



Loving God With All My Mind

Summary and Goal

The world rightly accuses us of being mentally lazy in how we express and understand our faith. What does it mean to love God thoughtfully?

Main Passages

Matthew 22:37; Romans 12:1-2

Session Outline

1. Respond to God's Grace with True Worship (Romans 12:1)
2. Transformation from a Renewed Mind (Romans 12:2a)
3. Loving God with All the Mind Brings Discernment (Romans 12:2b)

Theological Theme

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

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.

Historical Context of Romans

Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be identified from his direct statements in the text and inferred from the content. He expressly wrote that he wanted to impart spiritual strength to the believers at Rome (1:11-12; 16:25-26). He asked for prayer for the difficult task he was undertaking (15:30) and that he might be able to come and see them (15:32). He hoped to enlist the Roman churches to support a mission to the west (15:23-29). The content of the letter shows that the churches experienced tensions between believers from different backgrounds. Paul wanted them to be united and to avoid dissension and false teaching (16:17-18). The content also reveals his exposition of what is essential Christianity and what are matters of indifference.

Author

Paul the apostle is the stated and indisputable author of the book of Romans. From the book of Acts and statements in Romans, we learn that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth and on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of AD 57, to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to poor Jewish Christians (Ac 20:3; Rm 15:25-29).

Setting

All of Paul's writings grew out of his missionary/pastoral work and were about the problems and needs of local churches. The book of Romans is also of this genre, but it is the least "local" in the sense that Paul had not yet been to Rome. This letter was his opportunity to expound the good news message (the gospel). He could discuss the essence of sin, the salvation accomplished on the cross, the union of the believer with Christ, how the Spirit works in the Christian to promote holiness, the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, future things, and Christian living or ethics. Though Paul did not write Romans as a systematic theology, his somewhat orderly exposition has been the fountain for the development of that discipline.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Roman house churches has been preeminent among the New Testament writings for its theological and pastoral influence. It focuses on the doctrine of salvation, including the practical implications for believers as they live out the salvation given to them through Jesus Christ.

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Session Plan

Loving God With All My Mind

Introduction

- ❓ 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?

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)

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. 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.

- ❓ 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?

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.

- ❓ 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?

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.

- ❓ 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?

Conclusion

- ❓ 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?

❓ For Further Discussion

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?



Expanded Session Content

Loving God With All My Mind

Introduction

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."³

Urge

The Greek word translated "urge" (parakaleo) referred to "an exhortation [that] comes with authority, but the authority of a preacher who is the mediator of God's truth rather than the authority of a superior issuing a command."² The force of the word was stronger than a request; it fell just short of a command.


-  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."²⁴ 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?

Present Age vs. Eternal Age

Throughout the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul was highlighting a salvation-historical dynamic by drawing a bold line of contrast between this world's present age and the eternal age to come. Look especially at Romans 5-8.

-  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.’”⁵

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?

Prayer of Response

Pray and ask God to give you power by His Spirit to live as a sacrifice for Him according to His great mercy. Ask Him to transform you by the renewing of your mind according to His Word.

Additional Resources

- *Renewing Your Mind in a Mindless World* by James Montgomery Boice
- *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
- *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer

For Next Week

Session Title

- 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

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

Extended Commentary

Romans 12:1-2

12:1–2 The “therefore” in v. 1 refers back not simply to the previous argument about God’s mercy in bringing salvation to Jew and Gentile but to everything that Paul had been teaching from the beginning of the epistle. It marks the transition from the theology of God’s redemptive act in Christ Jesus to the ethical expectations that flow logically from that theological base. We come now to what is usually called the “practical” section of Romans.

The practical, however, must of necessity rest upon a solid theological foundation. Otherwise it is little more than advice about how to get along in a religious community. If God had not done what he did for us, there would be no compelling reason why we should now do what he says. The dynamic of God’s ethical instruction arises from its logical and necessary relationship to who he is and what he has done on our behalf. Many of the living religions have an ethical code that uplifts and inspires. Only the Christian faith, rooted as it is in a supernatural act that took place in history (the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ), has the ultimate moral authority as well as the effective power to transform human life according to the divine intention. So Christian ethics are practical specifically because they do not stand alone but emerge as unavoidable implications of an established theological base. Theology in isolation promotes a barren intellectualism. Ethics apart from a theological base is impotent to achieve its goals.

In view of the many mercies of God, Paul exhorted his readers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (cf. 6:13; 1 Pet 2:5). C. K. Barrett comments that “the mercies of God’ forms a not inadequate summary of what is contained in chs. i-xi, and especially in chs. ix-xi” and that the proper response “is not to speculate upon the eternal decrees, or one’s own place in the scheme of salvation, but to be obedient.” The first word of 12:1 is the verb *parakalō*, “I urge,” which has a fairly wide range of meanings including “to call to one’s side,” “to exhort,” “to implore,” “to encourage.” C. E. B. Cranfield says that it is a technical term for Christian exhortation, which he defines as “the earnest appeal, based on the gospel, to those who are already believers to live consistently with the gospel they have received.” The metaphor in the verse has as its setting the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Believers are exhorted to “make a decisive dedication” (Berkeley) of themselves as worshipers stepping forward to place their offerings on the altar. Holiness of life rarely progresses apart from deliberative acts of the will. While sanctification is gradual in the

sense that it continues throughout life, each advance depends upon a decision of the will. That the sacrifice is “living” reflects the voluntary nature of the act. F. F. Bruce comments that “the sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices, but in giving one’s own.” Such sacrifices are “holy and pleasing to God.” They are worthy of his acceptance. The possibility of bringing pleasure to God provides a powerful motivation for complete surrender of self.

Paul said that the offering of one’s body as a living sacrifice is a “spiritual act of worship.” This expression has been variously translated as “spiritual service, reasonable worship, rational service,” and so on. Perhaps the best paraphrase is that of Knox, “This is the worship due from you as rational creatures.” In view of God’s acts of mercy it is entirely fitting that we commit ourselves without reservation to him. To teach that accepting the free gift of God’s grace does not necessarily involve a moral obligation on our part is a heresy of gigantic proportions. The popular cliché “He is Lord of all or not Lord at all” is absolutely right.

If v. 1 speaks of a specific act in which we offer ourselves to God, v. 2 tells us of two ongoing activities that carry out the intention of the living sacrifice. The first is negative; the second, positive. Believers are no longer to conform themselves to the present age (cf. 1 Pet 1:14). As citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20) we are to “set [our] minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col 3:2). Paul reminded the Galatians that the present age is evil (Gal 1:4). It cannot, and must not, serve as a model for Christian living. Its values and goals are antithetical to growth in holiness. The church should stand out from the world as a demonstration of God’s intention for the human race. To be culturally identified with the world is to place the church at risk. Believers are to be salt and light (Matt 5:13–14), purifying and enlightening contemporary culture.

Rather than allowing the world to “squeeze you into its own mold” (Phillips), Paul told believers to be “transformed by the renewing of your minds.” From without there is a continuing pressure to adopt the customs and mind-set 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 comes from within. We must “let ourselves be transformed.” The verb occurs in two other settings in the New Testament. First is Mark 9:2 (Matt 17:2), where Jesus is said to have been “transfigured” before his three disciples. Next is 2 Cor 3:18, where Paul taught that believers, as they behold the glory of the Lord, are being “transformed” into his likeness. The transformation of which Paul spoke in Rom 12:2 is not a change effected from without but a radical reorientation that begins deep within the human heart.

A renewed mind is concerned with those issues of life that are of lasting importance. By nature our thoughts tend to dwell on the ephemeral. But that which passes quickly is normally inconsequential. As Paul said in another place, “What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). The mind renewed enables us to discern the will of God. Released from the control of the world around us, we can come to know what God has in mind for us. We will find that his will is “good, pleasing and perfect.” It is good because it brings about moral and spiritual growth. It is pleasing to God because it is an expression of his nature. It is perfect in that no one could possibly improve on what God desires to happen.⁶

References

1. Mohler, 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.]
2. Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
6. Ibid.