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*“The Transformed Mind in a Conformed Culture”*

*Romans 12:1-2*

Series: *The Church, The Home, & The School*

**Introduction:** Take your Bible and join me in Romans 12, Romans chapter 12.

We come this morning to the end of our little mini-series on Christian education. We have been pursuing some biblical texts which have proven crucial to a right understanding of truly Christian education. Over and over again we have made the point that there is a war raging over the hearts and minds of the next generation. This is not a time for the church to acquiesce and just take it as it comes, but this is a time for the church to rise up and equip and train and disciple our children and our children’s children to follow Christ. As a local church we have had the unique privilege and the unique commitment to the ministry of our own Christian school. This commitment has spanned 4 decades and has impacted thousands of lives for eternity. And yet, we are also well aware that we stand at a crucial juncture for our Christian School ministry. And so, we have committed these last few Sundays to consider our commitment to and our practice in the schooling of our children.

As we have done this we have seen the uniqueness and the peculiarity of truly Christian education. Whether done formally in the home or formally in a Christian school like the one we support and propagate as a church – we have seen that it is a very unique and peculiar thing we are doing. So, in Isaiah 8 we saw that truly Christian education has a unique motto – it’s motto in the face of a humanistic culture is “to the Scriptures!” Then in Colossians 2:3 we saw the unique privilege of this Christian education in that in every subject it gets to proclaim Christ because in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Then in Deuteronomy 6 we saw the unique foundation that must support truly Christian education – the home where dad and mom are diligent in their instruction about the Lord out of whole-hearted love for God. No formal education will truly succeed if this unique foundation is missing. And now today, we come to Romans 12 to see the unique goal of truly Christian education. That unique goal is to produce whole life worshipers who are being transformed by the renewing of their minds and who are then walking in the will of God. Whether we are training our children at home, or we are sending them to a school for their formal education – our ultimate goal ought to be that they have a Romans 12:1-2 type of life. This text is one of those passages that every follower of Jesus should be very familiar with. It captures the essence of Christian living and it directs us so clearly to a life of worship which is fitting for the Gospel we claim. Of the many magnificent texts in the book of Romans, this is one of the best – and over the years of my Christian journey it has proven to be one of the most important for my own sanctification and growth in Christ.

This text is so significant in the flow of the book of Romans because it is like the hinge upon which the door from Gospel explanation to Gospel application turns. So for the first 11 chapters of this glorious treatise the text has focused primarily on explaining Gospel truth and clarifying Gospel doctrine. But now, in chapters 12-16 the text will focus upon the application of that doctrine to everyday life. The text will go from God's Gospel work to man's Gospel action. And the hinge which turns this door from one room to the other is this text. Romans 12 and verse 1 says this: *read 12:1-2*.

In many ways, this text is like a perfect diamond which is worthy of our gaze upon its many faceted beauty. But for this morning we need to pick one facet of its glorious truth and seek to understand and apply its life changing truth. But step back for a minute and look at the whole diamond of this text before we pick one facet to gaze specifically at. As the hinge between gospel truth and gospel application, this text uniquely calls us to three actions which are driven by the great mercy of God shown to us through Christ. So, the foundation for these three commands in verses 1-2 is the mercy of God which has been explained in chapters 1-11. Paul's apostolic appeal in these verses is driven by the unyielding mercy of God which while we were yet sinners sent Christ to die for us. The mercy of God is the compassionate response of God to our sinful state. He sees us in our great need and He loves us and is compelled by his mercy to act on our behalf to regenerate us and redeem us.

These great gospel mercies ought to produce three responses in the life of the redeemed. So, if you have known and experienced the love and forgiveness of God and have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the light of His Son, then these things should be true in your life. You should present your body as a living sacrifice to God – one that is holy and acceptable to God – because this is your logical and reasonable act of spiritual worship to the Lord in light of His great mercies. Notice that this sacrifice to the Lord is compelled by mercy in that it is the logical response to mercy. This logical response is one of sacrifice. Sacrifice is often thought of as giving something valuable up, but that is the method and not the point. The method of sacrifice is to offer something which is valuable to us. But the ultimate purpose of sacrifice is to express the superior value of the one being worshiped through sacrifice. So, the world will tell you that this life which is centered around your body and its personal experience in this life is the most important and valuable thing. But when the mercy of God grips your life and causes you to be born again to a new and living hope in Christ Jesus, your value system is changed. The God you used to reject and count as unworthy of your obedience and loyalty is now your Savior and your Lord. He has won you through His great mercies, and now you value Him high above all others – even your own life. You willingly and logically and reasonably lay your life before Him as His. He can now use you for His full and happy use. However he determines to take your life and use it for his purposes and his glory – you are more than happy to have him do. This is the logical response to grace in the heart of the redeemed. This living sacrifice to God is the fruit of regeneration and the fruit of repentance. You have changed your mind about God because you have been born again by the grace and mercy of God. He who was once your enemy has now become your beloved Lord, and your body is the only logical thing to lay down in sacrificial expression of God's worthiness and value.

This is coupled in the text with two other Gospel responses. The presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God should co-exist with a resistance to conformity and a pursuit of transformation of life. These three Gospel responses are the framework upon which the drywall of application will be hung over the next few chapters. If these wood studs are missing, then the drywall will not stay in place. If we are not presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, resisting conformity to the world, and pursuing the transformation of life, then the commands of the next 4 chapters will not be fleshed out in Christ-honoring fashion in our lives. Of those three Gospel responses in the life of the believer I want to focus the rest of our time on the last two. Resisting conformity to the age and pursuing transformation through the renewal of the mind are especially pertinent to the training of the next generation. This is what we ought to be calling them to in the classroom – to a sanctified life which is compelled by Gospel grace, identified by reasonable sacrifice and which in particular resists conformity and pursues transformation.

This is an either/or response in verse 2. Either we are being conformed to the world, or we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds. If we are presenting ourselves as living sacrifices because of the great mercy of the gospel, then we must also be seeking a sanctified life which is resisting conformity and pursuing transformation.

### *The Sacrificed Life:*

#### **I. Resists Conformity to the Age**

- a. The first side of this either/or response is to not be conformed to this world. The idea of being conformed is a compound word in the original language of the word “with” and the word for “pressing into a pattern or scheme.” In other words – it has the idea of getting with the scheme or the pattern of thought. It is a pressing of the mold upon us to shape us into its ways. Peter uses this word in 1 Peter 1:14 to describe the pressure that our former lusts put upon us to be pressed into their desires.
- b. Many so-called Christian groups have used this verse throughout the decades to promote a form of asceticism which links godliness with keeping yourself from the outward worldly expressions and advancements. So the old-order Amish and some of the strict-order Mennonite demand that their adherents don't use modern conveniences like cars and telephones and electricity and tractors because then they would be conformed to the world. This puts the emphasis of this verse upon the outward appearance of things as though that is what the world is referring to in this verse. But that is not what is being taught here. The Greek word for “world” refers to this age – this culture – the present way of thinking and therefore of acting. It is the view of and interpretation of all things which the present age has adopted and is therefore seeking to pressure all of us into conforming to. It acts like an outside force always seeking to press us to acquiesce to the things that our sinful hearts already know so well. So, the rejection of God and the humanistic and secular and materialistic philosophies which direct so much of the world's life and practice are things that we know all too well. These ways of thinking which are absent of God and which de-value

God's worth to be worshiped with our whole life, which place greater value on the here and now stuff of this life, and which seek pleasure and peace from outward and external matters relating to the care and enjoyment of our bodies – these types of thoughts are not too far removed from our thinking as believers. We know those pathways of thought pretty well because we are still sinners with minds which are in need of renewal.

- c. This is what the world is seeking to do at every turn to every believer – to press us into its own way of thinking. This is an outside in process. We are stamped by the mold of the age of this present world. It comes at us from outside and it presses upon us. This conformity to the world is not speaking of conformity to outward trappings – like dress and hairstyle and piercings and tattoos – but it is speaking to the thoughts and motivations and worldview which lie behind such things. So being worldly does not first mean that you look outwardly like the world, but rather that you are pressed into the mold of thinking of the present evil age. This pressure presses down upon our souls at every turn. Every ad you see, every piece of music you hear, every television show you watch, every movie you put before you, every sporting event you watch or attend, every decision by your neighbor, every news source you read, every Facebook post – all of it is speaking a message to us. It is pressing upon us its own message, trying to tell us that what it thinks is important and what it values ought to be what you value as well.
  - i. *Illustration:* Just consider your next trip into Wal-Mart – The crazy driver in the parking lot who almost runs you over is telling you that others don't matter, value yourself first. The unfriendly greeter is telling you that work is a terrible chore that should be avoided at all costs. The display on the way in of sale items tells you that your life is incomplete without this product and beckons you to find satisfaction in a can of Pringles and a 2 liter of Coke. The donuts in the bakery tell you that sugar is your best friend. The housewares department tells you that your current kitchen stuff is old and outdated and you need to update soon. The electronics department offers you a seemingly endless array of ways to view life through the lens of your choice of artist or movie producer. The sporting goods section tells you that you need to have more fun in your life and you are obviously too busy because you haven't needed to buy ammunition recently. The pharmacy tells you that your problems can be solved with a pill. Then, when you finally get to the checkout line you are bombarded with magazines which preach to you about how skinny and an airbrushed body are the true marks of value in our world! And all the while the songs playing in the background have been telling you that true love is all about the emotions. Wow – going to Wal-Mart can be a scary deal! And that is just one way in which the present evil age presses its opinions and worldview upon us.
- d. If you are not aware and alert – you will be pressed into the world's mold. These outside pressures will conform you to their way of thinking and press you to

value and worship what it values and worships. If we are presenting our lives as a living sacrifice to God because we are compelled by His great mercy, then we must also resist the conformity of the world around us.

## II. Pursues Transformation through Renewal of Mind

- a. The flip side of this resistance is that we must then pursue transformation through the renewal of our minds. This is a passive process – so we cannot effect our own transformation. It is a work that God must do in that it is an inside out work. The word is metamorphoō from which we get our word metamorphosis. This is the inside out transformation of the caterpillar in the cocoon. He is changed through this process being enacted upon him through the process God has established for him. But he must put himself in the place of metamorphosis by wrapping himself in the cocoon at the right time. So too, we must pursue this inside out transformation by placing ourselves where this transformation takes place. So, how has God designed this to work? Well, he transforms us through the renewal of our minds. The word for mind here is not simply speaking of the intellectual part of our lives, but it is referring to the seat of our conscience – the center of our being where we process life and determine what is important and what is right and wrong and what matters most.
- b. In Romans 1 we were told that mankind exchanged the truth about God for a lie – this was an action of the mind. We deemed God's value to be less than the value of the things He has created. And therefore, he exchanged us and gave us over to the evil we had chosen. And so Romans 1:28 says that we have a depraved mind. It says that "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."
- c. Do you see how all of those wicked things flow out from a debased mind? This is what it means to be conformed to the culture, and this is why we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is the fruit of repentance and regeneration. Ephesians 2 and Ephesians 4 describes our former state under sin as being darkened in our understanding about God. We are blind and dead in our trespasses and sins. We can't help but live in a Romans 1 kind of way because we have futile minds which are opposed to the truth and which are defiled by sinful rejection of God. But this is where God steps in through the glorious work of regeneration and causes us to be born again by grace through faith. He brings us to new life through the preaching of the Gospel to our hearts. He graciously rescues us from our lost, dead in sin condition and he breathes new life into us through the work of His Spirit.
- d. This looks like a complete change of mind about God. We were once His enemies and we completely de-valued Him and exchanged Him as unworthy of our

worship. But now His mercy has captured us and we see Him as high and lifted up as our Creator, our Redeemer, our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And we can't help but lay down our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him, holy and acceptable to Him. We repent of – change our minds about – the glory and worthiness of God. And what we see in verse 2 is that this process must ever continue. You still do not value and worship God enough. You still do not see Him rightly. You still do not worship Him fully. You still are stained by sin in your understanding and your mind must be renewed. What was started at the moment of initial repentance through regeneration, but now be continued through constant renewal of mind. And this renewal of mind is a putting off of the our old man and a putting on of our new man as we are changed from the inside out by the Spirit of God bringing the truth of God to bear upon our soul. So Colossians 3:9-10 describes this process this way:

- i. “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:9-10)
- e. Do you see how practice is linked immediately with our new position in Christ and our new creation in Christ? We are being renewed in our minds in that we are being transformed in knowledge after the image of our Creator. This is what was lost in the Fall and advanced by our own sinful rejection of God. Now, God in His mercy is restoring and renewing us to what we lost. And he does this through the sanctifying work of His Word washing over us by the power of His Spirit. So, John 17:17 Jesus prays and asks the Father to sanctify them with His truth because His Word is truth. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we learn that God has breathed out all of His Word for the sake of changing and transforming His people in doctrine, and in reproof, and in correction, and in instruction in righteousness so that we may be complete and mature in Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us that we are being changed from one image of glory to another as we gaze upon the glory of our Savior. So, we turn to the Scriptures for the renewal of our minds because it is God's prescribed and clear way to sanctify us and to show Christ to us so that we will be transformed from one image of glory to another. In this cocoon of spiritual metamorphosis we are incrementally transformed from the ways of thinking and acting like the world around us to be more and more like Christ – our Maker, our Lord, our glorious Savior!
- f. And the amazing result of this in verse 2 is that we will then test the declared will of God and we will find it to be good and acceptable and perfect. This is not what the conformed life does with the will of God. The conformed mind rejects the will of God out of hand as being outdated and silly and stupid. This is, and always has been, the general milieu of the worldview of our culture. It is anti-God, opposed to Him as an expression of its rejection of Him. But the transformed life has a repentant mind which values God as worthy of whole-life worship. Whatever He has said and however He has directed – that will be my guide for every facet of life in this body. And what this transformed life will find is that the will of God really is good. The world has lied to us. Our own flesh has lied to us. Satan has

deceived us. God is not a kill-joy who demands obedience to antiquated ways which just zap us of all enjoyment. No, God's way really is best. He really is worthy of worship. There really is no better path in life than this whole-hearted worship which seeks transformation of life through the renewal of the mind.

**Conclusion:** Beloved, this is the goal of Christian education and discipleship. This is what we want for the next generation. Lives which are captured and changed by the great mercies of God so that they are compelled to present themselves to God as a living sacrifice as they resist conformity to the world and pursue transformation through the renewal of their mind which then compels them to try the clearly decreed will of God and find God's way to be best. But we cannot call the next generation to that which we are not also walking in. Does Romans 12:1-2 define your Christian journey? Are you compelled by God's great mercy to these three responses – presenting your body to God as a living sacrifice, resisting conformity to the world, and pursuing transformation of life through the renewal of your mind? You would know if that is true if you are delighting in the will of God as you test it out and find it to be good and acceptable and perfect. Let's pray.

**Lord's Table**