

Transforming: Becoming Like Christ

Romans 12:1-2

This morning we continue in our series - Passionately Following Jesus. That statement is the summary of what we want for every person. We want for all people everywhere to be passionately following Jesus. We believe that Jesus is Lord. And so our lives belong to Him. And our life is an adventurous journey of learning how to walk in vibrant fellowship with Him.

So how would we passionately follow Jesus? We use three words - Connecting, Transforming, and Serving. Each word speaks to a step we take in following Jesus. Connecting speaks of our need to respond to Christ's message of hope in the gospel. When we do, then we become a disciple of Jesus and a member of the church, the bride of Christ. We are connected to Christ in vibrant relationship and his people in vibrant fellowship. The bible calls this part of salvation justification. Then we begin the life-long process of transforming. Transforming speaks to the work that God does in us to help us become more like Christ. Jesus did not just save us from the penalty of sin, but He comes and takes up residence in us through the Holy Spirit and begins the process of saving us from power of sin. As we learn to yield to Him and to submit to His way of living, we find ourselves changing more and more. The bible calls this part of salvation sanctification. Then lastly, we need to be serving. Jesus was a servant and so must we be. First, we need to be serving in ministry to the body - helping others grow as disciples of Christ. Then second, we need to be serving in mission to the world - helping the lost and least find hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago we talked about Jesus as the only worthy object of our faith. Last week we talked about the gospel and our need to connect to Jesus in saving faith. This morning, I want us to explore Transforming. Jesus did not just come to rescue us from hell. He came to give us a new and abundant and satisfying and amazing life. And the only way to experience that life to the full is to become a different person, governed by a new ruler and living by a new rule. The bible calls this process of transforming to become more like Christ sanctification.

Please turn with me to Paul's letter to the Roman church. In this letter, Paul writes to a group of believers that come from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. And he wants to help this new church be grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So like many of Paul's letters, it has two parts. The first part of the letter is more doctrinal exposition. Then the second part of the letter is more practical exhortation. The first part focuses on God's truth and how it should shape our beliefs. The second part focuses on God's truth and how it should shape our behavior. In the first part of this letter, the first 11 chapters, Paul expounds the truths regarding a right understanding of the gospel. Then in chapter 12, he changes gear. In chapters 12-16, Paul will now exhort these believers toward a right practice of the gospel. Theology for Paul is not just acquiring truth. It is also putting the truth into practice.

Turn with me to chapter 12. We are going to look at verses 1-2. These two are the general introduction to the practical section of the letter. Out of these general statements, Paul then begins to walk through several specific areas where the gospel ought to radically change the way we live. Let's read them together.

This morning, I want us to walk through these verses and unfold them a little. This morning I want you to see that you can experience the transforming power of Christ in your life. Let's pray.

Look at the first phrase in verse one. **Therefore I urge you brethren, by the mercies of God...** The word "Therefore" signifies that as Paul changes gears, he is not leaving behind what was shared in chapters 1-11, but rather he is building on the "mercies of God" that he unfolded in those chapters. As we talked about last week, our first step is to embrace and believe the gospel and its power to transform our life. God's mercies are expressed in the gospel that we didn't deserve, that we didn't initiate, and that we can't bring about. We didn't deserve the gift of God's Son. We deserved wrath. But instead, we are objects of mercy. And so what can we do? We can respond, yield, accept, and then learn to obey.

Church, this is important. For our us to move to how, we must understand what and why. That is what Paul does so eloquently in Romans 1-11. He explains the 'what' of the gospel and the 'why' of the gospel. And now, he wants us to take what we learned of God's mercies and apply them to our daily lifestyle. And Paul doesn't see this as something we are to do whenever life makes changing convenient. It is something that he urges, something he is imploring or pressing us toward.

In our family plan, we unlimited texting and unlimited mobile to mobile. Just because the kids don't have many minutes with their friends, they do a lot of texting. So as a family, our first way to check in and touch base is by texting. But if you are a child and you get a text that just simply says, "Call me now." That doesn't mean leisurely call when you can. It means I want to hear your voice right this minute. That text is sent with a sense of urgency. And there is an expectation that it will be received with a sense of importance and urgency. And that is what Paul is doing here. The second half of the letter has a real urgency to it. What we know must be put into practice. Right beliefs must lead to right behavior. Living out your faith is not an optional second dimension. Transforming is not an optional step after connecting. Sanctification is not an optional add on to justification. It is the expected and necessary next step.

So Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit builds on the process of sanctification he unpacked for them in chapters 6-8. Our first point this morning is that **transformation involves a decisive dedication**. If we want God to transform us, then our part calls for relinquishing ownership of our body and giving our lives unreservedly to the Lord. In 12:1 Paul commands us to make a decisive dedication...we are **to present [our] bodies a living and holy sacrifice**. This sentence is full of imagery. Paul is using the language of the OT sacrificial system. The word "present" literally means to dedicate or offer up. In the OT an offering was to be the very best of the flock, an unblemished perfect animal. And it was to be slain and its blood shed. But in our case, Christ was the perfect sacrifice and He died in our place and His blood was shed on our behalf. Paul has explained earlier in this letter how we have died with Christ and we have been raised with Christ. So we are not dead sacrifices, but 'living' sacrifices. And we are not to be defiled sacrifices, but 'holy' sacrifices. And Paul is

not just talking about being holy in our position, but in our practice. He wants you and I to give Him our body as a living and holy sacrifice. Turn back with me to Romans 6. READ vs. 1-14.

Our body is to be a living and holy sacrifice. You are to give your body to Christ. It is to be a holy instrument for God's use. Not an unholy instrument for sin's use. Your body belongs to Jesus, he bought you. And your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, he dwells in you. And so offer or present or dedicate your body to the Lord. When we offer the Lord our bodies, this is **acceptable to God**. The NIV says it is pleasing to Him. Paul tells us this is **our spiritual service of worship**. We are not talking about some kind of religious ritual. We are not going through some mechanical ceremony trying to make God think we are on board. No, we are talking about a decisive dedication, a choice to offer to God our whole self, and especially our bodies as instruments for his exclusive use. And this is the expression of worship.

Almost all sin is expressed through your body. Paul is going to talk about our minds in a minute. He is not telling us to ignore our minds. But right now he realizes that for us to be transformed and changed, our bodies will have to be offered to God. Think about it. When you think mean or deceitful or harmful things... you have to use your body, your mouth, your tongue to express those things. When you have lustful desires, you have to use your body to carry them out. When you have bitterness in your soul, it is your body's demeanor that changes and shows it. And so Paul get's practical. Our body and soul are tied together. God's transforming work in our lives has to be expressed through our bodies. We need lips that can be an instrument of grace and truth. We need bodies that can be instruments of righteousness. We need mouths that can bring healing and express prayers. We need smiles that can demonstrate compassion and hands that can lift the fallen. We need ears that listen to the cries of the distressed and arms that can embrace the lonely and hurting.

Yesterday I was privileged to join Cliff and Elaine Tatham as they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. On August 20, 1960, they made a decision to become man and wife. They have been married longer than I have been alive! But what is amazing is not that they tied the knot, but that they then lived in light of those vows for the next 50. They made a decisive dedication and then from there, in sickness and health, in wealth and in poverty, in ease and in discomfort, they lived in light of that covenant decision. Every day little decisions were made looking back on that one big decision. You don't just stay married because of a marriage ceremony. Millions of people have said vows and then not lived in light of those vows. No, you stay married when you work out that one big promise every day in every decision. And that is the sense of verse 1. Paul wants you to have a once for all kind of dedication which anchors you for each daily decision.

Have you done that? Sometimes that decision is made clearly at salvation. But for me, it came a little later. As I grew in my faith, a time came where I realized that I was only giving God partial control of my life. And so I had to put a stake in the ground. There was a moment when I said I belong to Jesus Christ, my body belongs to Jesus Christ, my life belongs to Jesus Christ, my future and future family belongs to Jesus Christ. And from this moment forward, I will live for Him. I will be His servant. I will obey Him no matter what the cost.

You know what they say is the problem with living sacrifices? They tend to crawl off the altar! And that is so true. But every time I find myself crawling off the altar, I realize I am not where I belong. My life is a living and holy sacrifice. And so that means that every day, I must seek to live in light of that decisive dedication. And

that is where Paul turns in vs. 2. He begins to unfold with us very practically how our dedication can work itself out in the daily pattern of our lives. This is our second point this morning. **Transformation involves daily determination.** If you want to experience transformation, then it is going to require that you daily live in light of dedication. In this vs. we are going to find two present tense commands. That means that they are to be an ongoing emphasis and of continual importance. One will be something we must continue not to do. We are not to be conformed to this world. And one will be something we must do on an ongoing basis. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

Look with me at the first phrase of vs. 2. **And do not be conformed to this world.** Let me repeat that... REPEAT. The word conformed means to be pressed into a mold, or to be molded or shaped in a certain way. And the object of conformity we are to resist is the world. The world is that sphere of activity that is temporal and is the standards and practices that are associated with a society that does not recognize or embrace the demands of God. The world is not just the way you dress or whether you punk your hair or tattoo your body or listen to certain kinds of music. Paul's idea here is much deeper. The world is a way of behaving that is grounded in seeing and living life for the temporal and earthly and momentary. To be in conformity to the world is to have your plans, your ambitions, your desires, your passions, your hopes, your dreams determined and directed to this life here and now. To be in conformity is to believe a human perspective over a divine truth, it is to behave out of a momentary passionate urge rather than out of a sense of a divine and holy calling.

What are the ways you are being pushed to conform to this world? Take dress for example, what you wear. It is so easy to label certain clothes as worldly. And they might be. But to understand what we are not to conform to, we must look below the surface... we are told in our society we are what we wear. And so we have a whole societal institution built on fashion convincing people they are what they wear. To be conformed is not just to wear seductive clothes or certain brands of sporting attire... it is to buy into the system of thinking and believing that goes with that. For example, you may not be able to afford and buy the clothes the world says you should have. But that doesn't mean that you aren't being conformed and squeezed into a way of thinking and believing that is worldly about clothing.

Think of all the ways you are pressured every day to buy into a temporal and secular and worldly and godless view of life - in your vocation, in your sexuality, in your relationships... So you get to choose what pattern is going to determine your life. And it is not so supposed to be the world's.

So what must happen for me to experience the life God has for me? I will need to be changed and different. Look at our next phrase. **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...** The word for transformed here is the one we get our English word 'metamorphosis' from. Transformation means that I think differently, that I see the world differently, that I understand relationships differently. Being transformed means that I am constantly and continually in the process of becoming more and more like Christ. It means that I never arrive and that I am constantly seeking to let God shape and mold me. And the way God does this change is by renewing my mind. To renew the mind is to make it something new and different. So I am transformed by renewing my mind. Before I talk about how we renew our minds, I want us to look at how we will know if we have in fact renewed our minds. Look at Paul's next phrase... **so that you may prove what the will of God is,**

that which is good and acceptable and perfect. That word “prove” is so important. The idea here for “prove” means more than just examining God’s will to see if it will work or not. To prove the will of God does mean experiencing God’s will, but it also carries the idea of valuation. In other words I don’t just want to do God’s will, I value God’s will. I don’t just want to be obedient in my life, I want to treasure God’s way in my heart. I have been so renewed that I not only desire to do right, but that I see right as the good and acceptable and perfect way to live. I not only want to make a pure choice in my relationship with my boyfriend or girlfriend, but I know that God’s desire for my sexual purity is the very best for me and for an abundant and satisfying life and so I not only choose God’s way, I treasure God’s will.

Unfortunately, in the church, we are so little transformed to do God’s will and we are so much conformed to live out a worldly way. So practically, Mike, If I wanted to experience radical life change; if I wanted to really be transformed from the inside out; if I wanted to think differently and live differently, what are some steps I should take? I want to give you two concrete steps you can take.

1. Make time to saturate yourself with the will of God expressed in the word of God. Friends, most of all your questions regarding God’s will for you life is already completely expressed in the word of God. But our problem is that every day our minds are bombarded through the TV, Radio, Internet, billboards; they are programmed to see life a certain way through music and news and entertainment. Each of these is sending messages and casting a vision for your life. And most of them are based in a worldly secular perspective of life. And subtly, they ingrain us with a way of thinking, a way of seeing, a way of living that is distorted and deceitful and unbiblical. God’s will for our lives is expressed in the word of God. Friends, don’t be deceived. Because our society says its right doesn’t mean it is moral or God’s will. I can think of two areas where I have seen the world change its mind and try to convince us that Christian’s are wrong and backwards. One is abortion. Abortion is legal in our society. But is still murder in God’s word. Homosexuality has become an alternative lifestyle in our world. But it is still sin in God’s word. Marriage is being opened up for people of the same sex. But in God’s word, that is not marriage. So how does one know God’s will? How does one learn to treasure God’s will? By saturating their mind with the Word of God. But Mike, reading is hard for me. Then download the Bible and put it on your iPod. Almost all the online bibles have been recorded and can be read out loud to you! But as you read it or listen to it, don’t just do it academically, do it devotionally. Don’t just go after acquiring knowledge, but go after life change! If you have don’t have a devotional routine that helps you be saturated with God’s truth, then ask an older more mature believer to teach you how they spend time absorbing God’s will through His word. And that leads us naturally to number 2.

2. Put yourself into life-changing relationships. Get into a LIFE group. Join a group where you can find truth taught and love expressed and accountability given. Find people who will tell you when you are conforming to the world rather than carrying out the will of God. When Paul writes these verses, he writes to a community. He writes to people in relationship with each other. He expects that we will love each other unconditionally and pray for each other constantly and exhort each other daily.

Ladies, join one of the women’s bible studies this fall. Take extra time to grasp God’s truth and how it relates to your life.

Men, put Men's Fraternity in your schedule. You need to learn God's design for your role as a husband and a father and for your vocation and how to keep those in balance. You need to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And then when you find yourself in a group like that, find someone that will help you go to a deeper level, who will meet with you for prayer and scripture memory and accountability. Someone who will help you pursue real life change.

I will never forget Steve the electrician who came to Christ while we were fixing up our first house. We began to meet weekly for life changing interactions. And he began to saturate his mind with the word. And each week when we came, he would share something he learned and something he changed. He would show up and say things like,

"I was reading I Thessalonians and Paul was talking about how we need to have our bodies stay pure and how we need to stay away from sexual activity before marriage. I didn't know that. It was hard, but I asked my girlfriend to move out. I just can't handle the temptation. And I want to do what God wants me to do."

"I was reading in John about prayer and how we can dialogue with God. But I have this problem. I smoke pot. And I have for years. But when I do, I can't talk to God the way I know I should. And so I am going to stop smoking pot. Will you pray for me?"

"I was reading in Proverbs where it talks about how God wants us to have balanced scales. And when I did some searching, I learned that means that some people had heavier scales on one side so when they did their business transactions, they could cheat people. That got me to thinking about the way I work and how I fill out my time cards..."

Quote Romans 12:1-2. Pray.