

# **Romans 12:1-2**

## **Scott Newton © 2011**

### **Romans 12:1-2**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the 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.

### **Philippians 3:12-14**

Not that I already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

## **1. How are you haunted by the past?**

Graeme looked last week at how we need to look forward to the future with God as a church and used the passage from Isaiah 42 :9 – *See the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.* And I agree with Graeme that something new is happening. What the outcome will be we will need to wait and see but it is good to see the church moving.

But part of the change within in the church also needs to be within in the people in the church and that was what I decided to preach on this week. As some of you may or may not know the last few years have been really hard for me in one way and another what with fighting depression, a bad work situation and other issues. So I thought I would share some of the things I have learnt over the past couple of years. For some of you this may not be relevant but hopefully God will use what I have to say and maybe help you to see something in a new light.

### **1.1 What was your upbringing or how do you see the world?**

Probably few of us realise just how much of what we assume about the world we learnt while we were growing up and have never even bothered to question it.

My family was a very non-emotional, non-touch family. My mum didn't really like kids until they were about six years old and you could have a conversation with them and my dad was just there. Interaction with him was pretty sparse. My brother and I were expected to be pretty much independent and if the three pillars of a good upbringing are physical, emotional and spiritual then we missed out on the last two. The problem is you just assume that is normal when you are growing up as you don't know any better and don't have anything else to judge it by.

The problem is this really messes with your view of God. God is supposed to be a father figure so you assume that God is like your dad – he looks after you in the bigger scheme of life but you are pretty much on your own for the rest. Now we all know mentally that that is not what God is like but “*more is caught than taught*” so we end up with another set of assumptions around which our life is built.

Then you grow up and a new set of relationships emerge. Marriage or other meaningful



relationships. And again you carry all the stuff you have learnt into them as well generally for the worse rather than the better unless you were lucky enough to have a family that wasn't dysfunctional. Or you were blessed with some really good friends who just happened to know how to communicate all that stuff to you. If you are a man then the Tui advert probably says it all – Yeah Right. I'm probably safe saying that for 90% of us that didn't happen. It's just not something you are taught at school.

Being a man in our modern society makes the odds of that happening even higher. Most men are not aware of it but the odds are firmly stacked against any man reaching maturity even vaguely whole and complete. There is a really good non-Christian book *The New Male Sexuality - The Truth About Men, Sex, and Pleasure* by Bernie ZilberGeld which tracks this issue. As a boy you growing up you are quickly taught that crying is not an option and in fact anything vaguely emotional is taboo. You have got to strong and macho. So being good little children we stuff our emotions into a really tightly sealed casket, sink it to the bottom of the nearest ocean and pray like hell that it never rears it's ugly head again. Which generally tends to leave men with three emotional states – happy, vague and angry. As you can image this really prepares a man for marriage. The problem is even worse because modern culture tends to depict men as basically idiots, the classic example being Homer Simpson. But in most modern depictions of men, especially in sitcoms, the male is generally the scapegoat. In the more romantic depictions though he is brave, strong and can face a hurricane with steely determination and all the women swoon at his magnificence - and his biceps are large of course. Of he doesn't really have to be too emotional – just rescue the lady from her distress and sweep her off her feet. They of course don't depict the ten year later picture – him with a pot belly and complaining of shoulder pains. So how many of you men in this room are brave, strong, can face a hurricane and have the biceps? Enough said.

Interesting Steve Sonderman who has been running men's ministries in America for the past eighteen years has this to say as one of his points about what men are looking for in life:  
*Men are looking for healing: Men are carrying around a bag of wounds, hurts, and brokenness that needs to be healed. I would go so far as to say that every man has a wound or one sort or another, and sometimes they do not realise it. For most, they are the walking wounded of society. They have father, mother, work, or divorce wounds that are creating havoc in their lives and the lives of those around them. Many try to anaesthetize their pain with sex, drugs, or alcohol. If we are going to have an effective ministry to the men of our church, we have to provide a place where they can experience healing in their lives.”*

*We all assume our family and relationships are “normal” because we don't know any better.*

## 2. So where are you now?

So where 2011 find you? Do any of these fit how you are feeling?

Tired	Frustrated	Sad	Angry	Miserable
Nervous	Abused	Insecure	Unsure	Fearful
Worried	Down-trodden	Presumed Upon	Stressed	Guilty
Disappointed	Stuck	Doubtful	Undervalued	Stoic
Depressed	Anxious	Unloved	Not Wanted	Lonely
Doormat	Not Respected	Regretful	Ashamed	Resentful



Yes – they are all negative emotions. But the reality is that often we don't actually feel as good as we pretend to be. As a family we watched the movie *The Italian Job* the other night. The one lead player had a good definition of fine:

Fearful  
Insecure  
Neurotic  
Emotional

So now you really know what someone is feeling when they say they are fine! But on the more serious side you start to see much we hide behind masks. Often we don't even want our spouse to know who we really are in case they won't like us any more. Make us anything but don't make us vulnerable. We hide things afraid they can't handle the truth which is really just an excuse that we can't face what we really are – sinners to use that old, old word that is so much out of favour.

So what does this have to do with Romans 12 about being living sacrifices and renewing our mind? Let's find out.

### **3. Looking to the future**

#### **3.1 How do we trust in God?**

If we are carrying all this baggage from our childhood how do we trust in God in the way he wanted us to? Part of the answer is in finding ourselves – recognising ourselves for who we truly are and not what we have been taught about ourselves. If you know who you are you can trust God and other people much more easily. Think about it. To take two examples – our Lord and Paul. Both knew themselves very well. Our Lord we sort of expect it given that he was God but Paul was only human. Yet Paul knew who he was, could take pride in his accomplishments but yet was not afraid to vulnerable with his converts. Or to stand up to the authorities.

#### **3.2 How do we believe/trust in ourselves?**

So how do we believe/trust in ourselves? There are two aspects of this I want to look at. One is to define who we are and look at how we interact with other people and with ourselves and what that says about us. The second is look at who we are in Christ.

##### **3.2.1 The Psychology of Change (or I'm a Sinner but I'm Alright)**

###### **3.2.1.1 Affirmations**

If you go for counselling often one of the things they will get you to do is write down all the good things about yourself and then get you to repeat them to yourself two or three times a day. Why? Because often we have tapes in our head running about how bad we are or how unworthy we are. These tapes are from what we were taught as a child and this technique helps to replace the old tape with a new tape which affirms you. For the Christian the top one of those should be “I am loved by God” - we all need reminding of that.

###### **3.2.1.2 Hero Story**

Another technique that they will often use is to get you to write your hero story – the story of your



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life with all the good bits left in – how you have survived and even more than that – often flourished. Too often we go through life only remembering the bad.

### **3.2.1.3 Time Line**

Another technique is the will get you write a time line of your life. Often the good bits of our life feel short in comparison to the bad bits and a time line helps to put things back into balance. Often the bad bits were not as long running as we think.

### **3.2.2. Where we go wrong**

But why do we need these techniques? It really boils down to one thing – we all see the world differently and we see it from our own perspective – a perspective that has been coloured and distorted by the series of events that have led us to this day in time. The problem is that we have no idea we are actually doing this because this has been how we have always seen the world and worse we assume that this is how everyone else sees the world. Even if someone points it out to us we often just ignore it as we think they are wrong. So what are some of the things that we do to ourselves that are in fact our problem and not the other persons.

#### **3.2.2.1 Taking Things Personally**

An easy one to start with. We often take things personally when we shouldn't. Someone says something in what they thought was all innocence and we jump down their throats because we assume they were implying something or other.

#### **3.3.2.2 Boundaries**

We need to know who we are and what we believe in order to set boundaries – to define what we will and will not accept. The inability to say no to someone is a nice easy example of where we don't set boundaries. Letting other people take advantage of you is another. But then there are more subtle ones like taking responsibility for other people's problems. To be a friend you need to tell them what they are doing wrong but if they don't listen it is not your responsibility. They are an adult and are responsible for their own decisions. Believing that others can anticipate your needs is another.

Another area where lack of boundaries comes into play is the inability to confront other people over issues. We cave in and so go against what we believe or even who we are. You can stand up for yourself and still be gracious but not to stand up for yourself is not doing you or the other person any good. And it just adds to your stress levels.

Addictions and compulsions are another form of boundary violation where we essentially let ourselves down.

The next two I'm going to cover could easily be included under boundaries but I've separated them out.

#### **3.3.2.3 Unenforceable Rules**

This is one that can really bite us in the butt. This is when we have an expectation about how someone else will behave or think. When they don't we get angry or hurt because they are



deliberately be annoying, difficult or whatever. Meanwhile the other person had no clue they were suppose to react in a particular way so didn't. Have you ever been a conversation with someone and started to feel angry or rejected or some other feeling but are not sure why? Probably they just violated one of your rules. Basically any time you expect something from someone else – either in the way they behave or what they think you have an unenforceable rule.

The Puritans had a answer this – expect the worse and praise God when it doesn't happen!

#### **3.3.2.4 Denying, Forgetting, Blaming and Accepting**

Sometimes something hurts us so bad that we deny that it happened or we say it wasn't all that bad when in fact it was. Sexual, physical and verbal abuse victims often use this particular out. If it was really bad we may try to forget it – stick a lid on it and bury it so deep that we hope it doesn't surface. Another track we take is the blame track. Particularly if we feel guilty or really bad about what we did but don't want to own up to it. Then we find someone to blame. He or she made me do it. It's not our fault. It may be true but it also may just be an excuse not to own up to our own mistakes. The other side of the coin is when something is being done to us and we just accept it. It's not bad. I didn't know what else to do.

#### **3.3.2.5 You Made Me Feel...**

This is an interesting one. Have you ever heard yourself or anyone else say he or she made me feel x, y or z emotion? If you do you can stop them right there and tell them that no one else can make them feel anything. Yes. No one else can make you feel anything. Take two people and put them in the same situation. One feels anger, the other laughs. The situation is the same in both cases but their reaction is different. Why? Because they interpret the world differently. Between any event and how you feel emotionally about it there is a filter that is part of us and is there because of the way we were brought up or because of the events in our life. Those filters can be changed. Sometimes those filters are unenforceable rules. Sometimes those filters are from what we have been taught. But we can choose how we react to an event. Paul could say he has learnt to be content in whatever circumstance he finds himself.

#### **3.3.2.6 Mind Mapping**

This is one that happens most in close relationships – family normally. This is where we know the other person so well that we react to slight shifts in facial expressions, nuances of words etc that most other people would never notice and even more importantly we probably don't notice cognitively either. Based on our experience of what they mean we react, either for the good or bad, and so generate patterns that are not good for us or the other person. Children in homes where one or other of the parents are alcoholics will know this one. Very subtle changes we clue them when it is time to flee. But we all tend to do it to some extent or other in close relationships.

David Schnarch in his book *Intimacy and Desire* says we need four things in a marriage:

1. Solid Flexible Self – the ability to be clear about who you are and what you're about, especially when your partner pressures you to adapt and conform
2. Quiet Mind – Calm Heart – being able to calm yourself down, soothe your own hurts, and regulate your own anxieties
3. Grounded Responding – the ability to stay calm and not overreact, rather than creating distance or running away when your partner get anxious or upset



4. Meaningful Endurance – being able to step up and face the issues that bedevil you and your relationship, and the ability to tolerate discomfort for the sake of growth

So how many of you could identify with one or more of the above? But there is another aspect as Christians that we need to look at – who we are in God.

### **3.2.3 Who we are in God**

So how does God see us?

#### **3.2.3.1 God made you perfect**

Everything God created was perfect. We may now be tainted by sin but that is not fundamentally who we are. At the coming of Christ sin will be done away with. And we will still be ourselves – just sinless. As the bumper sticker says – God don't make no junk.

#### **3.2.3.2 God made you unique**

Unlike the storm troopers of Star Wars we are not all clones. Each one of us is unique, each with our unique gifts and abilities.

Ephesians 2:10 – *For we are God's workmanship* – not his factory produced clones.

#### **3.2.3.3 God choose you from before the foundation of the world**

Ephesians 1:4-5 – *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.* Enough said

#### **3.2.4.4 God was willing to give up his own Son to save you**

Romans 5:8 – *But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we still sinners, Christ died for us.* He didn't wait for us to make the first move. He didn't weigh us on the scales first. He sent his Son to die for us while we were still helpless. And why?

**BECAUSE GOD LOVES YOU (SINGULAR)!**

So stand tall. Yes you make mistakes. Yes you hurt other people. Yes there are days when you wish the second coming of Christ would come. But that doesn't make you any less than what you are. It makes you human. Remember:

*Sin is recognising who you are – not making you less than what you are.*





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