

**QUESTION 31: “REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF GOD —  
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?”  
(Romans 12:1-2)**

3.1.20

**INTRODUCTION**

Let’s pray! You all can remain seated, but would you please sing with me:

“Something beautiful, something good;  
All my confusion He understood;  
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,  
But He made something beautiful of my life.”

Wow — brokenness and beauty. That reminds me of a woman from the church in Hastings in which I ministered. Kay Trapp’s story: Her brokenness — and her beauty. Isn’t amazing, how God can make “beautiful” out of “brokenness?”

Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at some “hot-button” issues that are loud and proud in our culture — gay marriage, gender issues, divorce, cohabitation and remarriage, abortion and euthanasia — and we have made moral judgments on all those issues, declaring the practice of these things to be wrong and sinful because of one foundational, basic premise: They are contrary to reflecting the image of God; they are contrary to His design, and they are contrary to His purposes. Over and over again, we have referenced the centrality for Christians of reflecting the image of God. So it only seems appropriate that we look at the concept of the image of God and ask an incredibly important question based on that same foundational, basic premise: Are we, as a church, as individual Christians, actually reflecting the image of God? Does watching us, listening to us, observing us, actually make people think about God? It’s a very relevant question; it’s what Christ Himself had in mind when He told His followers: ***“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14-16.***

So, to do this, we are going to look at the progression of the life in Christ — how we move from new birth (what the Bible calls “justification”) to the lifelong process of becoming more Christ-like (what the Bible calls “sanctification”). Few conversations we have as a church family will be as important as this one.

**TEXT**

***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. 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 — Paul, Romans 12:1-2.***

**ANALYSIS**

Paul starts out by taking us back to the sacrificial system for sin that God established through Moses in the Old Testament. When an animal was presented as a sin offering on behalf of

somebody, the life of the animal was given. There was no such thing as a partial sacrifice for sin — cutting off both ears and the tail or something like that. The entire, complete animal died.

So when Paul is telling the Roman Christians (as well as us) to offer our bodies as “a living sacrifice,” he is declaring the idea of complete and total sacrifice, of unconditional surrender, of ourselves to God through Jesus Christ. There is no life left behind; we are completely dying to ourselves in order to be brought to life in Christ. There’s no such thing as a “partial” Christian because Christ did not present Himself as a “partial” sacrifice. He died completely for us. His complete sacrifice for us rightly demands our complete sacrifice, our unconditional surrender, the complete death of our former selves, to Him.

So, what does that mean in practical terms? What does “unconditional surrender” to God through the sacrifice of His Son look like? It means that we have surrendered everything about us — our perspectives, our prejudices, our priorities — to be taken over by God’s perspectives, God’s prejudices and God’s priorities. In other words, what we think might be important is now overwritten by what God thinks is important. It means that we have surrendered our physical sides — our strengths, our talents and abilities. It means that we have surrendered our inner sides — our intellect, our emotions, our passions. In short, our life in the world and our view of the world is taken over by God’s view of the world, and by His plans for our place in that world, that we would be melted and molded into somebody pleasing to His precise specifications. We become very much what Isaiah expressed: ***[Y]ou, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand — Isaiah 64:8.*** Simply put, our greatest joy is found in this: “Father, mold me however You want.”

And to make it understood, God is not seeking to be the co-pilot in our life. He seeks to be the ruler of our life. If we are indeed offering our lives as a “living sacrifice” to God, that means that we, in terms of ruling our lives, are dead and buried. God is the life, the only life, that’s left. You see, He’s not looking for our help. He’s not looking for our ideas. He’s looking only for our surrender, for lives that are unconditionally, totally His, to be used by Him in whatever way He decides. It is an “all or nothing” proposition. If God does not sit completely and totally on the throne of our lives, He is not ruling our lives. And to be reflecting the image of God, it starts with who is sitting on the throne.

But Paul also tells us how this unconditional surrender translates:

- 1) First, our unconditional surrender pleases God. That surrender declares us holy, in other words, separate, from the world around us. Our surrender declares who now sits on the throne of our lives. And what further pleases God about that is that surrender, the birth into something completely brand new, forms the bond of new relationship between us and God. He desires relationship with us and, when that happens, He is pleased: ***“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me” — Jesus Christ, Revelation 3:20.*** Relationship, fellowship, life together.
- 2) Second, our unconditional surrender worships God. Our English word “worship” comes from the Old English word “worthship.” In other words, our surrender communicates the worth of God in our lives, that we are recognizing the rightful place

of God as our sovereign ruler. Think of the many occasions where we present gifts to our loved ones. Those gifts are a reflection of our love for that person — a measure of their worth in our lives. In the same way, our unconditional surrender reflects God’s worth to us: ***He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in Him. . . . Many, Lord my God, are the wonders You have done, the things You planned for us. None can compare with You; were I to speak and tell of Your deeds, they would be too many to declare — David, Psalm 40:2-3, 5.***

Now, that unconditional surrender is what the Bible refers to as the “new birth.” The fancy theological word is “justification,” which is also a legal term which means “not guilty.” So, from this point (and this side of heaven), each person, every one of us who has become a Christian, is “becoming,” meaning a moment-by-moment, day-by-day transformation from the life they had based on themselves to a new life reflecting the image of God. And just like a newborn comes into the world like something of a blank slate waiting to be written on by parents and others around them, in the same way, once we are “born again,” we begin the process of becoming the image of God by letting God imprint Himself — His ways, His passions, His viewpoints — onto us. That’s what’s behind Paul’s encouragement to be transformed, changed, by the renewing of our minds. It’s the presence of God in our lives that initiates that renewal of our minds. We go from thinking from our point of view to thinking from God’s point of view. And as we continue in the life, the idea is that God’s point of view is more and more quickly the first place we go in how we view whatever circumstances are presenting themselves. Why? As we continue in the life, it becomes more and more important that God is what’s being reflected in our lives to the world around us. In other words, reflecting the image of God is the consequence of that process we call “sanctification.”

That’s what Paul means by telling the Roman Christians to avoid being “conformed” to the world and instead be “transformed.” The idea of being conformed in the Greek is the idea of being fashioned or shaped to look just like something else. Paul instead encourages being “transformed.” The Greek word is from where we get our English word “metamorphosis.” It means to be changed quite literally from the inside out — in both character and conduct — resulting in being able to see something unlike anything the world promotes. Jesus, standing before Pilate, said it very simply like this: ***“My kingdom is not of this world” — Jesus Christ, John 18:36a.***

Why is that important? Have you ever wondered why Christ warned us about being hated by the world? You see, the world looks for conformity, everyone acting the same way, as a means of validating their behaviors and beliefs. But when somebody thinks or acts or lives differently, it risks pointing out the foolishness in how they think or act or live. And, because mankind is hard-wired to feel that there is something more, something beyond this life, people acting different can begin to prompt questions that can make people feel uneasy, and then angry.

So, let’s trace that process a bit. Where does it start? What does it look like? Let’s take a peek:

- 1) The reality of God vs. the reality of us:

- a) “[A]ll things are possible with God” — Jesus Christ, Mark 10:27b.
  - b) “[A]part from me you can do nothing” — Jesus Christ, John 15:5b.
- 2) God’s sovereign rule/God’s complete ownership:
- a) *The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it — David, Psalm 24:1.*
  - b) *Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps — Jeremiah 10:23.*
  - c) God’s complete ownership of everything and everyone is the basis for David’s confession of his sin with Bathsheba: *Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight — David, Psalms 51:4a.* Everyone around us belongs to God; they are His. Do we see everybody around us like that? Look around, right now. Everybody we see is God’s; they belong to Him. Do we see each other that way? Do we understand that to care for and to love one another is in itself an acknowledgement of God’s ownership and His care and love for everybody around us. And, when we hurt each other, when we are angry with each other, we are sinning directly against God before anybody else because we are damaging HIS prized possessions, somebody that belongs to Him. So whatever we think of each other, the fact that they belong to God needs to be the first filter through which they are seen.
- 3) God’s establishment of His rightful place in our life upon our new birth:
- a) *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me — Paul, Galatians 2:20.*
  - b) *You are not your own; you were bought at a price — Paul, I Corinthians 6:19b-20a.*
- 4) The “new” you:
- a) *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! — Paul, II Corinthians 5:17*
  - b) *[Y]ou have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness) — Paul, Colossians 3:9-10 (Ephesians 4:24b).*
- 5) Feeding to grow into the image of God (being imprinted):
- a) *“[M]an does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” — Moses, Deuteronomy 8:3b.*
  - b) *[T]he gospel . . . displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God — Paul, II Corinthians 4:4b.*
  - c) *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good — I Peter 2:2-3.*
  - d) *[G]row in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — II Peter 3:18a.*
- 6) God growing us into his image:

- a) *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit — Paul, II Corinthians 3:18.*
  - b) *[Be] confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 1:6.*
- 7) God supplying all we need to grow into His image:
- a) *For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace — John 1:16 (NASB).*
  - b) *[M]y God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:19.*
- 8) The ministry of reflecting the image of God:
- a) *“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b.*
  - b) *[God] reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us — Paul, II Corinthians 5:18-20a.*

## APPLICATION

So, as a result of “reflecting the image of God,” what should be some of the results of that impact of God on our lives as we seek to minister to each other? We have looked at many different verses during the course of these messages which have been built on the foundation of “the image of God.” And last week, we looked at verses from Paul which reveal the tender love and care that we are supposed to show one to another in reflecting the image of God:

- 1) He wrote in Romans that we should *bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves*, that we *should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up — Paul, Romans 15:1-2.*
- 2) He wrote in Galatians that we should *serve one another humbly in love* and *[c]arry each other's burdens — Paul, Galatians 5:13b, 6:2a.*
- 3) He wrote in Ephesians that we should *[b]e completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love — Paul, Ephesians 4:2.*
- 4) And in First Thessalonians he wrote that we should *encourage the disheartened* and that we should *always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else — Paul, I Thessalonians 5:14, 15b.*

All those verses could really be seen as “fruit” of these two Scriptures:

- 1) Unlimited welcome: *“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28.*
- 2) Unlimited love: *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. . . . A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:15, 34.*

But none of all the verses we have EVER shared with each other will have meaning unless we add one final incredibly important character trait to all that must be in place to reflect the image of God: Zeal. And what is that? The Greek root is our word “zealot,” which is defined

as “an uncompromising partisan.” It also means to “seek or desire eagerly.” To have zeal is to have passionate energy for a belief or purpose.

Why is it so important to have an uncompromising zeal for the Lord? One reason: It allows us to be the clearest, most transparent ambassadors for the Savior that we can be. It’s something that as Christians we cannot be without; as Paul makes so clear in his letter to the Romans: ***Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord — Paul, Romans 12:11.***

So what does “zeal” look like?

- 1) From the OT: ***[H]is word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot — Jeremiah 20:9b.***
- 2) From the NT: ***[The Sanhedrin] called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah — Acts 5:40b-42.***

It is what allows us to do any of a number of things that the Scriptures instruct us to do — under the heading of “taking one for the team”:

- 1) ***“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:39b-41.***
- 2) ***The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? — Paul, I Corinthians 6:7.***
- 3) ***Christ left you an example, that you should follow in His steps. . . . When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly — I Peter 2:21b, 23.***

How can we do that? Because our eyes are not on the moment — but on the Master!

Why do I bring this up? Just this: I must apologize to all of you. I confess that I have been a whole lot of slow in coming to understand why it is so important for this body of believers to seek all the healing that is necessary, what needs to drive us to be doing that. But as these last weeks have gone by, God has made clear to me what He wants us to be: a body of believers overflowing with zeal for our Lord, completely sold out for Him, willing to do anything to communicate and reflect the image of God to the world around us — and to each other. That’s the Christians, the body of believers, we need to be.

And, with that in mind, I need to speak openly and honestly about anything that may get in the way of that outcome. You see, I came here some 18 months ago not just in the normal calling of a pastor, but specifically because there had been difficult times that a number of people had experienced — things that hurt people, in at least one case, deeply enough to cause them to separate from us. In other words, I came here with an agenda, with a specific situation to deal with. Unfortunately, some of the attitudes that resulted in those hurts have continued. I still

hear about fear; I still hear about anger — within this body. Folks, those attitudes don't just have to change; they have to stop — precisely because they do not reflect the image of God. These are things I have heard from right here in this body of believers regarding the circumstances that brought me here:

- 1) “Just get over it.” This has apparently been an acknowledgement that there have probably been hurts experienced here. But hasn't enough time gone by that you should just be able to be done with these hurts? Or is your hurt really that big a deal? That would be fine if we all experienced hurt the same way. The fact is, we don't. And what might be a little scratch to somebody might be a really deep cut for somebody else. But what did we just talk about regarding what the Bible commands? Bear with one another, serve one another, be patient with one another, encourage one another. Those verses need to be more than just words; they need to be verses that look like something tangible, that we in our passionate zeal for our Lord bring to life. That's what we are called to do by the Master of this “house.”
- 2) “There's nothing to talk about. Can't we just move on from the past?” The problem with this point of view is simple: If somebody's pain is ongoing, that pain is not in the past — it's the present. According to Paul, one of the great reasons God has called Christians into community is to be with one another in support — to bear, care and share with each other. That means we come alongside — with no limits. That means we listen — with no limits. That means we pray — with no limits. And our zeal for our Master, our zeal for His body, is what should drive this. It's not about who did what, or who was hurt, or whether we agree. It is only about being willing to do ANYTHING for the sake of the Master. It is about being driven by a passionate zeal for the image of God.

We need to ask ourselves: How important is it to us that our lives, and our church, reflect the image of God? If that is the most important aspect of our lives, then we should let nothing stand in the way of anything being resolved. If somebody is still struggling with a hurt, I am not to condemn them. Instead, I am to come alongside them, to do what the Bible says and help carry their burdens. Why? Because my zeal for the image of God compels me to do that. If somebody is still struggling with a past upset, I am not to belittle them or their feelings. Just because I may be beyond a moment of hurt doesn't mean everybody is. Just because I may not understand somebody's hurt doesn't mean their hurt is somehow less, or invalid. Instead, I am to come alongside them; I am to be patient with them and offer to do whatever I can to minister to them. Why? Because my zeal for the image of God compels me to be about healing and reconciliation and restoration. How can I not convey the same love and compassion and zeal for others that Jesus Christ showed for me? He loved me so much He died for me. And at no time on the cross was He dying for somebody who loved Him, who had earned His sacrifice; remember? ***God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners (while we were God's enemies), Christ died for us — Paul — Romans 5:8 (with Romans 5:10a).***

And if I have hurt somebody, or if I have contributed to hurt, or even if I am aware of hurt that I have nothing to do with, I don't sit still and just try and wish it away. I reach out: “What can I do? How can I help? How can I bring people together? How can we get through this? What

needs to happen?” I ask any and all of those questions precisely because nothing matters more than reflecting the image of God. And that’s the way it’s supposed to be in the body of believers: NOTHING matters more than reflecting the image of God to a world that desperately needs him.

## **CONCLUSION**

[Consideration for losing “interim” tag]. There’s our Master. This can’t be about religion. Our lives, our church, our future simply has to be about Him — a passionate overflowing zeal only about Him. So, like the shirt says, “Get used to different” — because I for one need to be. Will you join me? Let’s pray!