

ROMANS 12:1-2 "Be Transformed By The Renewing Of Your Mind"

As I mentioned last week the first eleven chapters of Romans addresses the doctrines of salvation and the redemption found in Christ for both Jew and Gentile; the whole world. In Theological circles this is known as Soteriology, the study of salvation in Christ.

But one of the things we learn about Paul's teaching is that he never gives us knowledge of such things concerning salvation, sanctification, regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit and so on, simply to pass on knowledge of such spiritual truths.

Knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or knowledge not coupled with another vital ingredient, can accomplish just the opposite of what it is intended to do.

This is why Paul warns us in 1Co 8:1-3 We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God.

In other words, if your knowledge is not coupled with a love from God that motivates you to love God in humble obedience then your knowledge is lacking and is potentially useless and can even be counter-productive.

This love for God is what we see in the beginning of chapter 12.

Romans 12:1-2 ^{NAU} Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Of course, the "therefore" in verse one ties the previous thought to the present action expected of all believers. And the previous thought was to understand that God sovereignly chooses a people for Himself from among both Jews and Gentiles to be His representatives, His ambassadors, His holy nation, to share in the inheritance He secured for us in Christ.

It is in light of this that we as believers in Christ should see what it is that we are saved unto as God reveals that to us.

Notice that Paul begins with the phrase, "I urge you, brethren..."

Our English word for *urge* is the Greek word *parakaleo* which is, to call out to. This is an emphatic call so as to get our attention. In other words, this is not an option to listen to or not. This call however, is based upon the reality that God has chosen us by His mercy with the express purpose of magnifying His name with our very lives.

This is the identical message that Paul had shared with the Ephesian church.

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For ***we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works***, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Walking in the good works that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in is totally dependent on the fact that we are His workmanship, which is to say, we were chosen by God and saved for a reason. That reason is to worship and glorify the God and Savior who gave us life.

And the means to that end is for our very bodies to manifest that life in a way where our actions conform to the image of Christ whose works were perfect as He fulfilled the will of the Father in His mission for His people.

Each of us in Christ have been placed on a mission by and for our Lord and Savior. That mission is one of grace and mercy as we walk in His life. But it is a mission that God has foreordained as He has prepared us for this mission as He enables us to walk according to His will.

John 8:12 ¹² Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

We who are in Christ possess the light of life who is Christ and therefore we are enabled by the Spirit of God to effectually walk in the power of our Lord found in His very resurrection and Paul has brought this out earlier in this letter to the Romans.

Romans 6:4-5 ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness

of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

And so, when Paul says back in our text that we are to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice it is in light of the living and holy sacrifice that Christ accomplished on the cross and in His resurrection that gave us this new life to the end that God will accomplish this holy life in us.

Paul simply says to walk in that new life and understand that when you do it is actually an act of worship unto the Lord. What does that mean in a practical sense?

If the Lord has called you to be an electrician for a company then pursue that with a desire to glorify God in that position as you represent the Lord faithfully in holiness. If the Lord has called you to be a Doctor then serve the Lord in that capacity with the understanding that that is your opportunity to worship God in that position.

The same holds true if the Lord has called you to be a wife and stay at home mom, or any other pursuit that puts us out before people in this world where we can demonstrate an attitude of worship with our bodies. That is stating it in a positive manner, but then Paul helps us to understand how all of this works by stating it in a somewhat negative manner in the next verse.

Romans 12:2 ² And do not be conformed to this world....”

What does it mean to be conformed to this world?

Peter puts it this way.

1 Peter 1:14 ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,”

1 Peter 4:3-5 ³ For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; ⁵ but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

And of course Paul sums up what it means to be conformed to the world when he identifies the world and its lusts in this way.

Galatians 5:17-21 ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. ¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

To be conformed to the world is to abide in the lusts of this world by denying the things of the Spirit whereby “self” becomes the most important person in the world.

In Christ we have been delivered from the world and the condemnation that accompanies being identified with the world.

Galatians 5:1 ^{NAU} It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Being identified with the world is different from saying that anything that is related to the world is necessarily evil. The world system among men has as its center piece man’s heart which is bent on hating his God.

And this is precisely the point that John makes early on his gospel.

John 3:19-20 ¹⁹ "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

There is nothing in this world as it relates to men in their natural state of being children of wrath that warrants God’s people to emulate.

However, the world that was created by God, was a world that did nothing wrong and was deemed very good by God prior to man’s rebellion and was actually an innocent bystander as the curse of man’s sin was subsequently placed upon the entire creation.

Romans 8:19-22 ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who

subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

And so, simply because Christ tells us that this world is at enmity with Him, this world, His actual creation, is not evil. Unfortunately, because of Platonism that has crept into the church, the world has been deemed evil as if the physical is in opposition to the spiritual.

And this has actually led many in the church to conclude that our real self is the spiritual side of our beings as the optimum place of contentment in our Creator, whereas the physical is something to be delivered from as being less than optimal when it comes to our ability to worship God in the Spirit.

This could not be further from the truth.

God created man both physical and spiritual from the beginning. In fact, God's creation of man began with the physical as He formed man from the dust of the earth and then subsequently gave man his life as He breathed into man the breath of life.

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Men are intrinsically tied to the earth because they are literally part of the earth and were never meant to dwell anywhere else. And for the believer in Christ they will never dwell anywhere else in eternity.

Remember when the apostle Paul said "I ...prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord "? (**2 Corinthians 5:8**)

Paul was in no way minimizing the physical aspect of his life as being an essential part of his life. Rather, he was simply stating the fact that in light of the present situation of all men in this sin-filled cursed world it would be better to be delivered from this present world so as to be at home with Christ.

He said a similar thing when writing to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:21-23 ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am

hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;

To live in the world where our flesh is corrupted with sin and the curse where people hate the Lord and their desire is to please self, or to be with Christ?; that is the question.

Paul always preferred the latter. But this was never Paul's final answer as to what it meant to be with the Lord. Paul's hope and desire was never to absent from the body and present with the Lord as his final reward in Christ. Because for Paul being absent from the body was secondary to being reunited to his body according to God's glorious plan for His people.

This was Paul's hope as he articulated it earlier in our letter to the Romans.

Romans 6:5-9 ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

The resurrection of the body necessarily means that both spirit and body are reunited forever to a hope of dwelling with our risen Lord. Peter also addresses this hope.

1 Peter 1:3-4 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

This hope may be reserved in heaven for us but one day it will be fully realized as our resurrection bodies will once again live in a physical universe that Jesus Himself will dwell in forever as He creates new heavens and a new earth from the old. This too, Peter addresses.

2 Peter 3:13 ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

And this new earth will be the glorious home of our Lord and us.

Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

And so, for Paul and us, to be absent from the body and present with the Lord in the present heaven is a temporary joy in Christ that will one day be completed in the hope that we should all look forward to as we are raised from the dead and reunited to our bodies on the new earth to be with the Lord forever in His presence enjoying the inheritance He has secured for us in His death and resurrection.

And so, simply because we are told in our text in Romans that we should not be conformed to the world it is understood that the world Paul speaks to is a world under the curse of God, not the world to come where Paradise will be restored.

But then Paul continues his thought.

Romans 12:2 but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

What are we to be transformed from? Well, we are to be transformed from that which is identified with the present world, which is death and destruction, sin and curse, wrath and judgment. Well, if there is to be a transformation it necessarily follows that there is a change from death to life.

Only God can transform us as His Spirit regenerates us from darkness to light.

Titus 3:5-7 ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so

that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

But this transformation is happening in a world where we are dealing with both the old nature we were born with and the new nature we have in Christ, thus making us new creations. And so, there is a sense in which this transformation is progressive in this present world; not that our justification is progressive, which is a once for all declaration by our God, but that our sanctification is progressive.

And this transformation, as we are conformed into the image of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, is the means by which this is accomplished in the Spirit through the renewing of our minds.

What is implied here is that our minds need renewing even when we are in Christ. But what are they to be renewed unto? They are to be renewed unto the truth of God's word with the express purpose of proving what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

What does all of that mean? Well, the idea here is that there is something which is good and acceptable and perfect that is to be demonstrated in our lives that is the direct result of the renewing our minds.

What is that? That is that part of our salvation we know as sanctification. Sanctification is a vital part of our salvation because it does in fact prove that we have a life in Christ that is demonstrated in a practical way. But, what is essential here to understand is that the means by which this is accomplished is through the renewing of our minds with the truth of God's word.

This is precisely what Jesus demonstrates as His prayer to the Father on our behalf acknowledges this very thing.

John 17:17 ¹⁷ "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

Well, how do we appropriate the word of truth? By engaging our minds to the extent that we read, meditate upon, study and then apply that truth in the power of the Holy Spirit to our own lives.

But the reason that you and I in Christ are even able to engage our minds is because God has miraculously transformed our minds as He gave us life and in turn gave us the mind of Christ as we now have eyes to see.

Paul points this out to the Corinthians when comparing the natural man and the spiritual man who has life in Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

And so, when Paul talks about being transformed by the renewing of our minds it necessarily follows that our spirits have already been transformed by Christ in whom we boast.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 ³⁰ But *by His doing* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

And now through the means the Holy Spirit provides our bodies will continue to be transformed from our former slavery to darkness to being slaves to Christ and His righteousness.

Romans 6:19-22 ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. ²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

And so, the point that God is making is that our salvation does not simply encompass our justification as if only being forgiven of our sin and being delivered from the wrath of God is an end in itself. Rather, God calls us out and gives us life with the express purpose of living that life out in this present world.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 ³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is,* that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles

who do not know God; ⁶ *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. ⁸ So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 ¹³ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because ***God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*** ¹⁴ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no salvation without sanctification. The two go hand in hand.

Hebrews 12:14 ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

But again, the bottom line is that we must take seriously the means for our growth in the sanctification that God has called us to which is the purposeful approach to studying the word of God to show ourselves approved.

Though Paul's exhortation to Timothy is in the context of one pastor encouraging another pastor in his duties, this reminder should really be for all of us who want to identify ourselves as "Bereans."

2 Timothy 2:15 ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, ***accurately handling the word of truth.***

I've heard it said, and I'm sure many of you have as well, that Christians are mindless people who simply exercise a blind faith. Unfortunately, the world has gotten some of that right as Christians disengage their minds to the truth of God's word to accept the attitude that we must live on feelings rather than on reason.

The word of God isn't against feelings, but feelings can be very deceptive when it comes to making decisions that affect your life to God's glory.

In a recent news letter of the "Christian Research Institute" Hank Hanegraaff says, "Feel--don't think." If you heard those words with no context you might think you were in some kind of

sensitivity training seminar.... Or perhaps a therapy group where the whole idea is to "get in touch with your feelings." Well, the problem is that many people are so "into their feelings" that they're "out of" their minds!"

He goes on to say, "If Christians -- succumbing to the "me-oriented" self-indulgence and consumerism of our age -- are so busy feeling that they're incapable of critical thinking, haven't we virtually surrendered the flag?"

But, what Paul teaches us is that the food which endures, the substance which allows us to walk through those down times, those weakened states where we are tempted to conform to the world, must be found in the word of God.

1Pe.2:1-2..... "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to your salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

Other times we find ourselves seeking a knowledge which is not in conformity with God's word and in fact is more in keeping with the knowledge and wisdom of the world. Sometimes we think that we need something more than God's word to help us grow in our faith. The world comes along and says, 'try this angle.' 'This angle of knowledge works for many other people give it a try.' And again it may have momentary success, but it will not stand the test of time as only God's word will for His people.

Timothy had to deal with this as well.

1Ti 6:20-21 "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you."

There are consequences in dabbling with the knowledge of the world to try and accomplish the spiritual workings of the Spirit which can only truly take place according to the knowledge of God's word.

Sanctification is not something that can be accomplished through fleshly worldly means. This is what Paul addresses in Gal 3:3 "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

Our minds must be engaged and meditating on the knowledge of God which encourages and builds up so that when the flaming

missiles of the evil one comes against us we may stand firm on the promises and the power of our God.

The renewing of our minds is not some spiritual exercise which only fills our heads with knowledge. Remember, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up..." If we're studying God's word with the express purpose of filling our heads with knowledge, and yet not walking in the power of the Spirit in that knowledge, then we've deceived ourselves into thinking we're something we're not.

In fact, James addresses this very thing when he says in Jam 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

God's Word and the doing of it by faith in the Spirit's power, as we humbly submit to God, is instrumental in our maturity in the Lord.

The renewing of our minds is the active pursuing of God's word and will with the express purpose of being conformed into the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we may demonstrate with our lives that we are children of the Most High God.

Simply listening to the word and gaining knowledge falls short of that purpose. And so to pick up the slack of this spiritual short coming we may be tempted to fill it with other spiritual experiences which are not lasting but only fill a void for a short time.

This goes back to what I mentioned in the beginning when I said that there must be another ingredient added to knowledge. That ingredient is love; God's love, so that we in turn may love God and others to the extent that we give them God's truth in love.

Paul says in 1Co 13:2 "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

You want to know what God's will is for your life? You want to grow in Christ and be strengthened in your faith? Then the word of God must be an important part of your life. That's not the only thing which is important, but it's essential and must never be pushed to the side.

I spent some extra time on this today because this is what Paul is doing in setting the groundwork for the rest of his teaching in

Romans as he takes the word of God and teaches many practical things for our growth and edification.

As we'll see next week in our text the word of God is never to be divorced from the body of Christ of which we are all members in Christ. And the individual members are never to be divorced from the Body. To do so would constitute something other than a body of which Christ is the Head and the One who forms His Body.

We have been called to represent our Lord in this world. To do so we must submit to the means by which God has designed for that to happen. The living word of God is an essential part of that process for our sanctification.

Let me close with two prayers of Paul's for me and you.

Col 1:10 "And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God..."

Phi 1:9-11 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God."