

Renewal - Part 5

Mind

1. The magnitude of the mind.

- *Proverbs 23:7; James 1:8*

2. Issues of the intellect.

- *Romans 3:23*

3. Grooves in the gray matter.

- *James 1:14-15; Matthew 5:27-28; Romans 8:7-8*

4. Bring on the brainwashing.

- *Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 5:26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

5. Isometrics of the mind.

- *Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 12:2; James 4:7-8;
2 Corinthians 10:5; Philipians 4:8-9*

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West Valley Church
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Renewed: Part 5

Mind

2 Corinthians 5:17

Encased inside your skull is a pinkish-grey mass of jelly-like tissue that weighs about 3 pounds. It's an organ made up of about 100 billion nerve cells, or neurons, and other cells and tissue. It constantly soaks in a bath of cerebrospinal fluid, and has unlimited electronic activity in it – if you could see it, it would look like a lightning storm on earth being viewed from space. One estimate is that the brain can store 100 trillion bits of information, or the equivalent of a 100,000-gig hard drive. It makes up only one fiftieth of your body weight, but it uses about one quarter of the oxygen in your blood. In a single day you will exercise *seven million* brain cells.

Why am I telling you this? Because today we are continuing our series called “Renewed,” looking at the renewal that God can do in our lives because of the resurrection. Today we are looking at a “renewed mind.”

We talked at Easter about stepping out of the grave into new life, and leaving our graveclothes behind – leaving behind a life of sin and all its infections and living a brand-new life. This series is about looking at a lot of ways that that happens, and today we want to learn how Christ renews our minds.

So let's start by looking at...

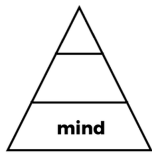
1. The magnitude of the mind.

God has created everything about you to be used to its fullest potential in relationship to him and for him. Your mind is hugely significant in that – your mind is a determining factor for the success or failure of your commitment to Christ. Of course, you have all the resources of God through the Holy Spirit who is available to you anytime, all the time, but it's up to you to decide what you will do with it. It is from your mind that you determine everything you say and do; and your mind is either directed by *you*, or it is directed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says about people:

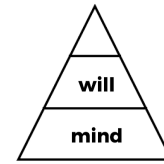
“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7, nkjv)

In other words, the way we *think* is what we *are* and what we *become*. Success in your Christian life will happen if your mind is on Christ and growing in Him.

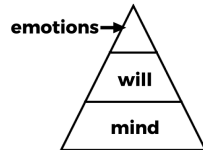
It is what you *think* that determines what you *do*, that determines how you *feel*. It is the mind that is the seat of your actions and emotions.



See, the way God made us is this: that the way we *think* is to be the foundation of our lives. It is the basis of how we think, perceive, interpret, and understand what is going on around us. It's from the mind that we then determine what we will do. In other words, the mind dictates our *actions* – our *will*, or our



choices. Our behavior is driven by what we think, right? Then, in turn, how we *feel* comes from what we do. If we do

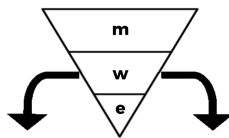
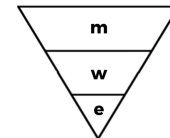


something fun or enjoyable, we feel pleasure or happiness. If we do something wrong or sinful, we (hopefully) feel bad, remorseful, or guilty. Follow that?

So how we *think* determines what we *do* which results in how we *feel*. The emotions or the feelings are the *result* of our choices and actions, and it should be that way. But we can't rely on our

emotions. For instance, many times we do what we know is right, but it doesn't always feel good right away, does it? Eating healthy and working out or exercising isn't always fun, but we do it regardless of how we feel at the moment because we know there is a payoff later. And that is the point – even if doing the right thing doesn't feel good immediately, we know that the feelings will eventually follow. Does that make sense?

But here's the problem with our culture and with sin: we have things flipped *upside down* from God's way. Most of the time, in our culture today, how we *feel* determines what we *do*, and then we'll figure out later what we *think* about it. It feels good, so we sin, and then we try to justify it in our minds. See? It's an upside down way of mind.



And that's a very precarious way to live – you can't find any real balance in your life because you'll too easily fall one way or the other, depending on what way the wind blows, what your circumstances are, or a host of other things. In the Bible we're told:

“Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” (James 1:8, niv)

So the mind is a very important part of our Christian life because, if we are thinking from a renewed mind – thinking correctly – it determines correct action which results in positive feelings. It all starts from the inside out – it starts with the way we think. That's why this is so important.

Naturally, then, that's why we have the...

2. ***Issues of the intellect.***

We have a lot of issues with the way we think about things. Did you know that the statistics on mental health are that one out of every four Americans suffers from some form of mental illness? Here's what that means: look at the people around

you. Odds are that one of them is mentally ill. If three of them are okay, then it's you!

I'm not trying to make light of this – I'm trying to make the point that this is something we all struggle with. How we think is important. If you imagine that the brain is the hard drive, then the way we think and the patterns of thought we have is the software. Sometimes, for some of us, there are problems with the hard drive. There are glitches in how the brain works. Or, as we get older, different areas get damaged and our memory gets bad.

Sometimes, things misfire and bring about depression or anxiety or other issues, and medications will help. For those who battle addictions to drugs or alcohol or pornography or food, whole sections get either rewired or wiped out completely. If someone has a medical crisis like a tumor or stroke or aneurysm, different areas will have to compensate for that damage, or sometimes it is lost altogether.

Most of you know that ten and a half years ago I was in an automobile accident, and I suffered a traumatic brain injury. One of the results of that was that for about six months or so I had no short-term memory. I remember very little from those months. The hard drive of my brain was damaged and couldn't store memory. Then during my recovery, my brain needed massive amounts of rest while it rewired itself. I also had to learn how to do certain mental exercises in order to help my brain rebuild or create new neural pathways. Still, after all these years, my memory struggles a little, and my brain can't take long exposure to multiple sensory stimuli, and it doesn't have the endurance it used to have.

But it's not those kinds of things we are talking about today; not all of us have those kinds of difficulties. But ALL of us *do* have software problems. The way we process and interpret the information we receive is faulty. We've all been infected with a virus that attacks our thinking. The virus is called "sin." The Bible says:

"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."
(Romans 3:23, nlt)

We're talking about the sins that we've committed and the sins that have been committed against us. Sin, like an addiction, drives our thinking in destructive and dysfunctional ways, so we act in ways that are selfish. And when we are victims of the sins of others and without Christ and help, it can alter our thinking in unhealthy and unproductive ways. That happens in ways that we don't even realize. That's why others can sometimes see things in us that we can't see in ourselves.

For instance, instead of loving others the way Jesus showed us and commands us to, we think the worst of others, or are untrusting and unforgiving and bitter, and we may not even realize that's our mindset. We'll talk more in a minute about how *our* sins affect our thinking, but let's talk about how the sins that others commit against us affects us.

I remember one teen that I worked with when I was a youth pastor who had been rejected by his parents because they said his birth was an "accident." From the time he was born, the message he received both directly and indirectly was that his

parents didn't want him. So, he believed that he had no value whatsoever. He wouldn't learn and grow, wouldn't believe that anyone wanted the best for him, and believed he wasn't worth it. But Christ gave him a new start, and he was able to change his thinking.

Many of us here have struggled with the wrong thinking about ourselves, about our value as individuals, and our role in relationships and in community because we've believed the lies we've been told – maybe by parents, or by people we thought we could look up to – relatives, adults, teachers, pastors, coaches – and for sure by our enemy the devil and by the world.

I remember one pastor talking about walking through a particular town where he was guest preaching, and he walked by a tattoo studio. In the window were displayed samples of the tattoos that people could get. There were all kinds of pictures and sayings, but one that stood out to him was the tattoo that, in big bold letters said, "Born to Lose." He was shocked that anyone would want to permanently put that on their own skin so he couldn't resist – he went in and ask the tattoo artist if anyone really does have that terrible phrase, "born to lose," tattooed on their body. The guy said, "Yes, sometimes." The pastor said, "I can't believe anyone in their right mind would do that." The artist tapped his head and said, "Before the tattoo is on the body, the tattoo is on the mind." That's the problem!

So, for instance, if someone had been abused as a child, their thinking has been tattooed to think in faulty ways about themselves and about others. It's going to take submission to what God says about us, to his healing, and quite possibly professional help to change that thinking.

Now listen: I'm not saying that we have an excuse for our faulty thinking. We are responsible, moral, people – *unless* we are too young, or we suffer from some form of mental illness or developmental issues. If not, then we reach an age of accountability – a time where we are responsible for our choices. We have the choice to continue in faulty thinking, or we can take steps to correct it. We either choose with God's help and others to get better, or to get bitter. It becomes our responsibility. We have issues to deal with, and the sooner the better. We don't have time to go into depth about this point, although I wish we could. But let us know if you want help in this area. We can give you biblical counsel and if needed, point you toward professional help.

Then there's the problem of our own sinful thinking, and that creates...

3. Grooves in the gray matter.

From studying the brain, scientists have found that repeated thoughts actually create physiological grooves in the brain. When we practice a skill, learn a sport or study some topic, a little trench is carved in our brains. This is another reason why it's so hard to break a habit. To make a new habit or break an old one, you literally have to make a new brain groove.

Picture a farmer driving his tractor down a dirt road. When the road is new, it's smooth and the farmer can drive easily from side to side. But if the farmer constantly drives in the same place, then ruts or grooves start to form in the road, and it gets more and more difficult to steer the tractor anywhere else but down the same grooves. Eventually, if the road isn't smoothed over, the ruts become so deep that the tractor tires just naturally follow them. There's no point in even steering.

The same is true when we continue to have sinful or dysfunctional thought patterns. We find it easier and easier to let our minds fall into the grooves than it is to steer down the right way. Then it's only natural for the actions to follow the thoughts. The Bible says:

"Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14-15, niv)

It starts with the thought, which we continue to think about, then eventually those thoughts easily give way to actions, and then it's easier and easier to repeat those actions. That's exactly why Jesus said this about sin, using adultery as an example:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28, niv)

It starts with a thought, and then it becomes an action. And the more we think about it, the more we will go back to that thought. The more we go back to that thought, the more likely it becomes an action. The more we act on it, the more it is a sinful habit.

Consider this: you and I were made to be passionate, to be ambitious, to better ourselves. We were wired by God for growth. But you must understand that our enemy and adversary, Satan, can't create anything; all he does is exploit what God makes. And we *let* Satan exploit our thoughts and ambitions and desires. So Satan will take natural tendencies that God has given us and exploit them, turning them toward things that are sinful. One of the ways, for example, is by turning our drives for our own growth (a good thing) into a lust for power (an exploitation), which leads us to do things that are unethical and immoral in order to gain power and control or to climb the corporate ladder or make the most sales, or whatever. Our competitiveness becomes a desire to use other people for our own gain.

For many people – men, especially – there might be no greater rut that we make in our brains than sexual sin. And the easiest exploitation comes through pornography. Pornography is an addiction in the sense that we create and then fall into that pattern. But the grooves are carved by our own repeated choices.

Did you know that pornography consumption can be as mood altering and addictive as narcotics? There is a release of endorphins, and we must have it in greater and greater amounts in order to get the same high. In fact, some studies have indicated that pornography can have the same effect on our brain as cocaine. Images can be

permanently “burned” into the memory by epinephrine, another chemical in the brain.

The more we expose ourselves to it, the greater the reality that we will act on it, moving from the computer to real people.

Dads, did you know that boys ages 9-13 are one of the largest targets of the pornography industry? Following the strategies of cigarette and opioid companies, if the pornographers can arrange for a child to become addicted, then they will have a steady flow of income. And parents: if you are using, you will addict your children even sooner. I would be willing to say this: this is one of the greatest threats to our integrity, to correct thinking, to our Christian lives, to our homes and families, to our communities and societies. Sexual assault and abuse against children has always been around, but the numbers of attempted and successful assaults, the number of sex offenders, is rapidly increasing, not to mention the human trafficking and slave trade that comes from it. You won't hear that from the mainstream media, since television and movies profit tremendously from soft-core porn. But it's true. And almost all those who are caught and convicted will tell you that long before they acted on it, they started with pornography. If you have started, you *must* stop. But you can't stop on your own. Those grooves are too deep. You need help. It starts with confession, surrender to God, and absolute accountability to others. It takes immersion in the Word of God and possibly professional counseling to address why you go there in the first place. And unless you are miraculously delivered, it will take time to get rid of those grooves. But you must do it. Let me be very clear: it IS a sin. Take steps immediately. God will help, but you must surrender and do the work. Let us know if you need help – we can point you in some directions.

The areas that God has given us natural inclinations, the enemy will exploit us, and we will create sinful grooves in our thinking.

The Bible says:

“The mind governed by the flesh (i.e., sin) is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:7-8, niv)

What's the solution? We must be willing to...

4. Bring on the brain washing.

Allow your brain to be cleansed, to be renewed! Only God can do that – make you a new creation so that the old is gone and the new has come! That's what 2 Corinthians 5:17 means when it says we are new creations – we are renewed in every way, including our brains.

In the book of Romans in the Bible it says:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)

To be “conformed” is to be shaped from the outside-in – to follow the patterns and teachings of this sinful world. To be “transformed” means to be changed from the inside-out. It's allowing God to *reprogram* the hard drive by His Spirit, to plow and re-grade the grooves out of the roads of our minds.

That's what happens when we allow Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to wash our brains and help us start over.

The Bible says that God's Word is what washes our brains and re-grades the grooves in our brains as the Word is empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians it says that Jesus gave his life for us:

“To make (us) holy, cleansing (us) by the washing with water through the word...” (Ephesians 5:26, niv)

The computer of our brain needs to be washed and reformatted, and that's what happens when we accept Christ and his life for us. Then, the Bible is the correct programming. It works like a cleanser, a re-programmer, and an anti-sin-virus protection. So it takes regular exposure to the Word, which means lots of time, in the Word of God. That's why the Bible tells us:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, nlt)

That's part of the...

5. *Isometrics* of the *mind*.

We have to exercise a right mind if we plan on letting Jesus renew our minds.

If God is going to work in us, we've got to exercise our brain correctly. How do we do that? We focus our brain on the right things. Starting with God. Jesus said that we should:

“Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33, ceb)

That's also why the Bible tells us we need to be:

“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” (Hebrews 12:2, niv)

We do that in prayer and regular washing with the Word of God daily. That's the exercise of the mind we need to engage in.

So what do we do if we face temptation? Keep in mind that the temptation itself is *not* sin; it's what we *do* with the temptation that makes it sin. The Book of James tells us:

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:7-8, niv)

You don’t want to be double-minded. There’s an old African proverb that says, “the man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants.” Keep your pants intact; be single minded. When tempted:

- 1) Submit to God,
- 2) Resist the devil in the power of God and the devil must flee,
- 3) Come near to God, and
- 4) Rid yourself of the temptation.

You must *remove* the temptation or your exposure to it.

Listen, if you have a hard time staying on a diet, don’t keep donuts in your fridge. Make sense? Remove the temptation. Exercise a right mind. Be in the Word. Focus on Jesus. Deal with temptation.

The Apostle Paul gives us some instruction in the Bible, too. When that incorrect thinking enters your mind, deal with it immediately. 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to:

“Demolish arguments and every pretension (*false thought*) that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5, niv)

Deal with it immediately and make your thinking obedient to, or in line with, Christ, then the Bible also says we should replace the faulty thinking with good thinking:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8-9, niv)

Focus on the right things! Allow Jesus to cleanse you of wrong thinking and start new patterns of thought. Resist temptation, deal with wrong thinking immediately, replace it with correct thinking. In all things, focus on Jesus.

Prayer

Benediction

Listen to this admonition, this challenge, this exhortation, this instruction:

“So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who

chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:13-16, nlt)

Dismiss