

## **“In Christ”: Think Again**

**11.19.17**

**Romans 12:1-2**



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“Why do you think that adopting a new set of beliefs about anything proves to be so unsettling? What are some of the ways you have found yourself responding when those fixed beliefs have been called into question?”*

*“What thoughts have occupied your time and energy this week? What feelings did those thoughts produce? What actions did they provoke? Did they reinforce, or challenge your sense of belovedness? If they were faulty and disruptive, why did you continue to entertain them?”*

*“To what are you dedicating yourself? What are you sacrificing to realize the life you want? Who/what gets the best of you? What is it saying about what you really desire?”*

*“What are some of the “gospel-centered exercise” you practice which keep you attentive to your new life in Christ? How is it helping to make you less susceptible to reverting to old patterns of life that you learned before Christ?”*

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## **Teaching Notes...**

The Story asks us to imagine a world...

... which is the thoughtful and self-initiated creation of a good and loving God--- one you could feel free to call *“Father”*.

... where the life that belongs uniquely to him--- real, eternal life--- is shared with us and through us to others.

... where the claims you make are either fortified by or invalidated by the way that you actually live your life.

... where the prevalence of deception creates a scenario in which you might actually choose to either ignore or reject the life being offered.

... where evil is not the last word--- love is, and love always creates an environment of justice; where we are set right and are now putting things back in their proper order.

## **The ultimate irony of faith: we usually end up at God (with God), not by doing it right, but mostly by getting it wrong!**

In Luke 15, we are offered a story about “prodigal” (extravagant; lavish) father and his two sons. The older brother is dutiful, compliant, and dependable, but never really experiences being at home with Father. He appears to have done everything right and yet proves to be in the wrong.

The younger brother is disrespectful, narcissistic, and demanding. He appears to have done everything wrong, but ends up being celebrated as the ‘beloved’.

1 John 3:2 *“See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like... but we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure.”*

*“As dearly loved children...”* It is the indispensable, non-negotiable point of origination! Anything that makes you feel disqualified from, or argues against love, is a lie that must be categorically rejected. Any version of yourself, other than who you were meant to be, “in Christ”, is ultimately deceptive and inauthentic.

## **There is a “gospel logic” that looks something like this: Love of God leads to trust in God, which results in rest in God, and offers itself in uncomplicated obedience to God.**

Romans 12:1, is the “pivotal moment” in the entire letter, made evident by its use of the word, *“therefore”*. It’s a word that indicates a transition; that what follows will help evoke a response to everything you have just read.

*“I summons (parakeleo: same word used of the Spirit) you, in response to the compassions of God, ...”*

Paul is insisting that every response that the Story anticipates from us is deeply rooted in the compassionate movements of Jesus toward us.

### **(3) assumptions...**

#### **We rarely ever live beyond our beliefs.**

I say, “rarely”, instead of, “never”, because I think that we all behave in ways, at times, which don’t really reflect who we are. It is your beliefs that orient your life and give direction to your will.

#### **The closer your beliefs are to truth (reality) the better your chances of living well; of having the fullest experience of life (John 10:10).**

Socrates believed that *“If we only know the good, we will do it.”* That philosophy underestimates the human capacity to look squarely at truth and choose to believe something else [or, look directly at truth and choose to ignore it]. The Bible calls it **deception**.

Deception is not simply being exposed to a lie, but being exposed to truth and failing to respond. Paul says that every time we are exposed to truth, yet fail to respond, something about our heart is hardened [1 Timothy 4; Ephesians 4]. Calloused to truth--- can you imagine a worse possible scenario?

**If your life is producing self-indulgent, self-destructive behavior, somewhere along the line, you have given yourself over to a faulty story-line.**

A faulty narrative is what causes a person who seems wildly successful in their public life to sit alone in their home at night, drinking themselves into a paralysis. A false image of reality is what causes the homecoming queen to cut herself, despite the appearances of “composure”.

As simplistic as it may sound, your life will be dramatically impacted by and oriented around the confessions that you make.

**confess-** (Gr.) ‘agree with; to concede to the truth of something; to say the same thing as’.

**Transformation is the process by which God turns our love around; re-directs our hearts and affections so that they are now pursuing the right things. I have become convinced that the process of spiritual growth requires a great deal of “unlearning”.**

Sometimes we have to choose to believe something, before we ever really “know” it. Everything in our lives, “in Christ”, is a response to revelation. With revelation, we are required to choose it (trust it, believe it), before we can say that we “know” it (experience it).

**I think that we greatly under estimate the power that we possess to direct our thoughts; to give permission (authority) to dwell on certain things and to deny access to others.**

Human nature is constituted in such a way that we are able to “multi-task”. We are able to give attention to a number of tasks--- able to accomplish a great deal--- without actually being present, fully, to any one of them.

*“I have set the Lord, always, before me...”* Psalm 16:8 (ESV)

*“.. offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... which is your reasonable (logikos) response...”*

In a Greco-Roman world, temple sacrifices were commonplace, as a means of securing the pleasure of the gods, for a favorable outcome in your own life.

This language seems so antiquated, yet so contemporary. We are all “dedicated” to something. We are all already “committed” to something... to someone. We all “make sacrifices” for something.

Paul says, this only makes sense (it’s only logical), given who God is and who he has created us to be. Offer your eating, sleeping, working, recreating lives to God as a trust-filled response; from a grace-centered place that has nothing left to prove, but gladly puts our Christ-centered identity on display to invite others into “rest”.

*“Do not be conformed... but be transformed...”*

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold” (JB Phillips)

It’s hard to function faith-fully amongst a culture which, in so many ways, lives in direct conflict with Godly values without either: 1) becoming self-righteous and cynical, making both God and ourselves

less approachable and appealing, or 2) being absorbed into the culture, itself; adopting some of those values along the way and forfeiting our distinctiveness.

Every decision, every choice, is supportive of a particular system. It is reinforcing a value system which is producing a life.

**Keep the vision of the “good” before you with such intentionality and frequency that it re-trains your imagination and re-shapes the ways that you think, feel, and respond.**

What we do not possess, in the scriptures, is a linear process or a systematic strategy for renewing our mind. What we do understand is that the transformational process will require a commitment to certain practices which allow us to better accommodate the new heart and new life within us.

One example might be the practice, encouraged by Paul, of “taking our thoughts captive and making them obedient to Christ” (e.g. if we recognize feelings of loneliness, we address those assumptions of abandonment with the promise of God’s presence, and we resist the old-life tendencies to isolate ourselves by intentionally pursuing community.)

It is about being loved into a new way of thinking. Loved into a new way of believing. Loved into a new way of conducting ourselves.