The Right Form

1.18.26

Romans Series

Message 46

Romans 12:1–2 (CSB)

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. **2** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Introduction

A. One of the biggest disasters of 2025 happened with a company called "Cracker Barrel."

1. In one day, they lost almost $100 million dollars in market value.[1]

2. Why?

a. Because they changed the logo and the brand.

b. The leadership thought they were transforming the company.

c. The customers accused them of conforming to culture.

B. Americans have strong feelings about conformity.

1. Part of our heritage, the people who started this country, were called non-conformists.

2. They were the forefathers of the Baptists, methodists, and presbyterians who PROTESTED against the Church of England and refused to conform.

3. They started this country on the basis that they wouldn't conform to the patterns of the day.

[1] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cracker-barrel-cbrl-stock-down-200-million-loss-new-logo-change/

4. Yet, when they came to the US, they expected people to conform to what they believed.

C. That is America in a nutshell.

1. No one wants to conform to someone else's rules, but we want everyone to conform to ours.

2. Conformity isn't always the biggest problem: it's what we are conforming to.

3. Notice what Paul said in Romans 8:29

Romans 8:29 (CSB)

29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

4. Paul is telling the Roman believers to conform to the shape of Jesus, not the shape of Rome.

a. Don't do as the Romans do (while in Rome).

b. Instead, our new life in Jesus is designed to look like Jesus.

c. It's possible to put the right product in the wrong mold.

D. Verse 1 is the goal of Christian life, and verse 2 is the plan.

1. Why do we avoid being conformed to this age?

2. Why are we to be transformed?

3. So that! we may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Let's Start with WHY?

The Will of God is Why!

A. For every believer, the will of God is our why.

1. When we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we changed masters.

2. No longer do we serve our flesh and sin; we serve God.

3. And doing the Will of God is our purpose and reason for being.

B. Paul tells us of the dangers of conformity and the power of transformity because God's will is worth it.

1. Paul loves the will of God so much that he describes it as:

    a. Good

    b. Pleasing

    c. Perfect

2. Then Paul gives us a great opportunity and a great command:

3. So that we may discern the will of God.

C. Discern means “test” or “prove”.

1. This morning I’m using more grammar than normal but it’s important to catch the meaning.

2. Discern is a Present, active, infinitive: Meaning that it is an ongoing action.

3. We aren’t invited to know the will of God once and for all but to day by day test and prove God’s will.

4. To live out His plan and purpose.

5. To advance His agenda.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

2 Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

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, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

D. The end goal of Christianity is not for us to merely live our best life, but for us to live out the will of God.

1. And when we test, prove, and discern the will of God, we end up living our best life.

2. Nothing is greater or better than living out the will of God.

3. That’s why Paul can proclaim to us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

    a. God’s will and God’s mercy make this a logical and reasonable decision.

b. For us to live our lives for Jesus, testing and proving God's will along the way, is the greatest opportunity we've ever been presented.

E. In order for this to be so, there is a Do not and a Do.

2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Do not be…

A. Christianity has a lot of dos and don'ts.

1. The BIG don't is probably not what you think.

   a. We think we know the Big ones, the Ten Commandments.

   b. We also have the ones like gossip and cursing.

2. The Apostle Paul opens up with a different kind of warning:

   a. Do not be Conformed:

   b. The word conform is where we get our word for Pattern, schema, " and " schematic.

   c. The really old translations used the word "fashion." Do not fashion yourselves to this world.

3. The word that comes to my mind? Jello.

   a. I'm not sure if families make Jello or not.

   b. But back in the day, moms or grandmas would buy Jello molds to shape and conform, to pattern, the Jello to look like something.

   c. When you would pour in the Jello mix and hot water, the shape would change and conform to the container.

B. Conformity means we change our shape without changing our substance.

1. The Apostle tells us not to pattern our lives in the mold of the world.

2. Don't dress yourself so that you look like the world.

3. Don't adopt the schemes of the world.

4. Don't adopt the plans and the schematics of this age!

5. BECAUSE the world, this age, is evil.

C. How do I know this world is evil?

1. Scripture told us the world is evil.

1 Corinthians 2:6–8 (CSB)

6 We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Galatians 1:4 (CSB)

4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

2. Paul remembered what we forget:

a. This world, this age, is fallen and broken.

b. When the mold is broken, the product is broken.

c. We can't expect to pour our lives into a broken mold and expect it to come out whole.

3. That's why Paul declared in 1 Cor. 2 that the wisdom of this age is coming to nothing.

a. No matter how hard you work, broken systems fashion broken people.

b. This world is broken, so why should we conform ourselves to what is broken and destined to be thrown away?

D. There is a danger for us to say that we are disciples of Jesus, but we are letting the world do the discipling.

1. Day after day, it is the culture of the world that is shaping us and not the Spirit of God.

2. We may claim that God is the potter of our lives and we are the clay, but we keep putting ourselves on the wheel of the world.

E. Paul declares that believers should not be conformed by this world.

Ephesians 2:2 (NLT)

[2] You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

1. In Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that if we are not being shaped by the Holy Spirit, we are being shaped by Satan.

2. Believers are not designed to take the shape of or be shaped by the spirit of this age.

3. We are saved by Jesus to be shaped by the Holy Spirit.

4. We are to take the shape of Jesus.

If we are not supposed to conform to the world, what are we to do?

Be…Transformed

A. The word for transformed is an important word for us.

1. Transformed is similar to our word Metamorphosis.

2. A caterpillar that morphs into a butterfly has undergone metamorphosis.

3. The experts at butterfly.org say it like this:

> The word metamorphosis derives from the Greek words meta, meaning beyond or transformation, and morphosis, meaning a forming, and represents significant change or transformation in shape, structure, or form.
>
> In biology, metamorphosis often involves a series of distinct stages where an organism undergoes a radical change from one life stage to another.

Summary: Metamorphosis is a significant change in shape, structure, or form. It involves a series of distinct stages where an organism undergoes a radical change from one life stage to another.

B. The Apostle Paul uses this word on purpose.

1. Where conforming focuses on changing the outside without changing the substance, transforming is a significant change from one life stage to another.

2. Paul says don't let the world shape you, but let God change you!

3. Jesus doesn't merely put new clothes on us and calls us good, but He transforms us from one life stage to another.

C. Paul uses metamorphosis not as a noun but as a verb. SUPER NERDY.

1. The Verb is Present, Passive, and Imperative[i].

2. The present tense is not a one-time-only event: it is continuous and always present.

3. The word is passive voice.

    a. Paul doesn't say "transform yourself" but let yourself "be transformed".

    b. It's the work of the Holy Spirit doing the work upon us.

    c. It's the clay on the potter's wheel, sitting there while being turned into a vase.

    d. It's the sacrifice laying itself upon the altar while the Lord consumes it as He sees fit.

4. Imperative, meaning our part is to cooperate and let God transform us.

5. Transformation is not a thing; it's a process.

D. Too often, we make Christianity a self-help religion.

1. And to a degree, we are successful.

2. We can become better, more moral people.

3. We become better husbands or wives, raise better kids, and live cleaner lives.

4. But much of this is only a form of conforming, a shaping, a fashioning.

    a. We can stop doing all the wrong things and start doing all the right things and still be lost.

    b. We conform to culturally accepted behaviors, including the culture of the church, but we don't transform.

    c. We can be religious, and not a believer, we can have a form of godliness and not be holy.

        1. We repress our desires instead of crucifying them.

        2. We stop the drinking, the cussing, and all of the things so we fit in, but deep inside, we are not transformed.

        3. As we get older, the desire to sin remains, but the ability diminishes.

E. The Apostle Paul invites us to a process in which God transforms us; we do not transform ourselves.

1. We don't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps; instead, we submit our will to the Father.

2. We don't change ourselves; we allow ourselves to be changed and transformed.

3. We don't make ourselves better people; we become better people as God works in us.

4. The work of transformation is a work done, effected, by the Spirit.

The work is performed in our minds.

A. To be a living sacrifice and to discern the will of God, we must have our minds renewed.

1. Where does the greatest transformation take place in the lives of believers?

2. It is in our mind.

a. As we present our lives as living sacrifices, our attitudes, thoughts, and emotions become exposed to the work of God.

b. More than changing our clothes and outward appearance, the deepest work of the Spirit starts in our minds.

B. When we change the way we think, we change the way we live.[2]

1. Our world knows this better than we do.

2. Especially in January, every TikTok, article, YouTube video, and product points to the importance of right thinking.

3. Change your attitude, change your life.

4. But the world sells it as a way for you to transform yourself.

5. For believers, we believe that the renewing of the mind is a work of God that we partner with.

C. How many of us are trying to manufacture what God wants to cultivate?

1. We all want to find ways to make ourselves better, more efficient, and produce the most bang for our buck.

---

[2] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 398.

a. So we turn to systems, plans, and strategies that guarantee the most amount of change with the least amount of effort.

b. We want to manufacture transformation, but God wants to cultivate it.

2. Cultivation is slower than manufacturing.

a. Manufacturing is cheaper and more efficient.

b. God chooses a slower, more involved process in renewing our minds and thinking.

3. I know many of you are frustrated by the speed of transformation in your life.

a. Some people seem to experience a rapid change, almost overnight, they are a different person.

b. And you look at your life and wonder why the transformation is so slow.

c. Let me encourage to stay on the altar.

d. Stay on the Workman's bench.

e. Let God do the deep work within you.

f. Don't try to shortcut the process it, Embrace it.

4. Our obedience is the product of what God has done in our lives, not something we can manufacture on our own.[3]

What does this passage mean for us?

1**. Worship and transformation belong together.**

a. Whatever we worship changes us.

b. Money, sex, pleasure, and comfort all change us if we make them our focus.

c. Whatever has my attention has my worship.

d. Let worship become a bigger part of your life.

1. Worship has to be more than a band singing songs once a week.

---

[3] Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 394.

2. Worship is a disposition and attitude.

e. When I worship, I'm being transformed by One I worship.

2. Don't substitute discipline for worship.

a. When the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices is solely out of discipline, instead of worship, I will get up off the altar.

b. My discipline is only as strong as I am, and none of us is that strong.

c. The Christian life that Paul describes is possible because God is merciful, and His will is perfect, good, and pleasing.

d. And as I grow in my trust and love of Jesus, I present my life to God from a place of worship instead of my discipline.

e. Many of us are FORCING ourselves to be good; forcing ourselves to stay on the altar.

f. But the only sustainable way to follow God is to be so in love with Him and so thankful for His grace and mercy, that our obedience seems reasonable as an act of worship.

3. Let your "imagination" be captured by Christ[4]

a. We all have thoughts.

1. Some are intentional and others are automatic.

2. Some thoughts we keep to ourselves and others just speak their "minds."

3. Then there is the area of imagination.

b, My imagination is kind of like my "fun money".

1. I don't get an allowance because I'm not a kid.

2. But money that I earn outside of our family budget is my fun money.

3. It's what supports either my eating habits or my hobbies.

c. It's where I don't have to be disciplined.

1. I don't have to be responsible.

---

[4] Timothy Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2015), 107.

2. If I want to buy gummy worms at Dollar General I can.

3. If I want to save it up for a gun or guitar, I can do that too. It's uniquely mine.

d. Our imagination is that hidden area that no one sees.

1. We imagine all sorts of things; some good, some bad, some embarrassing, some intimate, and many things we think here others think are dumb.

2. It's where we feel like we can be our unique selves.

3. And it's in the area of imagination that I experience the challenge of the renewed mind.

e. No one can see what I'm imagining but Jesus.

1. Jesus challenged the outward conformity of religion when He declared that to lust was to commit adultery and to hate was to murder.

2. Where does this take place? In our mind and our imagination.

f. The imagination is not neutral; like all human faculties, it is affected by the Fall.

1. It Can be a source of idolatry, vanity, and "darkened reasonings" when it creates false realities apart from God.

2. A redeemed imagination "takes every thought captive" to Christ.[5]

4. The renewing of the mind takes time.

a. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians to take captive every thought.

b. Sometimes our thinking and attitudes change all at once.

c. Sometimes, they must be taken thought by thought.

d. Every attitude, every "intrusive thought", every day dream is examined and if it isn't good, pleasing, and acceptable according to God's standards, then it goes no further.

e. Philippians 4:8 (CSB)

8 Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

---

[5] https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-imagination/#:~:text=May%2030%2C%202016%20by:%20Matthew,of%20the%20image%20of%20God.

e. When a thought comes to mind, and you don't know where it came from, ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

f. The renewing of the mind is an ongoing examination of our thoughts and attitudes.

g. Take responsibility for your thoughts and engage with the work of the Spirit in your life.

God wants to transform every part of us.

A. Let me end with one more story.

1. We started with the disaster at Cracker Barrel.

2. But the worst instance of conforming took place in 1985.

In 1985, Coca-Cola panicked. Pepsi was winning blind taste tests, focus groups were buzzing, and someone in a boardroom said the most dangerous words in history: *"What if we change Coke?"*

So they did. They changed the recipe and called it *New Coke*. Not "Coke Lite," not "Coke Plus," just… *New*. As if slapping the word "new" on it would calm everyone down.

It did not.

People lost their minds. There were protests. Letters. People stockpiling soda like the apocalypse was coming. One man reportedly said it felt like "losing a family member." Over a soft drink.

Coca-Cola learned something the hard way: people didn't want a better Coke—they wanted *Coke*. When they tried to stay relevant by becoming something else, they lost what made them distinctive.

Paul says in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world." The pressure to conform doesn't usually feel sinful—it feels sensible. It comes with charts, trends, and very confident experts. But conformity always promises relevance and delivers identity loss.

Transformation isn't about changing our flavor to match the crowd. It's about letting God renew our minds so we remain who we're actually called to be—even if the world prefers Pepsi.

B. Today, I invite us to a few moments of reflection and transformation.

1. Are there portions of your life you don't want God to touch and transform?

2. Does following Jesus feel more like conforming than real change?

3. Are you frustrated by the process and substituting discipline and conformity for the deep, transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

[i] a. He uses *the present tense*: "Continue to let yourselves be transformed." Accordingly, this transformation must not be a matter of impulse: on again, off again. It must be continuous.

b. The verb used is in *the passive voice*. Paul does not say, "Transform yourselves," but "Let yourselves be transformed." Transformation is basically the work of the Holy Spirit. It amounts to progressive sanctification. "And we all, with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

c. Nevertheless, the verb is in *the imperative mood*. Believers are not completely passive. Their responsibility is not canceled. They must allow the Spirit to do his work within their hearts and lives. Their duty is to co-operate to the full. See Phil. 2:12, 13; 2 Thess. 2:13.[i] [i] William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 12–13, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 406.