

Rom. 14:19
So then let
us follow
after things
which make
for peace,
and things
whereby
we may
edify one
another.

John 8:32 And
ye shall know
the truth and
the truth shall
make you free.

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ARE WE TRANSFORMED?

by Jim Stauffer

Rom. 12:1 *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Becoming a living sacrifice and being transformed from the ways of the world are the hallmarks of a disciple of Jesus Christ (**Mat. 16:24-26**). What is interesting and informative about **Romans 12** is the apostle fully explains in detail exactly what this means and what it looks like in the lives of God's children.

In **verse 3** he reminds us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but rather to be governed by our faith in God and Christ. Once we have done this, as transformed servants of the Lord, our conduct will be guided, as was His, by a love without hypocrisy which allows us to be devoted to one another (**vss. 9,10**).

In **verses 4-13** he lists all those things such brotherly love will accomplish and the mentality with which they will be accomplished. For instance, the teacher, the exhorter or the giver who are described in **verses 6-8** does so cheerfully, giving preference to his brother in honor.

One of the most difficult things for the human mind to accomplish is humility in the aftermath of accomplishment. When we have practiced a thing to the point of efficiency we tend to become proud. The apostle teaches us here that we are to practice those things our talents enable us to with humility out of love for our brother and not to demonstrate a level of skill that would bring praise to us.

It is often debatable as to which does the most good in some cases. The actual deed of service or the love with which it is delivered.

One of the things God has accomplished for His people is to bring them closer together through His word. His message is unique. So much so that we see it rejected largely by the world around us (**Mat. 7:13,14**). If we practice the things He has commanded

of us it will assist our goal of remaining a changed person; one transformed from this world; truly a living sacrifice to the cause of Christ. After all, is that not what He is looking for in the servant He offers a crown of life, **Rev. 2:10** *'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Why do we suppose we have such exhortation in Scripture as, **Heb. 10:23** *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.* What do we suppose the purpose of admonishing one another in song worship is (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16**)?

The answer is provided in **Romans 12**. It is so we may be bonded together in a harmony that enables us to be, *rejoicing in hope, persevering in persecution, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality..... to, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* It allows us to, *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.* (**vss. 12-16**)

What is so amazing about the lessons in this chapter is how they truly transform our lives through the *renewing of our minds*. We now have the strength to *bless those who persecute you;.....Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.* (**vss. 14,17**) We can now in reality leave vengeance to the Lord, knowing full well, *He will judge the word in righteousness through a man He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men, by raising Him from the dead.* (**Acts 17:31**)

VAIN WORSHIP

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:7-9).

In **Matthew 15** the Pharisees and scribes were concerned about Jesus' disciples not washing their hands before eating. These scrupulous Jews probably had ritual cleansing on their minds; their greater concern was guarding the Law. In this case, they believed their understanding and application of the Law was the best way to insure strict obedience. Why would Jesus, a rabbi, a teacher of religion, fail to instruct His followers in the intricacies of the Law? Jesus responded by exposing their own failures to live up to the strictures of the Law. Honoring one's parents was a command from God. *"Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12).* The practice of *corban* (korban) involved a vow, a promise, to give material goods to the temple. If one took such a vow he must keep it. **Numbers 30:2** says: *"If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."* Here, though, the Pharisees were claiming that they had nothing left for their parents after giving to the temple. How convenient!

The manipulations of the Pharisees were not new. Jesus quotes **Isaiah 29:13**; here the prophet targets the leaders of Israel; Jesus makes the application to the Pharisees particularly (**Matthew 15:1**). In Isaiah's time God's people faced impending doom. Even though foreign alliances would bring ruin, the Israelites still showed a lack of faith as they looked for safety in the nations around them. God's people had religion; they lacked reality. Even in worship with their mouths, their hearts were elsewhere. This is another illustration of what Isaiah had faced for a long time. When called to prophetic office, the Lord said: *"Go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive" (Isaiah 6:9).* Even with Assyria close by, the Jews refused to turn to God. The Jews of Jesus' time were the ancestors of those in Isaiah's time. They were mirroring the same attitudes and rebellion as their forefathers. The question is: Could we today be their kinfolks, too?

Unwritten laws, opinions, and traditions sometimes creep into the church. Reducing our relationship with God to merely a list of do's and don't's misses the true intent of what Jesus wants for us—changed hearts. Whatever the issue, whatever the question, we must remember that God's word always settles the matter. When we exchange God's word for our own desires and tastes, we lose what we need the most—fear of the

Lord. Fear and respect for our Savior's will keep our Savior at the center of our lives. Any attempt to circumvent His will always results in vain worship, vain lives, and vain religion.

Randy Harshbarger

"Their Heart Was Hardened"

by Hal Hammons

Throughout Scripture, the word "heart" is used in reference to that part of a man that either accepts or rejects God. The Jews at Pentecost were *"pierced to the heart" (Acts 2:37)*; Jesus exhorted His listeners to be *"pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8)*; Paul said of the Gentiles at large that *"their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21)*. Most famous of all, of course, is the heart of Pharaoh, which the text says was hardened by God (**Exodus 4:21**) and also by Pharaoh himself (**Exodus 8:14**). Is this a contradiction in the Scriptures? No, it simply illustrates the working of God's message in the hearts of men. Identical ovens heated to identical temperatures in identical circumstances will harden clay and melt beeswax. We wouldn't send such ovens back to be repaired; we would accept the results as a consequence of the nature of the two elements being heated. The gospel working in the hearts of man should be viewed in the same way. It softens some while hardening others. There is no question that God *"hardens"* the hearts of many, but blaming Him for that makes as much sense as blaming the oven for baking the clay instead of melting it.

The real issue at hand is not the nature of the gospel, but rather the nature of the heart. The material available for spiritual construction is described in **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**. The builder (i.e., preacher) works as diligently as he knows how with the material at hand. Sometimes outstanding temples to the Lord are built; that is because of the high quality of the souls in that proximity. As Paul said, the preacher deserves little credit for this -- *"God was causing the growth" (vs. 7)*. Other preachers might preach in territory with few if any souls interested in the gospel; the churches that result from such work are compared to *"wood, hay, straw"* in **verse 12**. The fires of trial will reveal the church for what it is in due course of time.

The same principle works in the lives of individuals. We either are or are not receptive to the gospel. That tendency can change, but it tends to remain the same and in fact becomes increasingly the same way. Many in the world are sent *"a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false" (2 Thessalonians 2:11)*, not because God wants them to be lost but because they themselves have set their hearts to be lost, and every stimulus put in their path is going to tend to push them further in that direction.

Generally we think of hardening in the way described above – bad people becoming worse.

However, in our text we find Jesus' closest disciples being hardened (**verse 52**). Had they ceased believing in the Lord? Of course not. This just tells us that their hearts had not become as softened to the truth as they should have. We are reminded of the words of the father of the demon possessed boy in **Mark 9:24** – *"I believe; help my unbelief."* No matter how long we have followed the Lord, we can still lose our faith at critical times in our life. This happened more than once to the disciples; usually it was because they got the Lord's plans confused with their own. Many aspects of Jesus' ministry (including His total command of the elements, as was demonstrated when He walked on the water) were still foreign to the apostles. We should be warned: If it can happen to the closest of Jesus' confederates, it certainly can happen to us.

The story of the walking on the water is prefaced by the feeding of the 5,000, which we will not detail here. We remember the basics of the story; certainly you would think it must have made a tremendous impact on the disciples. But we see in the storm on the lake that they had not been softened to Jesus' teaching as completely as should have been the case.

They should have learned, for instance, that Jesus cares about His followers. He cared enough about total strangers to provide food for them that very day. Does it make sense that He would abandon His closest friends to a watery grave? If not, we should be comforted that He will not forget about us in our hour of trial, either. He has a vital interest in our welfare, and we can count on Him acting on that interest.

They should have learned that Jesus can do much with little. All it took was a handful of food to feed thousands of people. Should it not have been enough for them, in their hour of weakness, to see the Lord walking on the water, completely unphased by the adverse conditions? **Verse 48** says *"He intended to pass by them"*; evidently Jesus thought He had given them all the encouragement they needed simply by being seen. Unfortunately, as is often the case when faith fails, the occasion was used by the disciples to make their mental state worse -- they thought He was a ghost (**verse 49**). And are we better? Do we demand that the Lord minister to us in the way we choose, rather than accepting what encouragement He offers through the agency of His word and our brethren?

Also we see the lesson that nature's laws mean nothing to Jesus. We can twist the laws of physics and common sense alike to our hearts' content and never come up with a rational explanation for the miraculous meal the disciples served that day. They should have known that the way Jesus taunted nature's basic rules of order was a reflection of His Divine nature, and that He could do similarly inexplicable things at His discretion. We should not think that Jesus will break the rules for us in the way that He did then, but we should be able to put our full confidence in the Creator and Sustainer of the

universe, with the full knowledge that He is fully capable of carrying our soul safely through this life and on into the next.

And yet we see the disciples astonished at Jesus' power. Why? Because *"their heart was hardened"*. They had chosen, consciously or unconsciously, to ignore the lessons Jesus had taught them. But if we make the decision to soften our hearts to receive Jesus' message, nothing will astonish us. We will see Him forgive the unforgivable, give spiritual life to the spiritually dead, bring joy to the cynic, turn pessimists into optimists, and grant hope to the hopeless – and all the time simply smile and say, "That's our Savior!"

via e Good News; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Taken from Market Street Messenger

What Do You See?

Don Truex

It's easy to criticize and complain. In fact, it takes no special ability or intellect at all to be a first class malcontent. And so, it is easy to chastise brethren, deride decisions, and generally be disagreeable and troublesome. But I tell you, there is a lot of good in the church of our Lord. I unashamedly believe that the church is composed of the very best people on God's earth. What could be better than scores of men and women devoted and dedicated to doing right? And even in this day of unbridled luxury and indulgence, what could be more pleasant to find than multitudes of Christians ready to make an expenditure of time, money, or effort in order that the Lord Jesus might be proclaimed and His brethren in the local church edified?

It is refreshing to see Christians who live life with exuberance; who look at life from the highest of perspectives because they, like Andrew of old, *"have found the Messiah"* (**John 1:41**). And, too, it is a pleasure to find brethren everywhere who speak good things of both the Lord and their brethren, and who share with untold multitudes of other faithful Christians that very real hope of inheriting a Home with God Almighty. No, we are not perfect but our deficiencies pale in comparison to the good among us. We are, my friends, a marvelously blessed people.

via Sowing e Seed; Plainfield, Indiana.

Eph. 4:1 *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Eph. 2:19 *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

1Pet. 2:9 *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

HOURS OF WORSHIP

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

Visitors welcome

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We offer Correspondence Courses

Evangelist and Editor Jim Stauffer

Elders: Ron Peck and Jim Stauffer

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PLEASE REMEMBER JAN
PATRICK, STEPHEN KIMKER, JIM
NEWMAN AND STEVE WIMP IN
PRAYER AS THEY DEAL WITH
HEALTH ISSUES.

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE CLASS
- FOLLOWING THE MESSIAH
RON PECK

WEDNESDAY EVENING BIBLE
CLASS - FORGIVENESS
JIM STAUFFER

SUNDAY SERMON: JESUS KNOWS
WHAT IS IN MAN - JOHN
2:23-25



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10