

A mind transformed by the good news of Jesus!

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[0:00] All right, welcome everybody. We're in Romans chapter 12 this morning, just a couple of verses! Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. And just a reminder, this is only a very brief one-month! series, which is in this church, our vision month. Our vision month is in October. And for those who are visiting, again, you can't see it because it's behind you or beneath you. But our vision or purpose statement as a church is that as followers of Jesus, we direct our lives around three objectives. We seek to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. That is our mission statement. That is our ambition as Christian believers in life. And so for this month, we're talking about Jesus and our priorities. And today we're thinking about a mind transformed by the good news of Jesus. One of our priorities mentioned last week as Andy preached was the priority of declaring the gospel. That is something we do. But as we seek to prioritize our mind being transformed by the good news of Jesus, that's something about what we think, what we do, and what we think. And both are equally dependent upon each other, as we will see in this passage. Romans 12, 1 and 2. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. That's something you do. You offer your body as a living sacrifice.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's something you think. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Something you do, something you think.

These are our priorities. As followers of Jesus, seeking to be with him, become like him, and do as he does, we seek to make sure that what we do and what we think is honoring to him.

And I want us to realize that we all have an absolutely marvelous gift of God in the mind. The mind is incredible, isn't it, when you think about it?

You might have noticed a strange phenomenon if you went down to the beach or to look out at sea. You might watch a fishing vessel going out from the harbor and heading out into the distance, and something magical happens. It shrinks. It's quite magical, that, isn't it? It shrinks.

[3:15] Or if it's not shrinking, your mind is playing a trick on you. Now, how do you know that the fishing vessel is not shrinking? Well, because you understand the concept of time and distance, yeah? You have what Immanuel Kant, that great philosopher, called a scheme or schemata in your brain. Kind of, he likened it to shelving that you put information on.

And that helps you interpret what you see. Because when you see things, what you see can be quite misleading and quite deceptive. You see something, but then you see it as something. You see, and you see as. And seeing as is a way of interpreting what you're seeing.

And we're thankful for it because ships don't sink. Sorry, shrink. They do sink. They don't shrink. You see, you knew I'd made a mistake there because your mind was working.

The mind is an incredibly complex thing. We're very grateful for it. People who lose their mind, we're very sad about that, aren't we? It's very distressing. What we think with our mind is really important, Paul says. Your mind can be conformed to this world, or it can be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And so Paul says, I earnestly plead with you.

I urge you. I urge you. The Greek word literally means, I call you out to do this. This is an urgent call.

[5:02] It's necessary that you make sure that your mind is thinking right about God and about the world in which you live. There's what we might refer to, next slide, as the urgency of the transformed mind.

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy. I urge you. This is really important. And the reason it's really important is explained to us by Paul earlier in the book of Romans. In chapter 8, for example, and in verses 5 to 7, Paul talks about the mind, and he talks about the mind of sinful man. He says, the sinful mind, or the mind of the flesh, is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

So there are people in the world whose attitude toward God is hostile. They don't like what God says. They are rebelling against what God instructs us to do. They are rejecting it and rebelling against it.

It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. And in verse 5 of chapter 8, he says, those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires.

But those who live in accordance with God's Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. We all have a mindset. Our mindset may be on what God desires, says Paul, or what the flesh desires.

[6:41] And you can test yourself very easily. Each day you need to ask yourself, what is the majority of my thinking about today? Is it about me and my needs and my desires, my aims and my ambitions, or is it about God and His will for my life? What is my mindset on?

Paul says there are two types of mindsets in the world. The mindset that is on God and the mindset that is on the flesh. Not necessarily things that are sinful, but just things that are the opposite of what God wants for your life. And then Romans 8 verse 6, he says, the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

There is a trend or a tendency in the mind to lead one way or the other. To think about the things which are temporary and therefore lead to death, or to think about the things which are eternal and therefore lead to life and peace. Two mindsets in the world. And so there's an urgent need for our mind to be set upon the Word of God. And if it is, the mind will be transformed rather than conformed to this world. Now, I'm a funny creature because I don't like heights. If I'm up a height, I get all kind of woozy and I think, oh, I'm going to fall, definitely going to fall. So I'm not keen on ladders, on climb ladders, especially ladders that are very high. But I don't mind going in aeroplanes. Kind of weird.

I don't mind being 35,000 feet up in an aeroplane. That doesn't kind of trouble me very much at all. I like that. I kind of guess I figure at that point that I've got a bit fatalistic and think, well, if this goes down, I'm dead, so there's no point in worrying. Yeah? But equally, I think I'm not in control of this. There's something quite wonderful, you know, about aeroplanes, and it's this.

We have something called air traffic control. And air traffic control manage the planes that are going out and the planes that are coming in, which I'm told is usually the worst part of any kind of danger of crashing, going out or coming in. And they queue you up. You sometimes get a message saying, the reason your plane is late is because something else is late and there's a knock-on effect and you have to wait half an hour or whatever. But we're trying to press air traffic control to let us go earlier. Yeah? And they manage it all. Now, air traffic control is a bit like the mind.

[9:24] It controls what we think, what we do, how we act, how we react. We all have air traffic control going on in our brain. And sometimes it's operating involuntarily, like, it's time to wake up. You better get up. I don't want to, but you've got to. I really don't want to, but I'm waking you up, whether you like it or not. And your brain is flooding you with cortisol and adrenaline and making you wake up, even though your eyes are still stuck together and you refuse to respond to the alarm.

So it acts involuntarily, but it also acts voluntarily and it directs our thinking. Paul says the mind urgently needs to be transformed because it's always acting to control you.

It will control you by conforming you to this world or by transforming you by the Word of God. Transformed. The next thing we notice is the nature of the transformed mind.

The word transformed is used only twice elsewhere in the New Testament. It's used of what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. What we call transfiguration is the same word used here for transformation. Now, when Jesus was transfigured, he looked amazingly bright and his robes were amazingly white. And the disciples were like, wow, that's quite something to look at. So transformation is something quite exceptional, something that stands out.

And then Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 when he talks about we being transformed by one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of God. And that transformation happens on the inside and works its way out. So that's the time that it is used.

[11:20] And this gives us a clue as to what non-conformity to the world is. Non-conformity to the world is not staying away from bad stuff. It is what happens on the inside and reflects itself on the outside.

Lots of people think, if I stay away from bad stuff, I'll become a better person. But then they realize they've got something on the inside called sin that makes them think bad things and do bad things. So just staying away from stuff on the outside doesn't make you a better person. The change has to come from within. And so it's not about staying away from stuff. It's about allowing the Holy Spirit of God to work upon the Word of God to transform us from the inside out to make us more like Jesus. Jesus in Matthew 5:16 says, in the same way let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. But how do they see your good deeds?

Because your light is shining. There's something transformational about you. So transformation is the practical outworking of the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. Working its way out in corresponding actions.

That's what transformation is. That's the nature of it. The third thing I want you to see is the necessity of the transformed mind. Paul says, let's look again, therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is what he wants to see you do. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices. Yeah? Living sacrifices are things where you put yourself on the altar and you stop squirming and you let God take control. Imagine putting an animal on the altar, it's going to squirm, isn't it? You put yourself on the altar, you're going to squirm too. You don't want to do this. Sacrifice and surrender yourself to God. That's not the sort of thing we enjoy doing. We struggle a bit against that. Paul says you've got to do that. You've got to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Now, you might have a footnote that says reasonable act of service. Spiritual or reasonable? Well, it depends how you translate the word. Logicon. That sounds like logical. Logical is the thing you work out rationally with your brain. It's a bit like saying, because God has done all of this for you, what is the reasonable reaction to that? You offer your bodies. He died to rescue you. He died to redeem you. He died to put your life right, so make sure you live in a way that shows that your life is being put right by the Spirit of God. That's a reasonable, logical, spiritual thing to do. So don't want to get too concerned with the variety of words that are used by translators. Now, this is education, but it's not education. Tony Blair famously came to power all those years ago saying three things. Education, education, education. Very good and very noble thing to do. Education is a very good thing.

[15:00] Just look at parts of the world where there is a lack of education and see the poverty. There's a connection. Nothing wrong with education, but sometimes there's an overestimate of what education can do.

Take it from me. I was a teacher for a lot of years. The belief that education can make you a morally better person is somewhat misguided, because you can get some very clever people who are very immoral people and do some very bad things. I mean, I know people are very clever and they can invent things like the internet. That's terrific, isn't it? Except whenever you try to spend anything on the internet, somebody's trying to scam you out of your money. Yeah. And they can create in the medical profession all of these wonderful drugs that can keep us alive, or they can also provide us with poisons that will kill us. Education is wonderful, but whether it's good or bad depends in whose hands and in whose minds it is then used either for good or for ill. So Paul is not talking about going to theological college and getting a better understanding of the Bible. That is not enough to transform you.

He is talking about your mind being renewed by the Spirit of God in such a way that your mind is informed, but your heart is set aflame. It's not just what you read that matters. It's how you apply it.

That's what counts. And Paul is clear about this in Romans. He talks about the problem with the mind. In Romans chapter 1, he says this, For although they knew God, that's people in the world, for although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. But listen, But their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, so these were clever people. He was perhaps thinking of Greek philosophers. Although they became, claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man, and birds, and animals, and reptiles.

[17:13] Therefore, God gave them over to the sinful desires of their hearts, to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised our men. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women, and were inflamed with lust for one another.

Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice.

They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil and disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but they also approve of those who do them. You see the problem of knowledge, which is not the knowledge of God. It tends toward perversity.

And I use the word advisedly, perversity. Because there's nothing more perverse than meeting a very clever person who does something quite outrageous. And you think, why did you do that? You're such a clever person. I mean, you're, I don't know, an MP, or you're this, or you're that, and you know if you do that, you're going to be in big trouble. But that's not enough to stop people. Knowledge is not enough.

Knowledge is not enough if it does not transform us as individuals. And so Paul in Ephesians 4 in verse 23 says, we are called upon to be renewed, and he uses this word, in the attitude, or if you like, the spirit, literally the spirit of your mind. Again, that word schema. It's not enough just to think new ideas. You have to think new ideas. You have to have a radical transformation of the whole schematic system of your thinking. The old way of thinking has to be removed, and the new way of thinking has to replace it. Completely radical transformation. So how do you do that?

[20:06] Well, you don't do that. The spirit of God does that in you. That's why Jesus talked about it as being born again or regenerated. It's like starting all over. In 1981, when I became a Christian, I had one way of thinking. Before I became a Christian, I had one way of thinking. It was all about me.

How well I could live life. How quickly I could satisfy my needs and desires. How could I get to the point where I was financially secure and happy in my life? And all that's all that mattered. And then I began to read scripture. I began to listen to the gospel. I began to hear of Jesus.

And one day I opened my heart to Jesus, and something changed quite remarkably. And it wasn't primarily or at first my actions. It was my thinking. Jesus invaded my thinking. His will became my desire.

His word became my guidebook in life. I am completely different as a result. The mind was renewed, and therefore the body begins to transform. Still a long way to go because transformation is from one degree of glory to another. And sometimes it's very, very slow. But it's happening all the time.

So, I am not what I was. I am not yet what I will be. But I am changing because the spirit has renewed my mind. And I am offering my body as living sacrifice. The scheme of my mind has been changed. So, Paul says, let's look again. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to keep offering, because it is a present continuous tense, to keep offering your bodies as living

sacrifices, so that your mind might be being transformed, because it is a continuous present tense, by the Spirit of God. Keep offering, be being transformed. So, what happens if you stop offering? [22:29] Well, then you conform to the world. Or as J.B. Phillips said, you allow the world to squeeze you into its mold. That's what happens if you stop offering. But if you keep offering, your mind will continually be transformed. So, now we have some practical application. How do we allow ourselves to be continually transformed in the renewal of our mind? First of all, next slide. Ah, you can miss that.

You can miss that, too. It's a shame, isn't it? Good quotes, but never mind. Gone past that. First of all, look at what Peter says. Prepare your minds for action. Be self-controlled.

Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, all right? Stop thinking and doing certain things, and then do other things. Stop seeking to fulfill the desires of your flesh by allowing your mind to consume the things that are going to feed those desires. Instead, prepare your mind for action. Be self-controlled. Think about and hope in the grace that has been revealed in Jesus. So, every day when you get up, you make a decision. What am I going to fix my mind on and focus on today? Who am I going to fix my mind on and focus on today? Because what we think we become.

What we think we become. And we have to live by faith and not by sight. So, the first thing, next slide. This slide, thank you. Live by a faith informed by the Word of God.

God's Word is given to help our minds transform. That means every day we need to be in the Word of God. Or at least if we can't read, listening to the Word of God. We have these wonderful apps. It's great, isn't it? You can say, Alexa, play me Psalm 110, and Alexa will play you Psalm 110.

[24:46] Read the Word. Allow the Word of God to transform your mind. Fix your mind on it. Why? Because it is a way of salvation. Paul says to Timothy, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. You need it every day. It is breathed out by God to you to transform you.

Psalm 119, 105. Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. It is life-giving, light-giving. It is health-giving. Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your understanding. In all your ways. Acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Do not try to figure it all out by yourself. Fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. And the Word of God is hugely satisfying, hugely satisfying. Just think of Psalm 1, the blessed man. As he meditates upon the Word of God day and night, he is like a tree planted by streams of water, whose leaf grows in season. Whatever he does prospers. Don't you thank God for the Word of God? You need to live a life informed by the Word of God every day. The second point of application. Oh, sorry, go back to that one. That one. This was Mahatma

Gandhi, not a Christian at all. A Hindu, but very, very moved and influenced by the life of Jesus. I saw this quote from him. You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilization to pieces. Turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet, but you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature. Wow, exactly wow.

You know, if you have a health condition that requires medication each day to keep you alive, you studiously make sure you take it. The Word of God is a divine medication to keep us alive, to keep us from being conformed by this world, and to transform us. We need it desperately every day.

[27:43] Second point of application related. We are to live by a faith prompted by the Spirit of God. I've already said that it's not enough just to read the Bible. The Bible will give you information, but it will not give you transformation. But I hinted that what gives you transformation is the Spirit of God. That's what changed me. That's what changes anyone. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and applies it to the heart and the mind of people.

That's why you can get some very, very clever people who read the Bible and study it. They may even teach theology or something like that in universities, but they haven't got a clue as to what it really means.

And yet you can get a Mary Jones of this world. Somebody who can hardly read. Somebody who teaches themselves to read and begins to read scriptures, and although they're not well-versed or well-learned in any of the other arts and ologies, they have a specialist knowledge of the Word of God.

Because the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes it live. You see, if you take words like, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Well, you can think, that's a nice verse. My sister learned that verse when she was a little girl in Sunday school. My sister's now with the Lord. And then when I had to tell her that she was dying, when I had to tell her that the doctor said there was no hope, I said, Do you remember when you read that, when you learned that?

[29:28] And she spoke it out to me again, off by heart, in the authorized version. And then she realized what it meant. And I watched her die with such courage and faith.

The Word of God, applied by the Spirit of God, transformed the mind and heart. And my sister went to be with Jesus, which is far better.

Do you know the power of the living Word of God? Do you know it alive in you? Do you know that it's everything to you?

And when you're prompted by the Spirit of God, when Scriptures come to mind, isn't it wonderful how the Scripture becomes powerful and effective? And just what is needed for your situation or for other people's situation.

Isn't it amazing how the Word of God lives in our hearts? We really have to let it permeate our being. Watchman Nee in a lovely quote.

[30:30] I think I have it on the screen. He says, All the worry and fret of God's children would end if their eyes were opened to see the greatness of the treasure hidden in their hearts.

Do you know there are resources enough in your own heart to meet the demand of every circumstance in which you will ever find yourself? Do you know there is a power enough there to move the city in which you live?

Do you know there is a power enough to shake the universe? Let me tell you once more, I say it with the utmost reverence. You have been born again of the Spirit of God and carry God in your heart.

And the Scripture teaches that. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Now to Him who can do immeasurably more than anything I ask or imagine, according to His power at work within me, to Him be glory and praise forever and ever.

Amen. That's what the Word of God teaches, but that's what the Spirit of God teaches, and that's what transforms the heart of God. A life transformed by the Spirit.

[31:40] And then lastly, live by a faith that is encouraged by the promises of God. A faith that is encouraged by the promises of God. You see, you see, the life is transformed as we apply the Word of God to our lives.

We allow the Spirit of God to prompt us to live, not in conformity to this world, but to be transformed by the Spirit of God. But here is another means of making that happen each day.

Take a promise from Scripture and live by it. There's a wonderful book that C.H. Spurgeon wrote called, The Check Book of the Bank of Faith.

And he talks about using Scripture promises like you would use it in the old days, a check. You know what a check is. Maybe nowadays you don't see them anymore. But a check is something that people have written out, and it's guaranteed as long as they've got funds in the account, the people who sent the check to you.

So you could take that check to the bank, and you give it to the bank clerk, and the bank clerk says, Yes, you can have your money. It's cleared. He says, Think of Scripture like that. Think of the promises of God like that.

[32:50] God writes you a promise. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. You wake up one morning and you think, I feel terrible.

I can't do anything. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. So I take that promise. I take it to God in prayer. I remind God of His promise, and I trust Him to apply it to my heart. How many promises are in the Scriptures? Hundreds, thousands of promises. If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, guess what?

You will be saved. That's a promise from God. If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord. If now you say, Jesus, you are Lord. I want you to be my Lord.

I believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead. Guess what? You will be saved. Why? Because John Winter says it? Not at all. But because God says it in His Word. It is a promise upon which we can rely.

[34:00] I am leaving you a gift, John 14, 27. Peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Who said that? Jesus. Maybe you say today, I am troubled and I lack peace. God says, here is my Spirit. Jesus says, I have left you a promise.

Take it to yourself. And you will feel so much better. So let us live by faith. A faith informed by the Word of God, prompted by the Holy Spirit of God, and encouraged by the promises of God. And let us remind ourselves of something we sang as we started. It's on the screen. 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.

[35:15] Let us pray together. Amen.