

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

How People Change – Part II

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Romans 12:1-2

January 10, 2016

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 12th chapter of Romans. We're continuing that series we started last Sunday, and we plan to get back into John, the Gospel of John, in February. We're going to take a number of weeks to talk about this subject, 'How People Change'. That is the title of the message this morning, 'How People Change', and the text is Romans 12:1-2. This is the second part of that message we began last week, 'How People Change'.

Last week I asked the question—*Why don't people change?* Why is it that we sometimes feel like we are not making progress, we are not changing, we're not growing in grace? A couple of main reasons that those who profess to be believers don't change, and the first reason is sometimes the person is not truly saved. Maybe they've made a decision, but it wasn't from the depth of their soul. They haven't really repented and placed their faith in Christ. They haven't really been given a new heart, and so where there is no spiritual life, if there is no new spiritual life, there will be no evidence of that spiritual life. They may have the external form, but not the inward reality. So that is why Scripture exhorts us in a number of places to examine ourselves, to see if you are in the household of faith, to look for the evidences of grace, to make every effort to make your calling and election sure, 2 Peter 1.

That is one reason, but then there is another reason that Christians don't grow in grace, and that is because we don't follow God's blueprint. We don't really follow His plan, we don't pursue His righteousness His way, and this is really what Romans 12:1-2 is there to help us do, to see why we may not be changing because we are not really seeking change God's way. We tend to, even when we think we are seeking change God's way, we focus on the externals too much. It is our nature, as we have still a fallen nature, and we have a view that we tend to look at things that are seen more than the things that are unseen. So sometimes our change that we try to make is to sort of '*window dress*' our lives, to work on the externals too much. Even though the externals need to be worked on, the Bible pictures change happening from the inside out for the believer. That we are to start at the root of the problem, and then move outward.

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We chose this passage because Romans 12 is talking about how to live out the Christian life, and a key word that we saw last time is the word ‘*transformed*’. We are going to talk a little more about it today. To be transformed, we’re going to see that as we read in just a moment, God wants us to be changed, to be dynamically transformed, and how do we experience that? How do people change? How do God’s people change? That’s our subject, let’s read Verses 1-2 of Romans 12.

Romans 12:1-2 ~ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You might grant us Your grace so that we might truly experience what this passage is talking about this morning. That we might stop being conformed to the world, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. And that we might see that Your will is that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect. And we ask these things for the glory of Your Son, and in His name, Amen.

‘How People Change’. How do we really change from the inside out? What we see in this passage is that the apostle Paul is outlining kind of a blueprint for us to experience this kind of change, and I want us to gather our thoughts around four questions. Now the first two questions I covered last week, but I think it is still important for us to see this, the whole picture, and so I will of course review briefly those two questions, but we are going to be focused on three and four. So there are two points today that are really going to be two questions, and we covered two questions last week. I’m going to list all four of them, and realize that we are going to focus on the last two, okay?

The first question that we need to ask ourselves is: *Who am I?* The second question is: *What am I called to do?* That is what the apostle Paul is addressing in Verse 1. He is saying if you are going to experience true change, transformation, you have to begin by understanding who you are, and what you are called to do. Then he moves in Verse 2 to two other questions—*How do you go about doing it? How?* And, *Why ought you go about doing it?* So you see we had *Who?* and *What?* last time, and *How?* and *Why?* today. So to set the context, I need to spend a moment on the *Who?* and *What?* from last week, and maybe bring some things out

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I didn't say last week as well, before we move in today to *How?* and *Why?* We are going to spend a lot of time on the *How?* today. How do we actually do what God has called us to do? And briefly, at the end, we'll talk about *Why?*

1) Who?

Now, if we are going to experience change, Paul says we need to first of all consider *Who am I?* Understand who we are in Christ. That is what He is talking about, that is the first question that was really raised as we look at this passage. And the answer to that, *Who am I?* If you have given your life to Jesus Christ. If you have repented of your sins, and placed your faith in Jesus. If you are trusting in Him as the song we just sang about. If your perfect plea before God is the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are resting in Jesus, and the gift of His righteousness. I love that second verse, *When Satan tempts me to despair, and focus on my guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin.* That is the Gospel, and God, the just, is satisfied to look on him, and pardon me. If you are trusting in that, if that is your heart, then according to the New Testament, in general, and Chapter 12, Verse 1, in particular, who are you? You are a priest of the living God. That is what Paul is talking about in Romans 12:1. The word '*priest*', you may say the word '*priest*' doesn't occur in the verse. It doesn't, but the action of a priest is what is described. He says if you are a Christian, you are to offer sacrifice, you are to present a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is to be continual. You are to continually present a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is your life. So who are you? You are a priest.

2) What?

And, *What are you called to do?* I actually answered the second question too. You are called to offer a sacrifice. And this, what we saw last time is that that means, to say that we are a priest means that we are to see ourselves as our lives are to be completely devoted to worship. That is what we are to be about 24/7, 365 days a year. You have been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ to become a part of His royal priesthood, and you are to offer up sacrifices of worship 24/7. No matter what you are doing, your highest calling is you are a priest. Your job is secondary if you are a Christian. If you belong to Jesus, you are a slave of Christ, and your calling is to be a priest. That is your first calling. The second thing is incidental. It is not unimportant, but it is not as important as your first calling. If you are a homemaker, what are you called to do? You are called to worship; you are called to be a priest. Everything that you do is just a way of expressing that worship, and

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living it out. This is what the Bible sees as the Christian life. The distinction between the sacred and the secular is abolished. It's not that we give God one day, Sunday, for worship, we give Him every day. We give him all of ourselves. The tithe that we give, the offerings that we bring, aren't a part that we give. The part is the acknowledgement that everything belongs to Him. So we are called to worship all the time.

Now, how do you worship? Or, I'm sorry, I'm mixing up my W's and an H. I'm going to confuse myself, and if I confuse myself that's going to be bad news for you probably, unless you can figure out better what I'm trying to say than I can. *Who am I? What am I called to do? Who am I?* I am a priest. The first two questions from last week. *What am I called to do?* I'm called to offer, to present a sacrifice, and that sacrifice is the perpetual death of self. I am to die, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:31, daily. I die daily. When Jesus said, in 9:23, "If any man would come after Me, let Him take up his cross and follow Me. Let him take up his cross *daily* and follow Me." The cross is an instrument of death. We are to die, and that is exactly what Paul is saying, present your bodies a sacrifice. We are to worship by dying.

I shared last time that sacrifice was a part, was the reality of what the temple was about, temple worship. If you think about it, the temple was a place of perpetual worship. The priests that were there, the people that came to make their offerings were there to worship, so that the temple was devoted to worship, perpetual worship. And the temple was also devoted to perpetual death. I didn't share this last time, the priest, I mentioned that they would arrive at the temple a couple hours before dawn, and they would begin their preparations. They would get the morning sacrifice, it would be a lamb, it would be made ready to offer, and the priest would be in position to kill the lamb, but he would wait until the watchmen on the wall, facing east, would announce that the morning has dawned. I forgot exactly the wording. Of course, it was said in Hebrew, so I guess I'm translating it anyway. The morning has dawned.

The priest would then ask him, "Is the sky lit up as far as Hebron?" Hebron was actually west of Jerusalem. They wanted to make sure that dawn had really happened. When the priest then said, "Yes," as he looked out and scanned the horizon, "The sky is lit up as far as Hebron," at that moment the priest standing down below, there were a number of priests involved in this process. The watchman, the one directing things, and the priest offering the sacrifice. The priest directing things would then give a command, and the temple gates would be

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opened, and at precisely the moment the temple gates were opened, the morning sacrifice was killed so that the blood offered was what brought people into the presence of God. Then throughout the day, until the evening sacrifice, at dusk, between dusk and dark, the final sacrifice is offered, another lamb slain. In between that roughly 12-hour period, on an average day, probably about 1,200 animals would die. That is a hundred animals an hour. Sheep, goats, oxen, doves—that is almost two a minute. Blood, death, that was to show us that the only way for sinful people, that are as sinful, and I said last time, isn't it appalling to think about the blood, and the death? And it is, and God, who is good, who overflows with lovingkindness, who loves all of His creatures. Who made the sheep, and the goats, and the oxen, and the doves? And Who has been feeding even the doves, as Scripture says. Jesus said, "Why do you worry about what you are going to eat? He feeds the doves. He'll take care of you. He feeds the birds." He loves those animals and yet they have to die for sinners like you and me to be made able to come into the presence of a holy God. We shouldn't be appalled at His system, we should be appalled at our sin that required this system. So all of that death, particularly on the day of Passover, where it was reported that 1.2 million lambs were killed one year, on one day. All of that death, all of that blood, that appalling picture of what it takes for sinners to be made right with God, was a picture ultimately of the ultimate appalling moment in all history, when the perfect Son of God would become sin for us. That is the most appalling thing that has ever happened, and that is what our sin required, and that is what a good, and holy, and loving God was willing to do to save us.

Now, you say, "We stand on this side of the cross," and we do, and we don't stand in a literal temple. The temple was destroyed to show, the reason the Lord did that was to show that the temple sacrifice had been offered once and for all in Jesus. We need no more sacrifice physically. His blood is efficacious to wash you forever, yet, as a Christian, Paul is telling you and me that we still have to die if we are going to worship. It is not a physical death, it is a spiritual death, because you see we still have the presence of sin in us. Every day you wake up as a Christian, you wake up with a new heart, but you also wake up with an old man. And it is true what Edwards said that in the truest sense the old man in you, when you got saved, did not change one whit. Your sin nature is the same as it was before you were saved. Now what is different is a new principle of life God spoke into your darkness and made you alive. He recreated you, all things have become new, and yet the old man is still there. You know, if you've been a Christian long, that is not news. Sometimes new Christians struggle with that at first, it takes them a while to realize that still those old patterns of thought, those old desires are still there. So

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for the Christian then to worship God truly, from the heart, requires daily death. That is what he is saying here. Offer your bodies a living, a continual sacrifice. If you are going to worship God, and live for him in every area of your life, you have to be willing to die continually.

Now let me just show you this. Turn back a couple of pages to Romans 8:12. Paul is encouraging these same Christians, a few chapters earlier:

Romans 8:12-13 ~ So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die;

Saying if you are living continually according to the flesh, the old man, if all that you do is live according to the flesh, then you are going to die eternally. Look what he says next.

Romans 12:13 ~ ...but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

So the Christian is the one who is learning to put to death the deeds of the body. That is the Christian life, put to death the deeds of the body. Earlier Steven read from Colossians 3, and we picked that passage because it shows the glory of the transformation that happens in the Christian life. But how does that happen? Verse 5, in the new NAS, this is Colossians 3:5.

Colossians 3:5 ~ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead...

There is a footnote that says, and it really should be translated as the ESV translates it, “Therefore put to death the members of your earthly body.” You have to put the members of your earthly body to death to live for God. So you see, as a Christian, we are called to sacrifice. *Who am I? What am I called to do?* I’m a priest of the living God. If I’m going to experience transformation, I have to see myself that way. It is all about worship and how do I worship? I die continually to the old me. *Who am I? What am I called to do?*

3) How?

Now, *How?* This is the third point, and our first major point today. *How am I called to do that?* How exactly am I to die? To go about living a life of continual

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sacrifice by dying? There are two sub-points under this third point, *How?* How am I called to offer my life? How am I called to die? How am I called to worship? Two things, first point is I need to *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*. I need to *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*, and secondly, we are going to see, I need to *Unleash the Transforming Power of this Book*. *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*, and *Unleash the Transforming Power of this Book*.

A) Understand the Conforming Power of This Age:

That is the *How?* To *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*, Paul says in Romans 12:2:

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,

Do not be conformed. This word ‘*conformed*’, first of all it is a present tense Greek verb, and the present tense in Greek refers more to the kind of action than the time of action. It is not so much about in the present time as it is the tense itself was more about the kind of the action. We just happen to use the label present tense in English because it mostly approximates present time, but in reality, in Greek the emphasis was on the kind of action, and it meant continuous, ongoing action. So what it means is, ‘*do not continue being conformed*’, or you could really translate it maybe best, ‘*stop being conformed*’. It is going on right now, it is a continuous pressure. Stop it, resist it. That is what is happening, this pressure to conform to this world.

I said to *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age* because, your translation may have a footnote that in reality, the Greek says, “Do not be conformed to this age,” translated ‘*world*’ because it is synonymous. But literally it means this present evil age. This present evil age is actively attempting to conform you, to fit you into its mold. The Greek verb here translated ‘*conform*’ has in it the word ‘*schema*’, which we transliterate the word into English into ‘*scheme*’. It wants to make us adopt its scheme, its form, its design, and it is exerting pressure, it is a molding and shaping force at work in your life as a Christian. It is a hostile and destructive source. The fact that it is a continuous action, it is a relentless and untiring force. The idea is that if we do nothing, we change for the worst every moment. It is like you are on an uphill incline on a bicycle and you don’t have any brakes. If you are not moving upward, you are moving backward, and that is what

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he is saying. The conforming power of this world is so great, we need to understand it is dangerous, this pressure.

Now also the word ‘*conformed*’ I think in context here, what you see is this age, which is we could say, what does ‘*this age*’ mean? Well it means the world, the values of the world, the thought forms of the world. It means the devil, who is the god of this age, 2 Corinthians 4:4. You have the world that he is sort of ruling over, you have the devil himself, his demons, who are tempting us. So you have the world, the devil, and the flesh, or the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have a sin nature that wants to cooperate with this age, that would like to cooperate with the agenda of Satan, that would like to cooperate with the agenda of the world. So we have these things that are always at work in our lives and these outward pressures are trying to press us into a mold. And it doesn’t just affect us outwardly, the outward pressure goes all the way into the heart though it starts on the outside. It moves from the actions of others, the words of others, to the values of others, to we began to shape and adopt the values and attitudes of the culture. We than adopt the actions of the culture, we start acting like the world, and before long we find ourselves worshipping the same things the world worships—idols.

Now, *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*. How am I called to offer myself as a sacrifice? Verse 2 is really telling us how to do it and it is basically saying, “Stop being conformed. This is how you offer yourself, you stop being conformed, you die to the pressure and the desire to conform.” Because in reality, that is what feels best in so many situations. I mean, when you are angry, and you want to yell, it feels good to yell. When you want to fantasize about wealth, or about sexual immorality, and you give into that, it feels good to do that. And the desire for those things can be so great. You want to give into fear and anxiety. It feels good to fret and to worry. But what has to happen is we have to stop that, and stopping that is dying.

In reality, the Christian life, I mean if you think about it, let me say a word of encouragement. The message, offer yourselves as a sacrifice, you’re going to live a life of perpetual death, isn’t that great news? Put that on the marquis and see how many people we draw in. I mean, that does sound like the Christian life is about pain and agony, and it is. It really is, but it isn’t pain, and agony, and misery, it is pain and agony that leads to joy, and life, and peace, and transformation, and fulfillment. It is pain and agony that is the pathway to true life, that is what we’re going to see when we get to the *Why*? He makes a case for why you ought to do

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this, and you ought to do this because it is the most wonderful, dying is the most wonderful way to live.

B) Unleash the Transforming Power of this Book:

Now, back to the *How?* How am I called to do it? I'm called to *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*, and realize it is so urgent that I've got to fight against it. Well how do you fight against it? The second sub-point. Not just *Understand the Conforming Power of this Age*, but *Unleash the Transforming Power of this Book* —the Bible. Again, the word '*transform*', which I mentioned earlier, an important word here in the passage. It means '*to be completely changed, to experience a thorough and dramatic transformation, a movement, a dynamic difference*'. And the context tells us this transformation, in contrast to the conformation that is trying to happen, this transformation is inside out. It starts in the mind, in the heart, and works itself out into the life so that the whole body, everything that we do is changed. In fact, this word '*metamorphao*' is the word there, '*transformed*'. The Greek verb '*metamorphao*', we transliterate '*metamorphosis*' from that. It is only used a handful of times in the Bible. It is used here, it is used in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where it says that as we look at Christ, we are being transformed into His image. That it is looking at Jesus that transforms us into the image of Jesus so that we are looking as in a mirror when you look at Christ. The more you look at Jesus, and the more that you love Jesus, and the more that you gaze at His glory, the more you become like Him. That is what 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, and it is the metamorphosis that is happening.

So '*metamorphao*' is used in Romans 12:2, it is used in 2 Corinthians 3:18, and it is used once in Matthew, and once in Mark, Mark 9:2, and in Matthew 17, I think it is Verse 2, but it is the same passage described by Matthew and Mark. It is the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they were on the mountain, He was transfigured. He was '*metamorphao'd*', in front of them. There was a metamorphosis that happened from the inside out, and the glory that was inside began to be released so that the body of Christ was still there, the flesh and bones of the Lord Jesus that they had seen day after day. His eyes were still there, and yet the glory that shone out so overwhelmed it that it was as if light was emanating from Him. His face was radiating, as one of the authors says, '*like the brightness and brilliance of the sun in the noon day*'. Mark says His clothes were so white, '*as white as no launderer could launder them*'. This was the transformation that they witnessed when God unveiled the glory of the reality of the person of His Son. And He is saying that is what the Christian is to begin to approximate in his daily

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life. That as we die to the old man, we are renewed in our minds, God works about a transformation where the supernatural life of Christ comes out.

This is why Jesus says in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” You see, the light of the glory of God is coming out in your life when you’re being transformed. It happens through the word. The word is that which is, as Hebrews 4:12 says, the verse right before Ted quoted that Verse, which says that all things are laid bare before the one with whom we have to do.” Right before that Verse, he says, “For the word of God is living and active.” The idea is that the word is what lays you bare before the one with whom you have to do. The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, so that when you get into the word, you realize that the conforming power of the world is so great, isn’t it? I mean, if we’re really honest, the power of this world, continually we’re bombarded all the time with the messages of this world. We have an enemy who is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He’s always after us, and we have an old man that we can’t escape, that wants to cooperate with Him. We have all this pressure on us. And when you get focused on that too much, you can despair, but the Lord Jesus has given us the way out.

The way out is to die, and you die as you stop being conformed and you start being transformed, as you give yourself to the Scripture. Because when you give yourself to the Scripture, what you’re doing is you’re unleashing the power of almighty God into your life. The word of God is living and active. It’s alive. It is active. It’s working. It’s got divine energy in it, and how does it work? When you’re letting it work in your life, it goes all the way to the roots. He says, “For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to dividing joint and marrow.” It goes all the way through the flesh into the bone, and it divides the bone. Do you see that image? It divides joint and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It goes all the way to the motives. It goes all the way to the essence of what you’re worshipping. It goes all the way to the depth of your soul, and when it does that, it’s living and active, it’s mighty, it’s powerful, and it transforms. It’s a two-edged sword. It cuts. It hurts on the way in, and yet it heals on the way out. It’s what Paul is talking about also in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 when he says, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God (or divinely powerful) to the destruction of fortresses.”

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2 Corinthians 10:4 ~ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

What he's talking about there, again, is the power of a transformed mind in the word of God. Now, let me make one brief point here, a sidelight for just a moment. The way that God works to change people does not ever bypass the mind. You see that. You're transformed by the renewing of your mind. I say that because we live in a day in which mysticism is becoming increasingly popular, sort of this spiritualization of everything so that intellectual and rational thought is thought of as not good. There are some circles where you'll run into that. "You're thinking too much. You're studying too much. Just let go and let God."

Well, the way that you really let go and let God is you let God's word unleash in your mind. He works through the mind. Somebody might say, "Well, the Scripture says, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'" and you say, "Amen." But they would be meaning, "Just let the Spirit do it. Don't worry about getting in the Scriptures so much. Why do you have to spend so much time in the word? You just need to let the Spirit work." Well, the Spirit that you're saying, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," the Spirit is the one who breathed every word of this book, and we're told that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. If I want the Spirit to work in my life, He's going to use the word of God. So getting in the word of God and trusting in the Spirit, that's how you do it, and that's what transforming is about. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. That means that we stop thinking and believing the things that God exposes as error.

But it's important for us to get at the heart issues as the Scripture wants to do, and sometimes we stop on the surface. Like, say for instance you have a problem with anger. You say, "I'm really losing my temper a lot," and you share this with a brother. "Pray for me." That's good, we need to pray for each other. We're supposed to pray for each other. There are verses that you apply to your life that are important. You memorize maybe James 1:19.

James 1:19 ~ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

Right after that it says:

James 1:20 ~ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

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So you remember that, and so you realize as you're starting to get angry, "Wait a minute. Anger doesn't accomplish my goal." That's good. That's helpful, but that's not getting all the way to the heart. It's a good thing to do, and you should do it. It's part of the solution, but there's more that you're missing. It's like the picture of an iceberg. You see the iceberg, but how much more of the iceberg is underneath the water? This is why the Bible talks about getting to the thoughts and intentions of the heart, that real change transforms from the inside out.

I want to share with you some extended quotes from this book *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande. It's a great book, a biblical guide to resolving personal conflict, but I choose to share from his fifth chapter of the book, in which he talks about really where do conflicts come from, and he's talking about how the conflict starts in the heart. He deals with this issue of how you deal with a problem by getting to the root of the problem. Listen to this, what Sande talks about, and see if you can't relate, and then see how important it is to go to the heart. He writes:

All I wanted was a little peace and quiet when I came home from a long day at the office.

Amen, right?

But I was not getting it. My children, Megan and Jeff, had been trying to control each other all week, and their constant friction had exhausted their mother's patience. And instead of resolving their quarrels with her usual calm, Corlette found herself resorting to sharp words and threats of, "Wait until your father gets home!" So instead of walking through the door and finding smiling children, and a serene, affectionate wife...

Leave it to Beaver—Sorry, for those of you who don't know, just watch one of the old—anyway, I can't remember what channels we watched. Me TV or something like that, a show from the 50s, for those of you who don't realize that. And anyway, everything was always perfect in their house. Okay, back to the reading:

So instead of walking through the door and finding smiling children, and a serene, affectionate wife, I found nothing but sullen faces, irritable voices, and the general sense that I had walked into a warzone. Each evening that week, Corlette and I worked to break the cycle of conflict, but it would start again in a day or two. By Sunday morning I was feeling frustrated and resentful toward my children.

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Corlette had gone to church early that morning to meet with some other women, and I followed thirty minutes later with the kids. As we approached the car, a new contest began.

“It’s my turn to sit in the front seat!”

“No! You got to yesterday!”

“Well, you shouldn’t sit there anyway. You’re so small the airbag could kill you.”

“I don’t care. I’m not sitting in the back seat.”

Then a new voice entered the exchange. “Be quiet!” I shouted. Then, pointing to each child in turn, “You get in the back seat now, and you get in the front seat. I don’t want to hear another word out of either of you.”

Climbing into the car myself, I gave vent to the anger that had been building in me all week. I even adjusted the rearview mirror so I could glare at Megan as I lectured her in the back seat. Among other things, I told them I was very angry at the way they had behaved all week, and that I was now going to make things miserable for them. When I finally paused to take a breath, my youngest son Jeffrey saw his opening. “Daddy?” he said meekly, “Do you think you should pray to Jesus and ask Him if it’s rightful anger?” His words must have been guided by the Holy Spirit, because they instantly cut me to the core. I saw an empty parking lot and pulled in, and before I’d even turned off the ignition, I knew what I needed to say.

So he basically pulls in, he apologizes to his kids, “I’ve sinned,” they go on to church, and the Lord continues to work on him through the week, because there continue to be conflicts and opportunities. And later he comes to understand that it wasn’t so much just his outward anger. There was an inner, controlling motivation in his heart that needed to be transformed. It wasn’t just that he needed to learn how to not speak harshly. And that’s a good thing to work on. Like I said, let no unwholesome speech proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as it good for edification. Those are important things, but there’s something a little deeper.

Listen to what he says. He talks about how idols are the problem, and idols are basically the things that we want. Sometimes they’re good things that we want, but we want them too much. We want them more than we want to please God. Is there something I desire so much that I’m willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it? What do I fear? What do I put my trust in? What do I want more than anything else? Look what he said.

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As you search for idols, you will often encounter multiple layers of concealment, disguise, and justification. One of the subtlest cloaking devices that the flesh uses is to argue that we only want what we legitimately deserve, or we only want what God commands. I just want my kids to behave. Isn't that a good thing? That is what I was doing the Sunday I was so angry with my children. Throughout the week, I had been trying to convince myself that all I wanted was for them to obey God's commandments to honor their father and their mother, and to love one another. I even quoted that specific verse to them repeatedly throughout the week. But as my anger intensified, it became apparent that there was another desire lurking in my heart. I wanted to come home to peace and quiet, to smiling children, and a loving and undistracted wife, not for God's glory, but for my own comfort and convenience.

How could I tell which motives were actually ruling my heart—the desire for them to be Godly or for me to have comfort? All I had to do was look at how I felt and reacted when my desires were not being met. If God-centered desires had been dominating my heart that week, my attitude toward my disobedient children would have been characterized by God's discipline toward me.

He's saying, "I would have been disciplining them like God disciplines me," and he quotes Psalm 103:8.

Psalm 103:8
The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in love.

As I drew on God's grace, my actions would have been in line with the corrective guidelines found in Galatians 6:1. I would have disciplined them this way. "If anyone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." My discipline could still have been direct and firm, but it would have also been wrapped in gentleness and love, and it would have left no residue of unforgiveness. But this was not how I was feeling or acting. My behavior throughout the week was marred by an increasing coolness and a smoldering resentment toward my children. Even after we had supposedly worked through the process of confession, discipline, and forgiveness on Sunday (before church, remember), my frustration still was there, and it finally overflowed in those harsh and angry words. These sinful attitudes and actions clearly showed that I was not concerned primarily about my children acting well in order to obey and honor God, instead I was being ruled by my desire for peace and quiet.

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That is idolatry, and until you see that, you really can't root out the problem. The question becomes, as the word works on us and we want to be transformed, we've got to let God deal with everything. We've got to ask some questions like, "Lord, why am I afraid right now? Why am I anxious right now? What's going on in my heart?" And what we have to do is at the heart level, turn from false worship to true worship. This is the key.

I can resonate with that idea of, you know, you want to come home to some peace and quiet. That's all I want is just some peace and quiet, and there's nothing wrong with peace and quiet. God is a God of order. There are a lot of good verses that we can bring out to show that. We want peace and quiet and there's nothing wrong with that, but is that what I want more than anything else? What I should want is to be faithful to God, and obedient to God, and available to God. I should want what He wants. If I'm really looking for rest in the right place, where do I find it? I find it in Jesus. I don't find it in outward circumstances. I don't find it in a storybook *Leave it to Beaver* kind of setting. I find it in resting in Christ. Jesus said, "Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." How does He give you rest? He says, "Take My yoke upon you." The yoke is not an object of rest. The yoke is an object of work. It's an object of enslavement. He's saying, "Become My slave. Yoke yourself to Me. Let's go to work. That's where you find rest."

So what we should do when we find ourselves feeling the way Ken Sande did is when I realize, "I'm becoming angry, sinfully angry, therefore I cannot be about God's business alone. It's like a warning light on your car dashboard. "You have a problem, Ty." Wait a minute. What's going on? What desire is ruling my heart? What do I really want here? I think I'm wanting comfort. I'm wanting peace, and I'm looking for it in my circumstances. I'm worshipping an idol of controlling my circumstances. How do I turn from that? I turn from that and I worship God. If I was looking for comfort and peace from circumstances, what I want to do now is go to God and say, "Lord, I want to look for my comfort and peace in You. You are the source of comfort and peace. And in reality, You've told me that I find comfort and peace in yoking myself to You, and remembering that I belong to You, that I'm here to serve You, that it isn't my prerogative to want to dictate how things are when I get home at night." A slave doesn't give orders. A slave doesn't offer preferences. A slave does what his master tells him to do.

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So what happens then is you begin renewing your mind, and even as you're dealing with the circumstance, if you've been in the word and you've been thinking about this issue, and you've been praying about this issue, and you've been letting the word transform you, then the Spirit brings back to mind things like, "My rest is found in serving Jesus. Lord, I was forgetting that we're constantly falling away from the truth back to our old default settings, the fallen man. It's all about me. Why are you guys an obstacle to my joy and pleasure? Wait a minute. That's not who I am. I belong to Jesus. You are my source of joy and pleasure. What's going to give me the greatest satisfaction in this life is doing what You call me to do, and Lord, I really felt like I was too tired to deal with anything when I got home. I felt like I needed to sit down, and just relax, and have peace and calm around me, but You know better, because You obviously didn't intend that. And if that's what You've intended, You're going to give me the grace to go through this, and I offer myself as Your servant. I'm not going to serve my own comfort and peace. I'm going to seek my comfort and peace in You. I'm Your servant." Now you start applying those other verses.

He who speaks before he hears, it's foolishness to him. You've got conflict going on, and, "Hey, what's going on? What's happening?" A gentle answer turns away wrath. You don't come back with, "I'll tell you who's in charge," but rather, "Hey, what's going on? Why are you so upset?" and you begin to speak words of love and encouragement, and you have to speak words of reproof, but now they're like apples of gold in settings of silver. They're coming through in a way that they could not before, because when I'm sinfully angry or yelling, the most obvious thing to the person that I'm yelling at is my sin, not the message that I'm offering to them. But when I get off of that and become meek and a servant of Jesus, I'm Your slave. You have for me the blessing. This is where we have to work on our minds. This is renewing your mind. It is not my objective to have a calm, easy evening. My objective is to have the evening that You have dictated for me, and to be faithful to You, and to find my rest in You as I go through that. "So Lord, thank You for this opportunity." You've got to do that by faith. "Lord, thank You." You don't feel that way at first. You're like, "Oh no, not again. Lord, don't you know I've had enough today?" He's sovereign. Be thankful and obey.

So as we worship Him, "I'm going to worship You as my peace, as my strength, as my contentment," then He begins to work and in the process He's changing us. He's shining out glory from us, and the people around us begin to see the metamorphosis happening from the inside out. This is what God intends for you and me. This is what we're called to, and that's how we're to go about it, to

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unleash the transforming power of this precious book into every area of our lives. That's how, but now why? That's the last question is, "Why?"

4) Why?

I said when you think about the fact that we're called to die continually, that doesn't seem like very good news, but the Gospel is good news. So I must not understand it yet if I think it's bad news, because it's always good news. That's what he gives you at the end of Verse 2.

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Why am I called to live a life of continual worship, continually dying to my own agenda by not being conformed, but being transformed? Why am I called to do that? I'm going to give you three reasons, and the third reason is what we have in Verse 2. But there are a couple others here I want to bring out and remind you of. The first reason is that's the will of God. That's enough reason. That would be enough reason completely, wouldn't it? "This is My will for you," God could say. "Yes Lord," we should say. But He's so gracious. He doesn't just give us that—so that you may prove what the will of God is, but He gives us a couple other reasons. I mentioned last week, at the end of Verse 1 when he says, "...to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship," we should do this. Why are we called to do this? First, because it's the will of God, and secondly, because it's the only reasonable thing to do. Remember I shared with you that the word *spiritual* in Verse 1 ***...which is your spiritual service of worship...*** actually could be translated as *reasonable* or *logical*. It's the only reasonable thing to do. Jesus died for you. The only reasonable thing that you can do is give yourself to Him without reservation. Anything else is insanity. It's complete ingratitude and insanity.

So those are the first two reasons, but the third reason is what I want to focus on now, and this is the best news of all. Why should we offer to God a life of worship where we're dying and being transformed continually? Why?

Romans 12:2 ~ ...so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

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This life of perpetual worship by perpetually dying is the only path to real usefulness, lasting pleasure, and true fulfillment. That's what he's saying in that verse. *...that you may prove what the will of God is...* That word *prove* means to test, to approve by testing, to prove by testing. You test it like metal. You put it under the fire and you prove its genuineness. That's this word δοκιμάζω (dokimazō). And so he's saying that as you are not being conformed, but being transformed, renewing your mind, what's going to happen is you're going to prove what the will of God is. You're going to be able to discern it for yourself to do His will, but I think he's saying more than that. He's saying that you will know what the will of God is and you'll do it, but you will also know that the will of God is that which is good, that the will of God is that which is acceptable, and the will of God is that which is perfect, that His whole design for you and me to die to ourselves and to be crucified daily with Jesus is actually that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect. And when you do it, you see it. I said that the Christian life in the sacrificial system, worship was a lot of dying, and the Christian life is going to involve pain and agony. But the pain and agony is always a doorway to understanding that the will of God is that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

The word *good* here, there are two words for good in the New Testament that are used both about the same amount of times. This one has the idea of usefulness. The other means good in the sense of beauty. The one here is good, useful. It speaks of the benefit. It's beneficial. So what he's saying is that when you give yourself to God, when you surrender to God, you put yourself on His agenda, you renew your mind, then you become good and beneficial, and you see that doing things His way is beneficial to you, and you become a benefit to others. You become useful. You become a blessing. The will of God is that which leads to usefulness and to blessing. That's what it means to be good.

Acceptable is the word which is usually used of God being well-pleased. It's the same word as in Verse 1, a sacrifice acceptable to God, which is good and acceptable, and I think it has a Godward view here too. As we do this, our lives are pleasing to God, but I think he's also saying it's pleasing to us to please God. This word *well-pleasing*, the adjective comes from a verb which means to gratify entirely, to take pleasure in. It's that in which one finds pleasure. What he's saying is that when you offer yourself up as a sacrifice, you will find the greatest pleasure in that. Dying to sin is the most pleasurable, pleasant place to be.

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And then finally, it's that which is perfect. The word *perfect* here means to have reached ones ultimate goal, to have reached the purpose, to have attained the purpose for which you were created or intended. So the idea is that as we live like this, we have a greater and greater sense of usefulness. We know that we're making a difference. We have a greater and greater sense of pleasure in God, and we have a greater and greater sense that we are becoming what He's called us to be. Have you not experienced that when you found yourself dying in some area to self, and God did use you? You went through this kind of renewal.

Let's say you come home that night and you think, "Oh no, it's not like I wanted it to be," and yet you give yourself to God, and you come out the other side and you realize, "Yes, this is true rest. This is true joy. I'm not here to have a pleasant evening. Why would that make sense?" I don't mean that I should never have a pleasant evening, but I'm here to build the Kingdom of God. "This was an opportunity for Kingdom building tonight. We did something incredible, this conversation we had. Lord, You are so good. You're using me. What a pleasure it is to be Your child. I'm doing what I was called and created to do." There's nothing more fulfilling than worshipping God by dying. That is the life of joy, and peace, and fulfillment, and that is how people change. We change by letting the word of God transform us, by looking at the Gospel and the glory of our Savior more and more, and as we look at Him, becoming more like Him.

May God help us do that. Let's pray together...

Our Father, we praise You for the beauty of Your word. We praise You for the glory of the Gospel. We praise You that salvation is salvation from sin in every dimension. It's salvation from the penalty of sin, it will be salvation one day from the presence of sin, and it is today salvation from the power of sin. We thank You for being a God who saves, who redeems completely. Lord Jesus, we worship You for being so great a Savior. Father, we pray that each one of us here would examine our hearts. Why am I not changing? Is it because I haven't given myself to You? If so, help them to give themselves to You today without any reservation, completely trusting in the sufficiency of Jesus. And Lord, to those who belong to You, may we give ourselves to a life of worship so that in everything Jesus Christ might have the preeminence, that people might see in us the glory of our Savior. We pray this in His Name, Amen.

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“How People Change – Part II”

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