

## Be Transformed by Christ

Romans 12:1-2, 13:8-14

Key Verses: 12:2, 13:14

“Do not conform 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.”

“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”

We are in our fourth week in our miniseries on being transformed. When we started the miniseries, we saw how we need to be transformed in our self-image. We tend to have a very haughty view of ourselves, but that leads to a lot of destruction and anger. We’re always comparing ourselves to others and trying to tear others down to make ourselves look good. It’s impossible for us to change ourselves. Therefore, we have to be transformed from the inside out. Two weeks ago, we saw that our love for others must be sincere, and that we’re not only called to love the people we are close to, which sometimes can be very tough. It seems like some of the closest people to ourselves are the ones who aggravate us the most. But we also should love those who wish to see us harm. The Bible doesn’t say that we shouldn’t have enemies, but that we should love them. Again, that is something that only happens when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Last week, if you remember, we learned that we have to submit to the governing authorities because God is the one who establishes their rule. Sometimes, we don’t like the person in charge, but God put them there for a reason that we may or may not understand. This is something that is so hard to take because we are inherently rebellious. By our own nature, we can’t submit, but it is only when we are transformed that we will be able to. Now, you have read this week’s passage and you might be wondering, “In what way will we need to be transformed this week? I don’t see how this fits in the series.” Quite honestly, you are right. This passage doesn’t follow the same pattern as the previous three, but it does tell us what it means to be transformed. It’s actually a very interesting puzzle to put together, so let’s start into it.

Take a look at verse 8: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” That’s an interesting verse. “Let no debt remain outstanding.” That sounds a lot like we shouldn’t have debts. When I say that, you are probably thinking about monetary debt. It’s good not to have a lot of debt. I say that from experience, but in our society is that even possible? There are credit cards, car loans, and mortgages. It is very hard, if not impossible, to function well without holding some debt. Without a credit history, it can be very difficult to rent an apartment or a car, or even pay for school. Without debt, buying a car is nearly impossible. I don’t think that anyone here has \$20,000 to buy a new car with cash. Does anybody? It’s not just our personal debt: our ministry wouldn’t have been able to complete the restoration of the second floor of our building without borrowing money from our parent church. That’s money we have to pay back. It’s a debt. Does that mean that we are in violation of verse 8? It looks like it, doesn’t it?

Let’s take a look at this verse in context. If you read verses 6 and 7 along with 8 you get, “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” Let those verses roll around in your mind for a bit. Give to everyone what you owe them. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. That sounds a little

different than just verse 8 alone. Verse 8 doesn't say that we shouldn't have debt. In fact, we will always have some debt, because debt is what we owe people. We can owe people lots of things. We might owe money, we might owe honor, or we might owe respect. We can be in debt with any of those, but the Bible teaches us we need to give people what we owe them out of love. If we need to pay our bills, we do so out of love. That means you have to love your credit card company, the bank, ComEd, Peoples Gas, Comcast, AT&T, Verizon, and even the city. Personally, I think that the company that has my student loans is run by demons, but I have to love them anyway. You have to pay them the money you owe them out of love. In the same way, if we owe someone respect, then we should give it out of love, not fear or legal obligation. We can respect someone because they put fear into our hearts. They can be intimidating, but that's not why we should respect them. As Christians, whatever we do, we do it out of love.

We heard some about love a couple of weeks ago, but there is a twist that is shown in this passage: "...for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (8-10) Since we started this miniseries, Paul has been focusing on the interpersonal relationships that a Christian has, whether inside of the church or outside of the church. If you look at the commandments he quotes in verse 9, they are all the commandments that deal with interpersonal relationships, and the summation quote refers to interpersonal relationships, too. This actually sounds like something that Jesus taught. Here's the story from Matthew's gospel, "Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40) Jesus says that there are two great commandments, but Paul only gives one. This is because Paul is only focusing on the interpersonal relationships. He spent eleven chapters discussing our relationship with God and now at this point, just talking about how Christians should relate to other people. In that respect, as verse 10 says, love does no harm to a neighbor and because of that, it fulfills the law. Look at the commandments that Paul is quoting. If you love your neighbor, then you will respect that person and not commit adultery, murder, steal or covet because your desire is not for your own gratification, but to love the other person and you don't want to hurt them.

This all sounds well and good, but as we have mentioned before, our culture is all about the here and now. We see everything that is going on now and we think very little about the future. We like to think that we have plenty of time to take care of others. Right now our needs are more important because they are timelier. We take care of ourselves now and then we can take care of others. We see this in regard to people getting married. Young people push it off because they want their lives to settle first. They want to establish themselves in work and have a stable life before bringing someone else in. It sounds kind of noble, but the problem is that marriage is disruptive. Being by yourself, you only have to worry about yourself, but in marriage you are responsible for the other person and you have to think about how to help and satisfy your spouse. I think that some people know that, but they want to have as much time to be selfish as possible. They want themselves to be the center of their life and they don't like the idea of having to play second fiddle to anyone.

In the same way, we don't really want to love others as ourselves. We want to do it later, but there is a problem with that. Verse 11 says, "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." The fact of the matter is that we don't know how much time we have. We can't choose to neglect what we were called to do. We were called to love others because that fulfills the law. We have to wake up and see that there is very little time. In a blink of an eye your school studies are done, you are married, you have kids, and you grow old and die. We don't have time for regrets; we can't let life slip on by. We don't have the luxury of wasting our time.

The Bible says, "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy." (12-13) We are living in the night because the fullness of our salvation has not been realized. We're not standing in God's presence. However bright our lives seem now is incomparable to light that we will experience when we stand before God's throne. The veil will be gone and we will be able to see the fullness of God's glory. It will be a time of great and continuous rejoicing. In light of this, the Bible says that we need to put aside our deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Some of the deeds of darkness are explicitly written in verse 13, "carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy." Honestly, that sounds a lot like everyday life for some people. In fact, that sounds a lot like what people will be doing today and this weekend. It's St. Patrick's Day and in this country, the day is marked by people wearing green and getting stone drunk, and most of you know what happens when you get drunk. Actually, you might not know because you don't remember what happened when you got drunk. If you don't remember, just look at verse 13 again and maybe it will come back to you.

Ironically, though, St. Patrick had the loving-his-neighbor part down. He wasn't one who reveled in the deeds of darkness that his day now epitomizes. Patrick was born in Scotland around the year 385. When he was about fourteen, he was captured by a raiding party and was taken to Ireland as a slave to tend sheep. He was a slave for six years, and during that time, he turned to God. God rescued him by telling him to go to the coast and some sailors were able to ferry him back home to be reunited with his family. When he arrived home, he heard God's calling to preach the gospel to the people of Ireland. He became a priest and then a bishop and was sent to Ireland on March 25, 433. He preached the gospel and converted the whole island and died on March 17, 461. His life is one of tremendous love of a people that enslaved him. By his own rights, Patrick should have been concerned about his own life, but God put it in his heart to love his neighbor no matter what they did to him. That's definitely not what we celebrate year after year.

How did Patrick do it? How was he able to overcome his baseline tendencies and love the Irish? That's the final verse that links all this together. "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh." (14) Patrick was clothed with Jesus. When people saw Patrick, it was as if they were seeing Jesus. These are actually interesting words: "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ". Paul doesn't write that instead of gratifying ourselves, we should seek to please God. The response to not thinking about pleasing ourselves is to clothe ourselves in Christ. We've said it many times before: we

can't change ourselves. We are physically, emotionally, and spiritually unable to change ourselves. We need outside intervention to change us internally. We require Jesus' intervention. He died on the cross for our sins. He paid the price for our salvation. We are only able to have eternal life because of what Jesus has done for us. We can't stand before God based on our merit. Our disobedience to God's word, led us to deserve death. But Jesus in his perfect obedience took the death that was meant for us. Likewise, Jesus' obedience deserved life everlasting and eternal glory, but because of his death, we get what was meant for him. We are in Jesus' place. Because of Jesus, when the Father looks at us, he sees Jesus. We inherit Jesus' obedience and righteousness. We become as if we are clothed in Christ.

When we become clothed in Christ, he does two things to us, he protects us and he changes us. Verse 12 says to put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Clothing yourselves in Jesus is putting on the armor of light. As you might know, armor is put on for protection. It protects the body from attack. Satan tries to attack us with thorns of doubt, anger, hatred, and selfishness, but the armor of light repels all of Satan's attacks. The armor of light protects our hearts and minds from Satan's attacks. When the devil looks at someone clothed in Christ, all he see is Christ, and the devil doesn't have any power over Jesus. Jesus took his most powerful attack and brushed it off as if it were just a nap. Thank God that that is what protects us. Otherwise, we would have no defense.

When we are clothed in Jesus, he also changes us. It's funny because three weeks ago I mentioned that putting on a new set of clothes does not change us, but putting on Jesus does change us. In fact, it is the only thing that can change us. The power of Christ radiates outward to protect us, but it also radiates inward to change us. Seeing his glory and majesty puts our lives into perspective. We see ourselves as sinful as we are and by putting Jesus on, we surrender ourselves to his will and that changes us. No longer are we thinking about how to serve ourselves. Truthfully, there's no need for it. Everything that we tried to give ourselves is inconsequential compared to the riches that we get when we are clothed in Christ. I used to have an attitude that I must have something and I wouldn't be satisfied unless I had it, and honestly that led me to make a ton of stupid purchases that I never needed. There are still things that I want. I would love a grill to have cookouts with. I would love to have a new computer since my desktop died. Last week, I saw some nice TV's. They were really nice: 50 or 60 inches in size and the picture looked like you were looking out a window, and a clean window at that. However, I noticed that these desires are completely dismissible, now. They do not drive me as in the past, but my own desires are not the most important thing to me. Sometimes the pull is very strong, but it's not stronger than Christ or my thoughts for my family.

When we choose to clothe ourselves with Jesus, there is something that we must do. We have to make a decision. We have to make a decision not to think about how gratify the desires of our flesh. That's something that sounds very hard to do, but what it involves is coming to Jesus and surrendering to him. We need to have a sincere desire to not want to please ourselves. We have to see where pleasing ourselves leads. I'm pretty sure that there are very few people who wanted to do evil things, but little by little gratifying our desires leads us to wanting more and more until we don't recognize ourselves anymore and we do something horrible. When I was in college, I had a girlfriend and we were sexually active. I only thought of how to satisfy myself and she got pregnant. Quickly, her thoughts went to having an abortion and I went along with it. I drove her there, waited and drove her home. My intention was to satisfy my desire, but what happened was that a life was extinguished before it started. I never intended for that to happen, but it did and it haunted me for a while.

When we seek to satisfy our sinful desires, we will do something that we regret or that will haunt us. It is inevitable. Thank God that there is healing in Christ! By being clothed in Christ, we can be changed and healed. We can be renewed and transformed. "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind!" (Romans 12:2) I can attest to this life-changing power. My great sin happened ten years ago, but God has forgiven me and I know that I will see that baby in God's kingdom. Jesus has healed me and I am no longer haunted. He has redeemed my life by giving me a beautiful and loving wife, who I don't love and respect as much as I should. God has given me the cutest and sweetest little girl that anyone could hope for, who is so smart and funny and another baby on the way. This is his healing for me and is his redemption of my life, so that I can be his and in his service.

Being clothed in Christ is connected to the other part of the passage through this. The Bible says in 1 John 4:10, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus is love; he is the very definition of love. Plus, Jesus also said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) Jesus is love and he is the fulfillment of the law, and therefore he satisfies what was written in verses 8 and 10. Only through Jesus can we be changed. The love that he has for us is the love can overflow from us and that is, as the Jesus Storybook Bible says, "a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love". Only when we are wrapped in Jesus will this love penetrate our bodies, souls, hearts and minds. Only when we are clothed in Christ will we be so flooded with love that whatever we do, we do in love. Only when we are clothed in Christ will we transformed by the renewing of our minds, because nothing else can change our minds. Our minds are stuck in sin and no measure of effort on our parts can change that. We will only continue down our downward spiral to destruction. Only Jesus can protect from both God's wrath and Satan's deception. And, only Jesus can change us. His love is boundless and he is waiting to embrace you. What will you decide?