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**Mind Renewal**

**Romans 12.2**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. “Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land! So I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything! I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!”
- B. That was from the final speech Martin Luther King, Jr. gave
  - 1. It took place on April 3, 1968 in Memphis, TN
  - 2. The next day, he was dead
    - a. Taken by an assassin's bullet
- C. It's known as the “I've Been to the Mountaintop” speech
  - 1. But there is, embedded in that speech, a strong message about knowing the will of God
  - 2. He says, “I just want to do God's will”
  - 3. And yet, he really didn't know what that would entail for him
  - 4. He says, “I don't know what will happen now.... But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.”
  - 5. He says, “So I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything! I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!”
- D. Martin's take on knowing the will of God is not the way we usually like to understand the will of God
  - 1. We'd like to know what will happen to us
    - a. We'd like the details up front
    - b. We'd like God to write the will of God for us on the mirror in lipstick
  - 2. Then we'll see if we like the will of God
    - a. And then decide if we really want to do what the will of God will require
- E. But knowing the will of God is not like that

1. Knowing the will of God is a process
    - a. An “experimental” process as the Puritan divines would say
  2. And there is much about discovering the will of God that is uncertain until we walk through the door of faith, trusting in the loving sovereignty of Almighty God
- F. We’d like a road map for our lives
1. We’d like to know that we start here, then use this route or that route
    - a. And eventually get to a destination that we have all planned out
  2. I remember when I was 10 years old, our family took a trip across the country – coast to coast, essentially – driving all the way to San Diego where my uncle and aunt lived
    - a. Dad had done his homework
    - b. Went to AAA; had them plan out the routes
    - c. And printed a “Trip Tik” – do you remember Trip Tiks?
  3. We’d like God to do that for us in knowing the will of God
- G. But God’s approach to our life’s journey is more like, let’s get to the top of the next hill and see what’s there
1. God’s approach to revealing the will of God is more like Lewis and Clark than like the AAA Trip Tik
- H. The good news is that He does reveal His will to us
1. And as He does, we discover that it is good, pleasing, and perfect!

## II. Text

### A. **Romans 12:1–2** (ESV) —

1. 1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
2. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

## III. **The Appeal Continues**

- A. We continue in our study of Romans – The Pure Gospel
1. And we are in Romans 12
    - a. The beginning of the section of Romans that is usually considered the application portion of Paul’s magnum opus
- B. We began last week with Romans 12.1
1. This week we turn to the second verse
    - a. Both verses are too rich to consume in any one meal!
  2. But the two verses are related to each other
- C. Verse 1 begins with “I appeal to you therefore, brothers...”
1. And then Paul appeals to, urges, his audience to present their bodies as living sacrifices
    - a. And we unpacked what that meant last week

- b. How its rooted in the “mercies of God” – the extraordinary grace of God as Paul has expounded it in the gospel, through the first 11 chapters
- D. Now, verse 2 gives us, once again, some imperatives, some commands
  - 1. These are not suggestions!
  - 2. But those commands, those imperatives, are also driven by his appeal
  - 3. Just as strongly as Paul pleads with his audience – and with us – to present our bodies as living sacrifices
    - a. He pleads with us to do even more
  - 4. There are two imperatives
    - a. One negative and one positive
- E. And these imperatives are slightly different that the previous one
  - 1. Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice is something that happens at a point in time
  - 2. But these two imperatives in verse 2 are present tense verbs
    - a. And they demand continuing action on our part
    - b. We are to do them today
    - c. We are to do them tomorrow
    - d. Next week
    - e. Next year
    - f. Every day for the rest of our lives
- F. And the result, he says, will be that we will be able, by testing, to discern the will of God!
  - 1. That elusive purpose that God has established for each one of us!

#### IV. **The Negative**

- A. The first imperative is negative
  - 1. **Romans 12:2 (ESV) —**
    - a. **2 Do not be conformed to this world...**
- B. So, this is a command against believers being influenced by worldliness
  - 1. Now, the idea of worldliness is easily misunderstood by Christians
  - 2. Often, especially back when you and I were growing up, worldliness was defined be certain activities that were suspect in Christian circles
    - a. Things like dancing, playing cards, going to movies, drinking, and so forth
  - 3. I used to hear admonitions like, “I don’t smoke and I don’t chew, and I don’t go with girls who do...”
  - 4. But I have to say, that boiling worldliness down to those kinds of behaviors misses the point of what Paul is wanting to say to us
    - a. And, in fact, true worldliness is more subtle, and more dangerous, than those kinds of behaviors
- C. Now, before we get into what Paul is warning us about, let me say one more thing
  - 1. We are in the age of influencers
    - a. There are a whole host of people who fashion themselves as “influencers”

- b. Cultural sages who purport to be able to set trends and mold behavior
        - c. It's like Dear Abby and Anne Landers have been fruitful and multiplied!
      - 2. And many times, these influencers are, first of all young
        - a. Savvy in the digital world, posting on YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, or other platforms
        - b. And usually they haven't really accomplished anything meaningful that should be emulated
        - c. They haven't built businesses
        - d. They haven't made their marks in science or technology
        - e. They haven't shown themselves stellar in much of anything
        - f. Other than persuading people to pursue certain courses of action through their internet presence!
      - 3. But the idea of influencers is not new
        - a. Those of us who do Study with the Pastor have been in 2 Chronicles lately
        - b. And the author of Chronicles is usually quick to point out who the influencers were in the lives of the Kings of Judah
        - c. So while the form of influencer has changed, the actual function is as old as humanity itself
- D. The effect of the influence, or as our text says, "conformity", can be devastating and highly controlling
- 1. The Greek word is **syschemtizo (Gk) – to shape or fashion one thing like another**
  - 2. The root is "schema" which implies some set of standards which are forcibly applied
  - 3. One translation reads, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world" (NLT)
    - a. Another memorable one – the J.B. Phillips Translation (paraphrase): "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold"
  - 4. So the effect is one of entrapment, of pressing the unsuspecting believer into a pattern of life which is contrary to the will of God
  - 5. Now, what constitutes the worldliness that Paul is urging us to avoid being conformed to?
- E. First, the word "world" is not the one we're used to seeing
- 1. Usually, "world" is cosmos
    - a. But in this case the word for world is **aion (Gk) – age**
  - 2. "Age" has to do with the **worldviews** which characterize a given time period or epoch
    - a. A worldview is a way of looking at things; a framework or filter to interpreting the events and activities of life
  - 3. And adopting the world's worldviews are far more dangerous than any particular behavior

4. So what are the worldviews of our age that are so enticing and problematic for the believer

F. **Secularism**

1. Secularism is nearly the exact referent for aion or age
  - a. **Secular – saeculum (Lat) – age**
  - b. So, secular and age are equivalent
2. So Paul is essentially saying, don't be secularist in your worldview!
3. Now, to be secular is to be concerned about this world as if it is the only thing that exists
  - a. It is life "under the sun" as the author of Ecclesiastes puts it – life apart from God
  - b. It is, as Carl Sagan once put it, "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be"
4. Sproul: For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in light of this present time.... What matters is *now* and only *now*. All access to the above and beyond is *blocked*. There is no exit from the confines of this present world.... We must make our decisions, live our lives, make our plans, all within the closed arena of this time – the here and now.
5. Harry Blamires: To think secularly is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth; it is to keep one's calculations rooted in this-worldly criteria.
6. Now, there is a proper way for Christians to be secular
  - a. We do live, after all, live in this world
  - b. We are concerned about world affairs, the affairs of this life
7. But the danger is that, even though we show up in church for worship on Sunday, we act Monday through Saturday as if God doesn't exist
8. Many so-called Christians are practical atheists
  - a. They can live quite comfortably in their own worldly bubble without ever giving a thought to how God enters into the picture
9. So Paul urges us to not get caught up in secularism
  - a. Secular is one thing; "ism" is another
  - b. We can be secular, concerned about the world
  - c. Once it becomes an "ism" – secularism – it is divorced from the God who made the world and is the Lord of everything in it

G. **Humanism**

1. There are plenty of first cousins of secularism, which are manifestations in one domain or another of secularism
  - a. One of the most dominant is humanism
2. Like being secular, there is a proper sense in which Christians are humanists
  - a. We care about other human beings
  - b. We are called to love one another and our neighbors as ourselves
  - c. We even care about people who are on the other side of the globe who are disenfranchised, oppressed, and disadvantaged

3. That, more properly, may be termed “humanitarian”
  - a. Christians are to be the best humanitarians
4. But humanism places humans at the pinnacle of value systems
  - a. And human beings, in one way or another, are the final arbiters of truth, value, and meaning
  - b. God has no place in the humanist’s way of thinking
5. A Humanist Manifesto (1933): Traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith... appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.
6. Humanism, then, leads to the deification of the self
  - a. And in spite of its declarations, always is destructive of humanity
  - b. The best examples have emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the form of communism
  - c. Communism’s rejection of God is the ultimate expression of humanism
  - d. And it has been, by far, the most destructive of human ideologies in the history of the world
  - e. Responsible for more death and destruction than even the worst despots of previous millennia
7. The danger for Christians is to live our day-to-day lives as if God either doesn’t exist, is irrelevant to our life’s decisions, or simply doesn’t care

H. **Relativism**

1. Another cousin of secularism is relativism
  - a. Once God and His absolutes are rejected, truth and value are entirely subjective
  - b. In biblical terms, “Everyone does what is right in their own eyes”
2. Relativism has been rampant in the academic world for decades
  - a. Allan Bloom (University of Chicago; the Closing of the American Mind): There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.
3. Relativism is death to genuine education
  - a. And is the source of the “moral morass” as one article put it, that is so endemic in the modern American university
4. I had plenty of encounters with students (and faculty!) To resonate with what Allan Bloom wrote
  - a. I would ask, “How many of you believe that there are no absolute truths?”
  - b. Nearly everyone would raise their hands
  - c. Then I would ask, “Are you absolutely sure of that?”
  - d. “If there are no absolute truths, how can you be absolutely sure there are no absolute truths?”

- e. Blank stares...
- 5. Christians can easily become relativists when we begin to doubt the clear teaching of scripture, and allow our media, our families, or friends to challenge the moral absolutes the scriptures contain

I. **Materialism**

- 1. Materialism is maybe the closest cousin to secularism
  - a. Nothing exists other than the material world
- 2. Our generation is perhaps those most materialistic of all
  - a. The most important issue that concerns Americans, polls tell us, is the economy
  - b. Basically, that's a material concern
  - c. If our politicians don't provide us with enough stuff, I'll vote for somebody else who promises to give me more stuff
  - d. Of course, promises of politicians concerning such things almost never bear fruit
- 3. T.S. Eliot: Here were decent godless people:/ Their only monument the asphalt road/ And a thousand lost golf balls.
  - a. That "lost golf balls" verse hits a little too close to home for me
  - b. I'm sure over the course of time I've lost a thousand gold balls!
- 4. Churches can easily come under the influence of materialism
  - a. Over emphasis on the measurable – like dollars and attendance, which are valuable in their proper place – can dominate decisions apart from spiritual concerns and faithfulness in ministry
  - b. There are churches that design growth strategies that are little different than marketing a Burger King franchise
- 5. But Jesus says He will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!
- 6. And Jesus was the opposite of a materialist
  - a. He was born into a poor family, laid in a borrowed manger
  - b. He never had a bank account or home of his own
  - c. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (**Matthew 8.20**)
  - d. When He died, He was laid in a borrowed tomb
- 7. But it's easy for us to get caught up in our material world

J. **Mindlessness**

- 1. The last area to address this morning is mindlessness
  - a. We live in the most psychological age in the history of the world
  - b. We really don't think seriously about much of anything any more
  - c. We don't even ask people, "What do you *think* about this?"
  - d. We say instead, "How do you *feel* about this?"
- 2. This is certainly evident in our political world and in the media
  - a. Where sound bites meant to enflame emotions take the place of reasoned conversations
  - b. Where two people of differing opinions can actually have a thoughtful and reasoned discussion

3. And unfortunately, it infects the church today – especially in its worship
  - a. Most evangelical churches have dumbed down worship
  - b. Marva Dawn wrote a book back in 1995 entitled “Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down”
  - c. In which she criticized the contemporary church’s tendency to accommodate to cultural influences at the expense of theological integrity
  - d. Her book could easily have been written today and have just as much application
4. Many evangelical churches have adopted an entertainment-driven approach which undermines biblical and theological reflection
  - a. Many lack a regular reading of scripture – which is commanded in the NT in worship
  - b. And many don’t have a regular pastoral prayer
  - c. Because it requires thoughtful effort on the part of the worshiper to engage with such liturgical elements that used to be standard practice
5. We are so taken with our screen time, we passively receive cultural inputs from all kinds of sources
  - a. In ways that do not evoke genuine thought
6. Even Neil Postman, a secular professor of communication at NYU, back in the 1980’s, wrote a book entitled “Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business”
  - a. Even he inveighed on the state of affairs in the church, and how our entertainment culture has affected worship
  - b. Postman: Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana....
- K. All of these things are dangerous for the Christian, and for the Church in general
  1. And Paul urges us not to be conformed to this age
    - a. To secularism
    - b. To humanism
    - c. To relativism
    - d. To materialism
    - e. To mindlessness

V. **The Positive**

- A. But Paul doesn’t leave us only with the negative
  1. The second imperative is positive
    - a. And it is the one to which we now turn
- B. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
  1. Do not be conformed to this world,
  2. **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...**

- C. And just as not being conformed to this age is something we must be concerned about until we're called home
  - 1. So our transformation is a process that we're called to pursue every day of our lives

## VI. Transformation

### A. Its Meaning

- 1. "Be transformed" – metamorphoō (Gk)
  - a. Same word for our "metamorphosis"
- 2. Metamorphosis is the term we use when a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly
  - a. The caterpillar looks nothing like the butterfly it is destined to become
- 3. It goes through stages
  - a. The caterpillar is essentially the larva stage of the adult butterfly
  - b. It eats as much dill and parsley as it can until it has enough raw material for the transformation
  - c. Then it attaches to something, and forms a chrysalis – a kind of cocoon where the true transformation actually takes place
  - d. It dissolves into cellular components, and then begins to take shape with the wings and eyes and antennae which more and more resemble the adult butterfly
  - e. And finally, it emerges in its adult form
  - f. A creature of great beauty
- 4. Well, the transformation of a believer has some similarities
  - a. When we become Christians, we may be nothing like what we will become
- 5. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV) —
  - a. 18 And we all, with unveiled face,
  - b. beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.
  - c. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
- 6. We are being transformed into the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ
  - a. And this world is our Chrysalis in which, piece by piece, virtue by virtue, we more and more resemble our Lord Jesus Christ
- 7. Romans 8:29–30 (ESV) —
  - a. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
  - b. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- 8. "Conformed" in that verse is symmorphos (Gk) – same root a metamorphoō
  - a. And the final stage in our metamorphosis is to be glorified!

### B. Its Means

1. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
  - a. 2 ... be transformed
  - b. **by the renewal of your mind...**
2. That's the means by which this metamorphosis is to take place
  - a. And it's our responsibility in our sanctification
  - b. Our minds must be renewed
3. By the way, that's why we spent time talking about the worldly influence of mindlessness
  - a. Because that form of worldliness directly undermines the believers' capacity for transformation
  - b. If we are to be transformed, it is to be by the renewing of our minds
4. So, how should our minds be renewed?
  - a. Well, we've alluded to some things already
  - b. We need to be fully engaged in our worship
5. In our worship we value the renewing of our minds
  - a. Certainly in the sermons we try to make sure we're always learning something
  - b. Not that we're learning something new
  - c. But that we're learning something new for us!
  - d. We're not teaching anything that hasn't been taught in historic, orthodox churches for centuries
  - e. But it's still new to us!
  - f. Hopefully, everybody learns something
6. Shell Point has its Academy for Lifelong Learning
  - a. Well, if our preaching isn't an academy for lifelong learning, we're failing
7. But in our worship, we are committed to the reading of scripture
  - a. Which we get primarily from the lectionary
  - b. In which the entire Bible is surveyed over a three year period
8. Our pastoral prayers are substantive prayers that we all participate in by following and affirming
  - a. Those who pray thoughtfully and prayerfully prepare their prayers
  - b. And our engagement requires mindfulness
9. And our singing
  - a. Our hymns and songs will always be songs of theological substance
  - b. And they will teach as well as praise God
  - c. That's one of the great things that the great hymns of the faith contribute to our worship
  - d. And there are new hymns being written which are deep expressions of the worthiness of God and of the gospel of Christ
10. But the coin of the realm of renewing your mind is Bible study
  - a. Bible study groups to be sure
  - b. But individual Bible study is what will really fuel your transformation
  - c. That's why we do Study with the Pastor

- d. And if you're not already involved with Study with the Pastor, I would strongly encourage you to join the more than 100 who are doing it with us
  - e. In SWTP we study together the same Bible study that I use, and have been using, for decades
  - f. And in 5 years you will have studied the entire Bible once and the NT twice
  - g. We meet once a month to discuss what the Lord has been showing you
  - h. But ultimately, the most fruit is picked in your own personal secret closet as the Spirit of God teaches you through the Word
11. So the means of your transformation is the renewing of your minds
- a. Worship – both Sunday morning and evening
  - b. Personal and group Bible study
  - c. It's what all of us need!

C. **Its Method**

- 1. And now, look at the method of this transformation
- 2. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
  - a. 2 ... but be transformed
  - b. by the renewal of your mind,
  - c. **that by testing...**
- 3. Testing – that's the experimental aspect of our journey
  - a. **Testing = dokimazo (Gk) – to prove the genuineness of something**
- 4. You actually have to step into the mind renewing enterprise before you discover the genuineness of your faith
- 5. Just like Joshua and the Israelites crossing the Jordan
  - a. The Jordan was overflowing its banks
  - b. And the priests carrying the ark of the covenant has to step into the Jordan before the waters would start to back up so the people could cross
- 6. You have to put your feet in the water! You have to get your feet wet!
- 7. Martin Luther King, Jr. understood that: Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase.
- 8. So, the process of mind renewal involves an experimental process
  - a. A process by which you start your journey and see where the Lord takes you

D. **Its Goal**

- 1. Finally, look at the goal of this transformation
- 2. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
  - a. 2 Do not be conformed to this world,
  - b. but be transformed
  - c. by the renewal of your mind,
  - d. that by testing
  - e. **you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

3. Discerning the will of God – that’s the goal!
  - a. His will is not something He tells you before you start out
  - b. His will is what you discover as you follow His lead
4. And when you pursue this journey of mind renewal you will discover that the will of God for you is good, and acceptable and perfect
5. The will of God is good!
  - a. It’s good, of course for God and His glory
  - b. But it’s also good for you
  - c. Good in that the will of God is designed for your welfare
  - d. Remember what we’ve already learned from Romans
6. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
  - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,
  - b. for those who are called according to his purpose.
7. Under the will of God, all things work together for good!
  - a. Remember as well:
8. **Romans 8:27** (ESV) —
  - a. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
  - b. because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
9. The Spirit of Christ is interceding for you according to ... the will of God!
  - a. And do you think the Spirit of Christ is going to fail in His intercessions?
  - b. No! The will of God is good
10. It’s also acceptable
  - a. Meaning, it’s pleasing – as some translations have it
  - b. Pleasing to whom
  - c. Well, not so much to God – it would be silly for this to say that it’s pleasing to God; of course God’s will is pleasing to God!
  - d. But in this verse, it’s acceptable, pleasing to us
  - e. It will be the ultimate way to our happiness!
11. Sometimes, what God has us go through is not pleasant
  - a. But even our suffering will work to our satisfaction ultimately
12. **Romans 5:3–5** (ESV) —
  - a. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
  - b. 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,
  - c. 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
13. **Romans 8:18** (ESV) —
  - a. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
14. So yes! The will of God, we will discover, is acceptable, pleasing – to us!

15. And finally, the will of God is perfect
    - a. Perfect = teleios (Gk) – complete, not lacking in anything needful
  16. The will of God for each one of us will not leave us lacking anything that we need
    - a. We will find the will of God sufficient for carrying us into eternity
- E. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) —
1. Do not be conformed to this world,
  2. but be transformed
  3. by the renewal of your mind,
  4. that by testing
  5. you may discern what is the will of God,
    - a. what is good and acceptable and perfect.

## VII. Conclusion

- A. Are you fully engaged in the renewal of your minds?