

Renewal

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About 2,000 years ago Paul wrote the following -

“Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

In Paul's day mankind's wisdom had brought them to the point that they did not know God. It is now nearly 2,000 years later and despite all the knowledge mankind has acquired about this world many still have no idea of how we came to be or why we are even here.

In recent lessons we have been looking into the following passage from Paul's letter to the Romans - *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* (Romans 12:1-2)

Our focus this morning will be on the idea of **renewing** our minds. Here in this passage from his letter to Rome Paul uses the Greek word anakainōsis pronounced an-ak-ah'ee-no-sis. It is defined as a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better.

This is the same word Paul used in his letter to Titus when he writes -

*“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and **renewal** by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:3-7)

In John's writings both Jesus and The Holy Spirit are referred to as being advocates (Greek paraklētos) on our behalf. We see in this passage above from Titus the things (work) they do for us - washing, rebirth and renewal (anakainōsis). The later being a work of The Holy Spirit. Or as stated in Titus - *renewal **by** the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 2:38 informs us that once we recognize that Jesus is The Christ we are to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins and we will be given a gift. That gift is The Holy Spirit. Then the **renewal** work “*by the Holy Spirit*” can begin within us. Remembering, as Paul stated in Roman’s, we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Peter explains a few things about God to those who will listen - “*But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.***”

This passage reminds us of something very important to understand about God. One which many fail to recognize and which leads them to a wrong conclusion about God’s Word. God is eternal and so is His Word. God is not subject to time. Rather God created time itself. Sadly many think the Bible is outdated. They think something written so long ago has little to do with them today. But again the truth of God’s Word does not change with time. In man’s mind or way of thinking it does. Thus understanding this aspect of God and His Word is really important. TV, the Internet, book etc. often plant the idea in our minds that humans are evolving, and in doing so are getting smarter. But as Paul stated - in their wisdom they knew not God.

Paul expresses another aspect of God’s amazing abilities in his prayer for the Ephesians when he says - “*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,*” (Ephesians 3:20)

In the passage above from Ephesians we learn of the limitless abilities of the power of God.

And as David stated -
“*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*” (Psalm 8:3-4)

In the Psalm above we see that limitlessness displayed before our eyes in the heavens. I have lost count of the number of times that in my short lifetime science has redefined the limits of the universe. Ever increasing as we gain the ability to see farther and farther into space.

Some time ago my wife and I were in a book store. She was looking for a book and I was just perusing. I went down an aisle titled Science, and there a particular book caught my eye. First because it was a rather big and thick book. And second because of it’s title. It was one word - Gravity. But why such a big book about Gravity I thought.

After all didn't we learn about gravity in elementary school. I remember being taught at an early age that gravity is what holds our feet to the ground literally, and it also keeps the planets in alignment. So I opened the book and started thumbing through it's pages. I began to realize there is far more to this thing we call gravity that one might expect. This book was filled with advanced mathematical formulas, various conclusion based upon tested theories and assumed knowledge about the universe, just to name a few. In conclusion I found out that despite naming this thing 'Gravity' to identify it, we as yet really don't quite know what it is and aren't even sure how it works.

I recall from previous study that Albert Einstein's once believed there must be an equal and opposite force to gravity which acts upon things so that gravity does not simply cause the universe to collapse in upon itself. He was later to refer to this idea as being the biggest mistake of his career. It appears no such force exists. Einstein couldn't figure gravity out!

I in my simple understanding of gravity will ask - Why is it that if gravity holds the massive planets in their place within our solar system and our feet to the ground, why then do astronauts experience weightless when going just a few miles up in space, and refer to it as being in zero gravity there? Where did this thing we call gravity go?

I have studied a number of subjects during my lifetime and have routinely noticed that the leading individuals in a number of those fields often have to humbly admit that very little is really understood about the subject they are considered to be an expert in. They often realize when something new is discovered in their field of study it only raises more questions for which they then have no answers. I have also noticed that the opposite is frequently true. That some in these same fields of study think they know all there is to know on a subject. But this knowledge they possess or believe usually only lasts for a short period of time. Ask any professional - do people in your field still believe today what was commonly believed in your field 50 or 100 years ago?

The renewing of our minds spoken of in Scripture is not about discovering how things in this universe work, but rather discovering who made the universe and what our part in it is.

We learn about God's Will and purpose for things in Scripture. Why did God create this universe! People often want to know everything there is to know about God before they are willing to believe in the creator. In last week's lesson I pointed out the order of things described there in Romans 12:1-2 and how we as humans tend to do the exact opposite of what it says. To use a common saying - We put the cart before the horse. Jesus told his disciples things are done differently in God's Kingdom. Thus Paul states we are not to be conformed to this world. Rather we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Scripture informs us that God made everything - *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. **Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**"*

Thus when we go to God for answers we are seeking knowledge from the source of all things created. Who to know better how those things should properly function than God the creator. Or as the Hebrew writer explains - *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* (Hebrews 11:6)

The Israelites had lots of questions about God. Here is something that they were told in Scripture -

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”

(Deuteronomy 29:29)

Interesting that mankind today should refer to things as being - the laws of physics, the laws of science and the laws of nature! Seemly recognizing that all things are subject to something it would appear.

Mankind has gathered much knowledge, but wisdom and knowledge are not the same thing. You may have used this example before - knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put one into a fruit salad!

Scripture tells us - *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”* (James 1:5)

and

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

God challenges humans to search Him out. To test and see if what He says holds true. Such a challenge was set before Israel as recorded in Malachi 3:1-12 -

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty. “I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

*“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. **Test me** in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.”*

God also calls for mankind to reason with Him as recorded in Isaiah.

*“Come now, let us settle the matter,”
says the Lord.*

*“Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.*

*If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the good things of the land;
but if you resist and rebel,
you will be devoured by the sword.”
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

The words “let us settle the matter” in the first line above are translated in the KJV as “reason together”. The Hebrew word used here is “yâkach” meaning to *be right* (that is, correct); reciprocally to *argue*; causatively to *decide, justify* or *convict*.

“Convict” - Reminds us of this statement by our Lord - *“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will **convict** the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:”* (John 16:7-8)

In the passage above our Lord is speaking of The Holy Spirit and the work He (The Holy Spirit) will do when He comes. He came at Pentecost and is a gift from God to us we have responded to the message (Gospel). Recognizing God and His Son who died for our sins, repenting of those sins, being buried with our Lord in Baptism where we die to those sins and then rise to walk in the newness of life. We become a new creature - Renewed by God.