

Romans 12 (Part 2): 2 - Be Transformed

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Romans chapter 12. We covered verse 1 last time. We're going to cover verse 2 this time. We're going to read them together as a package, but these are such powerful verses that I decided to pull them out and take them separately because as we unpack the meaning of these verses there's just so much here. Let's go ahead and read them both together again. Paul writes,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² 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, (or excuse me, what is, yeah, what is the will of God) what is good and acceptable and perfect." (ESV)

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word this morning and use this Scripture to do a work in our hearts today that will draw us closer to You. To know and understand Your will to be perfected into that image of Jesus Christ. We thank You, Lord God, amen.

As I said, we covered verse 1 last week. We look at verse 2 this week. Let me just read verse 2 all by itself for just a moment. Can I? Here's how it goes.

"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."

When you read this verse, if I were to give you a piece of paper, have you read through that verse and say, what's the thing that just jumps out at you initially? I mean, the power of this verse is really that statement. *"Do not be conformed to this world,"* right? It just jumps out at you. Everything else in the verse comes behind. It follows behind that initial, emphasis of, *"Do not be conformed to this world."*

It's reasonable to investigate the merit of that statement and what is being said there. Let's begin with a reminder of the definition of conformed since he says, do not be conformed to this world. Let me put this up on the screens for you so you can, we can see it together.

con•form verb

past tense: conformed;

1. Comply with rules, standards, or laws.

Synonyms: *comply with, abide by, obey, observe, follow, keep to, stick to, adhere to, uphold, heed, accept, go along with, fall in with, respect, defer to;*

2. (of a person) behave according to socially acceptable conventions or standards.

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It's a verb, past tense, obviously of conform is conformed, and it essentially means to comply with rules, standards, or laws. Various synonyms that you might use instead of conform or conformed are comply with, abide by, obey, observe, follow, keep to, stick to, adhere to, uphold, heed, accept, go along with, fall in with, respect, defer to. And when conform or conformed is being used of a person, it would mean to behave according to socially acceptable conventions or standards. Okay. Well, good reminder.

I know, we knew what that meant anyway, but it's just good to see the depth of what it means again. And so Paul is saying, do not be conformed to this world. All right, pretty simple. Now let's go on and let's investigate a little bit further and maybe this is that 1960s rebellion coming out in me a little bit, but my response is why? It's one thing for the apostle Paul to say to you and I, hey, don't be conformed to this world, but it's another thing to ask the question, why? And fundamentally, there's nothing wrong with the question why.

It probably more depends on the attitude that you have when you're, that you, when you're asking it or something like that. But so why not be conformed to this world? Well, as believers, we're going to go to the Word for the answer to that question, and so what that's going to mean is that we're going to need to investigate through the Scripture here, what does the Bible say about the world? And we're not talking about the big blue marble when the Bible refers to the world, it most often refers to that system of man's... I lost my synonym here or my thesaurus.

It's that reality that man lives in on a day by day basis. The world in which we live that is really set up as a kingdom apart from the kingdom of God is essentially the kingdom of man, I suppose. The world. What does the Bible say

about it? Well, again, we're going to investigate. We've got some scriptures to look at here, since we're going to the Word. Let's go to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Now this is interesting. It says,

2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)

...the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

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Well, the first five words just hit you, don't they? They just jump right out at you. Those first 5 words are, "*the god of this world.*" They grab your attention. And what we learn from this verse is that this world has a ruler, and he is referred to as, "*the god of this world.*" And you might stop for a moment if you're not terribly familiar with the Bible and what it has to say.

And you might ask yourself, well, when it talks about "*the god of this world,*" is it talking about the God that you and I know and love who saved us through Jesus Christ? Well, obviously not, because we look at one of the characteristics of the god of this world, and that his goal is to blind people so that they don't see the Gospel.

Well, obviously isn't the God that you and I know and love, so there must be another small g god who is in a position of rulership in this world. Well, we go on, we study the Word of God long enough and we figure out that what Paul is referring to here is Satan. He's referring to the devil, who is called in Scripture, the god of this world, okay?

He is the temporary ruler of this world. This is the first thing we learn. So, we've already run smack into our first reason why not to be conformed to this world. Because it's under the rulership of Satan. Okay? And that's probably all the reason most of us would need but it probably doesn't hurt to look even a little bit further into what the Bible has to say about reasons why we shouldn't be conformed to this world. Here's another one from 1 Corinthians chapter three, beginning of verse 19. It says,

1 Corinthians 3:19b (ESV)

...the wisdom of this world is folly with God.

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And folly is just another word for foolishness, so wisdom. Here's another reason why not to be conformed to the wisdom of this world. It's foolishness to God. God considers it foolish. Okay. The wisdom of this world.

Here's another one. 1 Corinthians from chapter 7. The last part of verse 31 says that,

1 Corinthians 7:31b (ESV)

...the present form of this world is passing away.

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Well, there's another good reason why not to be conformed to the world. It's passing away. You know, if we're going to conform ourselves to anything, why not conform ourselves to something that's eternal, and ongoing, and everlasting? But this world is, in fact, passing away. Okay. How about one more. From 1 John chapter 2. John, I love John, he just hits it right on the head. He says,

1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

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 of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. (and then he says this) 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 of life—(those things) is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world (and he repeats what Paul told us earlier. The world) is passing away along with (all of) its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Paul gives, or excuse me, John gives a warning in this particular passage, and the warning is to believers not to love the world. I like to remind you of the fact that John is not writing to unbelievers. He's not writing to the world. He's writing to Christians who are living in the world, just like you and me, people who love the Lord, people who are born again by the Spirit of God, and yet who have to live in the world.

This is where we live. It's not necessarily our address but it's where we also have taken up temporary residence while we're here, and John says, listen, don't become so captivated by the world that is around you, that you actually begin to walk away from your relationship with God. And I have to believe that the reason that John is warning us of that reality is because it is, in fact, a reality. That it is possible to walk away from your relationship, your commitment, your devotion to the Lord by cooling that relationship with a love, a corresponding love of the world.

Doesn't mean, it doesn't mean you lose your salvation. It does, however, mean you lose your effectiveness. Now, whether or not someone can walk to the point where they do lose their salvation, that's above my pay grade. And we can talk about that another time. But the point here is it is a very real possibility that you and I can become captivated by the world and that we can desert the Lord in that very real sense of the word. Do you guys remember when Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter, and Paul was, Paul knew that he was very near his home going, meaning going to be with the Lord.

He knew his death was imminent when he wrote to Timothy in that second letter. And he wrote about the fact that he was basically alone. And he made reference to one of his companions. His name was Demas. And here's what Paul said about Demas,

2 Timothy 4:10a (ESV)

For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and he's gone to Thessalonica.

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Demas was a believer. Demas was not only a believer, he was a companion of the Apostle Paul. Demas was a man who loved God, but something took over in his heart and it was a love for the world. And because he had a love for the world, he ended up walking away. How much we don't know, but he walked away from his devotion and his commitment in service to the Lord, and he left Paul, to be basically in prison alone there.

You'd have to agree, would you not, that the Bible gives us a lot to think about as it relates to the world and why you and I should not conform ourselves, our lives, our thoughts, our attitudes, our relationships, our business practices, you name it, everything to the world.

But this very verse that we're looking at here in Romans chapter 12 even gives us a reason why not to be conformed to this world. And it's, this time, it's a positive reason. And I want you to take a look here again at verse 2 because he says here in verse 2, *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* And here's the other reason. *“That by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Here is another fringe benefit, if you will, of not being conformed to this world and that is that we are increased in our perception as to the will of God. And this gets people's attention, by the way, whenever we start talking about knowing the will of God and that there's something you can do to have a greater perception and understanding and discernment of the will of God, because who doesn't want to know the will of God? I certainly do. Most of the questions that people pose to me have to do with discerning the will of God for their lives. Pastor what should I do about my marriage?

Pastor what should I do about my children? Pastor what should I do about this job option that came up? Pastor what should I do about this? What should, what they're asking is what is God's will? What is God's will about these things? Everybody wants to know God's will.

Well, here, Paul tells us that there's a benefit of not conforming to the world, and that benefit is that you can have a greater understanding, and a greater perception of what is the will of God. Whoa, we probably ought to pay attention here, huh?

Because this is something that we're all looking for, essentially. We want to know what it means. Alright. Here's the interesting part. You need to understand maybe some of the wording that's connected here. In this verse, and look at verse 2, you'll notice at least the 6 words in the ESV, it says, *“that by testing you may discern.”*

Do you know those 6 words, at least in the ESV, they might be slightly different in your translation if you have a different one, but those 6 words are 1 Greek word.

You might say, well, how can that be? Well, if you learn about Greek, you find out that it is such a rich language that it is not uncommon at all for us to have to take 6 English words to match one Greek word. It is so full and dynamic, *“that by testing you may discern.”*

One Greek word, dokimazo, means nothing to you, it sounds Japanese. Oh, dokimazo. But it's Greek. And you know what? It basically carries the idea of finding the worth of something by using it, or by testing it in the real world. Finding the use of something by testing it in the real world. Isn't that an interesting thought? So, you see God's will, this is important.

God's will is something that you learn about and is something that is revealed to believers when they're already testing His will in the real world. In other words, while they're already conforming themselves to His will in the real world He begins to reveal further His will.

Now, for a lot of Christians, that's unacceptable. They want to be shown God's will first, and then they'll decide whether or not they want to do it. Honestly, when some people come up and say, I want to know what God wants me to do here.

What they're saying is, tell me what God wants me to do, and then I'll judge whether or not I'm going to do it, or whether I think it's a legitimate or valid thing to do. They're not saying, just tell me what to do so I can do it. You see, they want to judge it.

What is God's will in this situation? And the reason I know that, you might think I'm just spitting in the wind here. No, no. I have watched people and listened to their expression when I have said, listen, the revealed will of God related to that question is this, I'll show you chapter and verse and they read it and go, pfft, forget that.

I mean, I've literally had people say it and sometimes they don't say it verbally, but you can see it all over their face. I'm not going there. So, we want to know God's will ahead of time and then figure out whether or not we're going to do it.

Here's what the single Greek word means, however, it means the more you walk out the will of God, the more His will, will be revealed. It's an interesting sort of a concept, but it is essentially a secret to knowing and having the will of God revealed, in your life. You might say, well, how can I know God's will unless He reveals it to me? Oh, listen, people, there is plenty of revealed will in God's Word for you and I to begin to walk out right from the pages of Scripture.

And there's a lot to get started if we want to. We can just start walking out God's will just from what we read, and the promise from this verse is that the more you walk down the road of God's revealed will that is right here in the Scriptures, the clearer you will see the road ahead. You with me?

Rather than coming and saying, I want to know what the road ahead shows. What you need to do is get busy walking on the road that you do know, the road that is revealed in the Word of God, and the rest of the road will reveal itself as you go.

We have to understand though, that we live in this world of, we want it now. We want it hot. We want it quick. Sometimes, often there's no shortcut, so it's just the way God works. It's just the way God works. The more you walk something out, the more you get of that thing. Faith is another element of that. The more you walk out faith in God, the more you will find your faith being built up and so forth.

Now, there's one aspect of this verse that you might've thought that I skipped over at this point, and we haven't addressed it yet and we're not going to skip over it.

It's the statement that Paul says that, we are also to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. But you might ask yourself, well, now, wait a minute. Hasn't Paul basically already covered this? I mean, he told us not to copy the behavior of the world and the customs of the world. I mean, isn't that what he's talking about? Isn't that enough? Isn't that what it means to be renewed in your mind? No, actually it doesn't because when you think about people who are not conformed to this world, I mean, think about that for just a moment.

Past history. Who are some of the groups that you can think of who weren't conformed to this world? I can think of one. The Pharisees for one. The Pharisees were not conformed to their world and yet they had missed the mark, didn't they? Because they didn't go on and have their hearts transformed or their minds transformed or renewed in the image of God, they just wallowed in their legalism. They pulled back. You can even see groups today that have pulled back from conformity to the world.

You can see them today when you're walking around. There are people who look differently, and visually you look at them and you say, wow, they've pulled back. They're not conforming themselves to the patterns of dress, for example. You can go to some places out east, and you can find groups of people who have pulled back in other forms of nonconformity, like not driving an automobile, not having electric lights in their home or running water or something like that. And you look at them and you say, wow, that's nonconformity.

They have not conformed to the patterns that you and I consider pretty average and pretty normal in this world. So, we ask ourselves the question, is that what he's asking of us? Is he telling you and I to give up the modern conveniences of this world, not to drive a car. Let's go back to the horse and buggy. Is that what he's saying? Well, no, because even the horse and buggy at one time was just the norm and everybody who had a horse and buggy was conforming to the pattern of this world. You know what I mean?

What exactly is he saying? He's going on now and he's saying that you and I are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, and obviously there are two words that just pop, pop right out of that statement, and obviously they are, transformed and renewal.

That's what we need to look at so that we can better understand what the apostle is saying to us. What does it mean to be transformed? Well, you might find it interesting, but the Greek word that is, transformed here is, *metamorphoō*. Sound familiar? Where we get our word metamorphosis. And here's the definition. Let me put this one up on the screen for you. It is,

met•a•mor•pho•sis (noun)

1. A change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means.

A change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or (here's us) supernatural means.

That is exactly what Paul's talking about when he says that you are to be transformed. I want you to be involved in a metamorphosis whereby you are being changed from the old, to the new. From the you, to the Him. Where you are being transformed into Christ. And it's really a beautiful thing. But there's two things that we know about this transformation. First of all, it's not a physical transformation. That's yet to come.

Do you know Paul actually uses this very same word that is translated, transformed to refer to our bodies but he only talks about it in reference to the coming of Jesus Christ when He will transform our lowly bodies into new heavenly ones. But that's at His coming. We know that this transformation that we're being told to be involved in now is not a physical transformation. Okay? That's the first thing.

But the second thing that we learn about this transformation from the rest of Scripture is that it is gradual, and it is ongoing. Let me show you a passage from Second Corinthians chapter three. It goes like this.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, (Look at this) are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Not only does this verse tell us that this transformation is gradual and ongoing, but it also reveals the goal of the transformation, doesn't it? What's the goal of the transformation? That we might be made into the same image as our Lord. It tells us, it's good to know, isn't it? You know exactly what He's transforming you into. It's to be like His nature, like His character and so forth. Certainly, your personality, I mean, people have asked me that before. So, we like, when we become Christians, do we lose our personality? No, of course not.

You're you from the standpoint of the personal uniqueness that is you, but the character becomes transformed into the image of Christ. What's the other key word that we were going to look at here in that phrase? It's renewal right? He says, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Of your mind. Paul's talking here about changing the way we think. Or as some people like to say, changing your stinking thinking. I think that's probably a good thing to, well, it's an apt sort of a definition. I think probably in most of our lives, certainly it is in mine. He's talking about the way we formulate ideas, the way we think about the world around us.

How do you think about the world around you? How do you think about people? How do you think about, how do you respond to people when they make you mad, when they make you sad, when they upset you? How do you think? How do you think about God? How do you think about life? How do you think about death? How do you think about money or the lack of it? How do you think about things, material and otherwise? What are your thought processes? Paul is saying that you and I need to have our minds renewed. They literally need to be changed.

And here's the question that we need to ask ourselves. Even though I understand that this is a gradual and ongoing work that God is doing in me. Where I am right now, does my thinking more resemble the world or the character of my Lord? Do I think more like the world around me or do I think in a unique sort of a Biblical, Spirit inspired sort of a way of thinking?

Do you guys remember in the Gospel accounts that one time when Jesus had just gotten done telling His disciples that He was going to be going to Jerusalem and this time it was going to be different in that He was going to be handed over this time to the Gentiles and that they would abuse Him physically and ultimately send Him to be crucified.

You guys remember that? Do you remember Peter's response? Peter was incensed by the idea. He pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Him for even saying such a thing. Do you remember the Lord's reply to Peter? Thinking about thinking. How you think. Let me put it up on the screen for you.

Matthew 16:23 (ESV)

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! (Look at this) You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Wow. Isn't that a punch in the gut? Because I don't think there's one of us who can't relate to Peter. Because we do. We just get to thinking, just like the world. And what happens is that we actually put ourselves in a position where we can become a hindrance to the Lord. A hindrance. Isn't that what Jesus said to Peter? You are a hindrance to me. He's not saying, you're going to hell and you're not really a child of God. He does reveal who's behind it all when He says, get behind me, Satan. But He's, now He's talking to Peter. He says, you're a hindrance to me.

You are standing in the way of the purpose of God as it relates to this whole thing. Why? Because you're thinking like a man, you're thinking from the world, you're thinking of this from this base kind of a perspective of limited understanding rather than being lifted up to understand that the will of God is different. It's other than the way the world typically thinks. And you're not open to that.

And now, in fact, you're even resisting it to the point where now you've become a hindrance to me. And I thought about that verse, I thought, man, I don't want to be a hindrance to the Lord. I don't want to be a hindrance to myself, and I don't want to be a hindrance to the Lord. But it is very possible if we don't take seriously this admonition in the Word of God to be transformed by the renewing or the renewal of our minds, letting the Lord renew us.

I mean, I can't think of any better way than to just dig into the Word of God and allow the thoughts of God that are recorded in the Scriptures to so permeate our hearts and minds that it begins to actually guide our thinking processes.

And we begin to have a biblical mindset that just guides and directs how I treat people, how I treat my wife, my children, others, business, and how I think about everything. I really believe that if we read and accept the Word of God, it will change the way we think about everything. It changes how you react to people because you think differently about them now. You think differently about yourself.

Oh man. It's really a study in humanity, but if you really want to find out what people are really like and how they think, watch people as they drive their cars, and when they come to intersections, and how they respond to other drivers and how angry. Have you ever been cruising along and you're wanting to get where you're going and you come to like a four way stop or one of those lights that's triggered by somebody going the other direction and you're driving along, I do this, I'll be looking at the side roads from quite a distance and I can see that nobody's coming.

Okay nobody's coming, and then I get close to it and somebody comes right up there, trips the thing and my light turns yellow and I'm immediately like, oh, I got to stop! And I put on my brakes. You know what's interesting about that? That is a very, pretty typical sort of human response to that sort of thing. But I got to thinking, why do I feel that way? What is it that makes me feel that way? What is it that makes me react that way to this other driver? You know what it is? I think I'm more important than they are. That's the way we think in the world, right?

If I cared more about that person than I cared about myself, I would just go, hey, cool, go. Hey, you got to get where you're going. You're probably in a bigger hurry than I am. Who knows? Maybe you're heading to the hospital. I don't know, but we don't think that way unless we've had our minds renewed, unless we've gotten into the Word of God, and we hear the apostle Paul say

things to us about it like, do not consider yourselves more important or better than others.

But how to treat other people and how to think of them first and how to understand our natural innate desire is to think of myself as the most important, but I have to resist that. See, that comes from the Bible and the Bible teaches me and helps to renew my mind related to those things. Just a simple an example.

Listen, this passage says to you and I not to be conformed to this world, but let me give you, let me give you one final reason why you and I should not be conformed to this world, and that's because Jesus suffered on the cross to deliver you and I from this world from its power and from its influence.

He suffered so that you and I might be delivered. And I understand too, He then, not only did He suffer to deliver us but then He put us in this world, and this is where we do have to live for this time, and we're here to tell the world that there's hope.

We literally are being made to live in the enemy camp so that we can go to the enemy, and not that we think of them per se as the enemy. But to go and to say there is hope in Jesus Christ, and that's our calling. The problem is we become ineffective in that calling when we take on the influence of the world in our lives rather than the other way around.

We are supposed to be influencing the world. That's why Jesus said you are the light of the world. You're to light it up. It's dark. World's a dark place, but you are the light. You are to be the influence in the world. You are the salt of the earth. It's decaying all around you. It's corrupting. And you and I are salt that goes to inhibit that process of decay and corruption. See, the influence is supposed to be the other way around, but it isn't always, is it? Sometimes we're the ones who become influenced. This is such an important reminder.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but (rather) be transformed by the renewal of your mind, (and then) ...by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)