Text: Various
Title: The Battle for Your Mind
Truth: God totally changes our thinking and wants it to grow even better.
Date/Location: September 27 and October 4, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

Getting someone to change their mind about something that is significant is often a seemingly impossible task. Think of trying to get someone to change from one political viewpoint to another, say from progressivism to conservatism. Or from being pro-abortion to being anti-abortion. You may have heard about the woman who changed on *both* politics and abortion after she took the abortion pill and had a severe hemorrhage. It took a dramatic and nearly tragic event for her mind to change. Her transformation also involved the compassionate responses of people on the right who embraced her and the rejection of those on the left because her story did not match their preferred story.

A person may have entrenched views on something they want or someone they hate or how something should be done. A person might be utterly convinced that the government is changing the climate or the earth is flat or there is extraterrestrial life and UFOs or COVID is a hoax or vaccines are all bad or 5G will fry our brains or 9/11 was at least partially an inside job or O. J. Simpson was guilty (or innocent), or Lindsay Clancy was innocent, or a number of other controversial matters. Someone might be convinced that Charlie Kirk was *not* murdered by Tyler Robinson, or that JFK was *not* murdered by Lee Harvey Oswald or that Neil Armstrong did not go to the moon. It is hard to get people to change their minds!

I use those examples to stir your mind out of sleepiness, regardless of your thinking on any of the particulars. But then there are theological matters. Some people believe that Jesus did not exist. Or, if he did, he was nothing more than a religious guru or teacher, maybe like the prophets of old, but nothing more. People genuinely think that everything came from nothing with no divine being at the helm—that time and random chance are ultimately responsible for all that we see today. Many people think that all roads lead to Heaven, or that people are basically good, or Jesus is

not God, or we will experience a series of reincarnations. And their minds are almost impossible to change.

Perhaps closer to home, your thinking is convinced that corporate prayer is a waste of your time. Or that coming to church more than once a week is excessive. Or that education or socialization or extracurricular activities are the most important things in a young person's life. Or that you have important tasks to do which crowd out spending time with the Lord in Scripture reading and prayer, and though unfortunate, it is necessary in this fast-paced culture. And your mind will not change on those topics.

I ask: why is this? How do our minds change? Could I change *your* mind? Will *you* change your mind?

I. Critical Cautions

A. We must not think of changing the minds of our family and friends using fleshly methods like manipulation or threats. Those are sinful and have no place in the life of a Christian.

B. Furthermore, we must keep logical persuasion in its proper place. It can be useful, but its utility is limited. On the positive side, it can result in a truly good thing happening. Showing the ultrasound images and sounds of a baby in the womb can result in a woman changing her mind from pro-abortion to pro-life, with the real effect that her baby might enjoy its right to life. You can show an engineer the shortcomings of his design and show him a better way and he can become convinced. You can explain the utility of a peaceful relationship, and it may help some people stop their constant fighting.

C. But the without-God method works only sometimes. The sad reality is that even a clear fact pattern and more persuasive reasoning does not change the mind of someone who is convinced of a political or religious viewpoint, not to mention many other topics. The rich man thought that if someone from the dead went to his family members to tell them about Hades, they would repent. But that is not the case—Jesus says that if they do not pay heed to the Bible, they will not be persuaded *even if they see evidence of someone rising from the dead* (Luke 16:27-30). That

evidence was later provided in the resurrection of Jesus, but multitudes still refuse to repent.

D. You need God in your thoughts to truly have right thinking that is accurate to the way things actually are. We will call this the "God premise." God is at the foundation of all things, so to truly understand them, you must have God in your thoughts. He must figure prominently in how you think about *everything*. Psalm 10:4 says that "the wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts."

E. Only *God* is able to change our natures and minds in the revolutionary way that we truly need to become one of His children and to change our thinking on the most substantial issues.

II. Before You are Saved

A. The thinking of someone who lives in a state of rebellion against God is described very starkly in Scripture. Such a person has a mind that may be brilliant in academics, but as far as God and God's things are concerned, it is:

1. Futile or empty, Romans 1:21
2. Darkened, Romans 1:21, Eph. 4:18
3. Blinded, Eph. 4:18, 2 Cor. 3:14
4. Evil, Genesis 6:5
5. Deceitful (of the heart, often a synonym of the mind), Jer. 17:9
6. Morally backwards, Isaiah 5:20-21
7. Hardened, Heb. 3:12-13
8. Enamored with darkness, John 3:19
9. Foolish, Isaiah 44:19, but considering themselves wise, Rom 1:22
10. Defiled, Titus 1:15
11. Unable to truly grasp the things of God, 1 Cor. 2:14
12. Hostile toward God, Romans 8:7

B. How is this practically manifested? Let us illustrate:

1. When you are conversing with someone and they become angry. What kinds of things do they say? Or what kinds of things do *you* say or think when you become angry about something?
2. When you bring up Jesus, the deception of anti-Jesus teaching quickly rises to the surface.
3. When addressing an addictive behavior or pet sin, the person may reject your exhortation and put on display the moral backwardness or blindness of their thinking.
4. When you talk about an issue like evolution or the problem of evil, the contents of someone's mind become evident. The unbelieving mind cannot grasp how God can be in charge of a world where there is evil, or how science could be so wrong about its conclusions concerning origins.
5. In polite culture, you may dismiss the gospel either as a personal preference or as a utilitarian concept for the good it produces in the world, or as a foolish notion. Or you may simply put it off because your mind *cannot* and does not *want* to process the gravity of your moral situation.

You can walk through the dozen characteristics of the unsaved mind above and remember conversations you have had, or imagine ones based on your experience listening to evangelists or events you have heard in the news. The mind without God is truly in a bad way.

C. Sometimes these thinking "hardnesses" poke through in the life of the Christian. Be on guard against this and pray God will cleanse your heart, dear believing friend.

III. When You are Saved – Ephesians 4:20-24

When God draws you to Himself, a definitive renewal happens in your mind. Your thinking changes radically. Look at Ephesians 4:20-24 which speaks directly to this point:

> [20] But you have not so learned Christ, [21] if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: [22] that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, [23] and be renewed

in the spirit of your mind, [24] and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

A. Take careful notice that though this was written for Christians, it was reminding them of what happened to them *in the past*, when they first became Christians. In the larger context, this has implications—like verse 25 says: because you have put off the old man and put on the new man, "therefore, putting away lying…" The big picture is this: because verses 22-24 happened to you when you became followers of Jesus, the Christian faith teaches you to live in a certain holy manner. Paul uses the same argument structure in Colossians 3:9-10 when he says that because you have put off the old man, and put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge, then you need to stop lying and put on tender mercies, etc.

B. To the point of our message, the Christian faith has much to do with changing our minds, rescuing us from the defiled, darkened state that we talked about earlier. Paul breaks down what happens to us into four parts.

First, in this faith, we **learn Christ**. There are some things we do not know before we follow Jesus, and we need to learn them—about ourselves, about God, about sin, about our future. This is what the good news in the Bible teaches us. Ignorance of the teachings of the Bible is a fatal situation.

Second, in this faith, **we put off the old man** with its corruption. Using the metaphor of clothing, it means we strip off our dirty clothing. Dropping the metaphor, it means we repent. We change our minds regarding our former conduct. We decide we are "done" with that life, even though it may not easily let go of us.

Third, as we begin in the Christian faith, our **minds are renewed**. All of the mind problems we had before we were saved (see above) are addressed in a substantial way. While we still can fall into old tendencies, we are entirely different than before. God resets our moral compass, turns us in the right direction, softens our hearts, gives us eyes to see and ears to hear the Bible, makes us friends instead of enemies, and helps us to see the things we

were blind to before. Whereas we bristled at Jesus before, now we love him and are grateful that He died for us and rose again from the dead.

The mind is the center of our thinking and motivations and desires. God renews that very central part of us. This is why a man like John Newton thought nothing of being the captain of a slaving ship in the 1740s but later became a great advocate for the abolition of the slave trade and a partner of William Wilberforce in helping to outlaw it. To get from being a coarse sailor to author of the most famous hymn called "Amazing Grace," God changed his thinking entirely. His mind was made new.

Then Paul explains that at the start of our walk with Christ, we put on the **new man** or the "new person." What we were before in Adam, slaves of sin and death, is totally transformed. We become a new creation, now "in Christ" and instruments of righteousness looking forward to eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are re-made spiritually in the likeness of God, so that the likeness we already had is enhanced with features of a holy nature and desire for good and right. This is not a surface reformation of outward behavior or remodeling that puts a new skin on an old structure. Instead, it is a re-construction of the very bones of who we are as people.

C. In all of this, as we trust in Jesus, God does a miraculous work to enable us to understand the good news, to strip off our old man and put on the new man, and to have our minds de-programmed from the cultic ways of the world and re-flashed with new software that enables us to joyfully walk in the ways of God.

God's changing of our minds is definitive and transformative. But it is not one-and-done…

IV. After You are Saved – Romans 12:1-2 (10/4/2026)

As our response to His grace, God calls for the ongoing renewal of our minds.

> [1] 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. [2] 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.

A. Paul wrote the good news of Jesus in Romans 1-11. He started with the depravity of mankind and moved to the graciousness of the God's salvation, how we are transformed and our old man has died. But we still have a sin nature that is challenging. He explains how God works all for good among those who love Him, and how He is going to rescue Israel in the future. *Therefore*, in view of this theology and the grand mercies of God, for which He should receive all glory (Rom. 11:36), Paul urges upon us three things, with the second and third quite possibly being means to the first.

B. **Present yourself as a living sacrifice to God**. This looks back particularly to Romans 6:13 where Paul tells us to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. We are not a dead animal sacrifice. Instead, our lives are a living, ongoing offering to God every day. Every day we get up and can offer a new day of living for the Lord to Him as an act of worship! Think of the privilege of that. How good it is that after yesterday, when we may have not done much worthy of worship, that we get another day to do so! Our sacrifice is *not* done once. It is *living*—done daily!

Christians have a priestly ministry (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The sacrifice language connects our lives to a temple sort of worship, although we do not look at a temple but instead to the person and work of Jesus. This makes all of our lives a suitable setting for the worship of service to God. Whereas the OT sacrifices are obsolete, and Jesus gave Himself as a complete and dying sacrifice, we are asked to be a living sacrifice. Some of our brothers are actually killed in their service for the Lord, but most service to God is done in life.

How practically do you do this with our lives and bodies? Praise and thank Him (Heb. 13:15) using your tongue; do not have impurity in your speech. Use your hands and feet to serve God, not to sinful deeds. Use your eyes to look with compassion, not look with lust. (See Chrysostom, Homily 20 on Romans 12:1.) Show your love for Him by honoring Him in some practical way in your life.

Spend some time with Him, read His word. Do something for others as a way to show Christ's love for them. Stand up for his holiness and for morality in your school or workplace. Serve God wherever you are. Say no to your flesh. Say no or "another time" to an event that conflicts with church to show God that you honor Him. Your life and my life should be in concert with the last verse of chapter 11 so that we too glorify God, which is what everything is supposed to do and was originally designed to do. Notice that Paul exhorts our *bodies* to be a living sacrifice. Not just some actions, but our entire selves, consecrated to God like "loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength" (Deut. 6:5). We must live as tools of God's righteousness and love.

Like sacrifices in Israel had to be spotless, we too must be *holy*. God did not accept second-best (Malachi 1:8). He is worth first-best.

This kind of living and holy sacrifice is well pleasing to God.

When you carefully think through everything that God has done for you (his many mercies, verse 1a), it will become evident that living for the Lord is the most sensible and reasonable course of action for you to follow. It is really of little sacrifice to serve the one who loves you so, with whom you have an intimate and precious relationship. This worship makes sense given what God has done. Our worship must be spiritual and rational. God is not looking for a mere emotive outburst or ecstatic utterances. God desires a non-superstitious, true worship, mind-involved kind of worship.

Or look at it in reverse: if you examine yourself and see that you have not done much of "living sacrificing" for the Lord, ask yourself why that is.

We do not do this to pay God back for what He has done, for that is unpayable. God's mercy is so infinitely dimensioned that it is impossible to even consider paying it back. And then you realize that for every sacrifice you make for God, His mercy is ultimately the source of it. And then, His mercy is renewed daily (Lam. 3:23). You cannot every pay it back because it is constantly poured out upon you!

This offering is not made only once. It is a constant state of existence for the Christian. Life is for worship. Church is not the only place we worship!

C. **Do not be conformed to the world**. The operative verb here means to form like a pattern or mold, to model after something. It is to share a schema[1] with the world. A schema includes how you perceive in your mind and respond to the complex situation of your world. It is extremely easy to continue to do so just as you would have without Christ, like the world. It is almost automatic for us to be like the world in speech, in thought, in deed, in attitude, in philosophy, in values, in customs, in principles, and in worldview. We can pick up habits, join in sinful conversations, and react like the rest of the unsaved world does. We might even be the non-conformist type, like a loner. Still, we are likely (and if still unsaved, *certainly*) conducting our non-conformity in the manner that the sinful, unholy world does . No matter what our personal tendencies are—conformist or not—Paul commands us simply not to be formed according to the mold of the world. The "way of the world" is not to be our way, no matter how hard the world presses us to get us into its preferred "shape." That shape is all about self-promotion and sin and death.

Some writers teach that conformity is an outward resemblance while transformation is inward. But it seems that Paul is deeply concerned about this conformity to the world because it is not merely a surface-level matter. You might excuse outward conformity by consoling yourself that your inward reality is different. But Paul says not to be conformed at all (inwardly or outwardly) and that is *because* an outer conformity indicates an inner problem. Paul does not say that explicitly here, but you can prove it to yourself. Take for example an outward conformity of your tongue to the speech of the world. From where does that come? Outward influence as certainly impacted your speech, but Jesus told us that it comes from the overflow of our hearts

[1] According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition), a *schema* is "a mental codification of experience that includes a particular organized way of perceiving cognitively and responding to a complex situation or set of stimuli."

(Matthew 12:34). So that outward conformity has become inward too. That is the problem.

The world wants you to be its friend, because "it" feels there are strength in numbers: "We all cannot be wrong!" To ensure your compliance, it does a lot of work to preach its beliefs and values to you. You receive many thousands of hours of instruction (ahem, discipleship) from school and media and social media. This is where the world starts pressing you into its mold—teaching lust and materialism and covetousness and unrealistic perfection in bodily appearance, besides pro-abortion, pro-divorce, anti-authority, violence, sexual immorality, and probably a bunch of other things. Do NOT be conformed into this system!

Look around dear friends—we are not in the kingdom of Christ. The world is under the sway of the wicked one. Satan has a lot of power and influence around here. He is a media king. He makes political movements happen. He has weaseled his way into the school systems and cultural apparatus so much that it cannot be undone. We must NOT be conformed to THAT. We are citizens of another kingdom, one we pray will come soon, but regardless, we cannot act like we are part of this world.

D. **Be transformed by having your mind continuously renewed**. Renewing of the mind is not just something that happens when you start your walk with Christ. Just like guarding against conforming to the world, this verb is in the present tense. It is for Christians all the time.

What happens in the renewal of the Christian's thinking is the undoing or reversal of the state of unbelievers whose minds are foolish and depraved (Romans 1:22, 28).

Notice that the verb, like the previous one, is a present imperative, and it is passive voice. The transformation of your mind involves not only *you*, but very importantly, the unexpressed agent of the passive verb—the *Spirit of God*. See Ephesians 5:17-19:

> [17] Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms…

We know from other Bible texts that God uses His word, and prayer and corporate and private worship and simple obedience to His commands in order to accomplish this transformation. For one example, consider Colossians 3:16:

> [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

And another that uses the same "transform" verb in 2 Cor. 3:18:

> [18] But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We can read more of that same sort of idea in about God's word and our thinking (Psalm 119:11, Phil. 4:8) and about the teaching ministry of the apostles and the church (Col. 1:28). Let your mind be filled with the word of God so it comes out in speech, in song, in thought, in writing, in everything you do. That is transformation. The source is God's word. It gets into your mind, and then you use that mind to discern and decide how to live. If it you fill your mind with God's word, it will be a healthy guide. Otherwise, it will not.

As you experience this renewing, you are being transformed in your inner character. This transformation is what we call Chrisitan growth! You are moving away from the world and toward God, becoming more suitable in your sacrificial life for Him. We are not in fact living for ourselves, but in faith we live for Him who died for us and rose again. He is the WHY of our lives.

The transformation comes by means of renewing your mind—making it new, like how it was intended to be from the factory, not how it got to be with a bunch of world influence poured into it.

Are you growing? Be real now—living things grow. Healthy living things grow a lot. Are you being renewed, or just static? Is transformation evident, or stalled out? Are you going about working through the will of God, or is that kind of back-burner these days? If you are not growing—being transformed—then you

are not in stasis or neutral. You are in what we have to call an unhealthy state.

E. The goal of all this is that you may put into practice the will of God in your life and find it proven as Paul says—good, acceptable, and perfect. This moral direction from the Lord is the guidance we need to live well. These words tie us back to verse one's sacrifice. For us to be holy and without blemish as a living sacrifice, we must be doing God's will.

I asked myself what exactly is the sense of *prove* or *discern* (ESV) or *test and approve* (NIV)? Here is a helpful comment on that point: "'Approving' the will of God means to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view to putting it into practice: 'discern-and-do the will of God.' That Paul means here by 'the will of God' his moral direction is clear from the way Paul describes it: this will is that which is 'good,' 'acceptable [to God],' and 'perfect.'"[2]

Conclusion

It is exceedingly difficult to change our minds about things. I wonder if your mind has gotten into a fixed state on some things that you need to break out of. By God's grace you know it needs to change and your thinking needs to be renewed. I advise you to make those changes now. Repent, believe, resolve with God's help to present yourself to him, and be an acceptable holy sacrifice by not being conformed to the world but having renewed, transformed minds. I am asking God to do that work in your life right now.

What the Bible is talking about here is a complete and radical transformation from the life of sin to the life of godliness. You and I are not done in terms of the transformation and renewal process. May God use this message right now to move us along the way of the Master to follow God's moral direction.

MAP

[2] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, 2018), 776.