

CHAPTER SIX



THE TRANSFORMED MIND

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DAY 1: CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK

It may come as a shock to hear this, but nearly all of your problems are in your head. In fact, the majority of the struggles we face in our daily lives are *head* problems. This doesn't mean you need to check in to the psych ward at the nearest hospital. Nor does this mean that your problems are imaginary or hallucinations. The reason most of our problems are head problems is because most of the ongoing challenges we face in life result from *the way we think*. We have thinking problems. Therefore, until we change the way we think *within* our lives, we are incapable of finding the answers we need to actually *change* our lives.

The transformed life requires radical change. You can change your address, change your job, change your wardrobe, change your friends, you can even change your name. However, your life will not change until you change the way you think. Becoming a Christian begins the process of transformation. Your spirit becomes new, your eternal destination changes, your relationship with God changes. Yet even with all these wonderful adjustments, we are left in the world, remain in a body, and are stuck with a mind that is pretty much the same.

“For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7a NASB).

“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” (Romans 12:2).

“Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let *God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think*. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2 NLT).

The Mystery of the Mind

We are living in unprecedented times. In the last twenty years, our generation has witnessed the greatest advances in our collective understanding of one of God's greatest gifts—the human mind. For centuries, doctors, psychologists, philosophers, sociologists and biologists have sought to understand the workings of the human mind and the physical container which holds it—our brain.

Much work had been done to understand how our life experience, environment, and heredity impacts how we think, feel, and behave. Yet the greatest mysteries of the mind remained unsolved. For example, how exactly does an image seen by the eye become stored in the soft gray tissue of the brain so that it can be vividly recalled, described, and even artistically recreated? Where does an idea actually come from? How and why does thought affect our bodies? Why do persistent kinds of thinking show up in our physical bodies—either in health or sickness?

Because of wonderful breakthroughs in science and technology, the rapidly growing science of neurology has begun to deliver remarkable answers to these and many other questions. We have begun to see that our brains are organs that can be developed, trained, and enhanced. Much like a muscle, the brain may also grow in both strength and precision. Parts of the brain that are neglected or left unused actually begin to shrink and become more difficult to access. Amazingly, we have just begun to learn that even the weakest, least stimulated parts of the brain may be energized, rewired, and provoked to grow when intentionally stimulated over time.

This means that the brain you were born with has the capacity to change—for the better or for the worse! It also implies that even if your brain has been “wired” for depression, negativity, addiction, or anxiety, given the right stimulus and placed under the right healthy “stresses,” it can be rewired, changed, and renewed.

This comes as no surprise to Christians. The Bible said long ago that our minds could be changed. God’s Word was given to help us to rewire our thinking and change our minds so that we may transform our lives.

God Transforms Us Progressively

One of the most important truths of the Christian faith is the teaching of *how* God transforms us from sinners to saints. When we become born again, we instantly become the children of God. Something in our hearts has changed. Yet we know that as powerful as that spiritual transformation is, there is still much about us from the human standpoint that is far from complete. We rejoice in our new relationship with God, yet struggle each day with persistent desires in our flesh, feelings, and minds that seem contrary to the change that our hearts have received. The question often persists, “If I am born again, why do I still struggle with my mind and flesh?”

The answer to this question is found in the biblical doctrine of sanctification. *Sanctification* simply means, “to be set apart for special purpose.” It refers to the process by which something is cleansed, purified, and prepared for special use. It means, “to make holy.” The teaching of sanctification, then, is the Christian understanding of how God takes us from a worldly life and begins to cleanse us and prepare us for His purposes.

The Bible teaches that this process occurs in three stages: *present*, *progressive*, and *promised*. These three stages are important to understand because they correspond to three different aspects of our human nature—*spirit*, *soul*, and *body*.

God’s plan for our salvation extends to the whole of our being. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul prayed, “Now may the God of Peace Himself *sanctify* you completely; and may your whole *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* be preserved blameless [holy] at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Just as God created us as spirit, soul, and body, God’s purpose is to redeem us in all three dimensions of our being through a series of stages. These stages correspond with the three parts of our human architecture mentioned in the above passage.

The reason most of our problems are head problems is because most of the ongoing challenges we face in life result from the way we think.

STAGES OF SALVATION

In one sense, the believer has been saved. In another sense the believer is being saved. And in yet another sense, it is perfectly correct to say that the believer has yet to be saved. These are not contradictory ideas; rather they beautifully explain the stages of salvation God has designed in His plan of redemption.

1. The Born Again Spirit is Saved

When a person is born again, they instantly receive the gift of eternal life. The spirit of the believer is instantly and completely transformed the moment one hears and believes the gospel. We become new creations in Christ *in our spirits*. At that moment, it may be said that we are *presently saved*.

As we learned in chapter four, this new birth is radical, complete, and permanent. While our spirit may grow in knowledge, grace, faith, and power, it does not become more perfect or righteous over time. At the moment we believe in Jesus, we become the *saved* children of God.

“[God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace *you have been saved*)”
(Ephesians 2:5).

“For by grace *you have been saved* through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, *that you may know that you have eternal life*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

2. The Believer’s Soul is Being Saved

The new birth, however, does not cause the same transformation in the believer’s mind or *soul*. Often we use the terms *soul* and *spirit* interchangeably, but in the New Testament Epistles (or letters), God makes a clear distinction between the two. The word *soul* comes from the Greek word *psuche*, or *psyche* and is typically used to refer to the mind, emotions, and will of human nature. The Greek word *psyche* is the root for our English words *psychology* and *psychiatry*, which are sciences devoted to understanding and healing the human mind.

The soul comprises the human mind, intellect, reason, emotions, and will. While your spirit is the eternal and essential “you,” the human soul, or mind, is the intellectual and emotional “you.” You use your soul in order to think, feel, relate to others, and process the data you receive through the senses of your physical body. With your spirit you touch God; with your body you touch the earth; but with your soul or mind you process and decide how to live in this world. In this chapter, we are going to use the word soul and mind interchangeably.

When we are born again, our minds still contain the memories, the patterns of thinking, the feelings, and the general outlook of our pre-Christian life. The soul requires transformation. It must be changed to reflect the true condition the believer has achieved through faith in Christ. This process of transformation occurs over the believer’s lifetime. By renewing our minds, we transfer the genuine experience of our spirit into our visible natural lives.

“So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept *the word God has planted* in your hearts, for it has *the power to save your souls*” (James 1:21 NLT).

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2a).

“And be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23).

3. The Body Has Yet to Be Saved

The Bible teaches in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that our salvation is a “treasure [contained] in earthen vessels” or “clay jars” (NLT). The “clay jars” Paul is referring to are our physical bodies. We have this wonderful, brand-new, born-again spirit in the same, old, unchanged physical body. In the next chapter we will learn about God’s plan for the salvation of our bodies, but for now it is enough that we understand that it is clear that the change we experience when we are saved does not substantially happen in our bodies. After salvation, our bodies continue to age, to weaken, and ultimately, to die.

However, the Bible does promise that there is coming a day where the Lord will raise up our lowly earthly bodies and transform them to be like Jesus’ glorious body! In this sense, we have yet to be saved—but it’s only a matter of time.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, *who will transform our lowly body* that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

“And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for *we long for our bodies to be released* from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, *including the new bodies he has promised us*” (Romans 8:23 NLT).

Dividing the Soul and Spirit

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword...dividing asunder soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12 KJV).

Only the Word of God can correctly help us to divide or see the difference between the human soul and the human spirit. Understanding whether a thought or urge is coming from your human soul or born-again spirit is critical to growing up in God. This is why Paul said that it is only once we renew our minds, that we can prove what God’s will is for our lives.

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, *so that you may prove what the will of God is*” (Romans 12:2 NASB).

The primary reason believers in Jesus do not experience lasting and ongoing change is because they have not changed the way they think. They have brand-new spirits, but the same old heads.

Receiving Christ changes your heart, your eternal destination, and your relationship with God; but until you change the way you think, your life will remain largely unchanged. This is why Peter teaches us,

“As newborn babes [in Christ], desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

DAY 1 EXERCISES

Fill in the blanks.

1. The born again _____ *is* saved.
2. The _____ has *yet to be* saved.
3. The believer's _____ is *being* saved.
4. What helps us to correctly divide, or see, the difference between the human soul and human spirit?

5. What is the primary reason believers in Jesus do not experience lasting change?

6. The Word of God has the power to expose our thought life. It brings clarity and help to us and strengthens us as we read it. Commit Romans 12:1-2 to memory. To help in that process, write it here.
