



ROMANS 12:2

PART 1

But be transformed...

READ ROMANS 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the renewal of the mind, it can be intimidating to say the least. There are so many things that we hold onto and fight to keep in our lives when, in reality, all things should be placed on the altar before the Lord as a sacrifice. (V. 1) Paul has spent the last couple of chapters in Romans discussing why we have such an amazing gift from God and why we should therefore worship and glorify Him because of these free gifts. (See chapter 11)

The question, once we have recognized that change and transformation must take place in our lives, is "How do I do this?" There are two answers to this question. First, it is important to note that, under your own power, it is impossible to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Jesus Christ must be the One to work in us to make us into a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) Once we come to Jesus, we are made into a new creation that's soul purpose is to glorify and worship Him through the sacrifice of our own life.

Secondly, we are to take responsibility for how much freedom we give to Jesus to actually work in our minds to transform us and renew our thinking. Make no mistake, Jesus will do His will, with or without you. But, that does not mean that we can be Christian and be pushing the things of God and the will of God away from our lives. In Romans chapter 12 Paul makes a list for us to follow that will assist in "how" we pursue righteousness through the renewal of our minds. This list (found in verses 9-21) gives us detailed examples of how we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Paul does not mince words here and lays out some very difficult tasks and responsibilities of the Christian discipline. If we are to be disciples of Christ, we are to obey His commands. How we think and how we act towards one another and Him will define our relationship, not only with Christ, but with everyone else around us.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you read the words, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” what does this mean? What is Paul saying about our responsibility once we come to Christ and how we live our lives? Do we, as Christians take this statement seriously enough?
2. Read through chapter 11 and find why we are to glorify God? When we look at those reasons, does that change how we read the first two verses of chapter 12? Why?
3. What does it mean to be a “new creation” in Christ? Why do you think God wants us to be so new? What is the benefit to ourselves, other Christians and the rest of the world by becoming a new creation?
4. Read through verses 9-21 in Romans chapter 12. What traits do you think God wants you to work on honing? What are the easiest parts of this list for you? The hardest? How can you change and be transformed?
5. When Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commands” what did He mean? What commands? Is the list found in Romans 12 God’s commands? Why or why not? How do we encourage others to be transformed by the renewal of their minds without being legalistic and pious?

WRAP UP

Following Christ requires a sacrifice. Our lives. We are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice and not puff ourselves up and claim to be something that we are not. Transformation means that we are no longer the same. It means that we are new, something different and that we should look different from the rest of the world. We don’t want to look like the world, we want to be completely and utterly opposite of the world.



1 JOHN 4:18

PART 2

Is God able?

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21

INTRODUCTION

When we look at 1 John 4, we see that the context speaks of having assurance on the day of judgement (v. 17). This is where we are to see God's perfect love casting out all fear. Through that casting out of all of our fear, we can have confidence to stand before Him knowing that Christ has shed His blood for us and forgiven our sins. This should give us confidence as we live our lives as well that, just as He said He would, God has provided us a way to pursue the things of God and to experience His love, grace, mercy and blessing. There are many who believe that they are not truly forgiven or that God is not able to forgive them for their sins though He may forgive others. The passage in Ephesians addresses this errant way of thinking.

Paul is writing to the Ephesians and encouraging them to continue on in their faith and their love for God and for one another. In these few verses, we see that having our hearts grounded in love and that we would be able to understand the "mystery" of God in our forgiveness and His love for us. (v. 17-19) When we marry the passage in 1 John to the passage in Ephesians that, God is love, and we are to be rooted in that love, knowing that He can take care of our fears and our doubts about the forgiveness of our sins and our standing before Him in judgement. We can be confident (strengthened) and sure that, not only have our sins been forgiven but that our salvation is in His hands and His desire is for us to walk in that confidence.

Finally, we see that Paul encourages the Ephesians that God is able to do more than we even realise when it comes to His love and mercy. He is not in need of anything and is able to forgive anything that we can come up with in our flesh. (This excludes the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12:31-32) He does "abundantly above all that we ask or think" and desires to see us follow Him. Our salvation is not based on our works but, we need to be clear, we are to follow and obey God and His Word. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments and so that requires us to change who we are and be "transformed by the renewing of our minds". (Romans 12:1-2) This requires that we pursue holy living and change our opinions to match what God wants and not necessarily what we are comfortable with. This can be a scary prospect but, when we look at Ephesians 3:17-21, we see that He is with us and we need not be afraid.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that God is love? (1 John 4) How can we read Ephesians 3 knowing that He is love?
2. What makes it difficult to trust that God is able to forgive all sins? What can we do to remind ourselves of His capabilities and willingness to love us?
3. What are some examples in Scripture that show God's willingness and ability to forgive sins? What about examples in your own life?
4. Read Matthew 12:31-32. What does the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit look like? Do you think that it is possible to commit this sin before death? Why or why not?
5. Why can it be scary to live our lives after Jesus Christ? Why does He ask us to live holy lives? How is He able to give us confidence while we pursue Him?

WRAP UP

We can have confidence in our faith. We can be confident that God is able to forgive and to save. We can have the confidence to know that He not only cares for us, but that He is love and that He is able to work in us to become new creations, righteously living for Him in all that we do.



1 PETER 3:13-14

PART 3

Suffer for righteousness' sake

READ MATTHEW 5:43-48

INTRODUCTION

We often have a misconception when it comes to suffering. We live in a culture that is obsessed with comfort and entertainment and so, when something happens that causes suffering or anguish, we reject that outwardly and inwardly and run from it as hard as we can. No one thinks that suffering is enjoyable. Even the Bible talks about that in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 11. This passage should be looked at through the correct lens of understanding that “correction” and “suffering” can sometimes be the same thing. No one enjoys it, but it does something for us that is far more important than earthly comfort: Righteousness.

Righteousness is the goal of God in the Christian life. He desires for us to live holy, righteous lives, and to accomplish His will in our lives, we must live differently than the rest of the world. In Matthew, we see Jesus telling the people to not only put up with or be indifferent to enemies but to love them. We are to actively pursue a loving relationship with people who may hate us. This goes against worldly wisdom and practice. Jesus even alludes to the fact that we are to find our “reward” in loving our enemies. We see that through our sacrifice of loving our enemies, we are made righteous and holy in the sight of God. There is something that happens that is more than we could ever imagine.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 we see Pau describing the transformation that takes place when we start loving our enemies and pursuing the righteousness that Peter talks about. We see that our outward man struggles but our inward man gets renewed day by day and that “light affliction which is but for a moment” works in us something that is incomparable to what we define as “comfort”. We often live in a state of panic when we come under any form of suffering and yet, we see that our response should be one of joy that Christ has counted us worthy of suffering for His name. It only is suffering in His name when we are following Him and obeying His commands however.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you find yourself running away from trials? Suffering? Enemies? Why? How can you better respond to these events in your life to shed the light and love of Jesus to the world?
2. Read Hebrews 12:11. What do you think the writer is trying to encourage here? What type of living are we to experience through Christ? How does that change our perspective on suffering?
3. How is righteousness defined in the Bible? How does living a righteous life propel us towards God? How does it require change? Why is it important that we desire holiness above comfort?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Why is it so easy to lose heart when our outward man perishes? What is required of us to be renewed day by day? (Romans 12:1-2)
5. What are some ways that you can remind yourself in the heat of a trial that God is working something in you that far outweighs the burdens of this world and is working something in eternity that is amazing?

WRAP UP

God knows that we struggle with trials and temptations. He understands that we don't always react perfectly to every situation. We have that grace to learn. The important thing is that we learn and change according to what Christ desires. Our desire is to become more like Him and that requires sacrifice and, sometimes, pain. It is worth it on the day of glory when we will enter into our rest and experience Him and His kingdom.



PROVERBS 17:9

PART 4

True Forgiveness

READ MATTHEW 18:21-35

INTRODUCTION

In this parable that Jesus teaches, we see a servant that is forgiven a great debt by his master and immediately, he turns and throws a fellow servant into prison over a small debt owed. There is a tendency to view others' transgressions against us in a very negative way when Jesus sees all that we have done and forgives us of every sin. It is common to ask God to forgive our sin and yet, not be willing to forgive others because they hurt us personally. This tends to turn into a situation where we see the speck in our brother's eye and cannot see the log in our own. (Matthew 7:5) We are called to help the brother remove the speck but first we are to remove the log in our own eye.

When we look at the forgiveness of Christ, it is refreshing to know that He forgives us for any transgression. We must show the same kind of forgiveness to others. How we forgive others is a big indicator of our spiritual maturity. When we see others as fellow sinners in need of a Savior, we are able to more easily forgive them of the hurt that they caused us. This brings up a key point of forgiveness: we must understand appropriately WHO the person has sinned against. David said that he sinned against God alone. (Psalm 51:4) The importance of this cannot be misunderstood. We sin against God and no one else. There are outward consequences to our sin and those affect others around us and we end up damaging our relationships through our sin but we sin against God and God alone.

We see in the parable that Jesus teaches a servant who decides to not forgive and yet, he is willing to accept the forgiveness offered to him. There are times that we can have the same temptation. Christ has forgiven us of our transgressions and we accept that gladly. We live in that forgiveness because it is what makes us happy and comfortable. Then, someone hurts us or breaks trust and we do not offer forgiveness to them because our personal feelings have been affected. This is not forgiving as Christ forgives. It is selfish and prideful and we must repent and change our heart towards our brothers and sisters, as well as our enemies. We do not get to accept God's forgiveness and not offer it to others. (Ephesians 4:32)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to forgive someone for something big? Was that easy for you? Why or why not?
2. How does the parable in Matthew 18 show us how God forgives? How does that help us when we are supposed to love others as Christ loves us?
3. In forgiveness, why is it important to remove the log from your eye before pointing out the speck in your brother's? What is the best way to forgive someone, even when they do not think they have done anything wrong?
4. Why does David say that he only sinned against God? What was the complete context of that interaction? How do you think it relates to how we forgive today?
5. Read Ephesians 4:32. What is the consequence of not forgiving others? Why is forgiveness so important to our walk with Christ? Is there someone that you need to forgive? What is holding you back from doing it?

WRAP UP

Forgiveness can be difficult. It is an emotional activity that requires humility and maturity to perform. The only way that we can truly forgive others for their wrongdoings is by understanding who we are in light of who God is. When we understand that better, it becomes easier to see past the sin and see the sinner who needs love from Christ and from us.



1 JOHN 3:18

PART 5

Actionable Love

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 16:14

INTRODUCTION

As we look at 1 John 3:18, we see that our love is supposed to show itself and not only in a way that is spoken. It is easy to say that you love someone but it can be more complicated to show them that you love them through your actions. Saying it does not prove that there is actually any love pouring out from us. Sometimes, we say that we love someone through gritted teeth and, at best, we are lying. The question then becomes, how can we love others and show them our love more than just using words to make them (or us) feel better?

This is where 1 Corinthians 13 comes in. We can see through those verses what it means to bear the fruit of love. (Recommend reading that chapter) In 1 Corinthians chapter 16 we see Paul, as he is wrapping up the letter, encouraging the Corinthian church to practice actionable love. Every action that we perform should be done in love towards others. In Romans 12 we see how that love takes action towards others. There is a renewing of our minds and a transformation that takes place where we are no longer concerned with our own profit but with the profit of others. This is how we die to ourselves and prefer others ahead of ourselves.

Loving others (including our enemies) is work that we have to practice. It is not something that comes naturally. Jeremiah 17:9 talks about what comes from the heart. We have to put Christ first in our minds and our hearts to even be able to love others. Otherwise, it is a self-seeking, self-preserving type of love. No one likes to feel like we are patronizing them and so actionable love is the most important thing to learn in relationships. How that looks is different for everyone but all people know what it is like to hear the word "love", it is so important to make sure they know that you love them.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does love show itself to you? What actions have others taken to show you that they love you and you could see it in them? Why is that so different/important?
2. Have you ever told someone that you loved them but didn't mean it? Has anyone said that to you? Why is it easier to say that you love someone than it is to show it?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 13. How do these verses encourage actionable love? What does it look like to love someone actively? Why does it matter?
4. Read Romans 12:9- 21. What do these verses add to the list found in 1 Corinthians 13? How do they better exemplify how we can love each other in our actions more than just our words?
5. How do you think Christ changes your heart to be able to love others? What can you do to increase your actionable love for others?

WRAP UP

In the words of DC Talk, Love is a verb. When you say that you love someone you may make them feel better but, when you show them that you love them, they will be encouraged in a deeper way than just the words. Jesus proved His love for us in that, while we were enemies with Him, He died for our sins. (Romans 5:6-11) His love took action and He physically showed His love for us. Let us walk according to that love and love each other through our actions and not just our words.



ROMANS 6:23

PART 6

The gift of God

READ REVELATION 22:1-5

INTRODUCTION

When we think of the gift of God, we often will start listing off our personal gifts that He has given us. Some are pastors, teachers, prophets, etc. These are certainly gifts and they should be known and cultivated to experience a full life in Jesus Christ. They are not the only gift that we receive from God however. He gives us the gift of eternal life that is mentioned in Romans chapter six. This gift is one that we often take for granted even though it is a key point that is talked about in Christian circles.

There are times that we can forget that this life we live here on earth is not our final destination. Hebrews talks about the fact that it is appointed a man once to die and then the judgement which will determine where that soul is going to spend eternity. Eternity is something that is hard to wrap our heads around because we are finite beings that have lived our entire existence within the realm of time. Eternity has no time, there is no beginning and there is no end and this is something that is obviously difficult to grasp. Often, we know that eternity will happen but, because we can't grasp it completely, we rarely dwell on what it means to have "eternal life".

Revelation 22 gives us a good description of some of the landmarks we will see when we reach our eternal resting place. There are certainly things, even in this description, that lead to more questions and more fascinating aspects of what it will mean to be in glory with Jesus but, it is safe to say that there will be plenty to see and do while we enjoy Heaven with our Creator. The fact is, we will enjoy it as long as we follow Romans 6:23 and do not sin, but follow after Jesus more and more every day. There is a condition to enter into this eternal rest and that is complete and utter faith in Jesus Christ and confession of sin. We rely on Him to be our Savior. We rely on Him to guide us in this life and on into the next.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What (other than eternal life) are some of the gifts that you feel God has given you? Why? How can you cultivate those gifts to glorify God through service to Him?
2. How regularly do you think about your after-life? Is it important that we think on those things? Why or why not?
3. When we realize that it is appointed for a man once to die, how should that change our outlook on how we live this life? How should we talk differently with each other as well as how should we then interact with those around us who do not believe?
4. How often do you think about your eternal life with Christ? What are the things that excite you? What things worry you? What things do you take comfort in?
5. Romans 6:23 encourages us to no longer be slaves to our sin. How do you practically do that and look forward to the eternal life that you will experience with God?

WRAP UP

Eternity is a broad topic that has been studied by many people throughout history. There are only so many things that we can know about it on this side of the river. One day, we will enter into the throne room of God and He will judge us based on our confession of faith in His Son or lack thereof. It is so important that we are no longer conformed to the image of this world and that we passionately pursue Jesus Christ and His desire for us here on this earth so that we can know Him and enjoy His presence for all of eternity in the next one.