bible that it

occurs outside Romans 12.2. The whole Greek Old Testament, the whole Greek New Testament, not one other occasion does the noun renewal occur except in Titus 3.5. So I feel some warrant in saying that that Paul's use of it there would help us here. And he says, God saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. So if you ask, how does the renewal happen? How does the mind of the Spirit get altered so that I'm not in rebellion anymore and I'm not finding more pleasure in me, but more in God? The answer is the Holy Spirit comes and does a double work.

He comes and He does a double work. To set the stage for what that double work is, listen to 2 Corinthians 3.18. This is probably the most important verse I'll quote outside the text. 2 Corinthians 3.18. We all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed.

Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image, image of Christ. From one degree of glory to another, this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. The key to a transformed mind is the steady gaze at the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now, for that to happen, we need a double work from the Holy Spirit. Let me describe what I mean and show you how you can join Him in this work. We need the Holy Spirit to work from the outside in by putting before us Christ-exalting truth in the Gospel.

And we need the Holy Spirit to work from the inside out by humbling our hard hearts. Both have to happen. He must lead us to hear the Gospel, read our Bibles, study Christ-exalting writings of great saints, meditate on the perfections of Christ, and our great enemy the devil does not want this to happen because it says in 2 Corinthians 4, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ.

The devil fears one thing more than anything else. You're seeing the glory of Christ. Seeing Christ for who He really is.

Seeing with the eyes of the heart. Seeing with the spirit of the mind. Seeing Him for who He really is in all of His glory and embracing Him.

The devil fears that more than anything because Paul says that's the way we get transformed. That's the way our minds are altered by gazing at the glory of Christ with an unveiled face. So direction number one that the Holy Spirit has to work is He must present us with the Gospel.

He must put Jesus Christ in the truth in a book, in a sermon, on the radio, on television, in a tract, in the mouth of a trusted friend. He must put Jesus Christ before you so that you can have an objective exposure to His glory which does no good at all unless He does this second. Namely, He moves inside and explodes that hard heart takes out the heart of stone, puts in the heart of flesh and makes us have a truth-embracing humility.

So let me sum the two works up like this. When you pray for the Holy Spirit to work, ask that He would objectively lead you to Christ-exalting truth and that He would inside subjectively lead you to truth-embracing humility. Christ-exalting truth must come to you from outside.

Truth-embracing humility must rise up on the inside. And when those two works of the Holy Spirit happen, worship happens because of the transformed mind, the renewed mind. So I ask finally, what should you do? And the answer is, pursue with the Holy Spirit, pursue Christ-exalting truth.

Listen to rich, expository messages about the glories of Christ. Whatever it takes, find them, listen to them. Read your Bible from cover to cover on the lookout for the perfections and the glories and the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Read great, old, rich, deep expositions of the nature of Christ and the work of Christ. Our bookstores are full of them. And then, pray, pray, pray, pray that the Holy Spirit would renew your mind by shattering the heart of hardness, by giving you a truth-embracing humility and openness and teachability and a whole new mindset so that this truth, which you are now reading, hearing, meditating on, pondering, will be seen and Christ-seen for who He really is.

And then will come true, 2 Corinthians 3.18, beholding the glory of the Lord, we are changed from one degree of glory to the next. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Let's pray.

Father, on Sunday morning here and on Saturday evening here, we ask that You would shatter hard hearts. Hearts that are just saying, I don't want to submit. I don't want to find in God the most beautiful, most glorious, most satisfying treasure in the universe that would alter all my passions and all my emotions and turn my life upside down.

I don't think I can handle that. And I pray that that response would be changed. And for those who have already embraced You, Father, as their treasure, all that You offer them in Jesus, would You take us another step farther on in having the renewed mind of Jesus Christ.

In His name I pray. Amen. For more information, visit www.fema.org

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