

The Renewal of Your Mind

Romans 12:2

We're down to the last two sermons in this series about seeking a deeper relationship with God, intimacy with Christ, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. In the past two weeks we've talked about the importance of living with an awareness of God's presence in our lives and the work that he's doing in us, which is ultimately conforming us into the image of Christ. And for the last two sermons we're going to be talking about how to live a life that's in harmony with God's character and will.

The way I want to start this is going to be a little hard for some of you to imagine – especially if you're a guy – but try to stay with me. I want you to picture your life as a dance. You've been dancing ever since you were born. Your dance is unique to you and contains everything about you – all your thoughts, feelings, experiences, attitudes, choices, words, and actions...

God is the one that started you on your dance. He created you, gave you life, and started you dancing. And the reason he did that is that his life is a dance as well. And his dance is amazing – awesome, brilliant, majestic, perfect, and holy. But it's also invisible and mysterious, and he made you to dance so that your dance would be a reflection of his. He wanted your dance to demonstrate to the world what he was like.

But your dance didn't start out very well, and as time went on it actually got worse. Instead of reflecting and demonstrating him to the world, it reflected other things, things not like him at all, things from dark places in your own heart and mind and things you learned from the dark and confused world around you that were in conflict with God. So as your life went on, your dance became further and further from his. It became quite ugly and distorted and you even began causing harm to yourself and the people around you.

But one day, God intervened in a powerful way; his compassion was stirred; and he turned things around from the way you were going. He opened your eyes so that you could see what was going on. He put new heart in you so you no longer wanted to continue the dance you were on but begin a new one – the kind of dance God created you to do. And not only did he do all that, but

he actually joined the dance with you. He entered your life as a lifelong dance partner, so you could experience a deep and fulfilling relationship with him and he could lead you in the way you should go.

It's a different way to think about your relationship with God, but there are many things in the Bible that liken our lives to this kind of dance, and it's critically important for us if we want to go deeper in our relationship with him, to learn how to live – or to dance – in harmony with him. The more that we do, the deeper we go. And the more we don't, the more barriers we run into – like a dance partner that's way out of sync.

So today and next week, we are going to talk about living a life in harmony with God – a life that can go deeper with him because it's in sync with his character and will and the way that he's leading. The Bible is full of passages that teach us how to live that kind of life – things that were written to certain groups of people to deal with specific issues they were having that may or may not be relevant to us. But as I looked at many of these examples, I could see two basic categories begin to emerge – two categories we can focus on in these last two weeks to help us live in harmony with God. I want to talk about one of these this week and the other next week.

Paul actually mentions both of them in Romans 12:1-2. He spent 11 chapters telling his readers about the gospel of Christ and God's mercy towards sinners through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, and now he appeals to them to live their lives in a way they will be in harmony with 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.

In order to live in harmony with God, Paul was appealing to his readers to focus on two things. The first is in verse 1 – to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. That's what we're going to look at next week. The second is in verse 2 – to not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewal of their minds. And that's what I want to look at today. In order to live in harmony with God and in step with the Holy Spirit in this dance that we're in, there must be transformation in the way that we think, and there must be devotion to God in the way that we live. If the way that you think or the way that you live is in conflict with God, it will prevent you from going deeper with him.

So let's dive in deeper this morning and examine what it means to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Why is this necessary in the first place? Paul brought up the problem with our minds and the way we think at the beginning of verse 2 when he said: *"Do not be conformed to this world."*

Whether we realize it or not, from the time we were born we've been conditioned, indoctrinated, and even deceived into thinking about life a certain way. It comes from the culture around us and the various forms of input and influence. We think the way that we think about life is just normal or even good because it's all we've known and we're comparing it to the norms of our society.

But Ephesians 2:2 points out that there's a deeper influence than just the input of our culture, saying that those who follow the course of this world are actually following the prince of the power of the air. When you go out into the world this week to go to work, or school, or shopping or fall sports practice, and when you think about government, business, education, military and culture I would assume that most of us look at these systems as being spiritually neutral, maybe even good. And yet the Bible indicates there's an underlying spiritual problem with them – they are being heavily influenced by Satan. That doesn't mean that everything is evil about them but it does mean that the course of this world or the way things are going, though normal to us, might just have a root problem.

It's hard for us to see that because we've lived in it our whole lives, but when you bring Scripture in to serve as a plumbline, you begin to see there might be a problem with the way that we're thinking about life. Romans 12:2 said: *"Don't be conformed to this world."* Ephesians 2:2 says that when we were dead in our sins we were *"following the course of this world, following the*

prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”

James 4:4-5 indicates a problem when it says: “*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*” 1 John 2:15-16 does the same thing: “*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. ¹⁶For 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.*” So Scripture seems to make it pretty clear that there’s a problem with the ways of the world and the way we’ve been conditioned by the world to think about life.

Now Christians in America might think: “Well that’s other countries, but not us. We’re a Christian nation.” Or maybe, “That’s the people in the other political party who are trying to ruin our nation. But not us. Not our side. There isn’t a problem with the way we think about life.” I don’t think Paul, or James, or John would agree. I think they would all say, “No, we’re all in need of transformation by the renewal of our minds.” We don’t realize how much things like secularism, individualism, materialism, humanism and relativism in our culture have influenced our ways of thinking or that those influences are often in conflict with God.

So if there’s a problem with the way we’ve been thinking about life, then what’s the right way to think? Well Paul writes about that at the end of Romans 12:2 when he says that the goal of being transformed by the renewal of your mind is that you will be able to discern what *the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect*. So the way we’ve been conditioned to think is a problem that needs to be transformed and the new way we need to start thinking is in harmony with the will of God because that is the only way of thinking that is good, acceptable and perfect.

Paul prayed for this transformation to happen in the lives of the new believers in every church he planted. In Philippians 1:9-11 he writes: “*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that*

comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” In Colossians 1:9-10 he writes: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” There’s a similar prayer in Ephesians 1 that I’ll read at the close of the service today.

In your dance with God, if you want to go deeper in your relationship with him, you are going to have to stop thinking about life the way you’ve been conditioned to think by the world. If you keep thinking that way, you’re going to be in conflict with God. You’re going to be like a dance partner trying to go the other way. We have to experience and cooperate with the renewal of our minds.

Now how does that happen? Well that ties in very much with what we’ve talked about the past two weeks. The good news for us is that the renewal of our minds doesn’t depend solely or even primarily on our power or ability. When you were born again, God sent his Spirit to live in you, and to do a work in you. And that work, which we saw last week was conforming us into the image of Christ, includes the renewal of your mind. Read Titus 3:5-6.

So God is already at work in you to bring about the renewing of your mind, and as we saw last week, your role is to cooperate and fully participate in the work he is doing.

How do we do that? That goes back to what we talked about at the beginning of this series – we cooperate in the renewing of our minds by spending time in meditating on God’s Word, prayer, and worship. You have to bring the plumbline into your life in order to discern the way you’re thinking. And Scripture is the plumbline. As you meditate on God’s word, his Spirit that dwells within you is speaking to you and opening up your eyes and understanding to see where your thoughts are not in harmony with his and to learn what is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Anything you can do to immerse yourself in God's Word is going to bring about transformation in the way that you think – listening to preaching, going to Bible study, spending quiet time every day seeking the Lord in his Word.

You've been conditioned and indoctrinated by the world for years and it will continue to happen. How much time do you need to spend in God's Word and prayer for transformation and renewal to happen? I'm very thankful for the power and work of the Holy Spirit in this process, because he can bring revelation and illumination in a moment that can undo years of deception by the world. That's why Paul prayed the way he prayed. But are you putting yourself in a position for that to happen?

We need to do our part. And as we do we will find ourselves more and more in tune with him in this dance that we're in and able to go deeper in our relationship with him. Our minds need to be transformed but we also have cravings in our bodies that need to be dealt with and that's what we'll talk about next week.