

*“I’m All In!”*  
Romans 12:1-8  
August 21, 2011

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s great mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual [reasonable] act of worship. 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.*

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, according to the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve, if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

Romans 12:1-8 (NIV)

Last weekend we concluded our retreat at Camp Cotubic by celebrating the baptisms of Josh Shoemaker and Katie & Addy Hartsel.

Jesus’ last words on earth as recorded in Matthew’s gospel:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*  
Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

Jesus didn’t say, “go and make Christians,” or “go and make believers,” he said “go and make disciples.” So what exactly is a “disciple?” If our purpose, or one of the reasons that we exist as a church is to make disciples,” and become better disciples ourselves and our vision is to “equip children, youth and adults for Christian discipleship and ministry,” then don’t you think it is important that we have a clear understanding of what the word “disciple” actually means or what a disciple of Jesus Christ is supposed to look like?

The word disciple comes from the Greek word “mathetes” which means student or follower. In the New Testament it almost always refers to a committed learner and follower of Jesus Christ. A disciple of Jesus is a Christian and a believer, but he or she is also a lot more than that. Some key words in that definition of a disciple: committed; learner; and follower of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a lifetime student of the master teacher, Jesus Christ. Follower means that one should be doing the same things that the master would be doing if the master was in his or her shoes. We are a nation of self-proclaimed “Christians” and “believers,” percentage wise probably more

so than just about any nation in the world, but somewhere along the way we have lost the sense of following or discipleship.

Why is it that the lives of Christians in America today are virtually indistinguishable from non-Christians? Why are the rates of divorce, sexual immorality, abortion, and just about every other type of sin pretty close to the same for Christians and non-Christians? Actually they are significantly better for some non-Christian groups.

And many Christians will say that the only difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that Christians don't sin, it's that we're forgiven for our sins because of our faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross. But is that really the full truth? Or is that a partial truth that has masked or covered up the real truth? To the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, Jesus did not condemn her, but he did say "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he (or she) is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Pastor, writer, and radio speaker Chip Ingram writes in his book Living on the Edge, "Many today reject Christianity not on the basis of logic or doctrine, but because of the inconsistency and hypocrisy of those who claim to be Christians."

This morning our passage is from Romans 12. Romans chapter 12 comes at a very important point in Paul's letter. For those of us who partook in our Bible study on Sunday evenings in the spring, we looked at the first eleven chapters. I left off with chapter eleven intentionally, knowing that we would be getting to chapter 12 later in the summer.

Paul spends the first eleven chapters outlining who God is and everything that God has done for us. From God's great righteousness and holiness, His creating us human beings in His image, and our fall to sin. All of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory. God in his foreknowledge chose to call a people to be his own, beginning with the Israelites, the Jews. Because of their faith in God they would become His people. But they would continue to fall and God would eventually send them into exile and captivity. But God would continue to call them back. And eventually, with His foreknowledge, He would send His own Son to die on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, first for the Israelites and then for all others, the Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles alike who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul does a great job of explaining the history of the salvation story in the first eleven chapters of the Book of Romans. And then he gets to Romans 12 and he begins with the word, "Therefore." Whenever we get to the word "therefore" in the Bible we need to pay careful attention, because more often than not something very important is coming. Just like Jesus' words in the "Great Commission" which I quoted earlier, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, **therefore** . . ."

Paul is saying to us Christians, in view of everything that God has done for us. In view of everything that is stated in the first eleven chapters, in "view of God's great mercy . . ." Paul says "I urge you." But actually it is more demanding than that. The King James says "I beseech you." "I plead with you." In view of what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, in light of His great mercy, I plead with you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

Since the beginning of time God has required sacrifices for the atonement for our sins. It is found throughout the Old Testament. But the sacrifice that was required was always a dead sacrifice: lambs, goats, bulls. It was the blood that provided the atonement for one's sins. Jesus paid the price, with his blood, once and for all. Jesus was both a dying sacrifice and a living sacrifice. He was the link between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

Now God calls us to offer our bodies as "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to Him." More often than not, the sacrifice that God required in the Old Testament was the firstborn, the first fruits, that without defect.

"- this is your spiritual act of worship." Actually the word "spiritual" used in the NIV is a bad translation. Because Paul isn't just talking about our spiritual life here. He is talking about all of our life - the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, the spiritual. All of our life. The better word used there is "reasonable." What Paul is saying is that in view of what God has already done for us through Jesus Christ, in light of it all, our reasonable, logical or sensible thing to do is to offer our entire bodies, everything we do, as living sacrifices. God gave everything for us and he expects us to give everything in return.

By now you might be asking, "where did I get the title for this morning's sermon?" One of the most popular sports shows on television today, including ESPN, is poker. Why they call it a sport, other than because some win while most lose, I'm not sure. The game that seems to have captured Americans the most is called "Texas hold 'em." The biggest moment in Texas hold'em comes when three little words are said: "I'm all in!"

At that point one player takes all the chips in front of him, representing everything he or she has, and pushes them to the center of the table. The drama then begins and the remaining players flip their cards face-up so everyone can see who has what and which cards will be needed to win the hand. The dealer then methodically and dramatically begins to turn over the last two or three cards to determine the winner. The person who has gone "all in" will either leave as a big winner or will be removed from the game. Texas hold'em demonstrates better than just about anything else what it means for one to surrender his or her life to Christ. The drama doesn't really get started and the action doesn't really begin until you say to God, "I'm all in." It's when you take the chips of your family, your future, your money, your talents, your dreams, and all your possessions and you push them to the middle of the table and you say, "Okay, Lord, you deal." That is when your life with Christ really begins. Sadly, most never really enter the game called "Christian Life" for real. Most just flirt with it.

Recently I came across this quote from G.K. Chesterton, one of the great thinkers and writers of the early 20th century: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found and not tried."

What Paul is beginning to do here in Romans 12 is to describe what the Christian life is supposed to look like. Much like Jesus did in his *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew, chapters 5-7.

Paul says that if you have truly understood what God has done for you, that if you truly have committed your life to following Christ, become a true disciple, “thrown all the chips in” as one might say, then “do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then [and only then] will you be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

Actually in Romans 12:2 we have two commands and a purpose clause. First we have a negative command: “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world.” It is an imperative, a command, it is in the present tense, and it is in a passive voice, meaning that it is occurring all the time and there isn’t too much that we need to do for it to happen. If you don’t take steps to fight it, you will be conformed to the pattern of this world. What is the pattern of this world? Well, busyness, which we talked about last Sunday at Camp Cotubic, is a pattern of this world. Giving in to Peer Pressure is a pattern of this world. “The American Dream” is a pattern of this world. The emphasis that many put on sports is a pattern of this world. The value we put on money and possessions is a pattern of this world. Want me to go on? Not very difficult to become conformed to the pattern of this world.

We also have a positive command in Romans 12:2, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Greek word for transformed is metamorphosis, as in when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. The positive command here is also an imperative, it is in the present tense, and it is a passive voice, meaning that there really isn’t that much we can do to make it happen. Other than to place ourselves in a position for it to happen, much the same way God changes, transforms, the caterpillar into the butterfly.

God’s solution for genuine transformation in our lives is not the Law or a list of rules. It’s not simply a list of things that we are not supposed to do. Humans throughout history have proved that doesn’t work very well. Real transformation starts within. God says through the apostle Paul, it starts by the renewing of our mind. What comes out of us is directly proportional to what goes in. It is written, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4 NIV).

You see, during our life here on earth there is a constant battle going on between being conformed to the standards of this world and being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in this world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*  
1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians:

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

Colossians 3:1-2 (NASB)

So, where have you been setting your mind lately? How much time do you spend reading or listening to God's word? Let's be real here, what is the ratio of time you spend on listening to God's word vs. the amount of time listening to the messages of this world via television, radio, movies, the internet, books, people?

Then we have the Purpose Clause in Romans 12:2, "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

The problem is that we cannot know what God's will is until we are at least in the process of being transformed (by Him), through the renewing of our minds. Many try to test and approve God's will without really knowing His Word.

The ultimate goal of reading and studying God's word is not for knowledge sake, but to be transformed into the image of God. That image being Jesus Christ, the visible image of the invisible God.

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*                      2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

Every single one of us struggles with some kind of sin. For most of us it is kinds, plural. Feeling guilty, trying harder does not remove it. In many cases it just makes it worse. It will not change until we change what we are putting into our bodies. It takes a change of our mental diet.

How about taking a media fast? Removing all the worldly things for a while. Maybe you'll like it so much you'll do it for good.

But it isn't just about taking away. How about adding, putting something good in?

Reading your Bible (15-20 minutes a day)  
Memorizing some Scripture  
Reading a good book, or watching good movies  
Surrounding oneself with good people

Spiritual growth is not performance oriented, it is relational.

Chip Ingram gives us this great definition of spiritual growth in his book Living on the Edge, which is all about Romans 12, "Spiritual growth (**transformation**) is accomplished by the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, in the context of authentic community, for the purpose of glorifying God. And then he gives us some practical methods for "renewing our minds."

Practical methods for "Renewing Your Mind"

1. Hearing God's Word
2. Reading God's Word
3. Studying God's Word

4. Memorizing God's Word
5. Meditating on God's Word

Another great theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, A.W. Tozer, wrote this:

“Theological knowledge is the medium through which the Spirit flows into the human heart, yet there must be humble penitence in the human heart before truth can produce faith.”  
A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Paul tells us the same in our passage this morning:

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, according to the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve, if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

Romans 12:3-8 (NIV)

God calls us to think of ourselves with a humble and penitent heart, with sober judgement, recognizing that we are all sinners saved only by His grace and what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. When we are baptized we are baptized into the body of Christ, the church. So when people say one can be a Christian without being part of the church, that is not true. And as disciples God has given each of us some level of grace to serve Him in His church. The words service and worship are interchangeable. “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your reasonable act of worship/service.

The big question for each of us is: Have I really committed my entire life to Jesus Christ, put all the chips in as one might say, or am I just flirting with the Christian life.

Let us pray:

Lord, God, you call us into this game called Christian Life. A very serious game which has serious consequences both to our future here on earth and in the life to come. Lord, Jesus, we want so much to be your disciples, committed followers of you here on earth. We also know we cannot do it on our own. Lord, Holy Spirit, help transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. May we no longer be “conformed to the patterns of this world,” but be transformed by the renewing of our minds which comes only through your Word. In the name of the Living Word, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.