

BECAUSE OF GOD'S MERCY...BE TRANSFORMED, PT. 2
ROMANS 12:2

We need to change. We have to change. We have been called to change. Change is necessary for the one who is in Christ Jesus. And we can change because of the gospel that has saved us. Just listen to a few passages that affirm the possibility and privilege of spiritual transformation (sanctification):

- “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness...But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” [Romans 6:17–18, 22]
- “...[Christ] condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” [Romans 8:3b–4]
- “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh...if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live...” [Romans 8:12-13]
- “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” [1 John 3:2–3]
- “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another....But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” [Galatians 5:13, 16]
- “...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, *even* Christ...” [Ephesians 4:15]
- “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.” [Philippians 2:12–13]

As Paul transitions in the book of Romans to teaching theology to drawing out the implications of theology, the first thing he does in Romans 12 is to state that obedience and sacrifice is the only appropriate response to God's merciful work in our lives (Rom. 12:1). And building on that idea, he also commands us to be transformed and changed spiritually (Rom. 12:2). He will say it this way:

BECAUSE GOD IS MERCIFUL, LET GOD TRANSFORM THE PRACTICES OF YOUR LIFE.

In this well-known verse, the apostle Paul exhorts believers to change by revealing **three characteristics** of biblical transformation:

1. The **OBSTACLE** to Transformation

- Raye Jeanne and I were pretty unreasonable parents when our children were at home:
 - ✓ We had expectations for our girls:
 - Worship and service in the church is prioritized over sleep-overs
 - School work and homework is prioritized over books, movies, and playing outside
 - You will inform us with whom you will be and when you will be home
 - You will not lie to us (and you will speak respectfully to your mother)
 - You will not stick knives in electrical sockets and climb ladders unattended at age two
 - You will eat what is placed in front of you at every meal — happily
 - We had some long discussions over some of those rules. At times the girls thought we were unreasonable, overly strict, and uncomprehending of the way the world works.
 - Everything we did for them we did according to our best wisdom for their protection.
 - ✓ When Scripture speaks to us with warnings and with commands, it is for similar reasons — to protect us from danger and to lead us to delight in God. That’s what God is doing when Paul says, **do not be conformed to this world**. He gives the command because it’s good for us.
 - ✓ We cannot over-estimate the power of this influence or the danger of the world system.
 - ✓ When we talk about non-conformity to the **world**, we’re not just talking about what we do, but about how we think — the influences on our minds, our desires, hopes, longings, and affections.
 - ✓ We noted last week that the term **world** is actually “this age” (as opposed to the eternal age to come). That emphasizes that in this age, there is nothing eternal that will last (except what God is doing spiritually in us). This world system is doomed to entire failure. Nothing produced by this world is enduring or for our benefit.
 - ✓ But the world won’t tell you that. The world system is under the control of Satan who is blinding the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4) and attempting to entice us with the world and destroy us (1 Pt. 5:8). We have been delivered *by* Christ and *to* Christ *from* this system (Rom. 5-6). There are “temporary” pleasures in the world (Heb. 11:25 — which is why people get drunk when they know the consequences, among other things); those “pleasures” offer no lasting hope and will only destroy. The world is not only not from God, it is against God in every way (1 Jn. 2:16; 3:5-8).
 - ✓ If we live for the world, we will get only what the world gives and nothing of what God gives.
- We need to be convinced there is nothing good in this world. Several years ago, one pastor wrote, “If what’s fashionable in our society interests you, then true Christianity won’t. It’s that simple.” He was right. And then he started calling people who say those kinds of things legalists who don’t know the freedom of Christ. And then his wife committed adultery, and then he did too, in retaliation...

- ✓ “Affections for Christ and desires for worldly comfort are mutually expulsive. A love for the world drives out affection for Christ. Admiration for Christ pushes out affections for worldly idols. Friendship with the world is enmity toward Christ...It is spiritual suicide to claim Christ as your fountain of joy but then feed your soul on sin, idols, and worldliness. The sinful pleasures of this world usurp true affection for Christ, and vice versa.” [Reinke, *Newton on the Spiritual Life*.]
- ✓ We need to get in the habit of reading and observing and watching the influences around us and say, “that is opposed to my soul and it will only bring grief if I engage in it.” Lloyd-Jones helpfully said, “The Christian is the man who expects nothing from this world. He does not pin his hopes on it, because he knows that it is doomed.” [*Messenger of Grace*]

2. The **NATURE** of Transformation

• **Recognize the command to be transformed**

- ✓ **Be transformed** is a command — we are responsible to be engaged in the process of sanctification. The command is also a present tense, which means that this revelation of ongoing change is continual. It is an ongoing process, as long as the believer is alive (*progressive* sanctification).
- ✓ It is also a “passive” command which means that we are not ultimately responsible — it is something that is done to us (by the Spirit of God, Rom. 8:11, 13).
- ✓ So the sense of the command is something like, “submit yourself to the Spirit’s work and do not resist what He will naturally do in you — let yourself be changed.” (E.g., **1 Thess. 5:19**).
- ✓ I have not been saved to remain in my sin. I have been saved to be redeemed from my sin. I will experience that ultimately in Heaven; God is progressively freeing me *now* from my sin.
- ✓ Also recognize that this is not merely changing a few habits. This is *real* change that happens because our hearts have been changed.
 - Let’s say that you have a problem with the kinds of things you say — your speech is prone to being critical, harsh, angry, and even filled with profanity.
 - Does that need to change? YES. (E.g., Eph. 4:25-32). But not as a change of habit only. In his extended explanation of the tongue, James concludes it is the fruit of righteousness (**Js. 3:17f**) — the outward manifestation of what has taken place positionally and is progressively taking place daily in our lives.
 - So we have a responsibility to be changed. But *how* are we changed?

• **Recognize the provision for being transformed**

- ✓ The **mind** is the total summation of everything we are internally. And all those internal mechanisms feed and direct what we do (**Lk. 6:45**).

- ✓ One thing we can be sure of is that the mind is critical to our sanctification. We can't keep thinking the same way we have always thought and expect to change.
- ✓ And God has given us a new mind to think in new ways! What are the realities of this mind?
 - We have the mind of Christ (Rom. 15:5; 1 Cor. 2:16)
 - Our pattern is to be heavenly (godly) minded (Col. 3:1ff)
 - Worldly minds and thinking are futility (Eph. 4:17-19) and lead to destruction (Phil. 3:19)
 - We are to actively engage in new thinking (Eph. 4:23)
 - Mind renewal includes thinking the way the Spirit thinks — desiring His desires (Rom. 8:5)
 - Godly thinking will keep us from pride (Rom. 12:3) — prideful thinking is immature thinking
 - There is even a “corporate” mind: our goal as a church is to have a unified mind (purpose) in our actions (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10). Unity in the church is the overflow of right thinking.
 - Right thinking will change everything we do — how we think about ourselves (v. 3), how we think about ministry in the church (vv. 4-8), how we think about our relationships (vv. 9-13), and how we think about our suffering and hard relationships (vv. 14-21). Right thinking changes everything.
- *How are our minds transformed?*
 - ✓ What Paul makes clear in this passage is that our minds must be renewed. But he doesn't explicitly say *how* we renew our minds.
 - ✓ Our minds will only be made to work and think rightly when we take in God's Word —
 - We have to be filled by the Spirit, and the Spirit fills us by His Word (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16)
 - The Scriptures are adequate to teach and mature every person (Col. 1:28)
 - When we look at the Lord of Glory in His Word, we will be changed (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - Growth comes from grace and knowledge of God in His Word (2 Pt. 3:18)
 - Sanctification comes by and through the Scriptures (Jn. 17:17)
 - And then there are all the benefits that come through the Scriptures in Ps. 119
 - ✓ If we are not doing that, we can be sure that we will be conformed to the world and left untransformed by the Spirit of God in our minds. We will be an impoverished people as long as we willingly take in the world more than we take in God's Word.
 - ✓ Because the goal of the Scriptures are to change us, we need to constantly be asking as we read:
 - What would God desire to change in me because of what I've heard?
 - What can I do because of what I have seen/heard in God's Word?
 - We want to move from hearing to doing, since that is what God's Word is designed to do.

3. The **BENEFITS** of Transformation

• You will **KNOW** God's Will

- ✓ In summary, Paul says there is one great benefit of being transformed — we will demonstrate that we know what **God's will** is — and there are three further implications of knowing that will.
- ✓ When he says that we will **prove** what the will of God is, he means that we will demonstrate that we know what God's will is by the way we live our lives. We will be living God's will.
- ✓ What does he mean by God's will?
 - One way Scripture uses the term is to refer to God's sovereign purposes that are hidden until they are revealed in time (**Rom. 1:10**; 1 Cor. 1:1; **1 Pt. 4:19**; **Dt. 29:29**).
 - He is talking about the moral will of God — His standards, desires, and purposes. It is God's decreed, stated purposes/regulations (e.g., **Mk. 3:35**; **Eph. 6:6**; **1 Thess. 4:3**; **1 Pt. 5:2**; **Dt. 29:29**).
- ✓ How does this work in daily life? We fill our mind with God's Word and we allow it to shape us and then we go through the day and have to make daily decisions and those decisions are informed by our growing and increasing knowledge of God's Word and will:
 - Someone from church comes to mind and instead of thinking "that's odd," you pray and call...
 - You are delayed in traffic and instead of anger you are aware of God's sovereignty and rest
 - You are given free tickets to a ball game and you think first about impact on family
 - You have a conversation with struggling co-worker and you think about how to talk gospel
 - Your child sins and needs discipline and you use it as an opportunity to also teach about grace
 - Your yard is dying from lack of rain, everything is brown, and you don't complain about weather
 - You talk to a friend after church and your first thought is, "how can I bless him?"
- ✓ All these things and thousands more are demonstrations (proof) that your inward transformation by the Word of God has led you to a knowledge of God's will and what to do in any situation. We are putting into practice what we have learned from God and how He has changed us. Is there value?

• You Will Know **GOODNESS** in God's Will

- ✓ Paul gives us three further words about God's will. These words explain what the will of God is, but they should not be taken only as "attributes" of God's will — they do more than explain God's will, but "describe the nature of the things the believer encounters as he follows God's will." [Hiebert]
- ✓ So when Paul says God's will is **good** He doesn't just mean "God's good will" (it *is* good) but he also means "God's will is good for the believer..."
- ✓ Does God make commands? Yes. But they are good. They are consistent with His nature and are always an expression of His goodness. And that will produces goodness through us and they are the means by which God makes us good (which he does, **15:14**).
- ✓ When He makes a decree, it's good, and good for us.

• You Will Know **DELIGHT** in God's Will

- ✓ God's will is **acceptable**. Some translations say "pleasing" or "well-pleasing." Those are helpful.
- ✓ The sense is that doing the will of God makes us pleasing to God (which he also says in **v. 1**).
- ✓ But it also means that doing the will of God will give pleasure to us. Obedience to God's will "leads to discernment and discernment to delight in God's will." We happily obey.
- ✓ Before we sin, the stream into which the sin will take us seems ankle deep; as soon as we step into it, we feel like we are in a riptide in the deepest part of the ocean. As soon as we sin we instantly (if our consciences are working) recognize the magnitude of our sin. And if we consciously avoid the sin, as we look back at the stream we will have no regret as we see the depth of the ocean of sin.
- ✓ For too many years, I cultivated a snarky tongue; I have been fighting hard against it for a long time. Because of that fight there are now times when I have had a "witty" comment pop into my head and I have fought against it and left it unsaid. I have *never* thought later, "I sure wish I had said that." I have always been glad that it was left unsaid. (And now I'm working to not even *think* those thots).
- ✓ Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of this reality — there is no lasting joy in that angry conflict, prideful word, covetous spending, lustful looking, or lazy inactivity. Delight is in obeying God's will.

• You Will Know **MATURITY** in God's Will

- ✓ The word **perfect** is a word that refers to completeness and maturity (e.g., Eph. 4:13; **Phil. 3:15**; **Col. 1:28**). When we know and follow God's will, that is the end and goal for which God created us. And that obedience is also the means by which God matures us.
- ✓ Obedience to the will of God is God's finishing school for the believer.
- ✓ That will of God is also the means by which we will bring us to final completion (**1 Thess. 5:23**).
- ✓ This maturity is what God is doing in us. And that leads me to one final thought this morning...

4. The Implications of Transformation for Church Leadership (Acts 6:3-6)

- Today we are recognizing a group of men that the Lord has given us to serve as deacons.
- These are men who are gifted for what we are asking them to do — they've been working for years.
- But they are also the kind of men that are demonstrating the benefits and fruit of transformation. Their lives have been observed in our church body and we have seen this kind of transformation.
- What specific qualities are seen in these men? The same kinds of things as the first deacons (Acts 6):
 - ✓ A deacon has a godly and **good reputation** with the congregation (**vv. 3, 5**).
 - ✓ A deacon is not as much about task as he is about spiritual character and maturity (**v. 3**) — they are **full of the Spirit** (controlled by Him). Members and elders and deacons are all called to the same kind of spiritual maturity; there is merely a higher accountability for increased responsibility.

“The New Testament makes the uncontested point that God’s paramount concern is not with buildings or programs but with the moral and spiritual character of those who lead and care for his people. Godly leadership makes the true, spiritual difference in the local church. In fact, almost all the instruction on deacons in the New Testament relates to their qualifications. According to the New Testament, not just anyone who wants to be a deacon can become one. Paul is emphatic about this, probably because this is where the church at Ephesus had gone wrong.” [Strauch]

- ✓ A deacon has a *personal* role with a *corporate* responsibility. It’s *his* role and *his* gifting and *his* responsibility, but it’s *for* the church body (v. 3).
- ✓ A deacon is not above the congregation and not below the elders. Their roles are different than elders/apostles (v. 4), but that does not denote inferiority/superiority. They serve *with* the elders. No matter our role, we all are just servants of the Savior and all are necessary to the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12). What is important is faithfulness.
- ✓ They are recognized by the congregation and are approved by the congregation (v. 5). Their role is for the church and recognized by the church.
- ✓ Not all deacons are well-known (v. 5), but all are known by God and He will reward their service.
- ✓ There is at least a two-fold result in the ministry of the deacons:
 - More people doing ministry in keeping with their gifts (both apostles and deacons, v. 4)
 - The spread of the gospel and the maturity of the church (v. 7)

CONCLUSION: Ask the new deacons and elders to come forward for time of prayer for the deacons...

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36

Be sure to thank these men for their ministry and to affirm them in their service of our church body.