**Be Transformed!**

**Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

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***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.* ***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.*

As a child, I loved the story of Zacchaeus. I loved singing that little song and the little hand motions that went along with it as this height-impaired tax collector met the living Lord Jesus, the King of Glory. I related to Zacchaeus as a child for a number of reasons. First, I loved climbing trees and it seemed like Zacchaeus was into that. I also was a wee little person, and I often would get frustrated at sporting events or parades when these tall people would be in the way and they kept me from being able to see the action. And then, I was very intrigued that when Jesus met Zacchaeus, He looked up in the tree and He said, “Zacchaeus, come down because I’m going to your house today.” This seemed really out of sorts to me as a child because I’d been reprimanded by my mom when I invited myself over to supper at our neighbor’s house. And it seemed like this is what Jesus was doing, and I didn’t understand how Jesus could do it, but I couldn’t. Of course, we realize that Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ house not for His own pleasure, His own needs, but because Zacchaeus had a need. Zacchaeus was unsaved. Zacchaeus was left in his sins and Jesus was One who sought after people who were lost and brought them so that they could be found, so that they could have their sins forgiven and know Him.

Now, Zacchaeus was a greedy, selfish, devious, manipulative man. He used his position of power to cheat hard working people of their wages. Everyone in his hometown of Jericho would look upon him with disgust. He was the kind of guy who people would point to and say, “That guy is rotten to the core! He’ll never change. He will never, ever change!” Yet, Zacchaeus meets Jesus and he’s radically changed. He’s transformed. Luke’s account tells us that after talking with Jesus and having the supper with Jesus and having some miracle happen in his own soul, he says to Jesus

**Luke 19:8** And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

This isn’t the old Zacchaeus talking. This is a Zacchaeus who is new and wonderfully transformed. The old Zacchaeus would have said, “Hey, Jesus! It’s great having lunch with You. Let’s do it again.” And then he would have walked about his ordinary life in his old ways. The old Zacchaeus would not have been transformed in his thinking about money of all things, which was so central to him as a tax collector. And he would not have been transformed in the way he treated people. He cared about them now. He actually loved them. So what we see here is a totally different man than the man who climbed up in that tree.

How did Zacchaeus experience such a radical transformation? Well in short, Jesus! Jesus transformed him. He made him completely new. In faith, Zacchaeus yielded himself to the supernatural life-altering work of God through Jesus. He believed in Jesus. He called upon Jesus as Lord and Savior, and Jesus rescued him. He rescued him from his sins. He rescued him from a futile way of life, from a darkened way of thinking. He rescued him from a life that was separated from God in the present and forever. This is the reason why Jesus would say to Zacchaeus,

**Luke 19:9-10** And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Something happened! Salvation came that day. God brought it to him through Christ. That’s what He did with Zacchaeus, and that’s what He does with every one of us who are saved. If we’re saved, it’s because the Son of Man came to seek after us and to rescue us from ourselves and our sin.

So this teaches us something about the grace of God. God’s grace in salvation always works supernaturally to transform a person both externally and internally. God’s salvation comes to us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And when salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ, it changes us from the inside out. So the Apostle Paul would state this truth this way in 2 Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

That’s what happens every time God saves a person. He is a new creation. The old passes away and behold, the new has come.

Now in 2 Corinthians, Paul says transformation has already happened. Here in Romans chapter 12, Paul says to transformed people, “Hey! Let it happen.” So in one sense, this transformation has already happened. In another sense, it is still happening and we need to let it happen. We need to remove all the road blocks that keep God from perfecting us in the present. Grace that does not transform our lives on the outside and the inside is not the grace of God received through faith in Jesus. That kind of grace is a weak, worldly grace that does not deliver us from sin and death. It’s worthless! So let’s be very aware of the kind of grace we’re grabbing onto. Is it the weak and worldly grace that doesn’t transform us, or is it the kind of grace that makes everything new? God’s grace, His true grace found in Jesus, always transforms us. That’s how we know that we possess it. We recognize its transforming power in us. So we open up our Bibles to Romans 12:2, and God’s call upon our lives is very clear. He says

***2****…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.*

Let’s read these two beautiful verses once again. They’re so wonderful just to allow our minds and hearts to roll over and receive all the blessing, all the goodness from them.

***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.* ***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.*

It’s always God’s mercy that’s in view of transformation and in view of our commitment and devotion. God calls us to wholly devote ourselves to Him, not out of begrudging duty, but in view of His mercy, out of our blessed delight of the reward of God in our hearts. He is our treasure. We want to know Him and we want to reflect His glory and enter into it. So the call that the Gospel brings to God’s people is that we would give all of our body and mind to the worship of God. He is worthy of such worship! That we would leave nothing for ourselves, but we would trust God to give us infinitely more than we could possibly imagine.

Now this wholehearted devotion is two-fold. It’s the devotion of our bodies, our physical aspect of our being, but also our minds, the immaterial, non-physical portion of who we are. So the material part of our person and the immaterial part of our person are joined together in the worship of God. That’s what spiritual worship is. It’s all of life, body and soul connected to God in delight and worship.

Now, we cannot worship God with our bodies without a complete devotion of our soul. So it’s foolish to bring our bodies to God and say, “Okay, God. Here’s what I’m going to do for You externally and by way of ritual,” and not bring our souls to Him, not allow Him entrance and access and yieldedness over the internal part of our being. Likewise also, it’s impossible to truly worship God and give Him over the internal part of our being, “God, I really love You,” and not have that expressed in some very extreme, physical ways in our life commitment to Him. So the devotion to God means we consciously present our bodies to Him and consciously renew our minds in Him.

This morning we’re going to concern ourselves with that second part, the renewal of our minds, the transformation on the inside. When we think about this internal transformation, whole-hearted devotion to God requires three actions, three commitments.

**I. Resist the pressure of conformity to the world.**

If we don’t resist this pressure, we won’t be internally transformed by God. So Paul says simply this command,

***2*** *Do not be conformed to this world,…*

Paul uses the word “world” here to describe the culture, the philosophy, the affections of the present age in which we live. It’s a culture that runs contrary to God, that is godless. In other words, it ignores God in almost all of its values. Paul has already described this world in the first chapter of Romans. Let’s recall what Paul has already written about this world. He’s talking about people who are conformed to this world and who are filled with the mindset of this world when he writes

**Romans 1:21–25** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!

They had some revelation given to them from God about Himself in creation and in His Word. But they didn’t respond to Him the way God is worthy of response. This internal part of their life, their thinking, became empty. It became vain. It was darkened from seeing God’s glory in the face of Jesus. They claimed, “We know what life is all about and we know how to live it with purpose and with meaning.” But they lived their life without real purpose. They lived their life in a way that was empty and in a way that was temporal and was passing away. They became fools! Now this worldly, internal mind is captivated by fleshly external physical actions. Why? Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. That’s the heart of worldliness; exchanging what is true about God and His goodness and greatness and majestic nature for a lie. They put all their emphasis upon the here and now, the temporal.

This world contradicts God both in external behaviors and internal affections and attitudes. This world loves temporal treasures rather than eternal treasures. It resists God’s authority in order to establish its own authority about what is right, what is good, what is perfect and pleasing. This world exchanges the glory of God for the glory of creation. It suppresses God’s truth in order to embrace and establish its own truth. So this world inflames itself while it ignores God. It yearns for pleasures that are fleeting rather than pleasures in God that are eternal. And to live a worldly life is to forsake a godly life. It is to forsake a life of meaning. It is to forsake a life of light. And that’s the reason why the Apostle Paul says, “Don’t be conformed to this world.”

J. B. Philips translates that first line this way: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” In other words, what the Apostle Paul is saying is that this world exerts a natural pressure upon us to squeeze us and to shape us to conform to its likeness. The world wants us to be like Playdoh so that when the world squeezes us, we become shaped by whatever image is stamped upon the world’s impression. And the Apostle Paul says, “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.” There’s going to be pressures there to shape you in your attitudes, in your mindset, in your thinking, in your beliefs, in your values. Don’t let this world squeeze you!

Now, the Apostle Paul doesn’t say “avoid this pressure.” He says don’t let this pressure conform you, or don’t be shaped by it.

It’s interesting because the world is not content merely to be the world. The world demands that every person living in this age follow, imitate, abide by its values, priorities, doctrines and attitudes. Among worldly people there is some room for various behavioral choices, but there’s no room for someone who lives for God’s glory. The world won’t allow this kind of non-conformity. It likes to think that it loves non-conformity, but it doesn’t. This irony of the world thinking that it celebrates non-conformity when in fact it’s demanding conformity all the time, is seen by a secular comedian that was very famous when I was in high school, and is still somewhat famous today, by the name of Steve Martin.

Steve Martin used to fill up arenas when I was in high school. And one of the things that he would do in his little time of comedy was he would have everyone in the audience raise their hand and take what he called The Non-Conformist Oath. Some of you might remember this. He’d say, “Repeat after me. I promise to be different.” And everybody would say, “I promise to be different.” “I promise to be unique.” (“I promise to be unique.”) “I promise not to repeat things other people say.” (Congregational Laughter!) Of course everybody would start laughing because they’d get it by then. This world may allow different colors in their rainbow, but it’s their rainbow. That’s the point! To rejoice in God’s rainbow is to be met with hostility, rejection and hatred. Jesus said,

**John 15:18** If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Anyone who refuses to conform will receive a heavy price. For this reason, Paul highlights a danger that every Christian must prepare to face, and that’s pressure. It is pressure to be shaped by the world around them. You see, we will be constantly squeezed by the world to make us look like the world around us, and not like the God above us. That’s what this pressure is. In short, we will be pressed to become worldly and not to become godly.

A little over a week ago, there was a couple guys in our church who invited me to go trout fishing with them in the Current River in Missouri. I’d never been trout fishing and never had waders on or waded through a creek like this to go fishing. But it was really sweet. We went for two days, and for a little over two days, we just walked through this river. Oftentimes the water was up to our waist, and we just walked through, fishing for trout. And it was a very sweet time with these two men. But I noticed at the base of this creek, it was very clear water. You could see all the way to the bottom very easily. I saw them and I felt them. They were these smooth stones. All the stones at the bottom of this river were smooth. How did they get smooth? Rocks typically don’t come smooth. So how did they get smooth? Well, you know it’s the pressure of water that was running over them moment by moment, day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade, time after time. And slowly, this pressure exerted by the water…That pressure seemed so gentle. It seemed so subtle. It seems like it’s not really able to shape a rock, and yet it does. Now not too long ago, I think just last year or two years ago, there was a big flood. And so there are some parts of this river that were transformed kind of radically and quickly by this flood. And those parts weren’t so smooth. Those parts were kind of jagged transformations. You could see it. There was evidence that there was something violent, something powerful, something really forceful that happened to transform the river in that way.

The world exerts both kinds of pressure upon us. It exerts often this violent, powerful, forceful pressure. “You must conform and conform now!” And we know it when it’s happening and we know the threats that stand behind it. But it also exerts this sort of gentle, subtle, almost imperceptible force of shaping us and molding our attitudes to the point where we aren’t even most often aware of that kind of molding. And for that reason, I think that’s a greater danger. We as Christians, we know when the world smashes into us, whether it’s at work or school or on the athletic field or wherever we might be and says, “You better bow the knee right now and do this!” And we realize that to bow the knee over here means I have to commit idolatry against God and I’m not going to do it. We stand up and we say, “I’m not going to be conformed in this way. I don’t know what the cost is going to be, but it doesn’t matter. I can’t do that.” But the far greater danger is the subtle, soft, constant, gentle force where we get worn smooth into the image of this world around us.

As I say the word “worldly,” many think only of external conformity. Many think about certain behaviors that have been presented to them that define this word “world” or “worldly.” One of my best friends growing up went to a Baptist church. I would often attend youth camps with him and youth events. And at that church, they talked about worldliness quite a bit, but it was always in the external realm. There was a little rhyme that sort of defined worldliness as they taught it. “I don’t smoke and I don’t chew and I don’t go with the girls who do.” Now the list of externals might be different from person to person. Some define worldliness by drinking alcohol. Others, by the use of certain curse words. Others, by music listened to or movies watched, clothes worn, card games played. Others, through even very external sins like sexual immorality and the like. And don’t get me wrong. I affirm that worldliness does squeeze us externally as well as internally. So I know that there’s a conformity to external behaviors as well. But worldliness is so much more than the external. So let’s not define it that way. Let’s not trivialize it by just setting it in the realm of the externals.

Here’s what John Jowett says about worldliness. “Worldliness is a spirit, a temperament, an attitude of the soul. It is a life without high callings, life devoid of lofty ideals. It is a gaze always horizontal and never vertical.” I love that last line! Worldliness in essence, says, “Keep your eyes right here on things that are passing away. That’s what is really important. And don’t set your heart on things above. Don’t set your mind on things above. Certainly don’t live there very long, if at all.”

Do you know it’s possible for us to do spiritual acts, external behaviors in worldly ways? So we can be conformed to the world even as we are doing things that we think are honoring to God. Let me use an illustration. It’s possible to come to church and worship God in a way that conforms to the spirit of this world. A worldly person would come and they would engage in the same way externally as a spiritual person, a person who is seeking God’s glory.

Imagine for yourself a man by the name of Mr. Churchman who teaches Sunday School here at this church. He wakes up on a Sunday morning and thinks, “I would love to sleep in. You know, I have not had much rest. It’s been a very stressful week this week. I don’t want to go to church, really, today. But other people are counting on me. I have a Sunday School class and it would kind of be embarrassing to simply not show up. I’m a man of responsibility, so I’m going to go.” And so he gets up and he starts getting himself ready. And as he gets himself ready, he’s trying to get others in his family ready because he has a car full to take to church and they have to all arrive there at the same time. He gets a little frustrated because others aren’t getting with the program. They’re slowing him down and he does not want to be late. He doesn’t like the looks that he receives when he comes into the church late. So he speaks in frustration to them. “Hey! Come on! Get along here. We gotta get moving!”

He finally arrives at church and he makes it through with the appropriate smiles and greetings, but there’s really no desire to engage with others. He is just hoping to just simply maintain. He hopes that his kids don’t act in a way that would stand out in a negative way and that other people might think ill of his parenting as a result of doing so. And so he comes into the Sanctuary and the song begins. He gets there in time to hear the first song. And as the first song begins to play, he says, “Boy! I really like this song.” He’s looking around and thinking, “I wish everybody would sing the way I’m singing. Why aren’t they singing more? They need to sing more.” And he starts singing out. And then the next song is played and he thinks, “Boy! I really don’t like this song. That musician seems to be a little bit off key there, too.” And then it’s prayer time. And as the Elder prays, he begins to think of all the things that have gone wrong that past week. The Elder’s voice begins to drift way into the background so that by the time the Elder says, “Amen,” if you were to ask him, “What did the Elder pray over?” he would not be able to tell you hardly even a single line.

He looks around and he sees a family over in the corner. Their kids are misbehaving and he kind of rolls his eyes. “How come they can’t keep it together like I can?” The offering plate is passed and he’s a tither. He believes in tithing. He believes in the commitment of the church. And he puts in a real generous gift. But as he puts it in, he’s thinking, “You know, this church’s budget needs more contributions. I wonder if everybody is giving to the sacrificial level that I’m giving? They need to. They better, because you know, this is really important, what we’re doing here.”

And then the Scripture is read and by this time, again, his mind is on other things. He stands and he hears a little bit, but his mind is really elsewhere. And then the sermon begins. And as the sermon begins he thinks, “Boy! I wish the pastor would tell a lot more stories and put a lot more humor in. It would really help me along the way.” And he listens. He even takes some notes. But by the end of that time, he’s really thinking about lunch, towards the last ten minutes of that sermon. And he’s thinking about what they’re going to do in the day. He has some activities planned and he’s starting to already prepare for the rest of the day. And then finally, there’s the closing prayer and there’s the hymn. And as they’re singing the hymn, he’s imagining the parking lot. He knows there is a long line in the parking lot. And he’s thinking, “Boy! I hope I’m at the front of that line. I hope I can get my wife and kids out of here in time. Otherwise, once we get behind that thing, there’s no telling how long we’re going to be here. And we got a lot of stuff to accomplish today.” And then he gets in his car and is finally on his way home.

Now in that whole story, Mr. Churchman didn’t curse. He didn’t drink alcohol. He didn’t smoke cigarettes. He didn’t view pornography. But he was just as worldly as the people who stayed home and did, because he had no eternal perspective. He had no connection to the glory of God in his entire day. It was all here on this plain. And that’s the reason why the Apostle Paul says, “Don’t be conformed to this world.” Your spiritual act of worship depends upon it. The thing that is the most central to the meaning and joy and fulfillment of our entire life rests on not being conformed to this world. In worldliness, the vertical is dominated by the horizontal.

Here’s what Lawrence Richards writes regarding worldliness: “Worldliness is not a matter of engaging in those practices that some question. It is unthinkingly adopting the perspectives, values and attitudes of our culture, without bringing them under the judgment of God’s Word. It is carrying on in our lives as if we did not know Jesus.” I would say, as if we didn’t rejoice in Jesus.

I like this from Kevin DeYoung. “Worldliness is whatever makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange.”

And finally, from John MacArthur: “Worldliness is any preoccupation with or interest in the temporal system of life that places anything perishable before that which is eternal.”

And this is why John would write in the passion plea:

**1 John 2:15–17** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Why would we be fixated on something that is passing away? The one who is transformed abides forever. So what can we do practically to resist conformity? If Paul says, “Do not be conformed,” how can we accomplish that? Well, let me give you three thoughts by way of application.

1. Reject this world as the source of life and joy.

Let’s recognize that this world is passing away. It’s not the source of life, and we absolutely refuse to be duped into thinking it is.

2. Lord, would you reveal to me where my heart is worldly? Where my attitudes, my values, my priorities are worldly? Where they don’t reflect You and Your goodness and Your love and Your grace and Your greatness?

If we are not alert to worldliness shaping our soul, then we will be unable to fulfill this commandment not to be conformed.

3. Let’s pursue God’s transformation.

God must do the work. We are in need of His grace, but God does the work and we can participate in that work of transformation. This leads us to that second requirement.

**II. Pursue God’s transformation of our lives.**

***2*** *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed…*

Again, it’s God that does the transforming. He doesn’t say, “But transform yourself.” Be transformed by God. It is transformation that we need. The only way to escape conformity to the world is through the transformation that God provides in Jesus. We are entirely unable to cast out this natural love that we have for the world, unless this higher love that comes to us by the Gospel, by means of God’s transforming our hearts, enters and expels this lesser love with a more powerful, valuable love.

There’s a guy by the name of Thomas Chalmers who was a Puritan who preached this famous message entitled *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*. And his whole argument is it’s not just enough for us to say, “I’m going to get rid of the world.” No. The only way we really can get rid of the world is if a new affection that is stronger, more powerful, moves it out of our life, because our heart will latch on to something to love. And if it’s not loving that which is highest and greatest, we will love that which is lowest. So he writes: “The best way of casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one.”

Now tragically, many believers fall for the false idea that worldliness can be overcome by legal restrictions or by physical isolation. “If we just had more rules, then we would be less worldly.” “If we isolate ourselves physically more from this world, then we’ll be less worldly.” Let me ask you the question. Do you think that worldliness comes to the doors of this church, Bethany Baptist, and respects our boundaries? No. Worldliness comes right in the door with you. And it’s right here, exerting its pressure even upon us in a Sanctuary, during worship. And so, we’re not going to rid ourselves of worldliness by placing more restrictions and laws in our life, or by trying to physically isolate ourselves from people who give themselves completely over to worldliness. We will succeed in not being conformed to this world when we press in to the transformation that God offers us in Christ. God offers spiritual transformation, not physical isolation or legal restrictions as the answer to the pressure of this world to shape us. God calls us to be in the world, but not of the world, nor conformed to the world. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5.

**1 Corinthians 5:9-13** I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? [The answer to that question, by the way, is yes. That’s what God calls every one of His believers to do to help each other, to love each other this way, by judging according to Scripture, attitudes and actions that are worldly.] God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

So this is an earlier letter that Paul is reflecting on. But they got it wrong. They misunderstood what he was saying when he says, “Don’t associate with sexually immoral people.” He says “I was not at all meaning the sexually immoral people of this world.” People were trying to physically isolate themselves from the people “out there” who were sexually immoral. He says, “That’s not at all what I meant. That’s not God’s design for us; to go out of the world.” Here we are, the people of God who have the Spirit of God, the Word of God. Let’s purge the evil person from amongst us.

Christians complain a lot about the world becoming more worldly. “Can you imagine? The world is getting more worldly.” Surprise, surprise! The danger is never that the world is becoming more worldly. The danger is that the church would become worldly. That’s the danger! So let’s focus on the things that would afflict us in the greatest way. The church is like this wonderful ocean-going vessel, a ship that is designed to sail on the most tumultuous, stormy seas. That ship was made for that ocean. But that ship is only safe if the water remains outside the hole. Once water starts pouring into the ship, the ship is absolutely doomed.

So we have to ask the question, first, personally and then for our church: “Lord, is my heart pouring in with the water of worldlines? Is it listing?” And what about our community? What about our church? So this is where God says, “Confront that pressure of worldliness inside your heart, inside your church, and do so by pursuing the transformation that’s supernatural, that’s miraculous, that God offers in the Gospel.” The great damage that worldliness brings to the church is that we lose our lofty view of God, of His glory, of His majesty, of His excellence, of His greatness, and we no longer take joy in Him.

Here’s what John Piper writes: “When you become so blind that the maker of galaxies and ruler of nations and knower of all mysteries and lover of our souls becomes boring, then only one thing is left – the love of the world. For the heart is always restless. It must have its treasure: if not in heaven, then on earth.”

That is the height symptom of worldliness, where that God becomes somehow boring. You think about that God and there’s nothing that causes your heart to jump with energy and joy. Then the only thing left is the love of the world. Again, it’s the expulsive power of this new affection for God. So that’s why we need transformation, so that we can find our true joy in God and we can glorify Him by the way that we live and reflect His Person, His Being. So how can we experience this transformation? Well, thankfully, it’s so simple what God writes.

***2*** *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,…*

The transformation of our life occurs through the renewing of our mind. So Satan from the beginning is a deceiver. He places in our hearts and in our minds, wrong thoughts about God, wrong thoughts about His will. He uses deception to lead us away from right thinking. From the beginning he said, “Did God really say not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? You won’t surely die. And after all, look at this fruit. Look how lovely it is. Actually, if you eat this fruit, here’s what’s going to happen. Then your life is really going to be great because you’ll have the knowledge of God.” (Genesis 3) And Adam and Eve listened to the serpent. They listened to the Devil and were deceived by him. Their minds became darkened and they became conformed.

So if we’re going to be transformed, it’s by a renewal of our minds. It’s by adjusting the attitudes of our heart and the thoughts of our mind in alignment with God, in alignment with His Word. How do we renew our minds? Again, we don’t create our own transformation. But we actively pursue it by the means of grace that God gives us. And that grace is simply His precious Word. The renewal of our mind is a lifelong process. It doesn’t happen overnight. That’s why none of us has arrived. For all of us, this is a call of God upon our hearts. “I need to chase after this transformation through the renewing of my mind today.” It’s a lifelong process that involves prayer, meditation, obedience and suffering. And all of that is centered around God’s Word. Prayer in God’s Word, meditation upon God’s Word, obedience to God’s Word and suffering in view of God’s Word.

Let me take some time and look at one text that’s so helpful in understanding how God works through His Word to transform us. It’s 2 Corinthians chapter 3. He’s talking about worldly, fleshly people, people who are unsaved.

**2 Corinthians 3:14–18** But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

God would try to bring truth and it would bounce right off of them because they were rejecting it. The old covenant, the Old Testament was God’s means to show people living in that time, His glory. But when these folks read the old covenant, that same veil remained unlifted. So he’s talking about this veil that kept people from seeing the glory of God. And so they’d read the Bible, which was God’s instrument to help them understand how great, good, glorious and majestic He is, and it was like they had a veil over their eyes. They couldn’t see God’s glory in the Word that God gave them, so that they could see God’s glory. Because only through Christ is it taken away. Only when we soften our hearts, repent of our sin and come to Jesus as our Savior, does this transformation take place. Our darkened eyes are able to see. “Oh! I see the glory of God!” The veil is lifted only through Christ. To this day, when Scripture is read, a veil lies over their hearts because they haven’t had the grace of God at work to help them to see. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is lifted.

So what happens then when the veil is lifted from a person and they begin to read even the Old Testament, let alone the New? The Old Testament had glory. We could see the glory of God in it. The New Testament has far more. There’s far more revelation. And what happens when the veil is lifted? We see the glory of God. We move toward Him because we see it’s something special, something desirable, something very rewarding. And then notice this. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Freedom to what? Freedom to be able to see God, to commune with God, to know God.

So then we who have Christ, we have this unveiled face. We have the ability to see. And what are we doing when we read Scripture? We’re beholding the glory of the Lord. In other words, we see who God is in the pages of Scripture. This isn’t something where we can check off and say, “I was a good Christian because I read my Bible today.” This is something where the veil is lifted off. I can see God. I can taste who God is, and He’s so sweet. He’s so wonderful. And then as we enter into the joy of the Lord, of who He really is, notice what happens. We are being transformed. It’s the same word Paul uses in Romans 12. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

He says this is how it works. The veil is lifted, we read Scripture, we see who God is. We wonder and joy and rejoice in who God is. And then as we are experiencing God in that way, something happens inside of us. We’re being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory into another. As God has a glory, we enter into that glory and we become like God in our spirit. So our mind, our attitudes, our values, our priorities, our way of believing, our hopes, all of those things are in alignment with God, and we are being transformed from one degree of glory into another. And this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. It’s all His work. Isn’t that wonderful?!

So do you want to be transformed? First, make sure the veil is lifted and you have Christ. Without Jesus Christ, the veil will never be lifted. You’ll read Scripture and say, “I don’t get it. I don’t see what other people see.” But if you have Christ, the veil is lifted. And then drink every day with the expectation that God is transforming me now through His Word in a supernatural way. This is exciting stuff!

The last requirement that is so wonderful in this passage is that we’re called not only to not be conformed to this world, not only to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, but finally

**III. Treasure the promise that we will grasp the supreme goodness of God’s will.**

***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.*

Here’s the result. If we do that [not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind], here’s what’s going to happen. By testing, by proving, by living it out, you’ll be able to discern what the will of the Lord is. It’s this heart attitude that precedes an understanding of what God really wants and who God really is. And then, as we enter into that kind of life, a life wholly devoted to God, we’ll see that God’s will is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Now to the worldly person, God’s will seems to be just the opposite. God’s will seems to be unpleasant, burdensome, very flawed, not very helpful. Please know that God’s will is always good, pleasing and perfect. But a worldly person will never see it. They’ll never discern it. Paul here says, “Go ahead! Test God’s will. Test it by devoting yourself wholly to the Lord. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, refuse to be conformed, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and then God will prove Himself and His will to be excellent for you.”

I talked to you about this fishing trip that I went on with these two guys from our church. I had never been. I was completely inexperienced; a newbie. And these guys knew a lot. And so, here’s what I did. I said, “I have no idea how to catch trout.” I had some ideas, but I found out they would have all been wrong. I would never have caught a single trout. And so here’s what you do. And we went into this bait shop and there were these like little cotton balls. They were all different colors. Just little tiny balls. Okay. Let’s get a dozen of these things. I’ve never fished with lure like that. It’s kind of crazy. I don’t know what would attract a fish to that, but okay. Let’s do it.

And so then we went out to the stream and they said, “Okay, here’s what you do. You cast it out. You have a little weight on the front end of it and you cast this little cotton ball that has all different colors. And you just let it hit the bottom and then you slowly drag it as slow as you possibly can.” I’m like, “How is that going to catch a fish? Don’t you need a wiggly worm or something that moves? It’s just sitting there on the bottom. You’re hardly even moving it. What’s going on?” And then it wasn’t too long, about an hour in, that Bam! And we all caught our limit each day that we were there.

Now, if I had went out by myself, I’d have caught zero fish. I would have not had any understanding. But I went out with these two guys who knew what they were doing. It seemed kind of crazy to me, what they said for me to do. And at first, even when it didn’t work right away, I was wondering, “I don’t know if these guys know what they’re talking about. But I’m going to submit myself to it.” And then, do you know what? I found out that their will in catching trout was good, and it was pleasing, and it was perfect. It was complete. And the time was wonderful! But I had to put my trust and I had to yield before I found out that that was true.

So if you’re struggling with the will of God and saying, “God, here’s what it seems like to me my life is going to work out. It seems like it’s going to work out if I do A, B and C.” And you’re reading God’s Word. No, it’s actually just the opposite. God actually says X, Y and Z, and don’t do A, B and C. But it seems like A, B and C is going to lead me to such a wonderful life. That’s where I’m going to have joy. God says, “Present your bodies to Me as a living sacrifice in view of My mercy. Don’t you see that I love you? I sent my Son, Jesus. He resurrected from the dead. I’m offering you life. Present your body to Me as a living sacrifice. And don’t be conformed to this world. I know there’s pressures. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And then you’ll be able to see and know and discern for yourself that God’s will is good. It’s the best thing for you. It’s pleasing.” It actually brings delight and joy to our heart. That’s just the opposite of the will of the world, by the way. The more we enter into the will of the world, the more we discover this isn’t good. In fact, this is draining me of all my hope, and joy. It’s really bringing all kinds of misery into my life and it’s really flawed. That’s what the will of the world is. We all know that because the allure is so great that we want to say, “But I want to believe this.” And that’s why we’re in Romans 12:1-2. It’s such a gracious word to us. It rescues us. It really does. Do we want a life that’s good and pleasing, rewarding, perfect, satisfying? God says, “Here’s the way. Walk in it.”

Here’s what Martin Luther says: “If you knew what you were saved from, you would die of fear; but if you knew what you were saved for, you would die of joy!” Isn’t that great?! We need more Christians who are dying of joy because they know what they’re saved for. God’s will is good, and it is perfect, and it is pleasing.