

Goodmorning! I am so glad to be with you all this morning, especially on a morning when we get to see Pat baptized, what an amazing privilege it is for me to preach on this special morning. For those who were just baptized, you are now starting a journey with God, the most exciting decision you can make. Before you is a life of worship unto God, a life of service to God and a life of telling others about the peace, joy and salvation you have found, sounds amazing!

Unfortunately, so often Christians get tangled up, worried and even stressed about a big question that almost all of us have thought about at some point in our life. What is God's will for my life and am I currently living in that will? What job does God want me to have? Who does God want me to marry? What Christian university does God want me to go to? This all can become very worrisome, scary and discouraging, especially when others tell you that "This is not God's will for you, this is what God wants for you". Have you ever gotten that?

I remember a while ago I was talking with a friend at college who asked, "Why can we not simply receive an email from God telling us exactly what he wants for our life, where he wants us to go, what he wants us to do"? At the time I had no answer and wondered the same thing myself, if God desires a relationship with us then why does he not make things as clear as he can? Why does it appear to be so hard to know the will of God?

I will not forget the response that our professor gave when the same question was asked in his class saying "There would be no need for relationship if we received an email from God every time we needed his wisdom. God desires a much deeper relationship with him that email could ever provide." Most of us are likely still wondering how we know what God's will is, and I am super excited to say that we can find all of this in Romans 12. Not only will we see how to know God's will, but also how to live our lives according to his will. I hope and pray that these verses will be of encouragement to you. Let us all come before God in prayer.

\*Pray\*

The passage that I chose is found in Romans, we already listened to the passage spoken this morning, but I would like to read the passage out to you again so that it will be fresh in your thoughts.

Starting at verse 1 of chapter 12.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> 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.

As you can all see, I have chosen a passage that takes place part way through the book of Romans, a very important part of Romans none the less. Knowing this, we need to look at the context of chapter 12. Romans is a letter written to the church in the city of Rome during a time when Paul wanted to visit, but was not able to. The letter was likely written 25 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and was written to explain the gospel to the church of Rome completely, confront the tension between the Gentile and Jewish believers, and it is also a possibility that Paul was hoping to be supported by the church in Rome for his later mission to Spain and so he was establishing a relationship for support. Romans is often referred to as the "Gospel according to Paul", and this is fitting as Paul explains the whole Gospel in the book of Romans. Paul says in 5:8 "*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*"

Up until Romans 12, Paul speaks about how we as humans "have all sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God". We are all separated from God. Then Paul talks about how God

sacrificed his son for us so that we might be in relationship with him again, and not take on the punishment we deserve. Paul goes on to say how we are sanctified through Christ, made new, and how God reaches out to the Gentiles and Jews alike. All of this happens right up until Romans 12. All of the gospel is laid out for us.

We then come to Romans 12, which is a major turning point in Romans. Here Paul switches from telling us what God has done for us to how we should respond. The first word in chapter 12 is “Therefore”. This starts the first point on how we may know the Will of God.

Often times within Evangelical Christianity, especially pop-Christianity I see verses being quoted either outside of context, or quoted without the context given, however Romans 12:1-2 desperately needs to be read knowing the context. “Therefore” is a word used to build on something previous. You would not say “Therefore I will go make myself a sandwich” without first explaining that you are hungry. In this case “Therefore” is building on the gospel and tells us that we are to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice in view of God’s mercy. Paul spoke for 11 chapters on what God’s mercy is, how we are depraved, evil, we have fallen short but God gave his son up for sacrifice. There truly is no other mercy that can fit in this verse. No other mercy measures up.

Some of you may know me well enough to know that I really like pick-up trucks, I often think of pick-up trucks, specifically a brand new Ram. I am sure that many of you are the same as I am with something, but think of coming to me with a brand new Ram truck with all the bells and whistles and telling me that it is all mine if I paint your fence. Well I tell you what, I would be so motivated, that I would do the best job you have ever seen. There would be so many coats of paint on that fence. Heck I would offer to paint your fence for a lifetime. Why? Because this is

a gift that is so incredible, that I could never afford myself. You also have the right to expect this out of me, you have given me a 45,000 dollar item for a day's work, I had better do an amazing job, I better give everything I have to that day's work. It is the same way with the mercy God has shown us, except on a scale infinitely more so.

Being motivated by God's mercy we are to sacrifice our bodies and this is our worship? First we need to know what Paul means by sacrifice. When Paul is talking about offering our body, he is speaking of our sinful flesh, all of who we are, all of what we think, all of what we do, all of what we do, good or bad, this encompasses all of us. It is a lot easier to give up something we have externally such as a car or even money, a house, than it is to give all of who we are because it requires us to give up the external things to God and our internal securities. Perhaps our securities are our sin, our pride, our self-confidence, our relationships, our family. These are hard things to sacrifice, really, really hard.

Many of you are married, many will be married in the future and perhaps some are going to be married very soon. I want you to imagine your wedding day, you are so incredibly excited to marry this person and you are madly in love with that person. That day your spouse pulls you aside and says to you, "I am really excited to get married to you, but I am hoping you are okay with the idea of sharing me, I do not actually want to be completely committed to you." Your response would hopefully be "No way", because when you get married you give all of yourself to one person, and the same is with God, we are to sacrifice all of us. So why do we not give all of ourselves, all that we have, all that we are to God?

God is so incredibly patient and merciful, because we are often that cheating spouse, or the spouse who is rarely present or open but that should not be reason to offer any less to God

because this is our worship to him. This is how we are to worship God, the sacrifice of our lives to him, and we must be alive, holy and pleasing to him. God has standards of what he will take as a sacrifice, and he should. It needs to be holy and pleasing to him.

Our second point leads to this phrase “Do not conform”. This is an interesting phrase that most people would like to agree with. “Conformity” is not a pleasant word in our society, especially when describing someone or a group of people, however conformity happens more than we realize. It can be as innocent as a young child deciding that they now like “Smarties” better than “M & M’s” because their older brother likes “Smarties” or it can be something more significant such as us conforming to cultures or friend’s interests. Often times when in a new friend group we conform to the interests of that group, city-raised kids become cowboy want-to-be, Vancouver Canuck fans become Montreal Canadiens fans and the list could go on.

This passage however is speaking about conforming to sinful patterns of this world. It is easy to look at this passage and think “I do not conform, I never swear, I always watch what I drink and I make sure that I watch movies that are rated PG and below”, but we all conform, likely in ways we do not even realize. I have come up with three different categories that we can conform to, and there is likely more but these three are a great place to start with.

The first is our culture. It’s interesting that as our church is studying the book of Judges on Wednesday nights, there are often comments about how the surrounding cultures had affected Israel so much, and those comments are true! Israel needed very little time amongst other nations before they worshipped other gods, and did horrific things but I wonder if we realize how much the church is like Israel at this point. I am convicted of the North American church’s adoption of cultural norms. North America is obsessed with the glorification of brutal violence, something

that certainly is not God's desire for his people yet we find horrifically violent movies and video games in our houses and sometimes even in our church events. North America promotes individuality and self-glorification, yet the Bible teaches unity of church and glorification of God and yet we see church services catered to individuals, people leaving churches because they do not like the music or people switching churches because the other church has a cool new youth room. Church and Christianity has largely become about ourselves, much like the majority of cultural practices. We become so easily conformed to culture without realizing it.

The second way we conform is to our generation. I cannot speak for other generations but my generation has a serious commitment issue. Matthew 5:37 talks about simply saying a "yes" or a "no" but yet my generation likes to play a game of maybe. If invited out to an event or asked if someone can be of help, that person says "maybe" so that they can decide at the last minute of whether or not something better, more fun has come along. Sometimes no maybe is involved, the person did commit beforehand but outright backs out because something better has come along. Now perhaps there are times when this is appropriate, when we actually do not know if we can make it but we work hard to give a yes or no to the person asking as soon as possible, but I see more often than not my generation using "maybe" to see what better event may come along. Sadly this is something I see often within the church, so many of us are conformed to this generational norm. If you are from a different generation than I am, what is something that your generation does that is worldly?

The third way that I see us as the North American church conforming is to our economic group. Different people conform to different scales certainly, some of us are minimalists and others worship money. Many of us look to the health and wealth prosperity church with disgust, saying things like "they do not worship God, they worship comfort" while we sit in our living

room sipping Starbucks on our leather couches with a big tv playing in the background. We have become so adapted to our standard of living here in North America that even as Christians we question those who choose to live with less.

There is a friend of mine in college who owns one pair of pants. Only one. He does not own one pair of pants because his family is poor, in fact his family is very well off but he has decided that he has so much so he wants to live with what he needs out of thankfulness. It is interesting that many people at a BIBLE college questioned him on this and thought that this was awful! He needed more pants for goodness sake! I am wondering however, how many people around the world are in my friend's situation, not because they realize they have so much but they really have nothing, while I have over 15 pairs of pants in my drawer. I have heard of others who question fellow Christians who want to downsize in housing, saying that they will not have near enough space when most of the world could not imagine living in the gigantic properties we live in here in Prince George. We get this from culture, we are to be in awe of the creator but instead we are in awe of what we have created. Christians, by in large are so incredibly conformed to our economic groups in North America.

Paul says to not conform but to be TRANSFORMED. What do we transform ourselves to? How do we transform ourselves? I have encouraging news, that transformation takes time, whether it is a car being transformed into a Hot Rod or a boy into a man, it takes time. We can be at peace knowing that our transformation will not be instantaneous, nor can it be, but we will continue to be transformed throughout our lives as we allow God to work in us. We should not see this as an excuse to transform later on in life, but Paul is encouraging us to allow ourselves to be transformed constantly.

Transformation is also a word that describes a radical change. When we hear about something being transformed, we do not think of one small thing changing but the majority, if not all of that thing changing. The text implies the same thing here. Our lives, our very being should be completely transformed by the renewing of our minds. As we sacrifice our worldly ways to God, we renew our minds to God's way of understanding, to his desires, to his love for people. How do you know that you are being transformed? That is a fair question as many people are not great at self-reflection.

Here is my first answer to that question. If neighbors, co-workers, business partners, acquaintances, etc. are not taking a notice of your behavior and asking you why or how you live your life so differently, then your life is likely not transformed. You are still living a conformed lifestyle.

This part of the verse really hit me when I was preparing this sermon. I often get remarks from those around me saying "Spencer, why do you have to do things so differently?" or "Spencer that was very stupid", but generally those comments come right after I have decided to throw gasoline on a fire, or ask a friend to pull me behind their car on my skateboard. It is very rare that I receive a comment from someone asking why I behave so differently about something that actually matters... This verse makes it clear that the Jesus follower should be so different that he/she sticks out like a sore thumb, and this week I was convinced that I am a long ways away from that.

Can people notice a difference in the way you spend your money? How you treat your wife? How many hours you work? What your worship? When was the last time someone approached you about your radically different life? Was it recent? If so, that's great!



Here is a second test; ask your parents, wife, husband, close friends, brother, sister, boyfriend or girlfriend if they see a difference in your life. A neighbor or acquaintance will see your public actions, but a good friend, family member or spouse knows you intimately. What would they say if you asked them this? In what ways would you be different from the world? In what ways would you be the same? Being transformed is hard, it requires that you trust God and place your identity in him, it effectively ruins your life, but Luke 17:33 states “Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it.” This sounds like a lot of discomfort, why would anyone want to do this?

At this point, some may feel very convicted, others of you may be un-phased, and others may not see the point in trying to be different at all, but Paul tells us why we sacrifice ourselves, why we resist conformation, why we pursue transformation; so that we will be able to “test and approve what God’s will is”. We do all these things so that we may know God’s will, and act accordingly.

In giving ourselves up as a living sacrifice, we leave behind our worldly ways, in resisting conformity we can allow ourselves to be transformed into God’s likeness and in this way God’s will becomes clear to us. We no longer have the ways of the world fogging our vision, because God opens up the eyes of our hearts. No longer do we need to worry, panic, stress over which city to live in, or what car to buy, because as we sacrifice ourselves daily, and renew our minds, God’s ways become our ways, his love becomes our love.

We see earthly things as God sees them, created, good, and to be used, not worshipped. We must remember that we do these things in light of what God has done for us, in light of the gospel. When we really get the gospel, we see what Jesus went through to save us, then we

cannot help but sacrifice ourselves daily, and we long to be transformed to his likeness. Last week Pastor Dan preached out of Matthew 7:21 that states “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Wow. Only those who do the will of the Father. We can only know the will of the Father by first getting the gospel and as an inevitable result, sacrifice our lives. God is giving something to us that is so far beyond our own reach. Do you understand how amazing that is? Have you gotten the gospel? Do you know God’s will and hunger to know more? I too am asking the same question, because it is so incredibly important, so let us take a moment to meditate on this. \*Pause\*

I am hoping that these words are an encouragement to you. Remember that God reveals his will as we sacrifice ourselves and allow ourselves to be transformed into his likeness. We no longer need to worry or panic but need to pursue him. I pray and hope that we all took time to examine our hearts, the gospel may ruin your earthly life but connects us to his “good, pleasing, and perfect will.”