

Title: Renewal is More Than Skin Deep  
Date: September 19, 2021  
Subject: Renewal of the spirit is to be day by day  
Scripture: Luke 19:1 – 10; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:16; Romans 12:1, 2; Psalm 51

It took a little digging, but I managed to find all sorts of beauty products that promise to “renew.” There are items for skin care, anti-aging, face cream, anti-wrinkle, nutrient mist, stuff with peptides and collagen in them, a veritable potpourri. Not that I'm in the market.

There are also “renew” products for household cleaning, restoring wood floors, freshening the air and more. Hopefully, people don't get confused. A little dab of wood renewer to the elbows...Might stiffen them up and bring out the grain...

Today we begin a sermon series called Renew. God is the God of the living and not the dead. He's interested in doing new things in us. It's not dependent on moving from one season to another, turning the calendar to a New Year, a change of life circumstances, trials, disappointments or relationship difficulties. The things of life can be signal a time for renewal. The most basic indicator is simply because we're alive and therefore need to move into deeper and more meaningful relationships with him.

Our bodies are the material shell housing our immaterial, the real us. We're going to treat soul and spirit as one because the call for renewal affects the totality of the inner person. Sometimes it's referred to as the heart. It includes the mind with its faculties of reasoning and understanding, affections and emotions. It's the moral aspect. God constructed us with this special inner person so we can relate to him. It's our responsibility to be good stewards and take care of that which God has entrusted to us.

#### 1. The first renewal – salvation. Luke 19:1 - 10

One of the more delightful stories in the Bible is Zacchaeus. He was viewed by most of his contemporaries as a traitorous crook. The reason - he collected taxes for the despised Roman government and had become wealthy as a result. He probably was skimming money two ways - charging people more than they owed and shorting the Romans on what had been collected. Even worse he was a chief tax collector, which meant he had people under him...more opportunity to get his hands on money.

One day he heard Jesus was coming to his town. Zacchaeus was curious and wanted to see Jesus. One problem - he was short, shorter than the rest of the crowd. He couldn't see Jesus. No problem. The little guy was resourceful. What you ain't got in height you make up for by climbing a tree. He got a bird's eye view. All was going well until Jesus spotted him. The crowd followed Jesus' eyes and saw the horrible creature whom they hoped Jesus would rebuke. Instead, Jesus invited himself over to the tax collector's house for supper. The unmitigated gall. The crowd hated this and began to complain about Jesus going to the home of a sinner.

Something profound happened at that meal. We don't know what Jesus said or how he acted but we can be sure his words and his actions were filled with love and truth.

Read Luke 19:8 - 10.

Zaccheus was changed. He proclaimed he'd donate half his wealth to the poor and if he'd cheated anyone, he'd pay them back four times the amount. These actions demonstrated a changed heart. How do we know? Jesus said so and we can't get better authority than him. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house." Jesus added his purpose in coming to earth was to seek and to save what was lost. This means the man was saved. His spirit was changed. We can put it in terms of him placing his trust in Jesus to save him from sins and give him the gift of eternal life.

This is where renewal begins. All people need to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior. A person needs to admit they've sinned against God, can't save themselves, Jesus is the one and only way to provide salvation through his death on the cross. People need to repent, turn from what they've been trusting in to get to heaven and turn to God. Then their spirit is awakened. They're no longer dead in their sins and living with a spirit being crushed by the devil. They become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), are re-created as they've experienced the new birth. If you haven't come to that place, that's the first step in being renewed.

Then what? Have we reached full capacity? No. As I just said, that's the beginning.

## 2. Regular renewal

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:16 to take a deeper look at a verse that was part of the Scripture read earlier. The apostle Paul shared that difficulty, trials and sufferings weren't the dominating factor of his life. Instead, the chief thing was what God was doing. Reread 2 Corinthians 4:16.

Paul wasn't caught up in any and all the externals of life. By that I don't mean his physical appearance. He wasn't concerned about the stuff happening to him. His focus was on the inner person, the place where God was doing his re-creation.

Some people brush off the need to be renewed. They say, "That's just the way I am. That's how I roll." They're okay with their rough edges. They seek to justify how they speak, act and respond to people and situations. The real question is: "Is that how the Lord wants us to speak, act and respond? Is he okay with how we roll?" I know, that's two questions.

Please go back one chapter to chapter 3 and verse 18. Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Renewal is conveyed through the keyword - transformed. The same word is used to describe Jesus' transfiguration before his disciples. He was changed from being God housed in a human body to a temporary revelation of the magnitude of his deity. It was a one-time event. Jesus returned to his pre-transfiguration form.

Our transformation is different from that of Jesus. The verb tense indicates it's an ongoing transformation – we are being transformed. Being renewed is something that happens day by day. It's a daily thing. Just as each day we need new protein, carbs, etc., for our physical renewal, so for our spiritual renewal we need more and new faith, grace, hope, strength, wisdom and the rest of God's provisions.

The goal of the transformation is becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. We are to be developing and maturing. God never intended for us to be stagnant in our spiritual lives. The NIV says it's being done

with ever increasing glory. Other translations say it's going from one glory to another glory. The idea is what we're experiencing in our spiritual lives is changing and will be eventually replaced by what is experienced when we're with Jesus in heaven.

The method for our renewal/transformation is given in the beginning of the verse. It speaks of reflecting the Lord's glory. As we look at Jesus who is the Light, some of what we see reflects off us to other people. We also absorb as we're imperfect mirrors as his light is converted to heat.

It's not a quick glance at Jesus, "Oh yeah, there he is." It's a steady gaze, keeping both eyes on him, watching him like a hawk. Hawks can see four to five times farther than we can. That's not the part that fits with keeping our focus on Jesus. We aren't supposed to see how far we can get away from him and still see him. The applicable part of their vision is a hawk's ability to see clearly is eight times better than humans. This is the kind of intent focus we should have.

It's often said, and we've all seen the truthfulness of this statement, "Children often become like parents." They'll use the same words and the same tone of voice in expressing those words. They'll adopt the same mannerisms and gestures. They have the same sense of humor. They use the same approach to the situations of life. It's because kids spend so much time around their parents that they absorb what they see and hear, the examples, the lives of parents. It's almost like they can't help it. Sure, there are some who rebel, but even at that, they'll still pick up some of their parents' mannerisms, vocabulary and idiosyncrasies.

I read of a "Christian" group who taught that their followers should spend time looking at a picture or sculpture of Christ on the cross. The idea was to intently stare for long periods of time which would lead to the marks Jesus had on his body appearing on the bodies of those people who looked. Kind of strange.

We don't look at Jesus to get his scars or a physical likeness. We look at him to get the inner spiritual resemblance. We need more of God in our lives. We're to look at him - his person, his teachings, his life, his work. We're to think about Jesus, contemplate him. We're spend time with him to get to know him better.

Please go back to the previous book of Romans and land in chapter 12. Read Romans 12:1, 2. There's a ton of meat here but we'll zero in on the first part of v. 2. A contrast is given. It tells us one thing not to do and one thing to do. The thing not to do is conform to the world's pattern meaning the world system opposed to God. The reason is because it's evil, corrupt and anti-God. It strives to live by its own rules which are the rules of the devil. It has little room for God.

People in the world system seek to engage whatever pleasures come around. It's readily visible in our culture which is based on pleasing whatever desires and appetites a person has. People in the world may seek some goodness but don't want to measure up to godly living which is striving to live according to God's Word and principles. They don't readily admit to or repent of doing evil -- lying or slandering someone -- unless pressured to do so. Most seek an excuse for the way they live.

The thing we're to do is be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Transformation/renewal of the inner person is again presented as the goal. The process is to have our mind renewed.

The question we need to ask is: how do we renew our minds? First, we need to have firmly implanted in our mind that our mind is incredibly important. As the commercial for UNCF, which for over 75 years has raised money for African American college student scholarships and to support historically Black colleges and universities states, “A mind is terrible thing to waste but a wonderful thing to invest in.”

God wants us to invest in our minds. In the financial world, you only get a return from where you’ve invested. You can't get one on something you haven’t put money into. It's like me demanding from Bill Gates, “I want dividends on my Microsoft stock.” Good luck Chuck! Pretty hard to do since I never bought any.

The same is true with our minds. We need to put something in in order to have something of value there. We’re to store God's Word in our minds where it will reap amazing dividends. It has the power to transform us. There are times we come across direct commands or examples of biblical people that will make an immediate impact we notice. There are other times when the teaching, commands and examples seem to slide into the cracks and crannies of life...but they're still there, part of the undergirding.

It's like building a house. There are important things underneath, that aren’t seen, that add to the strengthening and stability of the house. The same is true with our spiritual lives. There are some things we don't completely understand but they're helping to strengthen us and give us stability.

It's not about self-improvement but God-improvement. However, he does expect us to be active in the process as he gives commands about what we’re to do. Other Scriptures speak of being made new in the inner person, in the attitudes of our minds (Ephesians 4:22 - 24; Colossians 3:5 - 14). We’re to take off the old self which is being corrupted. Get rid of living according to the former way of life which was under the control of the devil and sinful desires. We do so even as we would take off old dirty clothes.

The record for wearing the same jeans goes to a Canadian college student. Josh Le wore his 330 times over 15 months and one week...without washing them. He said he did a smell test. If they failed, he'd put them in the freezer overnight or hang them for a few hours. At the end of his experiment, his textiles professor tested the jeans for bacteria, Josh washed them, wore them for 13 days and the jeans were retested. The same amount of bacteria was found each time and deemed to not be harmful. The professor thought washing once in 15 months was too long and people shouldn’t wash after every wearing but less often to extend the jean’s life and help the environment. Levi Strauss suggests washing their product once a month to save on energy and water (source:abcnews.go.com/US/canadian-student-josh-le-year-washing-jeans/story?id=12722442). Not sure it really helps the environment around those who don’t wash, if you catch my drift.

Most of us would have burned or discarded the jeans. The problem is we hang on to the stuff of the old life and it definitely grows bacteria that isn’t good. We’re called upon to get rid of the old clothes. In their place we’re to put on the new clothing of God's wardrobe, constantly be putting it on to replace the old we're taking off. This is because we’ve put on the new self, become a new creation in Christ Jesus. We continue to clothe ourselves daily because we’re in the process of being renewed.

Sometimes we need to be renewed because we've listened to the world's voice echoing the devil's message: "You have nothing going for you, you're not worth much, you can't do anything, you're worthless."

We need to counter with what God says. He declares, "You're my dearly loved children. I gave my Son for you. You're valuable to me." There's much more we could add, but these statements pretty much say it all.

### 3. Renewal when sin.

There are times when the renewal of our spirit is necessitated by something we've done...some sin we've committed. The good news is we can cry out to God. We touched on this during our study of The Disciples' Prayer. We have the promise that when we sin we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, who pleads our case to the Father (1 John 2:1).

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had one of his best friends murdered to try to cover up his sin. It took a while and the intervention of a friend, but David finally gets to the place where he is ready to admit his sin to the Lord. This is found in Psalm 51. He's heartbroken and longs to be made right with God. He desperately pleads for mercy, forgiveness and that his sins would be washed away. He states that he has a knowledge of God's desires meaning he knows what he did was wrong and didn't fulfill what God wanted him to do. He repents. He desires to be clean and that God would not turn away from him.

Read Psalm 51:10- 12. There are several related words to renew. He calls upon the Lord to create in him a pure heart. Create, really re-create. He wants God to renew a steadfast spirit within him. And he asks God to restore to him enjoy of salvation. Create. Renew. Restore.

The condition of our spirit effects our connection with our creator. Are we heartbroken over sin? Are we tired of the dirt of sin? Does it cause us to grieve, mourn and wail as it says in the book of James? Do we want God to renew us? Do we cry out for God to renew a steadfast spirit within us (Psalm 51:10). Sometimes he has to use some of his cleaning products to scrub away the grime.

### 4. Ultimate renewal

In heaven we won't need to keep being renewed. We'll be like Jesus. Sin won't be an issue. We'll be as new as we'll ever be. "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Back to 2 Corinthians 4:16. Reread.

Alexander MacLaren said, "If you want to change your characters, and God knows they all need it, change the deep convictions of your mind; and get hold, as living realities, of the great truths of Christ's Gospel. If you and I really believed what we say we believe, that Jesus Christ has died for us, and lives for us, and is ready to pour out upon us the gift of His Divine Spirit, and wills that we should be like Him, and holds out to us the great and wonderful hopes and prospects of an absolutely eternal life of supreme and serene blessedness at His right hand, should we be, could we be, the sort of people that most of us are? It is not the much that you say you believe that shapes your character...Truth professed has no transforming power; truth received and fed upon can revolutionize a man's whole character" (message on Romans 12:2).