



**Slide #1**

Are believers transformed  
by the Spirit's power or by the  
believer's choices?

**Presentation**  
*2013 National  
Conference*  
Grace  
Evangelical  
Society.

**Transformed**  
*Transformed*

by the Spirit's Power? or by the Believer's Choices?

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**Slide #2**

Romans 12:2 is the text  
usually turned to in order to un-  
derstand the way transformation  
occurs in the believer's life.

**Transformed:**  
by Power or by Choices?

Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rom. 12:2

2

Slide #3

In our pursuit to understand transformation, two major options are available: "A" It is a process of inward transformation by which the Spirit's power causes the believer to discern the will of God or "B" It is a process of knowing more of Christ in the Word and conforming to Him through obedience to the Word.

Your option determines your understanding of the Holy Spirit's work today. You must decide if the Spirit's ministry in the believer's life is either to cause obedience or to assist in obedience. Typically there is a preconceived mindset regarding the empowerment of the Spirit in order to live the Christian life. As a result, the usual way of understanding transformation is that the Spirit causes the believer's transformation. I believe that this typical mindset is a misconception. The Spirit does not cause obedience; rather the Spirit's ministry is only to influence the believer's transformational walk before God.

So, why is the Spirit-causes-obedience approach the mainstream option? I believe there are *Two Essential Reasons*: (1) the misuse of Ezekiel 36 and Acts 1 and (2) the misunderstanding of New Testament usage of the word "transformation."

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The *First Reason* is revealed in a statement that is often repeated.... "We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey and to live the Christian life, not so in the Old Testament times." Implied in this teaching is that a Christian can't live obediently without some special empowerment from the Spirit.

Nevertheless, Old Testament saints established a relationship with God (possessing life) through faith, and they experienced intimacy in fellowship (experiencing life) by obedience. Hebrews 11 is full of these examples. The Law never provided a means to establish a relationship with God. Instead the Mosaic Law was given to sustain fellowship. Keeping the Law produced an enriched life experience through growing intimacy with God.

OPTIONS

**Transformed:  
by Power or by Choices?**

Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.  
Rom. 12:2

**Option "A"**

Process of inward transformation by which the Spirit's power causes the believer to discern the will of God

**Option "B"**

Process of knowing more of Christ in the Word and conforming to Him through obedience to the Word

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**First Essential Reason  
Mainstream Thinking in the Church**

**We are empowered by the Holy Spirit  
to obey and to live the Christian life,  
not so in the Old Testament times.**

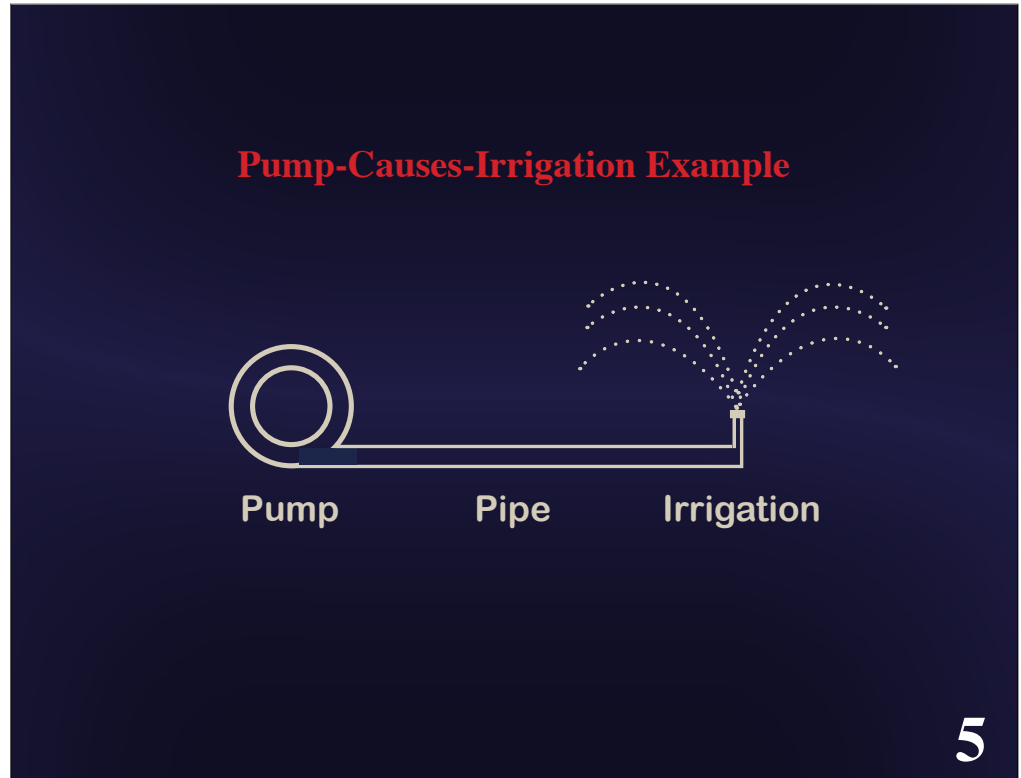
Radio Bible Teacher

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Understanding that with greater privilege (having the indwelling Spirit) comes greater responsibility (obedience) for believers today, the question remains: If Old Testament saints could live enriched lives without the Spirit's empowerment, is the Spirit's current ministry to empower believers to live the Christian life? Nevertheless, the teaching that God is *working in and through the believer* to live the Christian life permeates the church. If God is the cause of good works, then the believer is merely the conduit of God's energizing power.

**Slide #5**

This Spirit-causes-obedience view can be illustrated by an irrigation system. Pipes are used as conduits for the flow of water in order to irrigate a field. The pump activates and energizes the flow through the pipes to produce the watering. The pump is *working in and through the pipe*. "Because the pump works the pipes work" and the field is watered.



**Slide #6**

Replacing words, the Spirit-causes-obedience position shows that the believer is not actually responsible for his or her actions. "Because the pump (or Spirit) works the pipes (or believers) work," with godly behavior being the result. Being merely the conduit for the energizing work of the Spirit, does the believer participate in producing good works? "Sort of." Is the believer responsible for good works? "Sort of." See the problem? The believer is merely a conduit through which God causes obedience.

However, choosing to walk obediently to the Word is the biblical pattern for the Christian life. The believer is totally responsible and accountable for his or her walk with God. If not, the Spirit should be the One rewarded for the good



works produced in and through the believer!

So, what is the origin and rationale for the teaching that believers are empowered by the Spirit to live the Christian life? There are *Two Primary Scriptures* used to support this teaching.

**Slide #7**

The *First Scripture* is in Ezekiel 36 where we find God’s promise of the coming kingdom. Only if this promise to “cause obedience” has already been fulfilled would it be appropriate to embrace the Spirit-causes-obedience position.

**SCRIPTURE**

**“Caused to Obey”:  
Fulfilled or to Be Fulfilled?**

I will put My Spirit within you and  
**cause you to walk** in My statutes,  
and you will be careful to observe  
My ordinances.

Ezek. 36:27

**7**

**Slide #8**

If you are amillennial, then you would naturally embrace the Spirit-causes-obedience view. This is the Reformed view requiring perseverance in good works caused by God. Some who adhere to the premillennial position split hairs, indicating that since the New Covenant has been instituted the Spirit “causes” the believer to walk obediently. Then, the New Covenant will be completely fulfilled in the kingdom. It is my view that this particular promise of God awaits the coming kingdom and should not be used to support the typical Spirit-causes-obedience view at this present time.

**Causing the Believer to Obey  
Fulfillment of Ezek. 36:27**

	<i>Already</i>	<i>Not Yet</i>
<b>Amillennial</b>	Fulfilled	
<b>Premillennial</b>	Partially Fulfilled	Fully Fulfilled
<b>Premillennial</b>		Fulfilled

**8**

Slide #9

There are two Options regarding Ezekiel 36: “A” that the promise of Ezekiel 36 is fulfilled presently and the Spirit causes obedience or “B” the fulfillment awaits the future kingdom and the Spirit doesn’t cause obedience in the Christian life.

OPTIONS

“Caused to Obey”:  
Fulfilled or to Be Fulfilled?

I will put My Spirit within you and **cause you to walk** in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ezek. 36:27

Option “A”

Fulfilled presently and the Spirit causes obedience

Option “B”

Fulfillment awaits the future kingdom with Israel

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Slide #10

The interpretation of Acts 1:8 is the *Second Scripture* for the current teaching on empowerment to live the Christian life. Acts 1:8 usually tips the scales toward assuming that believers possess a special empowerment for Christian living.

SCRIPTURE

Christian Walk:  
Empowered or Not Empowered?

You **will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Acts 1:8

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These *Two Primary Scriptures* for the Spirit-causes-obedience approach impact the interpretation of other texts. We will now consider *Two New Testament illustrations* that this teaching affects.

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The *First Illustration* concerns one's understanding of being Led by the Spirit. [Read Text] This expression, led by the Spirit, is only found here and in Romans 8. Romans 8 presents a contrast between *life* and *death*, two realms of existence in which the believer can choose to live, *according to the Spirit* or *according to the flesh*. The flesh and the Spirit are competing for influence over the believer's life. The result of living according to the flesh is death, separation from fellowship with God. On the other hand, to live according to the Spirit leads to enriched, abundant living and intimacy with Christ. A believer is responsible to make choices and those choices have consequences.

ILLUS  
#1

Spirit's Leading:  
Directing or Influencing?

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are **led by the Spirit**, you are not under the Law.

Gal. 5:16-18

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Slide #14

The context of Galatians 5:18 is identical to that of Romans 8. The same choices confront the believer: the flesh and the Spirit. Choosing to walk in a manner pleasing to God gives visual evidence of the character of God in the believer's life, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). On the other hand, the influence of the flesh in the believer's life leads to behavior that does not reflect God, the deeds of the flesh (vv. 19-21). To be led by the Spirit is equivalent to walking by the Spirit; it can be experienced, or on the other hand it can be forfeited, depending on the believer's choice. In both passages the antithesis between flesh and Spirit presents two opposing forces seeking to influence the thoughts and behavior of each Christian. In fact both are competing to lead the believer in one of two different directions: one toward God and the other away from God.

Leading the Believer  
Sphere of Existence

Choice	Sphere	Result
Walk according to Flesh	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid white; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; background-color: #4a7ebb; color: white; text-align: center; width: 150px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">Ways of World</div>	Deeds of the Flesh
Walk according to Spirit	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid white; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; background-color: #4a7ebb; color: white; text-align: center; width: 150px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">Ways of God</div>	Fruit of the Spirit

Slide #15

The Options: “A” Believers look to God for direction in various ways [A still, small voice; God told me; claiming a promise] or “B” Each believer must make deliberate choices to walk, being influenced by one of two forces: the flesh or the Spirit.

OPTIONS

**Spirit’s Leading:  
Directing or Influencing?**

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are **led by the Spirit**, you are not under the Law.

Gal. 5:16-18

**Option “A”**

Believers look to God for direction in various ways [A still, small voice; etc.].

**Option “B”**

Each believer must make deliberate choices to walk, being influenced by one of two forces: the flesh or the Spirit.

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Slide #16

A *Second Illustration* of the impact of the Spirit-causes-obedience teaching concerns the Spirit’s Filling.

In verse 15 Paul made his third reference to the believer’s walk in fifth chapter of Ephesians. In verse 2, he commanded Christians to “walk in love,” and in verse 8 to “walk as children of light.” Here, Christians are to “take notice” as to how they walk. Why? Because one’s life can exhibit either wisdom or foolishness.

If by proper choices the believer walks in obedience to God’s will in His Word, he is walking wisely (vv. 15-16), living out the will of God (v. 17) and, further, allowing the Spirit to influence his or her walk (v. 18).

ILLUSTRATIONS  
#2

**Spirit’s Filling:  
Controlling or Influencing?**

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be **filled with the Spirit**.

Eph. 5:15-18

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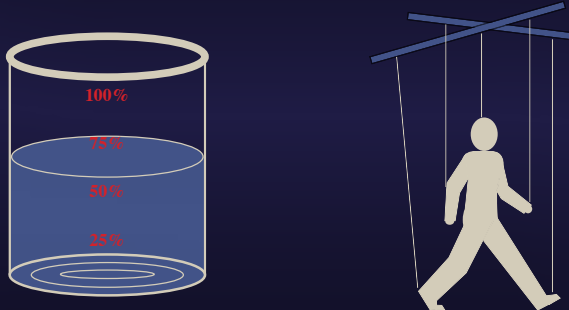


Slide #17

Obviously, the filling of the Spirit is not related to loosing or gaining the Spirit. Believer's do not get any more or less of the Spirit than when He indwelt them the moment we were saved.

Neither does filling refer to a controlling by the Spirit in which strings are pulled to cause obedience. Rather, Paul commanded believers to be influenced by the Spirit in order that they live in a manner pleasing to God.

**Controlling the Believer**  
**Wrong Concepts**



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Slide #18

Again, which Option you choose reflects your understanding of the Spirit's work today.

Option "A" Seemingly lacking the Spirit's presence and power, believers pray for the Spirit's filling or "B" Filling is the result of allowing the Spirit to influence the believer in walking obediently in light of God's Word.

If the Spirit's ministry is primarily that of influencing rather than directing or causing the believer's walk, then choices rather than empowerment result in a process that leads to maturity in Christ.

**Spirit's Filling:**  
**Controlling or Influencing?**

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Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be **filled with the Spirit**.  
Eph. 5:15-18

**Option "A"**  
Seemingly lacking the Spirit's presence and power, believers pray for the Spirit's filling.

**Option "B"**  
Filling is the result of allowing the Spirit to influence the believer in walking obediently in light of God's Word.

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Slide #19

We have just presented an alternative to the mainstream Spirit-causes-obedience view. Not only did we address the major passages for that teaching but we also illustrated the impact of integrating that teaching into various texts.

The *Second Essential Reason* that the mainstream view is adopted concerns the verb form of “transformation,” which is used only four times in the New Testament.

The two Gospel references in Matthew and Mark refer to the transfiguration of Christ, when the disciples were shown His future glory. The other two occurrences relate to the believer. Romans 12:2 teaches that renewing the mind is the agent of change; and 2 Corinthians 3:18 (a difficult passage to interpret) seems to imply that the Holy Spirit is the agent of change.

## Second Essential Reason

### Mainstream View

“Transformation” in the New Testament

**Matt. 17:2** “He was *transfigured* before them”

**Mark 9:2** “He was *transfigured* before them”

**Rom. 12:2** “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”

**2 Cor. 3:18** “Being transformed into the same image”

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Slide #20

Using a mirror analogy, Paul wrote, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

The two Options are: “A” The Spirit’s power causes the believer to be conformed to Christ or “B” Constantly beholding Christ transforms the believer so that he is more and more conformed to Christ.

Again, your Option affects your understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work today.

## Beholding Christ in a Mirror

2 Cor. 3:17-18

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Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

### Option “A”

The Spirit’s power causes the believer to be conformed to Christ

### Option “B”

Constantly beholding Christ transforms the believer so that he is more and more conformed to Christ

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Slide #21

By the rules of interpretation, the clearer passage (Rom. 12:2) should be used to interpret the far less clear passage (2 Cor. 3:18). While many use 2 Corinthians 3:18 to interpret Romans 12:2, George Ladd correctly uses the clearer text to help understand the less clear one. In reference to 2 Corinthians 3:18, he writes, "In this passage the Spirit is not the [Holy Spirit] but is identified with the ascended, glorified Lord. The Christian's preoccupation with his exalted Lord will mean that he will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ."

**Observation**  
2 Cor. 3:17-18

**In this passage the Spirit is not the [Holy Spirit] but is identified with the ascended, glorified Lord. The Christian's preoccupation with his exalted Lord will mean that he will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ.**

George Ladd  
*A Theology of the New Testament*  
p. 518

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Slide #22

A passage outside the Pauline writings, agrees with Ladd's assessment, providing insight to 2 Corinthians 3:18 and therefore clarity for a proper interpretation of Romans 12:2. James 1:22 and 25 uses the same mirror analogy as in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Looking intently into the mirror of God's Word and to abide in it (make one's home there) results in a believer becoming a Word-doer and therefore a work-doer. Likewise 2 Corinthians 3:18 pictures a believer exposed to the Lord in a mirror, which progressively over time, transforms the believer more and more into the image of Christ.

Isn't this the concept in Romans 12:2 that transformation is by means of a renewed mind by exposure to the Word of God? Of course it is! The emphasis of Roman 12:2 does not concern the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, but the transforming work of God's Word.

**Beholding the Law of Liberty**  
Jam. 1:22, 25

**But prove [be] yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For...one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed [content] in what he does.**

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Slide #23

The term, renewing, is used only five times in the New Testament. No occurrence teaches that the Spirit renews the mind. Titus 3:5 alone addresses the work of the Spirit regarding “renewing.” There initial salvation—a renewed person in Christ—is in view. The remaining four passages refer to the believer and his walk.

In both the 2 Corinthian 4 and Colossians 3 texts, the new person in Christ is being renewed daily. Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4, which are parallel texts, indicate that the renewal concerns the “mind” and “true knowledge.” One would conclude an increasing impact of the Word of God in the mind of the believer is in view. The exact same idea found in Romans 12:2. A renewed mind, not the Spirit, is the basis of the believer’s transformation.

**Renewing**  
Use in New Testament

ανακαινωω (vb—to renew)

**2 Cor. 4:16** “Inner man is being renewed day by day”

**Col. 3:10** “New man who is being renewed to a true knowledge”

ανακαινωσις (n—renewal)

**Rom. 12:2** “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”

**Tit. 3:5** “He saved us . . . by . . . renewing of the Holy Spirit”

αναανεωω (vb—to renew)

**Eph. 4:23** “Be renewed in the spirit [small ‘s’] of your mind”

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Slide #24

The Scriptures are our blueprint, our manual for every decision and therefore action in the Christian life (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

At initial salvation, believers are given a “new mind” (1 Cor. 2:16). Subsequent to initial salvation, the believer’s mind is to be continually renewed through exposure to God’s Word. While the “new mind” refers to a new relationship or position, a “renewed mind” concerns a growing fellowship with God.

The computer term, garbage in, garbage out, applies to the Christian life. However, Scriptures in, Scriptures out likewise applies. What we think ultimately determines what we do. Our actions are a result or product of our thinking. As we reprogram our minds through exposure to God’s Word, our behavioral choices reflect that new programming in obedience to God.

We have determined that not only is the *Spirit-causes-obedience* view based on Ezekiel 36 and Acts 1 *incorrect*, but also the *Spirit-causes-transformation* based on 2 Corinthians 3 is *incorrect*.

**Blueprint for the Christian Life**

All Scripture is inspired by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate [complete and ready], equipped [fully outfitted] for every good work.**

2 Tim. 3:16-17

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Slide #25

So, how are we to understand Romans 12:2? A grammatical layout provides a better perspective and an understanding of the way in which transformation occurs.

The *first command* is “do not to be conformed,” and is in contrast the *second command*, “be transformed.” The *result*: “may prove what the will of God is.” Notice that the second command is a specific instruction to be transformed in order that the will and desires of God are demonstrated (proven) in the believer’s life.

The reprogramming of the mind, aligning one’s thoughts with God’s thoughts, produces a change in behavior, reflecting those thoughts through actions. The text does not address a transforming mind, rather a transforming behavior: a behavior that does not conform to the world, but conforms to God’s Word.

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The *result*: “That you may prove what the will of God is” is identical to its usage in Ephesians 5:10. As believers walk obediently as children of light (Eph. 5:8), they are “[proving] what is pleasing to the Lord” (v. 10). They demonstrate a lifestyle consistent with the ways of God as revealed in His Word, the Blueprint. They are progressively conforming to God’s will, not the world’s system. Likewise, in James. James tells us that consistency regarding God’s will in our response to trials proves our conformity to God’s will and, therefore, experiencing God’s blessings.

So, how is the transformation of the believer in Romans 12:2 accomplished? How involved is the Spirit?” The answer lies not in some mystical empowerment with the believer merely understanding the will of God and behavioral modification caused and accomplished by the Spirit.

## Understanding Transformation in Romans 12:2

### Grammatical Layout

Do **not** be **conformed**  
to this world

but

be **transformed**  
by the renewing  
of your mind

so that  
you may **prove** what the **will of God** is  
good  
acceptable  
and  
perfect

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### To Prove or Proving Examples in New Testament

- Rom. 12:2** “So that you may **prove** what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect”
- Eph. 5:8, 10** “Walk as children of Light...trying to learn [**proving**] what is pleasing [acceptable] to the Lord”
- Jam. 1:3** “Knowing that the testing [**proving**] of your faith produces endurance”
- Jam. 1:12** “Blessed [content] is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been **approved**, he will receive the crown of life”

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Slide #27

Rather, the answer involves progressively knowing more of Christ in the Word and conforming to His image through choices in obedience to the Word—a process of being transformed from the world’s influence to the Spirit’s influence. This transformation process is a struggle, a conflict that takes place within the believer who continually must choose between the Word of God over against the influence of the World—between the Spirit and the flesh. The agents are the Word and the Spirit. However, the Spirit does not cause obedience, rather the Spirit’s ministry is filling, leading, teaching through the Word of God. The Spirit’s work in the believer’s life is not a mystical intervention; instead He is a Helper. He does not manipulate; instead He is a gentle Teacher, leading and instructing.

**Transformed by Choices!**

WORD OF GOD

Renewing Mind

WAYS OF WORLD

WAYS OF GOD

Transforming Walk

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Slide #28

Rather than “special empowerment” to live the Christian life, the spiritual life involves the cooperation of the believer with the Spirit in which the believer, allowing the Spirit to assist him or her through His influencing ministries, obeys God’s Word and lives out God’s will.

Believers continually conform themselves to God’s ways or the world’s ways by the choices they make! *Transformation is a choice.*

A wise person’s statement provides perspective. He said, “We need to make good choices because the choices we make turn around and make us!”

**Transformed**  
Transformed

by the Spirit's Power? or by the Believer's Choices?

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