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[Renewing the Mind – 2011 Old Union Ministers' School]

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“Renewing the Mind”

A Forgotten Calling in a Critical Hour

Lesson Text – Romans 12:1-2

Rom 12:1-2 (KJV)

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

12:2 And 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.

Explanatory remarks on the lesson title

- Renewing the mind

As I hope to bring out in this lesson, we are called by God to renew our minds. This process is of vital importance to anyone interested in walking with God in this world. Our minds are being continually bombarded with the ideas and philosophies of man. As God's wisdom is infinitely and eternally superior to man's wisdom, we must actively engage in the effort to renew our minds to Godliness.

- A forgotten calling

Though the scriptures speak plainly and often about the need to renew our minds, it has been my observation that on the whole, we have greatly neglected this vital doctrine. The damage that has resulted from this lack of teaching has crippled us in more ways than we might imagine. The average church member today regards the mind as evil, and the heart as good. As a result, many have put the mind at odds with spirituality, and the consequence is nothing short of mindless Christianity. The scriptures offer no support for such mindless Christianity. To the contrary, God gave much instruction in regard to the mind, and how we are to be spiritually discerning. Sadly, much of that Divine instruction has gone unheeded and is now at risk of being utterly forgotten.

- A critical hour

There have been many "critical hours" in the history of peoples. To refer to our time now as a critical hour is not done lightly, or to simply grab attention. As I survey the landscape of our people, I can reach but one conclusion. We are in a critical hour brethren. Our people are living in Babylon, our children are being raised in Babylon, and our identity as a separate people is at risk like it never has been in our lifetime. The greatest mission field in our country is arguably the individuals that make up the congregations in our churches from week to week. As a people, we do not think like Christians, and as a result, we do not talk like them, walk like them, or look like them as we should. We must commit ourselves to God in the attempt to restore and renew our minds. If we don't, it will only be a matter of time before we will have forgotten all together what manner of men we are supposed to be. Once we forget who we are, it is only a matter of time before history forgets us as well.

1. The Reality of the Spiritual Mind

Perhaps the best place to begin is to examine the reality that the inner man (the spiritual man) consists of both a heart, AND a mind. Together, the mind and heart make up the will. There is a *feeling* part of the inner man, and there is a *thinking* part of the inner man. God created us this way. Not only do we feel, but we think. We reason. We discern right from wrong.

1.1. The Witness of Scripture

In the New Testament, the Greek word "nous" occurs 24 times. *Nous* is translated "*mind*" (or its plural form) seventeen times in the King James Version of the Bible. The remaining times, it is translated "*understanding*". The word literally refers to the "*intellect*". It is that part of us that ponders, thinks, understands, and distinguishes truth and reality from error and myth. The teaching of scripture is that not only are we to "feel" like Christians, but we are to "think" like them too.

Though we may come short of coming out and stating it, there is an overwhelming undertone among our people that the mind is evil, and the heart is good. The logical conclusion from this belief is that thinking is bad, and our feelings are good. We have been trained to trust our feelings, and distrust our minds. When we consider the words of Jeremiah however, we see that this blanket trust of our feelings and hearts is not merited.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

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The scriptural truth is that our carnal hearts are just as wicked as our carnal minds. This truth does not change after we are saved. God does not change the carnal heart. Rather, He puts a "new" heart within us.

Ezekiel 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

We need to teach and remind our people that the sinful heart we had prior to being saved remains with us after we are saved. Thus, our feelings can, and often do, lead us astray. This condition is what the Apostle Paul was referring to when he spoke of the warfare between the inward and outward man. The struggle is not between the mind and the heart. The struggle is between the inward and outward man, both of which contain a mind as well as a heart.

1.2. The Implications of a Spiritual Mind

There are a number of implications that accompany the existence of the spiritual mind. The first, and arguably most important is the fact that God is ultimately knowable. God has not hidden Himself from man. He has made every provision to ensure that we can know Him. He has dwelt among us in the person of Jesus the Son. He continues to dwell among us in the person of the Holy Spirit. He has specifically stated that He is not the author of confusion, but of peace. Man is not to be confused about God. He has not been left alone to himself to try and discover who God is. The heavens bear witness to Him. Man's own inward knowledge that there is more to life than what we see with our eyes is another witness to God. Not only is God knowable, we are taught very specifically in the scriptures that it is our knowledge of God that will ultimately determine our eternal place of existence. It will not be our knowledge of science, history, or even religion that will qualify us for heaven. It will be based solely on whether or not we KNOW God. It will not be based on whether we merely feel, hope, think, or strongly desire to know Him. It will be based alone on whether we really do KNOW Him. A combined study of Matthew chapter seven and Matthew chapter 16 demonstrates this truth.

Matt 7:21-23 (KJV)

7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matt 16:13-18 (KJV)

16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Phillipi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

16:14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In chapter seven, Jesus speaks of people who specifically claimed to know Him, that in reality did not. The professed atheist will not hear these words from Jesus. Those who will hear those words will be those who STRONGLY BELIEVED AND PROFESSED a belief in Christ. According to Jesus though, these people never came to KNOW Him, or to state it more directly, He never came to know them. In chapter sixteen, Jesus speaks of the rock upon which His church would be built. That rock is an experience of salvation whereby we come to truly know Christ, AND He comes to know us. This relationship is one that is KNOWN to both God and man. The spiritual mind is involved in our knowledge of God, as well as the spiritual heart.

Related to the fact that God Himself is knowable, is that His Will is also knowable. Just as we are not to be confused about who God is, we are not to be confused about what He requires of us. It would indeed be a terrible thing to merely know that there is a God, but have no understanding of what He requires of us. God however has not left us without knowledge of His will. He has sent us the scriptures and He has sent us His Spirit. Indeed, God has abounded toward us in all knowledge as Paul told the Ephesians. God has made His Will available to His people. Not only is the spiritual mind involved in discerning God's Will, it is a principal part of obtaining that knowledge.

When you read and study the early church, and particularly the Epistles of John, you realize that one of the greatest enemies of the Gospel was the doctrine of Gnosticism. Though there were, and are, many strains of Gnostic belief, they all boil down to a contradiction of what we have just discussed. In all its forms, Gnosticism denies the "knowability" of God by every man. Some claimed that no one could know God. Others claimed that only a select few blessed individuals could know God. The New Testament writers were continually making it clear that God and His will were knowable by all. Gnosticism however created the religious system that allowed men to define God by their own standards. I contend that we are continuing to deal with this belief both outside, and inside our own churches.

There are countless millions of people who are even now deceived because they have swallowed the lie that you can't really know for certain if you've been saved. Go to the typical Christian bookstore today and you'll find an entire section of books dedicated to the attempt to convince men of their salvation through contrived philosophy or distorted interpretations of scripture. Many "Christian" preachers today categorically deny the reality of an honest and sincere firsthand knowledge of God. The forgotten doctrine of renewing the mind has made it possible for men to accept this false premise, and as a result, most who call themselves Christian are in reality standing at the altar of the unknown God.

We readily see the problems in this regard when it comes to looking outside of our own walls. Where it's more difficult to see however is within them. Because we have for many years neglected the spiritual mind, our services are often determined by the whims of our feelings and emotions rather than on a God whom we know, and who has clearly spoken His will. It is critical that we begin again to remind our people that what matters is what God has said, NOT what we might feel, or think within ourselves. This problem has manifested itself in a number of ways and the evidence of a neglect of the spiritual mind is not difficult to see if we are willing to look.

2. Evidence of Neglect

2.1. The First Article of Faith

Among the greatest evidences of the forgotten calling to renew our minds, is how our first article of faith seems to be slipping away. To say it as frankly as I can, we either believe our first Article of Faith, or we don't.

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.

I believe this article. Though written a long time ago, it continues to be an accurate statement of what I personally believe and hold to be true. I would guess that everyone in this room would agree that they too believe this article. But...is it enough to merely say we believe something if there is evidence to the contrary all around us? A church member stands and under the auspices of being led by the Spirit of God makes a

statement that is scripturally untrue, and we think little or nothing of it. A man stands up and uses the words "I feel" and they are given almost carte blanche to do or say whatever they like. I would contend brethren that there is more damage done to the cause of Christ by one man claiming to be led of God who isn't, then by 100 or more of the worst pagans the world has ever seen. Because we are not renewing our minds as we should, many of Satan's darts get through and we blindly follow anyone so long as they claim that they have been led of God. It seems clear to me that our hold on the belief that the scriptures are our supreme standard has given way to the substitute of human wisdom, thought, and emotion.

The root cause of the lost hold on our first article of faith is that we as a people are grossly illiterate of scripture. The vast majority of our members never open their Bibles except on Sunday. When they do open their Bibles, they are reading a book for which they have almost no contextual understanding. In many ways, it may as well still be in Greek, as it is "Greek to most of them" anyway. They do not cherish the Word, wrestle with the Word, meditate on or hide the Word in their hearts. If every Bible was taken from the average home of our people, little if anything would change in the way they raise their children, choose their spouse, or live their lives. With the absence of scriptural knowledge and insight to guide their lives and service to God, they are left with following what feels right, rather than what they KNOW is right. It bears our notice that every civilization, and every church throughout history has ALWAYS felt that they were doing right. At a minimum, they FELT that they were fine, and that there was no need to get too exercised over the loss of respect for the place God's Word is to have in our homes and churches. All the way up to end, man is ever believing himself to be right. May we recall the words of scripture though that caution us that the way that seems right to man, is often the way of death.

As pastors and preachers, we continually encourage our people to "follow [their] feelings". I believe we should look honestly at this advice and consider what we are really saying. Ultimately, it does not matter what I feel if those feelings are contrary to the Word and Will of God. It would be better if we would encourage our people to "follow God", rather than "follow their feelings". If we are following "**our** feelings", are we not in essence following ourselves rather than God? Are there not times that our feelings are completely at odds with God? Are we to blindly trust the whims of human emotion and the carnal heart, even though they might be labeled as impressions from the Spirit of God? To the contrary, scripture encourages us to "try the spirits" in 1 John 4:1.

4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

If we are to try the spirits, with what are we to try them? What is the ultimate test we are to employ in determining whether or not we are being led of God, or something else? Once again, it is the Word of God, as our first article of faith clearly states. Many times, we seem to be looking for extra-Biblical revelations from God in our church services, rather than examining and applying our lives to what He has already revealed. Studying, learning, testifying, and applying our hearts to what God has already revealed in His Word is just as spiritual a work as is being led to speak in a church service. My concern is that many who testify in church and claim that God is working in them bear no evidence of His working in their lives any other day of the week. I've been in services on Sunday morning where the whole house testifies of the goodness of God, just to return on Sunday night to largely empty pews. Brethren....THIS IS A PROBLEM! A problem that points to the fact that many have forgotten the calling to renew their minds. People justify themselves and make themselves "feel" okay about missing church, or neglect of prayer and Bible study, and they believe everything is fine because they "feel" fine. I literally had a man once tell me that he "felt free" to go bowling instead of church during a revival. That may seem like an extreme case, but how different is it with most of our people. What is it that they "feel free" about that is unscriptural and ungodly? Do they feel free to let their children become invested and completely absorbed in the world? Do they feel free to neglect their duties as church members? Is the fact that they "feel free", mean they are free? Because I feel like singing a song, am I free to sing the song? Because I feel like preaching a sermon, am I free to preach that sermon? Do you see how we have become servants of our own thoughts and emotions above God? Do you see how we have fallen victim to the Gnostic strain of thought that removes the objective reality of the knowledge of God and His will?

2.2. Services and Worship are Heavily Man-Centered

A second evidence that we have forgotten the calling to renew our minds is that our services are often more about man, than they are God. Preachers are praised, singers are praised, teachers are praised, children are praised, and God is often last on the list. In some instances, even lost people are praised before God. How many services have you been in where God is being honored and exalted, Jesus is being lifted up, and then He does exactly what He said He would do and begins to draw lost men to Himself just to have everyone's focus removed from Him and placed on the lost person. Brethren, our worship is for God...not lost people. Our Western culture has ingrained within our minds the thought that everything is about us. Lost people begin to think that the

service is about them, when it isn't. They hear a member say "*I have to sing a song or this lost person might not get saved.*", and they get the idea that something outside of them is required before they can be saved. If we give Satan that much rope, he'll hang all of us. He then convinces the lost person that they are dependent on others besides God. The lost person looks to us, rather than to God. They wait for us to move, rather than God. They look for some work to do themselves aside from sincere Godly sorrow, repentance and faith. The result is terrible confusion of both lost and saved at best, and at worst, a deceived individual relying on an emotional experience rather than true conversion. All of this because we have allowed ourselves to be more concerned with man, than God. We read John 3:16 and fail to understand that the word "so" in that verse means "*in this manner*". Our Westernized view of John 3:16 makes it appear as though Jesus died only because He loved man "*so much*". We then conclude that if Jesus loved us "*so much*", then there surely was something worth loving in man. If we arrive at that conclusion, we have completely missed why Christ died. Yes, He loves us beyond description. But that love towards man is ENTIRELY of grace. He did not, and does not love man for what they are, OR EVEN WHAT THEY "CAN" BE. He loves us...because He loves us.

However, we must also never forget that Christ died on the cross because of the love He has for His Father as well. He did not pray in the Garden of Gethsemane that the will of lost men would be done. He prayed that the will of His Father would be done. We are the beneficiaries of not only Christ's love to man, but of Christ love for the Father. Our preaching of salvation should include this great truth. It is a reminder to lost people that God is holy, just, and will absolutely judge sin. By failing to renew our minds with this Biblical thought though, we are left with a highly man-centered view of salvation where God becomes the servant of man, rather than man a servant of God. Such a man-centered view of salvation quickly removes the holiness, righteousness, and anger of God towards sin. In the preaching of most evangelical's today, God looks more like Santa Clause than Jehovah. This distorted view of God has led to a grossly distorted view of salvation.

A specific example of how we have begun to focus on man rather than God in our services is in our use of music. Our singing and music often manipulate the emotions of our carnal hearts, causing us to confuse emotions with the authentic movement of the Holy Spirit. The volume and intensity of our corporate prayer often coincides directly with a particular song. Once the song is concluded, the prayers are often not far behind. I do believe God has given us music to praise Him. I believe that God often uses music to assist his people in worshiping Him. However, we must be careful that we are not manipulating people into actions based upon emotional responses to music. We

must also be continually aware of our own motives and that of others when it comes to music. There are clearly times when we are more interested in being heard than we are in praising God. In such circumstances, God is simply not pleased, no matter how pleasing to the human ear the music may be.

2.3. Greater Knowledge of Religious Practice than God

A third evidence that we have forgotten the doctrine of renewing our mind is that as a people, we tend to know much more about our religion than we do God. Religion has ALWAYS been an enemy and obstacle to a true knowledge of God. From the fig leaves in the garden to the countless religious exercises of our day, religion has NEVER saved a single person, and it NEVER will. However, the average church member knows whether our church is okay with:

- Baptisteries
- Preachers who use notes
- Letters from other churches
- Dates for our revivals
- Non-King James Bibles
- Fellowship halls
- Youth weekends
- Wine or grape juice
- Pre – A – or Post millennialism
- Missouri preachers, Tennessee preachers, Kentucky preachers, African preachers...
- Whether there should be three songs before the sermon or four
- Literature
- On and on and on the list could go

...but... ask the average church member to distinguish between the holiness of God and the righteousness of God and you'll more often than not be met with silence. That we know more about our customs, traditions and accepted norms than we do God is a glaring red flag for us to honestly take note of and consider. Ignoring the truth of the matter does not change it. Consider as well that we tend to know more about how a Sunday service, Business Meeting, or even a revival service is to be conducted than we do about how the family is to be conducted. That's a striking example as there are many more scripture devoted to the discussion of how to run our families than there is about how to run a revival. Our dependence on, and knowledge of our "forms" of religion can, and often do, present obstacles more often than opportunities.

2.4. Our Grasp on Salvation

The last piece of evidence I would like us to consider is the most concerning of them all. Our forgetfulness to renew our minds with the Word and Will of God has begun to chip away at our understanding of salvation itself. Make no mistake...this is Satan's goal in it all. His desire is to remove the truth in regard to salvation. He will take any avenue, and use any tool presented to him in order to do so.

Consider what the scriptures teach in regard to the "fruits" of salvation. The Bible clearly teaches that a regenerated man will bring forth fruits. Fruit means "evidence". Specifically, it refers to evidence that is of equal weight to the claim that has been made. If someone accuses someone of murder, then the evidence they present needs to be of sufficient weight to equal the accusation. When Jesus taught on how we will know whether someone is saved, He clearly said we would know them by their fruits. Before John the Baptist would baptize, he required "*fruits meet for repentance*". While we all agree with this practice, what I'm concerned about is Satan's typical method of simply changing definitions, but not terminology. When I was five years old, I repeated words that are found in the Bible and was told that because I had spoken the words, I was saved. We all know the problem with that teaching. We realize that it is altogether different to have said that you believe in Jesus in Biblical times, than it is to say it now. We are under no direct threat of persecution by claiming Christ today. It wasn't the words that saved them, but the faith that brought forth the words. Because I needed no real faith to say the words as a five year old boy, the words had no power to save. We readily see this truth. But...we need to take a cautious look at our own practice. Children who are raised in church know the "story to tell". They know the "words to use". John the Baptist did not ask for a story though. He asked for fruit, and there is a big difference between words, and fruit.

3. How We Got Here

3.1. Fear

To this point, I have been quite hard on us. I want to stop here now, and state clearly that while I believe what I have said to this point, I do not believe that the condition we find ourselves in has been the result of malicious, or purposeful intent by preachers, or other men and women among us. I also do not believe that anyone around me at age five had any intent to purposely deceive me. I believe they were simply following what their religion had taught them. While I do not believe that men have acted maliciously to discourage the renewing of our minds, I do believe they have acted out of fear. It is a fearful thing to contradict the accepted culture and traditions of religious men. Fear of being ostracized from the religious community is a very real fear. I believe that we,

like all men, are susceptible to this sort of fear. We fear being viewed negatively by men we have great respect and confidence in. We fear losing friends and family. We fear being labeled as unsound. We fear having nowhere to attend church with our families. We fear the loss of fellowship. On and on go the reasons for our fear. But whatever the cause for the fear, the end result is a failure to renew our minds to Godliness. Failure to renew our minds to Godliness perpetuates and accelerates the problems, and before long, we feel as though we are in religious quicksand whereby the harder we struggle to work our way out, the deeper we sink. May God help us to lift our eyes and hands to Him and cry out with all the sincerity of heart we can find to deliver us from our condition and teach us again to renew our minds.

3.2. Public Education

Beyond fear however, I believe there is another cause for our forgetfulness of the doctrine of renewing our minds. That cause is the public education system in our country. In this case, I do believe there has been malicious intent on the part of our adversary. Satan has worked successfully to wrest control of the education of our children away from Godly parents and the church. The vast majority of young people in this country are no longer taught to think and reason for themselves. They are simply told what to think. They are told that completely absurd fairy tales are actually scientific facts. They are told that man is nothing more than an animal, and therefore it's okay for them to act like animals. They are told that our government is the solution to all their problems. It is the epitome of hypocrisy that we are accused of brainwashing children with our religious doctrine, when much of what is labeled as education is nothing more than repackaged humanism.

This lack of learning to think has had a dramatic impact on the church and has contributed to our lack of renewing our minds. We look at how education is carried out in our schools today and correctly reject it as having any spiritual value at all. We then draw the incorrect conclusion that education, learning, thinking, and the faculties of the mind are incompatible with being spiritual. However, this is not the witness of scripture. The Bible clearly speaks of the mind of man, and the need to renew it and utilize it to the glory of God.

Far from being an enemy of spirituality, education done rightly is of great value to the spiritual man. All knowledge is derived from God and ultimately ends with God. Science, history, math, art, even reading and language itself all come from and lead the true learner back to God. Education that removes God though will ALWAYS lead to the condition where students are not taught to think and reason. Consider the teaching

of evolution and all its glaring problems revealed from even a casual investigation. Would not a thinking, reasoning, and rational student, when objectively examining the facts in front of him, be required to admit that evolution is at best a theory? Could he possible label it as scientific fact and maintain his intellectual and academic integrity? I have been blessed by God to have my children in a form of education that brings with it a Biblical worldview. Everything is studied in light of the Bible. I believe this type of education has strengthened, and not hindered them.

4. How We Get Back

How do we restore the doctrine of renewing the mind? I believe the answer is simple, though not easy. We must begin anew to teach our people and particularly our children what God has said. We need to continually teach our people what God has already told us in His Word, and ensure that they understand that the scriptures are a higher authority than their feelings. We need to restore the Word of God to its rightful place in guiding the conduct of our lives, which in turn will guide the conduct of our services. We must understand that this work will not be accomplished in a series of Wednesday night lessons, but will require a lifetime of effort. We must let go of our fear of man, and grab hold of God with both hands. We must endure the criticism we might receive from others, even those whom we hold dear and in high regard.

[CONCLUSION]

In closing, I would like to state once again the critical hour in which we live. Our nation has lost its way. As concerning as that is, it pales in comparison to the concern I have that our people are at great risk of losing their way as well. I believe that in many ways we are far too concerned about the condition of the United States, and far too unconcerned about the condition of our people. Whether or not the United States stands, falls, changes, or returns to what it once was, is nothing we have any control over. God alone brings nations to power for His purposes. God raised Assyria and judged Israel. He raised Babylon and judged Judah. Perhaps He is raising a king over us who knows not Joseph or his God to once again remind His people who they are and who He is. One thing seems clear in all of this. If we do not work to diligently renew our minds with God's Word, we will be wholly unprepared to fight the spiritual battle that is laid out before us. May God help us to heed this call ourselves, and then take this call back to those among whom we have been called to labor. Amen.