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

Intro. The short definition of a Transformational Church is this: “Transformational Churches make disciples whose lives are being transformed by the Gospel....” So I want to start that process by preaching an introductory message entitled, “How to Live a Transformed Life.”

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). Sanctification is the process in which a person lives less and less for sin and self, and more and more for the Lord and others. It should be a process of dramatic change. Have you experienced a true transformation in your life after becoming a Christian? After all, 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Is that your experience? 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 and selfishness 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. 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 and transforming your life. So let’s look at the basics of experiencing a transformed life. Now the first thing you should be prepared to do is this:

I. STOP ALLOWING THE SINFUL WORLD TO MOLD YOUR LIFE

Paul says in v.2, “And do not be conformed to this world....” The word translated “conformed”¹ means to form or mold after something.

If you go to our Virginia state capitol, you will see in the rotunda 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 image of Christ, 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? Notice:

A. To What We Must Not Conform - 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

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

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 as opposed to the age to come, God's eternal kingdom. 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 and an increasing intolerance of Christian moral standards. 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. Most of our educational systems, the media, and the entertainment industry 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 surrounding culture in the ways that are not contrary to Scripture. However, we must never yield to the temptation of reaching unbelievers by conforming to their beliefs and practices that are contrary to God's revealed will.

If your child swallows poison, you don't sit around thinking of ways to adapt his constitution to a poisonous diet. You give him something to expel the poison.²

Even so, the present evil age with its godless beliefs, morals and aspirations are poisonous to the soul and we need to reject it, not conform to it. Someone said, "The church that marries the spirit of the age becomes a widow in the next generation."³

B. How We Are Tempted to Conform – 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 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. Let look at each one more closely. First, the present evil age appeals to us with:

1. Sinful 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 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. All three are extremely common in society today. However, remember that God's Word warns that the pleasures of sin are only temporary (Heb. 11:25).

2. Materialism – John warns about "the lust of the eyes." This world and its advertisers constantly appeal to the lust of the eyes. They make their products as attractive as possible, promoted by the most attractive people. 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 and long for the things of the world, but the things of God.

² Joy Davidman, *Topical Encyclopedia of Living Quotations* in "Bulletin Inserts," June 2005, page 9 [Illus.#C-1322].

³ Dean William Inge, quoted in *Context* - 3/15/97 [Illus.#C-241]

When I was in Bible College and seminary, I pastored a multi-racial mission church among the impoverished of South Dallas. David Allen, my roommate, served a church in the rich part of Dallas. After working with those folks for 2 years, he commented to me, “You know, Steve, I can see that these rich folks aren’t any happier than the poor people that you work with.” That was true. Obtaining material things only brings momentary happiness, but not deep satisfaction.

3. Fame and Power – This is what John calls “the pride of life.” This is when you take pride in your possessions, or your position. This is where you try to keep up with the Joneses so to speak, even if it means going deeply into debt. This is not something practiced only by adults. 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.

C. So What Should We Do? [Application] – We are not to masquerade as a person of the world when we are 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? 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. Many of our founding fathers came 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? Why is it that diversity is celebrated for everyone but Christians? A dedicated Christian is an open, visible rebuke to their sin and unbelief 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 Conforming to the World – I say it that way because based on the original 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 with Christians 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 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 about worldliness 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. We are not to conform to the beliefs of this world when they are contrary to Scripture.

D. The Reasons We Should Not Conform [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, for example, then you are probably being influenced to follow Satan, and the ways and attitudes of the world.

Now if you are exposed to the Word of God just an hour or so a week, but are exposed to the messages and temptations of the world far more, your life is far more likely to be conformed to this world rather than conformed to Christ.

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, and 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, even deadly. 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 quit following Christ 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 rescue 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 renewing of your mind....” Instead of being conformed, we are to be transformed. When you become a Christian, there should be a great change in your life (2 Cor. 5:17). A committed relationship to Jesus Christ should make you into a better, more Christ-like person. If that is not happening, something is wrong!

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. 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. One moment He looked like a normal man, and then His outward appearance was transformed into the glory of the Son of God. 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 righteousness. 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, the change in your thinking and your outward conduct is more progressive.

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 by teaching God's Word, and showing you what a transformed life looks like. That is much of what our transformational church emphasis is about.

Now let's look more in depth to this matter of being transformed. Consider first with me:

A. 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 by the power of the indwelling Spirit. 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." When you become a Christian you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Yet transformation is not automatic. 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's what Paul says in v.2. 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. 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.

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, ... 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." You need to replace your old patterns of thinking with new patterns of thinking. 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 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.

Beginning at the age of 16 I started reading the Bible. I also 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 and transformation 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.

B. 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 learn all you can about Christ, and pattern your life after Him. In each situation 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:

C. 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.” 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? Thomas Aquinas said, “A man’s heart is right when he wills what God wills.”⁴ 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 really is. 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 you were saved and your mind was renewed, what was your attitude regarding doing God’s will? You typically did not want to do God’s will because you did not approve it as the best way to live and enjoy life, at least from the perspective of an unbeliever. 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?

⁴ Quoted in *In Touch*.

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. Instead you need to model your life after Jesus Christ. You need to focus on becoming like Jesus as revealed in God's Word. So you need to commit to reading God's Word each day, and attending S.S. and church services on a regular basis. Being with Christians on a regular basis will help you. Will you make such a commitment today? Furthermore, keep in mind that Jesus was a servant, and a Christ-like life is a life of service and sacrifice. I pray that we will witness more and more of our people being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

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).

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