

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part thirty-six

Sunday, July 21st, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2150

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HOW RENEWED MINDS COME TO KNOW THE WILL OF FATHER GOD

Romans 12:1-2 - "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."

Paul holds out a marvelous goal in the last phrase of our text. The *method* of transformation is the renewed mind. But that doesn't just happen. The mind must be stretched around the great teachings of God's Word. The renewed mind will always be out of reach for those who are either too *lazy* or too *busy* to mine the depths of God's eternal, life-freeing truth. Our world *trains* us to think of light and little things. We are driven by the twin gods of entertainment and wealth. Our brains are naturally in the wrong shape to be filled with the ideas and aspirations of the Holy Spirit. And God's *method* for transformation is the renewed mind.

The *motivation* of transformation is the *mercies of God*. We are to be *drawn into* this divine venture, not by legal obligation, but by thankful adoration. Remember the words of Jesus to the Pharisee about the acts of devotion from the wicked woman. The one who has been *forgiven* much will *love* much. Of course, we've *all* been forgiven much. But some are more keenly *mindful* of this mercy than others.

The specific *manifestation* of transformation is the *presenting of our bodies* as living sacrifices to God. Purity, while never *legalistic* (our motive is the mercies of God, not religious law) is always *specific* and *detailed*. We are not called to follow Jesus *generally* but *specifically*.

The call to holiness reaches these physical bodies. Everything I do with my body - eating, paying bills, conversations with friends and family - traveling from one location to another - reading books - watching television - going out on a date with my wife - preaching a sermon - whatever I do with and in my physical body is to show everyone who sees me that I treasure Christ above all else. Everything I do with my body is to show the death of everything that would draw more love to it than to Christ.

So there are two dangers I must watch for with my physical body. First, I must put to death sin in my members. I must not allow the acts of the body to in any way *mar the presence and glory of Jesus* as I live in this material world. And second, I must not allow even *good, innocent pleasures* to tempt out of me a love and passion *that exceeds my passion for Christ*. Many *good* things need to die in my life for Christ to have His proper place. That's the sacrifice part. But it's still not *legalism* because I put it to death, says Paul, because of the *mercies of God*.

That brings us to today's teaching. Today we focus on the *goal* of the renewed mind. And the goal is to *know the will of God* - **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.*"

1) THE WILL OF GOD IS GLORIOUSLY WONDERFUL AND PERFECT FOR OUR LIVES.

Paul says the will of God is "*good and acceptable and perfect.*" And the reason is it reflects the *mind* of God and *He* is good and acceptable and perfect. In other words, the will of God isn't just to be seen as some list of do's and don'ts. It isn't something detached from God Himself. The *will* of God is the expression of the *mind* of God.

There's a reason Paul places that word "*acceptable*" in the list of adjectives describing the will of God. People who have a hard time embracing God's will *haven't seen it properly*. They sometimes view God's will as simply God flexing His muscles toward His creation. They confuse God's will with some stuffy, restrictive experience they've had in some church.

Many of the sitcoms on television pose religious people as having too much starch in their collars, as being narrow minded prudes who always have their noses in other people's business. Remember, the media is very *calculating* in it's relentless battle with the glory of God.

But Paul says for any who give God a chance, for any who come to truly *know* the will of God *in experience*, it is not something ugly and *unacceptable*. It is the guiding, merciful, all-wise hand of a loving Father. Remember, the *will* of God is the *mind and heart* of God. It is absolutely *perfect* for your life.

2) HOW DOES THE RENEWED MIND COME TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD?

This is a bigger question than many people think. Look at the way some of the different translations phrase this all-important **second verse** of Romans chapter 12. I'll start again with the **New American Standard**, then we'll read the **New International Version**, and finally we'll read the **English Standard Version**:

Romans 12:2 (NASB) - **“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so *that you may prove what the will of God is*, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

Romans 12:2 (NIV) - **“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 12:2 (ESV) - **“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.”**

We can see something very important right away. I think you can see that there is more to the process of the renewed mind knowing the will of God than merely knowing ***what the will of God is***. In other words, Paul isn't just talking about having the factual awareness of what God requires and what God forbids.

The King James Version and the New American Standard Version both use the word ***“prove”*** - ***“...that you may prove what the will of God is....”*** Both the NIV and the ESV use several words to replace that word prove - ***“...that by testing you may discern what is the will of God....”***

These translations are laboring to show that the word ***“prove” - dikamazo*** - is almost impossible to put into one English word. It literally means something like ***“proving by being put to the test”*** or ***“proving by implication.”*** So it's a knowing that is really more like ***valuing*** or ***appraising***. It's a knowledge that has ***fixed the proper assessment*** of what it knows. It appreciates the ***proper value*** of the object known.

You can know a great deal about something without knowing its ***value***. Let's say I own a gold mine and I hire you to work for me in the mine. I teach you where you are most likely to ***find*** gold. I teach you to know what gold looks like when it lays bare in the earth. I teach you the best way to extract it from the ground so as not to waste any of it. I even teach you how to tell ***real*** gold from ***fool's*** gold. So you become an expert at ***mining*** gold. But, let's also pretend I brought you in from some remote place on earth where you've never even ***heard*** of gold. You don't know what people ***do*** with gold. And you don't know how ***precious*** gold is. You know everything there is to know about mining gold because you learned it from me. You know everything about gold except how much gold is ***worth***. And I want to keep it that way because I'm giving you a dime for every pound of gold you bring me.

You can know a lot about something without knowing its ***value***. And when Paul talks about ***testing and approving and appraising the will of God***, he is talking, not just about knowing what God's will ***is***, but about the ***value you place on it in your life***. That's what the end result of the renewed mind is all about.

You can have a ***church upbringing*** without having a renewed mind. You can ***quote Bible verses*** without having a renewed mind. You can have ***Christian parents*** without having a renewed mind. You can be a ***Christian business person*** without possessing a renewed mind. You know so much ***about*** the will of God, because you've grown up being ***taught*** the things God wants you to do and the things He does not want you to do. And you can go down into the gold mine and bring out what you've been assigned to do with your Christian life. But you can do all of that with little sense of the ***value*** of God's will.

And sooner or later, probably later, you will be brought, probably by the Spirit of God Himself, into some very specific situation where the ***value you place*** on the will of God will be ***tested***. There will come specific times when you are feeling pulled between the will of Father God and some cherished expression of self-fulfillment. And it is precisely at those times the Spirit of God will tell you to choose life - to ***“taste and see that the Lord is good.”***

Here is a young man. He's dating an unsaved woman. In fact, he's falling in love with her. He's been taught since he was a child that it isn't right for a Christian to give his heart to a woman who isn't a Christian and he never questioned that revelation of God's will because he never ***had*** to.

But now everything is different. Now he's in love and he has to ***learn*** the will of God. He doesn't have to learn ***what the will of God is***. He already knows that. Now the battle is different, and much more difficult. Both the ***risks*** and

the **rewards** (if he only had faith to see the rewards!) are greater. The test now isn't **knowing** the will of God. The test is **valuing** the will of God. The issue is, "**by testing, to approve the will of God**" in this specific situation. The renewing of his whole mind is at stake.

I pray that silly illustration about the gold mine stays in your mind. We can all think of a thousand ways people, even sincere people, in this age are robbed blind of precious opportunities simply by not knowing the **value** of something. Parents weep when their children squander away money and time by not knowing the value of an education. And many times those same parents don't know the **value** of the will of God. We want those we love to know the value of a buck. So much so that many grow up thinking the buck can somehow fill the place of God in their heart. They're destined for misery.

We are invited "**by testing**" to approve the good of God's will in a world of smoke and mirror delights. We are invited to allow the Spirit of God to renew and remake our minds so our brains are more fitted to the values of the Kingdom than to those of Hollywood and Wall Street. Oh, the delight and the safety there is to be found when our minds learn to appraise the call of Christ and the will of God as being **perfect**, not in some abstract sense of God's own character traits, but **perfect on our own behalf** - perfect **for us** - perfect beyond telling, both for this age and the age to come!

3) **LEARNING TO DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD IS DIFFERENT FROM SIMPLY GLEANING INFORMATION ABOUT IT**

God won't tell you everything you're supposed to do in this world, and there's a reason He won't. Contrary to popular impressions, God doesn't want to form you into a person who simply carries out His instructions - not even if you carry them out very well. He wants to raise children who are trained to know His heart.

There are many Christians who feel it is the height of spirituality to constantly be seeking the latest revelation from the Spirit of God. This may shock you, but I want to say, as one who fully appreciates the gifts of the Spirit, and prophecy in particular, that constant prophetic revelations of the Spirit for personal guidance and direction are **not** the plan of Father God. Let me explain.

When I was very young my father took me out to cut the grass for the very first time. He showed me how to start the lawn mower, how to push it **across** the hills in the back yard, rather than try, as a small boy, to push it **up** the hills. When I was done I came in the house, proud of my accomplishment, and told him I had finished the task. He thanked me for my efforts and took me outside. Gently, he told me I wasn't quite finished. He pointed out that I hadn't **trimmed** around the steps. "The job isn't finished until the trimming is done," he said.

When the trimming was done I came back into the house and we went outside again. I had left all the cut grass all over the sidewalk and steps. Once again, "The job isn't done until the grass is swept and the walks are tidy."

Of course, when you're immature and just learning, the more complete and specific the instructions the better. But eventually, he didn't expect to have to **tell** me each step in the task. In fact, he knew I was growing up when, **without being told**, I knew the grass was getting too long, cut it, trimmed it, and swept it. In the early stages I was simply carrying out **instructions**. Eventually, I knew my dad's **mind** regarding the yard work. Once I even painted the fence without being told. I knew it would be pleasing to him. My mind was being in the process of being **renewed**.

Remember, the goal is **renewed minds**. God wants to raise up a group of people who **think** and **assess** differently from the world. A person can learn to carry out instructions without ever **loving the Instructor**. That's not God's plan. A person can carry out instructions without ever confronting a fallen mind set. God doesn't want to just leave us **messages**. He wants to train us to **think differently**.

That's because you will encounter a thousand situations every day that **aren't specifically mentioned in the Scriptures**. You need the mind of Christ. You need to learn, by testing, to value and approve the will of God. You need to learn what **pleases** the Father. That comes from so consistently valuing His judgments where they **are** revealed that the inner shape of Christ dominates when there are no clear instructions given. The whole process is called being "**conformed to the image of His Son**."

A servant can learn to **obey** the master without ever becoming **like** his master. That's not what Father God is after. Prove the delights of His will. Shape your mind with Godly desires. Trust that His will is perfect for your whole life. Don't just know it, or recite it. Cherish it. That is the shortest path to the transformed soul.