

The renewing of our mind

John Hay

Notes prepared for the communion ministry, 8 August 2021

Introduction

In Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the New Covenant, the Lord declared, 'I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts'. Jer 31:33. In this paper, we will consider the work of the Holy Spirit to put God's Law in our mind, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Through the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit, we can set our mind on the things of the Spirit; we can walk according to the Spirit; and we can prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God for our life.

The law of my mind

Our mind is a faculty of our soul. The soul of man lives and expresses itself through the energy of his fleshly biological life, which is in his blood. Lev 17:11. Our soul, together with our spirit, or identity, is described in the Scriptures as our 'inward', or inner, man. Rom 7:22. To explain the distinction between the two, we could say that our spirit is the essence of who we are, and our soul is the volition, or expression, of who we are. Thus, our mind is one faculty of our soul, through which our identity is expressed. The apostle Paul described all of the elements and activities of our mind as 'the law of my mind'. Rom 7:23.

Every person receives both their inward man, and their outward man (i.e. their body) from their parents through procreation. Because of this, children inherit many of the natural characteristics that belong to their parents. These physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual characteristics have all been impacted by the fall of mankind. Importantly, for those who have been born again as sons of God, the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit address the inevitable dysfunctions that are associated with these dimensions of our being. For the whole of our life, until the day of resurrection, when we receive an immortal body, the process of regeneration and renewing is to be at work in our mortal body. Let us consider this further, particularly in relation to the renewing of our mind.

The fallen mind is futile

Because of sin, mankind was separated from the fellowship of Yahweh. Adam and Eve had partaken of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil in an attempt to possess and define their lives apart from God. This principle of carnality was established as 'another law' within their spirits, and within the spirits of their descendants after them. God's word was no longer the source and definition of their lives. Consequently, they were no longer in fellowship with Yahweh, and their spirits were now degenerate, and in darkness. Their souls were lost and wasting, and their bodies were subject to corruption and death.

Now that the spirit of fallen man is in darkness, his soul clings to the dust. Psa 119:25. This simply means that his awareness of himself no longer comes from God. Instead, fallen man seeks to know himself through what he does in his body, i.e. the dust. His soul depends on the initiated actions, instinctive motivations and sensory responses of his

body for information and definition. People who live like this either seek to define their identity through the exercise of their fleshly capacities or they arrive at an understanding of themselves from the information that they collect through the senses of their bodies. In other words, they live by 'setting their mind on the things of the flesh'.

Further highlighting this point, Paul noted that unbelievers walk in the futility of their mind, 'having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart'. Eph 4:18. This futility is often demonstrated through a constant, anxious dialogue that takes place in a person's mind. This type of 'mind-chatter' is also found among Christian people who set their minds on the things of the flesh, rather than on the things of the Spirit. Thankfully, Christians do not need to live this way. The answer, for a Christian, is to set their mind on the things of the Spirit, and to walk according to the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Let us consider this further.

Regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit

When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the heart of a believer, they experience 'the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit'. Tit 3:5. Then, as they continue to participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, their inner man is being renewed and recovered, day by day. 2Co 4:16. As the believer receives the ministry of the word, the anointing that they receive from the Holy Spirit teaches them, so that they are illuminated regarding their specific, and ongoing, participation in Christ's offering. 1Jn 2:20. They do not need anyone to teach them concerning this participation, but rather they can join Christ's offering according to their unique sanctification as a son of God. As they walk in this manner, their inner man is being regenerated and renewed, and they are able to prove the good, perfect and acceptable will of God.

Through the Holy Spirit, a believer is being reconciled, in one Spirit, to the fellowship of the Father and the Son. Eph 2:18. These actions are causing their human spirit, which Jesus described as 'the eye (spiritual sight) of their body', to be restored. Consequently, their whole being - body, soul and spirit - is able to be full of light. They are now able to walk in the light of fellowship with God, who is light. 1Jn 1:5-7.

In the first instance, the restoration and enlightenment of a person's inner man, including their mind, restores their capacity to know God and to receive His word. In this regard, they are being restored to the capacity for fellowship that Adam and Eve had with God in the garden of Eden before the Fall. However, unlike Adam and Eve, who had the anointing of the Holy Spirit on them so that they could relate with Yahweh 'in Spirit', a person who is born of God receives the Holy Spirit within them. In other words, the capacity for fellowship and the expression of the love of God is now in them.

Set your mind on the things of the Spirit

Having received the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, those who are born of God can set their mind on the things of the Spirit. This is an important point. Fallen man can only set his mind on the things of the flesh, and thus walk according to the flesh. Rom 8:5. In contrast, a person who is born of God can set their mind in one of two ways - either on the things of the flesh or on the things of the Spirit. Paul highlighted this point to the Colossian Christians when he wrote, 'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.' Col 3:2-3. When a son of God sets their mind on the things of the Spirit, they are able to walk

according to the Spirit, joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Rom 8:5.

In the first instance, a believer sets their mind on the things of the Spirit by praying in the Spirit. When we pray in the Spirit, we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. This is the prayer fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this fellowship, our heart and mind are guarded by the peace of God. Php 4:7. As we pray in tongues, we are cooperating with the Spirit as He intercedes for us according to the will of God. Rom 8:26. Through His intercession, we receive grace to surrender to God's will in every circumstance of the day.

We recall that when Jesus prayed, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done', to the Father, He was strengthened to offer with Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit. Heb 9:14. He then began to pray even more earnestly. This is when He began to sweat great drops of blood. Luk 22:42-44. This sprinkling of Christ's blood marked the removal of the self-will that governs our motivations as a result of our fallen humanity. It is also the means by which His life is given to all who are in Christ, so that they are able to obey their heavenly Father.

The Holy Spirit joins us to this fellowship of prayer. Just as Jesus began to pray more earnestly when He was strengthened with Eternal Spirit, the Holy Spirit enables us to pray more earnestly in fellowship with Christ. Christ searches our heart with His eyes, bringing illumination to our understanding regarding our motives, which may be corrupted with self-righteousness and sin, and therefore, need to be put off, in Him. We also receive understanding regarding the will of God in which we are to walk. Rom 8:27. The sprinkled blood from Christ's offering of prayer is then applied to our life, giving us His life, which motivates us to live our life in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

Remembering the words of the apostle Peter, we could say that praying in the Spirit enables us to arm ourself with a mind that willingly and joyfully embraces our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. 'Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves also with the same mind*, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.' 1Pe 4:1-2. When we arm ourselves in this way, we no longer view our difficulties as 'strange' but, rather, we rejoice to the extent that we are partaking of Christ's sufferings so that when His glory is revealed we will be glad with exceeding joy. 1Pe 4:12-13.

Setting our mind on the Spirit also means allowing the Spirit to be the expression of our identity in the fellowship of Christ's offering. This is an important point. Paul noted that the mind that is set on the flesh is death, while the mind that is set on the Spirit is *life* and *peace*. Rom 8:6. This is because the Holy Spirit is the expression of our name and identity. When our mind is set on the Spirit, we do not anxiously endeavour to make a name for ourselves. Rather, we are one Spirit with the Lord and with our brethren in the body of Christ. We are enabled by the Spirit to lay down our life in offering to reveal another's name. This is our preoccupation, because the love of God is poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit. Through offering, we are becoming the son whom the Father predestined us to be, and we are fulfilling the works that He prepared for us. In this way, our hope of obtaining eternal sonship is not being disappointed; rather, it is being realised. Rom 5:5.

Transformed by the renewing of your mind

In the book of Romans, Paul noted that the Holy Spirit continues to regenerate and renew our mind in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' Rom 12:1-2. As we embrace our daily participation in Christ's offering and sufferings, the Holy Spirit continues to renew and regenerate our mind, and we are being transformed into the image of Christ's sonship from glory to glory. 2Co 3:18. Let us consider this further.

While all of the wounds of Christ's offering are effective in the renewing of our mind, the Scriptures specifically nominate our fellowship in Christ's scourging as the context in which we can find regeneration and renewing for our mind. This is particularly true for those whose minds are often troubled by fear and anxiety. The scourging that Christ received under the direction of Pilate was His fourth wound. The purpose of this wound was our healing. Isa 53:5. In particular, scourging is the means by which our inner man is healed through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Christ's scourging revealed and encompassed the sufferings of our common humanity. Obviously, the sufferings of humanity are many and varied, and have diverse causes. For example, people may experience suffering because of their own mistakes or the mistakes of others; they may be born with, or develop, certain impairments; their sufferings may even be associated with particular dispositions such as anxiety, anger or a troubled mind.

Jesus made all of these sufferings His own when He was scourged by Pilate. The multitude of wounds - some small and some more significant - which were caused by the brutal application of the scourging whip to Christ's back, represent the many and varied sufferings experienced by the sons and daughters of men. These sufferings are common to us all. This is true whether we are born of God or not. As Paul wrote, 'No temptation [or, adversity] has overtaken you but such as is common to man'. 1Co 10:13.

A person does not escape suffering when they are born of God and baptised into Christ. Rather, their sufferings are given to them as their participation in Christ's sufferings. Paul said that, although our sufferings are common to man, 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.' 1Co 10:13. 'The way of escape' is not that we are being delivered from our suffering. Rather, it is the capacity to endure suffering in the fellowship of Christ's scourging. In the fellowship of Christ's death, we are recipients of the healing that resulted from the shedding of His blood.

As we join Christ in the fellowship of His fourth wound, and indeed all of Christ's wounds, we are being healed in our body, soul and spirit. In particular, the Holy Spirit is renewing and regenerating our mind, replacing the futile chatter which is the product of a darkened and troubled mind, with God's Law of love. We remember that the Holy Spirit Himself puts the Law of God in our mind, and writes it on our heart in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Jer 31:33. Further, we are being delivered from the propensities of our other law, which war against the law of our mind, keeping us captive to sin and death. Rom 7:23.

The Holy Spirit helps us to have a sound mind

As we conclude, it is helpful to reflect on Paul's words to Timothy concerning our mind. 'For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a *sound mind*.' 2Ti 1:7. Even though there will be times when our mind will become troubled, or even fearful, the Holy Spirit is helping us to have a sound mind. The Holy Spirit is helping us to overcome our other law, which wars against the law of our mind; and He is putting God's law of love in our mind, and writing it on our heart.

Every day, the Holy Spirit is motivating, guiding and enabling us to walk according to the Spirit, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, He is regenerating and renewing our mind; and we are being delivered from our propensity to set our mind on the things of the flesh and to walk according to the flesh. As we set our mind on the things of the Spirit, our difficult circumstances are no longer a dilemma for us. They no longer trouble our mind. Through the Spirit, we are able to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2Co 10:4-5.

We can rejoice that our life is being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Rom 12:2. As our mind is being renewed, we are able to think differently about our life. We cease from thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought and, instead, think with sober judgement, according to the measure of faith that we receive from the word of God. Rom 12:3. Moreover, we can joyfully acknowledge that the circumstances which we experience each day are being priested to us by Christ, and are working together for the good of our sonship. Rom 8:28.