

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **A Christian Mind (Part 1)**

*Romans 12:2b*

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# A Christian Mind (Part 1)<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying Romans 12:1-2. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, “In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?”

So, let’s carefully examine each phrase in Romans 12:1-2.

Let’s read Romans 12:1-2:

<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

## Introduction

In 1963 Harry Blamires, an Englishman who had been a student of C. S. Lewis, wrote an important book titled, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?*<sup>2</sup> His book’s main thesis, repeated over and over in chapter 1, is that “there is no longer a Christian mind,” meaning that there is no longer a distinctly Christian way of thinking. There is to some extent a Christian ethic and even a somewhat Christian way of life and piety. But there is no distinctly Christian frame of reference, no uniquely Christian worldview, to guide our thinking in distinction from the thought of

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this material is taken from James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978). Original edition 1963.

the culture around us.

Unfortunately, the situation has not improved over the past forty-five years. In fact, it has grown worse. Today, not only is there little or no genuine Christian thinking, there is very little thinking of any kind. The Western world (and perhaps even the world as a whole) is well on its way to becoming what pastor James Montgomery Boice frequently called a “mindlessness.”<sup>3</sup>

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that Christians are called to mind renewal. He says in Romans 12:2a-b, “Do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. . . .**” Mindlessness is being conformed to this world. But Christians are called to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. In other words, Christians are called to develop a “Christian mind.” Or, to use terminology from last week’s message, Christians are called to develop a “Christian worldview.”

Over one hundred years ago (1890-1891), James Orr presented the Kerr Lectures in Edinburgh, Scotland. He titled his lectures, *The Christian View of God and the World*, and argued forcefully for the proposition that Christianity possesses a “worldview” or “view of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Orr said that a Christian worldview covered nine specific areas. A Christian worldview affirms:

- (1) the existence of a personal, ethical, self-revealing God;
- (2) the creation of the world by God, involving his holy and wise government of it for moral ends;
- (3) the spiritual nature and dignity of man as created in the image of God;
- (4) the fall of man into sin;
- (5) the historical self-revelation of God to the patriarchs and in the line of Israel;
- (6) the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God, yes, as God manifest in the flesh;
- (7) the redemption of the world through the atoning death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ;

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<sup>3</sup> Boice,

<sup>4</sup> James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1897).

- (8) the founding of the kingdom of God on earth, which includes the spiritual salvation of individuals and a new order of society; and
- (9) that history has a goal, including resurrection, judgment, and separation of the righteous and the wicked, the righteous to eternity with God and the wicked to eternal suffering excluded from his presence.<sup>5</sup>

## Lesson

In today's lesson, I want to examine the Christian worldview so that we understand what constitutes a Christian mind.

### I. A Christian Mind Understands Who God Is

First, a Christian mind understands who God is.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of God helps us to respond to the worldviews of secularism and of atheism. Secularism is best summarized by a statement of Carl Sagan in his television series titled "Cosmos." Sagan was pictured standing before a spectacular view of the heavens with its many swirling galaxies, saying in a hushed, almost reverential tone of voice, "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." That is bold-faced secularism.<sup>6</sup> And atheism, of course, asserts that God doesn't exist.

James Montgomery Boice, in his commentary on Romans 12:2, writes:

So I ask again, where do we start? How do we begin to think and act as Christians? There is a sense in which we could begin at any point, since truth is a whole and truth in any area will inevitably lead to truth in every other area. But if the dominant philosophy of our day is secularism, which means viewing all of life only in terms of the visible world and in terms of the here and now, then the best of all possible starting places is the doctrine of God, for

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<sup>5</sup> Orr, 32-34.

<sup>6</sup> Boice, 74.

God alone is above and beyond the world and is eternal. Even more, the doctrine of God is a necessary and inevitable starting place if we are to produce a genuinely Christian response to secularism.<sup>7</sup>

What does that mean for our thinking?

If anything exists, there must be an inevitable, self-existent, uncaused first cause that stands behind it.

Several years ago at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology Professor John H. Gerstner was talking about creation and referred to something his high school physics teacher once said: “The most profound question that has ever been asked by anybody is: Why is there something rather than nothing?”

Gerstner said that he was impressed with that at the time. But later, as he sharpened his ability to think, he recognized that it was not a profound question at all. In fact, it was not even a true question. It posed an alternative, *something* rather than *nothing*.

“But what is nothing?” Gerstner asked.

“Nothing” eludes definition. It even defies conception. For as soon as you say, “Nothing *is*. . .” nothing ceases to be nothing and becomes something.

Gerstner referred to Jonathan Edwards, who is not noted for being funny but who was at least a little humorous on one occasion when he said, “Nothing is what the sleeping rocks dream of.”

So, said Gerstner, “Anyone who thinks he knows what nothing is must have those rocks in his head.”<sup>8</sup>

As soon as you ask, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” the alternative vanishes, you are left with something, and the only possible explanation for that something is “In the beginning, God. . .” (Genesis 1:1). God exists. He is the inevitable, self-existent, uncaused first cause that stands behind everything.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is.

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<sup>7</sup> Boice, 100.

<sup>8</sup> John H. Gerstner, “Man as God Made Him” in James M. Boice, editor, *Our Savior God: Man, Christ, and the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 20.

## II. A Christian Mind Understands God's Self-Revelation

Second, a Christian mind understands God's self-revelation.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of revelation helps us to respond to the worldview of relativism. Relativism is the worldview that says, "True for you but not for me."

The God who exists has revealed himself. This is the doctrine of revelation. Francis Schaeffer titled one of his books *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*<sup>9</sup> to make this point. God is there, and he has not kept himself hidden from us. He has revealed himself—in nature, in history, and especially in the Scriptures. And since God is truth, what he reveals is true—and truth is thus not relative.

David says in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."

Paul says in Romans 1:19-20, "For what can be known about God is plain to [people], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

And speaking of the Scriptures, Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Christians believe that God not only exists but also that he has revealed himself. God's revelation of himself to us in his Word is to be trusted. Throughout the ages God's Word has been challenged with disastrous results, beginning with Eve doubting the Word of God in the Garden of Eden.

If God has spoken, then what he has said is truthful and can be trusted absolutely, since God is truthful. This gives us absolutes in an otherwise relative culture.

But notice this: If God has spoken, there will always be a cer-

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<sup>9</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972).

tain hardness about the Christian worldview. That does not mean that we will be hard on others or insensitive to them. Rather, there will be a certain unyielding quality to our convictions.

For one thing, we will insist upon truth and will not bow to the notion, however strongly it is pressed upon us, that “that’s just your opinion.”

Dr. Boice tells the story of when he was flying to Chicago from the West Coast. He got into a conversation with the woman seated next to him. They talked about religion, and whenever Dr. Boice made a statement about the gospel she replied, “But that’s just your opinion.” Her worldview was relativism.

Dr. Boice found a way to answer her politely but also to preserve the hardness of what he was trying to say. He said, “You’re right; that is my opinion, but that’s not really what matters. What matters is: Is it true?”

She did not know quite what to say to that. So the conversation went on, and after a while she replied to something else Dr. Boice was saying in the same way: “But that’s just your opinion.”

He said, “You’re right; that is my opinion, but that’s not really what matters. What matters is: Is it true?”

This happened about a dozen times, and after a while she began to smile as she anticipated his comment coming.<sup>10</sup>

God has revealed himself to us. The Christian mind understands that and will not yield to a worldview of relativism.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, and God’s self-revelation.

### **III. A Christian Mind Understands the Creation of the World**

Third, a Christian mind understands the creation of the world.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of creation helps us to respond to the worldview of evolution. Evolution asserts that “the earth’s species have changed and diversified through time under

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<sup>10</sup> Boice, 102-103.

the influence of natural selection.”<sup>11</sup>

The opening sentence in the Bible asserts, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

There is much about God’s creation that we do not know. But we affirm what the Scriptures teach us about God’s creation of the world and all things in it. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* has a clear summary of the Scripture’s teaching regarding God’s creation of the world:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.<sup>12</sup>

A Christian worldview asserts that God created this world. He also created everything in it. The Bible describes God’s creation of the world, and if science is in conflict with the Bible, then we assert the authority of God’s Word over science, not vice versa.

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God’s self-revelation, and the creation of the world.

#### **IV. A Christian Mind Understands the Creation of Man**

Fourth, a Christian mind understands the creation of man.

A proper understanding of the doctrine of man helps us to respond to the worldview of humanism. Humanism asserts that you are your own god. Humanism says that you are the master of your own fate, the determiner of your own destiny. Not only does humanism not understand who God is, humanism completely misunderstands the true nature of man.

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<sup>11</sup> evolution. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/evolution> (accessed: June 13, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996 (Chapter IV, 1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

John Calvin began his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a classic statement, “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>13</sup>

Let me turn you again to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* regarding the creation of man:

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible has two interesting things to say regarding man. First, we find that man is a uniquely valuable being, far more important than the humanists imagine him to be. But, second, in his fallen condition we also find that man is much worse than the humanists suppose.

Let’s take the fact that man is far more valuable than humanists imagine first. The Bible teaches this at the very beginning of Genesis when it reports God as saying, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26a). We are then told in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

In ancient times books were copied by hand with rough letters. There was no typesetting, so it was not possible to emphasize one idea over another by such devices as italics, capital letters,

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<sup>13</sup> Calvin, J. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis*.; Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. (I, i, 1). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>14</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996 (Chapter IV, 2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

boldface, and centered headings. Instead emphasis was made by repetition.

For example, when Jesus stressed something as unusually important, he began with “verily, verily” or “truly, truly.”

Interestingly, we have the same thing in the first chapter of Genesis with the phrases “in our image,” “in his own image,” and “in the image of God.” That idea is repeated three times, which is a way of saying that man being created in God’s image is very important. It is what makes man distinct—and unique—from animals.

Bible students have debated the full meaning of what it means to be made in the image of God for centuries. This is not surprising since being made in God’s image means to be like God and God is above and far beyond us, beyond even our full understanding. Nevertheless, we can know a few things.

*First, the image of God has personality.* To be made in God’s image means to possess the attributes of personality, as God himself does, but animals, plants, and matter do not. This involves knowledge, memory, feelings, and a will. Of course, there is a sense in which animals have what we call personalities, meaning that individuals in a species sometimes behave differently than others in the species. But animals do not create. They do not love or worship. Personality is something that links human beings to God but does not link either God or man to the rest of creation.

*Second, the image of God has morality.* The second characteristic of being made in the image of God is morality, for God is a moral God and those made in his image are made with the capacity to discern between what is right and wrong, between good and evil. This involves the further elements of freedom and responsibility. To be sure, the freedom of human beings is not absolute, as God’s freedom is. We are not free to do all things. We are limited. Nevertheless, our freedom is a true freedom, even when we use it wrongly as Adam and Eve did when they sinned. They lost their original righteousness as a result. But they were still free to sin, and they were free in their sinful state afterward in the sense that they were still able to make right and wrong choices. Moreover,

they continued to be responsible for them.

*And third, the image of God has spirituality.* The third feature of being made in the image of God is spirituality, which means that human beings are able to have fellowship with God. Another way of saying this is to say that “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and that we are also spirits meant for eternal fellowship with him. Nothing can be greater than that for man, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism states it well when it says in the answer to the first question: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps at this point we are beginning to see why humanism is so bad and not just a less attractive option than Christianity. Humanism sounds like it is focusing on man and elevating man, but it actually strips away the most valuable parts of human nature.

As far as *personality* goes, it reduces us to mere animal urges, as Sigmund Freud tried to do.

Regarding *morality*, instead of remaining responsible moral agents, which is our glory, we are turned into mere products of our environment or our genetic makeup, as B. F. Skinner asserts.

As far as *spirituality* is concerned, how can we maintain a relationship to God if we are god?

So, a Christian mind understands who God is, God’s self-revelation, the creation of the world, and the creation of man.

## Conclusion

Well, I had hoped to get further than we did today. We will have to finish our study of what constitutes a Christian mind next time. In the meanwhile, I encourage you to pick up a copy of today’s sermon manuscript and read about the Christian worldview and what constitutes a Christian mind. Amen.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism : With Scripture Proofs.* 1996 (3rd edition.) (Question 1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAAYER:**

O Lord, you call us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Help us to develop a Christian worldview so that we may have a truly Christian mind.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.