

Doxological Living 3

Romans 12:2

The human brain reaches its full size of 3 pounds around the age of 18. It contains 100 billion cells which can live the entire span of the human life, making them often the oldest living cells in your body. Most of your other cells are replaced every 7 years, which should have an effect on you. You should feel like a new person even if you don't think you are!

A person on average has 48 thoughts per minute. That adds up to 70,000 thoughts a day. If you feel crowded in your thinking, now you know why.

This means then that on any given day we could count 546 trillion thoughts on this planet. And if we could get a penny for our thoughts, we could pay off the entire world debt twice over in one day!

The mind of man is a most glorious gift of God. This is part of being fearfully and wonderfully made, or awesomely and incomprehensibly made! Psalm 139:

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

The Psalm ends: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

All of our thoughts are known by Him – The God of Light. An ancient theologian said of God that He is ALL EYE! He is the great source and cause of all things, so nothing can escape him who made all things.

But while humans have so many thoughts, very few know the peace of God! What a blessing is Isaiah 26:3 – “you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”

What and how we think matters. And what we think about God matters the most. Recall AW Tozer’s famous quote: “What we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Our natures cannot rise any higher than its conception of God.

Paul now is exhorting us, in this turning point of living for the glory of this great God, whose grace has found us. Our spirits are new – our hearts are new – our life is new – and that has the deepest, highest, and longest consequences.

How can it not? How can God in your life not change and mold and invigorate you in an upward, heavenly glorious direction?

We have seen that such glory must lead to glory-giving lives.

Paul built the altar of mercy in Jesus to begin. He put the wood of your bodies as living sacrifices, holy, well-pleasing to the Triune God. He now lights the fire – the transformed life that now glows and brightly shines in a dark world – a world that would bring you back to itself.

And this sacrifice of a transformed life grows bigger and brighter as you more and more live to the will of the Lord.

Let us see two things clearly in this connection which are often missed:

- A. In order to combat the present dark world, to not conform your minds, your thoughts to its dark ideas and ways, you need – get this – a greater world! No one trades a present thing for nothing. The early church had such a world-conquering faith, which smiled in the face of lions mauling them, because they knew they had another world given to them – a world far above and better and lasting and sure to come. Ignatius said, “let the lions grind my bones – I shall be as fine flour for God’s bread!” He delighted in an eternal God who gave eternal life. He knew what it was to be fully a living sacrifice in his body! And how did they know this truth?
- B. Here is the second connection – they were already receivers of that world. They already enjoyed the first fruits come down to them from heaven. Their spies into the Canaan above – their apostles and prophets – handed them the great clusters of grapes and some of the other delights of that land. John wrote:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1John 1:1-3)

The important point is heaven had entered them before they entered heaven. This other world had knocked out of their hearts the world's firm hold it had before. There is this – how can we call it? – an “Expulsive Power” of a new affection. A new mind had pushed out the old. And it wasn't an empty mind but filled with Christ.

So let this suffice for our first point. This is the context for our leading transformed lives. It must be at the foot, not of Sinai, or Creation, or any other good thing, but Him and His glory! John Calvin's famous motto: “I offer my heart to You, promptly and sincerely!” That motto can only thrive upon the splendor of God. You cannot grow this in any other light! You will only find toadstools and mushrooms if the glory of Christ is not your very life!

Now secondly, what does Paul insist upon? And here is this word, *transformation*. Rational or reasonable worship was the key note of verse 1. Paul said you are like a priest standing in the holy of holies, offering up a sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, **YOUR BODY!**

Now he says you are like a prophet – to be embodied by the truth of God more and more. Let the Word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly, fully, overflowing you!

How else can you stand, to use the old Latin term: “*Contra Mundum*”, *contra* – against; *mundum* – the world. The world's ways and schemes are not God's ways; His ways are far above the world; yet we are to shine as lights in this dark place.

This is our second point – your **resistance**: point one – your **reward**; point three will be your **renewal**.

As the New Humanity, arise like the sun over all things. Paul put it this profound way in Ephesians 4:

In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph 4:22-24).

You contend as new creature with the world, the flesh and the devil.

There are two key words here – *conformity* and *this world* or *age*.

The root of the word ‘conform’ is *schema*, where we get the word scheme from. The world would pour us into its ideas, its outlook, its mold and so conform us by how we think. It tries to squeeze us in a coat that doesn’t fit our new identity in Christ.

And the second word, *world* or *age*, helps us know what kind of scheme is in mind. Paul uses the Greek word *aion* instead of *kosmos*. This means this time period as opposed to the age to come. It is the present world that is fallen, broken, in need of redemption. This age has taken on a whole life of its own, contrary to how God created, commands, judges, and is bringing in a future age that does stand in line with Him. So it is the godless, sinful, this-time-oriented history.

It is all the ways of the world apart from God; all the ways of the flesh – man in his depravity; all the ways of the wicked one and pull away from God’s glory as the chief end of man.

Paul put it this way back in Romans 8:

Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Rom 8:5-9)

What a radically different worldview, right? Night and day! Thinking in the flesh is to live as if this life is all there is; alien to the Spirit of Christ. No need of salvation. Death is normal. No life following. No supernatural peace from above. No centrality of pleasing God. Such conformity to this age is hostility to God himself. They see no rebellion in even the greatest perversities.

Do you know that right now, a city in Indiana is considering a law that makes it illegal to counsel homosexuals to repent and change! Most of our nation already says that to professional, state-licensed psychiatrists. This is saying no one – not even ministers and Christian counsellors – may do so!

They deny that perversity is perverse and protect it. But here is the saddest part – true peace continues to elude them as they try to deny their guilt.

They have made their bed in this world, with the flesh which dominates them, and they face the devil's reward.

There are so many areas that would take us many weeks to unfold. James Boice mentions **secularism** (this world is all there is), **humanism** (man alone is the measure of all things), and **relativism** (truth, ethics, beauty are not objective but entirely based on whatever you desire or lust after).

All of this is a lifting of the fist to the heavens! And they try to put a religious paint on it. Derek Thomas says, “Those who defy God turn to religion for justification. Man’s religions are his greatest crimes!”

Are we saying that the world around us doesn’t think? No. They do. But they think wrongly. Like a saw that cuts a straight line, their setting is off. Their 70,000 thoughts a day are against Him ultimately! As the Bible says, “God is not in their thoughts!” They suppress the truth of God in their thinking.

You and I were a part of that world, and have been rescued out of it.

Two things then before moving on:

1. Everybody is a thinker, conforming to some scheme, some plan or purpose. The worldling has theirs, the Christian theirs. To be a Christian is not to be mindless. It is rather to be counter-minded; to be other-minded than this perishing age. The ways of darkness, unbelief, pride, self-trust, humanism – we say these are the ways of death.
2. Then our not being conformed to this present age, means that Christianity is not about escaping from this world entirely. Monasticism is not the answer to battling sin in our lives. Sin still dwells in us as well as in the world. But we cannot baptize all that is in the world as Christian.

WE come then to putting on the new as we put off the old. The renewal follows the resistance – in fact, without renewal, there is no resistance.

Consider you are to be transformed, the Greek word *metamorphosis* – the change of our nature. What a difference between the earthly caterpillar and the beautiful flying butterfly! To look at the two, how could they even be related?!

Then the word *renew* is not so much new in time, but new in **quality**. There is a freshness, a vitality in the new life. Isaiah wrote: They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength – they shall mount up like eagles; run with no weariness; walk with no faintness. They have found their true wings, their feet, their right path.

Then the **mind**. This includes our thoughts but more. It is the whole interior of our life. It is our inner orientation or moral attitude, moral consciousness. It is the whole compass of your heart.

A couple observations then:

1. Christians are once for all transformed, born again, raised up spiritually with Christ, and made new creatures. But there is a continual metamorphosis that follows. It is not that we are born again again again again, but that as we have new life, so we live. If a new life does not emerge, you are not born again! The Christian life can be lived only by Christians. You become what you already are! And yet, you become only imperfectly in this life what you are not yet! John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, said: “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope

to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am”

2. The renewal then ties in with the theme of the Reformation – *semper reformata* – always being changed.

Under the direction of Christ the Christian’s mind is constantly ‘being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator’ (Col. 3.10) There is a constant sharpening, honing, reorienting and recalibrating of our attitudes, perspectives, goals and life view. Just as a musical instrument needs to be retuned, a machine needs to readjusting, or a child needs to be reminded, our ability to resist a hostile world and thrive in it will come down to this work of renovation. Craig Troxel, p. 57, “With All Your Heart”

3. The mind is crucial in this process of sanctification. We must be spiritually minded if we are going to be of any earthly good. What a youthful joy and vigor of early Christians in the constant wonder of the world turned upside down – and right side up! The effect of the Spirit is fresh vitality and a love of the truth. And they stood out. They were in vivid contrast to the pessimism of their day. That is something like what we need, is it not?

How then do we renew our mind? Renewing your thinking, reasoning, understanding, wisdom, by the fear of God and doing what He commands. The *surrender* of our bodies is a part of our worshipful surrender of our wills, and our thoughts, and our affections.

John Calvin said: Oh how greatly has the man advanced who has learned not to be his own, not to be governed by his own reason, but to surrender his mind to God!

Let us close with a couple practical instructions on how to do this.

First, cherish and maintain a child-like awe of the gospel. Develop a daily wonder at the grace and glory of God in Jesus! Live close to the cross. We are transformed by Christ and Christ alone, in whose glory we are being changed. Living in Him and to Him is the Alpha and Omega of truly knowing God. In gold letters, write John 14:6 on your brain!

Second – there is not renovating your thoughts without God’s thoughts. And where do we find God’s thoughts? In the Bible alone! What a sword of the Spirit have you in the Spirit’s Word! To cut through the junk of this world and to point you to the true, the right, the good that pleases him! Think God’s thoughts after Him. Be assured that His book is His book. Let its authority and truth fill your memory and meditations day and night! It was said of the Puritans that if you pricked them with a needle, they would bleed Bibline!

Lastly, be assured of this Word and put the truth to practice. You really do grow when you exercise your mind, when you learn new things, when you see you have been wrong and humbly change by His grace! Our knowledge in this life has been called the *visio stadia*, the view of the Stadium. That we know and grow as we run and grow in holiness. It is not by standing still or God just zapping us with knowledge. Resist the temptation to just rest on some plateau. Press on! Fight bravely! Be a Valiant for Truth!

Bear with one more quote from Dr. Troxel, a member of our Presbytery:

“The world will continue to claim that the church's view of truth is too narrow and too close-minded. But it is in fact the world's view of truth that is too thin and too stagnant. The world sees truth as an idea, as a theory in your head. That is one-dimensional. That is a flat earth theory of truth. Truth is not just an idea. God's truth is a alive. It gets into your heart and changes you. We know the truth, and it has set us free. The truth is so real that it gives us peace, hope, comfort, real answers, and joy. It is so important, so precious, and so great that Paul says we should fight for it, Peter says we must defend it, Jude says we will contend for it, John says we should walk in it. Pp 62 and 63