

Christian Education in Biblical Perspective  
“Renewing Your Mind”  
Romans 12:1–2  
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
August 20, 2017, Evening Sermon

In this study we will be looking at Romans 12 and I confess this is my favorite book in the Bible. To me the Bible is like a range of mountain peaks with Mount Everest being the book of Romans. Our text for this study is one of my favorite in the book of Romans. This is the Word of God. It’s the truth. Romans 12:1–2 says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

I am grateful as a pastor for all the educators that God has allowed me to pastor at Briarwood. Some are almost like missionaries in the public school system as counselors, coaches, administrators and teachers and I get a chance to talk with them about some of the unbelievable challenges they face in their attempt to be faithful to the Lord. Some are from private school, home schools and co-ops. Then I am particularly grateful for Briarwood Christian School. It is an extraordinary ministry. We have about 121 ministries but two of them stand out in some very profound ways. One is our world mission’s ministry and the other is this ministry of Briarwood Christian School, in terms of its potentiality and its impact.

This is one of the reasons we are talking about this matter of Christian education. I thank the Lord for each one in education and particularly those who are in the classroom doing the teaching. I would like to give a little background with my encounter with Christian education for it started before I became a Christian. My father was in minor league baseball and in this career there was a whole lot of month at the end of the money so we stayed on the move quite a bit. In twelve years of education I went to eleven different schools. That may explain part of my problems in life and the weirdness associated with my life but I want to give you a snapshot of one of those moments.

This moment happened when I was in the ninth grade. My father was playing in the southern minor league at the time and he had a couple of days off. Unfortunately at that time in my life I had disembarked from where the Lord had led me through my parents. I tell people I became a Christian out of a ‘drug’ problem where my dad and mom ‘drug’ me to church every Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday nights as well. At this time in my life I began to rebel against it and went in another direction. With my father being out of town so much with baseball kind of facilitated my rebellion but my mother would keep a list so that when my dad got home from travelling he would even up the list with me. My dad didn’t believe in time-out so this was usually a painful experience for me when my dad got home at that time.

I don’t necessarily recommend this in parenting for I’m just telling you what happened to me. My dad got home, had the list in front of him and I could see he was exasperated and he said to me ‘Son, this is a trajectory that just isn’t going to continue. This is going to stop. I don’t know what it’s going to take for it to cease but I’m going to tell you what I’m going to do if it doesn’t cease. You are about to kill your mother and I loved her before I met you so I can get rid of you and keep her.’ I could just see the bazooka in his back pocket about to come out and shoot me in the face. Then he said how it was going to happen, ‘Up in Concord, North Carolina

there is a place called the Jackson Reformatory School, I have called them, they have an opening and you're next on the list to go there, unless there are some changes.' I did not become a Christian then but there were some serious behavior modifications that went on in my life after that just simply because of the reputation of that school.

It wasn't very profound or very immediate so my mother who couldn't stand the thought of me being sent there, talked my dad into plan number two or plan B. Plan B was that there was a new Christian school in Charlotte, North Carolina and that was where my mother wanted me to go. So that school became my Christian education and view of Christian schools. It was a reformatory. I thought that because obviously that's why I was sent there. Secondly, when I got there almost everyone in my class was almost in the same boat I was. Then my view of Christian education was this; there are some rules, you are going to behave or you will be expelled and then I would be on my way to Jackson Reformatory School, and you have to take a Bible class. That was about all I thought of Christian education. So it was education, plus the Bible and behave yourself.

In God's great kindness I became a believer where God brought me to the end of myself and to the bottom of the barrel at 21 years of age. I had performed the most amazing educational feat of my life before I was converted and that was I flunked out of East Carolina University. That is an achievement because if you can fog a mirror you can pretty much graduate from East Carolina University. I was on my way to the Marine Corp and in the meantime I met Cindy. She was a believer so I had to go to church in order to date her and there is another story of how I became a believer at that time. I finished putting Cindy through school because she consented to marry me. After I became a believer I had promised Cindy's parents she would finish school so after she finished I went back to East Carolina and majored in history and criminology. As I was on my way God called me into the ministry. When you are young and God calls you into the ministry at a Presbyterian Church of 120 the next step is that you become the youth director.

I knew I wasn't going to get trained for the ministry at East Carolina so through the advice of a wonderful man I was challenged to take one semester at Covenant College and if I didn't learn anything I would go to seminary. I went to Covenant College and realized your head could be used for something other than a baseball cap and golf visor. It was an amazing challenge I had before me. I remember being in Chapel and singing the hymn 'All For Jesus' and that grabbed my heart and my mind. I went to the classes and found out the Word of God frames, fills and leads us into every discipline of life. I had no idea that this was Christian education. The Word of God gives you and world and life view whereby every discipline of life can be understood to the glory of God. That so overwhelmed me and filled me that my life that it was almost like getting saved all over again for me.

In this study that is what I want to focus on, what does that kind of Christian education look like? What kind of Christian School has that Christian education? It certainly has to do with facilities, leadership, and curriculum choices but it really has to do with the teachers that have impacted our lives for it is the teachers that brought it home to me. I finally had a class in biology that I enjoyed, when it was taught to the glory of God, framed with the Word of God. It was overwhelmingly insightful for me.

The responsibility of Christian education for these children does not fall directly to the teachers, administrators, coaches and staff but it falls to their parents. We do not embrace the notion of *in loco parentis* (meaning in the place of a parent). I know there are some abandon children where we have to step in but we do not subvert or supersede parents. We are an extension of them. In the case of Briarwood Christian School and other private school they

make significant sacrifices for us not to take their place and we should never try to take their place because we need them to be in their place with their kids. They do have us to extend their ministry because they have said 'you have something that my kids need and I want you to deliver it to them in a way that is faithful and by God's grace is fruitful.'

Do I believe that every kid should go to Briarwood Christian School if I believe Christian education is mandatory? I do believe Christian education is mandatory. Every parent is responsible to educate their children and they are called to educate their children Christianly. The Bible does not mandate the delivery system so that is between the parents and the Lord as to which delivery system is chosen to use for their children. Parents need to prayerfully consider this delivery system. Now if someone were to ask me the best delivery system right now I would say Briarwood Christian School but I leave that up to the parents. As your pastor whatever you choose, I will come along side you to help make it work.

I have the great privilege to pastor a church that has a responsibility to make investments and oversight in something called Briarwood Christian School and I think it is unequalled in what it does and its potential for what it can do. The biggest reasons I think this is because of the teachers. It is not the only reason but they have teachers who understand what Christian education is, and embrace Christian education as Christian educators. What does this look like when it is put into place and how is it implemented?

Teachers, what I'm saying to you is the same thing I'm saying to myself. Here are the facts. Leadership works and teaching works. What if it's bad teaching? That works too. When all is said and done the pupils will become like their teachers. Good teaching will have good results and bad teaching will have bad results – good leadership leads to good results, bad leadership leads to bad results. If the blind lead the blind they both fall into the pit. It still works. So the question is not our teaching doing something but the question is, what is it doing? Teaching works.

So what does it mean to teach Christianly? What does it mean for us to reclaim something that is absolutely lost – the Christian mind? If you want to see the Christian mind lost just watch how people try to navigate the issues and the events politically, economically and culturally. Watch how the educators deal with it. We see no sense of the Christian mind any longer either by God's redeeming grace or by God's common grace. It is extremely important that our kids get the tools to be able to put on the glasses that are framed by the Word of God when events happen so they read it and understand it rightly including the antidote and the solution of it.

What would happen if we begin to think Biblically and no longer thought in terms of a Darwinian imposed race paradigm of three, five, or seven races but to think of a Biblical paradigm with multiple ethnicities but one race? One race being a human race where all are created in the image of God. What if we understood the fall where everyone in that race is born with a sinful heart? As much as I abhor the 'isms' (racism, nationalism, etc.) in this world it does not amaze me that it's there. It burdens me and hurts me that it's there but what amazes me is that everybody isn't doing it. I understand the fall where we are born dead in our sins and the only reason we are not absolutely depraved is because of God's common grace that is restraining our depravity.

Then I get the chance to tell that human race that there is another race where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, rich or poor, bond or free, and that's the second Adam's race, purchased by His blood and filled with His Spirit. I have Good News for you. Then, what if the people of God began to manifest that with burnished families, relationships, with their witness of salt and

light, of word and deed in a community? That is where we are training children to help them to think through these issues so it is thrilling to be an educator. God has put us in this position for the renewing of the mind, but it's also chilling and that is why the Bible says in James 3:1, *[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.* What you are doing is having an effect. So Lord, help us do it right.

What would it look like to do it right? That is why I love Christian education because we have Christianity, the glorious truth, not of a man-made religion about a relationship with God but a God-given religion where God establishes the relationship with man, by His grace and for His glory. Christianity is something that gives you the information with a right view of God, a right view of those who are made in the image of God and a right view of why we who are made in the image of God are wrong with God and a right view of how man can be right with God and God right within him. We have delivered to us the truth of God's Word that tells us a right view of God and that is where education starts. It doesn't start with us but it starts with 'who is God'. Then there is the right view of us who are made in the image of God and why are we not right with God and why is everything wrong with us so that we can not only look at creation but the fall and then how can that which is wrong with God get right with God and God get right within them. That is Good News. That's the Gospel.

So there is not only creation and fall in our world and life view but there is redemption. Then there is God's Providence that shows His common grace in restraining sin and there is His redeeming and sustaining grace so that we live and move and have our being in Him. Then there is consummation. I have been through quite a few funerals recently but the Lord has told me that He will always be with me. There was a lady in the church I pastored at in Charlotte who gave me a note and told me this was what she wanted me to do for her when she died. This note talked about a lady who had told her pastor to do two things for her when he did her funeral. One was to place her Bible in her left hand as she was in the casket and the other was to put a fork in her right hand. She wanted him to keep the casket open even though that wasn't his primary way of doing funerals. She wanted him to make sure everyone walked by her casket. Then when everyone sat down he was to tell them that the Bible was in her left hand because it was through the Word of God that she came to know the God of the Word and the reason she had the fork in her hand had to do with being served dinner. This was when the hostess would say after the main meal to keep your fork because you knew then that the best was yet to come and that is what the lady wanted her pastor to tell those at her funeral – don't weep for me for the best is yet to come.

Moody said about his death here on earth that his obituary would say that he was dead but don't believe a word of it, for on the day you read that I will never be more alive. Creation, fall, redemption, Providence and consummation – giving the information from the Word of God for the Christian world and life view isn't framed by intuition but by revelation which is why we need teachers who are filled with the Spirit for illumination. We don't think up Christianity. Bill O'Reilly would always say Christianity is a philosophy and it's not. This isn't a word of men about God but this is God's Word revealed to man and the biggest decision you will ever make in your life is whether you believe it or not. Then you and I get the opportunity to teach it because you can't know Him until you know from Him and you can't know what it means to be right with Him until you hear from Him, in His Word so we are people of the Book.

Christian education begins with Divine revelation and then it takes place through illumination which is the Spirit of God working through men and women just like you. You

teach them what the Word of God says about the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer and the coming King. You also teach them how to understand it so that they have a right view of God and how to be right with God and what it means that God is right within you. So let me go back to the text for this study.

Romans 12:1–2 says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Here is the educational outcome I want to leave you with. It is that the people we teach become worshippers of God in the gathered assembly and in their life. God made them to the praise of His glory. We want God to bring them to Himself and to His redeeming grace so that they not only love to gather for worship with His people but when they scatter they love to live worship.

Paul says ‘I appeal to you brothers, not *for* the mercies of God but by the mercies of God.’ We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices. It is great that we are in the New Covenant because in the Old Covenant they brought dead sacrifices and in the New Covenant you bring living sacrifices. We do it because of God’s grace and mercy. We don’t do it for God where we say ‘let me go do this and maybe God will be gracious to me.’ No, it is in light of God’s mercies and that’s why for 11 chapters Paul unfolds the Gospel of grace in Romans. He ends Romans 11 with a doxology that says in Romans 11:33–36, *[33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! [34] “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” [35] “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” [36] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Then Paul starts Romans 12 with *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy (sprinkled with the blood of Jesus) and acceptable (filled with the Spirit) to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Do you know what your students are facing with people that have technology, skills and gifts that are absolutely astounding in which they are trying to put a sovereign-self world and life view into the heart and mind of every one of your students? You get them for 40 minutes and they get them for unbelievable hours. They have even found a way to get them in your classroom if you can’t find that iPhone and they sneak it in. They have found over 16,000 communication initiatives every day to get to your children/students and no communication is without a world and life view. Every portrait painted, every picture taken, every book written, every song sung, all have a life view and they all come down to either a sovereign self in rebellion against God or the sovereign God who saves sinners. That life view is being pummeled into the life view of those children that you and I minister to every single day.

Do not be conformed to this world and that is, do not be pressed into the mold of the world but be transformed. The word translated ‘transformed’ is the same word we get the word metamorphosis – ugly caterpillar in the cocoon comes out as the beautiful butterfly. There is a sinner born into this world and the cocoon of God’s grace and the power of the Spirit of God with the Word of God brings them forth transformed to the glory of God. We get to be a part of that.

I understand if you are somewhat discouraged after what I said about the technology in our world that bombards our children because I can get discouraged too but here is our confidence. The Spirit of God will not be stopped. The Word of God is powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the Hammer that breaks the rock. It's the balm of Gilead that soothes the soul. We have the Word of God, the Spirit of God and the relentless love of God that is unstoppable in Jesus Christ. What a message we have to bring to them, so that when they leave our school they know Him and they know how to live for Him, to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. The more they glorify Him the more they will enjoy Him and the more they enjoy Him the more they will glorify Him. That's what we do!

I get paid to do this! I'm scared to death they will find out that I would do it for free. This is amazing what we get the opportunity to do! As the Bible says we are accountable for it so let not many of you become teachers and that may chill us but what thrills us is that God uses you to bring His Word in the power of His Spirit that they may see the Son of God by the grace of God to the glory of God.

That glorious Gospel in the first 11 chapters of Romans says that because of what Jesus Christ has done with the Spirit of God at work within you, when you become a Christian you get a new heart, a new record, a new life, a new family and a new home but you don't get a new mind. Yet you want to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind so even though you don't get a new mind you get the Spirit of God, the Word of God and those called to teach the Word of God for the renewing of the mind.

When I see you I am on the Road to Emmaus and I see a couple of disciples who are bewildered wondering how to interpret the events of this day and they are discouraged and depressed. Then the Bible says in Luke 24:27, *[27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* He opened their eyes, heart and mind to see Him. We cannot open minds, hearts or eyes but we can open the Scriptures and teach the Word of God that God would make them the people of God with new hearts, new records, new lives, a new family, a new home and a renewing mind. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for my dear colleagues in life and ministry. I thank You for the privilege to serve You together. May we serve each other well. May we serve You well. Father, we thank You that You have put us where You have put us and that amazingly when we open up Your Word and Your Spirit comes it is no longer we who speak but Christ begins to speak to the hearts of our students and His sheep know His voice and they follow Him. And faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. So as each one of these teachers take Your Word into the discipline they teach and frame and fill that discipline with Divine revelations so that the facts, figures, insights, axioms and all those things that make up their discipline are given framed in the Word of God to the glory of God as they are filled with the Spirit of God, may these students know the glory and grace of God with renewed minds in Jesus Christ. Lord we don't want to just white wash a bunch of Pharisees. We want men and women, young boys and girls who meet the Savior and have the mind of the Savior to live life to the glory of God in this present age. Fill them with joy, in Jesus' Name, Amen.