

Romans

- I. Don't Be Conformed To This World, Be Transformed
 - 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. Prayer

- II. Do not be conformed to those parts of the world that have made their way into the church –
 - A. Review:
 1. After explaining the doctrinal basis of NT Christianity in Romans 1-11, Paul begins explaining its practical basis in Romans 12. And he begins by urging us to present our bodies, that is, our humanity, to God as a living and holy sacrifice – a sacrifice that rises to the standard of holiness God commands of His people. And why does God command holiness of us? Because holiness protects His kingdom from evil and makes His abundant life possible.
 2. And though holiness of heart and life is commanded by God, it is – at the same time – the only rational expression of gratitude for God's gracious salvation from the penalty and power of sin. And beyond that, holiness of heart and life is the single characteristic that universally sets Christians apart from non-Christians.
 3. In Romans 12:2, Paul calls to break free from the ungodly influences of the world. Last Sunday we looked at some of the ways the world influences us and why it is so challenging to break free.
 4. Today, we will look at some of the ways current day Christianity and the life of the church have been infiltrated and are being influenced by the ways of the world. And without question, this is not a new phenomenon, for from the time of the Apostles until now, the ways of the world have been a constant threat to the purity of the church.
 - B. However, to prepare us for looking at some of the ways Christianity and the church of our day have been conformed to the ways of the world, we will look at the importance God placed on holiness within the nation of

Israel (because Israel is a type of the church), and the importance God has placed on holiness within the Body of Christ.

1. One of the most significant similarities between OT and NT holiness is that wherever God dwells, be it momentarily, or for an extended period of time, or for eternity, that dwelling place is designated as the most holy of all places and therefore requires the highest standard of holiness from those entering into that space.
2. There are a number of examples of this in the OT, but I will give you just two: one that is momentary and one that is extended over time.
 - a. When Moses came near the burning bush, God spoke to Moses and instructed him to remove his sandals, because the place on which Moses was standing was holy ground (Exodus 3:5). In other words, because God was in the burning bush, anyone entering the space surrounding the bush was to treat that space as supremely holy.
 - b. Based on the Wilderness Temple and Solomon's Temple, the most holy place in all Israel was the Holy of Holies. Why? Because God dwelt there – and His presence was manifested by the Shekinah Glory that rested over the Ark of the Covenant. Therefore, anyone entering that space had to rise to the standard of holiness required by God.
 - c. The point of these two examples is that God manifested His presence in specific locations and buildings – and those places were designated as holy spaces.
3. In the NT, Jesus and the Apostles teach us that God continues to use a variety of places for temporary manifestations of His presence, but the long-term manifestation of His presence is no longer in buildings, but in His people and among His people.
 - a. Jesus made the most significant statement about this new way of identifying God's presence, and it is found in Matthew 18:20 . . . “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” Though many refer to this as a promise of God's presence among His people, it also clarifies that one of God's holy spaces is wherever God's people gather.
 - b. A second clarifying statement also comes from Jesus. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus whether the right place to worship was Samaria's Mount Gerizim or the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus answered by saying that the time had arrived when true worship was no longer determined by a place, but by the condition of the heart of the one worshiping (John 4:19-24).

- c. The point Jesus makes is that from His day forward, God's holy spaces are no longer identified with a specific locality or building, but with those whose hearts are pure and holy.
 - d. Paul affirms that God's holy space is within each Christian when he says the believer's body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
 - e. And Peter affirms that God's holy space is among His people, wherever they gather, when he identifies God's people as being a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession (1 Peter 2:9).
4. Now we ought never think that a change in the location of God's presence, or the final sacrifice for sin by Jesus Christ changes the requirement of holiness for those who would come into God's presence. What God required in OT times, He requires of us in these NT times. For example:
- a. Christians – that is, those in whom God dwells – are called to confess and repent of sin in order to be in a holy condition in God's presence.
 - (1) 1 John 1:7,9 . . . If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 - (2) 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 . . . Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. . . [29] For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. [30] For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.
 - b. Gatherings of believers, that is, the church, are called upon to guard those gatherings against the impurity of sin and false teaching.
 - (1) Galatians 6:1 . . . Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
 - (2) Galatians 1:8-9 . . . But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! [9] As we have said

- before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!
- c. And in Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:9-13, and 2 Thess. 3:6, the church is told to remove unrepentant sinners. Why? Because allowing impurity to remain within the group diminishes the spiritual health of the group, and jeopardizes God's blessing on the group and God's presence within the group.
 5. My point is simply this – in these NT times, God's holy spaces are not identified with specific buildings or even a specific nation. Today, God's holy spaces are identified with God's people – first inwardly and individually, and then corporately. Therefore, as individuals we are to be holy in all our behavior, and as members of the Body of Christ, we are to protect the purity of our church while promoting holiness within the universal Body of Christ.
- C. With that foundation of truth in mind, we will now consider some of the ways the world is influencing current Christians and the life of the church. One of the more obvious ways the world has been brought into the church is the merging the business model of doing church with the seeker friendly model of doing church.
1. When I speak of the business model of doing church I am referring to churches that operate according to the principles and practices of successful businesses in the world. These churches act as if they are the provider of a product that must be sold in sufficient quantity to make the church successful. When this model of doing church was first popularized within the US church, it was used to make the traditional way of doing church more successful.
 - a. The worldliness of the business model is manifested by the fact that its primary focus is producing products that maintain current membership and attract new members. This naturally leads to hiring well-known or entertaining pastors, and designing meetings that keep the peoples' interest, buildings that comfortably house a variety of programs, and programs that address the felt-needs of the people.
 - b. As a result, the size of the crowd rather than the depth of spirituality becomes the measure of success. In other words, the primary focus of the business model is on getting people to attend by using means that are naturally attractive. And though this model produces outward manifestations of Christianity, it leaves many of its adherents with hearts still needing to be transformed.

2. It was upon the foundation of the business model that the seeker friendly model of doing church was developed. This model simply took the business model a step further by designing its Sunday gatherings and a number of its programs to make unbelievers feel comfortable while giving them the kind of positive experience that makes them want to return.
 3. Since unbelievers are primarily attracted to products by a sense of need stimulated by the kind of marketing that appeals to their fleshly or unregenerate desires, it only makes sense that seeker churches would need to use the world's methods to accomplish their goal.
- D. Now I want to be clear that seeker churches are not alone in choosing this kind of path. Almost every church that measures success by the size of the crowd rather than the spiritual health of its people, must eventually use the world's ways to gain the success it desires.
1. And should you think you are untainted by the world's ways in the pursuit of building the church, consider this:
 2. Over the past 75 years, many evangelism methods have crafted their message so as to appeal to people's self-interest in an effort to gain more converts. And though such methods have produced some God-honoring results, they have also fed the acceptance of using worldly means to build a spiritual and eternal kingdom. And I am pointing this out because it is possible you have unwittingly used such methods in your evangelism, to one degree or another.
 3. Beyond evangelism, it is possible you have wished our church was more exciting – in a worldly kind of way – so that you could give your friends and neighbors an appealing reason to attend. Any why would you wish for a more worldly attractive church? Because it is obvious that unbelievers are naturally attracted to the world and naturally put off by the godliness and non-worldly ways of the church.
- E. One of the more subtle ways the world has infiltrated the church is in promoting Christian service as a higher, more noble, and even a more exciting calling than the calling to holiness of heart and life. This thinking is so pervasive that many Christians believe serving the Lord in some capacity is the high water mark of spirituality. Now there is no question about Christian service being both commanded by God and important to the well-being of the church – so it isn't Christian service that is worldly, it is the worldly thinking and motives behind the promotion of Christian service that we must guard against. For example:

1. In those churches where Christian service is treated as the high water mark of being a good Christian, it commonly results in Christian service being used as a substitute for inward transformation, or as an excuse not to pursue holiness in all one's behavior.
 - a. The ways in which this thinking and behavior comes from the world is best explained by using the three temptations of Jesus while He was in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). One common thread is that in each temptation, Satan offered Jesus a shortcut to what God promised. Turning the stones to bread was a quicker, easier path to solving His hunger problem than waiting for God to provide. Jumping off the Temple pinnacle was a shorter, easier path to gaining notoriety than to wait until the day when all mankind will bend the knee and worship Jesus. And worshiping Satan to possess all creation was a shorter, easier path than God's path of the cross, time in hell, and finally the resurrection.
 - b. Then lesson to be learned from this common thread is that we are so susceptible to taking the easiest path that the devil makes full use of this susceptibility to tempt us.
 - c. Therefore, anytime the church offers the people under its care a short-cut to true Christian godliness, such as by implying that Christian service is proof of spiritual maturity and therefore can be used as a substitute for inward holiness, it has conformed itself to the world.
 - d. In reality, the path to God, to inward transformation and whole-life godliness is narrow, often hard, and only rarely easy.
 2. Another subtle way the world has infiltrated the church is the way some churches use service to feed peoples pride and their desire to feel like they are doing something important – like changing the world. The ultimate goal of using Christian service in this way is to bolster attendance by giving people a reason to feel important and useful. Therefore, increased attendance is not the evil, but rather the worldly motives and methods being used to increase attendance.
- F. There are a number of other ways the church has been infiltrated by the world. But for the sake of time, I will mention only a few more.
1. There is the problem of choosing what is popular or exciting over what is best. For example, many Christians decide what churches and conferences to attend, what books to read, and what music to listen to based on what is popular, or what excites them. And when something new comes along that is more popular or more exciting,

what was popular or exciting is abandoned for what is now popular or exciting. Surely this is the way of the world, for they embrace what is popular and exciting today, and chase something different tomorrow because what is popular or exciting has changed.

- a. Let me give you a test. How many obscure or inconspicuous Christians do you know whose life and message or music is spiritually superior to the more popular or exciting preachers, teachers, writers, and song-writers you follow?
 - b. Sadly, like the world around us, many of us are so committed to using the measurement of popularity or excitement to decide who we will pay attention to that we don't give much time to discovering the true, though often obscure saints of God who can do far more for our spiritual growth than those who are popular.
2. Another problem in the church is the emphasis on financial prosperity as the Christian's right and God's duty. This not only mimics the world's greed and pursuit of riches and possessions, it encourages Christians to use God for personal gain, and to gauge ones strength of faith by the wealth possessed rather than the godliness lived.
 3. Another way the church has invited the world in is its use of psychology to help Christians feel unconditionally loved by God and therefore to feel better about themselves – even when they are openly practicing some sin, or distrustful of and angry at God. This does not mean that godly counseling is wrong, for discipleship is commanded by Jesus himself. But when the church uses ungodly principles and methods to encourage the downhearted and lift up the fallen, it means it has succumbed to the world's methods.

III. Conclusion

- A. God calls us to reject conformity to the world, and that includes those ways in which the world is in the church. To naively follow the ways in which the church has become like the world is not only foolish, it is destructive to your spiritual health.
- B. It is true that it is not always easy to see the ways the world has infiltrated the church, yet we have direct access to God's wisdom, the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, the instruction of the Holy Scriptures, the understanding of God's godly people down through the ages, the warnings of the prophets from long ago and in our own day, and the privilege of prayer for insight and understanding.
- C. Therefore, may we be among those who treasure a holy church as much as God does, and may our efforts validate that this is what we treasure.