

Be Not Conformed to this World

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[0 : 00] So, we're going to return this morning. Last week we looked at verses, the first verse of Romans chapter 12. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, if you remember, if you were here by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Today, we're looking at the second verse. We're not going to do all one verse at a time, but the first two are really important. So, they're foundational really to the rest of the chapter.

So, this verse today is, 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.

So, it may be that for those of you who were here last week, or those of you who may be here for the rest of the summer, there'll be a bit of overlap each week. And that's fine. That's important, because they all dovetail.

We're not taking them out of their context or making them simply individual verses, because they're all part of the whole. However, we're looking at them in quite a bit of detail. And last week, we looked at the importance of Christians, recognizing that they are living sacrifices and all the connotations of what that meant for us.

[1 : 12] And we saw that, especially in our relationship with God, that it's not just, you know, the hour we're in church. It's our bodies. It's whatever we are, whoever we are, we take Christ and Christ is with us.

And we saw that particularly in our ongoing relationship with God, and also, it's not quite so obvious at this point, but it goes on to become clear in the chapter, a relationship with other Christians is hugely influenced by understanding who we are in Christ, as does our relationship with the world in which we live.

So in other words, it's everything. It impacts everything. And a true understanding of who we are as believers impacts everything that we do, the perspective we have, the conversations we have, the behavior we engage in, the choices we make, everything is affected by understanding who we are as living sacrifices in Christ.

Now, I'm going to enrage some people here just now, especially those who are historical theologians. And I plead already your forgiveness.

I'm just not sure sometimes today how helpful it is to describe ourselves as Protestants. Okay? Okay?

[2 : 27] You can sack me at the end of the service. Or even to describe ourselves as non-conformists. Now, hopefully I'll explain what I mean and why that's the case.

I get why historically that's the case, and I understand there's a reason for it and it is important, but it's only part of the picture. It's only part of the picture.

And we need to engage in a certain degree of spiritual nuance to understand deeper who we are as believers. Because Paul here in this verse is describing discipleship.

He's describing what it is to be a living sacrifice. He spent, we saw last week, the first eleven chapters giving deep, meaningful, meaty theology about who God is, about who we are, and about salvation, the significance and importance of that.

And here now is the more practical section of Romans, and he's describing with the authority and gifting of an apostle under the inspiration of Scripture, describing discipleship to the church in Rome, but also to the church throughout time.

[3 : 36] And if you read this verse, when you first read this verse, do you think that Paul's just going to use opposites? Do not do this, but do this. And it clearly looks like it's going to be opposites.

Don't be conformed, and you think he's then going to give, rather, do the opposite of not being conformed. But he doesn't do that.

The opposite of being and not conforming is maybe something we presume that we should be. The opposite of not conforming, we think, is to fight, to protest, to oppose.

That's the opposite of not conforming. It's kind of rebelling. Now, I know there's an element of that in the Christian faith, but he chooses not to use that opposite.

He doesn't say, don't conform to the pattern of this world, but be rebels, be non-conformists. Rather he says something much more positive.

[4 : 36] He provides a very positive alternative, which is transformation. It's not the opposite of being a non-conformist. It's something different.

It's something with a much more positive slant, and that is significant and important. He challenges what I think sometimes we have the very core of an understanding of what a Christian is, which...

And if we don't have that understanding, certainly the world have that understanding that the Christian is someone... It's always negative. It's always against everything.

The Christian is someone who's against everything. And now there's elements of truth in these things, of course. But Paul here describes being non-conformist, not in a negative use, or negative opposite, but rather in using the language of transformation.

Now, there's no doubt there's many things that we fight against in the light of being molded by God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

[5 : 46] But it's a healing. It's a rooting out of what is damaging and unhealthy to us. It's a coming towards wholeness.

It's being engulfed in this divine love. Last week we looked at what the whole summary of verses of chapters 1 to 11, that deep, meaty, meaningful theology of chapters 1 to 11 was.

What's the summary of it? God's mercy, in light of God's mercy, which is in light of all that Paul had been speaking about. So it's in the light of God's mercy that we're not to be conformed, but rather we're to be transformed towards wholeness.

Now, love will always have negative parameters, and that's true. But they don't define love for us, do they?

Usually, the negative parameters. For example, negatively, I'm not going to steal from my best friend. If I've got a best friend who I love, I'm not going to steal from them.

[6 : 47] Now, that's a negative parameter around my love for that person. I wouldn't do something bad or brutal like that and steal from my best friend.

But I wouldn't define my friendship with them as, oh, I've got this is my best friend, I don't steal from them. Do you see what I mean? Do you see what I mean? I wouldn't define my friendship in terms of what I wouldn't do, what I would keep for them doing, but nonetheless, there are parameters to love, and we'll come and see them very clearly.

But the core of our faith, I think it's a very important point that he makes here, is how you describe your faith and how you think about your faith. Do you think about it negatively, or do you think about it positively?

Do you see yourself as a non-conformist or someone who's being transformed? Because I think that there's an important perspective that we share in that.

Or if you're not a Christian today, maybe you've been brought up in the faith, but you haven't come to faith in Jesus Christ yourself, or maybe you're just invested, fantastic to see if you're here today and you're just investigating the Christian faith.

[7 : 55] But maybe you think also, if I'm to become a Christian, you think of it in terms of, well, there'll be enough, a lot of things I'm going to have to give up.

A lot of negatives, a lot of no-mores, a lot of do-nots. Now, clearly that is an important element of faith.

But to couch your faith in these terms negatively, I think it's to come at faith from the wrong direction, because we're to be transformed by the mercies of God.

It's to be at one level, yes, it's a battle, but it's a pleasurable battle at one level, because it's a battle of life. It's a battle of truth. It's a battle of coming alive from being spiritually dead.

If we're protestants, if we're always negative against everything in our Christian lives, you're missing the vista, you're missing the view, you're missing the beauty of Jesus Christ, the attraction.

[8 : 58] It's the attraction and the mercy of God which enables it, that makes sense of saying no to ungodliness. Absolutely, we say no to ungodliness. But it's because of who Jesus Christ is, and if you grasp nothing else from the study of the chapter over these next few weeks, grasp His mercy, in the light of His mercy, grasp that beauty, because that's the only motive that enables your heart towards Him in love and in grace.

It's the only motive that enables us to embrace the prodigality of the Father's love and to love others before ourselves. It covers everything.

It's not shallow, it's not soft, it's not sentimental, it's not cheap. It's the deepest reality of the universe. God is love, and He shows us His love in Christ, which is the first eleven chapters that Paul takes, theologically deep stuff, to make sure we understand that.

And last week we looked at offering our bodies to Him as living sacrifice, and that was significant into the Greek or Roman world of mystical spirituality, and all that matters was what you were like inside, what you thought inside, how your body was evil and everything else that goes with that.

But we saw that we're physical redeemed people. Our bodies are always somewhere, and therefore our bodies, our beings, our living existence to be in the presence of the Holy Spirit, because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 41] And that was speaking of a wholehearted consecration of love towards the living God. The temporal, the physical, in fact you're sitting on material seats in a building, and you can see one another, it is significant because we recognize that this is the world we're living that God has created that is to be redeemed.

But we also need to come to a fuller understanding of our physicality, of our humanity, because it's different in Christ.

And that leads us to the second verse which says, not just present our bodies, but we do so by the renewal of our mind. So it's, we're getting everything here, we're getting body and mind as Paul explains discipleship to us.

And therefore as believers what Paul is saying here is we are to think in a new way, all of us. We're to go on thinking in a new way.

Christian 50 years makes no difference. Christian five minutes, learn, or learning to think in a new way. That's what Paul is saying here in this chapter.

[11 : 52] This renewal is speaking of a totally fresh and in completely different thought process that is to be ours as believers in the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now you know today it's your thoughts that's triggered you to bring you here today. Ah, I think we'll get up. We'll get dressed. Ah, we'll have some breakfast and now we'll come to church.

So your thoughts govern what you do, the thoughts that we have lie behind who we are and what we do. They explain your priorities, your behavior, your choices, your self-image.

So if you're here today and you think you're ugly, worthless, beyond saving, without talent, unsociable, unloved, that is going to affect every single part of your day.

And it's going to affect the way that you interact with people. It's going to affect the way you think about God. You have no confidence and you will interpret the world that you go into with that lens through your thought processes.

[12 : 59] On the contrary, if you think you're great, that you're more talented than most, you're good looking and intelligent, you're independent. That also will cut, both these extremes will color how you, the decisions you make, the way you think of God, the way you think of people.

You'll be driven by pride. And Christ comes and smashes both these extremes and everything in between, both worthlessness and proud independence and that thought process that lie behind that, the brokenness, the disorder that lies behind our thinking.

We often underestimate how broken our thinking is and we don't consider the transformation of our thinking that's required when we come to Christ.

It's not just simply a decision we make and then life carries on the way it was as we'll come to see. Chapters 1 to 11 give us the truth.

Remember, summarize gloriously in the mercy of God. Reconciles of who God is, who we are. Our greatest need, His remarkable answer in Christ.

[14 : 16] And your call today, your call, go home and read these chapters because your call to let these truths capture your mind.

Your call to allow them, your call to make these truths begin to govern and mold your thinking. And as Christians, when we become Christians, we start thinking God's thoughts.

We start thinking God's truth and that molds and transforms and changes our thinking. Can I say, we maybe just start thinking.

We're so prone not to be thinkers today. We're living in an age where the mind is dulled relentlessly and we're not encouraged to be thinkers, fill it with entertainment, with noise, with distraction, with pleasure.

So we don't need to think about our minds and our brokenness and our disorderliness and the need for transformation. So can I just make a practical plea this morning to say that silence is good.

[15 : 26] Silence is great. Mental reflection is a worthy practice to engage in.

Not emptying our minds, far from it, but filling our minds with God thoughts and understanding how His truth transforms us. I'm making myself very unpopular this morning with historical theologians, but also with probably 90% of you by saying, can I encourage you to listen to less podcasts?

Stop always filling your mind, even if they're good podcasts, because sometimes they still dull our minds to actually apply and think about the truth that we're filling our minds with all the time.

Just something, maybe one, two podcasts less a week. And instead, listen for God and listen to God in the solitude of your own mind.

Listen for Him, speaking through His truth, and listen for Him saying, what truth is? What part of my life and mind is to be transformed by this truth?

[16 : 36] What thinking is ungodly and unhelpful and selfish and proud and self-centered that He is dealing with as we embrace thoughtful silence, taking God's truth and allowing it to change us.

You know, allowing it to change us. Use our reason. We saw that last week, didn't we? That's our reasonable service. It's our logical service.

It's what makes sense because of His mercy that we allow Him to transform our lives. And so at the same way, we're to think through what He has done for us and why that changes us.

So then briefly, in conclusion, two points. Since I'm taking Corey's place today, I'll say in conclusion 32 times. And I'll say this is the last point, five times.

And we'll still go on for another 20 minutes. So sorry, Corey, you're listening. So there's only two, I've only got two points. Yeah. So in terms of working out what it means to think in a new way, to think in a new way, there's two things he says here.

[17 : 44] The first is that we are not to be conformed to this world. So to paraphrase that, it's not conforming to a godless mindset.

That's what we are asked to do by thinking a new way. In Christ, because of Him, we are not to conform to a godless mindset. Primarily, what Paul is saying here is that we're not to fit into a system of thought that leaves God out.

That's how we were all born. We sung about that in Psalm 51. And I'm not necessarily speaking about the world out there. I'm speaking about the world in here that is also out there.

It is a system, by nature, we leave God out of the system of our thinking and of our life. Funnily enough, to be a rebel is what we think we are, and we call ourselves that sometimes against God.

But actually, to be a rebel against God is the most conforming reality in the world. It's the furthest thing from being a rebel. By nature, it's a universally predictable mindset.

[18 : 57] It's entirely unoriginal. Everyone has a system and mindset that leaves God out and leaves worship of God out by nature.

We are sinners, and you can call it rebels, conform, rebels who conform to godlessness. One of the temptation is for us in our hearts as believers to underplay that reality and to not consider the temptation and the danger of leaving God out of our mindset, to be selfish and sinful and to remain enthroned, to leave God and His love and His grace at the edges of our existence.

That is where we are to fight, primarily. We are not to be conformed to our sinful, selfish thinking.

And that has implications for the world in which we live as well. But it's not primarily that we're non-conformist with everyone out there, or to be, although it includes that, we're to be non-conformists with our own unbelieving heart.

We're to be non-conformists about the greed and the selfishness and the rebellion that wells up within us, that leaves God out of His place of centrality. And we're not to allow ourselves to think godless thoughts about God.

[20 : 29] You know, I'm good without God. I'm not sure if God can be trusted. I'm not sure if He's good. Maybe the difficult things are happening in your life. I'm not sure if He's good. I'm not sure if He can be trusted.

I'm not sure if He cares for me. Or that all that matters is what we feel about ourselves to be true. Or that we can't be bothered with other people who are difficult or problematic.

We just cancel them out of our lives, because that's what selfishness thinks not only in our own lives, but in society increasingly in which we live.

Or that we think, well, this material world is everything. Life is short, just having the best time is all that matters, becoming addicted to power or pleasure or sex or comfort or wealth or health or life or live and let live, because this is all that matters.

Oh, my life, my job, my work, my health, my body, living for today. We're only here for a short time. And thinking without considering spiritual reality, without considering eternity, without considering God and who He is.

[21 : 39] And that is, we're to not conform with that godless mindset, which thinks that all there is really today and my understanding and my life, we're to completely, be radically turned upside down.

Now, if Christ wasn't raised from the dead, if this wasn't the first day of the week, go for it. Live like that. That's fine, because our faith is a waste of time anyway.

If Christ isn't risen, if we only have three scoad and ten years at best, yes, go and live a crazy life and enjoy whatever you can.

But we know Christ, and we know about God, and we've come to experience His mercy, and we can't think and live as atheists if we are believers by conforming to a mindset that leaves God out, that leaves God out of the core of our hearts and lives.

We can't think just like everyone around us who might not be Christians and who might not believe in God. It's something radically different that we are to consider and think about.

[22 : 49] So you don't become a Christian and just continue to think like you always thought and continue to live like you always lived. There's this radical non-conforming to a philosophy and a thinking of this age that leaves God out.

Remember, we're living sacrifices, our bodies, wherever we are, wherever we go, Christ is with us. We take Christ. Christ is all.

He's everything to us. It changes our attitude to everything. So not conforming to a Godless mindset, but rather being transformed. And with this, I will finish, okay?

This is where I think we part from being Protestant or protesters primarily. It's much more glorious. It's a great word we have here for being transformed, metamorphosis.

That's the word that we use that comes from the Greek that is used here in transformation. It's the inner change. We don't conform because we've come to Christ and there's an inner change.

[24 : 04] We've been touched by the living God. That's what Jesus meant when He said, you must be born again. It's so radical, it's like a rebirth.

New way of thinking, new way of living, new way of behaving because we've been touched by God's incredible grace in Christ. And He helps us.

He helps us to understand this in nature. He gives us a beautiful example of metamorphosis of a caterpillar that is transformed into a butterfly and is metamorphized into something that flies and has wings and has outstanding beauty.

And the caterpillar basically disintegrates inside the cocoon. It almost goes just to a soup and is regenerated and reformed in a mysterious way that we can't truly understand, new cells are formed, new beauty and freedom is birthed in this metamorphosis.

And that is a great picture of the Christian life and what it means to understand discipleship. Briefly, a quick grammar lesson. We talked about thinking, using our minds.

[25 : 20] So use our minds for a minute. So the grammar of this word here of being transformed, it's in the present tense. Okay? Which means it's an ongoing reality.

It's a lifelong maturing. It just doesn't happen like that. It takes all of our life. We never stop being transformed. So you come to church today as a Christian and you're looking to be transformed because there's a job yet to be done.

There's change yet to be made. It's a maturing process. We never stop transforming. It's what Paul is saying here. It's what theologians we call sanctification. We're growing and being transformed into the likeness of Christ and His mercy.

It's in a passive voice, which means it's happening to us. God is doing it. We are passive and God enables us to be transformed.

We submit to Him. We rely on Him. We pray to Him. We seek His blessing. We seek His power and His strength and the miracle. Yet the mood is imperative.

[26 : 23] It's a voice and it's an imperative mood, which means that it's a command and we are responsible. God is telling us that we are to be transformed.

Now, there's mystery and it's a paradoxical reality. But there's two verses, one of them we read earlier from Philippians. But Timothy 4, 1 Timothy 4, says, have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths, stuff that isn't true.

Rather, train yourself in godliness. For while, bodily training of some value, godliness is in value of every way. So godliness is a gift.

It is God's work in us, but we're to train ourselves. But then more clearly in Philippians 2 where we read, it's an amazing paradoxical truth. Therefore, my beloved, as you've always obeyed so now, not only in my presence but much more in my absence.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Why? Because it's God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. And that whole section just was like a mirror of Romans chapter 12 and Philippians chapter 2.

[27 : 30] So we see that it's an ongoing transformation and coming to know God through Jesus Christ. We know our Father.

We know that we're His children. We're accepted. We're gifted. Every day is a purpose. We don't just live for today, but every day is precious. But we live in the light of eternity that the best has still to come, that God is preparing a place, that He's transforming us and transforming us body and mind.

And we cooperate with Him. We're partners with Him in this great work. We don't just sit back, come to faith and then just become fat slob spiritually.

We don't just receive, we energetically follow Him and serve Him spiritually. And He's with us and we are never alone and in Him and through Him.

We know the life, the fullness of life that He wants us to live. Can I say that as I mentioned last week, even in darkness, even in failure, especially in failure, failure's fine.

[28 : 39] Just through it, we learn as we take our failure back to Him and confess and seek transformation, He uses that to mature us, to make us, He says, that we understand.

And I haven't really any time to go into that last section, but we learn through that renewing of our minds that God's will is good and it's acceptable.

And it leads us to maturity is really the understanding of that word, perfect there, that He is taking us. As we allow Him, with all the struggles, all the battles, all the suffering, all the failure, He's molding and taking that as we go back to Him with it and using it for our good and for His glory.

He always says, don't be afraid. He always says, I'm with you. I will hold you by my righteous right hand. What are you doing in your struggles and battles?

Do you think in a worldly way that either God has rejected you or you must have done something bad or that He can't love you?

[29 : 49] Or it's just life? To have a renewed mind, we're to think differently about all the suffering and difficulties and battles and challenges and questions and aging and losing our youth and all these things about life and He will take and renew us and make us new each day and give us a youthfulness.

So the Christian life is one of transformation. It's one of non-conforming but also transformation. We're to ditch a mindset that leaves God out of the picture.

So if you're only going to think about God again this time next week when you come to church, then you're thinking and living as if you're not a Christian.

Because God wants us to change our thinking, not to be conformed to godlessness but to know that He's our partner, our friend, our Savior, our Lord.

And with our bodies, our bodies are His temple and we are to be transformed by His truth, by prayer, by understanding Him.

[31 : 03] So I hope that makes some kind of sense of why I spoke about Protestants and why it's not the whole picture, well a very important picture and we don't have time to go into that.

But to remember the positive reality of what it is to be a Christian, let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless us today and bless your word to us, apply it to our hearts and enable us to live in the light of your glory.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.