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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 back to some new converts in Thessalonica and said, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Th. 4:3). 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. As we are sanctified, we are set apart from sin and unto the Lord. 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.

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, but to 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 & 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. Now the first thing you should be prepared to do is this:

I. STOP ALLOWING THE SINFUL WORLD TO MOLD YOUR LIFE

Paul says, “And do not be conformed to this world....” The word translated “conformed”¹ means to form or mold after something.

The other day we took Cheryl’s mother up to tour the 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 & took measurements 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.

Paul warns that the world wants to mould you and make you into something other than a Christian. 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? Notice:

A. The Object of Conformity - Now Paul says we are not to be conformed “to this world.” But 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

¹ It is from *schema* – outward appearance, form, shape; and from *sun* – with.

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. The Greek scholar Trench defines it as “all that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, ...aims, aspirations, which constitute the worldly atmosphere in which we live.” 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? We are living in an age of increasing tolerance of immoral behavior. We are living in an age of political correctness. We are living in an age where concern for nature and the environment trumps just about everything else. 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. If all our goals & standards are determined by what falls within life here & now, then we are children of this age.

Someone has come up with a series of questions that can help you determine if you are still very much a part of the worldly age in which we are living. Which disturbs you most?

A soul lost in Hell... or a scratch on your new car?

A sermon 10 minutes too long... or lunch half hour late?

A church not growing ... or your garden not growing?

Your Bible unopened... or your newspaper unread?

The church work being neglected... or housework neglected?

Missing a good Bible study... or your favorite TV program.

Your tithes decreasing ... or your income decreasing?

Your children late for S.S. and Church... or late for public school?

Which really disturbs you most?²

B. The Means of Conformity - There are 3 ways the world will use to mould you into living, talking, & 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 lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” When you pursue or give in to any of these three, you become conformed to the world.

1. Materialism – John warns about “the lust of the eyes.” This world and its advertisers constantly appeal to the lust of the eyes. They will show you something and then try to make you believe that life will just not be happy without their product or service. Yet 1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world....” Do not desire & long for the things of the world, but the things of God.

2. Fame and Power – This is what John calls “the pride of life.” This is where you try to keep up with the Joneses so to speak. This is what you take pride in your possessions, or your position. I believe the pride of life is manifest on prom nights, where everyone seems to be outdoing each other in what they wear, the limo they ride in, and the restaurants they go to. This is even often paid for by the parents themselves who are full participants in the pride of life.

3. Pleasure – The world is also constantly appealing to “the lust of the flesh.” This world takes natural desires and twists them and seeks to satisfy them in

² The Bible Friend in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #7524* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

wrong ways. This world says that one of the main ways to be happy is to indulge in sinful pleasures, such as immorality, drunkenness, drug abuse, etc. However, remember that God's Word warns that the pleasures of sin are only temporary (Heb. 11:25).

C. The Message of this Command [Application] – We are not to masquerade as a person of the world rather than living as a child of God. So there are 2 main things we should do:

1. Resist the Pressure to Conform – “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. People in general are usually copy-cats. Have you noticed that? They want to follow the latest fads and trends. Many of our founding fathers come to this country seeking religious freedom. Baptists in particular were non-conformist of the established religion that prevailed in the English world at that time.

Young people in public schools probably face the greatest pressure to conform. There is great pressure to drink alcohol, take drugs, and engage in immoral sexual behavior. If you don't do these things, you may face ridicule. 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.

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. On the other hand, a Christian who joins them in their sinful lifestyle is an open affirmation of their sin. So what are we to do? We should not only resist the pressure to conform, but also:

2. 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. 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. Jesus said in Jn. 10:10, “I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.” The Lord will provide all the love & 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 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, every one else is doing it.”

D. 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, not God! - 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. So if you follow the world, you will find yourself following the devil! If you watch a lot of secular TV, then you are probably being influenced to follow Satan, & the ways & attitudes of the world.

2. It Is Harmful To Us – So much of what the world wants you to do is harmful physically. In John 10 Jesus calls Satan a thief, who has come to kill, steal, & destroy. When you follow the world which is so influenced by Satan, you will find yourselves engaging in destructive behaviors. For example, follow the pathway of sexual immorality and you can easily be infected with a sexually transmitted disease. Drugs and alcohol can be very harmful. Worldliness is certainly harmful spiritually. The Bible tells us that Demas forsook Paul “having loved this present age” (2 Timothy 4:10). I have seen many a person drop out of church 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 it took the death of the Lord Jesus to save you out of it, then what are you doing as a Christian trying 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

Instead of being conformed, we are to be transformed. 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! 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. In the New Testament it has the idea of changing your outward form so as to agree with your new inner self.

This 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 & speech.

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.

B. The Means of Transformation – This transformation takes place in a partnership between you and God. First, you can be transformed:

1. By the Work of God - The verb “transformed” is in the passive voice. You cannot change yourself. The kind of change I am talking about is accomplished with the power and aid of another. It is by the power of the indwelling Spirit that we can be transformed from looking & acting like the world, and becoming like Christ. In fact, Tit. 3:5 speaks of “the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:18 says, “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 by the Spirit of the Lord.” You cannot become like a Christian unless you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, you need to trust in God’s Spirit to help you experience this transformation.

Now, what is your responsibility? You can be transformed:

2. By the Renewing of Your Mind – That what Paul says in v.2. The world wants to control your mind, but God wants to transform your mind. The starting place and instrument of the transformed life is the renewed mind. Look over to Eph. 4:23-24. There Paul says, “and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God...” This renewing of the mind first suggests repentance – a change of heart, mind, and attitude about sin. Then, 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 behavior.

I know in my own life, it was not until I started learning the Word of God that my life changed for the better. I am constantly seeking to live out the biblical teachings that I have learned.

We must face the fact that our minds *need* to be renewed. Look back to Eph. 4:17-18. There Paul says “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being 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, Nor are your ways My ways.” So our minds need to be renewed.

Have you made a commitment to exchange old patterns of thinking with new godly patterns of thinking? You can’t obtain a renewed mind without making a commitment to learn the Word of God. Read it daily. Come to church where we can teach you more of the Word of God.

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. 1 John 2:6 says that we are to walk just as he walked. 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 you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” 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? Thomas Aquinas said, “A man’s heart is right when he wills what God wills.”³ Otherwise, 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]. To “prove” in this instance is not to test so as to find out whether the will of God is good or bad. 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.” It is to find out or learn by experience what the will of God is and then discover how approved the will of God is. God wants you to learn, not from the experience of others, but from your own experience. You are to prove this text in your life. Renewal of the mind results in a new perception which recognizes and embraces the will of God. You will discover by experience that God’s will is “good and acceptable and perfect.” Before our minds were renewed, we thought that doing God’s will is not the best way to live & enjoy our lives. But once our minds are renewed, we understand that the will of God is well-pleasing and perfect. Because God is who He is, He will not desire anything other than the best for us.

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 S.S. and church on a regular basis. Will you make such a commitment today? Perhaps you will make a commitment to read through the whole Bible in 2009? I will be happy to give you a Bible reading guide that will help.

Sources: 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); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); 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* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); 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 New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

³ Quoted in *In Touch*.