



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Nov 22nd - Nov 28th

Sermon: November 21st



November 22

2 Timothy 2:1-2

Yesterday marked a unique moment in the life of our church. It was special because it saw a wonderful, godly and maturing young man proclaim the Word of God to the gathered church for the very first time. I am grateful for and proud of my friend and brother, Kurt Jones, and I trust that you were blessed by his message.

I must tell you that days like yesterday are a great blessing to me. Pastorally, I love to see young men grow in their giftedness and I love what occasions like yesterday's represent as they are harbingers of the future, providing glimpses of the multiplication of faithful heralds of the Gospel that are coming from our church family. I celebrate yesterday but I also grieve, in some ways, as well. I grieve because I'm reminded that moments in which men preach for the first time are relatively few. In fact, the general manner in which a pastor covers his pulpit if he will not be in town has historically been to call up another "professional" to fill in during his absence. This may be a director of missions, a retired pastor or even a vocational minister who is a friend! Regardless, the opportunity to "promote from within" is usually shirked for a more polished, experienced speaker.

Now, please don't go too far here. I'm not condemning every pastor who has ever asked someone who qualifies as a "professional" to cover the pulpit. Instead, I'm really mourning what seems to be the normal expectation that preaching is reserved for the polished and experienced. The result of this kind of thinking is a church that is often handicapped with few godly men who are able and willing to preach. Generally, there are few men who can fill in if needed and this leads to instability and many of the problems we see in churches today, particularly when the vocational leadership (often ONE pastor) leaves.

In contrast to this way of thinking, we have really embraced the command Paul gives to Timothy in our text for today. As Timothy is busy leading the church in Ephesus, his mentor in the faith is intent to remind him that his job is not just to do the ministry at Ephesus but to raise up other men who will minister alongside him for the purpose of multiplication.

Notice that these men are to be "faithful". They are those who are dedicated to the work and ministry of the church and show an earnest desire to serve the Lord. Notice also that they are to be "entrusted" with the Gospel. This term communicates the value and responsibility that goes with preaching/teaching/ministering the Gospel. There is an urgency and a severity to making disciples in this way. It is not a flippant thing to entrust the Gospel to others! Third, and finally, I want you to see that the purpose of this entrusting is multiplication. The goal of entrusting the Gospel to others is to have them turn around and continue the process of making more disciples! Over the long haul, the result of this kind of ministry is a multiplication of disciples as you reproduce others who are reproducing as well!

That's our goal at Smyrna and it is a major reason why days like yesterday are wonderful and symbolic. You see, Kurt (and many others) love the Gospel and they've been called to proclaim it and walk with others to help them herald the good news as well! While this process means we grow with those who are learning, the fruit of this kind of endeavor lasts for years and even generations. Thank you for loving and supporting Kurt, and many other new teachers/apprentices. I trust that you will be blessed by their ministry and I'm sure that the Kingdom will grow exponentially as they develop and develop others.

November 23

1 Peter 2:9

As we begin to consider the text from Sunday's sermon in more fullness, it is imperative that we recognize the intended audience. In verse 1, the Apostle Paul makes quite clear that he is speaking to Christians, we see this quite clearly in the term he uses "brothers". All that Paul would direct his audience to do is predicated on his belief that they are, in fact, Christians and therefore brothers (or sisters) in the faith!

Why does this matter? It matters because only those who have been saved by grace have been adopted into the family of God and only those who are adopted by God into His family have been indwelt by the Spirit who then supplies both the power and wisdom to see and savor Christ in the renewing of our minds and be transformed accordingly! That is a long-winded way of saying that only Christians have any hope of obeying Paul's commands because only Christians have the tools to resist being conformed all the while being transformed thereby discerning the good and right will of God.

The Bible draws a distinction, repeatedly, between those who are lost and those who are saved. The lost have no hope of obeying any commandment to live like saved people, instead their most desperate and fundamental need is salvation in Christ alone. The saved on the other hand have the Spirit within them and therefore the ability to do all that the Bible has commanded, even if it is imperfect in nature.

Today's devotional text is a reminder that the church is a totally distinct group of people from the world. We are a royal priesthood and a people set apart (a term that means that we are holy) during an otherwise crooked and perverse generation. Our great God has called us through the Gospel into His light, and He has given us all the tools necessary to be able to proclaim His light to the surrounding world.

This proclamation of truth is, in many ways, the pinnacle and result of our being transformed by the renewing of our mind. As we renew our minds, we see Jesus and the wisdom of God in all things, and we are equipped to champion His cause to those who surround us. The goal then of Paul's exhortation in Romans 12 is at least partially realized in a people who are obviously unique from the rest of the world and dedicated to telling those who are around them about the Person who has called them from darkness into marvelous light, but we will only be faithful to this goal if we are no longer conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of our minds.

As we close today, I want to do so with a quick exhortation. Folks, to be quite transparent, I am amazed at how much "conforming" there seems to be in the church today. It appears that most Christians really think just like their lost neighbors. There seems to be little discernment within the church and very little concern to run all our preconceived notions and ideas through the filter of God's Word. The result is a church that looks just like the world and, therefore, a church that is robbed of her power and message. If we are truly going to be a royal and holy priesthood, we must begin with a robust understanding and commitment to God's Word. I pray you share that conviction and that you are putting in the time and energy to know the Word of God and apply it in faithful ways in the course of your life!

November 24

1 Corinthians 10:31

As we begin to think about the command of our passage from Sunday, I want to draw a connection between two things that are unfortunately often isolated in our minds. Notice that Paul refers to two distinct aspects of our beings in Romans 12:1-2 as he first commands us to offer our bodies and second, he commands us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

The connection in the passage is that our bodies will be offered to God in a holy and pleasing way only as our minds are transformed, thereby dictating what we do with our bodies. The Christian life is one that encompasses all our being. God is not just concerned with what we think or how we behave because what we think inevitably effects the way we employ and utilize our bodies.

Over the years, many have fallen victim to the idea that there are some “spiritual” things and other merely “physical” things. We believe that worship and prayer and Bible study are good but that they don’t necessarily influence or dictate the way we participate in our hobbies, professions, or even day to day activities. Its as if we live a “spiritual life” (generally on Sundays for worship or during our more religious moments) and a “regular life” the rest of the week.

I want you to see today that Paul connects the two. What we do with our bodies is holy and pleasing to the Lord (spiritual) and what we do is inevitably dictated by what we know! When our thoughts and beliefs align and inform our actions then all things can become worshipful and that is the point of 1 Corinthians 10.

In this text, the Apostle lays out for us a way of viewing our lives that encompasses all that we say and do. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we should do those things for the glory of God. This is a marvelous text, but it begs a simple question... how? The answer is through the renewing of our minds! It is only as we see and savor God’s blessing and design in all things that we think on those acts of grace and allow them to inform our attitude and actions as we do even the most mundane things.

So, how do I eat to the glory of God? One way is I eat while thinking and reveling in the fact that my very meal is evidence of God’s faithfulness and grace. God has given me food in order to care for me (Psalm 145:15-16) and God has given me taste buds as a way of reminding me that His gift of food reflects His goodness in allowing me to enjoy what He has prepared. Then, when I eat, I do so thanking God and reveling in His gift to the glory of His name and to His joy in seeing me enjoy what He has graciously given.

As my mind is renewed, I work to ensure that all the things I do are in accordance with His Word put in their proper perspective as activities that God has ordained for my good and His glory. I am able then to see Him, discern His will and praise Him for His goodness to me in ALL of life. This is how my thinking (in alignment with the Word of God) dictates and informs how I offer my body as a living sacrifice, which is an act of worship, in all of my activities.

November 25

Psalm 119:11

Hopefully by now we are all familiar with the command in Romans 12:2. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, but how does that renewal take place? If we were left without the rest of the Scriptures, this would be a legitimate and perplexing question but when we take Paul's exhortation in the context of the Bible in its entirety, it becomes quite clear that the way we are transformed by the renewing of our minds is through our study and meditation upon the holy Word of God.

Over the next four days, I want to take us through several texts that help us understand how the Bible works to transform our minds. This transformation is multi-faceted, and it is discussed throughout the Word, but I thought it might be helpful and interesting to root our study of the Bible's transforming power in one chapter. My prayer is that this chapter would provide a helpful anchor for some of you as you begin your journey of transformation. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, and it is a chapter that is devoted, interestingly enough, to the subject of the Bible! In its numerous verses, we learn so much about the character and power of the Word of God even as we are encouraged and commanded to be students of the Word.

Today's text is one of the more famous verses in the chapter. It deals with one aspect of our transformation by the renewing our minds as it relates to us that the Word of God is the means whereby, we are sanctified, avoiding the sin that used to assail us all. The verse says that David has "hidden" the Word of God in his heart. This is a marvelous, and picturesque, way of proclaiming the truth that David has studied and memorized God's Word. It is now not merely extrinsic to him; it is a part of his being and so deeply so that it resides deep within his heart.

What is the effect of this hiding of the Word of God? The answer is that David is now equipped and empowered to avoid sin. He is equipped because the Word points out those things in his life which are not in accordance with God's Word. While many sins are obviously evil to most, there are other things which may seem right to a lost man but in the end lead to destruction because they are evil. The Word of God provides the litmus test for all activities, exposing many things that are evil and to be avoided. He is empowered because through the Word of God, the Spirit illuminates truth and provides the spiritual strength to obey the commands of God. There is a real, sanctifying power in the Word of God (John 17:17) and it comes from the Spirit who uses His Word to impress truths upon our hearts even as he motivates us to obey Him.

I pray the connection between this text and ours from Sunday is clear, the Bible transforms our minds, in part, by exposing the true nature of sin which leads us to think differently about what we used to cherish. So many of the problems in the church would be solved if God's people were more dedicated students of the Word of God as it is only in the Bible that we truly learn to think correctly about what constitutes good and evil.

November 26

Psalm 119:18

I see today's devotion as a continuation of yesterday's thought as we reflect upon the inverse function of the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 teaches us that God's Word is the means that God uses to assist us in avoiding sin. In that way, the Word of God functions as a kind of watch dog, highlighting the things in our lives which are to be avoided and motivating us to steer clear of their grasp. This is a wonderful, and necessary, function of the Word of God but it is most certainly not the pinnacle of its utilization in the life of the believer.

Today's verse teaches us that God's Word doesn't only help us avoid sin, it shows us what is beautiful. The Word of God illuminates "wonderful" things. These are things that our minds love and cherish. These are the things which give us hope and a longing for a more intimate relationship with the Lord. They are the things that highlight the identity of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, the power of God and the joy that we can have in communing with Him (amongst many other subjects).

While this is wonderful, it is also necessary and I'm afraid it may not always be properly emphasized. As people, there is a fundamental reality that we sometimes neglect, and it is this: we choose to do and pursue the things we most love. Even the sacrifices you make are made because you believe the benefit of those actions outweighs the perceived blessing you would receive if you refused to bend. This is true of human nature, and it can be a good thing but only as we learn to love the right thing.

The true transformation that takes place in a Christian's heart is a reordering of his or her loves. What the believer used to cherish and enjoy he now finds little pleasure in doing but that is only because his previous love for such things has been replaced by a greater love. This great love is the love of the wonderful and beautiful things of God and, most importantly, a love for God Himself. When we truly love God above all things, our minds are transformed as we consider how marvelous He is, how worthy He is of our affection and obedience and how wise He is in all that He says and does.

When we see the wonderful things in the Bible, our minds are transformed and so are our lives. What we used to esteem and value above all is now relegated to second place as our hearts long for the beautiful and majestic things that only God can provide. Whereas we used to want the approval of the world, the goods of the world and the commendation of the world, now we want the approval of the God of the Bible, the goods of heaven which the Bible promises to the faithful and the commendation of our King which will only come as we obey His Word.

Have you seen the wonderful things of God? Has your mind been transformed such that what you used to love you now rarely even consider in your pursuit of the Lord? I believe that the only way you will answer those questions with a resounding "yes!" is if you have seen and savored the wonderful things of God which are revealed in the Bible.

November 27

Psalm 119:32

So, thus far, we have seen that the Bible transforms our minds by illuminating, warning and motivating us away from sinful temptations and by displaying for us the wonderful things of God thereby altering our affections as what we see changes our minds about what we most desire. Today's text even adds to the equation as it relates to how we understand the broader world around us.

It strikes me that so much of what people hold to, as it relates to political ideologies or convictions about world systems, is naïve in its foundational premises. So much of what people believe is predicated on a false understanding of human nature. This is the problem with socialism... for instance. The premise that everyone will voluntarily share and that those who are at the top of the Ponzi scheme (excuse me "socialistic government") are out for the best interest of everyone totally ignores the biblical truth that people (particularly lost people) are by nature sinful and therefore selfish, which leads them to govern with their own best interest at heart instead of the wellbeing of the masses. In a socialistic society, the depravity of man is revealed as especially wicked as it hinders the ability of the lower- or middle-class folks from receiving what they need for survival, much less for thriving, as the resources are sucked up by the ruling authorities.

Why would I bring up such a thing? Because the foundational presupposition behind a true, earnest socialistic supporter is biblically flawed. The same can be extended to a myriad of situations which causes the people who believe such things to adhere to something that is simply unattainable in our world and society today. What the world needs are discerning, who have had their understanding broadened. They need to be able to see past what is represented to the true heartbeat and intention behind the policies or societal convictions or political platforms.

All these convictions can be transformed if our minds are renewed by the Word of God. What we need are men and women who understand biblical truth and can apply it to all of life's circumstances and this only takes place as they are transformed individually and then corporately in the church. May we strive for such things, and may we consider more fully how our study of the Word of God is THE key for understanding, interpreting and navigating the times in which we live.

I pray that you desire to have your understanding broadened and I pray that the fruit of studying the Word of God is evident in your life and in mine. We have a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate the wisdom of our God and our Christian worldview but only as we commit ourselves to studying the Bible and applying its truths to our individual and corporate lives.

November 28

Psalm 119:105

In many ways, the truth of today's verse is really the culmination of all that we have discussed in the previous three devotions. It has been said that life can be boiled down to an almost endless series of decisions. Those who make wise decisions are generally prosperous and secure and those who make foolish decisions are generally hard-pressed and vulnerable. I believe that this is largely true, and it makes the prism through which we see life and the rubric by which we make decisions more important to us.

Today's verse tells us that God's Word is the way we gain necessary illumination to make wise decisions. The effect of the Word of God is clear, it unveils all the world around us in such a way that we can make informed and wise decisions as we navigate our paths.

All of us have frame of reference for the need of light if we are going to walk without complication. A few evenings ago, I made a foolish decision in the middle of the night. My youngest child woke up screaming because of a nightmare. As I walked to her bedside, I chose not to turn on the light in her room because I was afraid that would wake her up for good! So, I tried to navigate the perilous terrain that is her bedroom floor without the assistance of the light... and I paid for it! Right in the middle of her room was a little barbie doll that was positioned in just the right way to stab me in the foot as I stepped right on top of her! Now, the pain of a Lego is legendary, but I'll tell you the pain of Barbie is a close second!

Why did I tell you that story? The reason is simple, if there were enough light in the room, I never would have stepped on Barbie, because I would have seen her! My pain would be avoided if I had enough light.

In the same way, one of the ways that the Bible functions for our good and transformation is through illumination. It helps us see what is present. It shines the proverbial light on our dark moments and days, and it assists us in avoiding the pitfalls that otherwise would overtake us.

Think about this practically, how many people do you know who have made foolish and life-altering decisions because they were either lost or infantile in their thinking? They've borrowed ridiculous amounts of money, ignoring the biblical truth that a borrower is slave to the lender. They've trusted someone who showed so many signs of being disingenuous. They've raised their children with little to no interest in following the precepts of and now they have monsters on their hands because they've neglected God's teaching on the subject of rearing children.

In all those situations, and many more, the light for the path of life would save a world of hurt, frustration and disappointment. As we read the Word of God, it is transforming us by teaching us how to think, what to look for and how to evaluate all of life's situations and decisions. May we be dedicated students of the Word so that we can be transformed, and our lives can reflect the glory of God in Christ and the joy of following the Lord through all seasons.