



Romans 12:1-2
“A Changed Mind”

Romans 12:1 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.

2 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.

In the past 11 chapters Paul has focused on what God has done, now his focus shifts to what we must do. As I said last week we’ve had the indicatives of the gospel outlined to us, the doctrinal content, the “things to be known” part, and now Paul is switching over to the “things to be done” part of the letter. He hasn’t been teaching you these things so that you might know interesting things, but so that you might live the Christian life.

“Christian doctrine is never taught to provide a species of intellectual enlightenment but to promote practical obedience. For if theology is grace, then ethics is gratitude.” – F.F. Bruce

Note here that Paul does not command, but rather beseeches them. He knows that if his readers have not experienced the doctrinal truths that he has been outlining in themselves, then they will never be able to obey that command. Simply put, if you aren’t saved, or justified by faith alone, then a command to live a holy life is useless. To command the spiritually dead to act as though they are alive is pointless. We see in the preaching of the apostles to the unconverted, that the answer to the question “what must we do” is not answered with a bunch of principles for godly living, but rather repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until someone has believed, godly living is impossible. But once someone has truly believed, godly living becomes imperative. At conversion, we literally move from “I can’t” to “I must.” And that is why when it comes to judging the reality of conversion, Jesus pointed us to the fruits of conversion. Is there any good fruit? No? Then they have not yet become Good Trees.

Now if you truly have been moved by what Paul has been talking about, the mercies of God to man, then your response will be to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” To serve the God who saved you with all your being.

We are reading a story to the children at the moment called “the Eagle of the Ninth” and central to the story is the fierce loyalty of a former Celtic slave named Esca to Marcus, a Roman. Now, Esca’s natural tendency was to hate the Romans, but Marcus had saved him from death, had purchased him at a price, had shown him loyalty and love and then had given him his freedom. Esca’s response was to serve Marcus with a loyalty that no slave would show a master, being willing even to die for him.

There is a picture there of the believer's relationship to Christ. We too were slaves – slaves to sin – our natural tendency was to hate Christ. But Christ saved us from death, purchased us at a price, showed us unswerving loyalty and love and has made us free indeed. And Marcus only had to spend money and time on Esca, Christ had to suffer and die for us. So our response should be one of unswerving loyalty to Christ and willingness even to die for him.

We must serve him though, not just with our hearts, but with our bodies. The same bodies that once served sin and the devil must now be *holy to the Lord* and set apart for his service. And I can't tell you how critical that is, because the statistics say that Christians are not doing a good job of that. With our bodies we are too commonly serving the same lusts as the world, and that shouldn't be the case.

Because our worship of the Lord is not Roman Catholicism or Zen Buddhism it is not outward formalities or deep thoughts, but a constant sacrifice of praise involving our whole being as we become more and more obedient to God. That is why Paul in 1 Cor. 9:27 writes, ***“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*** To be subject to God out of love is truly our “reasonable service” our “spiritual worship” as the Greek words λογικὴν λατρείαν can also be translated.

Jesus presented his body as a sacrifice to save us, and the best of saints have served their Lord as living sacrifices themselves. In fact, the interesting thing is that true ministers will sacrifice their own lives to see that the Lord's people truly are living sacrifices to God. You see that in Paul's immortal words to the Philippians in Phil. 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. It was often the case in history, that the best of ministers died in essence of exhaustion, that was certainly true in the case of men like Knox, Calvin, Rutherford, and McCheyne.

But none of that can happen, unless our minds have first been *renewed* and are *being renewed*. Here the Greek word is *anakeinosis*, it means not just refurbished, but completely change for the better. So much so that we are thoroughly transformed, and the word for Transformation is the *metamorphosis*. Usually when we talk about the process of metamorphosis the image that immediately comes to mind is the metamorphosis or change of a caterpillar into a butterfly. What enters the chrysalis as a rather ugly creature, emerges as a beautiful butterfly. So too our own minds start off spiritually dead and dark, and filled with corrupt desires, and then through the process of being born again, regenerated, a metamorphosis happens - the veil is lifted, we can finally see things as they really are, and our desires change. We repent of our former sinful desires, and the direction of our lives changes. Our hearts are changed forever and our minds and wills are too.

Many of you probably know that the word for repentance is *Metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind. But when we say a change of mind, we don't mean it the way that the world uses the term, they'll say, **I went to the ice cream parlor thinking I wanted strawberry but when I got there I changed my mind and got Heath Bar Crunch.** That's really just a change of choices, in *metanoia* we have a complete change of mind. Old dead mind out, new living mind in. The things we once hated, Jesus, and holiness, and God and worship we now LOVE. The things we once loved, sin, and idols, and blasphemy, we now HATE. The people we associate with, change, the way talk changes.

The purpose of that change is intensely practical, then and only will we know that God will defines, tells us what is morally good. Before that change WE defined good according to what seemed Good in our own eyes. And our desires were sinful, so far too often we called evil good, and good evil. But now we know better and we know Good and Perfect his will is, not just abstractly, but practically.

The world is filled with untransformed people making evil choices they call good, and then finding out that the hard way that the choice was flawed and it made them miserable. You probably have relatives who do that all the time. The sad thing is they won't stop, because they don't want to choose the good. They keep going to the Ice Cream Parlor and choosing *week old garbage flavor* and getting sick because it looks good to them, but when you encourage them to try strawberry, they say "that looks and smells disgusting to me! I'd never choose that." They won't "**taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**" (Psalm 34:8) because they don't want to.

Turn with me to Romans 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

An outworking of that principle is that you are NEVER going to see truly godly behavior in your children, relatives, and friends until they are truly changed. Until the metamorphosis occurs, you are asking the caterpillar to fly. And dropping the caterpillar out the window, or gluing on paper wings and a little label saying "butterfly" won't help. So for instance, telling the addict or alcoholic, "you need to stop being addicted!" isn't going to work. Telling them the gospel and urging them to repent and believe is the only the thing that will.

Another outworking of this principle is to be seen in the horrified reaction that many unbelievers have when you discuss the gospel with them or when they come into worship. Their eyes get big and wide, they look around, "you guys like this??" Then they usually spend their time looking for anything to distract them or they fall asleep. Unless that is the Holy Spirit is working through the preaching of the gospel. Now please be assured I know that only too well because I had exactly the same reaction. Getting me to go to worship was like trying to get Damien to go to church, and when I was in it the only things that interested me were worldly, and I couldn't wait to get out. But after I was converted, I desperately WANTED to go to worship, and the less gospel there was to that service, the less I enjoyed it. I wanted to hear about JESUS.

Applications:

1) Now when it comes to judging the reality of your conversion, or that of others, the key is not simply to dwell on one particular evidence but to ask what is the general unerring direction of the lives, is it heavenly or worldly? We make a grave error when we assess someone as truly converted because they prayed the sinners prayer and once in a while attend church and yet for the most part live a life indistinguishable from their worldly friends. Similarly you make a serious error if you assess someone including yourself as unconverted if although they love Christ and generally live a godly life they occasionally sin.

Let me give you an extended quote from Thomas Brooks that I hope will help here: "***No man is to judge of the soundness or sincerity of his spirit by some particular acts—but by the constant frame and bent of his spirit, and by his general life in this world. If particular actions might determine whether a man had grace or no grace, whether he were in Christ or not in Christ, whether he were a saint or not a saint, whether he were sincere or unsound; we would many times conclude, that those had no grace—who indeed have; and that they were not in Christ—who indeed are; and that they are no saints—who indeed are; and that they are not sincere—who certainly are true Nathanaels. Though the needle of the seaman's compass may jog this way and that way—yet the bent of the needle will still be***

northward. So though a Christian may have his particular sinful joggings this way or that way—yet the bent of his heart will still be God-wards.

The best saints have had their various motions, and have very foully and sadly miscarried as to particular actions—even then when the constant course and bent of their spirits have been God-wards and Christ-wards, and holiness-wards and heaven-wards, etc. Witness David's murder and adultery, Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incest, Joseph's swearing, Job's cursing, Jonah's vexing, Peter's denying, and Thomas' not believing. He who walks most steadily—may sometimes trip. He who cannot endure to see a spot upon his clothes—may yet sometimes fall into a quagmire. So the holiest and exactest Christians—may sometimes be surprised with many infirmities and unevennesses, and sad miscarriages.” - By Thomas Brooks, 1669

2) Let's talk about what it really means to be a living sacrifice for Christ. That means putting him first in every part of your life. Giving him the best. Most non-Christians wouldn't seriously consider working only the morning and not the afternoon for their employer, or going to college classes in the morning and habitually skipping the afternoon ones, or leaving the cinema at the one hour mark every time they go to see a movie, because after all, 60 minutes is enough movie for one week. Christians claim that the Lord is the most important part of their lives and yet do we habitually give him less of our time than non-Christians devote to their employment, education, and recreation?

For instance, when I ask Christians "why aren't you reading the bible every day?" the answer I usually get is, "I don't have the time." When, however, I ask them "so do you read, Facebook, email, play games, watch TV, talk on the phone, or text friends, or just hang out during the day?" the answer is usually some permutation of "Yes." To which I'll follow up with "The truth is we can always make time to do the things we want to do. On the other hand, all the time in the world isn't enough time to do the things we don't want to do."

3) The RENEWING of your mind is an ongoing thing, the more you give your mind over to worship and the contemplation of good the more your mind is sanctified. The more time you spend in worship, the more you will like worshipping and the better at it you'll get.

Now some at this point will say, no you have it wrong, if you would just *change the worship* maybe you'd find that some of those culture shocked unbelievers would come back again. Well, here's the thing, I can guarantee you that each of you has at least one hobby or regularly done thing that you find fascinating, that I would not. I'll give you an example: golf. I have tried to like the game, I honestly have, I even went to golf camp. But at the end of the day, hit the ball, follow the ball, hit the ball follow the ball, doesn't do it for me. I don't love the game. Now I could change golf, until I did like it! But if I showed my changes to pastor Hughes, he'd look and say something along the lines of **“Andy, I know you want two teams, a referee, a time limit, mud instead of grass, four wheel drive golf carts, a larger ball, and hockey sticks instead of clubs, but at the end of the day, THAT ISN'T GOLF!”** And he'd be right. You see the problem isn't Golf, the problem is me. So too, I could change worship, until it was something that even unbelievers really enjoyed, but it wouldn't be worship. And the elements that I would be taking out or watering down, would be the elements that require a changed heart to love. It's like trying to create a coffee hour for people who don't like coffee, the element you are going to end up removing is coffee.

This is the hard thing, the key isn't trying to create a version of Christianity for people who don't love Christ, the key is what Paul is talking about here, it's about the Holy Spirit changing hearts and then training those changed hearts so that they do love worship and sermons and reading the bible and praying.

4) Now if you haven't yet gotten to the point where there is a Heavenward direction in your heart, if the needle of your compass points to the world, if your mind is not yet changed. Then the first step has got to be believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can do that wherever you are, cry out to him, close with him, call upon Him, as Peter called upon Jesus as he was sinking beneath the waves, Lord SAVE ME! No one who in truth, calls upon the Lord Jesus Christ has ever been turned away, because even your calling upon Him for salvation is the surest sign of his having started that process of transformation in you!