BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND

Romans 12:1–21

Key Verse: 12:2

“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.”

Chapters 12–16 are considered the practical life application section of Romans. Chapter 12 begins the section describing how the gospel changes us practically, both personally and as a community. The gospel especially changes our minds. This “renewing” happens not just at the outset of Christian life. It’s something the Holy Spirit continues to do in us on a daily basis, if we allow him to. In this study we want to learn the characteristics of a “renewed mind.” And since it’s an admonition to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” we want to learn what we need to do so that we really have this renewed mind from day to day. May God speak to us through his living words today.

**First**, a new mind toward God. Read verses 1–2. Paul begins by saying, “I urge you.” In Greek, this word is “parakalo,” and it means to come along side a person like a friend, to ask urgently and fervently, to encourage, comfort, or warn. Paul says, “…in view of God’s mercy…” What did he mean? He’d just written about God’s mercy in 11:30–32. In the Bible, mercy is at the heart of who God is. And God’s mercy is at the heart of the gospel. In 2:4 Paul said God is rich in kindness, forbearance and patience, mercifully working to lead us to repentance. In 3:24 he said that, though we sin and fall short of God’s glory, God in his mercy justifies us freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. In 5:8 he said that while we were still sinners, Christ in his mercy died for us. Receiving God’s mercy in Jesus is the real starting point of Christian life. And God’s mercy is the foundation of Christian life, the only thing we can rely on (5:1–2). Only God’s mercy can change our sinful minds and hearts. Paul says in verse 1 that we need to keep God’s mercy “in view.” It means we need to be reminded of God’s mercy each and every day. Only when we’re really aware of God’s mercy can we live the Christian life aright (e.g. Jas2:13).

We see in verses 1–2 that God’s mercy changes our view of God himself. Because of God’s great mercy, we want to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing, in true and proper worship. Before receiving his mercy, we were mostly indifferent toward God. If we did worship him, it was because we had to. We were like the Jews, who kept only the outward rituals of worship. We may have felt burdened by the thought of God, afraid or restricted by him. But after receiving his mercy, we *want* to worship God. And we don’t do it half-heartedly. We’re not satisfied with superficial rituals, with going through the motions or just giving God some money. We *worship* with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our souls, with all our strength (Dt6:5). When we appreciate his mercy, nothing is too good for him, even everything we have is not really enough. We want to give God our all, our very beings. Such worship of God is one aspect of the “renewed mind” Paul talks about in verse 2.

**Second**, a new mind toward our bodies. God’s mercy to us in Jesus not only gives us the desire to worship God; it also gives us a new view of our bodies. Paul said back in chapter 6 that we no longer offer our bodies in slavery to sin, as instruments of wickedness; now we offer our bodies in slavery to God, as instruments of righteousness (6:13,16,19). We realize that we were bought at a price—with the precious blood of Jesus—and so we seek to honor God with our bodies (1Co6:19–21). In view of God’s mercy, we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2Co4:10). It says in verse 2 that we offer our bodies “as living sacrifices.” It means just sacrificing an hour or two on Sunday is nowhere near enough; we want to worship God 24/7. We become like the psalmist, who wrote, “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water” (Ps63:1), or like Isaiah, who wrote, “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you” (Isa26:9). We become like Brother Lawrence, who found joy in worshiping God even in washing dishes and doing menial daily chores. When we have a renewed mind, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices each and every day, in all we do.

**Third**, a new mind toward the world. Read verse 2 again. According to this verse, when we have a renewed mind, we think differently about the world. What is “the pattern of this world”? It probably refers not to fashion trends but to a worldview and lifestyle. The world’s pattern is not to worship God wholeheartedly. Jesus’ parable of the tenants describes human beings as hostile to God (Mt21:33–41). At the core of our sinful nature, we don’t want to live under God. We want to live for ourselves (2Co5:15). In Genesis 11, when sinful human beings got together, they used their skills to build the Babel Tower to show their own glory and that they didn’t need God (Ge11:1–4). This is “the pattern of this world” in every generation. It’s to live for selfish ambition and vain conceit (Php2:3). It’s to follow the empty way of life handed down to us from our ancestors (1Pe1:18). At its worse, it’s to live to gratify the cravings of our flesh, following its desires and thoughts, living like dead fish floating downstream, influenced by the devil to disobey God (Eph2:1–3). When we conform to the pattern of this world, we become darkened in our understanding and hardened in our hearts (Eph4:17–19). 1 John 2:16 sums it up as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.” With a renewed mind, we see the world's pattern for what it is.

**Fourth**, “be transformed.” As Christians we still have to live in the world, where we’re constantly confronted with its pattern and pressured to conform. So in verse 2 Paul says to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The only way not to conform to the pattern of this world is to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The word “transformed” is powerful. It’s the Greek word “metamorphosis.” It means to be changed. We all need to be changed, not just once, but again and again. The expression “by the renewing of your mind” suggests that this renewal and transformation is an ongoing thing.

One thing is clear: we can’t change or transform ourselves or renew our minds with our own positive thinking. We need the Holy Spirit to really be changed and to have a renewed mind. But Paul writes it as an admonishment: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” These words are telling us to do something. We have a part to play. We’ve got to make a conscious choice, a conscious effort. In Ephesians 4:22–24 Paul describes it as taking off the old clothing of our old self and putting on the new clothing of the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Paul says when we put on the new self, we’re “made new in the attitude of [our] minds.” Still, it’s not easy to understand. Basically, to “be transformed” means that each day we need to invite the Holy Spirit to rule our minds and hearts. We shouldn’t just think about it; we need to actually ask our heavenly Father each day for the Holy Spirit (Lk11:13). As we ask, he helps us live according to the Spirit, not according to our flesh (Ro8:4–9). Our mind becomes “governed” by the Spirit; the Spirit is the only one who can truly renew our mind. The Spirit gives us a real love for God and a new hatred for sin. The Spirit makes us conscious of God in our thought world and daily life. The Spirit changes our thinking from godless to godly.

**Fifth**, a new mind toward God’s will. The “renewing of your mind” isn’t just intellectual; it’s very practical. Let’s read verse 2b. Here, seeking out God’s will becomes part of our “renewed mind.” We no longer insist on our own will, on doing things “my way,” on living to please ourselves. We no longer live recklessly or rebelliously. Instead, we really want to know God’s will so that we can carefully follow and obey it, out of love for God. We become like our Lord Jesus, who said, “I have come to do your will, my God” (Heb10:7). We begin to pray each day, as our Lord Jesus taught us, “…your kingdom come, your will be done” (Mt6:10). With a renewed mind, doing God’s will becomes like our food (Jn4:34). Even when we're really suffering, we pray like Jesus, “not my will, but yours be done” (Lk22:42). With a renewed mind, we don’t want to live foolishly; we really want to understand what the Lord’s will is and find out what pleases the Lord (Eph5:10,17).

**Sixth**, a new mind toward oneself. Having a new view of ourselves is crucial to having a renewed mind. Read verse 3. In our old self we thought of ourselves too highly. But with a renewed mind we don’t look at ourselves with rose-colored glasses, glossing over our sins. Instead, we think of ourselves with sober judgment. We acknowledge before God that we are not righteous, but nothing but sinners. We also acknowledge that whatever faith we have has been given to us by God. This makes our minds truly humble. Then we can see others who have faith with respect, and we can have real friendships and relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Seventh**, a new mind toward fellow believers. Read verses 4–5. So many people think, “I don’t need anyone; I don’t need you.” But according to these verses we believers not only need each other but also “belong to each other.” If we really believed this and lived like we believed it, we'd be thinking of each other very differently. This is a renewed mind in community. Paul continues to develop this. Look at verses 6–8. God gifts us in various ways by his grace not to elevate ourselves above others, but so that we can serve each other. We should be exercising our gifts by faith and using them in our Christian community, it says, “generously,” “diligently” and “cheerfully.” Paul describes the renewed mind in community in verses 9–13. Let’s especially read verse 10. In our sinful nature we’re just selfish and indifferent; we despise and criticize, and frankly, in our deep hearts we really don’t care. But with a renewed mind, we’re transformed. We’re actually “devoted to one another in love” and “honor one another above ourselves.” Again, Paul is writing this section with a series of exhortations. Of course, only the Holy Spirit living in us can produce such a genuine spiritual fruit of love. But based on God’s mercy to us, it’s something we also need to consciously do. It’s a practical application of exercising our faith in Jesus. Look at verses 14–21. There’s always a wide variety of people in any community, including a Christian fellowship. When we have a renewed mind, we relate to these various poeple opposite to the pattern of this world. Those who curse us, we bless. Those who rejoice, we rejoice with. Those who mourn, we mourn with. Instead of always creating conflict, we promote harmony with different people. Those in a low position, we’re willing to hang around with. We especially refrain from taking revenge. Instead, we put into practice what our Lord Jesus himself taught us: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Lk6:27–28). When we do this, we are not overcome by evil; instead, we overcome evil with good (21).

Today we thought about what it means to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. May God grant us a new mind each day toward him, toward ourselves, toward the world and toward one another.