

HEALTHY CHRISTIANS - PART 5

Healthy Minds

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Rom 12:2-3
Subject: How the apostle Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to live
Complements: not conformed to the world
But transformed by the renewing of their minds
Exegetical idea: The apostle Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to not be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.
Homiletical idea: **God wants to transform your mind.**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to give God permission to renew their minds so that they can experience radical transformation.

Introduction

Have you noticed how hard it is for some people to live a healthy Christian life? You say, “Have I noticed that some people find it hard...? I find it hard to live a healthy Christian life! We know all about healthy lifestyles...learning from the example of Jesus to go to the mountain, commune with God, receive wisdom to know when to say YES and when to say NO. We know about healthy finances, putting God first, listening to wise counsel from godly mentors. We know about healthy relationships, asking to be filled with the agape love of God so we can love as Jesus loves, in spite of shortcomings, in spite of failures. We know about healthy bodies, following natural health laws, honoring God with our bodies because we have been redeemed at a great price and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We know all of these things. So why is it so difficult to live what we know? Why is it so difficult to live a healthy Christian life?

The answer is found in our minds. That’s where transformation begins, by the grace of God. And today, as we conclude our series on healthy Christians, we want to talk about healthy

minds, and how you can experience ongoing, radical transformation.

The apostle Paul speaks about transformation in his letter to the Christians in Rome. In the first half of his letter, Paul declares that we are all sinners. There is none that is righteousness, no not one. And Paul tells us that the wages of sin is...death. That's the bad news. But the good news, the Gospel message is this: the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord! We can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Hallelujah. That is good news indeed.

And there, beginning in Romans chapter 12, the apostle Paul gives some practical application. He talks about how to live in the light of the wonderful salvation that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. I invite you to open your Bible with me to Romans 12:1ff. "....."

Paul says, Present yourselves as a living sacrifice. That's better by far than a dead sacrifice. And remember that he's not talking about HOW to be saved, but rather our response to the wonderful salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus. And then Paul gets very practical. He tells us what not to do, and what to do.

First, what not to do. Notice his words in Romans 12:2. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Don't live like the world lives. Can that happen, even after we become Christians? Absolutely. It usually doesn't happen all at once. It's a creeping compromise. So slowly you hardly notice. And the conformity happens because your attention is focused on the things of this world.

Advertisers understand that if they can get your attention, they can change your behavior. Whatever gets your attention, gets you. That's why companies spend millions of dollars creating

brand awareness, bombarding you with pictures of their products. If they can get your attention, they can get you.

When I was 21 years old, I learned the hard way that whatever gets your attention, gets you. I'd just finished my undergraduate studies at Newbold College in England, and I came over to the United States to go snow skiing with my gorgeous American girlfriend (now my wife of 24 years) and her family. They whisked me off to icy New England, and before I could imitate Eugene Meltzner and cry "assistance", I was standing on top of a snow covered mountain. The view was spectacular, as long as you didn't look down the mountain! Now, I'd never skied before, but I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of my girlfriend. You understand what I'm talking about, don't you, men? After all, I did know the basics about snow skiing: stay upright, don't cross your skies, and don't kill yourself! But that was about it. Bodil went first. I thought it might help to at least see someone who knew what she was doing. Then I began to slide down the mountain. After a few seconds, a wave of terror swept over me. I was picking up speed at an alarming rate. Remember, I knew to stay upright, I knew not to cross my skies, I definitely didn't want to kill myself but no one ever told me how to turn or stop! Part way down the mountain, a malicious pine tree leapt out into the middle of the ski slope. On another occasion, in a different setting, I might even had admired that tree. It was, after all, a beautiful pine tree. But at that moment, I could see no beauty in it at all. I just stared at that vicious pine tree in absolute horror. I was transfixed. Mesmerized. In my terror, I completely forgot about the fundamental principle of human nature that we spoke about just a few minutes ago. Do you remember...**WHATEVER GETS YOUR ATTENTION? GETS YOU!** Well, it got me! Wham! As you can see, the collision wasn't fatal, but I did learn an important lesson that day

that every successful advertiser already knows. Whatever gets your attention.....gets you!

The apostle Paul says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world..” And that will only happen if you don’t focus on the things of this world. Some people think that they can focus on the things of this world without conforming to the pattern of this world. But they are only fooling themselves. They are dangerously deceived.

Several years ago, a distinguished gentleman came into my office. He had attended a men’s conference and participated in a workshop on guarding your heart. He told me that he had been caught in the snare of immorality. It started with a few pictures on the Internet. He convinced himself that no one would be harmed. Right or wrong? Wrong. You can’t focus on the things of this world without being conformed to the pattern of this world. Before long, he was visiting immoral chat rooms. Just as an observer, you understand. He didn’t say anything, at first. But the compromise continued. Inappropriate phone conversations. And finally multiple acts of unfaithfulness. At every step of the way, he convinced himself that he could stop at any time with no negative consequences. By the time he came to my office, he had dishonored God privately and publicly, and he had broken his wife’s heart.

Do not fool yourself. If you are going to heed Paul’s counsel to not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, you cannot focus on the things of this world.

But Paul not only tells us what not to do. He also tells us what to do. Let’s read Romans 12:2. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The renewing of your mind leads to transformation. The Greek word translated “be transformed” is the verb *metamorphoomai*, from which we get the English word *metamorphosis*. Radical transformation. Radical change.

And how does the radical transformation occur? Through the renewing of your mind. And more specifically, through the healing of your conscience. Look carefully at Romans 12:2 again. “Do not conform any longer 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.”

We're not just talking here about a healthy intellect. Mental acuity. We're talking about a mind that is fully in tune with the will of God. A mind that is sensitive to spiritual realities. A mind that is so connected to the mind of God that it can be said of us, “We have the mind of Christ.” And when your mind is fully in harmony with the will of God, when your conscience is healed, when your mind is made whole, you will experience radical metamorphosis, radical transformation.

So here is the key question for this morning. We know that we don't want to be conformed to the pattern of the world. That happens by focusing on the things of this world. Because whatever gets your attention, gets you. We know that God wants us to experience radical transformation by the renewing of our minds. But how exactly are our minds renewed?

Someone might say, “Well, if we are conformed to the pattern of this world by focusing on the things of this world, perhaps our minds are renewed by focusing on the things of God.” Several passages of Scripture from the writings of the apostle Paul support that idea. Let's consider a few of them. Phil 4:8. “.....” And don't miss Phil 4:9. Behavior follows focus. Whatever gets your attention, gets you.

Consider also these words of the apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth. 2 Cor 3:18 “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his

likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” We reflect the Lord’s glory by focusing on Him. And by beholding, we are changed! Transformed.

Radical metamorphosis. Our minds are renewed. Our consciences are healed, so we can discern the perfect will of God. Our thoughts are so in tune with the will of God that it can be said of us, “You have the mind of Christ.”

Now someone might be thinking, how long do I need to focus my attention on Jesus in order for my mind to be renewed? What’s the answer? How long? Continually. This radical transformation is not a one time event. It is the work of a lifetime. A daily experience. But you say, “I can’t spend all of my time focusing on Jesus! I have work to do. I have a house to take care of. I have a clients to see. I have assignments to complete.

I know you do. We all have much to do. But listen to this radical thought. Did you know that it is possible to get everything done that God asks you to do and still stay focused on Jesus at the same time?

You can do more than one thing at the same time, can’t you? You exercise and listen to the radio at the same time. You prepare dinner and talk about the events of the day at the same time. You drive your car plan your daily schedule at the same time. I’ve even tried reading a book while I drive. But I don’t do that anymore. It’s too dangerous, especially if the book is really interesting? But you could listen to a tape or a CD and drive at the same time. Right.

Well, if it is possible to process more than one thing at the same time in your mind, then it’s possible to always focus on the Lord no matter what you’re doing. Right? That’s what the Psalmist David was talking about when he said, “I have set the Lord always before me.”

A 17th century lay brother by the name of brother Lawrence practiced the discipline of

always staying focused on the Lord, no matter what he was doing. He actually worked in the kitchen at a religious community, but focused on the Lord as much in the midst of his pots and pans as he did when he knelt to receive communion. His testimony is recorded in a classic work on spiritual life entitled “The Practice of the Presence of God.”

If whatever gets your attention, gets you, then I want to keep my attention on Jesus. Not just once a week, when I come to church for an hour or two, but all through the week. Every day. Every hour. Continually. That’s the secret of a healthy mind. That’s the pathway to a healed conscience and a mind that is fully in harmony with the will of God.

Do you want a healthy mind? Then turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth, with all of their corruption, and the things of earth, with all of their allurements, the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.