

Session 4

LOVING GOD WITH ALL MY MIND

Matthew 22:37; Romans 12:1-2

Memory Verse

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

– ROMANS 12:2, CSB

Loving God With All My Mind

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Loving God with the all one's mind means internalizing His Word and being transformed by it.

In a 2016 column, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. commented on the growing matter of biblical illiteracy in America. The topic was not a surprising one, as reports of decreasing knowledge of the Bible had sadly been surfacing for several years. However, the severity of the matter was highlighted with specific detail:

Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: "Americans revere the Bible – but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates." How bad is it? Researchers tell us that it's worse than most could imagine.

Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of American can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.¹

When it comes to the command to love the Lord your God with all your mind, it seems as though many believers are neglecting the main ingredients in doing so. So how can believers love God with all their minds, as Jesus indicated in Matthew 22:37? In his letter to the Roman believers, Paul offered incredible insight into this.

? Had you been selected for the surveys mentioned in the article above, how do you think you would have fared? Why do you think so?

❓ Obviously loving God is more than just factual knowledge, but what does biblical literacy indicate about a person's intimacy with the Father?

❓ What do you think is the most effective way to keep intellectual knowledge of God from becoming cold and detached? Conversely, what do you think the dangers are of a simply emotional relationship with God?

Session Summary

In this week's session, Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, whom he did not know. Being unsure of their understanding of the Christian faith, Paul wrote his theological magnum opus, spelling out in detail the foundational doctrines of the faith. In doing so, he pointed to the transformation that must take place when the believer understands the breadth of God's grace and mercy.

1. Respond to God's Grace with True Worship (Romans 12:1)

Romans 12 begins with the powerful connecting word, "therefore." This marked the transition from the theological and doctrinal portion of Paul's letter to the Romans to the instruction of how to practically apply the theological premises that Paul had covered in the previous eleven chapters. The church in Rome, which was a network of various house churches, had no apostolic foundation, meaning that it was not founded by one of the Apostles, unlike most other New Testament churches. One of the results of their unique origin was that the believers in Rome had a widely varying belief system, with as many different nuances as there were individual house churches. They had not been privy to the basic foundational truths of the gospel. To that end, Paul wrote the letter to provide a robust and authoritative explanation of the core beliefs of the faith.

The various topics covered in the first eleven chapters of Romans were explained in densely-worded masterfully logical arguments. Paul interwove doctrinal teaching on topics such as the security of salvation, the consequences of unbelief, the absence of distinction among believers in the sight of God, the difference between the old and new covenants, the believer's identity in Christ, and a host of other complex theological matters that the Roman congregations had been feuding over. When Paul opened chapter twelve with "therefore," he included the sum total of the theological/doctrinal teaching of the first eleven chapters and rhetorically directed them forward toward the appropriate response.

Paul was calling for a decision from the Roman believers. Having given them as complete and robust an explanation of Christian doctrine as found anywhere in Scripture—collectively referred to as "the mercies of God"—Paul urged them to respond accordingly with worship. According to Douglas Moo, "What Paul calls for in verse 1—and, by extension, in all of 12:2 – 15:13—is no more (and no less!) than the appropriate and expected response to God's mercy as we have experienced it... God's mercy manifested in His Spirit's work of inward renewal does impel us toward the obedience that the Gospel demands."²

? Take a moment and scan through the various doctrines Paul covered in Romans 1-11. Which of them speaks to you most powerfully? What difference is that doctrine making in your life today?


? There are multiple complex theological truths in Romans. When you come across a passage of Scripture, the meaning of which is not immediately clear to you, how do you go about learning what it means? Why is it important to guard the sources you learn from?

For one's body to be a living and holy sacrifice meant that, because of the mercies of God extended to His people, their response was to give themselves in a volitional manner to a life of sacrificially serving God. Moo comments, "In Romans 12:1, the sacrifice we offer is not some specific form of praise or service, but our 'bodies' themselves. It is not only what we can give that God demands; He demands the giver."³ It was critical that the believers in Rome understood that this sacrifice that Paul was speaking of was not to be thought of as a cultic compulsion to fulfill a ritual. Instead, it was precisely because the believers, having read the broad scope of Christian doctrine immediately prior to this exhortation, would be appropriately moved to worship and adoration that would lead to the surrendering of one's life to the will of God for it.

2. Transformation from a Renewed Mind (Romans 12:2a)

Completing the thought of presenting one's body and life as sacrifices before God, Paul continued by acknowledging the uniqueness of the believer's calling in verse 2. Paul brought to the forefront that some force would shape the believer's life—either the force of the world's mold or the power of God's grace and mercy. The world's standard of living is pervasive and unyielding. Yet, it is hollow, indulgent, and self-serving. Transformation by the renewing of one's mind was the only way, however, that believers could present their bodies to the Lord as genuinely holy and acceptable sacrifices.

The battle between not being conformed and being transformed was about more than just doing right things or not doing wrong things. The matter was much deeper than that. What was at stake was that which one placed his or her ultimate affection or worship on. The worldview of the present age came with a set of priorities and presuppositions that valued sin and selfishness. The biblical worldview was absolutely opposite of that, as evidenced by the free offering of one's life to God.

 How have you witnessed the exertion of various types of force from the world to conform to its worldview in the past week? What would you identify as the world's primary criteria for happiness and making decisions?



When allowing one's mind to be renewed, what would you identify as influences or elements that should be eliminated to aid the change? How would you recommend to someone to filter out those influences?

The word Paul used for “mind” was the same word that he used to speak of moral consciousness or practical reason. Renewing such would require a complete overhaul of the way in which the believer thought. To illustrate the gravity with which Paul viewed this sanctifying change, the word he selected to use for “transformed” was the same word the Gospel writers used to describe Jesus’ transfiguration before His three disciples.

It is helpful to identify the directional force of the two options presented. Being conformed to the present age comes about from external force that attempts to mold, bend, and forcibly shape a person. The pressure comes from without and is oppressive in nature. Robert Mounce notes, “From without there is a continuing pressure to adopt the customs and mindset of the world in which we live. Although that influence must be rejected, that alone will never create the kind of change God has in mind for His followers. Real and lasting change come from within. We must ‘let ourselves be transformed.’”⁴

3. Loving God with All the Mind Brings Discernment (Romans 12:2b)

As a result of obediently following the example of Christ in sacrificial living, believers would gain discernment of God’s will. Discerning (or approving) God’s will had nothing to do with deciding its value because it is God that deems things valuable or not. Because His will is His, it is perfect and beyond question. To discern God’s will, then, meant to agree with and align oneself under its purposes.

To underscore the holiness of God’s will, Paul used three descriptors: good, pleasing, and perfect. In order for the believer to be able to ascertain such things, in Paul’s view, his or her mind must be increasingly renewed so that no blur of temptation or hindrance of worldly desire would be able to sufficiently stop the spiritual ears of those who have been transformed.

❓ How does it impact your spirit when you are unsure about God's will in times of major decision? According to Paul's teaching here, what might that possibly indicate about your loving God with your mind?

❓ Evaluate your life with Christ now versus when you were a new Christian. How have you seen your understanding of God's will change as you've grown in Christ? What role did biblical study and doctrinal awareness have on that change?

One of the great frustrations for believers resides in those occasional seasons in which major decisions must be made and the will of God is not immediately clear. Paul was not necessarily indicating in Romans 12 that any degree of hesitation as to understanding God's will was always attributable to a lack of being renewed in mind. Rather, Paul was pointing to the dynamic in which, as a Christ-follower continued to grow in sanctification, his or her understanding of who God is and how He speaks to and leads His people would also grow and deepen. Knowing God more intimately as a result of sanctification logically would help the believer to identify that which is in keeping with God's character and biblical teaching.

Conclusion

Loving God with all one's mind demands that one's mind be renewed from its fallen fixations. Temptation, lust, greed, envy, and all manner of sin war for the mind's attention as the world continually exerts pressure on the believer to value what it values. In that light, Paul's word to believers in Romans 12 about loving God with the mind has never been more important.

First, believers must be able to consider "the mercies of God." That phrase is what Paul used to refer to all of the doctrinal teaching contained in the first eleven chapters of Romans, detailing God's abundant grace and love for sinners. Being able to consider the manifold mercies of God, though, requires that the believer

read God’s Word, meditate upon it, contemplate its truth, and allow that truth to condition his or her mind. However, because biblical illiteracy is at an all-time high, believers can frequently be impoverished when it comes to a working knowledge of the core doctrines of their faith. Living such a way thwarts discipleship and leaves the believer vulnerable to being conformed to the world.

Second, the natural outflow of loving God with all of one’s mind is sacrificial living. Sacrificial living grows out of understanding the sacrifice that Christ made for believers on the cross. When the believer understands the depths of his or her own sin, the hopelessness of providing for one’s own deliverance, and the grace of God to send Jesus to the cross while he or she was an enemy of God, the result is growing to be more like Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As one grows more like Christ the characteristics of Christ—especially sacrificial living—take root in the believer’s life.

Third, good theology is crucial for loving God with one’s mind. There was nothing coincidental about Paul’s instruction to be renewed by the transforming of the mind following immediately after eleven chapters of dense theology. Settling for emotional, feel-good Christianese is a poor substitute for a robust understanding of who God is and why that matters in daily life. Everyone has a theology; even if their theology is that God doesn’t exist. Good, biblical theology leads the believer to worship the God he or she increasingly knows and loves with the mind.

Fourth, God wants His people to know Him. God is a self-revealing God; everything believers know about Him is known because He chose to reveal it. In light of that, believers must realize and embrace that God wants to be known. God wants His people to understand His will. When the believer allows his or her mind to be renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit, he or she will grow in the capacity to discern God’s work and movement.

Fifth, the renewing of the believer’s mind is hampered when worldly influences are given unchecked entry into the same mind. Exercising discipline in what the believer allows to influence him or her is an important part of spiritual growth and development. The “garbage in/garbage out” principle is very much at work. For the mind to be renewed, believers must protect it from further contamination.

❓ How would you describe your ability to explain the core doctrines of your faith? How would you like for that answer to change in the next 6 months? What can you do to start?

❓ What do your personal Bible study habits look like right now? How are those habits effectively storing God's word in your mind? Why is that important for renewal?

❓ Who in your life has permission to ask you about what you're allowing into your mind? What role does biblical community play in your efforts to renew your mind?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jesus, the Word Incarnate, demonstrated His reliance on God's Word by quoting it to ward off temptation.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Believers living a world that seeks to diminish and blur God's truth can love God with their minds when they meditate upon His Word and internalize its truth. Doing so shields them from the worldly wisdom that would confuse and distract them from being gospel witnesses in the darkened world.



FOR NEXT WEEK

A Time to Let Go

Main Passages

- Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Session Outline

1. The Sovereignty of God from Beginning to End (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)
2. Seasons of Peace and Strife (Ecclesiastes 3:3-8)
3. The Frustration of the Immediate in Light of Eternity (Ecclesiastes 3:9-11)

Memorize

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

- Romans 12:2, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Philippians 3:12-14
- Tuesday - Proverbs 3:5-6
- Wednesday - Isaiah 43:18-19
- Thursday - 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Friday - Jeremiah 29:11
- Saturday - Hebrews 12:1-2

References

¹Mohler, R. Albert. "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem." Jan. 20, 2016. <https://albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4/> Accessed July 29, 2019.]

²Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.

³Ibid.

⁴Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.