

The Bible is a means of grace by which God communicates himself to his children, helping to shaping our reasoning into conformity to him (Rom. 12.1-2; Eph. 4.20-23; Ps. 119.28, 58, 65,116). This is accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit who is continually transforming us to be more like Christ. It is a life long enterprise.

So if the Christian neglects the Bible they neglect the heart of God and rely upon themselves to decide who God is.

If we understand that Jesus is the Living Word and that means that He is the Word incarnate, then we can understand that the first way to understand Scripture is to understand Christ because that is the priority of Scripture from Genesis to The Revelation. If we do this we can say that the text we read was lived by Him. So, what we read about Him all through Scripture as God, as Jesus, and as The Holy Spirit, reveals to us His completeness as a person with all of His attributes and as we understand that and how He has acted before He was incarnate and how He lived as the God/man then we can more easily understand the things He says with His words because His life and His words are indicative of who He is and the imperatives- the commands He gives us - once we are in Him, are rooted or established first in Him and who He is, then in us and who He has made us to be. We have the Living Torah, The Living Word - the Inscription of God. When we read Romans 12:1,2 this should give us a better understanding of why and how we understand the Word of God.

“1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1, 2, NAS95.

Paul speaks of the literal human body as a sacrifice unto God. Instead of taking a lamb to slaughter as a sacrifice for God, as Israel did before Jesus died on the Cross, Paul offers up visual imagery to allow the reader to better understand that Christians should offer their bodies unto Christ. This use of sacrificial language by Paul is important to mention. Literal sacrificial worship at this time was very vivid in the minds of most

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ancient religions, including Judaism. Using metaphors to describe this sacrificial act of worship were vastly understood by the Roman culture that he originally wrote the book of Romans to (Moo 73). Therefore, this usage of language was not foreign to the people that he wrote this specific letter to. This mention of a so-called spiritual sacrifice is considered an act of worship. Paul displays this sacrificial speech in symbolic and cultic terms in these verses (Moo 750). Instead of a literal slaughter of the human body, Christians should offer the body to be used by God for his discernment and will. The word “urge” or beseech in this verse is a translation of the Greek word parakaleo. This word is designed to deliver the correct meaning and usage of the word, which has moral undertones within it. The word parakaleo was often used when signaling a shift in conversation in the Greek language (Moo 73). Therefore, when a slight subject change was to be noted in text, this is a common word to include in usage to signal this change in conversation. This verse is designed to ask for dedication from Christians unto God, without demanding this act. Because the act of giving the body to Christ is an act of worship, this act cannot be forced but one who is truly regenerated does not need to be forced because we possess the desire to do so, albeit the conflict of the remnant of the old man may at times cause a struggle within us. . This worship is, however, a worship that not only involves the mind, the heart - meaning the total being of who we are in Christ.

The second verse of this passage speaks of God’s ability to transform an individual. The transformation is a life long enterprise as we are seeking the prize and the goal of Christ our Lord. Paul here is not referring, although some tend to believe so, to the church to stop conforming to the world, but is saying be continually transforming into the likeness of Christ ie., into who you are. This is a direct reference to the theology of Romans chapter 5-8. Not being conformed to the world, the age that produces what we were. Here in Romans 12, because of the work that has been accomplished for us by Christ from justification to sanctification to the indwelling of the Spirit we are now to be who we are according to the renewing process that keeps transforming us into the likeness of Christ.

To be transformed is having the mind of Christ in a growing way, in a maturing way, in knowing the Living Word and His words and walking in the Spirit. Knowing the will of God does not first come from obeying some external standards of law like the Decalogue. We are bound to the Law of Christ which includes all that Jesus has taught us and that which has been taught us by His apostles, all that is Jesus' teaching preserved in the teaching of the NT writers (This was Jesus' own plan: John 16:12; John 14:25, 26; John 15:26, 27; 16:12-15). And what does this teaching look like. Very little of it is law or rules or commands as we would normally understand those words and as compared to the Old Covenant Law. There are few commands. Jesus, primarily only gave His people two. Most of the teaching is showing us who we are and what we are to be in light of the knowledge of Christ.

What was taught also includes how they interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures in light of Christ, which then gives us the proper understanding of how to understand the Old Testament Scriptures as they are fulfilled in Christ. In this way we know that all Scripture is given to us by Christ and therefore is inspired and we learn what is for teaching by way of illustration from the Old Testament and what can be applied in light of Christ in the New Covenant. For example, we do not follow the dietary laws of the Old Covenant but they teach us about the holiness of God's people and how they were meant to be set apart as different. We see in all the sacrifices, which we do not make, that they pointed to Christ and are all fulfilled in Him. This informs and instructs us but we don't do those things.

We must see that The Law of Christ is not a series of written laws or codes or statutes or precepts that were used to describe what God gave to Israel under the Old Covenant. The Law of Christ is Christ Himself and His law is written on our hearts. That Law is there because by His Spirit, His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ we are internally driven to outwardly show who we are and a means of that is the desire to obey the imperatives-the commands - the things we read in the Scripture that reveal the standard of Christ for His New Covenant people. We are not shaped by the imperatives but by what Christ has made us to be and is causing/making us to be. I am not who I

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am in Christ because of what I do. I do what I do because of who I am, even though in
this life it will be imperfect.

I am continually being transformed into the image of Christ, who is my standard. I am
to be and to do like him.

Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets and is our New Covenant in his
person. There's a tendency for folks to hear "fulfilled in Christ" as simply meaning "he
did it", he fulfilled it.

Rather, "fulfill" has a much deeper meaning. Fulfill for example as a major theme in
Matthew's Gospel has the meaning of bringing the prophetic word of the Law and the
Prophets to fruition.

And they are brought to fruition not just in the words, they are brought to fruition not
just in the teaching, they are brought to fruition not just in the signs and wonders, they
are brought to fruition not just in the healing ... or the virgin birth ... or the return from
Egypt.

The Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the only begotten
Son of God.

Understanding His person as incarnate fulfillment is essential in the process of teaching
Christ to new believers and ourselves for that matter. He is incarnate word. He is
incarnate covenant. He is incarnate law. He is incarnate standard. He is incarnate
righteousness. He is incarnate God.

And he is now *fulfillment* indwelling his bride and bringing her to fulfillment.

What does Christ's fulfillment of the law look like and what impact does that have on
the kingdom citizen? The answer is that Christ's fulfillment and the corresponding New
Covenant have inverted-reversed heart issues and externals of the Old Covenant.

Whereas the externals were in the foreground of the OC (the Pharisees are the natural
outgrowth of the OC) and the heart issues are in the background, the heart issues are
now in the foreground and the externals are in the background, not absent entirely. So,

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while it was always adultery to lust after a woman who is not my wife, in the NC that heart issue takes the prominent position. Children aren't simply to honor their parents... they are to *obey* their parents "in the Lord"... as part of their union with Christ... an utter impossibility outside of regeneration and union with Christ.

So, that brings us to another aspect of this continuing to teach after we have brought an understanding of who Christ is and how we are in Him and relate to Him it is of extreme importance to help a new believer really understand what sin is in our relationship to Christ.

Sin is usually defined as falling short of the glory of God, missing the mark is literally what *harmatia* means in the greek. It is a term used in archery for missing the mark on the target. This has come to be understood as missing the mark when it comes to God, in other words God is not glorified when we sin because we have missed the mark, we have not lived up to the standard of God ie. "All have sinned and fall short of glorifying God."

Then this is usually taken to the next step for application in the believer's life and is illustrated by a list of don't do these things to regulate our behavior. These are sins and so we present a standard of external rules - laws that are not to be broken.

And by doing so we really miss the whole point of what it means to fall short of glorifying God.

Sin is really a lack of conformity to the image of Christ, who functions for us as Law, the standard by which we are measured and from whom our new ethic for living flows by the transforming work of the Spirit of Christ.

Here are the pertinent passages: Matthew 5:22a,26a,28a,32a,34a,39a, 7:24,26 (via Matt.5:17-20), 11:29, 17:5d (Christ as Torah is the *point* of the imagery of the Transfiguration), 28:18; John 3:36, 14:15 (*not* a reference to the OT law), Romans 8:29, 1Corinthians 15:49, 2 Cor. 3:18, Colossians 3:10 (via 2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15).

Do this and live, was the mandate of the garden and the decalogue. Even the OT law

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wasn't an arbitrary set of standards based on God's character. While it *was* based on God's character, the aim of the original mandate was conformity to God's character, be holy even as I am holy... image bearing.

Christ came to earth and was everything the original Adam/made in God's image, wasn't (2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15). In turn, we are being conformed to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 15:49, 2 Cor. 3:18, Col. 3:10).

Our hope should not long for how much we'll obey codes.

Our hope should be fixed on the Righteousness He is fulfilling in us...ruling our thoughts and desires to be perfect as the Father is perfect.

As the living Word is eternal and as His people we are eternal then His words and the result of them will never pass away.

So also we have the written Word. We have the text that informs us, reveals to us, illustrates for us, instructs us, rebukes us by the objective truth we see written there as the Holy Spirit convinces us of all these things.

The written Word is another means of God's grace for us to participate in growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

We do not disregard the Word in any way. We may be able to live according to the work of promise fulfillment that has occurred because of the real time event of Christ's cross work and the giving of the Holy Spirit to indwell His people to be continually transforming them, but the bible shows us the development and the reality, objectively and tangibly, of these great truths for our enlightenment, our encouragement and to give us tangible objective truth to see these things with new eyes because of a new heart. The Scripture helps to bring us to understand "the radical understanding of the law and the radical obedience to the law that is not based on law but on Christ, and therefore reflects the fullness of what God wills for us—and especially reflects the gospel, the covenant-keeping work of Christ at Calvary for his church." John Piper

The bible, in and of itself is paper and ink. It cannot change me, however, it is used by

So, once we have continued to teach new believers about Christ and who we are in Him, in the most personal sense, then we need to teach them who we are as participants in His kingdom and what is the place of the church, His bride and body in the kingdom.

First Christ, then His kingdom. Why?

Kingdom is one of the most explicit themes given all through Scripture.