

## Romans Part 39 – Chapter 12

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### Review

Paul concludes chapter 11 with an emotion filled praise to God's supremacy, unfathomable wisdom, amazing grace, faithfulness, love, and ultimately, His glory.

Then changes the subject to how we need to respond to God in light of all we just learned.

### Romans 12:1-8:

*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. 2 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.*

*3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

*6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

### Now let's dissect:

#### Romans 12:1:

*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.*

Some versions start Romans 12:1 with this word "therefore." Which in Paul's writings we always start with "what is it there for?" – or 'because of all I just said... here's a conclusion you should realize.'

Paul even ties the next statement to the conclusion by saying "*by the mercies of God.*" He explained previously that God is full of mercy and now uses it to explain how we "*present our bodies as a living sacrifice.*" You presenting your body as a living sacrifice is still only possible with God's mercy, which we should request, or plead for, as we exert effort to be holy and acceptable to God.

Paul launches into an appeal to his spiritual siblings: his brothers and sisters in Christ. Though he is the apostle sent by Jesus Himself to take the gospel to the world, Paul is also "one of us." He is a sinful human being saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. He calls God Father, as we do, making him our brother.

Paul writes that as the Jewish people offered killed animals as sacrifices to God, Christians should instead offer ourselves, our bodies, to Him as living sacrifices. In other words, the only rational response to God's mercy in giving us eternal life is to give Him our lives as a sacrifice to use for His purposes right now.

Animal sacrifices under the old covenant sacrificial system had to be set apart from the herd for that purpose and chosen with care to make sure they were acceptable—unmarked and unharmed. As living sacrifices, God has already set us apart for His purposes and declared us acceptable because He sees us in our position in Christ. In other words, we do not have to wait to be better people before we offer our bodies and lives to God. As people in Christ, He will receive the sacrifice of our everyday lives right now.

This life of worship, then, is the appropriate response to the mercy God has already given to us.

A literal translation of the last clause says, “this is your reasonable service.” Sensible people respond to God’s mercy by serving him.

What does this involve? Paul explains now in verse 2: “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” Our standard of behavior is no longer the society around us. We do not just continue doing what we have always done. Rather, we are to change, and this change begins in the mind. It takes conscious effort — thinking about how God’s way is different from the world around us. “Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

After we stop looking to the world, we will see what God wants, and we will find that his way is better. His instructions are not arbitrary rules just to test our loyalty — they are to help us avoid causing pain for ourselves and for others.

**Romans 12:2:** *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.*

The word "world" is often used in the New Testament to refer to the "world system," or the way that every human being lives by default. John described this worldly way of living as "*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life*" (1 John 2:16). By instinct, all of us chase those things in pursuit of happiness and meaning.

Paul tells us to abandon the chase for pleasure, possessions, and status—to stop living like everyone else. Instead, he urges us to be transformed from the inside out. Specifically, he writes that we must be changed in how we think, to have our minds renewed so that we can begin to understand God's will for our lives.

God may continue to provide us with pleasure, possessions, and status in various forms, but he urges us to learn how to look at life with a new question: What does God want for me? What is truly a good, acceptable, and perfect use of my life for His purposes and not just for my own?

Dr. David Jeremiah:

God has called each of us to love the Lord our God with all of our minds. He's told us that we can have the mind of Christ, and the mind of Christ is the mind of humility.

Paul makes an amazing statement about the possibility we have as Christians to grow in our faith. He tells us that the mind can be, indeed must be renewed. He makes it so plain that the difference between being conformed and being transformed is the renewing of our mind. Men and women, you can spend the rest of your lives making promises, filling out commitment cards, talking to counselors, but Paul's words are very clear. Unless you renew your mind, you won't be transformed. Things will stay pretty much the way that they are.

New Testament scholar Grant Osborne writes, "It is clear that the mind is where spiritual growth occurs, and in the mind decisions are made that determine one's spiritual direction and destiny". In other words, the ongoing conduct of the believer is based on input from the world or from God. This will determine whether you live victorious or whether you live in defeat. Let's begin with the purpose of the renewed mind. Remember the verse says, "By the renewing of your mind".

It is in our minds, men and women, that our new nature and our old nature are intermixed. It is in the mind that we make choices as to whether we will express our new nature in holiness or allow our old nature to act in sinfulness. And Paul tells us that the only way to get victory in this process is to renew our mind so that we can withstand the pressure of the world and its allurements. He says, "Be not conformed to this world". And the word that he uses that is translated in our English Bible by the word "conformed" refers to the act of an individual assuming an outward expression that does not come from within. It is not representative of the inner part of the person. Conformation is something that happens from the outside in.

J.B. Phillips has a paraphrase of this that is rather timeless. He says, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold". Kenneth Wuest has another paraphrase that goes like this, "Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from within, nor does it represent what you are as a child of God. We are not to be like a chameleon taking our colors from our surroundings".

When Paul uses the word "world," when he says, "Do not be conformed to the world," he's talking about the condition of humanity, its fads and its fashions, and everything in the existing order of things which is outside of the kingdom of God. Sometimes, that phrase is referred to as the age, like in Galatians 1:4, we read that he gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, that's the world. You do know that when he says we're not to be conformed to the world, he's not talking about the round globe which is where we exist. He's talking about the system of the world, the culture, the things around us. What Paul is saying is this, "Don't allow the world in which you live as a Christian, the fashion, the fads, the culture, don't allow that world to pressure you into such a way that you become just like the world. Don't be conformed to the world".

The reason why your mind needs to be renewed is so that you do not become conformed to the world in which you live in. That's the normal, natural thing, isn't it? Even when we become Christians, we try to fit in. We try to be a part of the community.

We are subject to the peer pressure that the world puts on us. And Paul says the only way you will be able to be a true Christian, to really walk what you believe, is to make sure that you do not let this world pressure you from the outside in into being something that you're really not.

There are two purposes for the renewing of the mind. The first is kind of a negative one. We need to renew our minds so that we won't be conformed to the world in which we live. But secondly, and this is the positive part, we need to have a renewed mind so that we do become transformed by the Word of God. Now, the Greek word for transformed that's in this text is an interesting word, it's only used three times in the New Testament. Actually, we can boil it down to two times because two of the three times are in the gospels which are recording the same event almost in exactly the same words.

The first time is in Matthew 17 and Mark 9, where we read these words, "Now after six days, Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and he was transfigured before them". It's the same word as the word "transform". He was transfigured. Now, read the rest of it, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light". In the transfiguration, the Lord's glorious inner essence was allowed to show through his body so that his face radiated like the sun and his clothing was as white as light. A complete change came over Jesus, his whole body became translucent. Jesus told his disciples that this was such a significant day that they would not be able to understand what was going on until after the resurrection, and indeed they did not.

The word is used one other time in the New Testament and it has to do with us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, we read, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed," transfigured if you will, "into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord". The Greek word for transformed is our English word "metamorphosis". And on two occasions in the Scripture, the metamorphosis in the life of a believer was so complete as to be evident to all who are watching. Many of you remember the story of Moses going up to Mount Sinai to get the law. And the Bible tells us in Exodus 34 that, "It was so that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hands, that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he had talked with God".

Likewise, the Bible tells us that when Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, faced his enemies and they were taking him out, stoning him to death, looking steadfastly at him, they saw his face and it became the face like an angel. And the Bible tells us that one day that metamorphosis, that change from the inside out, is going to be perfectly experienced by every single one of us who are Christians. 1 John chapter 3 says, "Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it is not yet revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". Just as when Jesus was transfigured and he was totally changed from the inside out, just as Moses when he came down from the mountain was changed from the inside out, the Bible says that one day, when we get to heaven, when we see Jesus, we're going to take on this incredible metamorphosis, and we're going to be just like him. We're going to be changed to be just like him.

Now, the Bible says, "Don't be conformed from the outside in, but be transformed from the inside out by the renewing of your mind," and we've got it, we understand that. But the question remains, what does it mean to have your mind renewed? There are two agents involved in the renewal of your mind, two essential agents that are necessary. The same two agents that are necessary for you to become a Christian are necessary for you to have your mind renewed. There are two things the Bible says that are necessary for you to become a Christian. One of them is the Word of God, and the other is the Holy Spirit.

You cannot become a Christian without the Word of God and without the Spirit of God. They work in tangent with each other to bring you under conviction and to cause you to be born again. But interestingly enough, in the Bible, we are told that our minds cannot be renewed unless the Holy Spirit is involved. In fact, one of the ways we know that is the word "renewed" in its very special application is only used two times in the New Testament, once in Romans 12:2 and one other time in Titus 3:5. And here's what it says in Titus 3:5, *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit"*.

One of the reasons we know the Holy Spirit is an essential agent in the renewing process is because this word "renewal" is only used two times in the Greek Bible, Romans 12:2, Titus 3:5. Both of them refer to what happens in the process of renovation. We are being renovated in our minds, and the two agents who are involved are the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Paul reminds us that this renewal that we are going under and that we are experiencing, Colossians 3:10, he says we are renewed in knowledge. And in Ephesians 4:23, the Word is used in a different form than the other two, and we are renewed in the spirit of our minds.

The Word of God is taken in by listening to sermons, or reading, or studying, hopefully by reading some of the Bible every day. The Spirit of God then takes the Word of God that has been ingested into your system, and he uses that Word to apply it to the situations in your life. He uses that Word to show you the things in your life that ought not to be there, or to bring things into your life that should be there. And little by little, there is a replacement of the old things with the new things.

Somebody said the old things begin to fall off of your life like barnacles off of a ship, and little by little the new things begin to take hold. The Bible says, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passing away; behold, all things are becoming new". The agents involved in that process are the Word of God and the Spirit of God. They work together in cooperation to change the way you think and to change the way you go about life, two agents. Then there are two actions that take place in the renewing of the mind. One action is an action from the outside in. That's the Word of God.

How do you get this information in your system? The Bible becomes important to you. You begin to read things that help you understand the Bible. There is an intaking of the Word of God, that's necessary. That's the outside in action. Without it, it doesn't work. But there's an inside out action too. If you take the Word of God in and you're not prepared in your heart to receive it, if God has not done a work to plow up the hard soil of your heart so that you are willing to accept the seed of God's Word, then nothing will happen.

That is why testing is mentioned in the second half of the verse: *"that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

John Stott warns, "To suppose that salvation lies in a book is as foolish as supposing that health lies in a prescription". He said, "When we are ill and the doctor prescribes some medicine for us, does he intend that we should go home with the prescription, read it, study it, and learn it by heart? Or that we should frame it and hang it on our bedroom wall? Or that we should tear it up into fragments and eat little pieces of the prescription three times a day after our meals? The absurdity of these is obvious. The prescription cannot cure us. The whole purpose of a prescription is to get us to go to the chemist, obtain the medicine prescribed, and drink it.

### **Romans 12:3:**

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Paul writes that one of the ways our minds must be transformed is in developing the ability to see ourselves accurately. We must develop "sober judgment," or an objective eye. We need to be honest with ourselves about what we're good at and what we're not.

Paul does not say we must all learn to think of ourselves as terrible and worthless. Instead, he wants us to step away from the funhouse mirror that causes us to see ourselves as big and powerful and important. It takes faith to see ourselves objectively in this way, Paul writes. Why faith? He will go on to show that we must see ourselves truthfully so that we can trust God to do through us what He has gifted us for.

In other words, God has work for each of us to spend our lives doing in service to His church. An inflated view of ourselves will only get in the way of the truly powerful things God intends to do through us.

*4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

Paul begins to get into what our specific jobs in this sacrificial lifestyle might be. It turns out that God's purpose for Christians is that we will spend our lives serving each other in specific ways. His analogy here applies broadly to each local congregation, but it also includes the worldwide church in general.

Paul uses the familiar analogy of a human body, something he develops in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Bodies are a unified whole, containing one person. But that unified body is made up of many different parts that serve wildly different functions from head to toe. Paul will show in the following verses that the church, meaning all Christians, is similar in that we are the body of Christ.

*6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

All Christians together are meant to operate as a single human body. Since we are all in Christ, by definition, we are Christ's body on earth. We are to function in the world as a single entity. That does not mean, however, that God intends for each of us to be exactly the same. We serve wildly different functions just as all the different parts of a human body serve different functions.

Our job is to serve our function, in service to each other, in the power of God. Paul describes our differing functions in the body with the word "gifts." In the church, we usually call these the "spiritual gifts." These gifts are given to each believer through the Holy Spirit to use in our specific service to and in the church. We might describe each of these gifts as the supernatural ability to perform or fulfill a specific function that our fellow members in the church truly need.