

January 17, 2010
Romans 11:33-12:2
REAP Method & Bible Invitation

Alright good morning. I'm so glad that you are here today. If you are a guest today or if you weren't here last Sunday, then let me warn you that this morning is going to be little different than normal in our study time together – but I'm glad that you are here for it. We will resume next Sunday our study of 1 John that got interrupted by the snow over Christmas, but this morning I want you to turn to the book of Romans with me.

By the end of our time together, we will be in about as practical a mode as we can be in, but before we get there let's look at Romans chapter 11. We will begin in verse 33. TEXT

Our focus today is really going to be verse 2 – a verse that is fairly well known. But I wanted to start with the verses before that. The fact that chapter 12 verse 1 begins with “therefore” means that what comes next is connected to what has gone before. In fact what Paul says in chapter 12 is linked not only to all of chapter 11 but pretty much the entire first 11 chapters. For our purpose this morning though, I want us to see the connection to verses 33-36.

I'm not going to go into detail in breaking down those verses, but take them as whole. (Quote 33-36)

We need to see that **Romans 12:1-2 is based on a right view of GOD and His WISDOM in Romans 11:33-36.** Paul reminds us of the omniscience of God and the wonder of his truth and in doing so reminds us, you don't know everything. You don't know enough. You don't ever know better than God.

So with an humble understanding of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, Paul tell us how we worship this God is to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices” – literally to give all that we are over to Jesus – or to use the wording of our vision here, to do life in Christ one step at a time.

And then we come to our focus in the passage today in verse 2 where Paul explains how we are to do that. Look at it again. *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

Do not conform to this world. The word there in Greek is not kosmos, the word for world, but **the word aion which means “AGE, don't be conformed to this age.” The age is the fallen unredeemed PHILOSOPHY of life.** One scholar explains that it is “the floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations at any time current in the world.” So basically, **it's the whole pile of the WORLD'S stuff.** Be not conformed to that. The Germans used to call it the “zeitgeist” – the spirit of the age.

And what Paul says in verse 2 is “do not conform **any longer**” – literally – stop it. Stop being conformed to that. **The assumption is what? That we are – that it IS happening. So God says STOP it** – don't allow it to be done.

And the word there is **conformed** – and the Greek word used that I won't try to pronounce is a compound word but at its core is a word that give us our word scheme or schematic. What it means – listen to this – is **the act of assuming an OUTWARD expression that does not come from within, putting on an act.** Like a masquerade – stop masquerading as if you belong to the world.

Instead Paul writes, *“be transformed.”* The Greek word there is one that will sound familiar – it is the word metamorphoo. Metamorphosis is the root idea. It is the meaning of **changing your outward appearance to match what you are WITHIN.** That's the word. It is a perfect contrast and use of words. In fact it is the word use in **Matthew 17** when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. If you don't know that part of the gospel of Matthew, go read it today.

Matthew explains how Jesus was transfigured – metamorphosed – that for a moment His outward appearance was made to be exactly like His inward being. Jesus was God in the flesh and for a moment, His human flesh matched and revealed the God that He was inside.

And what God is saying through Paul is that **we are to be transformed on the outside to MATCH the redeemed new creation we are by the grace of God on the inside.** But what is hard to see in the NIV is that both the words transformed and conformed are in the present passive imperative. That means it is present and ongoing – not a one time change and done but a right now and every moment continual deal – and it is passive. The transforming happens to you. And yet it is a command – which means we play some role in it.

How? How does the transforming take place? He says, “be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind.” That word renewing is the word anakainosis the means **RENOVATION** – it means a complete renovation of thought. You’ve got **to have your thinking completely altered.** It’s all about the mind – **it is not about the emotion – not about how you feel – it is about the MIND.** That’s where it starts.

How do you renew your mind? If you are conformed to and by the stuff of the world then how are you transformed – how do you renovate your mind? David put it this way in another verse many of you know, **Psalm 119:11:** “*Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against God.*” It’s the Word – it’s the Word – it’s the Word. That is the key to a renewed mind.

We’ve seen this over and over in our studies. You’ve got to know the Word of God. We spent over a year in Colossians. **Colossians 1:28** Paul says we teach everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. A perfect life comes from perfect knowledge of the truth.

Colossians 3:10 says “put on the new self which is renewed in knowledge...”

Colossians 3:16 says “let the Word of Christ” what? “Dwell in you richly.”

We spent over a year in James. **James 1:22** said don’t just listen to the Word, but do what it says. **Verse 25** says that it is when we look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue to do, that is when we are blessed in what we do.

Over and over again, **the renewed mind is a mind that is saturated and controlled by the WORD OF GOD.** Question, do you spend as much time in the Word of God as you do in the allurements of the world? What are your reflexes? I mean when something happens in your life, is your involuntary response biblical? That’s a renewed mind – a mind saturated with the Word of God – preoccupied with the Word of God – the truth of God.

But the truth is that is not where we live is it? We are full up with other stuff, aren’t we? David Nasser tells of the experience of a friend of his that helps really bring this reality home. Let me share it with you.

Christ Heurt is a young man who is the head of Word Made Flesh Ministries in India and all around Asia. They provide shelters for homeless people, those with AIDS, and those with other diseases. At one point in his life, Chris went to Calcutta to work at the House of the Dying. Calcutta is one of the largest cities in the world but it is also the poorest. Most of the over 13 million people there are destitute. Poverty and disease are the way of life – and death for most people. Every morning city maintenance workers find bodies on the sidewalk or in the street of those who died over night. At the House of the Dying, Chris’s job was to go out and find those dying people and to bring them in off the street and give them a place to die with dignity. It was not to cure them. They cared for them, gave them a meal, shared the gospel with them, so they could die in peace.

In Calcutta 70% of the homeless population have the lung disease tuberculosis so up and down the streets you find thousands of old men and women literally coughing up their lungs. Chris would find those closest to death and invite them in to a place to lie down. Their heads would be shaved. They would be given a shower and a bowl of hot food. Chris would replace their ragged, soiled clothes with clean ones. There these men and women would sit with other dying people who coughed up their lungs into a jar that was passed around and when it was full, the jar was thrown into the garbage with the soiled clothes and infested hair.

Lepers would come in stinking of rotting flesh – fingers, toes, whatever missing or falling off and they too would be cleaned up and taken care of. In fact one of the jobs there was to take a

syringe and stick it into their sores and extract the poisonous disease. Those syringes were used over and over until it was too dull to pierce skin and it was thrown into the garbage can.

That's a far cry from our neat and clean existence isn't it? And yet I want you to hear Chris' own words. "One thing I begged not to do was taking out the garbage. The stench was almost unbearable. Can you imagine the disease, ragged clothing, and half eaten food? I begged them not to ask me to do it. It haunted me forever after the first time I took out the garbage. As soon as we walked out the back door toward the dump, children came out of the alleys and ripped open the bags to get whatever was there. I yelled "Don't eat this garbage. It is full of disease and death!" But they were so hungry that they ate garbage because that was all they could find. They had no other choice. I wept as I saw them scramble through the spilled jars of disease, the clothing stained with rotten flesh, and used syringes trying to get to scraps of last night's dinner that a dying person didn't eat."

Disturbing image isn't it? But in all honesty, how far are we from this same thing spiritually?

Many of us are like those kids scrambling for garbage. We elbow each other at the office, at the mall, at the theater, at school, on the net, wherever in our hunger for food – but the food we fight for is rotten and diseased – and we eat it. We eat it every time we fill our minds and hearts with sexually suggestive movies or music, every time we make fun of somebody for whom Christ died, every time we value the praise of people more than the praise of God, every time we live to get revenge on someone who has hurt us, and every time we try to put things in God's place in our hearts.

We are so full of this world – this age that Paul talks about - that we aren't hungry for the food that really satisfies and nourishes. Sure we may listen to a sermon or a song about God and that message has as much appeal as another bite of pizza after we have stuffed ourselves at the buffet to the point we're ready to explode. **The truth is that for many of us our souls are so full of garbage that we don't even recognize our NEED for God's food.**

That's why God says through Paul: stop being conformed to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

When we are hungry for God and eat His nourishing Word, we are satisfied and yet we are hungry for more. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their peace in you." That's the same heart that Jeremiah spoke in **Jeremiah 15:16**. *"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty."*

Eating requires intention, selection, and effort. Listen – we don't eat by being in the same room with food. And we don't take in the grace and truth of God by being in a sanctuary. We have to take initiative to eat because we recognize our need for the spiritual nourishment – the transformation of our lives – that God's Word alone can provide. John Piper told his church last Sunday this very simple truth – **"there is a spiritual diet without which NO Christian can be strong and healthy and fruitful. And that is a diet of the Word of God."**

And that's where we get practical today. See if those of us in this room match the rest of the Christians in the nation, then statistics would say that if there are 300 of us in here today, only 30 of us have ever read through the entire Word of God. So as we are still in the beginning days of 2010, and because one of the steps to life in Christ that God has called us to as our purpose for being here includes learning truth together, I am inviting you to read the Word of God through with each other this year.

And just like eating anything else, if all you do is chew it up and spit it out, it does you no good. If you aren't willing to swallow the food, you receive no nourishment. So not only am I inviting you to read the Word together, but I want to give you a method of digesting it. Now it is just one method among many – if you already have one you use and like, then great – don't change. But if not, then let me share this with you.

You guys know that I go to a pastor's conference each year with several guys who went to Texas A&M and have ended up as full time senior pastors of a church somewhere. One of the guys there is a guy you have heard me talk about before – his name is Matt Carter – he is the pastor of the fastest growing church in the state or something like that – the Austin Stone in Austin, Texas. Yes, he's an Aggie trying to serve Jesus by bringing the good news of God's truth to the pagans from the University of Texas and others.

But anyway – God has used Matt to plant a church in Austin that is changing the city – growing incredibly – all this stuff – and so he was invited to another pastor's conference where there was a bunch of hotshot young 20-30 year old pastors being given a chance to be mentored by some older pastors in their 50s and 60s. Matt met with a guy named Wayne Cordeiro – pastor New Hope Christian Fellowship with 20,000 people in Hawaii – suffering for Jesus in Hawaii – he's about 55 or so – and is just one of those guys who is so much like Jesus that when they talk you just hang on every word.

One of the warnings he gave Matt and those guys was how easy it is to go to the Word and not be a Christ worshipper. He talked about how so many pastors get into trouble because they are studying every week going to the Word and then coming Sunday to give it out to the people. To be doing this (bible to people) but not this (bible to heart to people.)

He told Matt and all those young hot shot pastors that he would be up at 6 in the morning and if any of you boys want to come, I'll teach you how to have a quiet time. Matt was like – this guy Wayne Cordeiro pastor of fellowship Honolulu written like 20 books he's godlier than me – if he wants to teach me how to have a quiet time, I'm there. So he goes and every one of those hotshot 20-30 year olds was in there and all of them were taking notes and what I want to share with you today is what Matt shared with me is what Wayne shared with them is called the **REAP method** and it is absolutely changing the way I read scripture for me. And I'm going to teach it to you today. So take some notes. Here we go.

When you leave today, these journals will be available outside. REAP journals. In the journal is a bible reading plan starting tomorrow for us to read through the Bible this year – couple chapters a day – sometimes 1, sometimes 2, sometimes 3.

And you just sit down and the **first thing you do is you just simply PRAY**. You don't pray for grandma you don't start interceding you just say – God I want to meet with you today. Lord, I want to know you more today – I want to know your heart. And **you cannot SKIP this step**. The Bible is not God. It is the infinitely precious, and infallible Word of God. **But if the living God does not OPEN our hearts to the Word of God, we can read it a hundred hours a week and never see the glory of what it says**. So you pray and ask God to speak to you.

And then you just **READ the passage**. Listen – you don't study it – you just read it. Let me free you up on that – this is not study, it is reading. And as you go through there grab a pen and as the Holy Spirit makes a verse jump off the page for you, just underline it. **As the Spirit brings a verse home to you, just mark it – don't study it, don't stop and research it, just MARK it and keep going**.

When your done you go back and you look at the 3 or 4 verses you underlined and **you pick ONE**. You read them all and you pick one. And then you come to the page in your REAP journal and put the date and then write an **R**. **That means READ**. After you've read the 2 or 3 chapters after you've underlined the one or two verses and you've picked the one to focus on, you just **write that verse out** right there by the R. I'm going to use a passage that reflects where we were last September in our study about worshipping Jesus as well as the first part of our Romans passage this morning as well as what we talked about last Sunday in Haggai about the temple. 1 Chronicles chapter 16. Let's say that was your passage for the day. And the verse that you underlined was 1

Chronicles 16:25. So you just write that verse down by the R. "Great is the lord greatly to be praised." Just write it. Something about writing it that helps it get into your soul and to begin understanding.

The next one is an "E" so you just put an E over there on the left of the page. That means to **EXAMINE** and this is where I think a lot of Christians get hung up. Because immediately after we write it down, we think we need to begin applying it. And examining is a skill I had to learn as a preacher. Examining is when you go to the text, you go to the Word, and you simply **write down what it is saying to us. What is the Bible saying here** – what is God trying to communicate to me. Examine the scripture – that what David is saying is that our worship should be on par with the greatness of God. God is great – our worship should be great. Examine it.

Then you get to the fun part - you **APPLY** it. You put the "A" there and you begin to ask the question "**how is my life going to be different today?**" When I leave this coffee shop, this closet, this balcony, this bedroom, this office, this wherever you spend time with God – wherever you privately worship Jesus - wherever you lay the foundation for life in Christ – you ask the question "how am I going to be different because of this?" And that's how you apply it.

And there is nothing deep here. Just write my worship today, tomorrow, Friday, Sunday must reflect God's greatness. If I don't – if my worship is not great - then I must have a really small view of God.

And the last part there is the "P"- it means to **PRAY** and you just **write your prayer – you write it down** – Lord you are great – you are awesome – Lord help me to praise you in light of your greatness.

And you're done. And what's amazing here is you've got this great deal going on. You've read the Word. You've written the Word. You've examined the Word. You've applied the Word. You've prayed the Word and you've got this amazing little nugget or truth that begins to work in you. You may want to **put a TITLE on top of that portion of the page that sums up the truth you learned:** The great praise of God – or something like that.

And you can go back in 4 months and see what God showed you. And this amazing thing happens. As I begin to grow and I begin to spend time with Him, I begin to rub up against His greatness, that foundation gets laid and then I am able to begin to think and ponder what He has done for me. Talk about transforming your life. **A TRANSFORMED life is about an individual doing life in Christ with a mind being RENEWED by the Spirit of God through the Word of God day by day by day.**

If you long to break loose from conformity to the world.

If you long to be transformed and new from the inside out.

If you long to be free from mere duty-driven Christianity and do what you love to do because what you love to do is what you ought to do.

If you long to offer your body – your life as a living sacrifice so that your whole life become a spiritual act of worship.

Then give yourself to the pursuit of renewing your mind.

Listen – God has brought you here today so that He could tell you through my voice: I have an invitation for you. I have a gift for you. I give you my very Word. Take it in 2010 – take it and hold fast to it.

Now listen to me. That is not optional. Not being conformed to the world. Being transformed instead. Having our minds renewed by the Word of God. That is not an option – that is a command – that is necessary – without it you starve the very grace that God means for you to thrive on in this world.

The REAP method is optional. Reading the Bible in a year is optional. Don't confuse the two. But if you aren't already in the Word regularly. **If you don't already have a way to digest what you read. Then take this invitation and take this tool and hold fast to the Word of God.**

Hold fast **for the sake of FAITH** – Romans 10:17 says “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Hold fast **for the sake of JOY** – John 15:11 says “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full.”

Hold fast **for the sake of your FREEDOM** – John 8:31 says “If you abide in my word – you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

Hold fast **for the sake of your HOLINESS** – John 17:17 says “Sanctify them in truth, your Word is truth.”

Hold fast **for the sake of your LIFE** – Matthew 4:4 Jesus says “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The Word says we reap what we sow. Let's REAP the Word of God in our lives this year.

Let's pray.