

Paul's Appeal to Believers to Live Lives Consistent With God's Will: This lesson deals primarily with Romans 12:1-2. What is the context of these verses? Chapter 12 begins Paul's appeal that believers live their lives consistent with God's will. The appeal continues for several chapters. Focus is on relationships: (1.) 12:1-2, Believers relationship to God, (2.) 12:3-8, their relationship to themselves, (3.) 12:9-16, their relationship to one other, (4.) 12:17-21, their relationship to evildoers and enemies, (5.) 13:1-7, their relationship to the government, (6.) 13:8-10, their relationship to the law, (7.) 13:11-14, their relationship to the day of Christ's return, and (8.) 14:1-15:13, their relationship to the "weaker" members of the Christian community.

There are three main ideas: Consecration, Humility, and Love. A believer's attitude toward God should be consecration. A believers' attitude toward self should be humility. Their attitude toward others should be love.

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV): *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² 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."*

Presenting Self to God as a Living Sacrifice: Each believer's goal is to please and honor God. Paul says they should please and honor God by consecrating their body to Him as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing. Paul says that is a believer's true and proper worship. What does Paul mean? Several questions arise.

Why does Paul say believers should sacrifice their "body" to God as a living sacrifice? Animals were killed for Old Testament sacrifices. Paul also says, the act of a believer in presenting their body to God as a living sacrifice, is an act of spiritual worship. What does he mean? Why does he link spiritual worship with presenting the physical body to God?

Our body is the instrument through which our soul acts. Our soul is intimately embedded in and animates the body. We are an integrated "body and soul" entity. Concrete bodily acts are a normal part of worship (audible prayer, singing, baptism, and communion). Worship is never entirely an inward, abstract and mystical act.

With that understanding, by presenting or consecrating our body to God. Paul means consecrating our whole person. Being a living sacrifice requires the involvement of mind, will, and emotions. It implies living life totally devoted to pleasing God. A person's "mission control center" is their spiritual heart. Giving our heart to Jesus is another way and more modern way of saying "consecrate your whole person to God." Since the spiritual soul activates the physical body, things physical and spiritual are intimately connected.

Human Depravity versus Redeemed Nature: In the first few chapters of Romans, Paul pointed out that depraved human nature reveals itself bodily through tongues that deceive, lips which spread poison, mouths filled with cursing and bitterness, feet which are swift to shed blood, and eyes that look away from God.

Believers are to be the opposite of depraved. Their commitment to God is to be demonstrated through worship, tongues that speak truth, lips that spread the gospel, love for one another, and hands that willingly and lovingly do the mundane tasks of everyday living. Being consecrated to God means being committed to make thoughts, words, and deeds pleasing to God. How does that happen? The answer is in the second part of Paul's appeal.

Be Transformed Through the Renewal of Your Mind: The human mind is both finite and fallen. God's mind is infinite, holy, and, as seen in Isaiah 55:9, cannot be fully understood by finite beings. Nothing would be known about God had He not chosen to make Himself known. But God has revealed Himself through: (1.) The glory and order of His created universe. (2.) Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. (3.) The Bible, the God-breathed written Word. (4.) His actions in history.

Fallen human minds are unwilling to understand or accept the things of God. No one can discern and understand God's truth until God regenerates them, giving them new spiritual ears to hear, spiritual eyes to see, and a renewed mind for understanding. Regeneration prepares the soil of the heart to receive the seed of the gospel (Matthew 13:1–23).

The mind is the gateway to the soul. It stands between and connects the spiritual soul and the physical body. Cognitive faculties of the mind include perception, reason, intuition, will, and imagination. Emotions and instinct are non-cognitive faculties of the mind. Activities of the mind function at conscious, self-conscious,

subconscious (or preconscious), and unconscious levels. Renewal of the mind deals with all the mind's faculties at all levels. Transforming the whole person by renewal of the mind depends on the connectedness of body and soul.

Do Not Conform to the Pattern of This World: Pressure to conform to the pattern of the surrounding culture is enormous. Resistance is difficult. Conforming to the world's pattern is a deadly threat to every believer. Consecration to God means living every day by standards different from those of the world.

Paul gives the direct command ***“Do not conform to the pattern of this world.”*** The problem to be avoided is the moral attitude of the fallen world. The world's moral spirit is selfishness. The world's pursuits are dedicated to pleasing self. The world's moral spirit rejects the rule of Christ and is dominated by influence from the evil one (John 14:30; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 2:2).

God has always appealed to His people to avoid being conformed to the world. Two examples: Through Moses in Leviticus 18:3-4, God said, ***“You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴ You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God.”*** In Matthew 6:7-8 Jesus said, ***“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”***

The message could not be clearer. God's people must avoid conforming to the moral structure of the prevailing culture. They are to cooperate as the Holy Spirit transforms them by renewing their mind. Cooperating with renewal means consistently practicing Christian disciplines such as praying, study of Scripture, evangelism, associating with other believers, speaking truth, thinking right thoughts, and being generous. Believers are to diligently focus on growing to maturity in Christ.

Both “conform” and “transform” denote continuing attitudes. The idea is to persist in refusing to conform to the fallen world's ways and continue to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work of transformation.

The first step in resisting being conformed to the world is to willingly consecrate your whole person to God! The whole person is consecrated, not merely

the body. Proof of this is that we are to be a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice requires active involvement of will and rationality. A living body is a whole person. When life is gone, the body remains, but it cannot make sacrifices.

Sanctification and Transformation by Renewing of Mind: “Sanctification” and “transformation through renewing of the mind” are intimately related concepts, possibly two terms referring to the same process. Before we can be sanctified or transformed, we must be regenerated. God makes us spiritually alive to Him, giving us a new heart (mission control center), making us able both to hear and to believe the gospel. He justifies believers, declaring them legally righteous.

Though they possess legal righteousness, a believer’s sin nature remains and must be dealt with. The Holy Spirit indwells regenerated, justified new believers and works to sanctify them. Sanctification is a continuing process of dealing with the sin nature and ultimately making the believer holy.

As pointed out, sanctification and transformation through renewing the mind are much alike and possibly the same. A person is passive in both regeneration and justification but are to be actively involved in transformation. Transformation (or sanctification) is ongoing until mortal death. At death (or when Jesus comes again) the Holy Spirit completes the transformation making the believer like Christ. That final step eliminates every vestige of sin and sin nature and is called glorification. Glorification prepares a believer to live eternal life with God.

So, what difference, if any, is there between sanctification and transformation by renewing the mind? Both involve gradually eliminating the effects of our fallen nature. In both, the Holy Spirit is in control and the believer is actively involved. The only possible difference I see is that the term sanctification emphasizes “making holy as God is holy.” Transformation through the renewing the mind emphasizes “making our moral character like God’s moral character.” “Making a believer’s moral character like God’s moral character” is necessary for a believer to be holy as God is holy. “Making holy” and “making moral character like God’s” seem to be the same.

Renewal of the mind is necessary for godly moral character or holiness. After justification, the renewal project of making a believer morally like Christ progresses throughout life, but is not completed until the Holy Spirit glorifies at death (or when

Christ comes again). Glorified believers will be holy, having pure minds, and wills entirely devoted to acting according to God's will.

Regeneration enables a person to make godly moral decisions but not immutably so. Regenerated people can still make ungodly decisions. They can still sin. As the mind is renewed, thinking right thoughts and making right decisions improves. Changing the way we think in our inner being is the way to holiness. Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) reminds us that “**as he thinks in his heart, so is he.**” Actions and decisions follow thoughts. Thoughts and the decisions and actions they produce define our path through life. Our goal is to stay on the narrow path of righteousness.

Testing and Approving God's Will: What does Paul mean by this phrase? Scripture recognizes three categories of God's will: (1.) God's sovereign decretive will, the will by which God brings to pass whatsoever He decrees. This will is hidden until the willed events happen. (2.) God's preceptive will is His revealed law and commandments. Believers have the ability but not the right to break God's preceptive will. (3.) God's will of disposition describes His attitude or disposition. Disposition reveals what is pleasing to Him.

Given the three possibilities for what God's will means, which category of God's will does Paul intend? What does he mean by “test and approve?”

Paul can't mean God's hidden sovereign will. Moreover, since he says we are to test and approve God's will, he can't mean God's will of disposition which is simply God's attitude and is not to be tested. Therefore, Paul means God's revealed preceptive will of law and commands. The word “test” or “prove” means to explore, investigate, or ascertain. The idea is that when you explore God's revealed preceptive will of law and commands, you will see they are for your benefit. Your feelings and mental judgment will both admit God's laws and commandments are good, pleasing, and perfectly suited to accomplish what God intends.

Proper Thought Life: To be transformed into a moral likeness of Christ, all the faculties of the mind and heart must be made “right.” For transformation, the things which occupy our mind are of utmost importance. We must be careful both what we think about and how we think about it. Remember, everything we think and everything we take in through our senses is stored in memory. It is profoundly true that “*For as he thinks within himself, so he is*” (NASV Prov 23:7). The computer

age saying of – “garbage in, garbage out” – correctly warns us of the consequences of bad thought.

There is an old adage which provides further insight.

***“Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.”***

We reap the consequences of thoughts we sow. Galatians 6:7 says, ***“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”***

Our goal is always to be thoughts suitable to who we are in Christ. Paul writes about things which cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He transforms us. In Philippians 4:8 he says thoughts are to be disciplined. ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”***

As we think on such things and make them an integral part of our life, they will shape our attitudes, our actions, and our speech. Each of these words is filled with meaning and we need to consider them one-by-one.

“Whatever is True:” Scripture underlines the importance of truth. Jesus said in John 14:6a, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*** He prayed to the Father about His disciples in John 17:17 saying, ***“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”*** In John 8:31-32, ***“Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”***

The first requisite for clear thinking is to be sure we are not mistaking error for truth. It is an unfortunate fact that much mischief in the world is caused by good intentioned people acting on totally erroneous convictions which they believe to be true. Knowing how to test information claimed to be true is vital, as is knowing what

degree of certainty or uncertainty is acceptable for a given situation. Understand how truth, knowledge, and faith are related. Don't be gullible.

“Whatever is Honorable, Whatever is Just:” Think about things which are right and worthy of respect. TV programs, movies, books, and other sources expose us routinely to steady streams of things which are not honorable, not worthy of respect, not right, nor just. When such things capture our attention, they tend to control the flow of our thoughts and actions. As followers of Christ, we are to be in the world but not controlled by its patterns. We are to keep our eyes on Jesus and live a life of Christian love.

Living in the world, we cannot avoid contact with unjust and dishonorable things. There is danger that repeated exposure to such things, and to the people who do them, may desensitize us to evil. Because of unavoidable contact, we need to examine ourselves vigilantly and diligently to be sure we haven't bit-by-bit become desensitized to wrong and dishonorable things. We should train ourselves to constantly bring before our mind things that are right and worthy of respect.

“Whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable:” By pure, Paul means moral purity, the state of being free from moral fault or guilt. Lovely refers to beautiful, attractive, or harmonious. Commendable means deserving esteem, worth talking about, or appealing. Believers are to focus on thoughts driven by knowledge of Scripture. The believer should not focus on morally depraved thoughts which are common in the world.

“Whatever is Excellent, or Praiseworthy, think about these things:” With this phrase, Paul reaches out to encompass and sum up other virtues he might have put into his list of desirable things to think about. Excellent means eminently good, top moral quality. Praiseworthy refers to things worthy of praise, things which have God's approval. Filling heart and mind with God's Word will provide us with a built-in error detector for sensing wrong thoughts.

What Next? Next we will consider certain external things we can do to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's internal work of transformation.