

Regeneration – The New-Life Metamorphosis

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Romans 12:1-2

Last week we looked at the start of the believer's life. It starts with conversion. Conversion is not merely a change of religion. It is the change of a life that is lost without God to a life of being made alive in Christ. It is moving from the realm of darkness to the realm of the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus. We saw last week that conversion may come upon a soul with a sudden and quick change such as Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus. Or, it may come by a slow and gradual change such as that of the Apostles who studied under Jesus for years before understanding faith.

Our text today comes from Paul's letter to the Romans. A church had formed in Rome but not by the preaching of any of the Apostles. Peter had not been there yet, and neither had Paul. So Paul sent a letter to give instructions in the faith. He speaks of theology in chapters 1-8. In 9-11 he addresses the issue of unbelieving Jews. In chapter 12, Paul begins to speak on the "now what" of the Christian life. He gives basic Christian guidance on this new life in Christ.

Romans 12:1-2 NIVO

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.

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1. Be like a ship, not a barge.

The Christian life is targeted toward change in godliness, not aimless drifting while waiting for heaven.

What does the Apostle Paul give as his first instructions to the believers in Rome? He tells them they are to take on a life of change. In specific, he tells them there is a goal to this change. The goal is to be living

sacrifices with the goal of being holy and pleasing to God as spiritual act of worship.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to guide and empower this change. I will address the role of the Holy Spirit later. For now, what is important is to understand that God intends for us to change.

Before Christ, we were what Paul calls "flesh." He has in mind by that term the idea of the sin nature. That nature is under the influence of sin, that which is not of God. When we are saved, we are brought into a new life. What is important is to understand that this new life will necessitate change. It will not all come at once, but it will come. Moreover, it will need for us to give attention to this process.

I used the picture idea that we are to be more like ships with a rudder than a barge. Barges just sit and drift. They have no ability to get direction or steer in themselves. A ship has a rudder and an engine. It can turn and direct its course. The Christian is to direct its course in discipleship to change and conform to God's character as opposed to the world's.

Paul speaks of this by telling us we are to be living sacrifices. It is an interesting concept. Sacrifices are done on an altar. When an animal sacrifice is made, it must die. Sacrifices are about death. Death to the old way. Yet, we are to be living sacrifices. The idea is that we die to sin constantly, not just one time. We are not to die physically, nor are we called to make a sacrifice to merit salvation. Instead, we are making ourselves living sacrifices in response to the love and mercy God has shown us by giving us salvation.

Our old life lived untargeted. We drifted alone in sin's ocean blown by any wind that came along. Now, as a new form of worship, we are to target our lives to becoming like God in every way. The aim of this life is holy and pleasing to God. We are not called to a new legalism. We are called to a new relationship. Because God has saved us by his mercy, we respond with love wanting to please him.

2. Be like the butterfly, not a soda pop.

The Christian develops through constant change instead of a singular burst.

Paul tells us our spiritual transformation is not a singular event, but a continuous process. We see this already by the idea of being living sacrifices. We see it again by the second statement, that we are to unconfirm to transform. We are to unconfirm to the world while we are transformed into God's holy nature. We put off one nature to put on the other.

Paul gives us some picture words to help us.

We are not to conform to this age.

Conform is a passive verb. It means to allow someone to place you in their mold. Here, the mold is the thought processes of the world about us, or literally this age – the fallen order. We are not to allow culture to change our minds regarding God's design and desires. We are pressed about this all the time. Culture abandoned faith in God and has now gone off the path into all kinds of immoral and spiritual darkness. Culture has abandoned the idea of truth based upon the declarations of God's Word for truth that is based upon feelings. Christians have even adapted themselves to cultic teachings of other religions without even knowing it. When someone says, "I need to center myself," they are expressing a concept that comes out of Hindu meditation, not biblical worship. God warned Israel not to practice the religions of the nations around them, yet Christians in our day are very syncretistic, blending Hindu with Christianity. We are to unconfirm to the ideas of this age and be transformed.

We are to be transformed (metamorphosis).

Paul uses a term we know well from watching caterpillars turn into butterflies. Caterpillars spin a cocoon, and over time, are transformed from a worm into a beautiful butterfly. The Christian does much the same. We change over time into something other than what we were when we were lost. Metamorphosis takes time. It is not a sudden burst and then we are there. God uses the Holy Spirit and His Word to change us a little at a time.

Like a sculptor, he may take off large sections at the start. Yet, in time, he will spend most of his time focusing on tiny changes shaping our final design.

We transform by the renewing of our minds.

Renewing our minds is the process for this change. What does this mean, renewing our minds? It means replacing the thoughts we have that come either from the world around us or from our own sinful nature with the truths that come from God's Word. What you think, the way you feel, what others say, all must come through the filter of God's truth. Instead, what the world is telling you is that you must change God's Word to fit their system of thought. That system of thought reflects the mind of the world without God.

Renewing the mind does not mean that Christianity is simply a mental argument. I have seen some Christians who seem to be more mental converts than spiritual converts. They end up becoming Christian legalists, always arguing and finding fault with everyone. When Paul uses the mind as a principle, he is speaking of the spiritual seat of the soul. What your mind does, your life follows. We need constantly to be changing our minds toward God because we are constantly bombarded by false ideas from the world.

As such, the Christian life is more like the butterfly than the soda pop. The butterfly undergoes transformation over a time of progression. The soda pop if it is opened to quickly, will spew out in vigorous activity, then go flat. There is a difference between devotion and passion. Some people want to follow those who have *passion* for God. I'd rather have those who seek to have devotion to God. Devotion last longer than passion.

3. Be like the mountain stream, not a sewer.

The goal of the Christian life is reveal God's purposes, as opposed to the world's rebellion.

The final words Paul gives us helps us see the goal of this transformation more clearly. The result of our life-change is to bring us to a place where God's will is accomplished in our lives.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

This phrase is a little difficult to understand. How does one test and prove God's will? Then, also the lasts three items listed are just three words: good, pleasing and perfect. The last word comes from the Greek *teleos*. I noticed Alex McFarland interpreted the word to mean "purpose," doing God's purpose of growth. I think the word is better translated as "complete." It is often used to indicate the completed aspect of a purpose. It is often translated as perfect. Yet, perfection, as McFarland says, is not going to happen in our lives here.

Our holy purpose is suggested by he word picture that we should be pure like a mountain stream rather than a sewer. A sewer takes in everything. All of the streams both good and bad flow into the sewer when it rains. A sewer is a mix of everything. The sin life is a mix of everything. When God enters our lives, he begins to clean the stream. The goal is to bring it back to its pure purpose.

When we put the three words together – good, pleasing, and perfect, we realize that the goal of this transformation is carried out in our ability to demonstrate the full nature of God's will in how we live. It is much like saying that someone can see Jesus by how a person lives. When Jesus' nature, the same as the Father's nature, is seen in our lives we demonstrate the will of God completely. I think this is the idea Paul is striving for. We are not striving for some kind of perfection of holy living, but of such a transformed self that our lives point others to God.

You are saved to grow!

God saved you for eternity. Until you get there, He wants to dress you well for the place you are going. He wants to dress you not with clothes, but with His righteous character. You are saved not just to get to heaven, but to get heaven in you.

So what is next for a new believer? Growth in this new life.