

## The Missing Mind of the Believer Romans 12:1-2

We have been going through these opening two verses and we have seen that the theology of the opening 11 verses are meant to change us and we are to live in light of those wonderful truths of justification, sanctification, eternal security and election. And this is what Paul says in this chapter and the following chapters - "based on what I have just said - do." There is command after command. But as we look at verses 1-2 we realize that this is almost like a summary statement of all the commands. It really lays the ground for what is to come.

And we have seen based on the mercies of God that are ours in Christ that we are to present our bodies or all of our life as living sacrifices to God. This is reasonable based on what he has done in Christ and who he is. It is also worship to God. All of life is to be worship to him. And it is easy to say what he has just said but for many it might seem a little vague. What does that life of sacrificial service for the glory of God look like? What does it look like to live holy lives that are acceptable to God? And he begins to delineate that in some big categories in verse 2. And we looked at the first of those the last time we were together. And that is "Do not be conformed to this world." And we mentioned that this is not teaching or principle per se, but a command, an imperative, in other words, there is no option here. This is a command from God.

So what does it mean to be conformed to this world? The word "conform" means to be molded or shaped. And what are we not to be conformed to? He says "this world," or literally "this age." And what he is talking about is the present age that we live in that lives and function, hopes and dreams without God in this world. Don't be conformed to this world. Don't think, act, talk like the world that is around you. And what he is saying is something that has been really lost in our modern Christianity that other ages took for granted and that is there is a distinctive way as believers that we should live that is radically different that those that have their hopes and dreams in this life, and live as if there is no God, or have changed him into something of their own image.

And it is a command. And every age has to come to grip that with this negation. There are things to be avoid and things we do not take in as believers in Jesus Christ. We do not train our inner selves with the things of this life. We looked at a few areas last time we were together. Such as the amount and also the indiscriminate watching of various norms of media, or the music we listen to, or listening to the message that life is found in materialism. And we feed ourselves with so much of the world, that the Word of God and the glory of the truths that have just been presented have no access or are strangled from our lives. Why? We are conforming ourselves to this world. And there are somethings in life, and it is amazing that this seems so radical that God wants you to say "no" to. How much media and entertainment are you consuming? And what are you watching? Could you watch that with another believer? It is so easy to say that I can handle it, but it has a slow and deteriorating affect that conforms us to the present world. Many times we do not even know that is going on. This takes effort.

But then Paul follows with a positive command, which we are going to look at this morning. You see, we are not just saying no to things. Many individuals think that Christianity as just a negation. And the reason why is they want the world and the

experiences of the world and that is where their hearts are. But Christianity is about saying no to things in our lives so that we can say yes to superior things - things that ultimately bring so much more joy, satisfaction and meaning to our lives. And again, they bring so much purpose in our lives because we were meant to live for another and that is God - the God of our salvation. So I want us to understand the command, and then I want us to seek to apply the command.

1. We need to understand the command. V.2b.

One of the missing things in Christianity today is the ability to think and to think biblically. We have lost that ability to be put in a certain situation or trial, take that trial and pass it through our biblical grid of knowledge to come up with the best way to glorify God and minister to others. We have lost the ability to think. I saw this with the recent pandemic. Many said I follow this pastor or this teacher because they were for things being opened or for things being closed but could not articulate a biblical reason for their position. It was good enough for them that someone else thought about it. I do not need to. And if you look at all our difficulties, struggles, trials, it is amazing how we do not use our minds -really concentrate on what God has said, really concentrate on our struggle with sin and lack of conformity to Christ.

We see this in the whole Charismatic Movement. It looks at the mind in many ways as an enemy of Christianity. If you want to encounter God then you have to bypass the mind. We are even told there is heart knowledge and then there is head knowledge. Heart knowledge, which is superior, doesn't try to think - but tries to experience God. In fact thinking is for the weak and for those who are immature. Again, you have to go around you mind. The heart of course is not just talking about emotions but the entire you that includes not only our emotions, but also the mind and will. The heart doesn't just feel but thinks. So there are whole generations of professing believers who have not thought long and hard about the teachings of God through Paul in the Book of Romans. And they do not know what to do with this command and others like it.

But our circles are not immune from not thinking. We can go through the motions and never think about what we do or why we do the things we do. They become like mindless religious actors that do because they are suppose to. It is no better than dead traditionalism. We do the Lord's Table. Why? Because that is what is commanded. Why is it commanded? I don't know. What is the purpose or message? We are content with just going through the motions. It was no better than Israel of old that would bring their sacrifices to God but without any thought of what the sacrifice said about themselves and why they brought them. They became mindless and involved in dead ritualisms. To bypass the mind is a sin before God. God has given us a sanctified mind as believers to think, learn and apply truth, and again it does take effort and work to obey this command.

And let me ask you quite simply - are you training yourself to think biblically? Are you even thinking about what you are thinking? So often people can let their minds wander into lustful thoughts or vengeful thinking, but how often even in the midst of that do we turn our minds and think on the things that Jesus wants us to think about? How often do we intentionally say, "No that is conforming myself to this world, I am going to think about God, his mercy, his character," and truly changing on thinking.

Because look at the command here, **“but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”** It is amazing to look at that word “transformed.” It is much like the word conformed. It has the meaning of an outward change because of an inward reality. We get our word metamorphosis from the Greek word that is used here. This word is used in the gospels to describe a particular event, and that is the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Matthew 17:2 says, **“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.”** Jesus’ inner divine nature shone through at that time. Who he was came out. And here is the point - remember this is a command. We are to be transformed. That does not mean that we just keep a list of do’s and don’t’s. We can do all those things but truly not be transformed. We just become ritualistic at best. But what this is talking about is an inner change that is to be taking place inside of us that is manifested by different loves, desires, goals, actions and words than those around us. And it is something that we are to be involved in and active in and pursuing.

So how do we as born again believers in Jesus Christ pursue that transformation? He says, “by the renewal of your mind.” I love how one person explained this **“A new orientation in our thinking leads to a new orientation in behaviour”** (Douglar Moo). Rather than the old way of thinking and comprehending, we are to think in a new and a Christian way. We are to have and cultivate a Christ-like and God-centred mind. We realize why we need this because of the old way that we thought. Ephesians 4:17-18 says, **“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 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.”** Notice those words, “futility of their minds,” “darkened in their understanding,” and “ignorance that is in them.” Paul is saying don’t walk like that any more. And then he says a few verses later in Ephesians 4:23, **“and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.”** Reshape and refashion the way that you think about life and how you respond.

And that process has already begun if you are a believer in Christ. Titus 3:5, **“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”** We have been renewed and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit of God. But here is where we have to see the chosen instrument that the Spirit of God has chosen to use. Listen to what Jesus says in John 6:63, **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”** The Spirit gives life but He works through the Spirit given word of God. He illuminates our hearts and minds to transform us more into the image of Christ.

So if we are going to renew our hearts what must we do? If we are going to obey this command how do we pursue a renewed mind? Listen to Colossians 3:16, **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”** We have to put his word in us. Listen to Psalm 119:11, **“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”** What has the Psalmist done? He has stored up God’s word in his heart, and the result is a

transformed mind and life. Again listen to what happens when we are seeking God and seeking a transformed life and heart in 2 Corinthians 3:18, **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”** So often we have the cart before the horse. We want change but are we looking into the perfect word? Are we spending time weekly, daily learning the Scriptures? Are we intentionally when we find ourselves thinking of things that we should not taking our minds and placing them on something else? Remember this is a command of God.

2. So how can apply this principle or this command into my life. 2b.

I want to say something to you that you may realize or you may not realize and that is no one talks to you more than you do. Our minds are never on interlude or turned off. As I preached this message, you have been talking to yourself. As you went through this week you talked to yourself about the spat you might have had with your spouse, or your teen’s disobedience, or about that physical trial that you are going through. You talk to you more than anyone. And all that internal talking leads to a way of interpreting life. A spouse that says to another spouse, “I hate you and you will never change” is interpreting life and circumstances and the way he or she responds is not through the gospel but through some sort of hopeless worldly message he or she has been preaching to themselves. The same as the teen who says, “I hate living here,” indicates not how bad it is to live under his or her parents but wants things that are worldly - self-autonomy, freedom to live as they want, a life without God. They have been preaching a message contrary to the Scriptures. And if you want to see what someone is thinking, what we are thinking, just listen to what comes out of them or us. And here is Paul’s whole point: we change the way we respond and act by changing the way that we think. We honour God and seek to do his will when we change our thinking.

And there are a couple of things that we have to realize about this command. One is that it is a process. The language that is used here is not one of complete and forever renewal. That will not happen until we get to be before Jesus Christ. God’s Spirit indwells us and lives inside of us and provides a whole new orientation of life and thinking about life. Think about how much our goals and joys have change, how we associate with people we would have never associate with before, how much we pray or sing that we never used to before. The evidence of the Spirit’s influence on our lives is all over it. But this is what you have to understand about life in the here and now - many of the old ruts and ways of thinking and responding to life are deeply ingrained in us and do not come out over night. Think of it: I became a believer in my early twenties. I am now in my late fifties, and I am still struggling with many of the mental habits or ways of thinking that I had in my pre-conversion days. Thank the Lord I am not what I was, but I am by no means a finished product. The process through his Spirit and through the Word of God continues on.

The key question becomes: what am I feeding my mind on. Many spend 40-50 hours every week in your places of work, which is a bastion of worldliness with those who have their hearts and desires all set on this present life. But God has given us through his grace what we call discretionary time. This is free time to rest, relax, do

things around the home, spend time with family and so on. But with our discretionary time, how much time are we spending renewing our minds. It is so easy to sit in front of the television, tablets or phones and mindlessly coast. This command is calling us to cooperate with God's Spirit by informing our minds with the Scripture. It could be listening to a sermon, or reading a book or devotional or meditating on the Scriptures, but seeking Bible intake. It is to be ongoing in our lives. This past week, be honest, has there been time in the Word? Have you reflected about your own sin and sought to apply the truths of God's word to your life? No one unintentionally becomes holy. We must seek God through the Scripture. We must train our minds.

The second thing that will help us apply this passage is that the process of renewing the mind is not primarily an external command, but something that is internal that leads to external change. After these two verses we are going to meet with command after command, and those commands are important, and yes, God wants us to obey those commands. Listen to what Paul says here, in Philippians 2:12-13, **"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."** He commands us to obey and work out our salvation - in other words live as those who are God's children. But then he says "for it is God who works in you." Where does he work? He works in the believer. So the Spirit of God takes something external - the word of God - and makes it active internally changing us, so what comes out of us is so different than what it was before.

Let me end with this challenge by John Piper on this verse, **"What then do we do in obedience to Romans 12:2, 'Be transformed in the renewal of your mind'? We join the Holy Spirit in his precious and all-important work. We pursue Christ-exalting truth and we pray for truth-embracing humility. Listen to rich expositions of the 'gospel of the glory of Christ.' Read your Bible from cover to cover always in search of the revelation of the glory of Christ. Read and ponder the Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting writings of great, spiritual men and women. And form the habit of meditating on the perfections of Christ. And in it all pray, pray, pray that the Holy Spirit will renew your mind, that you may desire and approve the will of God, so that all of life will become worship to the glory of Christ."**

Listen to the words of "May the Mind of Christ, My Saviour":

**May the mind of Christ, my Savior,  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.**

**May the Word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through His power.**

**May the peace of God my Father**

**Rule my life in everything,  
That I may be calm to comfort  
Sick and sorrowing.**

**May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.**

**May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.**

**May His beauty rest upon me,  
As I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
Seeing only Him.**