

The Renewed Mind

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

—Romans 12:2

THE RENEWING OF THE

mind is a necessity for every dedicated follower of the Master who wishes to know and do the perfect will of God. Thus, it is also a necessity to do so if we are to have the “mind of Christ.” The mind of the fallen flesh, developed in the environment of the world, views essentially every aspect of life from the standpoint of self-interest, whereas the will of God for his people is that they be motivated by love, setting aside interests of self that others might be blessed, and that he might be glorified.

In verse 3, immediately following our opening text, Paul mentions the first logical and necessary change of viewpoint on the part of one who has consecrated himself to do the Heavenly Father’s will. He says, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to

think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

The viewpoint of the world is that anyone who expects to be a success in life must have a high estimation of his or her own self and ability. Nor do most people of the world hesitate to advertise their qualifications. While this may not be wrong according to the standards of the world, a disciple of Christ should learn soon after entering the narrow way of sacrifice that his accomplishments in the service of God, and his growth in Christlike character, will not be due to his own qualifications and ability. Rather, they will be due to the power of the Holy Spirit, through the grace of God.

This does not mean that we are to think of ourselves as having no ability. Paul’s admonition is to “think soberly.” Here, the Greek word translated “soberly” has the meaning of being sound. It is the same word that is translated “sound mind” in II Timothy 1:7, which reads, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

Paul explains that we are to “think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” He then reminds us of our membership in the body of Christ, and of the various services which are to be rendered by those of his body members. (Rom. 12:4-8) The lesson is that those who think logically, and in keeping with their faith in the divine promises, will recognize the type of service they can render, and will not be undertaking to serve along lines for which they are not qualified.

The fleshly, worldly mind might well conclude that it would be illogical not to do everything possible to

improve one's standing among the brethren, and thus to attain as much honor from them as possible, but the renewed mind, the "sound mind" of a dedicated follower of Christ, should not take such a view. In the process of renewing his mind, a Christian should learn that if there is to be any advancement, it can come properly only from the Heavenly Father, and not because he sought or promoted it.

A SOUND MIND

In renewing his mind, the follower of Christ considers as "sound" only those viewpoints which he knows emanate from God. He accepts God's invitation to reason with him, and rejects as unreasonable every thought which does not square with the written Word. His renewed mind approves only those things known to be in harmony with the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

This results in far-reaching and sweeping changes of viewpoint. One of these is reflected in Paul's reference to the spirit of a "sound mind," quoted earlier. Human reasoning might well conclude that the spirit of a sound mind means great carefulness and caution lest we overexert ourselves in attending meetings, or in other efforts in the service of the Lord. Taking the context into consideration, however, it would seem that Paul was admonishing Timothy quite differently.

In this epistle, Paul explained to Timothy that many of the brethren had forsaken him in his hour of great need. (II Tim. 1:15) Paul sensed his need of comfort and encouragement and urged Timothy to visit him in his prison home, where he was awaiting execution. By responding to this invitation,

Timothy would, of necessity, show himself to be a friend of Paul and a believer in the Gospel of Christ, for which the apostle's life was soon to be taken. Such a visit could well have been very costly to Timothy.

Paul endeavored to strengthen his "beloved son" Timothy for this hazardous undertaking. In II Timothy 1:8, he continues, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God."

Here was a definite invitation to Timothy to knowingly place himself in a position in which he would be a "partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." He would thus experience the spirit "of power" which the Lord promised to him, not necessarily for his protection, but for grace to help in his time of need. Should Timothy be fearful of such an undertaking, he was to remember that his fear would not come from the Lord, for he does not give the spirit of fear, but only of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

The Scriptures are silent as to whether or not Timothy actually made this much-urged trip to Rome to visit his beloved and aged Paul. However, we can be virtually certain that he made every possible effort to do so, even though he must certainly have known what the possible result could have been. The point we are making here is that from the standpoint of human reason, to accept Paul's invitation would have seemed very illogical, and in no sense a reflection of sound judgment to thus risk his young life, when there were so many other opportunities of service before him.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

God's will for his consecrated people is in many respects different from what the fallen human mind might conceive to be right. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."—Matt. 5:38-41

Human reasoning dictates that we stand up for our rights, and demand just treatment from our fellows. However, Jesus indicates otherwise. Instead, he says, accept abuse and injustice. Do not resist. Let them smite the other cheek if they wish. Give them more than they unjustly demand. Since these are the instructions of our Master, we must conclude that to obey them would be exercising the spirit of a sound mind, and bringing ourselves into line with that "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Continuing along this same line, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."—vss. 43-45

How unsound such a viewpoint seems to the worldly-minded. Prior to knowing God and

consecrating ourselves to serve him, we all had more or less of this mind. Now, however, our minds are being renewed. The old viewpoints are being supplanted by God's thoughts. Thus, from his standpoint, our minds are becoming more and more in harmony with the divine standard. The spirit of a sound mind is one which prompts us to love our enemies, and to do good to those who persecute us. This is not an easy thing to do, yet it is the course which is dictated by the spirit of a sound mind—a renewed mind.

Jesus reasons this point out for us. He says, "If ye love them [only] which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—vss. 46-48

How reasonable this is in the light of Jesus' explanation. God has begotten us as his children, and we are growing up into Christ in preparation to be born of the Spirit on the divine plane of life to live and reign with Christ. Our Heavenly Father therefore expects us to be like him, not like the publicans or others. God showers his blessings of rain and sunshine upon the just and the unjust, and sent his Son to redeem the whole world which was alienated from him because of sin. Therefore, he wants us to have the same largeness of mind and heart, to be "perfect" in this respect even as he is perfect. To make every effort to do so is to exercise the spirit of a sound and renewed mind, because it is the mind of our Heavenly Father and his Son.

THE FATHER KNOWS

The worldly mind likes to be appreciated and praised. Jesus mentions this viewpoint in his reference to those who “do . . . alms before men, to be seen of them,” and those who “sound a trumpet” to call attention to their benefactions, “that they may have glory of men.” (Matt. 6:1,2) This principle is operative all around us every day. The larger the gifts, the more fanfare there is to glorify the giver. This is not considered wrong by the world. Indeed, it is a common practice of the world’s “best people.”

This, however, is not pleasing to the Lord and, from his standpoint, such a course is not exercising a renewed mind, because it is not his mind. In learning what is “that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,” we are to take heed to Jesus’ instructions, “When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.”—vss. 3,4

“IF, WHEN YE DO WELL”

The Apostle Peter was greatly used by God to reveal his will to his people. He wrote, “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”—I Pet. 2:19-21

“This is acceptable with God,” wrote Peter. We are endeavoring to have our minds renewed that we may know and prove what is the acceptable will of God, and here Peter explains a very important aspect of the divine will for all dedicated followers of the Master. It is simply that we endure suffering patiently, when it is inflicted upon us because we did well.

How unsound this appears from the human standpoint. In this passage, Peter reminds us of the possibility of being punished for our faults, or for doing those things which we and others know are wrong. Human reasoning would say that this would be all right—just what we should expect. Yet, as Peter explains, there is no glory in this—no cause for feeling that simply because we have gracefully accepted just punishment for our faults, we are especially pleasing to God.

It is only when we “do well” and suffer for it, that we truly demonstrate our love for God and his ways. For, as Peter explains, this is the example set before us by our Lord. Jesus, who simply went about doing good, was arrested and crucified, and he voluntarily surrendered to this ignominy and suffering because he exercised the spirit of a sound mind.

Herein is a basic principle of the life of one striving to develop the mind of Christ. Prior to Pentecost, Peter could not understand it himself. He said to Jesus, “Be it far from thee, Lord.” (Matt. 16:22) However, Jesus explained to Peter, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (vs. 25) How utterly illogical this is from the standpoint of the

worldly mind. Actually, though, from the standpoint of our Heavenly Father's will, Jesus reflected the spirit of a sound mind in surrendering himself to be killed.

Later, through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, Peter understood this, and was able to encourage the brethren along this line. "It is better," Peter wrote, "if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." (I Pet. 3:17) The reason for this is that we are following in Jesus' footsteps, and he suffered, "the just for the unjust."—vs. 18

To the human mind how illogical is the idea that it is better to suffer for well doing than for evil doing. Yet, this is the will of God as we renew our minds. The mind of the flesh rebels against this "unsound" viewpoint, and we need to examine ourselves very carefully, and very sincerely, to make sure that we do not yield to the fleshly reasoning, which exalts self above the will of God as expressed through Christ Jesus. As Paul admonishes, we are to bring "into captivity every thought" to the divine will.—II Cor. 10:5

OUR "REASONABLE SERVICE"

The exercise of the spirit of a sound or renewed mind enables one to reason and reach logical conclusions. However, the conclusions reached depend upon the information used by the mind as a basis for reasoning. While in the world, we reasoned on the viewpoints of the world. All the information available indicated that self should be given first consideration under practically all circumstances, therefore we came to selfish conclusions.

Now it is different. We have, as indicated in Romans 12:1, presented our bodies a “living sacrifice,” and have reached the conclusion that this is our “reasonable,” or logical, service. Having entered upon this course of sacrificing all in the service of the Heavenly Father, it would be illogical to sidestep the opportunities that present themselves from day to day to carry out the terms of our consecration.

Thus, it is not enough that we have formally dedicated ourselves to sacrifice. It is not enough that we hear, read, and study the subject of sacrifice. The transformation of our minds must be so complete that we will be impelled to action, and thus demonstrate that we have actually accepted the baptism into Christ’s death as our new way of life. The true spirit of a sound and renewed mind will not permit any other course.

“ON THESE THINGS”

The renewing of our minds should affect every facet of our thinking. While it is the merit of Christ which makes our imperfect sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, it is incumbent upon us to bring every thought and deed as nearly into line with divine righteousness as possible.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”—Phil. 4:8,9

What a wonderful formula for holy thinking. The mind that is daily being renewed will delight to dwell upon the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. Such holy thinking will surely leave no room, or have no time for the selfish, sordid things of the fallen flesh, and of the selfish, sinful world. Let us pray with David that such holy thoughts will indeed be the meditations of our heart.—Ps. 19:14

However, meditation alone is not sufficient, nor did Paul indicate that to “think on these things” was all that was necessary. He added that “those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.” Indeed, we are to “do” as well as “think.” We are to do the things which, through the Scriptures, we have seen in Paul, or, as he mentions, we are to follow him as he followed Christ.—Phil. 3:17; I Cor. 11:1

Here again, to the worldly-minded, it would seem very illogical to do the things in the service of the Lord that Paul did. No inconvenience to himself, no hardship, no danger, nothing that would adversely affect his well-being as a man, motivated his decisions as to how and where and when he would serve. To those who endeavored to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, thus to expose himself to his enemies who were waiting there for him, Paul said, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”—Acts 21:13

Referring to the trouble which awaited him at Jerusalem, Paul said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so

that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24) As here stated, the secret of Paul’s unfaltering course of sacrificial service was that he had learned to think properly with a renewed mind. He was guided by the spirit of a sound mind, and therefore did not consider his life to be dear unto himself.

CHRIST’S MIND

Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) Certainly Jesus possessed a sound mind from his Heavenly Father’s standpoint, and it was a mind which led him in the way of humble and submissive sacrifice. In addition to leaving the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—vss. 7,8

How unwise it would seem to the worldly mind for one to make himself of no reputation. However, the mind of Christ, guided by heavenly wisdom, led him to do just this, and further, to actually give his life on the cross for the sins of the world. “Let this mind be in you,” Paul admonished. This mind will be in us, and will dominate our decisions and our whole course in life if, day by day, we are being “transformed by the renewing” of our minds. To put it another way, this mind will be in us if we

take up our cross and faithfully follow Jesus into death.—Matt. 16:24

APPROVED SACRIFICE

Sacrifice in itself is also not enough. Paul wrote that even if we give our bodies to be burned, and have not love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) Here Paul reminds us that our motive for sacrifice must be right. It must be God's motive, which is unselfish love. It was this love that prompted our Heavenly Father to give his Son to die for the sin-cursed and dying race. It was the same love that impelled Jesus to suffer and to die in carrying out the divine will. It was unselfish love also that prompted Paul to lay down his life in the service of the Lord and the brethren.

Thus, as our minds are renewed day by day, our motives should become purified. Love should replace every semblance of selfishness. Otherwise, all our giving, our labor, our sacrifice, will be in vain so far as the will of God is concerned. With love ruling in our hearts and minds, and motivating our actions, what a wonderful transformation it will mean. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth."—I Cor. 13:4-8

The thoughts which engender these gracious and godlike qualities of character are dominant in the renewed mind of the faithful follower of the

Master. They are the pure thoughts which reflect the spirit of a sound mind given to us by the Holy Spirit of truth. Finally, it is these motivating thoughts of love which will urge us on to faithfulness as day by day we continue to present our bodies a living sacrifice, rejoicing to realize that this is our “reasonable service.”



“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. . . . Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. . . . May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.”

—Psalm 90:12,14,17

New International Version