

Friday, October 18, 2019—West Michigan Grace Bible Conference—Pauline Neurotheology: What Is It?

Introduction

- Please turn with me to every verse in your King James Bible that uses the word “brain.” There aren’t any. Yet, we do know that we possess a physical organ called the brain.
- It is taken for granted, by most everyone, except scientists, that there is a difference between the mind (immaterial) and the brain (material). This distinction between the physical body/brain and the immaterial mind is known in philosophy as Dualism. In contrast, Materialists believe that humans are merely physical structures possessing no immaterial personhood.
- Brain scans can show us a brain in the process of thinking, but they cannot tell us what thought a person is having.
- Can you think of single spiritual task such as reading God’s word, meditating upon God’s word, or prayer that does not involve the brain? Apart from the brain we cannot relate to/with the physical world. Everything we do, even in the realm of our inner man involves the use of the brain.
- Romans 12:2—instructs us to renew our mind not our brain. Does renewing the mind, according to God’s word impact the brain? These are some of the questions that I want to explore in our study together this evening.
- Many factors have contributed to my desire to teach this study:
 - Why do rightly dividing grace believers, who understand positional truth and their identity in Christ, struggle so badly with minding the things of Spirit and walking after the Spirit and not after the flesh?
 - Why do these same believers have such a hard time believing that what God says about them is true? Many believers function with the mentality that those things are true for other but not for them.
 - In last 2 years, I have been counseling and working with saved men who understand the doctrine who are struggling badly with addictions to pornography.
 - Many others who understand the doctrine are full of care, anxious, or depressed. Others feel the need to be perfect or are addicted to people pleasing.
 - I Thessalonians 2:13—is telling someone that they just don’t believe this verse really an answer to their problems and/or struggles?
- What is going on here? What are we missing? Does all of this just result in a new form of grace legalism or worse grace pretending? Struggling and wrestling with these questions has been the impetus for what I am going to teach on this evening. I and others who I have spoken to about this topic privately have benefited from the perspective that I want to share with you this evening.

- Acknowledge Craig and Kari's impact and help.
- For organization purposes, my study this evening will break down Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2

- *And be not conformed to this world*—this is a negative phrase, it is instructing believers what “not” to be. Paul does not want believers to be “conformed to this world.”
- The verb translated “conformed” appears one other time in the Greek text of the New Testament supporting the KJB. The Greek word carries the following meaning “to conform one's self (i.e. one's mind and character) to another's pattern.”
 - I Peter 1:14—“not fashioning yourselves according to”
- The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) offers the following definition for the root word conform: “to form, shape, or fashion according to some pattern, model, or instruction; to make of the same form or character, to make like.” The OED gives Romans 12:2 in the Wycliffe Bible from 1382 as an example of this use of the word.
 - “And nyle 3e be confoormed, or maad lyk, to this world.”
- Romans 12:2—Paul does not want believers to be fashioning themselves according to the world. Believers are to be of a different character than the world.
- Getting technical just for a moment, the Greek verb translated “conformed” is in the present tense and the imperative mood which means that Paul's instructions are a present command. In the present, Paul does not want believers to be conformed to this world.
- The voice, however, is either middle or passive. This means that in terms of being conformed to this world one can either be actively engaged in the process or passively engaged in the process. The bottom line is this, conformity to the world is happening regardless of whether you are actively practicing or not.
- Ephesians 2:1-3—each and everyone us came into this world with the same default setting to walk “according to the course of this world.” According to these verses, we are good at it and it comes naturally to us.
- Colossians 2:11—even though there is nothing wrong with our inner man until the day of redemption do we still reside in a body of flesh that is subject to sin and the course of this world? Yes.
- *but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*—how are we to avoid conformity with the world? By being “transformed.” The Greek word translated “transformed” is the word

metamorphoō which means “to change into another form.” This is where we get our English word metamorphosis which means:

- The action or process of changing in form, shape, or substance
- A complete change in the appearance, circumstances, condition, or character of a person
- We see this in the process whereby a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. Conformity to the world is combated by transformation. One is going to either be conformed or transformed, there is no middle ground.
- How is this transformation accomplished? “*By the renewing of the mind.*” This means that transformation/metamorphosis is brought about by the process of renewing the mind i.e., they are not the same. The one brings about the other.
- The renewing of the mind is an immaterial process.
- All this leads to an interesting question, what exactly is being transformed by the renewing of your mind? Well, as we saw this morning in my first study there is nothing wrong with your inner man even our former heart issues have been rectified via our justification. God the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts by faith.
- So, what is left to be transformed? I believe that it's your brain. I believe that when we renew our minds it transforms and rewires our brains. I believe that our brains stand in the way of having the life of Christ that is in us be manifested in our mortal flesh.
 - II Corinthians 4:10-11—the Holy Spirit is seeking to manifest the life of Christ that has been put within us in our bodies in our mortal flesh. I believe that our brains are the biggest barriers that we have in terms of manifesting the life of Christ.
- “*My Hypothesis*—spiritual realities are, necessarily, experienced by and dependent on the brain until the day of redemption.” (Holcomb)
- Our brains have been formed, literally wired, by every sensory experience and your reaction to them since you were born.
- The Problem:
 - The natural man automatically follows the course charted by the enemy (Eph. 2:1-3).
 - Our physically bodies are carnal and sold under sin (Rom. 7:14).
 - The brain is a part of our physical bodies (Observational Fact).
 - Therefore, our brains, the main conduit through which we interact and relate is carnal and sold under sin.

- Romans 7:14-23—is the flesh the Bible’s word for the brain?
- The brain has been wired by the lie program through all our sensory experiences to follow the course of this world (Eph. 2:1-3)
 - Talk about the brain scans of the Catholic Nun & the Buddhist Monk. The flesh likes religion.
- We were enemies in our minds by wicked works (Col. 1:21). Acting in accordance with wicked works solidified brain circuits which formed habits and addictions.
- Even though believers have been made perfect in Christ, we don’t possess two natures struggling against each other, our brains are still sending us deceptive brain messages that are contrary to the truth of God.

The Battle for the Brain

- What if we viewed Romans 6, 7, and 8 as the battle for the brain?
- Romans 6—Who you are in Christ; Building Habits of Righteousness
 - Rom. 6:1-10—understanding our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection
 - *Know*—we have to know about who we are in Christ. (Rom. 6:3, 6, 9)
 - Rom. 6:11-23—forming habits of righteousness
 - *Reckon*—account that what the scriptures say about our new identity is true. (Rom. 6:11)
 - *Yield*—yielding our members including our brains as “instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19)
 - *Obey*—“obeying from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered you.” (Rom. 6:17)
- Romans 7—The Enslavement of the Flesh (Brain)
 - Rom. 7:14—the flesh needs a new master (i.e. our renewed mind)
 - Rom. 7:23—the law of sin resides in our members.
 - While we are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, until the day of redemption we reside in a carnal physical body, controlled by physical processes and impulses in our physical brain. The physical, carnal, part of us has been sold to the master of sin, the sinful condition. Upon salvation we have been given an undefiled spirit that

can relate to God. The Holy Spirit within us understands and desires obedience to “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).

- The renewed mind is to be the new master of the carnal brain and transform it into a servant of righteousness.
- Romans 8—The Hope of the Spirit
 - Rom. 8:2, 9—believers are in Christ and in the Spirit.
 - Rom. 8:23—at the redemption of the body/brain will no longer be a barrier in terms of manifesting the inward life of God the Holy Spirit in our mortal flesh.
 - To the extent we renew our minds thereby transforming our brains we can overcome this barrier now.
 - Rom. 8:26-27—the Holy Spirit advocates for God’s truth in your life.

Practical Application

- The main reason people don’t “see results” in their edification is they don’t know what to expect. Moreover, believers don’t know the process or how the process works. The transformation process is just that a process and takes time and persistence.
- I Timothy 4:7—believers are going to have to exercise themselves unto Godliness.
- Philippians 2:12—this process requires work and effort on the part of the individual believer.
- I Thessalonians 2:13—is not a magic pill that one can swallow and be fixed.
- When one renews their mind, meditates upon God’s word, minds the things of the spirit, and acts upon God’s word (i.e., yield their members as servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:19)) by faith; the brain is transformed thereby establishing and solidifying new pathways and/or circuits in our brains that are tuned into the truth of God’s word.
- The body of science supporting neuroplasticity over the last few years is massive. Studies prove that changes take place in the structure of the brain as the result of thinking and repeated action. What we think and what we do will determine what these changes will be produced.
 - [Neuroplasticity Video](#)
- Our thoughts combined with our actions are the raw materials, the ingredients, the instructions necessary to rewire our brains. Your brain is “plastic”, the only question is from where it will receive the instructions for how it changes, and how it is wired. Recall from above, the conformity to the world is our automatic default setting.

- AA, Drug rehab, Meditation—people can beautify their flesh (pretty flesh) to a degree through these methods but they can never manifest the life of Christ in their mortal flesh apart the word of God and the internal ministry of the God the Holy Spirit.
- This is what we want as believers. We want the life of Christ that is in us to be worked out through us and manifested in our mortal flesh.
- Romans 12:2—renewing the mind (our thinking process) and obeying the directives of scripture, transforms our brains and, thus, facilitates godly character thereby proving what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (this is the edification process). Renewing the mind forms habits of righteousness, which are the building blocks of godly character.
- As saints we don't have to let our deceptive brain message run our lives. WE ARE NOT OUR BRAINS!
 - *Deceptive Brain Message*—any false or inaccurate thought or any unhelpful or distracting impulse, urge, or desire that takes you away from your true identity of who you are in Christ.
- Deceptive brain messages (thoughts, urges, desires)—Uncomfortable physical or emotional sensations (including cravings)—Habitual unhealthy responses—Momentary relief of distress. (Schwartz & Gladding, 11)
 - This cycle is how habits and addictions are formed. Walking this pathway repeatedly engrains it into our brains.
- Romans 8:26-27—Meanwhile, God the Holy Spirit is constantly advocating for God's truth in our lives. Since we have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands and cut away from the body of sins of the flesh, we no longer need to be slaves to our deceptive brain messages.
- How do we combat deceptive brain messages and renew our minds?
 - *Revalue*—learning to look at everything in your life from the perspective of being perfect in Christ.
 - *Relabel*—being mindful of and catching deceptive brain messages or rogue thoughts as soon as possible and not allowing your mind to wonder aimlessly. Identifying thoughts as true or part of the lie program.
 - *Reframe*—we can't stop our brains from presenting us with thoughts, but we can decide what we do with them. We don't have to listen to rogue thoughts and deceptive brain messages but can choose rather to live in accordance with the truth of who we are in Christ.

- *Refocus*—make intentional choices that are in line with our true identify and purpose as believers. When we respond in faith to God’s word through obedient action we transform or rewire our brains in line with God’s truth. (Holcomb)

Conclusion

- *that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*—the purpose and intent of this process is that God’s will is proved in our lives.
- The meaning of the English word “prove” is very important in this verse. According to the OED the word “prove” means:
 - “to put (a person or thing) to the test; to test the genuineness or qualities of; (Sc.) to test by tasting, to sample.”
 - I Thessalians 5:21—is given as an example for this usage by the OED. The same Greek word is translated “prove” in Romans 12:2.
 - I Samuel 17:39—David had not “proved” Saul’s armor. We need to be proving God’s will in our lives.
- When we renew our minds and are transformed we “prove” or “put to the test” or “test the genuine or qualities” of God’s will in our lives. When we do so we find God’s will to be good, acceptable, and perfect. These are NOT degrees of the will of God that we go out and prove in the sense of “to establish as true; to make certain; to demonstrate the truth of by evidence or argument.” (OED)
- Rather through the transformation process that is brought about by the renewing of our minds the good, acceptable, and perfect nature of God’s will is confirmed in our experienced.
- We don’t need to kill the good in our lives by seeking to chase down the perfect. Good, acceptable, and perfect are adjectives that describe the will of God that is proved within us when we renew our minds and are transformed.
- II Corinthians 10:5—what we are talking about here is “Pauline Neurotheology or Building Godly Character One Thought at a Time.” (Holcomb)

Works Cited

Holcomb, Craig. *Pauline Neurotheology: Building Godly Character One Thought at a Time*.

Schwartz, Jeffery M. and Rebecca Gladding. *You Are Not Your Brain: The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life*. New York, NY: Avery, 2011.