



Seeing a World of Difference

Lesson 10

by

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The Truth about Spirituality

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“They honored God and gave him thanks....They worshiped and served... the Creator who is blessed forever! Amen.” —The Apostle Paul (Romans 1:21, 25)

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.” —Moses (Exodus 20:3–5)

The Truth about Spirituality

One little warm-blooded five-year-old, when told by his mother to put on a jacket, replied, “Mama, I’m not cold. God just made me like this! I’m not like other people.” Christians are not like other people! Their source of spiritual warmth comes from the way God made us—to worship God the Creator and Redeemer. Christians are not like those who worship nature or their inner divinity. Instead, they worship God, basking in the love of Christ and naturally giving him thanks and praise. Paul is so full of praise for God that it bubbles up constantly in his writing, as we see in Romans 1:25, where Paul speaks of “the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen!” This mini-refrain is a shortened form of Old Testament hymns of praise. Here are a few examples:

- “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” (Psalm 41:13)
- “Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!” (Psalm 72:19)
- “Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.” (Psalm 89:52)
- “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 106:48)

These Old Testament texts celebrate the everlasting God—his amazing, mysterious, immortal being, and his acts of goodness. To praise the transcendent and loving God, who is radically “other,” is the essence of biblical spirituality. From the depth of their created being, creatures praise their Creator. (“God made us like this!”) In our biblical praise and piety, God is blessed, glorified, honored and thanked for his act of *creation* but also for his act of redemption. Unbelievers neither “honor God nor give him thanks” (Romans 1:21). In their rebellion, they reject the Creator’s existence and thank and honor what God *made*, including themselves. Because they refuse the Creator, they also refuse the work of salvation God offers in Christ, so they cannot praise God as Savior.

Jesus, Worthy of Praise

Paul's praise to the "Creator, who is blessed forever" reappears in Romans 9:5, where he calls *Christ* "God over all, blessed forever. Amen." He recognizes the divine nature of Christ in two ways:

1. He explicitly affirms it – "Christ who is God over all;"
2. He ascribes to Christ the same honor and blessing he ascribed to God in Romans 1:25, with exactly the same terminology – "Christ...blessed forever. Amen."

We not only owe praise and blessing to God for his act of creation, but for his divine incarnation and work of gracious redemption accomplished through the Son. Such blessing captures the ultimate experience of true worship, described in the book of Revelation. John takes us into the heavenly courtroom, where, in the background, the entire created cosmos is worshipping:

I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. (Revelation 5:13-14)

The Great Little Amen

Did you notice the little word, "Amen"? Paul uses it often. The four living creatures say it. "Amen" is a little word with a big meaning. Saying "amen" binds you to an affirmation, in this case, the expression of praise. "Amen" acknowledges, in complete faith, the certainty of the statement. The "amen" of the worshipers binds them as a solemn oath. Our "amen" is a response of faith and commitment to the object of our praise, namely God. Jesus is even called the "Amen" of God (Revelation 3:14). Paul wants believers to say the "amen" of praise to both God the Creator and to Christ.

Old Testament believers also said "amen" to a *curse* on the worship of idols (described in Romans 1:23). God says, "Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the Lord, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret." The people are then to say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:15). The opposition between Twoist and Oneist spirituality is stark: we affirm the former with all our hearts and agree with God's curse on the latter. Paul takes his cue from the Old Testament spirituality of Israel. After their deliverance from certain death at the hand of Pharaoh, Moses and the people of Israel sing a song of praise to the Lord:

I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Exodus 15:1-2)

It's funny: singing is often absent in pagan gatherings. Oneist self-worship doesn't sing too well. Pagans have no idea whom to thank, but the psalmist says: "I give thanks to *you*, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify and honor your name forever" (Psalm 86:12). The singing Roman church "with one voice...glorifies the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6). Giving thanks to the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ for *everything* is what Christians do (Colossians 3:17).

Twoist, theistic spirituality does not celebrate our inner divinity, but offers a life of praise to the external God who has done all things for our good. Theistic spirituality is stunning and unique. Spiritual worship is not a state of ecstatic trance, whereby "in the spirit," as power-wielding shamans, we manipulate the divine, demand favors from the gods, and seek inner knowledge. Rather, life in the Spirit is worship and service *to* God for what he has done.

The focus is on God's gracious actions for his people, not on the emotional state of the worshiper. In Romans 1, Paul limits his discussion of worship to the worship of God as *Creator*. But in Romans 12, he explicitly includes God as *Savior*. Paul implies that these two passages should be read together for a full description of worship. Notice the clear parallels between these two passages.

Romans 1:18–25	Romans 12:1–2
Undiscerning Minds	Discerning Minds
Worship of Creation	Spiritual Worship
Dishonoring their Bodies	Offering Holy Bodies

In light of these parallels, it is fair to mine Romans 12:1–2 for Paul's teaching on a theme he began in Romans 1:18ff.¹ In Romans 1, Paul says that the fundamental orientation of our life is "worship and service of the Creator." In Romans 12, Paul takes into account God's saving work in Christ, and fully develops that idea, calling it "spiritual service," literally, "worship," to be expressed in our bodies and our minds.

¹ See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008), 216–22.

Holy Bodies: Acceptable Behavior

Oneism maintains that all religions experience the same mystical union with the divine. But the differences between spirituality in Oneism and Twoism are enormous! After writing eleven chapters (Romans 1:1 to 11:36) explaining the gospel and its application to Jews and pagans, Paul begins Romans 12 with a huge “therefore,” a pivotal word that commands attention. Paul says:

I appeal to you *therefore*, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

The total devotion of “worship” and “service” can be given to God or to something else. Worship should not be judged on its *intensity* but on its *object*. Worshiping and serving the transcendent Creator produces not *self-worship* but *self-sacrifice*, which is the very reason we were created. As Moses says, “It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall *serve*” (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Twoist Spirituality: The Sacrifice of Holy Bodies

When Paul says “*present* your bodies” (Rom 12:1), he is recalling the Old Testament priests who were called “to *present* themselves and minister in the name of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18:5; 21:5). Priests were separated to be *entirely devoted to* and *made holy for* service to God. They received no inheritance of land, because God was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20). They were “set apart” to carry the ark (Deuteronomy 10:8). Most Levites were not of Aaron’s descendants and thus were not priests, but they were nonetheless set aside as a kind of “living sacrifice” to the Lord (Numbers 8:10–11). When David prepares his son Solomon to build the temple, he gives him “the plan for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the *service* in the house of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 28:13). In the New Testament, all believers are called to and enabled for priestly service (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Our “spiritual service,” says Paul, is to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. Priestly service always involved *sacrifice*. Paul wants believers, who come to Christ as needy sinners, to think of themselves both as full-time priests *and* as full-time “sacrifices.” In the Old Testament, the sacrifices were dead animals, but Paul calls humans to be a “living” sacrifice—human beings living a life sold out for God, ready even for martyrdom itself. The acceptable living sacrifice, pleasing to God, is not a few bucks in the offering plate, but our *bodies*, entirely devoted to his service. (The Levites mentioned above are a preview of this dedication.) Spirituality is not a mystically produced high but a rational, conscious commitment to self-sacrifice. We often feel that “spiritual service” means giving God our “spiritual” side: our dreams, aspirations, imagination, good intentions, moments of ecstasy or our vast vision for his kingdom. God says, “No, I want your body!” Why our bodies? There are at least two reasons.

First, our body language must be in sync with our public speech. We all hate hypocrites. Unfortunately, many high-profile Christian leaders have fallen prey to hypocrisy, condemning on world famous TV the greed or sexual sin that they are themselves committing! Such false shepherds and leaders exist in the church in every country. Young people often leave the Christian faith because they can see in the lives of their parents the sins they have been taught to flee. Church members walk away from church when they discover that their elders are caught up in pornography or adultery.

Second, our physical bodies visibly witness to God the Creator of everything, physical and material. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:26, citing Psalm 24:1, which continues: “for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers” (Psalm 24:2). What we do in our bodies shows our spirituality to the world. God cares about our bodies. Jesus healed bodies, not only souls, when he was on earth. The effect of the Christian gospel is seen in one’s bodily lifestyle. Of course, there is no guarantee that God will spare us from sickness, danger or persecution. Nonetheless, the life of a Christian is, in general, a more peaceful, productive and joyful life than that of someone seeking the many lusts and pleasures of this world. When Jesus healed the **Gadarene demoniac**, the man moved from being lonely, anti-social and out of control to a position of sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind (Luke 8:35).

Gnostics and the Body

Christianity is not like the old heresy called Gnosticism.ⁱⁱ “Christian” Gnostics rejected both the creation and the body, claiming that the spirit/soul was the only important thing. The body was an unworthy receptacle, made by the foolish creator god, who for his sins would one day be hustled off to hell. They worshiped the great impersonal Spirit, the “Father of the Totalities,” behind all things. They had good reason: they loved the freedom that bodiless “spirituality” gave them. Such spirituality left them unencumbered by daily, earthly constraints of physical living—like marriage, childbearing, or an eight-to-five job. One of their favorite expressions was *abasileutos*—“without a king,” expressing radical autonomy. You find the same notion in Hinduism, according to famous twentieth-century guru, **Krishnamurti**, who declared that the truth of Hinduism is “No authority, no master.” Autonomy is the essence of Oneism. Spiritual feminists consider “egalitarian creative *autonomy*” as “*the pillar of the modern world.*” They refuse the constraints of their biological makeup, stating that “biology is not destiny.” Our culture is committed to the realization of spiritual and physical *autonomy* and freeeeedom!

Such freedom was the goal of the “kingless” Gnostics. Some were ascetic, denying the reality of the body, whereas others were libertarian, doing anything they chose with the body. Both brands deny the Creator. Today’s spiritualists are like the Gnostic libertarians, who believed they could do

ⁱⁱ See Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992).

anything they wanted with the body, “dishonoring...their bodies among themselves” (Romans 1:24). We will discuss this more fully in the next lesson.

Paul denounces **Gnosticism** when he says, “Everything God created is good” (1 Timothy 4:4). The Bible is deeply committed to the physical and the corporal—because God created them. The creation is a beautiful, physical thing. The body is “sown” or created by God a natural or physical body (1 Corinthians 15:44). Christian spirituality includes the *created* body because salvation presupposes the goodness of creation, and Jesus’ physical body was raised. This is why Christian spirituality does not seek “out-of-body experiences.” We are not saved *out of creation*. We are reconciled to it and to its Creator. Christianity begins like a police novel, with a missing body—not an ecstatic “out-of-body” experience, a spiritual idea, a social program or a moving poem. It starts not with an empty body or an empty mind, but with an empty *tomb*. God the Creator would not leave the body of Jesus in the grave. Jesus’ bodily resurrection is a sign of the future of his people and of creation as a whole. “The creation, and we ourselves, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

By starting with the body, Paul emphasizes that the God who *saves* us is God the Creator, who *made* us. “You were bought with a price (the body of Jesus), so glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). If God respected his work in saving and raising the body of Jesus, we need to respect that created work in both our sexuality and our spirituality.

To be spiritual, God’s way, we should not seek to get outside our bodies through trance or mystical transport. We should not get in touch with the unconscious by denying the place of the mind in our physical body. The body is not something to be mistreated or exchanged at death for another imprisonment in matter in an endless cycle of re-incarnation. Rather, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for *what he has done in the body*, whether good or evil” (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27).

The Gnostics denied the incarnation. They could not believe that God would assume a human body. According to them, Christ sat on the branch of a tree laughing, watching the man, Jesus, die on the cross. Paul, on the other hand, gives great dignity to our corporal reality. He states that “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19). “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:17).

To be spiritual, we need to remember that we are physical! We must not deface the created bodies we have been given: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions” (Romans 6:12). Pornography has no place in a holy body, nor does any kind of sex outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage. We cannot claim to be spiritually in touch with Jesus while at the same time practicing perverted forms of sexuality. We must live now in the body that pleases God, so that when we come to the end of our lives, we believers can say, with Paul: “it is my eager expectation...that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20). The body is front and center in biblical spirituality

as the means and place of spiritual service to God. But it is not just the body. It is a *holy* body that is acceptable to God.

Holiness and the Body

The Old Testament sacrifice had to be “an animal...without blemish” (Leviticus 3:1). An Israelite brought the best of his herd, not an old haggard he-goat or skeletal excuse for a cow. To be received by God, the sacrifice had to be spotless, an outward sign of holiness. As we mentioned earlier, holiness is mostly about *cosmology*—how the world is divinely put together. We live in a morally and physically structured universe that we did not create. Our life is workable because we act as if the laws of morality are as true as the physical laws of nature. Ultimately, the moral standard pressing in on us is *holiness*, which is the shape of the material universe in which we all live. Remember that to be “holy” is to be set apart for a specific function in a rightful place. God is holy, because he is separate from the creation, with a distinct “place” that only he can fill. God has created us in distinct, holy places and functions. Twoism recognizes the distinctive nature of these different places and functions. Because Oneism refuses to acknowledge them, it is *profoundly unholy*. If holiness is the key to the cosmos, then witnessing to that holiness in our bodily conduct is the central calling of Christian believers. Forgive the use of a four letter word—*submission*.

Many are shocked when they hear Christians say that we must submit to people in authority and to God himself. Biblical submission is an essential part of biblical spirituality. Submission brings honor and glory to God as Creator. Take biblical marriage, (see lesson 12), which is not about subservience or freedom, but about the harmony of male and female roles, lived with dignity out of love for God. Biblical submission is ennobling, not demeaning. It rejoices in the distinctive creation structures, made for our good by the will of a loving Creator. Submission is integral to biblical spirituality.

We are commanded to submit to created structures: magistrates, church leaders, employers, husbands, parents, Christ and God—because all creation is “set apart” to reflect the holiness of God. If holiness is the essence of righteousness, then sin is the very essence of unholiness. So Paul exhorts the ex-partying pagans of the church in Rome: “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Romans 6:13).

As Paul puts it, “none of us lives to himself” (Romans 14:7), so Christian holy living is corporate. Individual holiness and righteousness build up the body of Christ, whereas individual unholiness and sin cause the body to suffer. Even in the Old Testament, the priestly holy service was to be performed not only by a designated priestly tribe, but by the whole body of the saints.

The Lord says, “[Y]ou shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), an idea that is picked up by the apostle Peter, who describes the Church as “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Christ’s goal is to “present

the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). The Church is not a place to service our own needs, but a place to serve God by serving others in *corporate* witness to the holy name of God.

Spirituality in Twoism is service. Some of what we call *spiritual* activities, like prayer and praise, are called “service” in the New Testament—responses provoked by God’s act of grace. In Hebrews, the writer reminds himself and his readers: “through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

In the Old Testament, “sacrifices of praise” were “brought into the Temple” as part of the sacrificial system (Jeremiah 17:26). Hosea tells the people to say to the Lord: “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay as bulls the *offering of our lips*” (Hosea 14:2). Praise to God is more valuable than an offering of expensive bulls. Speaking about God and to God are aspects of a life of sacrifice. The book of Hebrews speaks of other activities, like “doing good and sharing what you have,” as “sacrifices...pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13:16). This doubtless includes obedience to the spiritual overseers, who “have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God” (Heb 13:7, 16, 24); faithful attendance in the Christian assembly (Hebrews 10:25); and feeding one’s soul at the “altar” where Jesus’ offering of his flesh and blood is celebrated (Hebrews 13:10, 12). Spiritual sacrifice includes the essential elements of the Church, as described in the Scripture—hearing God’s Word, receiving the sacraments of baptism and communion, and submitting to church discipline.

Being a Christian is a life-long program that involves your entire being, because we have a holy identity: “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Christians have a noble calling—to reflect to the world who God is. The Cherubim cry: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). By our intentional holy living, we show “the whole earth” that creation is not a chance, evolving mass; not animals in a life and death battle for survival; not an autonomous, self-defined existence—but the gloriously finely-tuned product of a God, who has his own holy place and has given us ours. Our life of sacrifice is a response to God for his gift of mercy. The holy ones *become* holy.

Transformed Minds: Wise Thinking

Paul’s “therefore” affects not only our bodies, but our minds. God wants *renewed/transformed minds*: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

Many think that walking in the Spirit means a rejection or suppression of the mind. Not so. Paul speaks of a *renewed mind*, but he also uses its opposite, a *depraved mind*. The Greek verb “discern” is the same in Romans 12:2, “a transformed mind to *discern*,” as in Romans 1:28: “And since they

did not see fit to [*discern*] God, God gave them up to an [*undiscerning* or *depraved*] mind to do what ought not to be done." Don't miss the parallels. A depraved mind is "undiscerning"; a renewed mind is "discerning." The depraved mind misunderstands God's will and does what ought not to be done. The discerning mind knows God's will and does what ought to be done. Paul describes the depraved mind: "By their unrighteousness," people "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). Though they knew God as Creator, "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21).

So we see that there are two ways of using the mind: one is the Truth, the other is the Lie. You will find this stark antithesis throughout Paul's letters. He contrasts the "wisdom of God" and the "wisdom of this world" (1 Corinthians 1:20–21); being "conformed" to the world with being "transformed" in our mind. We can only know God's will for our lives by acquiring the wisdom of God.

The Mind Goes to College

Evangelistic methodology on US college campuses in the 1960s was to reach the BMOC (big man on campus), often the star football player, whose conversion would have a snowball effect. Things have changed. Christian college ministries now work "under the radar" in the atmosphere of multicultural interfaith. Intimidation of Christians is a fact of college life that evokes several possible reactions:

- Fear: Use the Soft-Sell Approach

The multicultural and multi-religious worldview pressures Christians into silence, not only in the US but in other countries where Christianity was dominant for many generations. Certain evangelical student ministries, once known for unapologetic gospel preaching and evangelism, now want to be known only for their kindness to all. They are afraid to be too confrontational and content themselves with showing love to others and waiting to be asked about their faith.

- Apology: Modify the Message

Some Christians believe that modifying our message will improve our reputation with outsiders. If we avoid mentioning sin (especially sexual sin), the cross or personal salvation, we will be fine. Let's tweak our techniques, update our message, and participate more heartily in compassionate care for the earth and its inhabitants.

- Assimilation: Adopt the Culture's Agenda

Kester Brewin, an English Emergent leader, believes we must recognize "our dependence on the host culture." The culture, "essentially good," differs little from the Church anyway. Brewin advises Christians to "completely rebirth the church into...[the] culture... and adapt to it. We must resist the idea that the main goal of the church is getting people saved."

But how can that be? A Lutheran church billboard announces: “We are a community of sinners saved by grace alone by faith in Christ alone.” The basis of that community differs radically from the worldly culture where we live. Paul insists on the conflict between this world and gospel truth. There is “no partnership” between “righteousness” and “lawlessness...” [there is no] “fellowship” between “light” and “darkness” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Christian holiness involves a clear analysis of the godless culture and a deliberate rejection of its *ideology*. Paul says: “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing *holiness* to completion in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1). Though unbelievers are made in God’s image, with a sense of God’s truth, “they suppress it in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The separation command is, of course, ideological, not physical. He warns against fellowship with false brothers, not with unbelievers:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:9–11)

Paul shows a healthy mistrust of the culture intertwined with a robust love for sinners, but our love does not encompass the ideology of the world. Humans are made in God’s image and produce wonderful things like language, *foie gras*, and a Picasso painting. But their worldview is tainted by the Fall. Paul says that this “wisdom of this world” is foolish (1 Corinthians 1:20), blind (2 Corinthians 4:4), evil (Galatians 1:4) and Satanic (Ephesians 2:2). Let’s not be fooled. The culture has a *mind* of its own, a worldview that we must understand with *our minds* in order to avoid “conformity” to it. The anti-gospel worldview is increasing in intensity and openly forcing Christianity to the margins of Western society, changing everything we once thought normal, calling good evil and evil good.

Paul does not advise us to adapt to the culture. Instead, he says, “you must no longer walk as the pagans do, in the futility of their minds” (Ephesians 4:17). The contemporary “Christian” exhortations to conform to the culture and to adapt our message to its assumptions and norms must be resisted as expressions of “the Lie.” We have a clear word from Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world.”

Transformation (Romans 12:2)

Some Christians live in a culture where just becoming a Christian is a life-threatening decision. In other countries, Christians have been accepted and even honored for their faith. Whichever situation you are in, you will feel the pull toward safety or popularity. How do we avoid conformity to the Oneism of our culture while still treating unbelievers with respect and grace? The answer lies

in a *transformed mind*. Paul is not asking us to rectify a few minor details. He wants a gospel brainwashing—a mind-cleansing transformation that affects everything about the way we think. He uses “transformed” in another text as well: “we all, with unveiled face [recalling Moses on Mount Sinai] beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This text reminds us of another mountain—the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus was “transformed before them, and his face shone like the sun” (Matthew 17:2). In all three texts, transformation occurs when we see God’s glory and are changed from the inside out by its power. Jesus’ transformation anticipates his resurrection, when he is the first to enter the future dimension of resurrected life. Seeing clearly who God is changes us from top to bottom. It changes how we live and think, and it prepares us for a resurrected place in a transformed, new creation world. In this business of rational discernment, there are, again, only two kinds of minds:

1. The *transformed* mind, which understands who God is, worships and serves the Creator, and builds a worldview on that truth. This Twoist, transformed mind prepares us to offer our bodies as a spiritual act of worship.
2. The *debased* mind, which makes nature god, worships and serves the creation, and builds a worldview on the Lie. In this Oneist spirituality, the mind is silenced or used to despoil God’s creation.

But, you will protest, it is impossible to live the life you say we must live! We must not give in to hopelessness. We all know that we *cannot* be holy. Oneism tries to pretend we have no sin and guilt, but it is wrong, and we have no way to offer God holy bodies. Our bodies are sin-stained. Our minds are not transformed minds. They are twisted, confused and screwed up minds. God’s demands drive us to despair. We long for purity, but see filthiness. We yearn for wisdom, but when we “look within,” as the Oneists want us to do, we see folly and selfishness. Our inner self is not some pure “higher self” but putrid hypocrisy and mental delusion. Christian Spirituality needs one more essential ingredient. To be truly spiritual, our hearts need to be purified, cleansed and set aflame, but how?

The Body and Mind of Christ

By the holy body of Jesus and the mind of Christ. Paul’s heavy agenda of Christian spirituality (Romans 12:1–2) is not a series of rules and obligations. This kind of worship is only possible by knowing the Creator as personal Savior. As a gentle pastor, Paul begins chapter 12 with the following words: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.” The verb translated “appeal” can mean “entreat,” “encourage,” “implore” or “plead.”

More to the point, the appeal is based on the “mercies of God.” In other words, the heart of “acceptable” spirituality is a response to divine mercy by people who need it more than food or clothing. After King David commits adultery and has a good friend murdered, he begs God for pardon:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ...Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:1, 9–10)

Divine mercy transforms Oneist self-worship into God-honoring Twoist spiritual self-sacrifice. Divine mercy is what makes Twoist spirituality so different from Oneism. There is a real God, separate from us, who stoops to act on our behalf. True spirituality is based on *what God has done for us*, not on what we “divine beings” do for ourselves and others. The Oneist utopia is always threatened, because, while *All Is One*, all is one disgusting mess, which the fantasy of altered states of consciousness will not change. Going within to some trance-like state may, like a drug-induced high, soothe us temporarily, but it won’t change the state of things when we emerge from our reverie. The objective nature of evil and of our sinful hearts will always ruin the fantasy world of Planet Pandora (in the movie *Avatar*). However, the gift of a “clean heart” produces “the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17), which becomes a heart on fire for God, for his people and for the nations, with the real hope of a new heavens and earth.

His Holy Body

God the Son offers us his holy body. As Paul says, the Son “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4). Only the “holy body” of Jesus makes it possible for us to offer holy bodies to God. Only he is the Holy One of God; the true, final priest, after the order of Melchizedek; the perfectly obedient son, who does the will of God; the perfect, efficacious sacrifice for sin. The sacrifice of the body of Christ is completely acceptable to the holy God and it is through that sacrifice alone that we can be made holy.

His Holy Mind

We depend not only on the holy body of Jesus, but on his mind as well. Paul asks, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11:32). We come to the truth in humility before a God whose wisdom blows us away. Yet elsewhere Paul tells us to have “the mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5–11). The gospel cannot make sense without the wonder of Twoism: the transcendent Second Person, in unimaginable condescension, takes on the form of the creature, and dies the death of a criminal to bring reconciliation between hate-filled, rebellious creatures and their Maker. The vicarious atonement of the God/man, Jesus, is unique in the annals of religious history, and the denial of the gospel of the cross by leading evangelicals today is at stake in the heart of the unique message of our faith for lost sinners.

The Result—Burning Hearts

When grace vanquishes our rebellious hearts, and humbles our pride by the truth of God’s love, we are fired up to use our bodies and minds for his glory, not ours. Belief in the gospel of God is not

mere intellectual assent but a belief “in your heart” (Romans 10:9). God’s undeserved grace makes believers “obedient from the heart” (Romans 6:17), motivated by the mercy of God revealed in Jesus, rather than by fear of the consequences of divine rules or by purely moralistic obligation.

Dear reader, if you are not a Christian believer, you are either “Oneistically” suppressing sin and guilt or trying to appease it through moralism. This produces both despair and its twin brother, pride. Throw yourself on God’s mercy and hear the amazing, liberating truth of the gospel. God sees those who place their faith in the sinless body, perfect mind and compassionate heart of Jesus, as perfectly holy in body, mind and heart.

The Christian message is not just good news—it’s the *great* news of God’s gift of forgiveness to undeserving sinners. We give him ourselves, corrupt and unholy; he gives us the perfection and beauty of his beloved Son, Jesus.

Discerning God’s Will

That’s quite a *mindful*! The goal of holy living, transformed thinking and heart-felt emotion gives us the wisdom to act. The Bible does not give us a list of all we must do. If it did, we’d have to cart our Bibles to church in a wheelbarrow, and new editions would outpace iPhone models and overwhelm Kindle memories. We discern the will of God in the light of the basic holiness of body and mind shown in Twoism. When we bow to the Father/Creator and accept his Son as the only path to knowing him, he gives us the Spirit, who resides in our hearts to interpret the Scriptures and to lead us along the path he wants us to take. He also gives us scriptural structures for worship, the discipline of godly elders, the preaching of the word and the fellowship of wise Christian brothers and sisters. All these, as used by the Spirit, teach us to discern God’s will.

The Spirit teaches us the nature and character of God and the world he made, helping us discern his will as we mature in Jesus. The *will* of God is something we *do*. This is why Jesus teaches us to pray “your *will* be *done*” (Matthew 6:10) and affirms for himself the principle: “my food is to *do the will* of him who sent me and *to accomplish his work*” (John 4:34). Paul specifies some things that Christians should do and not do. As to sexuality, he says: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Thus the transformed, discerning mind, says Paul in Romans 12:2, will do what is good (not evil) what is well-pleasing (offering our bodies as holy) and perfect (a sign of Christian maturity). These are Christ’s goals for his bride, the Church, whom he will present to God, mature and complete in his image at the end of time.

In 1738, a prim and proper English clergyman, **John Wesley**, met the transforming power of grace—with unimaginable effects. In a period of unusual social and moral degradation in England, Wesley travelled a quarter million miles on horseback in all kinds of inclement weather, to preach forty thousand sermons. He wrote two hundred and thirty-three books, including a commentary on the whole Bible and, with Charles his brother, penned nine thousand hymns. The revival he led

(along with George Whitefield) transformed the lower classes by the power of the gospel and helped England avoid a bloody revolution similar to that of France. It also produced a majority in Parliament, which Wilberforce persuaded to end the slave trade.

Remember what Wesley said: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." This is the secret to true spirituality, as the modern hymn says:

Let the cross be our glory and the Lord be our song

By mercy made holy, by the Spirit made strong...

If such a revival could happen in eighteenth-century Britain, what could God do in our ungodly twenty-first century with holy, wise and heart-warmed living sacrifices? If the gospel is true, it is worth living for, and what is worth living for is worth dying for. In a world of confusion and error, truth is a precious commodity. Speaking it clearly is worth the insults, social ostracism, legal consequences and, in some places, torture and death that Christians now risk, especially as they speak truth in the area of sexuality. We have found Paul's reasoning about God and spirituality to be surprisingly pertinent for the culture of the twenty-first century. It would be foolish to dismiss what he has to say about sexuality, which is a logical extension of his argument and the subject to which we turn in the next lesson.