

“Transformed”

August 30, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Test: Romans 12: 1-2,9-21

Today's Scripture lesson picks up where last week's finished, therefore we need to pick up a couple things from last week to get us started. You will remember we talked about Paul's not-very-high understanding of the human condition before Jesus. Paul's main point back in the first chapter of Romans was people were worshipping the creature instead of the creator. In other words, normal, everyday people have a hard time looking beyond themselves and their perspective. It isn't just that people are naturally foolish, self-serving and violent. It's also that humanity is marked by an inward focus. If people naturally think at all of others, it's about how others can help us. We look at the world and define everything about the world through our eyes. Good is defined by what is good for me, and evil is defined by what is bad for me. Meaning, murder that benefits me is good, and murder that hurts me is bad. Gossip and slander that benefits me is good, and only evil if they hurt me. Likewise rebelliousness, foolishness, heartlessness, ruthlessness – good when used to my advantage, evil when used against me. It sounds extreme, but think about your favorite cops and robbers shows. We like it when “Walker Texas ranger” deceives the bad guys, breaks all the rules of law enforcement, and adds one more kick than is necessary. That stuff is only wrong if the bad guy does it.

Well, God came to us in Jesus and brought a better way. God said what I really value, what I really long for, is you. To be in relationship with you. For you to come home. For you to have an abundant, beautiful life here on earth, and then come home to me when this life is over. And God says the way to get there is through seeing the world My way instead of your way. God used Jesus' death on the cross to separate our selfishness, our sins, our shortcoming, our rebelliousness and foolishness from us, and have them paid for, so that we might be forgiven and come home to God. The cross took care of everything that defines us in this world, that we might be free to be defined by God. That is what God has done, “therefore,” begins of chapter 12, “Therefore, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship.” That is take your body of work – what you do, what you say, what you think about, how you spend your time, how you spend your money – take your body of work and give it to God for transformation. Verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Renewal of your mind means: not me Lord, but You. “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

That is all followed by today's Scripture lesson which is a list. The list starts, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers." These are good things. Like Ted said, the heading over this section in your pew Bibles says, "Marks of the True Christian".

Jerry was a friend and church member of a congregation I served in Kentucky. He once told me he read this passage everyday as part of his daily Bible reading. He said, "If these are the marks of a true Christian, I am going to read this passage every day until I have a day that I actually live up to it." Well, he and his wife raised their two sons, adopted a son and a daughter (one with some special needs) and raised them. After both sets of kids were raised, his wife died of Leukemia. Jerry then left his private practice in speech and hearing therapy to go to seminary and became a minister. While in seminary he remarried and helped raise two more children. Upon graduation he accepted a call to serve a church that was hurting and divided from a minister who messed up and hurt a lot of people. He went there knowing he would be under a microscope every minute. Jerry retired from that congregation but not before reviving the spirit of that church, and as far as I know, he is still reading this part of Romans 12 everyday, because he was going to read it every day until he could have a day that actually lived up to what it says. These "Marks of a True Christian" are set high.

The list continues, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are." I think Paul is giving us this great list because he is trying to give us a picture of who we become when we stop worshipping ourselves and start worshipping the God who gave us Jesus.

For many years, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a key political operative in his corner named Louis Howe. Howe was a chain smoker and hard drinker who used to give Eleanor Roosevelt the creeps. But he was the head strong, pushy, shrewd operator FDR needed in the hardball arena of politics. One of Howe's characteristics is that he never forgave anyone who had ever slighted FDR in any way. At a party one evening, Howe was in the presence of Eleanor when he was sharp and dismissive of a man who came up to greet the First Lady. Eleanor asked Howe why he had done this, and he then reminded her of something unkind that man had said to FDR a quarter century earlier. "Goodness" Eleanor exclaimed, "I forgot all about that." Howe replied, "I NEVER forget!" That, my friends, is a picture of the age we live in. You slight me, I will slight you. You hit me once, I will hit you twice, twice as hard. How you treat me and mine is how I will treat you and yours. Tit-for-tat, vengeful, never forget. Verse 2, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind."

The list goes on. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I

will repay, says the Lord.' Instead, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The small, western Kentucky town of Dawson Springs was completely devastated from the rape and murder of one of its young women. That kind of thing just doesn't happen in this 2000-person town. They have their own independent school system. Everyone simply grows up together. It just doesn't happen. The entire town was shocked and horrified, but there were more shocks to come in the open and shut court case. At the end of the trial, the young woman's grieving father walked over to the man just found guilty of raping and murdering his little girl, and said, "I forgive you." But it didn't stop there. The father went to visit the young man in jail. He brought his Bible and started to teach the young man about Jesus. Month after month, year after year he returned. They talked, they laughed, they cried, they prayed. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." The father led the man to Jesus and eternal life as well as successfully worked for his early release. "One life was already lost, no need for there to be two," he said. "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind."

This renewed mind, this mind that worships the creator over the creature, this mind that sees others as treasured children of God no matter what they have done, this mind that strives to embrace these "Marks of the True Christian", this mind that looks beyond itself to discern the will of God, this mind has a focus. Some perceive following the will of God as turning right or left at the intersection, whether they should choose to go to this school or that school, which apartment to rent – what path am I supposed to be on to be in God's will. And I am all for trying to put yourself where God wants you, but I think discerning and following God's will is more about how we behave, what we do and why we do it; right where we are. Renewing your mind is letting God shape your reality. Not conforming to the world around you, but to who God is.

One more story. Eric Liddell was an Olympic distance runner whom the Japanese army imprisoned while he was serving as a missionary to China. While in the Weishen Japanese prison camp, Liddell not only continued to read the Bible, but read it aloud. He would read many passages, but kept coming back to Jesus' sermon on the mount and dwelled on the part that says, "Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that despise you. Do good to them that hate you." Liddell spoke to those around him, who were being abused by the soldiers on a daily basis, just as he was. He said, "I've begun to pray for the guards and it's changed my whole attitude toward them. When we hate them, we are self-centered." "When we hate them, we are self-centered."

"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind." Let the "Marks of the True Christian" be the marks of your renewed soul.

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