A renewed mind for 2020

Text: Romans 12:1-2

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**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-21

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 103, 90, 485, 520, 525

Series: Occasional (first sermon of the year)

Theme: In response to the grace of God in Christ, the Apostle Paul exhorts the Roman believers to live lives of continuous worship by having their minds transformed so that they can discern the will of God.

Proposition: Be transformed by the renewal of your mind!

**Introduction**

Early in 2020 some people have already decided to make some changes in their lives. A new year’s resolution is ‘*a firm decision made on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day to do or refrain from doing something over the course of the coming year*’. A new year’s resolution is a commitment to change. The 10 most popular resolutions at the start of a new year are:

1. Exercise more
2. Lose weight
3. Get organized
4. Learn a new skill or hobby
5. Live life to the fullest
6. Save more money / spend less money
7. Quit smoking
8. Spend more time with family and friends
9. Travel more
10. Read more

Perhaps you have made firm decisions like these this year. A resolution is really a state of mind, a way of thinking with the aim of bringing about lasting change in life. To follow through on a resolution to change you need: a strong enough **motivation** for change, a **process** to change the way you think and therefore act and a clear **goal** to aim for. Of far greater benefit and lasting value than the 10 most popular ones are these three resolutions:

1. Worship the Lord your God every moment of every day
2. Think like Jesus Christ (or as German mathematician, astronomer and astrologer Johannes Kepler said “think God's thoughts after Him”).
3. Have the spiritual sensitivity to discern and live the will of God.

Our text from Romans 12:1-2 teaches us how to have renewed mind which enables us to worship God 24/7 and to think and live as those who are resolved to love the Lord who first loved us (1 John 4:19). Let’s look at this renewed mind under three headings:

1. The motivation for change
2. The process of change
3. The goal of change
4. **The motivation for change**

Without motivation it’s very hard, if not impossible, to keep to new year resolutions or decisions to change of any kind. Motivation may be defined as *‘a reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way’.* A common theory of motivation is that people move towards what they define as being more pleasurable and move away from what they define as being more painful. Motivation for many people ‘boils down to’ seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.

This is **not** the Biblical motivation for change as we see from v1: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God*”. The ‘mercies of God’ are what the Apostle Paul has been writing “*to all those in Rome who are loved by god and called to be saints*” (Rom 1:7a). The manifold ‘mercies of God’ fill the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans.

God is merciful in revealing the true nature of fallen humanity who ‘*by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*’ (1:18), having become ‘*futile in their thinking*’ (1:21). In judgement, God gives them up to ‘*a debased mind to do what ought not to be done*’ (1:28). God’s mercy is seen in that even though ‘*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*’ (3:23), He chooses to save some. He justifies all who believe by His grace as a gift – through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24). “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set (them) free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*” (Rom 8:1-2).

God’s mercy is seen in the gift of the Holy Spirit who ‘*helps us in our weakness*’ (8:26). God’s mercy is experienced as he works all things together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (8:28). God’s mercy is seen in His faithfulness to complete the work of salvation which He has begun, having predestined His adopted children to be conformed to the image of His Son (8:29), effectually calling them to faith, justifying and in the end glorifying them (8:30).

God’s mercy is seen in the security which He provides in Christ, from whose love nobody or nothing can separate His people (8:35). God’s sovereign mercy is extended in perfect justice only to those on whom He has mercy and compassion (9:15). Salvation then does not ultimately depend on ‘*human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy*’ (9:16). “*So, then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills*” (Rom 9:18).

God’s mercy is seen in His open invitation to everyone to respond in faith to the person and work of His Son: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved*” (10:9).

The disobedience of Jews led to God’s mercy reaching many Gentiles and the mercy of God towards the Gentiles led to His mercy being received by many Jews (11:30-31). In all of this, and more, in all the mercies of God towards all those in Christ who would be lost apart from His great love are together the **motivation for change** in the lives of His children. Those who were once futile in their thinking, who did not honour God or give thanks to Him, but whose minds and hearts have now been enlightened by the gospel are grateful for His many mercies. **Gratitude is the Biblical motivation for change**. Thankfulness is the driving motivation for true worship; it always has been.

Notice that the ten commandments begin with God’s mercy: “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Exo 20:2). Willing, wholehearted obedience then is first and foremost a thankful response to God’s mercy by those who have been received His generous compassion. In light of God’s mercies in Christ, the Law of God is no longer a fearful burden of duty which is impossible to entirely fulfil, but rather His Law is the pathway by which gratitude is expressed to our Heavenly Father.

There is a precious gift which each of you has brought with you today. It is a gift which accompanies you everywhere you go at all times. That gift is you yourself in your complete entirety. The Apostle Paul refers to this as ‘your body’ meaning your whole person.

Brother and sisters in Christ, motivated by gratitude for all God’s mercies towards you, you are exhorted by God’s Word to present your whole self as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God; which is your spiritual worship. Not one of us is doing this completely at present, so we all need change - which brings us to our second point:

1. **The process of change**

A resolution to change is unlikely to succeed without a process by which to gradually alter established habits. Many here today will be familiar with ‘TED talks’. (Although I doubt if any here will have actually attended a TED conference – the cost of the US conference is upwards of $5,000USD!). However, the talks are available without cost on popular online platforms like YouTube. TED is an acronym for “technology, entertainment and design” and began in 1984 as a global non-profit organization with talks covering a very wide range of topics. The slogan for TED is ‘*ideas worth spreading*’. The underlying philosophy is that educating people about ideas changes the way they think and therefore the way they live.

There’s clearly much truth in this, but it is not the whole story. For example, you can provide a person an education about, for example, being a tidier person or learning a new skill or saving money. However, what is also needed is a process for putting information about change into practice so that there is a lasting adjustment to a person’s lifestyle.

The Apostle Paul has been ‘educating’ the Roman saints about the mercies of God in chapters 1-11, however this does not automatically result in a change of mind. The process of change is that of being ‘*transformed by the renewal of the mind*’ (v2). The Greek word translated ‘transformed’ is the one from which we get the English “metamorphosis”. Metamorphosis is the “the process of changing in form or substance”. Like the transition within a chrysalis of a caterpillar to a butterfly. Whilst the creature remains the same in essence, yet there is radical change in form.

Being ‘*transformed by the renewal of the mind*’ (v2) is not a self-help method of personal improvement, but a divine work of the Holy Spirit, as Paul has already referred to in chapter 8: “*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot*”. (v5-7). First and foremost, having a mindset of the Spirit is itself a work of the third person of the Trinity in regenerating the spiritually dead to make them alive in Christ (Eph 2:5).

Notice though, that although the renewing of the mind is a work of God in the believer, it is also a work in which the Christian cooperates. The exhortation is ‘*not to be conformed to the world*’ (v2). This refers to the unbelieving world which is dominated by sin and death. It is the realm in which the spiritually dead belong. The call of God from our text is not to be “*squeezed into this fallen world’s mould*”; not to follow the patterns of this world e.g.

* “If it feels good…. then do it”
* “Nobody else has the right to tell me what do to”
* “I deserve it”.
* “I live life my way”
* “If I don’t look out for number one, who will?”
* “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul”.
* “I’ll enjoy life on my terms whilst I am young, then later I might turn to God and become part of a church”

How then can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in being transformed by the renewing of our minds? By being where the renewing ministry of the Spirit is active e.g. actively listening to preaching and Christian teaching, actively participating in Bible studies, actively reading, meditating and praying through Scripture, actively seeking out fellowship with those who love the Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

These are some of the means that the Holy Spirit is pleased to use to apply the living Word of God to our minds and hearts so that we are progressively changed. Paul explains this to the Corinthians in these words: “*So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being* ***renewed*** *day by day... as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*” (2 Cor 4:16,18).

Are you willing to resolve this year to recommit, (or to commit for the first time), to consistent, regular activities which we know from Scripture the Holy Spirit is pleased bless, in conjunction with God’s Word, to renew the minds of those who belong to Christ? This is well worth resolving to do because the goal is invaluable:

1. **The goal of change**

Seneca the 1st century Roman philosopher said “*Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind*”. The Apostle Paul lived at the same time as Seneca and wrote to the Philippians: “*One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:13b-14). The goal for the disciple of Christ is to be like Him in His character. Paul expresses this aim to the Roman believers in these words: “*to be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Romans 8:29).

Becoming more and more like Jesus is the process of sanctification - a progressive growth in godliness, in holiness, in purity. As we have already seen, this process begins with a transformation of the mind. To have a renewed mind is to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2.16). The mind of Christ is a mind which willingly accepts the will of God. Wherever God wants us to go, whatever He wants us to do. The perfect mind of Christ is made evident in His words: *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 6:38).

The goal of this change of mind in the life of the disciple of Christ is to be able to ‘*discern what is the will of God, what is good acceptable and perfect*’ (v2). To discern means to ‘test, examine; interpret, discern, discover; approve; prove, demonstrate’. (This word was used of testing metals by fire, for example coins were tested for their authenticity). The idea is that our human wills become aligned with God’s will through the process in which we actively discover His plan for our lives. The sanctifying renewal which the Holy Spirit works within the willing believer develops a ‘spiritual sensitivity’ to discern God’s will in each situation in life. This is the development of spiritual maturity in Christ. As we more and more have the mind of our Lord Jesus, we are more and more able to worship God with all that we are, all of the time in every situation and circumstance of life.

This is the essence of presenting your whole self as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, this is your spiritual worship. It is a life lived in such a way as to please the Lord with every thought, word and action. It is a life lived in gratitude to God for all His mercies. It is a life lived not according to the standards, patterns and motivations of the unbelieving world, but according to will of God.

So, in conclusion, what is your new year resolution for 2020? I hope that you are persuaded by our text today that the highest, best and most important resolution you can make this year is to have your mind renewed.

If you do not yet know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour then the first thing to do is to believe that by the mercies of God, His only Son died in your place so that you could be spiritually alive in Him. You need to repent of breaking God’s perfect law. You need to trust that God’s Holy Spirit is renewing you day by day to become more and more like Jesus

Brothers and sisters, let us all commit/recommit ourselves this year to the ongoing process of being transformed by the renewal of our minds so that we can know the will of God in every situation as we worship the Lord with our whole lives.

AMEN.