

**What It Takes To Really Change**  
Part 3 - A New You For A New Year  
Romans 12:1-12  
Rev. Jean Smith  
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We are continuing in a series on a New You for a New Year. The first week we talked about the importance of having a vision because what you see is what you get; and how you need to see things through eyes of faith rather than eyes of fear. The second week we looked at the importance of having faith as you set personal goals for change; how important it is to really believe that you can change with God's help. Today we are going to look at some more issues involved in making lasting changes in your life. We're going to look at what it takes to really change.

One of the universal desires of human beings is the desire to improve. It's universal. We all want to be the best we can be. Psychologists call that the need for self-actualization. That's the need within all of us to make the most of who we are and what we have. That desire, that passion is within all of us. All healthy individuals aspire to grow and improve. Only unhealthy people think they are just fine the way they are. Healthy people want to improve who they are. One proof of this is the fact that we spend billions of dollars every year on products and gizmos and gadgets that we think will improve our lives and make our lives better. There's an entire industry built around the idea of, if you'll buy my product, eat my product, use my product, your life will be better.

The sad thing is: those things don't produce lasting change. In fact, a lot of things we buy don't make any lasting difference in our lives at all. The only source of real and permanent change is our Creator; the One who made us. He alone is the source of deep and lasting change and so we must go to Him and to the Owner's manual for instructions for real and lasting change. The classic text in the Bible on how to change is found in the book of Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 through 12. In this passage we find six principles for lasting change. Today we're going to look at just the first two and next week we'll look at the others.

The **FIRST PRINCIPLE** for lasting change is found in verse one. I call it the Principle of Dedication. **The Principle of Dedication is this: COMMIT YOUR BODY TO GOD.** That's the starting point for real and lasting change. It doesn't matter if you are seeking financial change or vocational change or social change or emotional change or relational change; it all starts with committing your body to God. Why is that? Why is it necessary to start by committing your physical body to God? Very simply: because your physical body affects your entire behavior. Your body affects your mood. Your body affects your emotion. Any teacher knows this. If a student comes to class slouching and slumping, that student will have a bad attitude. You already know that kid isn't going to be in a good mood to learn. Your physical body influences your moods. Your physical well being influences your emotional wellbeing.

Romans 12:1 says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— which is your spiritual act of*

*worship.*” This verse is packed with meaning. It begins, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers...”** Folks, whenever you see a “therefore” in the Bible, it’s important to stop and look at what it’s there for. A “therefore” means, “in light of everything I just said to you.” So what has Paul just said? He’s just spent eleven chapters telling them all the awesome things God has done for us. He says God has done this and this and this and this and this and on and on, sharing with us the awesome things God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Therefore, in light of all the mercies God has shown us in Christ Jesus, in light of all that God has done for us, in light of all that, the rational thing to do is to offer your very body, to God as a living sacrifice.

Notice it doesn’t say, “Offer you heart to Jesus.” We hear that all the time: give your heart to Jesus. It doesn’t say, “Offer your spirit to Jesus. It doesn’t say, “Offer your soul to Jesus.” It says, “Offer your body to God.” Where ever your physical being goes, the rest of you goes with it. Have you noticed that? You may daydream for a second or two but you always come back to where your body is. Have you ever heard anyone say, “I can’t be with you but I’ll be with you in spirit.” You know what that means? Nothing! You can’t be with anybody in spirit. If you’re not there in the body, you’re not there.

The Bible teaches, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, that the body is a good thing. It was a group of people called the Gnostics who infiltrated the Christian community and tried to influence them into thinking the body is a bad thing, an evil thing, and everything associated with the physical body is evil. They denied that Jesus even had a physical body because if he did, he would have been clocked in sin. But the Bible teaches us the opposite. The Bible says our bodies are the handiwork of God, to be offered to God as a living sacrifice in light of all that he has done for us in Christ Jesus.

When you offer something to someone, is it something that is forced or is it voluntary? It’s voluntary. It’s not forced or demanded. This is important. Nobody can force you to offer your body to them. And nobody can force you to change. Nobody can force you to improve. It has to be your decision and it starts by offering your body to God as a living sacrifice. A lot of people get married thinking they can change their partner. Then they find out they can’t and it’s a rude awakening. This is the **FIRST LAW OF CHANGE: CHANGE IS MY CHOICE.** No one can force you to change. No one can make you change. You will not change until you decide to change. Real and lasting change will happen only when you offer your body to God as a living sacrifice.

Now the problem with a living sacrifice is that it can choose to crawl off the altar. We do this all the time. We offer our bodies to God and then we take them back again. So this is not a once for all time thing. It’s something we have to do continually, moment by moment. The problem is: we offer our bodies and all that we are to God on Sunday morning and on the way home in the car we take it back again. We sing “Onward Christian Soldier” during the worship service and then on the way home we go AWOL. We need to leave this place and continue to worship God.

There are three specific things you can do with your body that the Bible says are acts of worship. First, you can cleanse your body of contaminants. You can stop putting

into it things that harm your body, things that poison your body, things that destroy and harm your body. 2<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1 says, ***"Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."*** What contaminates the body is what you put into it through your mouth; what you put into your stomach and into your lungs. What contaminates your spirit is what you see with your eyes and hear with your ears. You contaminate your spirit by what you watch and by what you listen to. So the first decision to make as an act of worship is to cleanse your body of the contaminants you've been abusing it with. That's an act of worship.

**The second thing you can do as an act of worship is to care for your body.** Caring for your body is an act of stewardship. What you think you own is really on loan. Your body is on loan to you from God, just like everything else you possess. It's all on loan to you from God. When you die, all that you have will go back to God and God will hold each and every one of us accountable for what we have done with what he has given to us. We will be held accountable for how we cared for our bodies. The Bible says, ***"No one hates his own body [at least not anyone in their right mind] but lovingly cares for it just as Christ cares for his body which is the church."*** (Ephesians 5:29)

So how do you care for your body? By keeping it in shape and eliminating the toxins you put into it. That is actually an act of worship.

**A third thing you can do as an act of worship is to control your body.** Some people cleanse their bodies, care for their bodies and control their bodies simply out of pride. That's not an act of worship. Some people do these things as an act of worship of themselves. A self made man usually worships his own maker - himself. If you are doing these three things as a way to honor God, and please God, then they become for you acts of worship. The Bible says, ***"Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable."*** (1 Thessalonians 4:4) We are to control our bodies and not let our bodies control us. It doesn't honor God when we say, "I can't help myself" when it comes to my body. The Bible says, ***"I discipline my body like an athlete training it to do what it should."*** (1 Corinthians 9:27) That is what we are to do.

Folks, if we did that, we'd be a whole lot healthier. A recent article in Time magazine reported that Americans spend 2.7 trillion dollars on health care each year and seventy five percent of that 2.7 trillion dollars is spent on treating chronic illnesses that could be prevented by lifestyle choices. That means that 75% of all health problems are caused by how we live, the choices we make, the toxins we subject our bodies to, our decision not to care for our bodies or control them. The first principle for lasting change is to commit your body to God.

The **SECOND PRINCIPLE** for real and lasting change that we find in this passage in Romans is what I call the Principle of Concentration. **THE PRINCIPLE OF CONCENTRATION is this: REFOCUS YOUR MIND.** If you want real and lasting change you must refocus your mind. The Bible says, ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, [he's talking about the way the world thinks] but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** (Romans 12:2) There is a simple truth being drawn from here: **whatever gets your attention**

**gets you.** This verse is so full of meaning. First it says, ***"Do not conform any longer..."*** What does it mean to conform? It means to copy everybody else. Too often we let the people around us shape our lives. Have you ever done something really stupid, dumb, risky or unhealthy just because everybody else was doing it? Oh, yeah. Because it was popular. Because it was the cool thing to do. Because it enabled you to fit in with the in crowd. Nobody ever smokes a cigarette because they liked the smell of it. They started because they saw someone else do it and they wanted to be like them and then they got addicted to it.

Notice it says ***"Do not conform any longer..."*** When you do something for a long time, it becomes a habit. We start off copying other people and pretty soon it becomes a habit. It becomes habitual. When you've done something for a long time, you're no longer copying someone else; it's now your habit, your hang up, your addiction, your compulsion. It's now yours, a part of who you are.

Everything you've learned in life you've learned from someone else. Someone else has modeled it for you. The problem is: there are no perfect models in this world. Every human being is imperfect. Every model is flawed and imperfect, even the best ones. You may have some models for conflict resolution growing up that weren't very good. You may have had some models for anger management growing up that weren't very good. You may have had some models for eating as you were growing up that weren't very good. You may have had some models for how to treat others that weren't very good. You may have had some models who taught you to procrastinate or avoid responsibility. A lot of the things that were modeled for us as we were growing up weren't good. You're going to have to find some new models in order to change those attitudes and behaviors that are bad. That is the **SECOND LAW OF CHANGE: TO CHANGE MY LIFE, I MUST CHANGE MY MODEL.**

There's only one perfect model. His name is Jesus Christ. God sent him to earth to be our model. Twenty times Jesus says, ***"Follow me..."*** Why? Because he is the perfect model. We are to follow his example. Six times Paul says, "Follow me..." Why? Because he was following the only perfect model, Jesus Christ.

As kids are growing up, they desperately need models. They will adopt the models around them. It is impossible not to have models in your life. We all have models. We need to choose them carefully.

The passage before us says, ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** (Romans 12:2) The word for transformed in the Greek language is the same word we get the word metamorphosis from. That's what happens to a caterpillar when it changes into a butterfly. When a caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon, when it comes out, it's not a better version of a caterpillar. When it comes out of the cocoon, it's a totally different animal. That's not reformation. That's not renewal. That's not improvement. That's transformation. That's radical transformation and only God can do that! Positive thinking can't do that. We can turn over a new leaf. Lots of people do that, but it takes God to experience transformation. And God does that by renewing our minds.

What does that involve? The Bible says, "***Put off your old self which is being corrupted by deceitful desires.*** [That's those impulses and compulsions that pull you the wrong way] ***and be made new in the attitude of your mind, and put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***" (Ephesians 4:22-23) Notice there's a putting off and there's a putting on. Real health comes down to stopping some stuff you need to stop doing and starting some stuff you need to start doing. Stop putting in your body some negative, hurtful things. And start putting in the right things. There is a putting off and a putting on to real and lasting change.

Suppose you went over to Macy's and you're looking for a new coat. You find one you like the look of, but you need to try it on to see if it's a good fit. But you don't try it on while you're still wearing your old coat. That would be stupid. You've got to take off the old one before you can put on the new one. That's not just true physically; it's true spiritually, emotionally and mentally. You've got to take off the old in order to put on the new. You've got to let go of the old in order to receive the new.