

# Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind

Romans 12:2

One of the prominent themes running through Scripture is the truth that authentic holiness is a heart issue. Holiness is not achieved by the renovation of our external appearance. True holiness starts and progresses on the inside—and even the external tokens of our spiritual identity are supposed to be reminders of that truth. In the words of the apostle Paul, from Romans 2:28-29: "No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God." Or in the words of Jesus, from Matthew 23:26-28: "You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"

True morality is not a question of outward behavior alone. Genuine holiness is a state of the heart, and therefore the law of God was given to govern the heart first and foremost—the internal person; the mind, emotions, and will.

And the Bible teaches this from cover to cover. Sin is not merely a question of external actions. But the real wickedness of sin stems from what takes place in the heart. The things that defile you the most are not sinful *things* that you do, but sinful *thoughts* you entertain. In other words, it's not what you *do* that colors your character, but what you *think about*. In Mark 7:20-23, Jesus said,

"What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,

22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Now, notice that in this context, even when he lists sins like "sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit," and so on, He is not focusing primarily on the *act* of adultery or *acts* of thefts and murder. He's talking about the thoughts that give birth to such acts. Those evil thoughts come from within, and they are what defile a man the most.

He's also saying that every evil act begins with evil thinking. Murder doesn't spring from a pure heart. It is the product of envy or hatred. Fornication and adultery are the fruit of lustful thoughts. Whenever someone transgresses the purity of the marriage relationship or dishonors his body with an act of fornication, you *know* that person entertained unrighteousness first on the inside, in his thought life. All sin is incubated in the mind.

By the same token, the person who willfully entertains evil thoughts—who deliberately savors lustful thoughts in his own mind—that person *will* eventually commit evil acts, too. You can't keep evil thoughts bottled up forever. Jesus said they "defile a person"; they defile the *whole* person. And they inevitably bear the fruit of evil behavior, because a corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit (Matthew 7:18).

So let me ask you: How is your thought life? How wholesome are the secret thoughts of your heart? Did you know that is the true measure of your character? Proverbs 23:7: "As he thinks within himself, so he is." The *real* you is not the person other people see. It's not the

person who comes to Church every week with a smile and takes notes and tries to keep up a pious veneer. The *real* you is the person only God sees. And according to 1 Samuel 16:7, "The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." God judges you according to what you are really like in the secret chamber of your heart: 1 Chronicles 28:9: "the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought." Jeremiah 17:10: "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind."

God sees *all* our thoughts, and He judges us accordingly. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 139:

139:1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

And we will be accountable to God for our secret thoughts, not just our external works. Jesus said this in Luke 12:1-3:

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

3 Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

In other words, you cannot keep your secret thoughts secret forever. God already knows your heart so well that by the time a word is formed on your tongue, He knows it altogether, according to Psalm 139:4. And the apostle Paul says in Romans 2:16, "according to my gospel, God judges the *secrets* of men by Christ Jesus." First Corinthians 4:5 says "the Lord . . . will bring to light the

things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." Whatever you have thought or done in secret is going to be exposed and judged one of these days. Does that make you tremble a little bit? "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

What takes place secretly in your mind is in some ways the most important thing about you. It is the barometer of your character and the gauge of your spiritual health. It is what reveals more clearly and more infallibly than anything else what you are really like.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? How is your thought life? How do you expect to fare at the judgment seat of Christ when your private thoughts are brought to light and you are called to give account for them?

In *The Vanishing Conscience*, John MacArthur writes: No sin is more destructive to the conscience than the sin that takes place in the arena of the mind. Sins of the mind assault the conscience like no other sins, because the conscience is their only deterrent. After all, who but God and the sinner ever knows about them? "Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11). . . . To indulge in sins of thought, therefore, is to molest the conscience directly. Those whose thoughts are impure *cannot* have pure consciences; the guilt is inherent in the evil thought. When the thoughts are defiled, the conscience immediately is, too. That is why nothing is more characteristic of unbelief than an impure mind combined with a defiled conscience: [Titus 1:15 says,] "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but *both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*" . . . In fact, nothing damages the conscience more than the habit of indulging in evil thoughts. Unfortunately, once begun, the practice becomes all too easy. This is a sin that does not have to wait for an opportunity; the mind can sin anytime, anywhere,

under any circumstances. So the habit is quickly and easily established.

And sinful thoughts become a horrible bondage that is very difficult to escape from. These are sins that need no opportunity. You carry the evil thoughts around with you in your head. They are with you wherever you go. And they can surface in every idle moment. It doesn't matter whether you are alone or in a crowd. It doesn't matter whether you are in a prayer meeting or at a circus. Once you get into the habit of this kind of sin, it can be a snare to you at any moment of the day or night.

I often counsel with people who have become entangled in the snare of sin because they harbored evil thoughts in their hearts. If you do that, you *will* reap a bitter harvest. Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. There is ultimately nothing *more* wicked than evil thoughts, because that is where all sin is hatched: in the mind.

And if you want to be holy; if you want to be sanctified; if you want to be conformed to the image of Christ, the place where the transformation must begin is in the inner man—and the *mind* in particular. That is why the apostle Paul spoke repeatedly about the renewing of the mind. Listen to Ephesians 4:22-24:

put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

23 and to *be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*

24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

In other words, sanctification is first and foremost a process of mind-renewal. Paul says the same thing in Romans 12, the passage I want to look at this morning.

Turn there, and I'll read Romans 12:1-2. I want to focus in particular on the idea of mind-renewal in verse 2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Now let's set the context for this. Paul has just completed eleven chapters of the most intense doctrinal instruction you will find anywhere in the New Testament. The first eleven chapters of Romans are a series of theological discourses. He talks about sin and the problem of human depravity in chapters 1-3. He outlines the doctrine of justification in chapters 3-5. He writes about the doctrinal aspects of sanctification and the believer's struggle with sin in chapters 6-7. In chapter 8 he talks about the security of the believer. In chapter 9 he talks about election and the sovereignty of God. And in chapters 10-11 he talks about the role of Israel and the eschatological future.

Those first eleven chapters are like a miniature systematic theology. Paul is dealing with objective doctrinal themes. But beginning with chapter 12, the apostle Paul turns to the issue of practical application. And from this point on, the epistle has a new tone. Paul here is concerned with putting to work in individuals' daily lives the truths of the first eleven chapters. And so here he gets intensely practical.

The logical order is significant: doctrine first; then application. The doctrinal truth Paul covers so carefully in the first eleven chapters of Romans lays the necessary foundation for the practical teaching of chapters 12-15. The two go hand in hand. I hope you don't have the idea that doctrine is inherently *impractical*. Nothing could be

further from the truth. In fact, all doctrine has practical implications; and apart from sound doctrine, practical teaching can be downright dangerous. Practical exhortations that are not grounded in sound doctrine usually reduce to a kind of pious moralism—works salvation. But because Paul has already laid a careful foundation for Christian soteriology, there is no danger that careful readers of the book of Romans will get the idea that the practical exhortations of Romans 12-15 are supposed to be means of salvation. Instead, these are the *fruits* of salvation—the outworking of God's justifying and sanctifying work in us. Here is how redeemed people are to live.

And Paul ties it to the preceding doctrinal discussion with the adverb *therefore*. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, [in light of God's gracious justifying and sanctifying work on your behalf, and] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Since you have been justified freely by the grace that is in Christ Jesus—and since you have been united with Him in His death and resurrection—it is only *reasonable*, it is only *logical*, it is only *equitable* that you render your bodies a living sacrifice to God.

But not only does Paul call us to present our bodies *to* God; He also commands us to renew our minds *for* God. And this is the commandment I want to look at closely this morning. Verse 2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

There are two points here that I want to dwell on. Notice that there are two ways our minds are influenced: We can either be influenced from the outside, by the world, through worldly pressure that conforms us to a worldly standard; or we can be transformed from the inside out, through the renewing of our minds.

Whether you realize it or not, one of those two things is currently happening to you. You are either passively allowing the world to conform you to its own evil standard, or you are actively renewing your mind and being transformed by that process into greater and greater Christlikeness. There's no middle ground and there's no standing still. If you are not renewing your mind in Christ, you are being conformed to the world.

Let's look at the two sides of this command and see what Paul is talking about. First,

#### 1. DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

Paul uses the Greek word *suschematizo* to speak of being conformed to this world. It speaks of fashioning or changing someone or something into the likeness of another. But it is a unique word that speaks of change that is unstable and transitory. It speaks of a cosmetic and external change. You would use this word if you were speaking of molding a lump of clay. Or you might use the same word if you were speaking about plastering over defects to disguise them. It evokes the idea of change wrought by external pressure. It speaks of change in the shape or appearance of something. This word does not speak of change in the essence or the nature of something. It's an outward, external conformity in appearance only.

Now someone might ask, *Is this a warning to true believers?* Are authentic Christians susceptible to worldly pressure? Is it even possible for a genuine believer to be conformed to the world? After all, James 4:4 says "friendship with the world is enmity with God [and] whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Is it possible for a Christian to be "conformed" to the world?

Well, yes, in a temporal and temporary sense. We are susceptible to worldly pressures. You no doubt *feel* that pressure to conform. Lots of Christians *give in* to that



pressure to conform. But no Christian will be permanently conformed to the world. After all, God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image."

"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Ephesians 1:4). First John 3:2 says, "we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." And then verse 3 adds this: "everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

So one of the marks of a true Christian is that he resists being conformed to the world. He struggles against worldly influences and seeks to purify himself, as Christ is pure.

And yet, both Scripture and experience teach us that even true believers can, for a time, be susceptible to worldly influences. The remnants of sinful corruption remain in us. Temptation still entices us. And if we neglect the means of our preservation, we can to some degree be conformed to the world.

And in fact, this seems to be the peculiar failing of the church in our generation. The church is filled with people—including many Christian leaders—who seem to think the church *ought* to strive to be as much like the world as possible. And so we see multitudes of people who profess to be Christians but who are being conformed to the world.

In fact, many who call themselves Christians are indistinguishable from their unsaved neighbors. We immerse ourselves in the same types of entertainment. We follow the same fads. We have the same interests. In many ways we are not diligent enough to keep ourselves from being conformed to the world. And it is to our spiritual detriment. It reflects how cold our hearts are to

the things God loves. Remember, you cannot love this temporal world and all its fads and fashions and still be a friend of God. We forget that sometimes.

If you know me at all, you will know what a foe of legalism I am. I despise the sort of pietism that makes extrabiblical rules and teaches Christians to order their lives around lists of dos and don'ts that have nothing whatsoever to do with biblical holiness.

And yet in our zeal to guard our liberty, we must remember that there is a grave danger at the opposite end of the spectrum. We're free from the yoke of bondage under the law, but we must avoid the bondage of sin as well. We are not to use our liberty as a cloak for evil. We are not supposed to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. We must resist being conformed to this world.

There's only one other verse in Scripture where this Greek word *suschematizo* is used. It's 1 Peter 1:14, where the word is used to speak of conforming ourselves to our former lusts. Let me read you that passage, starting at verse 13 (1 Peter 1:13). Peter writes:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action,  
and being sober-minded, set your hope fully  
on the grace that will be brought to you at  
the revelation of Jesus Christ.

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed  
to the passions of your former ignorance,  
15 but as he who called you is holy, you also  
be holy in all your conduct,  
16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I  
am holy."

Notice that just like Paul in our passage, Peter is focused on mind-renewal: Verse 13: "prepar[e] your *minds* for action"—or as it's translated in the King James Version: "gird up the loins of your mind." Don't be conformed to your "former lusts." That is just another way of saying do not be conformed to the world. Don't let "the passions of your former ignorance" shape your thoughts. "gird up the

loins of your mind." This calls for a willful, deliberate, self-control, exercised particularly in the arena of the mind. This is *how* you resist worldly pressure to conform. You can't do it merely by following lists of rules that govern external behavior or manage your external appearance. You have to get control of your *mind*, and direct it toward holiness.

Your carnal lusts were formerly framed in ignorance, Peter says. But now that you are a believer, you have no such excuse. You know better. Don't think in those old patterns. "Gird up the loins of your mind."

Peter is using language that evokes the imagery of a soldier going into battle. Every soldier, prior to battle, had to gird up his tunic—tuck it up into his belt so that he was free to fight without getting his legs entangled in his own clothing.

So this is militant language. It calls for an active response. If you're passive or lazy, you will fall back into old patterns of thought and be conformed to the former lusts and this world's values. In other words, this is something we must *do* as Christians. He isn't calling for "surrender," or passivity, or anything like that. He is urging us to take control of our minds and steer them in a godly direction.

And that brings us to point two in our look at Romans 12:2:

## 2. BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND.

Now remember, the word translated "conformed" speaks of an outward change—where something is molded or shaped by external pressure. Here Paul uses a different word for the idea of being "transformed." It's the Greek word *metamorphoo*, which obviously is the origin of the English word metamorphosis. It speaks of a change that takes place from the inside out. It is a total transformation of nature, a change of the very character and essence of our hearts. "be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Why the mind? Why does it have to be cerebral? Why is it an intellectual thing? I mean, this is so contrary to the spirit of our age, where people think what you *really* need to transform you is an emotional experience or a mystical experience of some kind where you are slain in the spirit.

But far more important than any emotional experience is mind-renewal. Why the *mind*? Why the *intellect*? Because "from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The mind is what rules us. All our actions; all our choices and decisions; and all our legitimate emotions are fed and watered by what flows from the mind—what you think about; what you believe; the way you perceive reality.

And to a large degree, we control what we think about. That's why this is an imperative, a command: "be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Now, how do we do that practically? That is what I want to focus on in the time we have remaining this morning. Now I have six practical suggestions to help you in the process of mind-renewal. So if you already put your pen away because you figured I only had two main points, take the pens out again and be ready to write. Because this is the stuff you want to take down. Here are six practical steps toward victory in your thought life. Here is what you need to be doing if you want to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Step 1:

1. *Confirm your salvation.* Paul is writing to Christians here. Verse 1: "I appeal to you therefore, *brothers*, by the mercies of God." If you are not a Christian, You need soul-renewal before you can work on mind-renewal. Second Peter 1:10: "Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure." If your struggle perpetually with evil thoughts and have no interest in the things of the Lord, it may be that you have never been truly converted, even if you profess to be a Christian.

We have no power apart from the grace of God to renew our own minds. And if you are not a genuine

believer, if you have never truly embraced Christ as Savior, you simply *cannot* renew your own mind.

Scripture is very clear about this. Romans 8:7-8: "the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil."

We cannot, by sheer force of our own wills, change our own nature. So if you have never been born again, what you need is a new heart. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit (Matthew 7:18), so apart from a total new birth, you will never be able to renew your mind.

So that is step one: examine yourself, to see whether you are truly in the faith. And if you are *not* a Christian and have never been born again, what you need is salvation. You need to call on the name of the Lord, and ask God to Give you His Spirit. Romans 10:13: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Step 2:

2. *Clear your conscience.* This is where mind-renewal begins. verse 2: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind." If you don't first clear your conscience, you will never get anywhere trying to renew your mind.

Remember Titus 1:15, which I read earlier: "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled." Impure thoughts defile the conscience, so if you have settled the matter of your salvation, the next step toward renewing your mind is clearing your conscience. Pray as David prayed in Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

How do you clear your conscience? First, you repent deeply and sincerely of your sins. Don't hide secret sins away from the light of truth. Bring them all out and deal

with them thoroughly. "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." And when you truly deal with your sin, and lay hold of God's pardoning grace, you will hear the echo of God's pardon in your conscience.

Next, having repented of your sin, make right what needs to be made right. Make a list if your sins are many, and systematically set out to seek the forgiveness of those whom you have offended, make restitution in cases where restitution can be made, and make right whatever damage your sins may have done. This may be a long process, and it is never an easy process. But once you devote yourself to it and start the process, your conscience will speak approval.

If you have harbored secret sin for a long time, you will discover that there is nothing more liberating than a clear conscience. This one thing alone will do much to deter you from the sin of thinking evil thoughts. Anthony Burgess, a Puritan commentator, suggested that some people deliberately give themselves lusts and carnal pleasures, just so they may put a foggy mist between their conscience and themselves. Get in the habit of listening to your conscience, and you will face fewer temptations to think evil thoughts.

Then inform your conscience with the word of God. Surrender your conscience to the truth of Scripture, and it will become a strong deterrent to evil thinking.

Step number 3 in renewing your mind:

3. *Commit to holiness in your private life.* Remember, we are talking about mind-renewal here. Verse 2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." That is speaking of something you that must take place in private. It's not something you can do in the three or four hours a week you spend in church.

Learn to cultivate holiness in solitude. That is the *most* important aspect of your spiritual growth. Fellowship groups, Bible studies, and discipling relationships have their place, but no aspect of your spiritual life is more important than your own private pursuit of holiness. You have to be committed to that, or else no amount of accountability and fellowship can possibly help you in the long run. Everyone else is simply wasting time trying to disciple you if you're not willing to cultivate holiness in your own private life.

It's great to seek accountability and fellowship. The company of other people is often a deterrent to sin. Fear and shame keep us from sin when we think others will know about it. But you cannot be accountable for every moment. Eventually, you will be alone, and it is in those moments of solitude, when you are in secret, that your true character reveals itself.

You need to devote yourself to the pursuit of godliness in those private times. Cultivate the fear of God, and learn to be ashamed at what *God* sees spilling forth from your heart. That will do more than anything I know to cleanse your heart of evil thoughts and help in the process of renewing your mind.

There are a thousand practical ways this works out. When you find yourself alone with nothing to do, don't instinctively flip on the television and shift into passive mode. Instead, read something edifying, or look for something good to do that will help others. Listen to tapes of good preaching. Keep a journal. Find ways to fill your leisure time with that which edifies.

And when you go to bed at night, bring something edifying for your mind to contemplate in the dark. It may be a Bible verse you are memorizing that you can meditate on. The psalmist said, "I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night" (Psalm 63:6). That's a prayer to God. This is what is so great about being a student of theology. There are a thousand good things to meditate on in the dark when

you can't sleep at night. That's when I do some of my best thinking about things like infralapsarianism and the hypostatic union.

The best and simplest remedy for evil thinking is the command in Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Above all, if you want to pursue holiness in your private life, memorize and meditate on *Scripture*. Make some cards with memory verses, and learn at least one a week. That will give you plenty to do in those moments of solitude.

Another puritan writer, William Bridge, says, "Meditation will keep your hearts and souls from sinful thoughts. When the vessel is full you can put in no more. . . . If the heart be full of sinful thoughts, there is no room for holy and heavenly thoughts: if the heart be full of holy and heavenly thoughts by meditation, there is no room for evil and sinful thoughts."

Now you have to *decide* to do this, and commit yourself to it, and start doing it when your mind is clear and when you are not already being assaulted by lust or other evil thoughts. You have to be proactive. If you take a passive approach, or if you are think you can simply react to temptations by deciding to meditate on Scripture whenever an evil thought arises, you will fail. You have to fill your mind with righteousness, and start meditating, *before* evil thoughts have a chance to assail your mind. It takes diligence and discipline, but that is precisely what the apostle Paul is calling for here when he tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

The next step:



4. *Cultivate your Spiritual gift.* Have an edifying pastime. Find a hobby or a volunteer activity you can devote yourself to where you make use of your spiritual gift. Stay busy. Don't give yourself too much time for idle thoughts. Remember, vain thoughts defile the heart as much as vile thoughts. Thinking about trivial and worldly things is ultimately as hostile to true godliness as entertaining impure fantasies. And one leads to the other. Both will rob you of opportunities to glorify God.

Here's what I am saying: It is a sin to waste time, especially if that means squandering opportunities to use the gifts God has given you for the edification of others.

You are in Romans 12. Look down at verse 6: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." Find what you are good at, what you enjoy doing, and seek ways to use your gift to the edification of others. Believe me; in the long run, you will enjoy it far more than some of the mindless activities you might be doing in your leisure time right now.

Stop watching "I Love Lucy" reruns and find something edifying to do with that time, and the quality of your life will be vastly improved.

Step 5:

5. *Continue steadfastly in prayer.* Look down at verses 11-12: "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

Prayer is a great deterrent to impure thoughts. It's a little hard to indulge in evil fantasies when you are directing your mind towards the Lord. I don't need to say a whole lot about this. It's a pretty obvious point. But again, this is an area where you need to be proactive. Cultivate your prayer life. Get in the habit of praying. Let this habit replace some of your old, evil habitual ways of thinking.

When an evil thought presents itself to your mind and tempts you to entertain it for awhile, respond immediately

by going to the Lord in prayer. But don't *wait* for those times to pray. Learn to pray whenever your mind is idle. Turn off the talk radio stations and pray while you are driving in your car. Pray while you are stuck in some waiting room. Get in the habit of allowing your mind to turn to God whenever you have an idle, private moment, and you will eventually reprogram your mind so that evil thoughts don't continually arise.

And here's a final step towards mind-renewal. Look at the end of verse 9. This is step 6:

6. *Cling to what is good.* Learn to abhor what is evil and cultivate thoughts about what is good. If you're going to start memorizing Scripture, learn Philippians 4:8 first. "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, [etc.] if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

And notice the flip side of this, also in verse 9 of Romans 12: "Abhor what is evil." Cultivate a holy hatred for evil. Learn to abhor that which is evil. If you are in the habit of entertaining fantasies about sinful things, contemplate the evil consequences of the act instead. Next time you are tempted to fantasize about adultery or fornication, instead, you should prayerfully contemplate what the consequences would be if you sinned that sin and got caught. Think about what it would mean for your family and friends. Learn to have fear and loathing for sin, and that will help quell your evil thoughts.

Cling to that which is good. Ephesians 5:3-4 "Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." Cling to that which is good.

And clinging to that which is good also means avoiding the opportunity for evil. Romans 13:14: "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Don't put yourself in situations where you are tempted. Don't drive

through parts of town where evil is on display. Don't walk where it is slippery, and you won't be so prone to fall.

If you are tempted to look at pornography on the internet, I have a very practical suggestion for you: Arrange your desk and furniture so that you wife or someone else can always look over your shoulder and see what you are viewing. And if that doesn't work, get rid of your computer and your Internet connection.

*"Yeah, but I need that for my job."* Change jobs. No change is too radical if your mind is enslaved to evil thoughts. Remember what Jesus said about this very subject (Matthew 5:29-30):

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

No measures are too radical to take if you are in bondage to this kind of sin. Evil thoughts will destroy your soul. "For you may be sure of this," Paul says in Ephesians 5:5, "that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

And then he adds this in verse 8:

for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

That is the pathway to a pure mind. There is no *"secret"* to victory in this area. There is no magic remedy, no silver

bullet, that will end the problem for you once and for all. But the answer lies in a commitment to a life of self-control and disciplined thinking.

I beseech you to do these things, Paul says, by the mercies of God. Again, you cannot renew your mind without the enabling grace and strength of the Lord. And my prayer for you is that you will learn to lean on Him for that grace so that you will be genuinely transformed—from the inside out—by the renewing of your mind.