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The Fact of Inwardness

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1-2).

Those words, which form the beginning of chapter 12 in the letter to the Romans, bring us quite definitely to a very comprehensive, as well as a very definite and precise application of this principle of inwardness. This point in the letter is really a terminal point, and there is a sense in which it is *the* terminal point of the letter; that is, it looks right back over all the earlier part of the letter, gathers it up, brings it to a practical application, and carries it forward in a new realm. That is a statement which we will explain as we go along.

There are several changes mentioned in these two verses.

The Reversing of an Order

We will take the one which now is the pivot upon which everything else revolves; "Be not *fashioned* according to this age (the word in the Authorised is "be not *conformed* to this world"), but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind". There you have the reversing of an order. One line is being fashioned according to this age. The tense is that which means a progress, going on, being fashioned, according to this age. The other line is being transformed by the renewing of the mind.

The difference there is twofold, one in the definite statement, and the other in the words used.

1. From the Outward to the Inward

In the first place it is clearly a change from the outward to the inward. "Fashioned according to this age" means definitely taking a pattern outside of yourself, to which you are conforming your life; an objective pattern by which you are being governed, regulated, influenced, controlled. The opposite, and the reverse, is "transformed by the renewing of the mind", an inward thing. From the outward to the inward; from the pattern or the fashion of the world, to the renewed mind.

2. From the Passing to the Permanent

The word "fashion" in the Greek is simply something which relates to this world that is passing. The word "schema" means something which comes as a mode, a fashion for the time, and passes. But the word "transformed" (*'morphe'* in the Greek) is not the passing fashion but the permanent form of a thing. So you change from something passing as a fashion, to something permanent as a form.

That is the very heart of this letter to the Romans. We might say, in a sense, so far as we are concerned, it is the heart of the New Testament. There is a tremendous difference between fashioning or conforming to something outward, and transformation or transfiguration by something happening within, or something which has happened within.

The Renewal of the Mind

That brings us to the main matter: "...be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". Thus the renewal of the mind is the key to everything. That is only saying in other words that the inwardness of things in relation to Christ is the key to everything; that things now in relation to the Lord have become basically and inclusively inward, and, inasmuch as that is true, and we are living on that principle along the line of the inward relationship with the Lord, we are being transformed.

We are not only being transformed in the matter of life and character. This chapter has especially to do with service and ministry. Everything now, both in life and in service, is from within, and no longer from without. That is a thing which is needing so much stress. When we light upon that, we light upon an enormous factor, really a revolutionising factor. Those to whom that is in any way real, feel the tremendous strength of it, that everything now, both in life and in service, is from within.

That brings us to the point of the contrast which this chapter touches and refers to. These changes that are here noted, these reversings, gather up this whole letter, and bring into the realm of life. You see what follows: "That ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God", or "What is the will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect". That does not refer to knowing the will of God on all details in life; that is not the connection, although it will progressively work out in that way. But this will of God is a basic thing. It is something upon which everything else rests. You will see what we mean if you turn your attention to former parts in this letter with which these very clauses are dealing.

Take, for instance, the fragment in Rom. 1:9: "For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son". That is a contrasting word: "Whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son". Why does Paul put that there like that? It is not just a remark, not merely a statement. It is put there with the emphatic intention of showing the difference between *worship* (it is the same word,

Conybeare says: "Whom I serve with the *worship* of my spirit") and *service* on the old basis of outward things.

Note here in chapter 12 again: "...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, which is your spiritual *worship*", your service, "Whom I serve with my spirit". You have, he is saying, now passed altogether away from that old regime of outward sacrifices and outward forms of worship, as represented by the whole Jewish system. All that outward fashion of worship is passing in its nature, and is passed now with the coming of Christ. The inwardness is the abiding, the permanent, the form, and not the fashion. All the service is first of all inward. It comes from the inside, not from the outside.

This is a Levitical realm: "present your bodies a living sacrifice". It takes you right back into the Levitical realm, where sacrifices slain were offered; now: "present your bodies *a living sacrifice*". You have come away from that realm altogether. When you see the Levites busy in the service of God, that counts all movement with Levitical activity in serving God in these outward sacrifices and forms, it is but a fashion, a "schema". It is only for a time, and has passed. It was a type of something, an outward representation of an inward reality; but the reality could not be a reality until Christ came in fulfilment of the types, and now it becomes inward. Ministry is now not an outward thing, it springs from within: "Whom I *serve* with my spirit", "...which is your spiritual *worship*".

This word "*that ye may prove*", means applying the test. Test the will of God. You may apply (it is really very strong) the infallible test as to the will of God, even what is good and acceptable, and perfect. That will take you back to chapter 2:17-24:

"Behold thou callest thyself a Jew, and retest in the Law, and boastest of God's favour, and knowest the will of God, and givest judgment upon good and evil, being instructed by the teaching of the Law. Thou deemest thyself a guide of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, and instructor of the simple, a teacher of babes, possessing in the Law the perfect pattern of knowledge and of truth. Thou therefore that teachest thy neighbour, dost thou not teach thyself? Yes, as it is written, 'Through you is the name of God blasphemed among the Gentiles'".

One fragment of that only we will consider: "knowest the will of God". So you see the outwardness of the whole thing in the Jewish system, notice it again, "...retest in the law, boastest of God's favour" (that is merely traditional). "And knowest the will of God" (that is merely so far as written oracles are concerned), "givest judgment upon good and evil" (merely according to objective standards as written on tables of stone), "being instructed by the teaching of the law, Thou deemest thyself a guide to the blind...".

It was of an outward system, without a corresponding inward life.

That is taken up in chapter 12. How are you going *really* in a *living way* (not a technical way, not an objective way, a traditional way, a historical way, not in all these ways which are outward), so that the thing is Spirit and Life in you, to know the will of God? Not as oracles written on tables, but as in your own heart by the renewing of the mind. Chapter 12 marks that tremendous movement from everything in relation to God as outward in a system, and everything in relation to God as inward in a life. What a tremendous thing is the renewing of the mind! What a tremendous thing is represented by the renewal of the mind! The inner man is the key to everything.

You come into an awful contradiction, bewilderment, and unrest if again you turn to the things of God as an outward thing, and try and comprehend them outwardly as truth presented. It cannot be

done. God took pains through centuries to show over the whole history of this world that it cannot be done. He raised up a people, and presented to that people an outward form of His mind, comprehensive and detailed. He presented His thought to them and said: "Now, that is My mind in detail; work according to that!" And through the course of centuries He proved for ever to man that that is not possible. Then He changed the dispensation, in bringing in His Son, to show that there was a Man who could do it. But what a Man! A unique Man! And then, having perfected it, that Man took it in His own Person to glory, and sent His Holy Spirit to reproduce it *in* saints, and not work it out again in an outward system to which saints had got to adhere and conform. The Holy Spirit's requirement for doing that is an inner man renewed. If the inner man is renewed, the Holy Spirit has got what He needs, and can do the work, so that in that basic and comprehensive way we know what the will of God is.

Do you see what that phrase refers to? "*That ye may know (or apply the infallible test as to) the will of God*". What does that mean? Testing the will of God by the renewal of the inward man? It is really tremendously satisfying. It simply says this: get into the realm where everything is inward, and cease to be in the realm where everything is outward, and you will know this truth. If you are simply governed by an outward religious system, and have to conform to it, and follow out all its rules and regulations, and try and do God's work and live according to God's will, oh! The death of it, the burden of it, the paralysing of it, the confusion of it! You never get anywhere; you are moving round in a circle all the time; you come back continually to the point where you started. Get emancipated from that whole thing by an inward revelation, by coming into the things of God in your spirit, and you will know this is the mind of the Lord, this is the will of God, this is the realm where you know that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect. It represents a tremendous transition, and those who have passed by that way, have just gone over that line and know the difference! They know what Paul is talking about, "You Jews have this whole system, it represents the things of God in life and service, and yet you are in bondage and in death, tied hand and foot by the whole thing, without any liberty. "Now," says Paul, "I have come out of that whole external system of things, into a realm where it is all Christ within, and I know the will of God as you Jews do not know". It is not merely now a matter of changed intellect, affections, the difference between what was once but a mental thing, and what is now a thing of the heart: "Whom I serve with my spirit". You see the change.

As to the knowing of the will of God in all details; you will never do that until you get this basis: the renewal of the mind. It is basic to everything.

The Lord is now not desirous of governing His people's lives by external orders. The Lord is now desirous of governing His children by inward witness.

Let us put in a parenthetical word of safeguarding: that does not dispense with the Word of God. We are taking for granted that there is a life in prayer and a life in the Word of God, which are essential means for the Holy Spirit. But, taking that as accepted and recognised, the Holy Spirit desires that it shall be in our spirit through the Word, through prayer, that we come to know that which is the will of God, even the thing which is good, well-pleasing, and perfect.

So that to live in this present evil age is only possible by the inner man being renewed. To serve the Lord in abiding fruitfulness demands that it shall proceed from the inside. That is why things get such a little way when they are according to a set and accepted system at work. We use the word "organise". Well, there is an organised system of Christian activity at home and abroad, accepted, and people are drafted into it, and they take it up, and get on with it as the accepted thing. Without being for a moment censorious or critical we ask the question: really, have we a commensurate fruitfulness with the tremendous number who are doing the work? When you think of the effect of a

few in apostolic days, so far as abiding fruitfulness was concerned and spiritual value, to say nothing of the range, and then the number of Christians in the organised Christian system of today in an active way, is there any comparison between the results in spiritual fruit? Surely not! Why is it? Reasons may be various, and perhaps numerous. One very real reason is this, that it is working in an order, a system, and it is not proceeding in every one out from the Lord in the inner man; it has not its rise there, and it is not carried on as a stream from there.

So everything: life, work, and knowing the will of God is a matter of the renewal of the inward man, the renewal of the mind.

Ask the Lord, in relation to all the things concerning Himself, that there may be a continuous and progressive renewal of the mind according to His Word. The Lord's people in the end of this age, which is the closing age, are shown to be very clearly, by the Word of God, a people of the inwardness of the things of the Lord. Take a statement like that, and think about it in relation to the Word of God. The new covenant is constituted upon those terms: "I will make a new covenant... I will put My laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them". "They shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me". What is the nature of the knowledge? It is an inward knowledge of the Lord. If John represents an end time, then John's letters represent this very thing: "The anointing which ye received of Him abides in you, and ye need not that any one teach you". You will see from the Word that the Lord's intention, His desire, is that in the end all that which was outwardly indicated as His mind, shall be inwardly and spiritually real in His people. It marks the great change in the dispensations.

Perhaps if there is one thing needed today more than another amongst the Lord's people, it is that they should come to this very thing, where they know the things of the Lord, and the Lord Himself, in their own hearts. A very great deal of the trouble in the direction of schisms and divisions through the ages has been because of outward, mental acceptances, because of being taught - in some cases from infancy - to accept certain things, and not knowing of the existence of something quite other. And then one day becoming aware that there is something quite other, and people who represent the other sort, to whom that is the accepted thing and the thing that is right, now it is a matter of conflict of mind, and you get divisions. And even in the realm where one thing may have been accepted mentally, sooner or later some deviation, some turn in things, brings about a division because of a mental handling of truth. Most of the trouble is there. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit never says two contradictory things. The Spirit of God never presents two things which are in principle opposed. If the Lord's people really did know the Lord inwardly, the only difference that would be possible amongst them would be the difference resultant from the measure of their spiritual growth. Some would not see as others, because they had not reached their point, but if it is only a measure, and not a kind, it is all right.

We have to be very careful that we do not confuse those things. To be governed by the Holy Spirit and know the Lord inwardly is to agree with everything that the Holy Spirit says. If the Lord could get a people like that, what a power there would be, nothing outward can disturb such people.

The All-inclusive Ground

"I beseech you therefore, brethren... to present your bodies a living sacrifice...". What is the point in presenting the body? This is the point where service arises in this letter. So far it has been a question of Life, and now the question of spiritual service comes in, and the body is necessary to the Lord in relation to others here on the earth. The body's peculiar object is relationship with others as an instrument and a vessel through which there is communicated to men and women the knowledge of

God's will. God has chosen (not normally and as His usual way) to visit men by apparitions, visions, or direct spiritual means, even by angels. That is the unusual, and represents quite an extraordinary activity of God. God's ordained method is to meet men through men, that He should have men and women in whom there is established this spiritual order, this spiritual reality, this spiritual knowledge of Him, so that being the embodiment of that, men may not come into touch with an abstract, men may not come into touch with mere paid servants, but with living representatives of the mind of God, and the body is given as the vessel of the living representation of God's mind.

You see that point worked out so clearly in the New Testament, taking Paul only, that he regarded himself personally as being peculiarly held for the expression, the personal, physical representation of the testimony of the Lord Jesus: "...as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body...". Even though there was death working, yet there was something working against death all the time. It was the testimony of Christ risen, that in his very body there was an expression of something of Christ Himself as risen, and through his body, and what he met in his body. The accumulation of adversities coming against him physically in his body, in his human life, were all an accumulative opportunity for the expression of something superior. Read his catalogues of adversities. Why all these? Simply that all this is here, and yet over against it there is something other and more. So that his very body was a representation, a vessel, a channel, an instrument of the manifesting of the power of the risen, ascended, exalted Christ. We are not meaning merely and only in the matter of physical suffering, but the fact that he had a body here, and that that body was the vessel of the testimony against which men and demons were set; what it meant that there was a man here.

That man met hell, and yet hell was conquered through that man. It is an expression of what has happened in *the Man*. "*Your bodies a living sacrifice*", that God may have *you* in the entirety of your human life as a vessel in which He is, and in which He is making Himself known, in order that spiritual service may be done, the registration of God through you and through me upon men and women in this world; that God should come out through human beings - not angels, not disembodied spirits, but vessels of fragile clay. Present your bodies living sacrifices, holy (that is, entirely consecrated), your spiritual service, as differing from the outward, external, material service of a Levite offering the body of a slain animal.

We are brought right back to the central thing. Everything is bound up with the renewal of the mind, the new man, quickened and brought into living fellowship with the Lord, "*joined to the Lord one spirit*". For that we must ask and seek more and more, to know and to do as out from a new relationship with the Lord.