

A Renewed Mind for a Changed Life

Romans 12:2

Everyone in this world has a worldview, a philosophy of life, and while there are thousands of different philosophies and ways of viewing life, they can be boiled down to just two: the way of the world and the way of the word.

The way of the world is man-centered and self-centered. It believes “My life is my own to live as I please.” The way of the word of God is: “My life is God’s to do as He wills.” Psalm 1 describes these two as the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. Proverbs describes the two ways as the way of the fool and the way of the wise. Jesus described two gates that led to two different roads,

(Matthew 7:13-14 NKJV) **13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide [is] the gate and broad [is] the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 "Because narrow [is] the gate and difficult [is] the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.**

These two ways of thinking are diametrically opposed to each other and can never be compatible. One is the way of destruction, the other the way to life; one is rebellion, the other revelation; one unrighteousness, the other righteousness; one is of this present evil age, the other is of the age to come; one is passing away, the other is eternal. Basically it is man’s way or God’s way. In Romans 12:2 Paul contrasts these two ways as the way of the world and the way of God’s will—he writes, **“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** (Romans 12:2 NKJV).

As we saw last time, the aim of Romans 12:1–2 is that all of our life would become “spiritual worship.” Verse 1 in the NASB says: **“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”** Worship means using our minds and hearts and bodies to express the worth of God and all He is for us in Jesus. Because of the mercies of God that He gave us in saving us from sin and death through Jesus Christ, we respond by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to God in a life of service and worship.

How does this take place? How can we live all of our life in a way that shows the glory of God? Verse 2 is Paul’s answer to how we turn all of life into worship. We must be transformed. We must be transformed. Not just our external behavior, but especially the way we think and feel and decide — our minds.

J. B. Phillips’ paraphrases verse 2 this way, *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-make your minds from within, 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.”* Paul is saying, *rather than being conformed to this evil age, be transformed by renewing your mind so that you prove in practice God’s good, acceptable, and perfect will.*

In this verse Paul gives a negative command and then a positive one:

1. Do not be conformed to this evil age.

Verse 2 begins, “**And do not be conformed to this world...**” What “world” is Paul warning us against? The New Testament uses two key words when it talks about the world. One is the word *kosmos*, from which we get the word “cosmetic.” That’s the word John uses in 1 John 2:15-17 to warn us against loving the world. It refers to the organized system of life that leaves God out. The second word is the one Paul uses in our text—the word *aion*, usually translated as “age.”

In the New Testament, there are two main “ages”—this present age of sinful darkness (Ephesians 2:2, Galatians 1:4), from which we have been rescued by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the age to come when the Lord Jesus Christ will reign in righteousness in His Kingdom (Revelation 11:15). The text literally reads, “*Don’t be conformed to this age.*” What is this present age like?

- It is an age of evil: (Galatians 1:4 NKJV) **4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father**, Christ did not die to leave us to be conformed to this present evil age, but to rescue us from it, so that our lives would glorify God.
- It’s wisdom is really foolishness: (1 Corinthians 1:20 NKJV) **20 Where [is] the wise? Where [is] the scribe? Where [is] the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?** The wisdom of this age is foolishness to God because the world’s wisdom is based on man’s flawed thinking rather than on God’s revelation.
- It is under the dominion of Satan: (Ephesians 2:2, 7 NKJV) **2 in which you once walked according to the course (age) of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.** (2 Corinthians 4:4 NKJV) **4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.**
- It is passing away: (1 John 2:15-17 NKJV) **15 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. 16 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. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

At its core, not being conformed to this evil age is a matter of how we think. John Murray (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], 2:113) explains, “*Conformity to this age is to be wrapped up in the things that are temporal, to have all our thought oriented to that which is seen and temporal.... If all our calculations,*

plans, ambitions are determined by what falls within life here, then we are children of this age.”

Being conformed to this present evil age is the natural inclination of every human being. It is the bent of our sinful minds. Remember back in chapter 1 of Romans when Paul was writing about the sinful condition of people without God he wrote, **“And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;”** (Romans 1:28 NKJV).

You don’t have to try to be conformed to this world, the world will conform you to its mold if you simply do nothing. Someone has compared the world’s influence to Velcro. Due to the ongoing influence of the flesh and its presence lingering in our lives, the present age has Velcro qualities. The world sticks in our thoughts, attitudes, phrases, conversations, and desires. We see images, hear ideas, and observe examples that stick to our minds like Velcro.

The world tightens its grip in our lives to pressure us into certain patterns and ways of thinking and living. It exerts enormous pressure and influence through media, daily conversations at work, graphic scenes of impurity, and godless examples. Relentless bombardment by worldly ways of thinking crash into our lives to such a degree, that Christians often give in and accept the ways of the world.

So Paul commands us, negatively, do not be conformed to this age, to the kind of godless thinking that characterizes people who just live for today. Always live in light of eternity, live for the age to come.

2. Be transformed by renewing your mind.

We’re to stop being conformed and start being transformed. The word “transformed” refers to an inner change. We get the word “metamorphosis” from this Greek word.

A. Transformation is on on-going work of God.

I base this point on the tense, voice, and mood of the verb. It is *present tense*, indicating an ongoing process. We’re not talking about a quick fix or a dramatic, instantaneous change, but steady, lifelong progress toward godliness. The verb is in the *passive voice*, indicating that this is a work that God does in us. But it is also in the imperative mood, indicating that we are to obey its command.

Paul shows us in chapter 8 that this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us

(Romans 8:5-9 NKJV) **5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those [who live] according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded [is] death, but to be spiritually minded [is] life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind [is] enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed**

the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

B. Transformation happens by the renewing of our minds.

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind....” We act as we think. All sin and all obedience begin in the mind and the heart. So the key to overcoming sin and to growing in godliness is to change your thinking. How you think about God is immensely important. For example, if you think daily about the fact that God is with you and that He knows your every thought, word, and deed, it would have a profound effect on your behavior. Before you stretched the truth or lashed out in anger, you’d stop and think, “I can’t act like that because God is here with me.” So the process of change is directly linked to changed thinking.

How do we renew our minds? The primary source for changing your thinking is God’s Word.

Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:

(John 17:14-17 NKJV) 14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

How are our minds renewed? By God’s word of truth. We are sanctified, made holy, conformed to the image of Christ, by the word of truth.

Paul indicates the same in Ephesians 5 where he writes how Christ loved His church and gave Himself for her,

(Ephesians 5:26-27 NKJV) 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

I cannot emphasize enough that if you are not saturating your mind with God’s Word, you will not change for the better. You must come to know God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. The Bible speaks to virtually every area of life. How should we think about trials or success? How should we think about our relationships, especially when we’ve been disappointed or wronged? How should we think about money and possessions? What priorities and goals should we adopt in life? What moral standards should we hold to? What entertainment is wholesome and renewing? How do we process world news of terrorism and threats to our freedom? What political position should we adopt? Should we be concerned about the environment? What is good art? Should Christians be involved in the media? How should we educate our children? The Bible speaks to these and many more issues.

This means that you should have a regular habit of reading through the Bible over and over again, to get the balance of the totality of Scripture (Ps. 119:160). God is love, but He is also a God of wrath. You are prone to sin, but you're also a saint in Christ Jesus. You need the balance. Meditate on God's Word and how it applies to your life. Memorize the Word so that you can evaluate any situation or decision in light of Scripture. We must have a steady diet of God's Word to renew our minds.

The late Dr. Barnhouse found that at night he would often have dreams that were not glorifying to God. The sensual thoughts of his subconscious mind were finding release. So he began to memorize Scripture before he went to bed at night in order to put his mind on Christ just before falling asleep. He found that this did not completely cure his thought life at night, but it certainly made a big improvement.

C. Transformation results in proving in practice God's will.

Paul describes the result of being renewed in your mind: **"that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."**

(1). You are to prove in practice what God's will is.

"Prove" means to discern and approve by testing. The NIV translates, "to test and approve." Phillips has, "prove in practice." Romans 12:2 is not about "discovering" God's will as much as it is "proving" or "approving" that God's will is always good, acceptable and perfect. Psalm 18:30 contains a similar idea: **"As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him."** Eugene Peterson offers this colorful paraphrase: *"What a God! His road stretches straight and smooth. Every GOD-direction is road-tested. Everyone who runs toward him makes it."*

(2). God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect.

Good refers to moral goodness or holiness. It is also good for you, because sin always damages you, whereas holiness always restores and blesses you. That means that doing things God's way will always prove to be for our ultimate benefit. Again it's the difference between thinking like the world and thinking according to God's word.

When Eve saw the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, she saw that "the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6). All those things were true. So she took the fruit and ate it, and gave it to Adam and he ate it, with disastrous consequences that continue to this very day. Sin always looks good at first. Remember that sin does bring pleasure for a short time. If sin were always immediately unpleasant, we'd all sin a lot less than we do. Sin often brings short-term pleasure. **"There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."** (Proverbs 14:12). All Satan's apples have worms. But God's will and his way and his path are always good for us.

Acceptable primarily means, “pleasing to God.” It means to live in such a way that God says at the end, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In Ephesians 5:8-10, Paul says, **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”**

“Finding out” is the same verb that is translated “prove” in Romans 12:2. We are to prove in practice what pleases God. But it also means that living God’s way will also be pleasing to us personally. Not easy, because carrying a cross is not an easy thing to do. But in the end, those who live for Christ will be happier than those who don’t.

Perfect. The word means something that is complete or whole, something that has reached its intended destination. If you live for God, you will come to the end of your life satisfied. If you live for God, you will demonstrate to yourself and those who know you that that God’s way is always good, pleasing and ultimately perfect.

Conclusion

Let me ask you as we close, is your life conformed more to this present evil age or to the life of Christ?

Do you think like the world or is your thinking in line with the word of God?

Kate Wilkinson wrote a hymn that expresses the prayer of my heart, maybe it will yours as well,

May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God, my Father,
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea.
Him exalting, self abasing:
this is victory.

May we run the race before us,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as we onward go.