

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015 – Part II

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Romans 12:1-2

January 11, 2015

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 12th chapter of Romans. We're continuing a message we began last week, a two-part message. The title of the message in kind of a New Year's theme, we've departed for a brief time from our ongoing exposition of the Gospel of John. We had finished Chapter 14 before Christmas, and planned to start back in Chapter 15, but wanted to consider for a couple of weeks kind of a New Year's theme. I titled the message 'Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015'. You know New Year's is time of taking stock of a lot of different things, and usually it is a time for taking stock of where we are physically in our fitness and that kind of thing, and so certainly if it is important to do that physically, and certainly it is good and profitable for us to do that in this life, to consider our physical fitness.

Paul tells us that in 1 Timothy 4, how much more is it profitable for us to consider our spiritual well-being, and to take stock of where we are in our walk with the Lord. So we've gone to Romans 12:1-2 to look at that, and we begin looking at this, and I'm going try to hit these, get us in context real quickly. I encourage you, if you weren't here last Sunday, to listen to the message. You can go online to our website and download it, or stream it any time. So we encourage you to do that. But what we saw is, as we look at this passage, that Paul is basically telling the Roman Christians how they are to take their theology and put it into practice in their life. Chapters 12-16 of Romans deal with the practical outworking of the Gospel and the difference it is supposed to make in our lives. The first 11 chapters of Romans really just lay out for us the glory of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and the plan of salvation, the miracle of His love for us. Then, in Chapter 12, and these first two verses I think serve as kind of a hinge between the theological section of the book, and the practical section of the book between the doctrine and the ethics, you could say, 12:1-2 are like a hinge that hold them together and show us that the real hinge, the thing that takes theology and makes it practical, is worship. It is to see your life as an outworking of worship, of gratitude to God for what He's done. That's the way the Christian life is to be lived. It is to be lived in continual, the overflow of gratitude for what God has done, is what motivates us in how we should live.

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We see that as we look at this, and as we consider this, I want us to consider this around four points. I said that we can look at this passage, Romans 12:1-2, around four points. After we read the text, and we pray, I'll begin to share those. Let's read Romans 12:1-2.

Romans 12:1-2 ~ 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might, even now, transform us by the renewing of our minds through this passage. That the Spirit, who inspired these words, might now illuminate them in our hearts, in our minds, and transform us into the image of our Savior. We pray this in His name, Amen.

So we said, 'Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015', we'll think about kind of a four-part plan for spiritual fitness, and the way that we can, on a daily basis, try to apply and live out the wonder of the Gospel in our lives. We said there were really four parts of the plan. The first thing is you need to set your goal. Secondly, you need to cultivate your motivation. Thirdly, you need to work your plan. And fourthly, you measure your progress. So you set your goal, cultivate motivation, work your plan, measure your progress. Last time we talked about two and a half points. We talked about setting your goal, and we talked about cultivating your motivation, and we talked about the first half of working your plan. And today we are going to talk about the last point and a half.

Let me just quickly, pray for me to be able to do it quickly, summarize the first two and a half points. We first of all have to set our goal, and the passage is calling us that the goal of the Christian life, our goal on a daily basis ought to be to have increasingly transformed lives. That is the goal. That is to live lives that are distinctly different than the world because the power of God is being made evident in us. The word '*transformed*' is the same word that is used of Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, where they looked at Jesus, and they saw the glory, the Shekinah glory of God, the glory of God coming out of the physical body of Jesus.

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He had looked like an ordinary man when they had met Him. They knew He wasn't ordinary because of the way He taught, and His miracles. They had come to believe He was the Son of God, but they didn't fully, at this point, understand the reality of who He was. Isaiah tells us He would just look ordinary. He would have no stately form or majesty that we should be drawn to Him, the prophet wrote 700 years before the birth of Christ. He looked like an ordinary man, but on the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw a glimpse of the reality of who He was. The light that was coming out from His face made His face like the sun, Matthew says. Mark says it made His clothes so white, so white as no launderer on earth could launder them. The light and the glory of God coming out of the person, of the Son of God, out of the body of the man, Christ Jesus. That is the kind of metamorphosis, which is the word that is used here, 'transform' is 'metamorphóō'. We get our English word 'metamorphoses' from it. That is the kind of metamorphosis we're supposed to have. We are supposed to live lives where people see in the changes in our character something of the handiwork, the fingerprints of almighty God. They are to see that we now have, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, we have a treasure in an earthen vessel. We have light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We know the living God. We've come to experience His presence in our lives, and though we look just like everybody else, we are just clay pots, we have treasure, and God wants that treasure to shine out. And how it shines out is in transformation, changed lives. That is the goal.

The motivation that we have to cultivate is that we are to be motivated by grace. We are to be motivated because of what God has done for us. We don't try to change our lives to be accepted by God, but listen, it is very important, we change our lives because we are accepted by God. We are already accepted by Him. This is the motivation for the Christian life. We lay down our life for Him because He has already accepted us. There is nothing that we are trying to earn. We, in wonder, in amazement, that He could accept and love us in our sin because of what Jesus has done. We then lay down our lives for him. The more that you look at the cross, the more that you want to obey your Savior. This is really so important. It shows that the imperatives of God's word, and there are lots of imperatives of God's word, tell us things that we should do, things that we should not do, but the imperatives of God's word are always built upon the indicatives of God's work. The imperative is a command, the indicative is a statement of fact. God commands you to do something, it is always on the basis of what He's already done. We are commanded to pursue righteousness because Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for us, and the more that you look at the indicative of what He's done,

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the more that you are able to obey the imperative. So that is cultivating motivation. And as I said, we talked about those two things last week more extensively.

So you have the goal of a transformed life, you are operating out of gratitude for what God has done for you, as your motivation. Now you work your plan. There is a two-part plan that is put here before us, and those two parts are *Offer Your Body*, Verse 1, **...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice...** And the second part is, *Renew Your Mind*. Offer your body, renew your mind, Verse 2, **...be transformed by the renewing of your mind...** We talked about offering your bodies, the first part, last time. That is that you are to see yourself as a priest. That is the imagery of Verse 1, that our lives are to be lived as a priest, who is all about the worship of God. From morning until night, he was about the worship of God. And we are to be about worshiping God from morning until night, and the way that we do it is we offer the sacrifice of our own bodies, as a living sacrifice. We continue to do this by denying ourselves. We see every temptation as an opportunity to worship, by saying, “No,” to the flesh, we are able to say, “No,” to the flesh, as we look to God and say, “I want to worship You by saying, ‘No,’ to the flesh, and by looking at what Christ has done for me, and with the power that He gives me, I want to do this.” Or we say, “Yes,” in offering our bodies in acts of service, and we talked about that last time. You are to offer your body in an ongoing way in worship. That is how the plan of spiritual fitness is worked out. How do you see transformation? You live a life of worship and offering yourself to God.

B) Renew Your Mind:

Now we come to the second point of the plan, and to the new material this morning. As a subset of the third major point, now remember we covered the goal, we covered the motivation, now we’re talking about the third point, *Work Your Plan*. We saw that you offer your body, now we’re talking about *Renew Your Mind*. How do you work the plan of spiritual fitness? You renew your mind, Verse 2, **...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...**

Now this word ‘renewing’ is an important word for us to consider. It is a word which means to be qualitatively new and different, to be different from what you were before. So your mind is to be changed in a qualitative way from what it was before. Your thinking is to be different. Your values are to become different. The intentions of your heart, your purposes of your mind are to become qualitatively

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different. This is what God is saying, “The way that you are going to fulfill the goal of being transformed is by renewing your mind.” A helpful image might be that of a renovation project. There is a sense in which everyone who is a Christian in this room, you are a renovation project. God, when He saved you, He transformed your heart. He took out the heart of stone, and He gave you a heart of flesh. You were renewed at salvation, the washing of regeneration, and renewal by the Holy Spirit, is how Paul describes it in Titus 3:5. Regeneration, renewal. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. In some sense, we’re already new, in the very center of our being, but that new person in the very center of our being is still housed in an old, dilapidated house, run down, and that old house includes our old mind and way of thinking. Our brain, which is filled with all kinds of bad patterns of thought. If you think of it that way, we are all old, dilapidated, run down messes. That’s right, that’s what we are.

Though He’s given us a new heart, the idea is unless we labor at this, we will not be what we need to be. There is such pressure on us that is working against our transformation. You know if you think about a renovation project where you buy an old house, a fixer-upper, and you go in and you take stock of all that needs to be changed. You know, there are floorboards that are rotten, there is mold, that’s a big deal. You know mold is a bad thing to have in your house, and you have to tear it out. You have to treat it so you don’t have it anymore. You’ve got to figure out why you had it in the first place. Maybe there is a water drainage problem under your house. So you have to fix that. And then you get that all fixed, and you put the new floorboards in, and now you have to cover up with new carpet, or whatever else has to happen on that floor, and that is just one little spot of the house. Now you move on to the next project, and maybe you start working on the bathroom, and you’re like, “This tile? People thought looked good at one time?”

Have you seen some bathrooms like that and you’re like, “Really? This color of pink was...” You know the pink, shiny tile? Anyway, sorry about that, I... There have been a couple of times where I’ve been in a place like, “Wow! That’s amazing. Somebody was happy when they got finished with this.” But you have other things where maybe it did look good originally, but it doesn’t anymore, and so you’ve got to tear things out, and put things in. That is really what is being required of us, that we’re to be about renewing our minds in that way. And very often, when you feel like you just gotten finished with something, isn’t it funny how you are working on something, and you finish something else, and something else breaks? Good news and bad news. Good news that you’ve really made progress. Bad news, you’ve got a whole lot more work to do.

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But that's what we're called to, we're called to the renewing of our minds, and the problem is in our minds, what the Bible refers to also as our hearts, the place, the seat of thinking, the seat of our mind, will, and emotions, our affections, must be renewed. And there is a sense in which, and you see in the text, if we don't do this we're not going to be what we are supposed to be. In fact, you can think about this point, *Renew Your Mind*, maybe under three questions. *What? What is renewing?* It is qualitative change where you replace the old with something new. *Why?* Let's talk about the second question under this point, *Renewing Your Mind. Why must you renew your mind?* Paul impresses upon us the urgency and importance of the work we are called to do by introducing it in Verse 2 by this command, **...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...** In fact, there are two imperatives there, **...do not be conformed...** is the first imperative. That is a command. Don't be conformed but, a second command, **...be transformed...**

Now the word 'conform', **...conformed to this world...** the Greek verb means 'to mold, to form after, to form into, to shape or mold to a pattern', and the idea is that the world is trying continually to shape, or form, or mold you according to its pattern. In fact, both of these verbs, these imperative verbs, 'be conformed', or 'be transformed', they are both present tense imperatives. We talked about that a number of times before that the Greek present tense is more about the kind of action than the time of action. It is not the past, present, future as much as it is in English. The present tense describes the kind of action, and the Greek present is about continuous, or ongoing action. So when he says, "Do not be conformed. Do not go on being conformed," is the idea. Or you could really, when you have a Greek present imperative like this, that is negative, it means 'stop being conformed'. The idea is that you are presently being conformed, but you must stop it, you must choose by an act of your will to not allow the world to work on you.

And also, these verbs are both Greek present tense, imperative mood, but they are passive voice. Remember the voice of a verb, in an active verb, the subject does the action, and a passive verb the subject is receiving the action. So here he is saying, "Do not be conformed, we are commanded to stop allowing the world to act upon us. The world is acting upon us every moment, and we are to stop allowing that. It is seeking to form us into its shape." In fact, the word 'world' here, you may have a footnote that tells you, "Don't keep conformed to this world." It actually means 'this age'. Literally, in the Greek, is 'this age', and the idea is the thinking of this age, the spirit of this age. Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present, evil age. This is the age

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before Jesus comes back and inaugurates the new age, the age to come. Until then, we live in this present, evil age, and that is the spirit of the age. They translated it 'world' because it related to the concept that is also used in the New Testament of the 'World System' of thought processes, values. The idea is that in living in this world we are constantly bombarded with attempts to change our thinking for the worst. To make us love things that we ought not love, and it is a continual thing. G.C. Trents defines this phrase 'the age', or 'the spirit of the age'. Listen to this definition. This is the spirit of the age that we live in every day.

The spirit of the age is that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power.

In other words, it is the immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale again, inevitably to exhale. That this world, all of their thoughts, and opinions, and speculations, and aims, and values, all of these that the world calls dear, are controlled by the god of this age, 2 Corinthians 4:4, the devil, and fueled by the sin nature that dominates every unbeliever. And that we live in a world where these things are continually bombarding us. And so shaping us, attempting, like you are a piece of clay, the world is trying to shape you into its mold every single day. It is relentless, unstoppable, never takes a break. 1 Corinthians 5:19 says, "We know that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." So that the Christian, though you have been changed in your innermost being, if you are not working at this, and heeding these commands, you will find your life being shaped, and becoming more worldly. Now if you really love God, eventually if you keep allowing that to happen, He'll discipline you. Those who continue to keep getting more and more worldly, show that they really don't belong to God, eventually it becomes clear. But the idea is, I shared a quote last week from John Stott, that holiness, for the Christian, is not inevitable. You have to work at it. You have to heed commands. There are commands in Scripture that we must obey. We must cooperate with God in our sanctification. All the work will be done by His power, but we must actively surrender to Him.

Now how do you not be conformed to this world? How do you heed that command, ... ***do not be conformed to this world***,...? I mean, do you just sit around and think about how, "I'm not going to listen to that. I'm not going to listen to that. I'm not going to listen to that."? No, He gives the answer by the second command, ...***but be transformed by the renewing of your mind***... And the idea of the 'be

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transformed' is it is a present tense, passive voice imperative. It is a command, **...be transformed...** It is not a suggestion, it is present tense. The way that you stop being continually *conformed*, is you are continually *transformed*. It is passive voice. If you don't want the world to act upon you, put yourself in a place where God will act upon you. There is no middle ground. You are either being *conformed*, or you're being *transformed* at every moment. That is the picture.

To be transformed, let's think about that a little more. You must allow yourself to be acted upon by the renewing of your mind, by the word of God. The way that we are changed is by the power of the word of God. God has changed your heart, but you and I have a responsibility to allow His word to be continually purifying us, and changing our thinking. I mean, we really are, our thinking, the things that we value, the things that we believe are like that dilapidated mess I was talking about. The reason that you and I struggle with sins that we struggle with are because our thinking is all messed up. The reason that someone struggles with sexual sin is because their thinking is messed up. The reason that another struggles with fear, or anger, or anxiety is because their thinking, their beliefs are all messed up. You say, "Well, I'm a Christian. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe that He died on the cross for my sins." Yes, yes you believe that, but there are deep thought processes in your mind that need to be radically altered, that are holding you prisoner.

Let's take one for example, maybe you struggle with fear, and what does that mean? Why do we struggle with fear? We all, at some point, struggle with fear. It is one of the commands that is most often said in the Bible is, "Do not fear." If God keeps telling us, "Do not fear," what does that say? We're prone to fear. Do not fear. If you struggle with anxiety, or fear, what is really going on in your mind? Why do you struggle with that? Isn't it funny how sin, the sins that we struggle with, that we really struggle with, isn't it amazing how it feels like at times we have no control? It is like inevitable, we're sliding down a slope that we can't get our footing, and we're just going down into the sin. Doesn't it feel like that at times? "There is no hope of me ever overcoming this. It is just too hard." According to the word of God, it is an issue of transformation that needs to happen.

The reason that we're conforming, and sliding into the world's patterns is because we are not being transformed like we need to be. There are deep thought processes that are really almost below the surface of our awareness. Beliefs that we have that we don't think about. It's not like we go around thinking through our messed up thoughts. If you were living in a house that is all messed up, don't you want to just

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ignore that? I think I have a real gift for ignoring things that are not so good around the house. Patti wishes I did not. But we just would rather not think about it, and so what happens is we have patterns of thought that are messed up, but we don't think about it, and they control us, these wrong thoughts and beliefs. They are formed every day by things that happen in this world, and the lies that our sin nature wants to believe, the lies that Satan is casting at us through the world system. And every day that we are in this world we are either being conformed or transformed, and so the idea is, things happen.

For instance, you know a child experiences a horrifying circumstance of some kind, something bad happens. In the pain and anguish of that, they begin to believe bad things happen in this world, and of course that's true, isn't it? Bad things do happen in this world. And then you hear about other things happening to other people, or this tragedy that happened. "Man, this world is out of control." Doesn't it look like that at times? And the world basically is telling you that, your own perception is telling you that, "This world's out of control. I want to be safe. I want to be secure. I need to be constantly fearful so that I can control my circumstances." These thoughts, these desires, these values are what then lead us to act the way that we do. And what has to happen is we have to change our thinking all the way down to the root. We have to stop wanting to be safe and wanting to be secure ultimately. Those are really at the level of heart desires, heart thinking. If you want to be safe and you want to be secure more than you want to please God, you're going to struggle with fear. You're going to struggle with anxiety. If you want control, you're going to be really anxious. And some of us really struggle with that, don't we? We're trying to be in control of everything.

What has to happen is you have to start believing the truth. See, the world would say that you can be in control. The world says that if you really plan well, you're going to make things happen. The Bible says you can plan well, and that's good and all that, but in reality, you're in control of nothing. That's what the Bible says. I like how Nicolas Ellen says it. "The only thing that you run is your mouth."

The Bible shows that God is the one who's in control, and that for us to want to be in control is to want to be God. That's what we're wanting to do. We're wanting to control our destiny. That is what a Creator does, and a sovereign ruler, not what a creature ought to be aspiring to do. So you see, what we need to do is repent. We need to see things the way God sees them and repent. The Bible is so clear on that.

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Lamentations 3:37

***Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass,
Unless the Lord has commanded it?***

I love that. Jeremiah is saying I can't say I'm going to walk to the back of the church at the end of the service. I can say that. I can purpose to do that. In fact, I plan to do that later. I plan to get in my car, right? But it won't happen unless God commands it. It cannot happen. His sovereignty is over every molecule in the universe, and He determines everything that happens. He goes on to say:

Lamentations 3:38

***Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
That both good and ill go forth?***

That is, though God is not the author of evil, it is from His mouth that He allows those things to happen. Nothing happens in your life or in my life or in anyone's life that God is not sovereign over. He is in control. So to overcome fear, one of the things we have to do is we have to accept that thought process, labor at that, be in the word renewing our minds in the truth, and saying, "Yes, I'm going to take out this nasty, mold-covered, filthy idea that I can be in control. I'm going to despise that, and hate that, and tear it out by God's grace, and I'm going to replace it with the fact that the Lord of glory is in control, and that He has me in His hand, and He will do with me as He wills, and I will praise Him all the way and thank Him." This is why it says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

When you thank somebody, you thank the person responsible for whatever blessing you receive, right? If somebody brings you a gift, you don't thank this person over here. You thank the person that gave you the gift. So when he says, "In everything give thanks," what he's saying is everything that happens, where did it come from? It came from God. The person may have been used. You may have had an evil person do something to you. You may have had something random almost feel like happened to you, but the Bible says, "Give thanks, because all of that came directly from the hand of God. When you understand that and you meditate on that, it begins to help you. That's the sovereignty of God. That's one of the foundational principles that we need to embrace that will help us in renewing our minds and being transformed.

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You might add to that, the area of fear, not just the sovereignty of God, but the love of God. The Bible doesn't just teach that He is sovereign. It does teach that, but it also teaches that He's good. It teaches that His goodness is way beyond our highest hopes or our fondest dreams. He is so much more in His goodness and His loving-kindness than we could have ever imagined. So what we know then is that the sovereign God of the universe who's reigning over everything is wanting to do us good every moment, that everything that happens is for our good. We know verses like Romans 8:28, don't we?

Romans 8:28 ~ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose...

Every single thing, God is working for our good. This means that only good things are going to happen to you if you're a Christian, only good things. In fact, my favorite two verses that relate to this are right after that. If you turn over to Romans 8, just turn a couple pages back.

Romans 8:28 ~ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose...

And look, what's His purpose?

Romans 8:29 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son,...

We become transformed so that we can be conformed to the image of His Son. Not conformed to the world, but conformed to the Son, by an inner transformation. But he goes on to say in Verse 30:

Romans 8:30 ~ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

He's saying, "Listen, in suffering, know that God is doing everything for your good, and everything for your good, the ultimate good, the best thing that can happen to you is that you become like Jesus." Now, the problem is we don't

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believe that. We do in our deepest part of our souls, that it's been changed, we believe that, but all this messed up thinking, "I don't want to be like Jesus like I ought to be," and I have to be in the word to keep changing me to make me really want to be like Jesus, because the best thing in the world, God says, the thing that will make me the happiest, truly happiest, the thing that will give me the most fulfillment is to be like Jesus. This is where we have to take out the nasty stuff. "I want to be what I want to be. No, wait a minute. Tear that out. I want to be like Christ." Now, back to this idea of love, look what he goes on to say in Verse 31 and Verse 32. This is helping us to overcome fear of suffering and fear of pain. Verse 31:

Romans 8:31 ~ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

I love that. If we were surrounded right now, I mean, if everybody that hated God in the world surrounded this building, and we felt like we could feel the presence of all the demons in hell surrounding this building, and they came to kill all of us, this verse would still be true. If God is for us, who's against us? I mean, the U.S. Army is against us. The Russians have all banded together. This is kind of a silly thing, but anyway, everybody's against us. The tanks are pointed at this little building, and this is true: If God of Heaven is for us, what does it matter who's against us? They're nothing. They're a drop in the bucket. He's saying, "Listen, how can you be afraid if you know God is for you? He's for you." How do you know He's for you? He's for you in Christ. And look what he says after this. How do you know God's for you? Verse 32:

Romans 8:32 ~ He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

He says, "If you just think about the cross and you meditate on the reality of the cross, you will understand that it is impossible for God to be against you. And if He's for you, what do you have to be afraid of?" If He gave His Son, that which is most precious to Him, if He didn't spare His Son, think about it. He looked at the cross, and the Son looked at the cross, and the Son went willing to the cross, but the Father, he's saying, "Look at the Father giving His Son." How He must have wanted to spare His Son from the agony of the cross, from the agony physically of the cross, where He would experience the incredible physical torment of crucifixion, when He would experience the emotional suffering of being spat upon and beaten by the Jews and the Romans, mocked and scorned by all the people that

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passed by, mocking Him with hatred, the pure Holy Son of God being treated as the lowliest criminal. But beyond that, God the Father wanted to spare Him from His own wrath. God's holy wrath against sin was going to be poured out upon His Son. And if you or I would want to protect our kids, how much more did the Father of glory want to protect His Son? He truly loves.

Jesus says, "If your son asks you for a fish, what man among you gives him a snake? If your son asks you for bread, what man among you gives him a rock?" He says, "If you being evil know how to give good gifts, how much more your Father in Heaven gives good gifts." We're stupid and evil, and we know better than that. And God wanted to protect His Son. He loves His Son more than we ever would love our children, and if He didn't spare Him, but He delivered Him up for us, if He would love us that much to give us that, how can we not know that He's freely giving us all things now? The argument is from the greater to the lesser. If He gave us that which is most precious, that which is most valuable, will He not also give us the little things? Absolutely yes.

This means that He is only giving good things to His people every moment of every day of every year of your entire life, that no matter what happens, it is a love gift from a Father who you know loves you, because He didn't spare His Son. So He's in control. He's completely in control. Nobody can sneak in around Him and get to you. That's the beauty of the reality of it. The Bible shows us that Satan's not running amok. It looks like it from our vantage point, doesn't it? At times we wonder, "What? Things look like they're totally out of control," but the Bible says they're not, and they are not.

So if Satan can't sneak in and do something that God doesn't want him to do, in fact, the only things that Satan does are what God wants him to do. Evil people may want to hurt you and they may want to hurt me, but they can't touch us unless God wills it. I love how the Lord put that extended passage in Genesis 37 to 50, the first book of the Bible. Those 14 chapters just really show you the providence of God, the name of our church, Providence, that God is sovereignly governing all things for His purposes, and to bless His people. That's really a shorthand definition of Providence. He's blessing us.

Remember the story of Joseph and all the evil that happens to Joseph done by evil people. Satan's involved. His envious, jealous brothers, full of hatred and animosity want to kill him. I mean, how much is wrong there? They want to kill him, and then even hurt their dad. This is all kinds of ungodliness. Things seem run

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amok. Things seem out of control. Even Jacob was not being a very good parent. He's stirring the pot with his favoritism, right? Sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, and yet in the end, do you remember what Joseph says to his brothers after his dad dies? "You meant it for evil. God meant it for good. Everything that happened that you meant for evil, God meant for good." God was at the same time governing every single thing that happened, all those things that happened to Joseph.

That's true of you and me, and we believe that. How do you transform your mind? Well, you hear the word of God. You put yourself under the preaching and teaching of the word of God. You hear it. You read it. You keep reading the word and reading the word. You study the word. You memorize the word. You meditate upon the word. You speak the word to one another. You admonish one another.

That's how the word of Christ richly dwells within you (Colossians 3:16). Let the word of Christ (which we read earlier) dwell within you richly. How do you do that? Teaching and admonishing one another, that's what he says. In fact, that's one of those verses where it's you plural. Let the word of Christ dwell in y'all richly. That's what it says. It's not just about you individually. It's about you plural. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. How does it dwell in you richly? You speak the word to one another. You remind one another of these things. You say, "How are you feeling? You look discouraged." You tell me what I'm preaching today, three weeks from now, remind me of it when I need to hear it. "Have you forgotten? If He didn't spare His own Son, this is good." "Yes, thank you." We forget. We're sheep. We're forgetful and stupid, but the Lord has put us together to help one another, and His Spirit working in us will do that.

So we transform our minds and we transform our lives by renewing our minds, the thought patterns down at the deepest level. And so that's the plan. You offer your bodies as a sacrifice, and you renew your minds. And as you do this, you will make progress. And then the fourth point is:

4) Measure Your Progress:

How do you know you're making progress? He gives us a clue here:

Romans 12:2 ~ 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.

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The ‘so that’ introduces a result clause or a purpose clause. The reason that you are to be transformed by the renewing of your mind is so that the result is that you will prove what the will of God is. This word ‘prove’ is an important word here in this text. *...that you may prove...* The word means to test, to make a thorough examination of, or a trial of. The idea is like an experiment almost. The word would be used often of metal. You’re testing the metal to see if it can stand up to become a sword or to become some other implement that needs to be made. You’re testing it. You’re proving it. The idea is that you test and you prove so that you can approve.

So he’s saying that what happens is one of the ways you’ll know that you’re making progress in the renewing of your mind and the transformation of your life is you will be able to discern the will of God. You’ll be able to see, “Hey, wait a minute. I’m not supposed to be acting like this. What am I doing? I’m not supposed to be responding in anger like this. Why am I raising my voice? What’s wrong with me?” That’s the first part. “God doesn’t want me to act like this. He wants me to be kind and tenderhearted.” And we begin to see what we don’t need to be, and we need to see what we want to be or ought to be, and then we do it.

I want to think about this in terms of two things. You can measure your progress in terms of your attitude and in terms of your actions. You can measure your progress first of all in terms of your attitude. *...so that you may prove...* The idea, I said, is prove, test, and approve. Once it’s gone through the testing, now it’s approved. What he’s saying is that as you renew your mind, what happens is your attitude toward the will of God changes.

A lot of times we’re not honest with our attitudes toward the will of God. We say we believe, and we think that the will of God is right. “I know I shouldn’t hold this grudge,” but you’re still holding it. “Yeah, I know. I know I should be forgiving, but I’m just having trouble with that.” Well, you’re not really approving the will of God. But when your attitude really changes, and this is what he’s getting at, you prove what the will of God is, that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect. When the Lord says, “Thou shall not,” and you find yourself doing, or when the Lord says, “You shall be doing,” and you find yourself not doing, the first thing that needs to happen is the attitude about the will of God needs to change. And as we renew our minds, what happens is we begin to see that the will of God really is that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

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This is the problem. Sin really came from the problem of how they viewed the will of God. That's what was wrong with Eve and Adam. Satan attacked them at that point, didn't he? God had made it really clear, "Don't eat from that tree." The will of God was clear, and until the temptation came along, I don't think that they really spent a lot of time thinking about it. Satan comes and says, "Has God said?" He questioned the word of God, and remember he questions the character of God. Remember what he says? "Has God said that you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" What a liar. He was accusing God of telling them they couldn't eat from any of the trees of the garden. "Isn't that what He said?" Satan knew full well what He had said. But he is an accuser and a blasphemer, and so he impugns God's character. Eve corrected him. "No, no, He just said about the one tree in the center of the garden, we can't eat from it," and she added to it, "or touch it, and in the day we do it we'll die." And Satan says, "You shall surely not die, for God knows that when you eat it, you will become like Him, knowing good and evil. You'll be like God. God's holding out on you. You see, His will is not for your good. His will is not good, or pleasing, or acceptable, or perfect. His will is evil."

Every time you and I sin, we are saying God's will is evil. "It's not what's best for me." One of the major words used for 'evil' in the New Testament is a word which means harmful, hurtful. That's the major word that's used for evil. It's harmful or hurtful. And the major word for 'good', in fact, this word translated 'good' here, that which is good, is beneficial. The word has the idea of that which is useful, profitable, brings benefit to you, blessing.

So when we sin, we think that what's most beneficial for me right now is to transgress the law of God and to indulge my sin, and that to obey God would be hurtful to me, too hurtful to me. But what happens is when we renew our minds, we start thinking about His truth. We start, as we were doing a moment ago, talking about why fear doesn't make sense when you know the sovereignty of God and the love of God, and when you know that God's commands are only good for you. So He says, "Don't do this," it feels like I need to do this, He says, "Don't," and it will bring blessing to abstain from that. I feel like I need it. I believe His word, and I cry out to Him for grace and help. "Lord, help me," and then I start obeying Him, and now, "Yes! His will is good. It's so much more beneficial to do what He says."

Acceptable, the idea of this word—there are three adjectives. The will of God is good, and acceptable, and perfect. Whenever God speaks in threes like that, it tends to bring it to the superlative degree, and these three words have different windows. I said beneficial. Acceptable means to be gratified entirely. It's

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translated sometimes as well-pleasing. Well-pleasing is just a little too pedestrian, I think, in the way we think. This is more of a word that connotes more of the sense of just complete and utter satisfaction, that God's will is like that. It's not just beneficial. It gratifies entirely, and perfect means it's finished, that which has reached its end or its goal. It's exactly as it ought to be.

So the idea is that as you transform your mind, you come to see that God's way, His will, His commands, are what are most beneficial, what bring the most satisfaction, and they are perfect, lacking nothing. That's what happens, and when you understand that you're beginning to think about your former sins in this way, you're still struggling, you're still wrestling, there are moments where you're stumbling, but your mind is being renewed to believe, "This is wrong. I want holiness." Your attitudes are a way you measure your progress. What's your attitude toward sin and your attitude toward obedience in the particular areas you struggle with? Measure that.

Then secondly, your actions. It's not just enough to think or to want the right thing, but you've got to do the word. You keep meditating on it, and you look to the Lord to give you grace, and then you do the word. You obey. And then in another sense your life then proves what the will of the Lord is.

When I was talking about your attitudes, I was thinking more internally. You approve internally the will of God. When you do the will of God, you prove externally that the will of God is good, and acceptable, and perfect. When you and I begin to lay down the sins that we struggle with, and walk in more holiness, people around you look at you, and the goal is that they would see that God's way is good, and acceptable, and perfect. Your life bears witness to it. This is what we're called to.

Now, unbelievers don't always see that, but this is how God changes a lot of hearts. There are people out there who doubt God. They don't think God's good. They think they should run from God. They believe the lies of Satan. Every person who doesn't know Christ, believes God is against them. Now, they may talk about God in all kinds of ways but they believe that the God of the Bible, the true God, is against them. But when you live a life where you show "No, the most wonderful thing in the world is to obey God," and you show that it's good, and it's acceptable and it's perfect, the Lord begins to open their hearts through that, and the reconsider, and they look at they see your good works, and they glorify your Father who's in heaven, and they ask you for a reason for the hope that's within you.

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This is what God intends. He intends for us to have a goal of a transformed life, to set your goal, to cultivate your motivation. Continually the motivation is what He has done for me, and gratitude for that. And then you work the plan, to offer your body as a sacrifice and to renew your mind, and to be about that every day, because if you're not being about that, you are being conformed. You measure your progress by looking at your attitudes and your actions.

The Lord wants us, next year when we come around, Lord willing, to January 2016, to be able to look back and say, "I see real areas where I've made progress this year. The Lord has changed my attitudes in these areas. He's changed my behavior in these areas." And the good news is, that's just like you've renovated one room. Now deal with the next one. But isn't it good to know that God knows that you're a mess and He knows that I'm a mess? And He loves us because of Christ, and He invites us in love, in graciousness, in goodness, to allow Him to work to bring blessing, and benefit, and beauty into your life.

Let's pray together...

Father, we thank You for the privilege, the amazing privilege, of being called the sons and daughters of God. And we say with the apostle, "It is not yet appeared as what we shall be, but we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is." One day we will be completely renovated, transformed forever into the likeness of Christ, finished and complete. But we rejoice for the opportunity that we have today of being about such a holy and noble work, to offer to You lives that are increasingly clean and pure, and to know that that only happens by Your grace and for your glory.

We pray for those that are here that have not repented and believed in Christ, that today you would show them that they need to stop their distrust of you, their disobedience to You, and they need to submit to You and give themselves to You in faith and surrender, for You are worthy. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

"Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015 – Part II"

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