

## The Transformation of our Lives: Romans 12:2

-By Steven Shepard, February 15, 2004

The title of my sermon today is “The Transformation of Our Lives”, and will be taken from Romans 12:2. Transformation is something all Christians should desire. This passage teaches us how transformation actually takes place. That is why the truth presented in Romans 12:2 is one of the key truths of all of Scripture. It unlocks the secret of how our lives are transformed. It answers the question of how we grow and how we are sanctified as believers. If we realize in our lives the truth of this one verse – then a God centered worship, the love of the brethren, Christian community, and fervent evangelism will be the result.

That is one reason why I decided to speak on this text – because it actually is so crucial to the mobilization of the Church for the Great Commission. In fact, unless the Church realizes the truth found in Romans 12:2, the Great Commission will not be fulfilled. This is because the Great Commission simply will not be accomplished through giving a certain amount of money, or by having good strategies or methods. There is not a lack of any of these things. What is lacking is motivation on the part of Christians. The Great Commission will only be fulfilled when Christians believe the Gospel, love God, and have a burden in their hearts for lost souls. This can only happen when the Holy Spirit transforms the life from the inside out; and this transformation is only possible through the renewal of the mind. It is through this process – the renewal of the mind - that Christians both grow into the image of Christ and are used to extend God’s Kingdom.

From Romans 12:2, the Scripture reads, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans chapter 12, verse 1 is a pivotal verse. In the first 11 chapters Paul presented his teaching about the Gospel. Now in chapter 12 Paul turns his attention to the application of how we should live as a response to the Gospel. He says in chapter 12 verse 1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God --this is your spiritual act of worship.” Paul is saying, in view of God’s mercy, in view of the mercy that was unveiled in the first 11 chapters -- in view of the free favor of God coming to you through Jesus Christ, in view of Christ receiving in your place the wrath that you deserved, in view of the fact that He chose you, that He called you, that He justified you, and will glorify you, in view of the fact that He is therefore unchangeably for you and on your side, and that nothing will separate you from His love, in view of all these mercies and many more -- you should therefore give your whole lives in service to God as living sacrifices. Then Paul says this is what it means to worship God. Worship is more than coming to a meeting once a week on Sunday, but rather it is the offering of our whole lives to God.

Paul now goes on to say in verse 2 that this kind of commitment, this kind of dedication, this kind of all consuming worship of God, requires a radical separation from this world. If we give ourselves to God, we cannot at the same time give ourselves to the world. James 4:4 says, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” Not conforming to the pattern of this world means to not be made like the world. The word world in Greek is the word *aion* which means an age. In Romans 12:2 it refers to the spiritual characteristics of this world’s system: lust, selfishness, greed, hatred, and the totality of the sinful nature. 1 John 2:16 says, “For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.”

Because the children of God are not of this world, they are not to conform to this world. They are not to take their cues from this world for what their standards should be, for what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Yet, this is all too often what happens. The world influences the church more than the church influences the world. Often people are not able to see a big difference between professing Christians and non Christians. This is because professing Christians conform themselves to the world instead of conforming themselves to God. They take on the world’s pass times and the world’s standards. Sinful practices gradually take on acceptability until eventually they seem normal. *It just becomes the way everyone lives.* Endless amounts of worthless, mindless, and sinful images are injected into the mind through TV and videos. Standards of dress that are immodest become normal fashion. Christians seek fulfillment in the same way that the world seeks fulfillment, in materialism, personal comforts, constant entertainment, and all manner of escape. Personal

privacy is protected while homes remain closed. Christians, live in isolation, just like the world, and like the world are too busy for relationships. We think it is all o.k. because it is just normal; this is the way everyone lives. Meanwhile eternal realities are forgotten and multitudes die without Christ.

But as Christians we are not to get our values or take our cues from this world's system. We are not to think the way the world does. Christians are to be conformed to God's reality. We are to think His thoughts. We are to be different from the world. We are to be governed not by the flesh, but by the Spirit. As 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The church is to be a counter culture, with its own standards, its own customs, and its own agenda.

Yet we can't do any of this in our own strength. In our own strength we can't give our bodies as a living sacrifice, and we can't keep ourselves from becoming conformed to this world's system. We must be transformed by the Spirit of God. That is why after Paul says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world", he goes on to say, "but (or instead) be transformed." What is the transformation to which Paul refers?

First I want to say what transformation is not. Transformation is not personal success. It is not the ability to achieve your own goals. It is not the ability to control your own life, or be healthy, or well liked. It is not enhancing your intellectual powers. It is not a man-centered or a self focused kind of transformation.

This kind of false transformation is what the world itself constantly seeks. Personal transformation is constantly being talked about on college campuses. It has become big business. Many books about transformation have been written. Therapies and techniques have been devised, conferences given, nutritional supplements sold, illegal drugs consumed, and religions invented. Many are obsessed with such ideas as "self realization", "personal enlightenment", altered forms of consciousness, positive thinking, visualization techniques, and New Age meditation. On the internet, you can find such things advertised as cranial stimulators, brain wave harmonizers, magnetic field therapy, bio energy balancers, and stress busters – all in the name of personal transformation. Don't ask me what all those things are. But I do know one thing. None of these things will bring real transformation. 1 Cor 3:19, says, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness before God."

No matter what sinful man does – no matter how hard that he tries to become transformed, real transformation will always elude him. That is because sinful man can never really or essentially change himself. As Jeremiah says in Jer 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil."

Jesus pointed the way to real transformation when He told Nicodemus in John 3:7, "You must be born again." Man who is dead in trespasses and sins is miraculously made spiritually alive through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and made into a "new creature in Christ". As the Scripture says in **2 Cor 5:17**, "old things have passed away; behold all things are made new." This is real transformation, from darkness to light, from condemnation to righteousness, from death to life, and from futility to hope.

Yet this is just the beginning of a whole process of transformation for the believer. There is much more to come. Paul says in Romans 12:2, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind". The Greek verb "be transformed" is in the present continuous imperative tense. God is actually commanding His people saying, "Be continually in the process of becoming transformed more and more."

The Greek word for "be transformed" is *metamorfao* from which we get the English word *metamorphosis*. This is usually associated with the complete change of the caterpillar into the butterfly. *Meta* means change, and *morph* means form. The word means to change into another form. In Romans 12:2 it means a total change and an inward change that finds expression in character and conduct. As Christians we are to be in a process of continuous change from what we were before. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory." We are being transformed to become more like Christ. As we go through this process we become progressively freed from sin and more and more under the Spirit's control. We become different people, with different values, different attitudes, different motivations, different thoughts, different words, and different actions. We conform our lives more and more to the will of God.

For a true Christian this kind of transformation, (or you could say, this kind of sanctification) is not an option. Rom 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son". This verse says, all believers have been predestined, not just to be saved, but "to be conformed to the

image of His Son.” Ephesians 1:4 says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Hebrews 12:14 says, “Pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” Transformation is absolutely necessary. True saving faith always brings transformation. If there is no transformation, there is no salvation. So if you have been chosen to be saved from God’s wrath, chosen to go to heaven, then you have also been chosen and called to be transformed -- transformed to be made partakers of the Divine nature, transformed to love like Jesus loves, transformed from a life of fear to a life of faith, transformed to live in His presence, transformed to have peace where there once was confusion, transformed to glorify God through good works, transformed from a life of futility to a life of purpose, transformed to be like Jesus.

The question is how does this take place? How are we transformed? 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “But we all...are being transformed into the same image...just as by the spirit of the Lord.” We are transformed not by any human techniques or human works, but only through the power of the Spirit of God. But how does the Spirit of God do His work? Romans 12:2 gives us the answer. It says “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Do you want to be transformed? Do you want to live your whole life as a living sacrifice for Christ and not become conformed to this world’s system? Romans 12:2 tells us exactly how this transformation takes place – through the renewal of your mind. This means that if your mind is renewed, you definitely will be transformed. If your mind is renewed, you definitely will become more like Christ. If your mind is not renewed, then you will not be transformed, because transformation happens this way – by the renewing of your mind.

Renewal means to make new. To renew the mind means to make new the way we think and understand reality. It means that our thinking and our understanding is no longer guided by the perspective of this world, but our thinking is reformed by the Word of God. But renewal of the mind means more than just thinking new thoughts. It means becoming convinced of these new thoughts. It means that God’s reality takes the place of the world’s unreality. The world’s unreality is based upon the lies of the Devil. If we don’t renew our minds, we will in fact become oppressed by the lies of the Devil; we will become conformed to this world, and the result will be that we will not glorify God with our lives the way that we should.

The only way that we can be transformed is by the renewal of the mind. We cannot transform ourselves through our own works. We cannot change ourselves by trying to conform to an outward form of religion. We will never be able to give our lives as living sacrifices through our own will power or out of a sense of duty. We must be transformed from the inside out and this is only possible through the inward transformation of our beliefs. Transformation is completely by grace and through faith. What we believe and what we are convinced of will end up determining all that we do. If there is a behavior that needs to be changed, focus on renewing the mind. As the mind is renewed, as unbelief is turned to faith, attitudes will change, inward motivations will change, and then actions will change.

Do you believe that sharing the Gospel is urgent? If you don’t, then your mind needs to be renewed. When you look at the people in your daily life who are unbelievers – your co-workers - your relatives – how do you see them? They may be nice people, and you may even think of them as successful - yet are you able to see them in their true condition - held captive to the Devil, under the wrath of God, and headed to an eternity of unspeakable torment from which there will be no escape? Do you really believe that you have eternal life? Are you *persuaded* that you will never die, that you will live eternally in the presence of God? Only then will you live fearlessly for God. Or as the Proverbs say, “You will be as bold as a lion!” But if you think that this life is all there is then you will love this world and you will live to gratify your own desires. Are you a believer? And yet are you easily offended? Do you fear the rejection of others? Are you in bondage to what others think about you? Renew the mind! Think about yourself the way God thinks about you. Realize that you have the unchangeable favor and acceptance of Almighty God. This is the only true security. It does not matter what mere people say. It does not matter what they do! Nothing can harm you, because “if God is for us, who can be against us.”

This is the transformation of heart that comes through the renewal of the mind and through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It transforms the life and brings peace and joy in the midst of the severest of trials, because you are persuaded of truth. You are persuaded of who you are in Christ. You are persuaded of where you are going. You are confident that God is in control of every detail of your life, that nothing happens by accident, and that all things are working to your spiritual good.

So what will be the result? What will be the result of the renewal of the mind? Our text says, “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.” You will be able to know from experience what God’s will is. You will know how He wants you to live. You will understand what is pleasing to Him. You will see that God’s will is good and pleasing and perfect. You will see that what most pleases God is also that which is best for you. To experientially know and follow God’s will is to possess the greatest freedom and the highest joy. It is to have knowledge of salvation. It is to be ready for eternity. It is to be used by God for eternal purposes. It is to have your life count for all eternity. There is nothing better, nothing more pleasing, and nothing more perfect for our lives than to personally test and approve what God’s will is – through the renewing of our minds.

The question for us now – if we are to be transformed, and if transformation only comes through the renewing of the mind, what should we do? We cannot illumine our own minds, we cannot convince ourselves of God’s reality. This is the realm of the Holy Spirit. Yet there are some things we can do so that the renewal of our minds might happen.

**What can we do to renew our minds?** (These are things we can do that are important to our minds becoming renewed and our whole lives becoming transformed.)

**A. Recognize that only the Holy Spirit can bring renewal.** Only the Spirit can cause us to be illumined within and convinced of truth.

1 Cor 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. Eph 1:17-18

**B. Pray.** Ask God for a hunger for His Word, for wisdom to understand it.

**C. Get the Word into your mind.** If you get the Word into your mind, God will get the Word into your heart. Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom. Rom 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. John 8:31

**1. Hear the Word.** Come to church. Pray ahead of time. Pray for the preacher.

**2. Read the Word.** Study, use a concordance, read through a book, snack on the Word.

**3. Avail yourself of other resources** – tapes, books, videos, conferences

**4. Meditate on the Word.** Gr: To ponder, to attend to, to care for. Heb: to moan, utter, speak.

This is not a technique, but born out of a love and delight in His Word. Spurgeon captured meditation in his advice to preachers, “Probe your text, like a bee with a spring blossom... Worry at it like a dog with a bone. Suck it as a child sucks an orange. Chew it as a cow chews the cud.”

**5. Study and meditate on the part of the Word that relates to your area of weakness.**

**6. Learn the key truths** like the attributes of God, the depravity of man, the finished work of Christ, grace, the sovereignty of God, repentance, faith, and perseverance.

**7. Speak the Word to one another.** Seek fellowship with those who will build you up in Christ. Be the person others seek to be built up in Christ. We need to be a community who will reinforce God’s reality of the Kingdom. We will eventually become like the people we hang out with.

Don’t allow yourself to be distracted from the things of God.

**8. Control your thoughts.** Do not feed on thoughts that contradict God’s Word. 2 Cor 10:3-6

Do you recognize your need to be transformed? Are you willing to be transformed? The good news is – you can be transformed. The way to be transformed is through faith in Jesus Christ which works through the renewal of the mind. If you put the truth of God into your mind, God will use that truth to transform you through the power of the Holy Spirit. If you do this you will be like the man David wrote about in Psalm 1:1-13, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”