



**2013 Motto Verse:  
January 6**

Reading: Romans 12: 1-2

Background:

Transformation. It's a lovely word that explains a wonderful truth. As you may know, the English word "transformation" comes from a greek word, *metamorphis*. It means to change form, to change nature. This is perhaps best expressed by a caterpillar that is transformed into a butterfly. What was once a drab and slow earth bound bug naturally becomes a colourful new creation that is free to fly.

For the Christian, because of the work of Christ, we are people whom the living God desires and enables to be transformed. But into what?

To be new people in Christ, in whom the character and image of Christ grows over time. Transformation into the nature and image of Christ is a promise and a reality for everyone who accepts Christ as Lord. Theologians have a word for this – sanctification. It's an ongoing blessing. But, we have a part to play in our transformation.

Ice-breaker:

Can you list some television programmes that are about improvement, transformation?

Why do you think such programmes and similar articles in magazines and newspaper supplements are produced?

Study: (see Helpful Hints)

Following on from his explanation of what God has lovingly done for humanity in Romans chapters 1-11, in our reading, Paul now intentionally begins to explain the implications of the grace of God for us. The result of grace is metamorphis – transformation into the likeness of Christ for God's glory.

**Read Romans 12:1-2**

1. Respectfully, I think that in all of us is the innate longing for improvement, transformation. New Year Resolutions reveal this. We want to thinner, fitter, better. The media reflect this. Think for a moment of the number of television programmes that are essentially all about transformation – improving your cooking, your appearance, your finances, the look and value of your home, your relationships.

You see, deep in the human soul is the longing for transformation. The sadness is that so many choose to see the motivation and mould for transformation to be what this world values. Paul makes this clear in Romans 12:2. "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world....*"

- a) What are the values of this world?
- b) In what ways can the values of the world constrain our development as Christians?

2. Why do you think Paul encourages Christians to “*set our hearts and minds on things above not earthly things*” (Colossians 3:2)? (See Helpful Hints)
3. Why do think Paul picks out the importance of the “*mind*” in spiritual transformation?
4. How can we develop our “*minds*” for Christ and then as verse 1 teaches, live fully surrendered lives for Christ? (Note: You may find it helpful to recall what Richard shared in his sermons on Sunday.)
5. A recurrent theme in all of Paul’s’ teaching (and he wrote approximately half of the New Testament) is that the life of blessing is found by living a life that is fully surrendered to Christ. Looking at Romans 12:2b, what practical example does Paul give? Do you agree?

### Conclusion:

Take some time to consider how you can develop your mind and life in Christ so that you can increasingly live in the fullness of God’s love this year.

What practical steps can you take.

Conclude with a time of sharing and prayer.

-----

### Helpful Hint:

2. Like all Jewish people, Paul believed that world history was divided into two periods. The first, the present age, is characterized by rebellion against God and the consequences of sin – injustice, war, suffering, and death. (see Galatians 1:4; Romans 1) This is the age when the Messiah was awaited. The second age, the age to come, is when God is sovereign and God has transformed everything as He desires. This age, the Messiah will bring about the restoration of Eden.

The Christian faith is built on the understanding that through the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the age to come has broken into the present, imperfect age. Through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in all believers, God is bringing the age to come, His kingdom, forwards into the present age. And in so doing, this age (and us today) are being progressively transformed into God’s promise – to be like Christ. As you know, this transformation will only be completed after Christ’s return, and judgment.

This theological understanding, this belief, this certainty is at the core of Paul’s teaching. As God is doing this work right now, bringing His kingdom into being right now through the Holy Spirit, Paul encourages believers to focus our lives on this wonderful truth. The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof so Paul encourages us to live today totally committed to God.

And this happens when we allow our minds to be focused on Christ and not this world.

It is helpful to also recognize that we live in a time of spiritual conflict. As C.S. Lewis draws out in his books, “The Great Divorce” and “Screwtape Letters”, Satan seeks to use the temptations

of worldly things and also the human tendency to be lazy and procrastinate to prevent Christians from living in the fullness of God's love.

3. The mind is vitally important. Action follows the intention of our mind. Pastor Martin Luther King wrote, "*As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free.*" Paul's logic is simple. A transformed mind brings a transformed walk with God.
5. The original recipients of this letter, the early church in Rome around AD60, would have understood about the ritualistic sacrifices of dead animals in the Temple. Paul immediately challenges believers, members of the New Covenant, in verse 1 that the holy, living and generous God requires a "*living sacrifice*". This is the willing and full surrender of our heart, mind and body to Christ at all times in our daily lives. A faith that is alive and which infuses every aspect of our living for good.

One consequence of living a Christ centred life is that it helps us to live more fully in the riches of relationship with Christ. Paul teaches that as we grow in the image and character of Christ over time, it becomes 'easier' for us to know and live as Christ desires: "*Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (Romans 12:2b)

The Greek word used for "*test*" is *metaz*. This word was normally used in the context of a goldsmith & silversmith to test the purity of precious metals. So Paul teaches that by possessing and developing a transformed mind for Christ, we can lead a transformed daily walk with God.