

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The sermon text is first part of the Epistle lesson we've just heard. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your rational act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your eyes, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The mechanics of an automobile and the Christian faith may not seem to have any common ground, but looks can be deceiving. So, let me begin this sermon by leading you on an imaginary tour through the innards of a car, even though most of you probably know more about those things than I do—which is not saying much. The engine works hard to bring the drive shaft into motion, basically a long pole that extends from the engine to the rear axle of the car. But the drive shaft turns like this (left to right). When you step on the gas, though, the car doesn't move like that, it moves forward. That's because of the universal joint, which can turn this motion (left to right) into this one (forwards/backwards). So for the car to function properly, the one kind of motion has to be converted into the other.

That kind of thinking is helpful for understanding some basic Christian principles. In this example God would be like the engine and the drive shaft, showering us with his fatherly goodness, saving us from our sin by the grace of his son and creating faith and the will to do good in our hearts. In doing that he wants to set us in motion, too, so that we spread the good news of Jesus Christ and are on fire with deeds of love. He wants this motion, from heaven to earth, to be converted a motion from us to our neighbors. There is perhaps no better passage in scripture that describes the conversion of spiritual motion that this passage at the beginning of

Romans 12. 11 chapters long, Paul talked in great detail about the motion from God to us—about the engine and drive shaft of our faith, about how all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but that all are saved by God’s grace in Christ Jesus through faith, about how God’s Holy Spirit is at work creating faith in our hearts, and confidence and trust in God, about how the Spirit leads us to call God “Daddy” and to think of ourselves as his children, about how nothing—nothing!—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. All of that is the great mercy of our God. In view of that mercy, Paul writes: “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” What answer to the mercy, the sacrificial love of God could be more appropriate than our offering ourselves thankfully as living sacrifices to God? How else could we more properly place ourselves into the motion—into the purpose—of the church, which originates from God, than by placing our very selves, with all that we are and own, in God’s service—that same God that drew so close to us in Jesus Christ and then loved us to death, and loves us with the same intensity even today? Offering yourself in that way means realizing and taking to heart that God is not present just in one part of his life, not just on Sunday morning, but in all that he does, every day of the week. It means acting in accordance with the fact you are not simply a spouse or member of your family, not simply putting in time at work. You are God’s servant in that marriage, in that family, God’s way of showing love and support there. You are God’s servant at work, helping people by working honestly and with integrity. The same thing applies to you at school, on vacation, when you go dancing on the weekends or to happy hour after work. You’re where

you are for a reason. You're there in the service of God, you're there being a Christian, a little Christ for the people around you.

One major guideline for us as we go about making that thank offering to God is what Paul writes in verse 2: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In other words: Don't just fit in, don't just float in the current, don't just assume the attitudes and opinions of the world around you without reflecting on them from a Christian point of view, don't just say what everybody else says, do what everybody else does, wear what everybody else wears—unless it's a good and helpful thing to say or do. Don't be driven by the outside world—from the outside in—but rather from the inside out: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind", from the inside out. There are not many passages in scripture that appeal to our reason and our thinking, but if you think about it: Why not? God gave us our ability to think and reason just like he did our other bodily functions, and our minds have been saved by grace through faith, just like the rest of us has, too. Sanctified thinking, faith-filled reflection, is essential to our lives as Christians—not only that, it's quite helpful, because it can protect us from our own stupidity. We have the ability to think—and that too can be put into the service of Christ. Looking at this passage more closely, we see that Paul speaks of the renewal of the mind. That means the confrontation with new thoughts and ideas that are helpful for the sacrifice we are called to make. Certainly God's word provides us with that food for thought. That's why sermons are preached, lessons are read—and it's why we have Bible study and personal devotion. All of these things

help renew your mind, so that your thinking, your decisions, and finally your actions are Christ-like, in sway with the motion of God's church.

God and his grace are the engine that empowers us in our faith, and he wants that energy to be converted in us to reach out to those around us. That conversion takes place best, when we place ourselves, our mental energy and our bodily strength, in the service of him, who served us first and best.

And may the peace of God, which far surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.