

Living the Transformed Life

Romans 12:2

Introduction

We are a generation with complex machines. These complex machines are designed to make life easier and better. That's true as long as the complex machines are operating the way they were designed to operate.

The inventors or designers of those machines know how they are supposed to be used in order to get the most out of them and also to ensure that they are used safely. The reason they know these things is because they created them. They designed them to operate a specific way. That's why these complex machines come with a user's manual to let us know what the creators know so that we can use them to their greatest potential.

About a year or so ago I bought my wife a tread mill. It came in this huge box and it had to be assembled. Now, how many of you men here in this room refuse to read the instructions and just plow right ahead? NOT ME! I am about as handy as a foot! If I don't read the instructions step by step, I'm totally lost.

See, I know that if I don't follow those instructions...and also, if we don't follow the manufacturers' instructions on how to properly operate that tread mill, my wife and anyone else who uses that machine won't be able to get the full benefit out of it, and may even get seriously hurt.

God is the Creator of this thing we call "life." He knows how life is to be lived properly in order to live it successfully and to its fullest potential. Why? Because He is the Designer. The inventor of life. He knows how He made it to operate. We find that it operates at its best when lived according to His ways.

That's what happened in the Garden. As long as Adam and Eve lived under God's authority and in His ways, they enjoyed life to its fullest. But as soon as they chose to depart from that, it all fell apart. And now we live in the aftermath of that decision, and our decisions to depart from God's ways. This gives us what we have today...what the Bible calls "the world" or "this present evil age."

We as God's people have been called out of that and given His Spirit to live in the way that life was intended by its Creator.

I'm going to be speaking this morning on Romans 12 verse 2. Let me set it up for you first.

"That logical response consists in shaping our lives to the structures of grace rather than the structures of the world." – Paul L. Achtemeier

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – ESV

Paul just got finished speaking specifically about Israel in chapters 9-11, especially in chapter 11 immediately before our text. Therefore, we have to understand something very important about Israel and who they were called to be because it has everything to do with this verse and what Paul is telling the Roman Christians, as well as us today.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

God called Abram to separate himself from the idolatries of his native land, even the idolatries of his own family. When God said, “to a land that I will show you,” He called Abram into a relationship with Himself. “I will make you a great nation” – Israel. And Israel’s vocation would be, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

1. Paul begins with a “don’t” –

NIV - Do not conform to the pattern of this world

NLT - Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world

J.B. Phillips - Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould,

The Message - Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.

In the context, when I see the phrase, “Do not be conformed to this world,” I immediately think of God’s admonishment to Israel as they became a nation and were preparing to inherit their land. This is the whole reason God gave them the Law of Moses in the first place. The Law (Hebrew *torah*, meaning “teachings”) was given to teach them, or mold them, into a lifestyle that reflected who God is. This lifestyle was completely different from the world around them. That is precisely why the Lord said through Moses:

“When the LORD your God goes ahead of you and destroys the nations and you drive them out and live in their land, do not fall into the trap of following their customs and worshipping their gods. Do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations worship their gods? I want to follow their example.’ – Deuteronomy 12:29-30 NLT

Conformed – Greek work means literally “to fashion in accordance with” and “to conform or assimilate one’s self to.”

This is an imperative – a command. This is more defensive in nature. It is telling us what to avoid, or what to defend against. The implication here is that there is a danger in doing so.

“(Paul’s) appeal is that we should refuse to let ‘the present age’ squeeze us into its mould, dictate to us how we should think and indeed *what* we should think, and tell us how we can and can’t behave.” – N.T. Wright

Key term: **World** – this present age. The Greek means “an age; hence, a state of things marking an age or era; the present order of nature; the natural condition of man.” In Galatians 1:4, Paul calls it “this present *evil* age.” In accordance with Paul’s worldview as a first century Jew, he believed that world history was divided into this “present age,” characterized by corruption and rebellion against God that leads to death, and “the age to come” in which God will make all things new and there will be no more sin or rebellious culture.

We have to understand that as Christians, we have been taken out of that culture of sin and corruption and have been given a new citizenship in the kingdom of light.

for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light –
Ephesians 5:8 ESV

WARNING: This will affect every area of your life, even the friends you choose to hang out with.

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing; (Isaiah 52:11)
then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.”*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. – 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 ESV

Now I know that there have been movements in the past, and even now, that preach a legalistic message. They tell you that as Christians you can't wear certain clothes, listen to a certain type of music, dance, or wear your hair a certain way. They focus completely on the outward conduct and forget the inward motivation of the heart. But don't think that the things we watch on TV or in the theater, or the music we listen to, or the books we read don't matter. They matter a great deal! That old saying, "garbage in, garbage out," is true. Whatever we allow into our minds does indeed defile our thoughts and, if left unchecked, will affect our lifestyle and our behavior.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. – Galatians 6:7-8 ESV

What we have to ask ourselves is, "would what I am listening to or watching or reading be honoring to God in my mind and in my heart?"

Whatever we give credence to, or support with our finances and our time, those are the things we approve. But God wants us as His people to be discerning in what we approve.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. – Philippians 1:9-11 ESV

Point #1: As the people of God, we are to not be conformed to the culture and ways of the world around us.

2. Then Paul goes on to give us a "do" --

Transformed – The Greek word is the same word which we get "metamorphosis" and it literally means "to undergo a spiritual transformation."

"To be conformed to the world, therefore, is to be like unrenewed men. The word accurately translated *conform* expresses strongly the idea of similarity in character and behavior; and the word translated *transformed* expresses with equal strength the opposite idea." – Charles Hodge

J.B. Phillips - but let God re-mould your minds from within,

Now notice, though, the original language has an imperative – a command. "Be transformed." Yes, God will do His part in bringing transformation to your mind, BUT the text says that we again have a responsibility. This time it is proactive or offensive.

“We don’t think about 95% of what we do before we do it, so we desperately need a transformed mind.” – John Piper

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, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and 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. – Ephesians 4:17-24 ESV

Jesus reminded us of the greatest commandment,

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” – Matthew 22:37 ESV

How to Renew Your Mind

- a. Prayer and Thanksgiving – Philippians 4:6-7 – “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- b. Immerse yourself in the Word of God – Psalm 119:9, 15-16 – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”
- c. Turning away from worthless things – Psalm 119:37 – “Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.”
- d. Set your mind on eternal things – Colossians 3:1-3; Philippians 4:8
- e. Immitate Christ – Philippians 3:12-15; Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 5:1-17

Point #2: As God’s people, we need to set our minds on things that honor God and make us like Christ.

3. The Result

“that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Discern – literally means *to prove, try, examine, scrutinize*

J.B. Phillips - so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

If you remember, Israel was called to be set apart, to be different from the world, in order to show the watching world what life in proper relation with God was supposed to be like. They were called to be light in a dark world.

*I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* – Isaiah 49:6b ESV

This was a reinforcement of the promise to Abraham. This was their calling. This was their God-ordained vocation and purpose.

Who ultimately fulfilled this calling perfectly? Jesus Christ. Jesus became the perfect and faithful Israel and completely fulfilled the covenant with Abraham. And now, we who are *in Christ*, carry out that calling. Romans 11 says that we have been grafted into the vine.

So what does that mean for us?

It means that we have inherited Israel’s calling to be the light of the world. We have inherited the call to be holy, to be different from the sinful world around us. We are God’s people in and through Christ. And through us, the world should be able to see what life rightly related to God is like. They will see, as you test and prove what God’s will is, that living in God’s will is good, acceptable, and perfect. Remember the definition of “discern”? *To prove, try, examine, scrutinize.* You will be living in God’s will, proving it to not only yourself, but to the rest of the world. They will examine and scrutinize your life. Many will hate it and hate you for it. Some will be drawn to the light. But that is our calling as the Church, as God’s people.

Point #3: As God’s people, we are to **display to the world what life lived in God’s will looks like.**

And we aren’t expected to do this alone. Part of the whole theme of Romans is to show us that living right before God on our own is impossible, but, as it says in Romans 8, that is why God gave us the Spirit. But we are expected to make choices to keep ourselves separate from the world’s influences and avail ourselves to being transformed by God’s Spirit so that we may live as His people before the world.

Big Idea: We display God’s will to the world by living a set-apart, transformed life.