

## Romans

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Don't Be Conformed To This World – Part 2

January 03, 2016

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### I. Holy Behavior Is Necessary For True Worship

- A. Romans 12:1-2 . . . 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. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- B. Last Sunday, we looked at three reasons why holiness is a vital part of the Christian life. First, God commands holiness, and it is the only rational response to God gracious salvation. Second, holiness enables us to see God, to know God intimately, to understand the scriptures and discern how to apply them in the most practical ways possible. And third, holiness is the quality that universally sets Christians apart from non-Christians. As you may recall from last Sunday, a primary focus of the OT Jewish perspective on holiness was to keep themselves separate and distinctly different from the Gentiles, whereas the primary focus of the NT Christian pursuit of holiness is to keep ourselves separate from sin and distinctly different from the world.
- C. Prayer

### II. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

- A. Do not be conformed to this world –
  - 1. In Romans 12:2, Paul begins by stating what we must stop doing, and then he tells us what we are to do.
    - a. This is an important sequence, because we must begin with rooting out the ways we are conformed to this world if we are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
    - b. In other words, as Christians, we are to find and root out the ways in which we have been conformed to this world, and we are to guard against further contamination while pursuing spiritual, mental, and practical transformation.
  - 2. Pau's exhortation of "Do not be conformed to this world," is stated in various ways in both the OT and the NT, and here is one from each.
    - a. Deuteronomy 7:1-6 . . . When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the

Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, [2] and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. [3] Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. [4] For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. [5] But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. [6] For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

- b. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 . . . Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? [16] Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. [17] Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. [18] And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty.

B. However, putting an end to the ways in which we have been conformed to this world is not easy. In fact, it is quite challenging because the world is constantly pressuring us in both obvious and subtle ways to conform to its values, beliefs, desires, and ways. And in my opinion, history and personal experience confirm this. In considering this, I have concluded there are four primary reasons why discovering, rooting out, and protecting ourselves – individually and as a group – is so difficult.

- 1. First, even if we are raised in a Christian home, we start life as those who are not only susceptible to the influences of the world, but also as those who naively and even willfully embrace at least some of the world's ways. And as thoughtful adults have figured out, the world's influence has a profound effect on the shaping of our youthful

thinking, values, beliefs, opinions, and habits, as well as our day to day behavior.

- a. Pau's clearest NT statement about this is in 1 Corinthians 15:33 . . . Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.
  - b. And Paul explains this same truth in greater detail in Ephesians 2:1-3 . . . And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, [2] in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, [according to] the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. [3] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.
  - c. Then Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, shows the extent to which the world's thinking and ways influences wrong or distorted thinking and behavior when he said that none of the rulers of during his life-time understood the wisdom of God, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
2. The second reason breaking free and remaining free from the world's influence is hard is because the world, under the leadership and instructions of the devil, has harnessed a number of powerful forces which it uses to influence, educate, and train us in its ways.
- a. For example, consider the power of fashion, not just on teens and younger adults, but on all of us. And when I speak of fashion, I am not only speaking of the fashion industry, but also what is fashionable with those we want to imitate.
    - (1) As you know, the fashion industry is highly organized, and uses advertizing, mass media, and display windows to spread its influence. In fact, it is estimated that U.S. advertisers will have spent 190 billion dollars in 2015 to persuade us to buy what they are selling.
    - (2) However, the influence of what is fashionable in our social circles is even more powerful, for our social circle holds the power of laughing at or praising us, and of accepting or rejecting us.
  - b. Another example of a powerful source of influence is the educational system. Some of their influence promotes the world's beliefs and values about right and wrong, along with derogatory views of God, and skeptical views the Bible. And beyond that, the educational system promotes the superiority of science and psychology over God and what He has revealed in His word.

- c. This list could go on, but for the sake of time, I will just mention several more influential sources – the Internet, social media, TV and movies, radio, music lyrics, the insurance industry, medical science and the health care system – both of which are committed to reducing or removing the effects of sin on people’s health.
  - d. Obviously, this is only a partial list of the powerful influences pressing in on us in order to conform us to the world’s ways. And once again I want to remind you that the world’s influence is persistent and often subtle.
- 3. The third reason breaking free and remaining free from the world’s influence is hard is because in our unregenerate state we are fighting a losing war against the common human weaknesses. And sadly, many Christians accept some of these weaknesses as normal or too hard to defeat – thus continuing to make them susceptible to the world’s influences.
  - a. For example, many struggle with the longing to belong, to be accepted and approved, or even to be the center of attention. Probably just as many long for the privileges, possessions, and wealth promised by the American Dream. Some struggle with the use of pleasure, entertainment, food, or other such things as a means of soothing or blocking the pain of disappointments or other hurts. Some struggle with the use of money, the desire for things, discontentment over what they don’t have, anxiety, and sexual purity.
  - b. The degree to which we allow these weaknesses to remain part of our life is the degree to which we are willing to follow the world and its ways – even though we know they dishonor God, weaken our faith, and undermine the Body of Christ.
- 4. The fourth reason I believe it is difficult to break free from the unholy influences of the world, and to persevere in protecting ourselves from future contamination is because our society belittles, reprimands, rejects, mistreats, and even persecutes those who do not conform. This is especially true when our non-conformity exposes the world’s foolishness, selfishness, arrogance, and the failure of their ways to give them lasting happiness, joy, comfort, and security.
  - a. In other words, the cost of rejecting the world’s influence keeps many in line with the world’s way. This can be clearly seen in our teens. Ask them to wear clothing that does not conform to what their friends or the popular kids at school are wearing, and you’ll likely have a fight on your hands.

- b. Why? Because there is tremendous power in being shamed, embarrassed, made fun of, or forced to stand alone.
    - c. As adults, we may have learned to work around or toughen ourselves to these kinds of costs, but that does not mean we are immune to other, more subtle costs forced on us for non-conformity – which is a reason we need to work together as a church to root out and keep out the ways of the world.
  - 5. The point of all this is that the world's influence is subtle, progressive, and stubbornly persistent. Which raises the question, "Are we the first nation or culture to face this kind of progressive evil?" NO! Way back in Isaiah's day, Israel faced this same challenge. Therefore, we read in Isaiah 5:20-21 . . . Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! [21] Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!
  - 6. There is one more point I want to make about not being conformed to this world. Though Paul makes no mention of this here, I am urging us to work together – as a supporting family of believers – at rooting out the world and being transformed. Why? Because we are not just resisting the world's influence, we are standing against the pressures of a world that wants to win us over to its ways. Therefore, doing this together empowers us all the more to resist the influences of the world and gain transformation into the likeness of Christ.
- C. but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,
- 1. In order to be transformed, we must first reject and start working at getting rid of the evil that is the reason we need transformation.
  - 2. To be transformed means (1) being changed in nature – such as the caterpillar to the butterfly; and (2) being changed in disposition – such as a conceited person to a humble person, or a timid, shy person to a brave, outgoing person; and (3) being changed in thinking – such as a careless, illogical thinker to an insightful, sensible thinker; and (4) being changed in character – such as a willful, immoral sinner to one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness.
  - 3. The NT verifies that Christians are to live a life that is obviously different from the world's way of living. For example:
    - a. 2 Corinthians 7:1 . . . Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

- b. Ephesians 4:22-24 . . . In reference to your former manner of life, you [are to] lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, [23] and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, [24] and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.
  - c. Colossians 3:8-10 . . . But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. [9] Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, [10] and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.
  - d. 1 Peter 1:14-15 . . . As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.
- D. How do we become this new creation? As you already know, we must begin with repentance, faith in Jesus Christ for redemption from sin, dependence on the Holy Spirit for help and empowerment, the study of God's word, much prayer, and putting off the deeds of the flesh – or the old nature – so we can put Christ-likeness in their place. But we are not to stop there. We are to move toward a progressively complete transformation by the renewing of our mind.
- 1. And why is the renewing of our mind so vital to spiritual transformation? Because, as Jesus said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23).
  - 2. Of course, this principle works the other way too, for Jesus also said, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good” (Luke 6:45).
  - 3. In other words, our outward behavior comes from within. Therefore, being transformed on the inside is God's way, and therefore the only way to be transformed into the likeness of Christ on the outside. We can put on religious goodness, like the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day, but to become Christian through and through, in a whole-hearted and whole-life way, we must become new creatures inwardly, for that is the only way to become genuine Christians outwardly.

- E. Paul concludes vs 2 with these words: “so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
1. In other words, as your mind is progressively transformed, you progressively prove – to yourself and to others who trust in God – that God’s will is good, acceptable, and perfect. And if you persevere in living this way, you will – in time – become convinced – in the depths of your heart – that God’s will is perfect in spite of what the world says or what your current circumstances seem to imply.
  2. Now you may be wondering why proving the will of God to be good and acceptable and perfect is so important.
    - a. It is important because the Christian life is a life of faith – which means, in any given moment or situation, you are either trusting God, and therefore living like a Christian, or you are distrusting God and living like the world.
    - b. The more we are convinced God is perfectly and eternally good, the more we naturally trust Him. The more we naturally trust Him, the more we live in those ways that show the world we belong to God and value pleasing and serving Him above pleasing and serving the world.
    - c. On the other hand, when we distrust God, we behave in ways that tell the world they are right to distrust God.

### III. Conclusion

- A. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In closing, I have one more point to make. We are, individually and as a body of believers, the Temple of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us – which makes us a Holy Temple of God.
- B. To allow unholiness to remain or to bring unholiness into this Temple is to insult and displease our holy God. But it also results in publicly dishonoring God by implying to the world that God and unholiness are friends rather than arch enemies.
- C. May we live as those who have been taught by grace to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, knowing that we have been redeemed from every lawless deed so that we will be a people for God’s own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11-14).