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Romans 12:2 “How to Live the Transformed Life”

Intro. After a person becomes a Christian, the most important question he can ask is, “What does God want me to do now?” Paul wrote to some new converts in Thessalonica and said, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Th. 4:3; NKJV). That is a word that we do not use much in everyday conversation, so what does it mean?

Sanctification is the process in which a person lives less and less for sin and self, and more and more for the Lord and His glory. It should be a process of dramatic change. Have you experienced a true transformation in your life after becoming a Christian? If not, I want to show you from our text how you can and should experience such a transformation from self-centered sin to God-centered holiness.

The first step is found in v.1. There we are called upon to present our bodies as living sacrifices unto God. You should say, “God, from now on, I present my body to you. It will not be used for sin and selfishness but to worship you, serve you, and obey you.” Now the order is important. Until you are willing to make such a commitment, you will not be willing to obey v.2 and live differently from the world. But if you have offered up your body as a living sacrifice, then you are ready to learn about what God wants to do with your life. Verse 2 tells us the basic elements of God’s process of sanctifying your life. In the rest of the book of Romans, Paul will give us the details of what we are to do. But for now, let’s look at the basics. Today’s message is so important. You will not hear this kind of message in most churches today. Now the first thing you should be prepared to do is this:

I. DON’T ALLOW THE SINFUL WORLD TO MOLD YOUR LIFE

Paul says in v.2, “Do not be conformed to this world...” The word translated “conformed”¹ means to form or mold after something. It especially refers to outward conformity.

Years ago, we took Cheryl’s mother up to tour our state capitol. There in the rotunda is a life-size statue of George Washington. The French artist did not want to make the statue from portraits. Instead, he wanted to mold an image directly from George Washington himself. So he came and took measurements of Mr. Washington. He even did a facial mold. In the end, the statue at our state capitol is the most exact likeness of George Washington that we have.

As we shall see, God wants to mold you into the likeness of Christ (8:29), but Paul warns that the world wants to mold you and make you into something other than a follower of Christ. So don’t allow the people of this world to mold you and shape you into acting and thinking like the world.

Now let’s consider more specifically certain truths from our text. First of all, what is it that we are *not* to be formed like?

¹ The compound verb (*suschematizo*) is based on *schema* – outward appearance, form, shape; and from *sun* – with.

A. Don't Be Conformed to "This World" - What does he mean by "world"? The Greek word that Paul uses does not refer to the earth or the world of nature (*ge*). He does not use the most common Greek word for world, *kosmos*, an organized system of mankind. Instead, Paul uses the word *aion*, which refers to an age or period of time. He is especially referring to this present evil age, which is strongly influenced by sin and ungodly ways of thinking and behaving. The Greek scholar Trench defines it as "all that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, ... aims and aspirations, which constitute the worldly atmosphere in which we live."² Paul is referring to the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era. Have you noticed that the spirit of the age is constantly changing? For some time we have been living in an age of political correctness. We have even gone from an age of increasing tolerance of immoral behavior to demanding that everyone accept and affirm such behavior, such as homosexuality and transgenderism. We are living in an age where concern for nature and the environment trumps just about everything else. More recently being woke dominates much of western society. Have you noticed they no longer talk about equality but call for equity in outcomes, regardless of personal responsibility. Most of our educational systems, governments, the media, the entertainment industry and even businesses actively promote the changing tides of the present evil age. Furthermore, conformity to this age means being wrapped up in the things that are temporal, to have all our thoughts oriented to that which is seen, felt, and heard. If all our goals and standards are determined by what falls within life here and now, then we are children of *this* age.

I believe this command must be applied to churches as well as individual Christians. I do believe that churches should adapt to the times in certain respects, including the use of technology. After all, since Paul adapted to Gentile and Jewish culture (1 Cor. 9:20-22), churches should as well. However, we must never yield to the temptation of reaching unbelievers by conforming to *their* beliefs and practices that are morally and theologically contrary to God's revealed will. Someone said, "The church that marries the spirit of an age becomes a widow in the next generation."³

Next, I encourage you to:

B. Be Alert to How the World Entices Conformity – One way you can determine if you have been caught up in the spirit of this age is to examine what interests or concerns you the most. In Mt. 13:22 Jesus warns of those who are wrapped up in "the cares of the world (*aion*)."² There are 3 ways the world will use to mold you into living, talking, and thinking like the world. 1 John 2:15-16 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world." When you pursue or give in to any of these three, you become conformed to the world.

Now let's think more in terms of application. What shall we do?

² In 1 Cor. 2:6 Paul says, "Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age..." In Eph. 2:2 Paul says "you once walked, following the course of this world (*aion*)." In Eph. 6:12 Paul says we wrestle "against the rulers of the darkness of this age" (NKJV). Other examples are cited in this sermon.

³ Dean William Inge, quoted in *Context* - 3/15/97

C. Resist the Pressure to Conform – The verb “be conformed” is passive. That indicates that Christians are under intense pressure from without to conform to the thoughts, goals, and actions of the world. We have witnessed the past two years how much the world gives mandates, threatens job loss, and take other measures to get people to conform to the latest prevailing worldview and practices. They are setting the stage for communist-style conformity.

Furthermore, people in general are usually copy-cats. Have you noticed that? Children are by nature imitators, and we tend to maintain that characteristic even later in life. So people tend to want to follow the latest fads and trends. It seems that increasing numbers of Christians not only look like the world but they even talk like the world. About 10 years ago there was a preacher on the West Coast known as the “cussing preacher.”

Young people, especially in public school, face great pressure to conform. There is great pressure to join others in getting high on alcohol and drugs, and engage in immoral sexual behavior. Increasing numbers are becoming transgender as the latest fad of this present age. It has been pointed out that “social contagion” is a primary factor in this development. Now the pressure to conform to the ways of the world is even evident in young children. They have a tendency to dress like the world, talk like the world, and adopt the same attitudes as others in the non-Christian world. There is an increasing tendency to sexualize children. They need to leave the children alone in regard to such matters!

Why does the world want to pressure us to conform? Such conformity will soothe the consciences of those who are lost or who are worldly Christians. A dedicated Christian is an open, visible rebuke to their sin and they do not like it.⁴ On the other hand, a Christian who joins them in their sinful lifestyle is giving open affirmation of their sin, which is what they seek.

So what are we to do? We should not only resist the *pressure* to conform, but also:

D. Stop Thinking and Acting Like the World – I say it that way because based on the Greek (*me* with the present imperative), Paul is prohibiting a problem that was going on among the Christians in Rome. This is not surprising since Rome was the capital of the world at that time. It was the primary mover of the spirit of the age. So it can be translated, “stop being conformed.” Too many are chameleon Christians. When they are at church they act like Christians. When they are out in the world, they act like the world.

On the other hand, Paul is not teaching here that we should not enjoy life in the present age. 1 Timothy 6:17 tells us that God has given us all things richly for our enjoyment. There is no real need to seek pleasure from the *sinful* things of this world when God provides us spiritual joys, family joy, and the God-given pleasures of life. Jesus said in Jn. 10:10, “I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly” (NKJV). The Lord will provide all the love and joy we need. Furthermore, this does not mean that everything the world does is wrong. Just because the world uses cars for transportation does not mean that we Christians should not use cars. I believe the Amish take this teaching too far when they ride around in a horse-drawn buggy. But Paul

⁴ Jesus said in John 7:7, “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.”

certainly is saying that we should not imitate the world when the world is doing something sinful and wrong. This verse destroys the excuse, “Well, everyone else is doing it.”

Furthermore, by way of application I call upon you to:

E. Know When to Separate from Worldly Influence – We are to live in this world (John 17:15) and be salt and light to the world (Mt. 5:13-16). However, in 2 Cor. 6:14-18 Paul exhorted believers to separate from idol temples and other close associations that are contrary to Christian faith and practice. There are some parties you should not go to. There are some movies you should not watch. There are some schools and universities I would not send my kids to, especially now. Smart phones and other computers now give the world’s evil influences easy access to our kids and to us. I know there is social pressure to allow kids to have smart phones even by the third grade but it is a bad trend.

In order to be willing to separate from the world when appropriate, we need to have the attitude of the apostle Paul, who said in Galatians 6:14, “far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Finally, let’s see:

F. The Reasons for the Command [Argumentation] - Why should we obey these commands? I realize that this teaching against worldliness is a hard sell, especially to the younger generation. So I want to give 3 reasons why we should not conform our lives to this present evil age:

1. The World Is Dominated by Satan! - One of the main problems with the age in which we are living is that the present age is ruled to a large degree by Satan. In 2 Cor. 4:4 Paul calls Satan “the god of this age.” 1 John 5:19 says, “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” Satan’s influence is seen in many aspects of current society. His influence is seen in the business world, in the entertainment industry, and in government. He also influences the religious world. So if you follow the world, you will find yourself following the devil! If you watch a lot of secular TV, movies, and videos, for example, then you are probably being influenced to follow Satan, and the ways and attitudes of the world.

2. It Is Harmful To Us – So much of what the world wants you to do is harmful physically, as well as spiritually. In John 10 Jesus calls Satan a thief, who has come to kill, steal, and destroy. When you follow the world which is so influenced by Satan, you will find yourselves engaging in destructive behaviors. Just look at the destruction all around us, especially in our major cities. Worldliness is certainly harmful spiritually. The Bible tells us that Demas forsook Paul “having loved this present age” (2 Timothy 4:10; NKJV). I have seen many a person stop following Jesus because of their love for the world.

Furthermore, you should not allow yourself to be molded by the world because:

3. Christ Died To Rescue Us From This Age – The Epistle to the Galatians (1:4) opens with the thought that Jesus Christ died to redeem us from this present evil age. If He died to deliver us from this present evil age, then why would you as a Christian try to get back into it?

It is good that Paul did not stop there. If we are to reject one model to follow, we need another to take its place. So we come now to the 2nd step.

II. START ALLOWING GOD TO TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

Paul says in the middle of v.2, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind...” Instead of being *conformed*, we are to be *transformed*.⁵ When you become a Christian, there should be a great change in your life. A committed relationship to Jesus Christ should make you into a better, more Christ-like person. If that is not happening, something is wrong! In fact, this is a commandment we are to obey. Now consider with me first of all:

A. The Meaning of Transformation – The word “transformed” literally means to change from one form to another. In fact, the Greek word is *metamorpheo*, from which we get our English word metamorphosis, like the change from a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly. Yet this word is different from the word translated “conform.” It is not just a change in outward form but a change from within that results in a change in outward form.⁶ In the New Testament it has the idea of changing your outward form so as to agree with your new inner self.

The same verb is used of Jesus’ transfiguration. He became outwardly what He was inwardly. His deity, which was normally veiled by human flesh, was outwardly manifested. Even so, our new nature is to become manifest in our outward behavior and speech. He will transform you from a life of sin to a life of holiness. He will transform you from a life of sadness to one of joy. He will transform you from a life of hatred and conflict to a life of love and peace. Christ wants to transform your life!

Now even though the transfiguration of Jesus was instantaneous, it is for *us* a continual process. One reason I say that is because the verb is in the present tense. Thus, he is talking about a continual process that continues until Jesus comes again. At that time there will be an instantaneous change, but for now, your thinking and your outward conduct is more progressive in change.

So every day, and every year of your life, your goal as a Christian is to experience more and more of a transformation of life. And after you have been a Christian a little while, people ought to notice that you have really changed. Has anyone ever commented to you that they have noticed a change in your life? That typically should happen to transformed believers! Furthermore, our church has a role in helping you to experience transformation of life.

B. The Means of Transformation – This transformation takes place in a partnership between you and God. The verb “transformed” is in the passive voice. You cannot change yourself. The kind of change I am talking about is accomplished by the power of the indwelling Spirit. In fact, Tit. 3:5 speaks of “the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Yet Paul’s focus here is upon one primary means of transformation that we

⁵ Douglas Moo (p.395) rightly points out that the neat contrast of these two words in English is not found in the Greek, which uses two different words in sound and meaning (*syschematizo* and *matamorphoo*).

⁶ Barclay makes this point. *Morphe* is used in Gal. 4:19, “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

participate in. Notice he says in v.2 that you are “transformed by the renewal of your mind...” Transformation is not automatic. It only happens when you actively participate in the process of the renewal of your mind. The world wants to influence and program your mind, but God wants to transform you by renewing your mind. He wants to give you new ways of thinking, new perspectives, and new attitudes.⁷ Look at Eph. 4:23-24. There Paul says that we are “to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” This renewing of the mind begins with repentance – a change of heart, mind, and attitude about sin. Then Col. 3:10 says that we “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” So it is through gaining the right kind of knowledge that our minds are renewed. The Word of God is the source of that knowledge. As we learn the Word of God, our thinking patterns change. We learn new standards of righteousness. We gain a new attitude, new goals, and new aspirations. Then, once your mind is changed, there will be a change in outward behavior. So our focus should not be first on changing behavior, but on changing thinking and attitudes.

We must face the fact that our minds *need* to be renewed, especially if you grew up in a non-Christian home. Look at Eph. 4:17-18. There Paul says, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them...” God said in Isa. 55:7-8, “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.... For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.” You need to replace your old patterns of thinking with new patterns of thinking. Unfortunately, some of our old ways of thinking are deeply ingrained and they will not disappear overnight. So our minds need to be renewed over time.

Have you made a commitment to exchange old patterns of thinking with new godly patterns of thinking? Are you committed to reprogram your thinking to become in line with the values of God’s kingdom? (Mt. 6:33). Understand this: You can’t obtain a renewed mind without making a commitment to learn the Word of God. Read it daily. Come to a small-group Bible study and church services on a regular basis where we can teach you more of the Word of God. Learning the Word of God is absolutely essential to develop a renewed mind. On the other hand, if you are spending almost all of your discretionary time watching secular media, reading secular books and listening to secular music you will maintain a secular worldview.

Beginning at the age of 16 I started reading the Bible. I began to listen to solid expository preaching. I went to youth Bible studies. Then, my life began to be dramatically transformed. I gave up more and more of the sins of my youth, and began to live a more morally pure life. I began to put on more and more of the character qualities of Christ. My spiritual growth was to a large degree in proportion to my study of the Word of God. I can testify to you that the Bible is absolutely essential for spiritual growth and transformation.

I will also point out that a commitment not to conform to this world goes hand-in-hand with the renewal of our minds through sound exposition of Scripture. Voddie Baucham said, “I will not violate the teaching of the text in order to somehow sound more appropriate for the culture.”

⁷ “Renewal” is from *anakainosis*, based on *kainos*, new in kind, rather than *neos*, new in time.

As we seek this renewal of our minds, we need to understand also:

C. The Final Goal of Transformation – We need to have a target or goal of what we are to be transformed to. We find the answer right here in Romans. Back in Romans 8:29 Paul indicates that we will be changed into and conformed to the image of the Son. The Lord wants to make us more and more like Christ. We are to pattern our lives after Jesus. 1 John 2:6 says that we are to walk just as He walked. So instead of being conformed to this world, we are to be conformed to Christ! (See also Eph. 4:13).

So learn all you can about Christ, and pattern your life after Him. Ask, “What would Jesus do?”

I have shared with you some reasons why you should not be conformed to this world. Now I want to give you one good reason why you should be transformed by the renewing of your mind. So consider with me last of all:

D. The End Result of Renewal – Why should you diligently seek to be transformed by the renewing of your mind? Well Paul says in the last of v.2, “that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” That is the result of a transformed life. Let me ask you a question, for this question is a good indication as to whether or not your mind has been renewed. What is your attitude toward the will of God? Do you know God’s will, and *want* to do God’s will? If no, your mind has not been renewed, and your life has not been transformed.

Now notice what will happen when your mind is renewed. The purpose or goal of the process of transformation and renewal is expressed here [by *eis* and an infinitive of purpose]. The ESV translation does not reflect my view. The “testing” in this instance is not to test so as to find out what God’s will is. Here it means *to approve*. In fact, the same word is used in this sense in Romans 2:18, where Paul says to the Jew that you “know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law” (NKJV). Through the renewing of our mind we learn what the will of God is and then discover how approved the will of God really is. As a result, we embrace the will of God. How blessed it is to no longer question God’s will or resist God’s will but instead embrace God’s will! That’s because you discover by experience that God’s will is as Paul says here, “good and acceptable and perfect.”

Before we were saved and our minds were renewed, we thought that doing God’s will was not the best way to live and enjoy our lives. Is an unbeliever interested in gathering to worship and praise Jesus? Isn’t an unbeliever more interested in sinful and worldly pleasures? But once our minds are renewed, we understand that the will of God is good, well-pleasing and perfect. Have you found that to be true in your own life? Thomas Aquinas said, “A man’s heart is right when he wills what God wills.”⁸

Conclusion: If you are going to be a Christian that pleases God, you must reject the world as your standard of behavior and as your guide for thinking. You need to commit yourself to reading God’s Word each day, and attending Bible study and church services on a regular basis where you will hear solid biblical teaching in both song and preaching. Will you make such a commitment today?

⁸ Quoted in *In Touch*.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Discipline" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2022; Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); John MacArthur, Jr., *A Living Sacrifice: Study Notes on Romans 12:1-8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. McBeth & Hodge read but not used. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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