

No Longer Waiting For The New Heart

Texts:

John 10:10; Romans 7:15-25; Romans 8:1-11; Romans 12:1-2; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26-27

Opening: The Question I Could Not Answer Cheaply

Kyle helped us see that the Church exists to make disciples of Jesus who live all of life **for** the glory of God. I want to press into that word **for**, because no one can live for the glory of God while remaining disconnected from the glory of God. *We live for His glory only as we learn to live in His glory.*

The glory of God is the radiance of His goodness, love, beauty, and life. Jesus says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). So this morning I want to ask why discipleship matters, why the mind must be renewed, and why formation is not optional. To answer that, we need what I am calling a right anthropology. We need to understand what kind of creature Christ, the Great Physician, came to heal.

God is good, and in Him there is life.

When God created humanity, He created us with the capacity to aim for the Good that He is, so that in Him we might have life. I have been thinking about this as a father. When my son was younger, much of my work was to keep him safe through imperatives: do not touch that, do not run there, stay close, listen to my voice. Those imperatives were good. They preserved life.

But I do not want my son to remain a child forever. I want him to mature until he can see the good, love the good, aim at the good, and become good by grace. That is why his question mattered so much: *“Dad, why is it that even when I know what is good, I still sometimes do and choose what is bad, almost as if I cannot help it?”*

As a father, I was glad he could ask that question. In ministry, I have seen people lose even that sensitivity. So I could not tell my son, “Do not worry. Just try harder.”

That would not be the gospel.

If I only tell him to try harder, I may leave him with imperatives, but not with the glory Christ came to give. I may leave him with instruction, but not with new life.

I often tell you that I do not teach you anything I would not teach my own sons. I do not merely want to tell my sons, “This is good, and this is bad.” I want to teach them how to aim for the good and do it. And that is what I want for us as a church: not spiritual childhood, but the mind of Christ within.

I am not only answering my son. I am answering as a father in the room of the Church.

1. The Compass: What Kind Of Person Did God Make?

So the first thing I had to tell my son was this: you were made to aim at God.

Genesis says, **“Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness”** (Genesis 1:26). Humanity is created with dignity, vocation, and direction. We are creatures made in the image of God and called toward the likeness of God.

That is our telos. We were made for communion with God, participation in His life, and priestly care for creation. Humanity was made for glory. This is why Romans 3:23 matters. Paul says, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). He does not merely say we have fallen short of moral improvement. He says we have fallen short of glory.

That means glory was the aim.

In Romans 12, Paul says, **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”** (Romans 12:2). In English, the word “mind” can sound thin. We hear thoughts, opinions, ideas. But Paul is speaking about the **nous**: the mind’s eye, the inward faculty by which we perceive, attend, discern, aim, and move toward the good.

Think of the nous like the compass of the soul. It is not merely a database of facts. A database can store information, but it cannot love the good or aim toward life. The nous is the faculty by which we perceive the Good, aim toward Him, and move toward life.

We were made to see the Good, aim at the Good, and live in the Good who is God.

2. The Battery: Why God’s Imperative Was Good

The second thing I had to tell him was this: God’s “no” is never against your life when God is guarding you from death.

The Fall begins with the misreading of God’s imperative. The serpent asks, **“Did God actually say?”** (Genesis 3:1). What was given as instruction for life begins to appear as restriction. What was given as formation begins to appear as deprivation.

Parents, have you ever seen this with your children? A toddler sees something shiny on the floor, maybe something dangerous, and thinks, “That looks good.” A father says, “Do not eat that.” To the child, the imperative may feel like deprivation. It may feel as though the father is withholding joy. But the father is not withholding life. He is preserving life.

So it was in Eden. God’s imperative was not arbitrary restriction. It was life-giving instruction. It was love tutoring humanity toward life.

But before the hand reaches for the fruit, the nous has already begun to darken. The mind’s eye no longer sees God clearly. His word no longer appears as life. Life apart from God begins to seem possible. Then the will becomes divided. Desire becomes disordered.

This is why Scripture speaks of sin as missing the mark. Sin is not merely bad behavior. Sin is aiming at glory apart from God and missing. The compass is wounded. We still move, still desire, still choose, but we begin moving in the wrong direction.

So when my son asked why he knows the good and still sometimes chooses the bad, I had to tell him the truth: *this is the wound of Adam in us. We aim, but miss. The mind's eye is darkened, the will is divided, desire is scattered, and our nature is wounded.*

3. The X-Ray: Romans 7 Is Diagnosis, Not Destiny

Then I had to tell him this: the struggle you are naming is real, but it is not your destiny.

Romans 7 gives voice to my son's question. Paul says, **"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing"** (Romans 7:19). That sounds very close to, "Dad, why, though I know what is good, do I still choose what is bad, almost as if I cannot help it?"

But we have to be careful how we receive that passage. Romans 7 is often mentioned in a way that leaves people thinking we are simply stuck. We hear Paul say, "I do what I do not want," and assume the Christian life is a long resignation to inner contradiction.

Romans 7 is like an X-ray. It shows the fracture, but it is not permission to remain broken. Paul does not hand us the X-ray and say, "Well, this is just who you are." He cries out, **"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Romans 7:24). And the answer comes immediately: **"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 7:25).

Then Romans 8 opens with the new covenant announcement: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1). Notice the word now. Paul is not only speaking about a future verdict at the resurrection, though that is gloriously true. He is announcing a present reality for those who are in Christ. He says **"the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death"** (Romans 8:2). John says the same thing: **"God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life"** (1 John 5:11-12). Not merely will have life one day, but has life now in the Son. So Romans 7 is not hopelessness, and Romans 8 is not only future comfort. It is present deliverance, present life, and present freedom by the Spirit.

Even in ordinary creaturely life, we know change is possible. A person can exercise and change the body. A person can study and gain knowledge. We can read books like *Atomic Habits* and learn how repeated practices shape behavior. There is wisdom there. Habits can be formed. Skills can be learned. To be a creature means, in part, that we can change.

But Paul is speaking about something deeper than behavior management.

If the wound reaches the heart, then the healing must reach the heart. He is speaking about the renewal of the inner person, the renovation of the heart, the transformation of the nous (mind).

So I could not tell my son, "Try harder," because Paul does not leave us with "try harder." Paul brings us from Romans 7 into Romans 8, from bondage into the Spirit, from the cry for deliverance into the life of Christ.

4. The Guardrails And The Engine: Why Imperatives Are Good But Not Final

Then I had to tell him why I cannot parent him only by guardrails, and why God did not save His people only by guardrails.

This is why the imperatives of God matter. I want to keep that word: **imperatives**. We often speak about commandments, and Scripture does speak that way, but “commandments” can sound to our ears merely judicial: law, violation, penalty, courtroom. But God’s word is also instruction, teaching, direction, the way of life.

Psalms 19 says, **“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul”** (Psalm 19:7), and **“the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes”** (Psalm 19:8). The imperatives of God are good. They tutor, guard, instruct, and preserve.

Think of guardrails on a mountain road. They are good. If the road is icy and the car begins to slide, the guardrails may keep you from going over the cliff. But guardrails cannot make a broken engine drive up the mountain.

The old covenant was good and glorious. It oriented the people toward life, and for that reason it was truly glorious. But it also revealed the wound it could not finally heal, because healing does not come merely from knowing the right instructions.

Point: The imperatives of God can guard us from death, but only the grace of God can make us alive.

What we need is not less than instruction, but more than instruction. We need a new heart. The Psalmist asks, **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me”** (Psalm 51:10). Ezekiel promises, **“I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”** (Ezekiel 36:26). Jeremiah says, **“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts”** (Jeremiah 31:33).

What David asked for, Ezekiel promised, and Christ gives.

The tragedy would be to live with the New Covenant in our midst, while acting as though we are still waiting for the new heart, still stuck in an Old Covenant posture.

5. Milk, Meat, And Maturity: What I Want For My Son

Then I had to tell him what I want for him as a young man: not milk forever, but maturity.

Children need imperatives. Children need tutors. Children need guardians. Children need words from the outside because they are not yet mature enough to move toward the good naturally. Those words are good. They preserve life. But milk is good for babies, and milk is not the goal of human life.

Paul tells the Corinthians, **“I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it”** (1 Corinthians 3:2). Hebrews says, **“You need milk, not solid food”** (Hebrews 5:12).

But then Hebrews tells us what maturity looks like: **“Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil”** (Hebrews 5:14).

That is the issue of the nous. Maturity means the faculty of discernment has been trained. The mind’s eye is not only informed; it is healed and exercised. The person is no longer a spiritual child without teeth, unable to receive meat. The person has matured in Christ and can discern good and evil.

This is what I want for my son. I do not want him merely to know my rules. I want him to become the kind of young man who can see the good, love the good, aim at the good, and do the good. I want the imperatives that once guarded him from the outside to become wisdom formed inside of him. I want him abiding in God who is Good.

And church, this is what I want for us.

The evil one would gladly have Christians remain children: always needing external management, always negotiating the imperative, always asking how close we can get to death without dying, always hearing God’s word as restriction rather than life. He would gladly have us interact with God as though the new covenant had not come.

But Christ did not come to keep us in spiritual childhood. When we are joined to Him, we do not merely receive a new set of instructions. We enter His death and resurrection. We are born again. We receive the Spirit. We begin to walk in newness of life.

This is what I had to tell my son. Not, “You know the good and choose the bad, so simply try harder.” But, **“Son, Christ has come to heal the part of us that sees the good, aims for the good, and moves toward the good.”**

Paul says, **“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind”** (Romans 12:2). He prays that **“the eyes of your hearts”** would be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). He says that we are being transformed **“from one degree of glory to another”** (2 Corinthians 3:18). He says, **“We have the mind of Christ”** (1 Corinthians 2:16). But this renewal is not simply the accumulation of Christian information. We should learn. Scripture teaches us. Doctrine matters. But information alone cannot raise the dead.

This is where Romans 8 gives us another word. Paul speaks of the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit. This is the **phronema**: *the settled posture, disposition, and orientation of the inner person*. The nous is the compass of the soul. The phronema is the direction the whole life is oriented toward.

Paul says, **“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace”** (Romans 8:6). This is new covenant life. Christ does not merely give us more imperatives from the outside. He gives us His Spirit, renews the nous, and reorients the whole person until the mind set on the flesh gives way to the mind set on the Spirit.

6. The Forest: What True Freedom Is

And I had to tell him that freedom is not walking in any direction he wants.

Imagine being lost in a dense forest with a broken compass. In one sense, you are free. You can walk north, south, east, west, or any direction you want. No one is stopping you. But if you do not know the way home, your options are not freedom. They are only more ways to remain lost.

True freedom is not the ability to walk in any direction. True freedom is having the compass healed so you can walk the path that leads home.

Our culture often teaches us that freedom means endless options. You can feel this even in something as ordinary as opening Netflix. Thousands of choices are in front of you, and somehow you are not freer; you are more restless, more distracted, less able to choose. That is a small picture of a larger reality: if the nous is darkened and desire is disordered, more options do not heal us. They only give us more ways to miss the good.

So let us stop calling distraction freedom. Freedom is not doing whatever we want. Freedom is being healed until we naturally want the will of God.

But now we have to ask the honest question: how is this healed in us? If the nous is darkened, if the will is divided, if desire is disordered, if the heart itself is wounded, how does the mind set on the flesh become the mind set on the Spirit?

The answer is not that we renovate the heart by ourselves. A wounded heart cannot finally repair itself. A heart of stone does not slowly decide to become flesh. This is why the prophets did not merely promise better instructions. Ezekiel says God Himself will act: **“I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”** (Ezekiel 36:26). Jesus speaks of the same gift when He tells Nicodemus, **“Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”** (John 3:3).

So the healing begins as gift. We are born anew. We receive the Spirit. The life of Christ is given to us. John says, **“Whoever has the Son has life”** (1 John 5:12). Not merely will have life one day, but **has life** now in the Son. *Then that life is nourished, trained, and matured. The new heart is not an idea we admire. It is a life we learn to walk in.*

This is why the practices of the Church matter. They are not attempts to earn the new heart. They are the places where the new heart is nourished. Scripture retrains our sight. Repentance turns us back toward the Good. Worship reorders our love. Obedience strengthens healed desire. Communion with Christ feeds the life He has already given.

7. The Inventory: Am I Walking In Newness?

This also means the healing is not private. Christ gives us new life and then nourishes that life in His Body, the Church. So this is where we make an inventory.

1. How am I interacting with the Bible?

Do I receive Scripture only as an external command, or as the healing speech of the Father who is renewing my mind?

2. How am I interacting with Christ?

Do I think of Him only as the One who forgives me after I fail, or as the One who gives me new life and teaches me to walk in it?

3. How am I interacting with the Church?

Is the Church merely an event I attend, or the Body of Christ where my sight, will, desires, and loves are being healed?

4. Am I walking in the newness Christ has already given?

Or am I cruising through life, hoping that someday the promises of the new covenant will become true for me?

These questions are not meant to shame us. They are meant to wake us up to the gift we have been given. So let us not live as though we are still waiting for the heart Christ has already given. Let us receive the word of God as life. Let us stop calling distraction freedom. Let us bring our divided wills, our disordered desires, and our darkened sight to Christ.

The gospel is not only that sinners are forgiven. The gospel is that fallen humanity is healed: our sight restored, our will freed, our desires reordered, and our life gathered into the Kingdom of Christ, where grace makes us whole.

Go, then, and walk in the newness Christ has given.

Compressed Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, true Image of the Father, have mercy on us. Heal our darkened sight, our divided will, and our disordered desires. Teach us to receive Your word as life and Your imperatives as instruction unto glory.

Make us whole by Your grace. Renew our minds. Reorient our hearts. Teach us to walk now in the life of the new covenant. Amen.