

## **CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED?**

ROMANS 12:1,2

A. The Bible mainly has 2 major structural flows that encompass all of Scripture.

1. Either God is telling us to believe something OR
2. He is telling us to do something.

Most of the "to do" passages follow on the heels of the "believe this" passages. In other words, 'here is truth, now respond to it'. In the N.T. there are several, what I call, pivotal passages, which are 'to do' passages. By that I mean they are pivotal to living out the essentials of the Christian life. E.G.... Matt.28:18-20 says "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age." So disciple making is an essential part of the Christian life. Today I want us to look at another pivotal passage. This one speaks to the role of the mind in the process of sanctification. Sanctification, very simply, means the act of being set apart or separated unto God from our old self and the world, during the time period of our first trusting Christ until we meet Him face to face. As Paul says in Romans 8:29, we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

We also need to remember that the mind often refers to both the heart and intellectual processes. As Proverbs 23:7 says "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." (KJV) I don't want us to come away with the idea that sanctification is merely and intellectual process, or that the Christian life is reduced to mere thought processes alone.

**II.** With that in mind, let's turn to Romans 12:1,2.

**A.** This passage is basically a summary of what our response should be to all the great doctrinal truths set forth in chapters 1-11 where Paul has explained God's righteousness, grace, and mercy in salvation, justification, election and other truths. This summary is then followed by

more detailed exhortations in rest of chapters 12, 13, 14, 15 as to how this looks in everyday life, relationships and mission.

When we read these two verses, questions should just leap off the page to us.

1. What does Paul mean "present your bodies as a living sacrifice?"
2. What is 'spiritual worship?'
3. What really constitutes being conformed to the world?
4. What does it mean to be 'transformed by the renewal of your mind?'

These are some of the questions we need to address.

**B.** One of the first words that draws our attention is the word 'therefore' that refers back to all the great truths of the previous chapters. The word is used 1039 times in the Bible. Invariably the word flows from a view of reality that preceded it. For example

1. Romans 5:1 says "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. Romans 8:1 "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
3. Matthew 10:31 "Fear not, therefore, you are more valuable than the sparrows."

So if we want to live in the power of the great practical therefore, we have to be gripped by the realities ( )truths that precede them, and embrace those truths. And everyone of these truths is undergirded by the greatest vision of reality there is, and that is the reality that Jesus is triumphant over sin, guilt, shame and death and over hell!

With all that said, Paul says therefore, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. "Living " modifies sacrifice, not body, so it refers to the nature of the sacrifice. IE Body refers to all that we are and not just the physical. The sacrifice is not like a one time dead animal, but rather it maintains it's efficacy as long as the person lives. It's Holy (set apart to God) and it pleases God because we've already been made holy and acceptable through the blood of Jesus. What this means is we are to live in such a way that reflects the reality of God's grace, mercy and steadfast love toward us that Paul outlined in previous chapters. And this is what our spiritual worship really is: living in the light of truth 24/7.

The word translated spiritual is not the usual word, but is 'logikos' which is where we get our English word logical. It is sometimes translated reasonable or intelligent. It is a reasonable and spiritual worship that responds to God's grace, mercy and love. Like Jesus said to the woman at the well. God is looking for worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. So it is a daily lifestyle of worship. So how do we do that?

**III.** Now in verse 2 Paul summarizes what is necessary to live our lives in obedience to the exhortation of verse 1. He wants us to know that ideas have consequences.

**A.** Paul begins with a command to not be conformed to the world or literally to the age in which we live. What Paul knows is there's not a neutral position—if we are not fighting against it, then we are being conformed. Because we are always in a battle against the world, our own flesh, and the devil. They never take a timeout! But what does Paul actually mean by conformed to the world (age)? Look at Colossians 2:8—  
“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits (demons) of the world, and not according to Christ. It really is the philosophies of the world, misguided human tradition, and demonic influence that conform us to the thinking of the world. The word philosophy means 'the love of wisdom'. But as James clearly points out in chapter 3 of his letter (3:13-17), there are 2 kinds of wisdom. God's wisdom James describes as 'the wisdom that comes from above and is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.' But there is another kind of wisdom he describes as earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. That's the wisdom of this age. So there really is some level of demonic energy behind every man-centered worldly philosophy. We need to spend a few minutes addressing some of the philosophies of our age. Hopefully this will illustrate how they come after us in everyday life.

**1.** Secularism is the umbrella that covers almost all of these philosophies. It leaves God and faith out of everything because it says there is no such thing as transcendent being. Karl Sagan stood in front of a picture of the cosmos and said, "this is all there is, and all there ever will be". The application is that all institutions such as government, education and social programs must be entirely free of a concept of God. WE see the results of this everyday. It's all about now and only now.

**2.** Humanism is another one. It is not humanitarianism which is coming to the aid of people in need. Humanism looks at all people, including oneself, as completely apart from God. Basically, man becomes god unto himself. The perfect example is Genesis 3. Humanism has been here from the beginning.

**3.** Another one is relativism. There is no absolute objective truth. EG John 18:37-38

**4.** Another one is materialism. If Sagan is right and this material world is all there is, then you better get everything you can. EG bumper sticker

**5.** Another one is racism. Yes, racism is a philosophy that says people who have a certain ethnicity or skin color are inferior to others. There is unspiritual and demonic power here.

**6.** Others are rationalism, modernism, post-modernism, pseudo modernism, existentialism, darwinism.....

Not all philosophies are as easily discernible as some of these. Existentialism dominated the 20th center and is still with us under different names. We are constantly bombarded with these philosophies in movies, tv, certain music, certain theologies, education, politics, psychotherapies, and literature. However the groundwork for this existentialism occurred in the 19th center, primarily with the philosophy of Soren Kierkegard and Fredrich Nietzche, who are often referred to as the fathers of post-modernism. The basic tenants of existentialism are that the essence or meaning of life must come from inside the individual and only there is found truth and not from any external value system. IE Proverbs 21:2 'every man does what is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.' For example Nietzche wrote a book entitled "UberMensch" which translates to superman. But what is so important about this stuff is if you watch movies, read books, listen to politicians, read certain theologies, sit in college classroom, etc you are constantly being exposed to these philosophies that the Apostle Paul warned about. The the movies "Apocalypse Now", "Clockwork Orange", "Blade Runner", "Fight Club", even "Toy Story", and Brad Pitt in "Legends of the Fall". Current

theologies have arisen that incorporate these worldly philosophies: for example there is open theism and emergent church theology, and another theological movement I'll mention later.

All these "isms" remind me of a sign that hangs in the general store in Study Butte, Texas which says: "This is the place where brilliant minds assemble to willfully pool ignorance with questionable logic in order to reach absurd conclusions."

One very influential writer of the 20th century was Viktor Frankl. He was a Jewish neurologist and psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz and Treblinka, and afterwards wrote a best selling book entitled "Man's Search for Meaning". QUOTE: "I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers."  
POINT: IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.

So what is the solution to battling these philosophies? Should we not go to movies, watch tv, read literature, be involved in politics, etc. NO! The solution is in the second half of the verse: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable and perfect."

The word **transformation** is where we get our English word metamorphosis. EG Caterpillar to butterfly. But Paul is speaking here about inner transformation, not external. Paul knows what we truly believe ultimately determines our behavior.

The word **renew** means to make anew like when Paul writes to the Corinthians (2 Cor 4:16) about the death of a Christian—"though the outer man is wasting away, the inner man is being renewed day to day." This renewal is strongly connected to another "change word" which is repentance (metanoia) or literally to change the mind. But it's more than mere intellectual change. Repentance means inner change such that we feel, think and see all people and circumstances in the same way God would. So continual renewal of the mind and heart is really the essence of

the Christian lifestyle. There is a new movement in some Christian circles that is challenging that thinking.

So how do we renew our minds? Well as far as I can see, God has given us three means or agents to work out our sanctification and mind renewal:

- 1.** The word of God in all its forms, but especially the scriptures. We need to become deeply intimate with God's word. It's alive and powerful and able to penetrate deep within us.
- 2.** Spirit of God—He is our comforter, who brings to mind all Jesus said; He guides us into truth and administers the spiritual gifts. He superintends the 2 ordinances and is present in them. We must be deeply intimate with the Holy Spirit.
- 3.** The people of God whom the NT says weep with one another, rejoice with one another, encourage one another, exhort one another, comfort one another, teach each other, sometimes admonish each other and sometimes even rebuke one another.

All three of these are interconnected in order to accomplish God's intended purpose of sanctification with the renewal of our hearts and minds. And you can't leave any of them out.

In the rest of chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15 Paul gives many exhortations which are not remotely possible without a continuous renewal of our hearts and minds.

In chapter 12 Paul exhorts his readers to exercise the spiritual gifts well with proper grace to one another. He exhorts believers to a genuine love (without hypocrisy). Love is the quintessential characteristic of Christians. Then he tells us how to treat unbelievers and to bless those who persecute us. And to bless our enemies. How is that possible without a renewed mind?

In chapter 13 he tells us how to relate to the governing authorities. Chapter 14 tells us how to relate to the weaker brother. All these exhortations are based on our obedience to verses 1,2, and that's why these 2 verses are so pivotal to the essence of the Christian life.

As Tim Keller and many others point out we are living in a post Christian world. So if we are going to make an impact on the world around us, it won't be by pointing out how evil the world is, but by demonstrating the love and truth of the gospel to all people. And it requires a continual renewal of our minds to do that!

C.S. LEWIS QUOTE:

"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a see it as a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one of those destinations .....there are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals with whom we joke, with whom we work, marry, snub, and exploit—those who are immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."