

**Text:** Various

**Title:** The Battle for Your Mind

**Truth:** God totally changes our thinking and wants it to grow even better.

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## 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:

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

in the spirit of your mind,<sup>24</sup> 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.
- 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**

God calls for the ongoing renewal of our minds.

<sup>1</sup> 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.* <sup>2</sup> 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 about 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 these grand mercies, Paul urges upon us three things.
- B. **Consider yourself as a living sacrifice to God.** We are not the same as the traditional dead animal sacrifice. Instead, our lives are a living, ongoing offering to God every day. We must live as tools of God's righteousness and love. Just like sacrifices in ancient Israel had to be without blemish, we too must be holy and acceptable to God. When you carefully think through everything that God has done for you (his many mercies, verse 1a), it will become evident that this is the most sensible and reasonable course of action for you to follow.
- 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<sup>1</sup> with the world. A schema includes how you perceive in your mind and respond to the complex situation of your world—and 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. 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, or a loner. But we are very likely (and if still unsaved, *certainly*) conducting our non-conformity or lone-wolf life in the manner that the sinful, unholy world would do it. Paul commands us simply to *not* 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 in that direction.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.”

#### D. Be transformed by having your mind continuously renewed.

Notice that the verb is, like the previous one, 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*. 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:

<sup>16</sup> 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:

<sup>18</sup> 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.

As you experience this transformation, 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 our faith, we live for Him who died for us and rose again. He is the WHY of our lives. Serving Him is the why.

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

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. But our focus today is on the work of changing our minds.

## Conclusion

Indeed, it is very difficult to change our minds about things. I wonder if your mind has gotten into a fixed state on some things that it needs 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. I am asking God to do that work in your mind right now.

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