

We've been talking for the last couple of months about self-image, and I'd like to continue exploring this subject this month. The attributes we discussed help us identify how our self-image has been shaped by our first birth. Everything we have experienced—and continue to experience—has a significant impact on how we see ourselves and how we interact with the world around us. This is why I spent so much time in the May newsletter discussing the new birth and wrote the following:

"It's critical to recognize that, when we are born again, we are empowered by the Spirit to make distinctions. Isn't this new identity through our second birth the key to seeing ourselves the way God wants us to?"

Our new identity in Christ is how we must begin to see ourselves, because this is how God sees us—not defined by our past, but by what He is able to guide us to be in our future. This is why it's so important to get ourselves in God's Word and learn to see things as He does. Isn't it an amazing blessing that we have the Word of God to bring clarity and transformation to our thinking? This is crucial, because our natural mind tends to distort everything, influenced by how it has been programmed over time. Remember, we mentioned **Ephesians 2:3** last month, where Paul distinguishes how we once:

"...conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

Scripture teaches us that renewal always begins in our minds. **Romans 12:1-2**, a passage we often cite, speaks directly to this truth:

"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. 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."

When we choose to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, we begin to prioritize God's Word over our past experiences, which have so powerfully shaped our self-image. **The key to this sacrifice is identifying what must be surrendered.** We must recognize and pull down strongholds that work against us so we can gain clarity in areas where our thinking contradicts God's Word. Our will—what we ultimately decide to do—is shaped by our experiences, emotions, and memories, all of which influence what we believe. The belief system that develops in us over time is deeply connected to our self-image and shapes what we believe about ourselves, others, and God. Whether those beliefs are true or false, we often assume we're "right." In other words, I might be convinced my thinking is correct—even if it's based on a lie. What you believe is what governs your life; and if that belief is a lie, it still defines the reality you're living by. Jesus spoke to this directly in **Matthew 6:22-23**:

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

I often teach about what I call the **High 5**, which are the processes of our heart: Fixed Beliefs, Perceptions, Assumptions, Attitudes, Expectations. You can see how, when these operate outside the boundaries set by God's Word, they become dangerous to ourselves and others. It was only by becoming like us that God could make us like Him, restoring us to His image. Jesus, the likeness of the invisible God, perfectly reveals the image we were created to bear from the beginning (**Hebrews 2:16-18**).

Here are nine things that have helped me change my self-image. I pray they help you as well:

1. ***I put on truth. (Ephesians 6:14; Ephesians 4:22-24)*** I'm willing to pay the price within myself to discover the real me. This is often the hardest thing for Christians to do.
2. ***I gained an understanding of how my mind is transformed when it's linked to God's Word. (Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14)***
3. ***I refuse to let "handicap thinking" from my natural mind become a permanent barrier.*** For example, I avoid agreeing with things I enjoy if they contradict God's Word.
4. ***I place my self-image on the altar to die so that His image can be formed in me. (2 Corinthians 3:18)***
5. ***I learned that by setting my mind in God's Word puts my failures in their proper perspective.***
6. ***I took deliberate action to change my behavior, once I'd done the work in Point 1.***
7. ***I choose creative challenges to overcome the difficult things causing me to fail.*** This is where biblical fasting comes into play.
8. ***I stopped being easily offended and became more open to constructive criticism.***
9. ***I decided not to live a negative lifestyle, because negativity does nothing to build my faith.***

Many Christians never achieve this **transformation** because they spend their lives trying to blend their personal concepts of God with the truth as revealed by Christ. This mixing does not work—it creates confusion, and the mixture always falls short. Isn't this one of the main reasons why people backslide from God? They've never truly given Him full control of their lives.

Our calling is certain, as confirmed in God's Word. "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." (**2 Corinthians 3:18**)

God bless,

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