

Romans 12:1-2

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Date: 12 May 2024

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[0:00] Well, good morning and happy Mother's Day. If you will please take out your copy of God's Word and join me in Romans chapter 12.!

I find these two verses to be of great importance for the church of our day.

In an age of post-modernity and moral relativism, we find ourselves particularly susceptible to the temptation of allowing our passions to lead the charge in directing our lives.

To let emotions rule the day. If you have no truth, what is left? It's whatever you feel may be true. And this just should not be so amongst Christians. We are to be a distinct people set apart for the glory of Christ. And Paul, in part, tells us how this is to be in these two verses.

[1:39] So Romans 12, verse 1 and 2 is our text for today. Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good, and so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Paul writes, And we will spend the bulk of our time and attention this morning drawing out the meaning of the phrase.

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And we're going to move quick this morning because I have more notes than I normally do. But before we get to that phrase, we must take a look at the preceding words of Paul's exhortation.

He begins at the beginning of chapter 12 with, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.

Verse 1 contains the conjunctive adjective, therefore. And these conjunctions in the Bible carry a great deal of weight and should be paid a special attention to.

[3:08] You could think of the phrase, for that reason, in the place of the word, therefore, which begs, for what reason? This little word, just three Greek letters in the original language, bridges everything that Paul has said in the first 11 chapters to everything he will say in the following five chapters.

So, this, therefore, is packed full of meaning. The first 11 chapters of Romans is Paul's magnum opus of Christian theology.

It is the most extensive and clearest defense of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. We've been deriving that across the past months.

It speaks to the Christ followers' adoption in Jesus and identification with Christ as our federal head. Paul tells us that we are no longer captives of the law, but captives of grace.

He speaks of the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit who intercedes for us, leads us in holiness, and helps us in all our affliction. He gives us reason for patient hope as we stand in God's election, the certainty of coming glory, the confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and total assurance in God's continued faithfulness.

[4:39] He then works out what all this means for missions. Condemnation, justification, adoption, soteriology, pneumatology, missiology.

It is grand and all contained in this therefore, and all summarized by the phrase, by the mercies of God. Paul is making an appeal to his brothers, and he wants to root it in all that he has taught so far in this letter.

Therefore, then, accordingly, consequently, these things being so, indicating that something follows from another thing necessarily.

Because God has been so merciful to you, Paul says, I appeal to you, brothers. Paul's appeal is for those who have received the mercies of God, those who are adopted sons.

And ladies, you want to be sons in Christ, receiving all the benefits of the Father. Adopted in Christ, as Paul is, those who are co-heirs with Jesus.

[5:54] For anything that Paul will go on to say to be of any benefit to you, you must ensure that you are counted in this number here called brothers.

If you have yet to place saving faith in the personal work of the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from your sin and throw yourself on his mercies.

Assuming that you are a brother, including you, ladies, moms, this morning. Paul moves from doctrine to practice, from theology to ethics, from foundation to application.

And what is it that Paul urges us to do in light of the mercies of God? Two, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The word present in Greek is an active, aorist, imperative verb. It is the same word used in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to speak of the priestly duty of sacrifice, which Paul develops in the next phrase.

[7:07] This type of verb means that this presentation is a decisive, deliberate, and continuous surrender of our whole selves, over and over and over again.

We are urged by Paul to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, not one that is slaughtered and laid on an altar, but one that lives devotedly for the aim of the glory of God.

The word here translated bodies is used in the New Testament to speak of the physical body, but is more commonly used to speak of the whole self.

So all of us, decisively, deliberately, and continuously, because of the mercies of God, are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, give all of ourselves in devotion to God.

Paul then qualifies the presenting of our whole selves as a living sacrifice with the word holy and the phrase acceptable to God.

[8:14] What kind of sacrifice are we to be? One that has been set apart for a particular purpose. One that has been declared without spot or blemish.

But I suggest, as Paul transitions this letter from doctrine to practice, one that is also in the process of being made pure. Justification, Paul has argued, guarantees sanctification.

Having been saved guarantees that we're going to be made perfect in very degree. And he is urging our part in this glorious work of God.

So it is this sacrifice that is acceptable to God. One that has been washed and one that is being washed. Paul then says that this decisively, deliberately, and continuously offered whole self-sacrifice is your spiritual worship.

The word translated spiritual is an interesting one. And a tricky one to assign a single English word to. I am using an English standard version of the Bible.

[9:29] Some translations, you may have one open in front of you today, render this word reasonable. And, on first glance, you may think that these English words run in contradiction to each other.

Spiritual and reasonable. This Greek word is the word that we get our English word logic from. So reasonable or logical are fair words here, but still not perfect.

The word sets itself in contrast to the material world. The Greek word sets itself in contrast to the material world.

It is the rational immaterial that it is concerned with. But that would be a clunky translation, wouldn't it? This is your rational immaterial service.

Which is why we get the word spiritual in the ESV and many other good translations. So, what are we to think of this word?

[10:36] First, let's praise God for the faithful work of good Bible translators and for Greek tools to dig around a little bit deeper on these words. Second, Paul is introducing this idea that he is going to flesh out for us in the following verse.

And here it is. The transformative power of God for sacrificial living begins in the mind. Our faith is a mindful faith.

There is one other place in the New Testament that this Greek word is used and rendered once again spiritual in the ESV. It's found in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 2.

There Peter writes, Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation.

What is the pure spiritual milk that Peter is talking about? The saving knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, it could have been translated like newborn infants long for the pure reasonable milk.

[11:51] Knowledgeable milk. Before we have received the practicality of verse 2, bear with me as I present a bit more proof that our faith is a mindful faith.

Paul has much to say about this. I will show you three examples from four texts in rather rapid fashion. Are you ready? Hang on.

If you turn back just a few pages to Romans chapter 8, I'll begin reading in verse 5. There Paul says, Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.

[12:58] If, in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. So you see the functional work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian, in part, is to take their mind to the things of God.

The things of the Spirit are the things of God. The Word of God. Another text. Now this is Ephesians chapter 5. If you'd like to join me, feel free.

If not, listen carefully. Beginning in verse 17. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Now to show you this, I need to take you to a parallel passage to this one. And I read so much of that because I want you to see them as parallel passages. So that was Ephesians 5, 17-21.

[14:13] Now listen to Colossians 3, 12-17. And I'll point out why it matters in just a second. There, Paul writes, Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. You probably heard a lot of similar language throughout there.

I hope that you heard, I'm going to draw your attention to two phrases just before this idea of teaching and admonishing one another in songs, hymns, spiritual songs.

Right? In Ephesians, you see the phrase, be filled with the Spirit. In Colossians, you see the phrase, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

[15:41] And so I think what Paul's communicating to us as you look at these passages, Romans chapter 8, Ephesians chapter 5, Colossians chapter 3, is that for those who are filled with the Spirit, those who are walking by the Spirit, who are setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, that means that the word of Christ is dwelling within us.

We have a mindful faith. One final text, an example, very briefly, 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 5. There Paul says, we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

Christ. Our faith is a mindful faith. And don't hear me saying that there's no place for emotion in our faith. What I'm saying is, it should be led mindfully.

I do not have the time to prove what I'm about to say to you, but nonetheless, I think it important to say at this point, our earthly existence is a dichotomous existence.

And this is probably not the best word for our existence, as it means branching out or in some cases set against. But the point is that we are made of two parts.

[17:05] We are two parts. We are bodies and we are souls. And better yet, we could say we are embodied souls.

This is the state of your earthly existence. There is the part of us that is readily observable through plain vision or instrumentation like an x-ray or CT scan or microscope.

And then there is the part of us that is not so readily observable like our affections, our sorrows, our thoughts. We are embodied souls.

If you have trouble in this world and you certainly do and will, then those troubles fit within a Venn diagram of being either physical, which means you need physical relief, or spiritual, and often but not always some intersection between the two.

Your spiritual issues need spiritual solutions which begin in the mind. John Owen, in his book *Spiritual Mindedness*, which I commend to you, a quote that's on the back of your bulletin said this, The mind is a leading faculty of the soul.

[18:31] When the mind fixes upon an object or course of action, the will and the affections follow suit. They are incapable of any other consideration.

The mind's office is to guide, to direct, to choose, and to lead. End quote. So our faith is a mindful faith.

It's not a stoic faith, but it is mindful. Beware of anybody that teaches you that Christianity is first and foremost an emotional endeavor.

Now let's look at verse 2 and because it's been a minute since we read it, let's read it once again.

Paul says, 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.

Verse 2 is an explanation of how we are to fulfill the encouragement of verse 1, which Paul will then work out in greater detail to the very end of the chapter. He begins with the negative part of the exhortation, Do not be conformed to this world.

[19:50] To be conformed is from a word that means shaped or molded. It refers to the outward appearance of a thing and not the substance of it.

Paul is saying that we are not of this world and therefore we should not look like we are of this world. World could also be rendered age, which I prefer.

I think it pulls our thinking beyond just the material and presses us to think toward the immaterial. Thoughts, emotions, motivations, ideology, and so forth.

G.C. Trench in his book *Synonyms of the New Testament* on this word world or age says this, quote, that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power being the moral or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale again inevitably to exhale, end quote.

Right? This is explanation of this word, world. Do not be conformed to that. Paul distinguishes this world or age from the will of God which is good and acceptable and perfect.

[21:29] So the spirit of this age runs in contradiction to the ways of God and we ought to not be conformed to it. It will always be pressing onto us and into us.

The age in which we live cries out for conformity. But our reasonable worship is to rather be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

We are to be changed by thinking differently than this age. This Greek word is where we derive our word metamorphosis.

Whereas to be conformed is in contradiction with our nature. To be transformed is to be becoming consistent with our nature. We have been made new in Christ.

So we are to be about appearing new in Christ by the grace that God provides. This is the glorious work of sanctification.

[22:36] Paul says of us in 2 Corinthians 3 and verse 18 and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. He is the Spirit working in us to make us look more like Christ bit by bit by bit. The Spirit of Christ empowers us to look more like Him as He leads us in the Word of Christ.

I see my argument coming together here. What part do we play? This is an exhortation to us to be transformed by the renewal of our mind.

What are we to be about in this work of being transformed? Before I spend the remainder of our time addressing this question I want to make a brief aside concerning mental health by making four axiomatic statements.

I don't want to oversimplify this. There are complications in the world in which we live. Four quick statements and then we'll press on. Number one, we are embodied souls and our thinking faculty takes place within an organ that is susceptible to the curse.

[23:57] There is a gray matter organ in which all the neurons fire. This is where our thinking is going on. It is also susceptible to the curse.

I'm a type 1 diabetic and my pancreas does not produce insulin. In the same way, we should understand that the organ is susceptible. Secondly, some, not all, but some of our spiritual problems intersect a physical problem.

My really big and obvious common example of this is schizophrenia. This is a physical problem going on in the brain, but it has spiritual implications and both need to be addressed.

Thirdly, physical problems are never an excuse for sin. They don't become entitlement to sin against God because, fourthly, God is more powerful than your physical and, for that matter, spiritual problems.

He is more powerful. 1 Corinthians 10, 13, Paul says, no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. So, guess what? You're not unique. You don't get a pass on your sin.

[25:12] God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it.

So, grace comes with it and God is more powerful than your physical or spiritual problems. Okay, so, what are we to do in the work of being transformed by the renewal of our minds?

What is the activity that we're meant to be engaging in? Let me show you two biblical examples and one extra biblical so that we can learn just a bit about it.

So, if you will, please join me in Genesis chapter 3. In the fall, I want you to see a negative example of the leading of the mind.

Here we see beginning in verse 1, now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, he addresses her at her point of faculty, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

[26:37] Satan tempts Eve to doubt God's word, to doubt the truth. And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

So here, Eve fails because Eve adds to God's word. The very first legalist in the Bible. As you can see in Genesis 2, verse 16 and 17, Lord God commanded the man saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Eve has added this prohibition from touching as well. But the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die.

He tempts Eve to doubt God's goodness, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So, Eve disbelieves God. This is a mental activity that's going on and then we see the results.

[27:55] So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, it is objectively not, and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

A failure on both of their parts to let their minds lead and win the day. Second example, let's go to Psalm 73.

Turn with me if you will. Psalm 73. Psalm 73. Asaph, one of the Old Testament saints I look forward to meeting someday.

And we see a complete arc in this Psalm of his thinking. He feels a way and then he thinks and feels a different way.

Starts out in verse 1. Truly, God is good to Israel. For me, my feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. And he tells us the story of what happened.

[29:11] For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek.

They are not in trouble as others are. They are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore, pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness, seen as a good thing.

Their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongue! struts through the earth.

!! So he observes people who are not following God and they just seem to be doing great.

They have favor with the people. Nothing's going bad in their lives at all. And then he says, verse 13, all in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

[30:26] For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. This is the way that he feels about his pursuit of God, his pursuit of innocence.

It's been in vain that I have done this. But verse 15, if I had said, I will speak thus, what he's just said.

He recognizes that it's not true. It's an evil thing for him to say this and to feel this way. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

How is it that they prosper and I don't? I'm the one that's pursuing! God and they're not? Why am I getting the short end of the stick? Verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God.

Then I discerned their end. Their end. Then the truth of where they're headed came to light. Truly, you set them in slippery places.

[31:32] You make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors. Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

That's what will happen to them. The truth begins to take its place in his mind. He says, when my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant.

I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, even though I let emotions rule the day, nevertheless, I am continually with you.

You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[32:35] For behold, those who are far from you shall perish. You put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works.

So see the arc through that, the mindful faith of Asaph. What does he do? He picks up the things that God has said to be true and he meditates on them and he let them lead him out.

One more positive example. This is extra biblical. I recognize that some of you don't love this but I do and I have the microphone so bear with me. This is from the Pilgrim's Progress.

Again, a work that I commend, commend, commend to you. And in this part of the story, Christian is along on his journey with a man named Hopeful and they have left gone over a little stile into a field.

They fall asleep and they're taken captive by a giant named Despair. He takes them, he locks them in the dungeon of his castle called Doubting Castle where he is there with his wife distrust.

[33:56] So there's an anguish going on with Christian and with Hopeful. They're not believing the promises of God and they are despairing.

They're in a sorrowful place. Their emotions are leading the charge in this little episode. And so time has gone on.

I'm going to spare you very much reading of it. But the giant has come and beat them almost to the point of death. And he has promised that he'll now take care of them the following day.

I pick up reading here. Quote, Around midnight, Christian hopeful began to pray and continue till almost the break of day. Shortly before the sun came up, good Christian, as one half amazed, broke out into this passionate speech.

What a fool I am to lie in a stinking dungeon when I might instead walk at liberty. I have a key in my bosom called promise that I believe will open any lock in doubting castle.

[35:01] Promise God's word to him. Hopeful responded, that is good news, good brother. Take it out and let's try it. Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom and began trying to unlock the dungeon door.

The door's bolt as he turned the key came loose and the door flew open with ease. Christian and hopeful both came out and they're pursued but they make it safely out of doubting castle letting the truth reign in the moment.

So a couple of practical steps for to be transformed by the renewing of our minds we are going to need number one to read.

I always encourage wide broad reading but primarily we need to be reading God's word. If the spirit of Christ is to take up the word of Christ in our lives it's going to have to be inside of us.

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 16 and 17 all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work.

[36:26] How are we to navigate the challenges of this world? How are we to do anything? By the truth that God provides for us. The spirit employing it in our lives.

I said at the beginning of our time together that in an age of post modernity and moral relativism we find ourselves particularly susceptible to the temptation of allowing our passions to lead the charge in directing our lives.

This just shouldn't be so. John Piper in his book on regeneration called Finally! Alive wrote this, My feelings are not God.

God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God's word defines truth. My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives.

And sometimes, many times, my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens, and it happens every day in some measure, I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings, but rather, I plead with God, purify my perceptions of your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth.

[37:44] End quote. The average American spends one hour and twenty seven minutes playing video games per day, that just pains me deep down in, and two hours and fourteen minutes on social media.

I am sure that I am speaking to an exceptional group of individuals, but perhaps this is true of us in at least some measure.

That's three hours and forty one minutes a day spent unnecessarily in front of a screen. Not all bad, I'm not saying that all of that is bad, wasted time, but that's a lot of time.

For further perspective, that's 529 hours and fifteen minutes of video gaming per year and 815 hours and ten minutes of social media consumption per year.

1,344 hours and twenty five minutes total per year. I didn't do the math, but you should divide that by 365 and see how many days that is.

[38:48] Now it takes on average an individual 78 hours to read the entirety of the Bible. Which means that if the average American replaced their video game and social media consumption, I'm not saying you need to do that, but if you did with Bible reading, you could read the whole

Bible a bit more than 17 times per year.

We have time to be in God's word. Ready for another one? The average American spends 11 hours and 42 minutes per week working out, including stretching, warm-up, cool-down.

That's 608 hours and 24 minutes per year, which is enough time to read the entirety of the Bible almost eight times. Don't stop taking care of your bodies.

That's a good thing to do, but we have time. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4, 8, God is of some value. God is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

We need to be regular readers of God's word. We need to take it in in high amounts again, again, again. We are to be people of this word, right?

[40:06] Arm the spirit in your life to take it up and give it application. Almost all of the counseling I do in this church, not all, but almost all the counseling I do in this church begins with how's your Bible reading?

And very often it's not going too well. Somebody's not spending much time with the Lord in his word. So we need to read it. Not only that though, we also need to reflect upon it.

Every single one of us, myself whatever is going on in our lives. It must be something that is active inside of us.

Psalm chapter one verse one and two blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

Fairly clear takes the time to think about it. Steps into situations and is constantly running everything through the filter of God's word. How does God's word speak to me in this moment and that moment and that moment?

[41:15] The entirety of our lives should be shaped by God's word. Psalm 119 verse 9 and 11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you. Let me not wander from your commandments. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

We need to read it and we need to be considering it reflecting upon it and finally we need to be resting in it. Isaiah chapter 26 in verse 3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you.

This world is a troubling place in which to live. Knowing God's word for us steadies us through all of those storms.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians after his exhortation against anxious living says this rejoice always in the Lord again I will say rejoice let your reasonableness be known to everyone the Lord is at hand do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things this is what should occupy our minds and I would challenge you to take to take that list and run the things that you're spending your mind on through that list and see what comes out the other side

[43:19] I hope lots of good stuff perhaps there's some things we need to turn our attention away from that we might turn ourselves to God's word and rest within it so Paul says I appeal to you therefore by the mercies of God present your whole self your whole self as a continual sacrifice to God holy and acceptable which is your spiritual reasonable worship 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 and I will tell you that I don't believe that this is some kind of formula for figuring out the hidden will of God for your life but rather he's saying if you're engrossed in God's word you're going to know what God would have you do and he's!

about acceptable and perfect things are on their way so let's ask for God's favor as we continue as