

## The Bible in One Year Week 29: Transformed (Romans Pt. 2)

(Romans 12:1-21)

- **True Worship**

- On this journey through the Bible in One Year, we're looking at Romans in just two short weeks, and this is week 2, so here we go! Today we're looking specifically at the later part of the book with Romans 12, but watch last week's message if you missed it for more of an overview.
- Have you ever been in a situation where you had the privilege of being able to use or take care of something special that belonged to someone else? My wife recently got to drive her friend's new car to meet her down at the beach and it was a really nice ride with all the new "bells and whistles," but she was a little nervous about driving it. I think back to my high school days when I got to play one of the youth leaders' *really* nice guitars for worship. Or there was the time in 8<sup>th</sup> grade when the family I did yard work for asked me and my friend to watch their house for a couple days: they let us stay in their home, swim in the pool, jam in the music room—all we had to do was take care of the pool maintenance, feed the dog, and generally make sure the house didn't burn down. I'm happy to report the dog and the house survived, and we had a sweet time.
  - When someone gives you this kind of opportunity, there is definitely a *right response* and a *wrong response*, right? There's a really big difference between treating something like it's our own to do whatever we please with and treating it like it belongs to someone else. If it isn't yours, you can enjoy it for a time, but you can't do *whatever* you want with it; you don't have that authority and it would be wrong to act as if you did.
- The Biblical worldview is that all of life and all that we are *is a gift from the Creator, God*. It's given lavishly, generously, for our enjoyment, but it's *from God*. Romans 11:36 says, "*From him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*" Immediately after that verse, the right response to God's gift of life is laid out in Romans 12:1, here's The Message translation: "*...Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering.*"
  - Romans 1-3 says that the root of sin is this rebellion against the Creator, this turning inward to become a law unto ourselves. Paul says that the heart of the issue is *worship*. We go astray when we serve false gods, idols, when we give *ultimate worth* to created things that are *not ultimately worthy*. Our minds and hearts become darkened, our desires and actions become distorted, we become slaves. And the messy history of humanity unfolds.
  - But when we turn back to God, in response to his mercy in Christ, we come into a proper relationship to God, to ourselves, and to the world. We're able to receive life as a gift to be enjoyed rather than something to be idolized and grasped and hoarded and used up and thrown away. When we become followers of Jesus and we receive this New King, this New Community, and this New Life as a gift of faith, it's no longer, "*this is mine!*" it's "*I am yours.*"
  - That's some of what Paul means when he writes in Romans 12:1-2. Let's read it again, because if you understand this part, you get all of chapter 12: "*...in view of God's mercy...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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.*"

- **Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind**

- Become "living sacrifice," give God everything, full surrender of your life before the Creator. Once you accept that this is the proper response and posture for your life, you're in the place to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. "*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*" That's huge. Have you ever seen someone who's really mature in their walk, who really seems... to live and love like Jesus, and wonder, *how does that happen?* They're being *transformed* by the *renewing of their mind*. Because where your mind goes, your life follows. It's how we're made, it's how things are meant to work.
- This is where the rubber meets the road for discipleship, and this is where we see so many people come up short or fall away. This is where the whole journey of discipleship unfolds as a

process of sanctification, of being made holy like he is holy, for the rest of our lives: *being transformed by the renewing of our minds*. It's rethinking everything in light of the Gospel of Jesus and the fact that we are not our own, but now belong to God in joyful surrender.

- A more direct translation of this verse is, "*don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age...*" That's what we experience isn't it? Whether we're conscious of it or not, we're swimming around in this culture—the present age, the pattern, the mold of this world. Everybody is being "disciplined" by something. There are many Christians who are being a whole lot more disciplined, a whole lot more effectively, by the society around us than they are being disciplined by the Way of Jesus. And we wonder why so many believers look no different from the world around, why many people avoid the Church or walk away from the Church altogether. If we're not being transformed by the renewing of our mind, we're letting whatever *mold* is set by the world around us press and squeeze us into its pattern. As long as we refuse to be a living sacrifice in joyful surrender, we'll just keep doing things that way. If your life is not surrendered on the altar in worship, any time there's a conflict between the pattern of the world and the pattern of Christ, you'll default to culture because it's the path of least resistance.
- Paul uses the phrase "the present age." In the Biblical worldview, there are two ages: there's the present age that's defined by sin, idolatry, corruption, and death, and there's the hope of an age to come that will be defined by new life, justice, restoration, peace, and joy.
  - The prophets spoke of this hope, you can read about it in Ezekiel where God promises to give us a new heart and give us his Spirit, you can read about it in Isaiah with the lion and the lamb lying down together and all that cool stuff. The promise of New Creation, all things restored and made right once and for all. The claim of the Gospel is that *in Christ the New Age has already begun, is now unfolding with Christ's people, and will come into fullness when Christ returns*.
  - Paul is saying something amazing here: he's saying that Christians are people who live, not according to the present age of sin and death, but according to the coming age of New Creation. The Resurrection of Jesus was the foretaste, the open door into this New Life. For those who are in Christ, the New Creation has come! So, we are now figuring out how to think, speak, and act in a way that's appropriate, not for the present age of our world, but for the age to come, for the New Creation that's already begun in Christ. That's what it means when it says, *don't be conformed to the present age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*.
- **Overcoming Evil with Good**
  - In Romans 12:1-2, what you have is basically, *right worship* that leads to *right thinking* that leads to *right living*. Following Christ is not primarily about following a list of rules—although there are rules and boundaries that are meant to be good and life-giving and life-preserving—but it's more fundamentally about *laying your entire life on the altar and rethinking every part of your life in light of the Good News that Jesus is King*. That's discipleship in a nutshell.
  - So, this is where Paul launches into all these practical applications and exhortations that are still *so very relevant for us in today* in Romans 12:3-21.
    - Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice and being transformed by the renewing of our minds looks like this: in the new community of Church, we won't think more highly of ourselves than we should, but we'll discern our place according to the faith and the gifts that God's given us. And we *all* have a place, we all have a part to play, a gift to offer, a ministry to perform. There are gifts in the body of Christ that are dormant because we're not using them, but we need people who prophesy, who serve, who teach, who encourage, who give, who lead, who show mercy, who exercise their God-given gifts with zeal and joy.
    - Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice and being transformed by the renewing of our minds looks like: loving authentically, clinging to what is good, utterly rejecting what is evil. Devoting ourselves to one another in love, honoring others above ourselves. Being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Sharing with the needy and practicing hospitality.
    - It looks like: blessing even those who persecute you, loving even those who hate you, relinquishing the desire for revenge, because that's what Jesus does! And because the way Jesus overcame evil was not repaying evil with evil but overcoming evil with good.

- All that Paul says in the rest of chapter 12 is just showing *this is how Jesus lived, this is what it means to conform to the pattern of his life as an alternative to the pattern set by the world.* Christians are we ready to actually live like this? This is what turns the world upside down.
- Is there any greater vision for life or goal for life than *being transformed so that you can live like Christ? So that, like him, in this dark world you can overcome evil with good, rather than be overcome by evil?* Can you come up with any better purpose or mission for your life than that?
- This is the call of the Gospel of Jesus and it's a gift that's *free for everyone who believes.* If you want this to be your life, it starts here: "*Offer yourself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.*" Give him your full surrender and adopt the only logical posture of a creature before the Creator: *kneel down in worship with all you are.* Allow him to transform your life by the renewal of your mind, to change how you think and live according to the pattern of Jesus and the New Creation. Then you'll find out just how good and pleasing and perfect God's will really is. Amen.