

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

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WHY BRIGHT, INTELLIGENT PEOPLE STILL NEED RENEWED MINDS

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."

All of life is worship - either the worship of God, or the worship of something else. But **everyone** is a worshiper. We've been studying these two verses for about six weeks now because they tell of the Holy Spirit's plan to take people who worship the **wrong** thing and lead them to worship the **right** thing - God Himself.

The other thing made clear in these verses is that worship involves **the mind coming to know the will of God as good and acceptable and perfect**. There is more at stake to this issue of worship than just singing choruses, saying prayers, and knowing hymns. In other words, the worship Paul describes as "**spiritual worship**" extends beyond mere external religious exercise. Paul's not just talking about a church service here. He's talking about knowing God - **really** knowing God.

And what is at stake in this battle for worship is finding a center of life that is pleasing, eternally good, and absolutely perfect. It matters what you and I worship because we become just like what we worship. Trinket worship destroys us.

The other interesting thing to note in these verses - and this relates directly to today's central teaching point - is that Paul doesn't describe the process of knowing God's will the way we so frequently do today. Please notice, there is no mention in these verses about God **revealing** His will to us. That's the way almost all teaching about knowing God's will is flavored in the church today. No, Paul talks about knowing God's will by our minds **discerning** the will of God - "**....that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**"

So we worship God most and best by discerning and proving and **treasuring His will**. Remember that sentence because we're going to come back to it in a few minutes. And the **tool** for treasuring His will is the **human mind** - "**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**"(Romans 12:2).

The key to it all has to do with the human mind, but not just **any** human mind will do. Success in spiritual transformation **is** tied to the mind, but **not** in the way most people think. Transformation isn't tied to the mind in terms of its **I.Q.** Rather, it's tied to the way the mind **fixes value** and **significance** and **importance** to the hundreds of thousands of thoughts and ideas that float through it on any given day. Your mind can have thousands of **ideas**. And that's good. But it mustn't have thousands of **treasures**. That's disastrous.

So there is a lot to consider in these two lazar-like verses of Scripture. I hope you're starting to see that these truths are too important to just gloss over carelessly or quickly. In fact, there is much to ponder and pray over here. I want to pull these thoughts together and urge you to think deeply and slowly about them. Your life will never be transformed by accident, at least not in a **godly** direction.

1) **YOU CANNOT DISENTANGLE YOUR LIFE FROM THIS WORLD WITH EXTERNAL CHANGES ONLY**

I hope you can see the way the last part of verse two really explains the first part - **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.**"

Do not be conformed to this world. That's the goal. That's the command. Then comes the **means** for obeying that command - "**But** (rather) **be transformed by the renewing of your mind....**" You can't really unconform your life from this world merely by making **external** changes. There certainly will be, and **must** be, external changes. That is why Paul actually says your worship must change even the way you use your physical body.

Your eyes and what they see, your ears and what they listen to (there is the worship music of this world and there is the worship music of Christ, and each pulls your mind toward a different god), the mouth and the things it eats and drinks and speaks, the sexual organs of the body - all of these must be used only for the glory of God and on His terms. So **yes**, there is no argument with the fact that your life must be **externally** unconformed to this world. But the change doesn't **begin** externally in the body. It begins **internally** in the mind:

Matthew 23:26 - "You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean."

We begin to see the fundamental flaw of *moralism*. Good deeds don't clean the inside of the cup. They can clean up *society* a good measure. They can maintain *order*. But external deeds have *eternal value* only to the extent that they come from a spiritually renewed heart and mind and are done out of love and devotion to Jesus Christ under His Lordship.

If you start with the *outside* rather than the inside you will never make *permanent* changes in your *spiritual* condition. You will, sooner or later, either fall back into the very *same* sins again, or you will merely *exchange* one form of external bondage for another more socially acceptable one. That's because external changes alone never establish the *Lordship of Jesus* in your heart. And without new Lordship you are merely exchanging the outward expressions of habit and bondage. God wants to start changing your life by renewing your mind.

2) **THE INWARD RENEWAL THE MIND REQUIRES IS SPIRITUAL IN NATURE AND CANNOT BE ACHIEVED NOR SUSTAINED THROUGH THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE ALONE**

The renewal of the mind Paul is describing is something deeper than correct *knowing*. It is correct *valuing*. The Bible gives a hint about the renewed mind when it says we should "*taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Psalm 34:8). You can know something will be good *for* you by reading up on it and studying its nutrient content and fat content.

That tells you nothing about its *taste*. Paul says the renewed mind knows the *flavor* and the *smell* of things holy and unholy. In another very interesting passage about the renewal of the mind Paul says this: **Ephesians 4:23** - "....be renewed in the spirit of your minds...."

I like that phrase. I think Paul means the renewed mind has the capacity to taste the *spirit* of something - "*be renewed in the spirit (small "s") of your mind*". It knows things by *taste* and by *value* - not just by *description or definition*.

Imagine two people. One falls into sexual immorality while the other, though tempted, is faithful to his wife. Let me ask you the obvious question - *what is the difference between those two men?* The tendency is to give a very meaningless answer, like, "One was a better Christian than the other." But that doesn't go nearly deep enough. *In what sense* was the one a better Christian?

Why can some people *smell* the danger of temptation a long way off while others don't sense it until they're trapped in sin? Is it just a matter of *I.Q.*? That can't be. Bright people fall into sin just as much as slower people.

No, the difference is found in the renewed mind. Some people have developed such a *taste* for the pure and holy - such a delight in the *perfect will of God* that Paul describes in **Romans 12:2** - that they instantly know when they're being pulled away from it. They *crave the sweetness of God's will* and instantly sense when something doesn't fit in with that perfect will in the same way you can sense when there's too much salt in the soup or the coffee has gone cold in the cup. A renewed mind *tastes* the things of God and *values* them as sweet and perfect.

3) **WITHOUT A RENEWED MIND PERSISTENCE IN HOLINESS WILL BE TEDIOUS AND ANNOYING**

Look once again at our text - **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."

Be very honest with yourself. Do you walk with Jesus because you've been raised to do that by your parents? Or because you want to go to heaven when you die? Or because that's what all your social network at the church expects of you? Or do you walk with Jesus because you have come to the profound conviction that the will of God is the most perfect life you could possibly have? Again, be very honest with yourself.

Many people go to church without really following Jesus, except in the very barest sense. And the reason they don't is they have seen the law of God - out there in the distance, or in the pages of their Bibles, or described in sermons - and they see it as demanding and hard and, more than anything else, *restrictive to their personal freedom*. And, without ever turning away from God out loud, in their minds they have formed a negative opinion about the will of

God.

Every day of the week bright, intelligent people - people who have grown up in church and can quote verses from their Bibles - form **wrong opinions** about the will of God. They don't embrace it. And it's all because they can't see the beauty of the will of God by examining it externally, on the pages of their Bible. You can **never** correctly evaluate God's will that way. You have to **taste** the law of God. You have to get into it. You can't pre-judge it. You have to live it before you can really value it.

If you accept the opinion of the world, or your carnal friends of God's law you're going to miss finding out for yourself how wonderful it is. The way soap operas and movies depict sexual purity makes it look boring and confining. Donald Trump makes self denial and material sacrifice look weak and foolish. Hollywood makes the cultivation of inward beauty and purity seem secondary to the good life. The world's religions make Jesus look like another pleasant option for a decent life-style.

Is **this** where you're going to form your opinion about the good and perfect will of God? If you do you will never enter into God's ways **deeply** enough nor **long** enough to find the treasure buried there. You can't accurately assess God's will just by **knowing** it or **analyzing** it. You have to **walk** in it to find its sweetness.

There is the mind that **refuses** to walk in the will of God - **Ephesians 4:18** - "**They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.**"

And there is a mind that is in **training** to develop a taste for the ways of God - **Psalms 25:4-5** - "**Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. [5] Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.**"

We are all in this process, at different stages of completeness and discipline. But if we **do** continue, there will be formed a mind that has experienced the **radical re-orientation of values and desires** around the sweetness of the treasure of God's good and perfect will - **Psalms 19:8-10** - "**The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; [9] the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. [10] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.**"

True enough, no one lives on this spiritual plain all the time. But I believe God wants to increasingly renew our minds in this direction. That's because He knows more than we that our lives will never be transformed by **hearing about** His will. They will only shine with more and more of His glory as we **increasingly treasure His will**.

How does this happen? Is it truth alone that can remove the natural hardness from our hearts? Truth is vitally important. We try very hard to teach the truth of God's Word in our church. But if I read my Bible correctly there is another call than the call to learn truth. It bubbles up over and over again:

Psalms 119 - "**Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.**"

Ephesians 1:16-18 - "**I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints....**"

Pray for opened eyes! Pray for new tastes! Pray that your mind be so renewed around the values of Christ that the will of God becomes the default position of the 95% of your daily life where decisions are made without spending much time rationally processing them. **Delighting in God is the greatest protection for the rest of your life.** Delight in God is meant to be the prayerful, joyful end result of all Bible learning and all church attendance and all study. There is no delight and no protection in the **unprayerful** learning of Biblical truth.

4) **THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY FOR GOD TO BE TRULY GLORIFIED UNTIL WE HIS PEOPLE FOLLOW HIM WITH RENEWED MINDS THAT DELIGHT SUPREME IN HIS GOOD AND PERFECT WILL**

Now we're in a position to put all these things together to see Paul's ultimate goal in these verses. Our minds must be radically renewed because it is not enough just to **know** God's will. We are to **treasure** His will as good and perfect. Paul says when people truly treasure God they are authentic worshipers of God.

And when people see Christians with renewed minds worshiping God in daily life they will see them making **sacrifices** for His cause and kingdom. I think you can see that this is exactly what Paul says - **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."**

What do we sacrifice? We don't butcher sheep or goats. We don't cut off our own hands and feet and offer atonement for our own sins. What do we sacrifice? The Apostle Paul tells us:

Galatians 6:14 - **"But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."** As the mind is renewed by the Spirit of God a whole new way of **valuing God** develops that **puts to death the way I used to value the things of this world**. That's the sacrifice. That's the change. If I am a true worshiper of Christ, if His will is my treasure, there is only one way this world will see this is so. It will see me gladly renouncing and denying what it treasures for the greater joy of Christ. There is no such thing as Christian witness to the glory of God without this kind of sacrifice.

The world will never be reached by our doctrinal statements, no matter how precious and important they are. The world will never be reached by hard, grudging obedience with a long face. For sure the world will never be reached by Christians who **say** they treasure Christ but never turn from the values of this world.

Your whole life is merely the outward glow of what you truly treasure. The only godliness that shines is a **joyful** godliness. God wants to renew your mind to beam the greatness of His glory so darkened, confused, sin-cheated sinners will see the way home to Christ.