

## CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED?

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**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-2

Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup> 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.

I'd like to read it from the NLT as well.

<sup>2</sup> And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. <sup>2</sup> 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.

Heavenly Father, we invite You to teach us through Your Holy Spirit that we may understand this passage of Scripture, understand it in our context, understand it in our own environments and be able to put it into our own lives, for we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

*"I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God..."* That's actually a strange word to be used. We gloss over it, and yet if we think about it, the word "urge" is not something that is used very often. "I urge you" = because in this particular context, especially with the Greek understanding, the word has a little broader kind of context. It's like when we talked about "the love of God constraineth me," and we said that the word 'constraineth' in the Greek is so difficult to translate, because it can mean 'to constrain, compel, propel' and all of these to mean 'to hold and yet, to move'.

The Greek has these kinds of nuances that can come into a particular passage. And it's the same with this word urge because Paul uses it dually: in one sense to entreat, and in another sense to talk with authority. For example, I can say, "Please, I urge you to do this." Or I can say, "I urge you, please do this." The same word, but used differently. And the Greek brings out this nuance that Paul is entreating people on the one hand, and on the other hand, speaking with a certain degree of authority that the words to follow are words that we need to take cognizance of. He's speaking to the believers here, to brothers and sisters.

Then he very quickly adds a basis or a rationale for what he is about to say – "by the mercies of God." He says because of the mercies of God, I urge you to do what he's going to talk about. As we look at the mercies of God, we see that the whole eleven chapters that have gone before have all talked about God's mercies. It talks about us getting what we don't deserve. It talks of us being justified freely by faith. It talks about giving us the life-giving Spirit, in making us, His children, all things that we don't deserve at all.

Then he says, "Because of all of these things that we've talked about in the first eleven chapters that have nothing to do with anything we have done, but everything that God has done for us. Based on that, he says, "Brothers and sisters, I urge you."

What is he urging us?

In v. 1, he has one focal point, and in v. 2, he has another. Two very clear points that are backed by an argument that is based on the mercies of God, which is as he says in v.1 that we need to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. This is our spiritual service of worship. The key thought here is:

What does good worship look like?

And Paul very quickly outlines it by saying: Key worship in this particular context is that it involves a sacrifice of holy living, which is a reasonable response to all that God has done for us.

So, for us to understand this passage in a broader context on the one level, and then in a more particular context at another, is to understand what God has done for each one of us. To be able to look at our lives and say: who I am now compared to who I was before I met God, has to do with God's mercy. And if we are able to understand that, then we will be able to buy into the rest of this verse.

But if we have a callous attitude to what God has done in our lives, we're never going to be able to understand the rest of this verse. Because Paul says: the mercies of God, His loving generosity, giving us things that we didn't or don't deserve. Because of that, he says, I'm going to tell you that the most reasonable response to what He has done is to offer a sacrifice of holy and living worship.

Two things that qualify worship: holy, and living. Let's look at those two qualifiers.

**Living sacrifice:** When we looked under the Mosaic Law, it was always a sacrifice that was made, and death ensued; it was the end of the animal that was sacrificed. But now, he says, we have a living sacrifice. By living, he says, it should be ongoing; it cannot be once, and then forgotten. So our sacrifice of worship must be something that happens continually. It's something that not only happens in church, but must happen on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday. It must happen while you're going to work, or at home. It must happen in your conversations with people. It must happen with the way in which you think and act and react. A living sacrifice is ongoing.

And sacrifice always entails that we give up something to make it happen. We give up something to make worship happen. So, our question is: What do I give up for worship? What is my sacrifice to make sure that my worship is living? And then to push that question even further, would be to say: Has my worship become something that is convenient rather than sacrificial? *I urge you, brothers and sisters, because of the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a holy and living sacrifice, ongoing every day.*

**Holy sacrifice:** We must present our bodies as a holy sacrifice to Him.

Romans 6:12-13 *"Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body."* Interesting choice of words! Let not sin reign, which means – let not sin sit on the throne in your bodies *to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

In other words, he's saying, if you want to make a holy sacrifice to God, don't let your members be used for anything that is unholy. Don't let your eyes dwell on things that are unholy. Don't listen to things that are unholy. Don't let your mouth, your tongue speak words that are not pleasing to God. Don't let your hands do things that are wrong. Don't let your members do anything that is an instrument of unrighteousness. Rather, let them be used as instruments for righteousness. That is what a holy sacrifice is to the Lord, that we are able to give everything – our eyes, our hands, our mouths, our feet – and say that they are all going to be used for a holy sacrifice to God.

When working on this sermon, the thought of all these parts came to me so strongly, to ask myself the question: As I look at my own life and my own worship of God, as I look at the way I deal with issues every day – am I offering every part of me as an instrument for righteousness, and not unrighteousness? And that’s the question that must confront each one of us as well. Are we instruments of unrighteousness? In that case we are not a holy sacrifice of worship to God. Or are we instruments of righteousness? It’s a good time to just think about that and say: is there anything in my life today that I’m using myself to facilitate unrighteousness? And then to be able to course-correct that.

Paul is saying in the first verse: Because of what God has done for us, we respond and say, “We will offer You worship. Worship that is sacrificial worship, that is holy. Worship that is ongoing. Worship in which we submit ourselves, every part of us, as an avenue for righteousness.” Paul is saying that is a reasonable ask of brothers and sisters who have been saved by God through His mercy. It’s a reasonable ask to expect that of us. That’s the first verse.

Verse 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.”*

If the focus in v. 1 was on worship, in v. 2 the focus is on the will of God. He’s offering proof about the will of God – that it is good, it will be acceptable, and it is perfect. That is the will of God. When we look at ourselves in the context of wanting God’s will for our lives, to be able to say, “I’m going to wait for it because His will will be good, His will will be acceptable for me, and His will will be perfect.

How do we prove this? Two things, Paul says; one is a negative, the other is a positive.

**i) Do not be conformed to the things of this world.**

Don’t let this world make you align with its principles and its allurements. He says, Don’t let the world shape you.

How do we understand the world? 1 John 2:15 talks about the things of the world as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. if you recall, you can place this exactly over the temptation that Eve faced in the Garden of Eden.

The lust of the flesh – includes everything that appeals to our appetites and involves excessive desires for either food or drink or sex, anything that would satisfy physical needs as an excess. Things that we don’t need but we go after, or we lust after it.

The lust of the eyes – would be materialistic things that we look at that don’t belong to us and we want it. we envy those who have what we want. We go after that to the exclusion of what God wants in our lives.

The pride of life – any ambition that unseats God from the throne.

There’s a lot to think about when we think of those three areas. Don’t be conformed to the things of this world. Don’t be conformed by the lust of the flesh or what we long for which you don’t really need, or the things that don’t belong to you, or things that will usurp the authority of God in your life. Don’t let these things shape you.

**ii) Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

This is the positive. When I look at that line, I am always reminded of this: If you have a glass full of dirty water, and you put it under a tap and allow clean water to flow into the glass, after some time, you will find that the dirty water is slowly getting poured out and the clean water is filling the glass. And if you let the tap run long enough, you’ll find that the clean water completely removes the muck from that glass and you’re left with just clean water.

I always think of our lives like that. As we open ourselves to God, we realize with all the 'sickness' in us, whatever we do to try and contribute to our wellness, really doesn't contribute to holiness and holy living. What we need to do is to allow the pure light of God's Word to flow in and keep flowing in until it begins to create a wholesomeness in us.

Be transformed by the renewing of our minds. How do we allow that to happen in a practical sense? Let me give you 5 points that I think are important for the renewing of our mind by God's Word.

- We need to hear the Word.
- We need to read it.
- We need to study it.
- We need to memorize it.
- We need to meditate on it.

There's so much going on that just one aspect, for example, coming and listening on a Sunday is not sufficient. There needs to be some things that you put into your lives that happen through the week so that there's a constant renewing of your life.

**Hearing** – faith comes from hearing. Romans 10:17 *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.* How many times we see in the Bible: *He who has ears, let him hear.* How important it is to hear and heed what God is saying!

**Read** – Revelation 1:3 *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

To be able to read the Word of God. I've been forcing myself to read parts of the Bible that typically I don't go to. Sometimes we think the Bible consists of the New Testament. We skip to Matthew and then even skip further to the 18<sup>th</sup> verse of the first chapter. And yet, there are such riches in the Old Testament, and I've been forcing myself, in fact, looking, studying, reading Jeremiah; looking at the prophets, the minor prophets which we skim over – to see the whole counsel of God, the Bible that is given to us. Not to just pick and choose, but to look at every aspect and read the word.

**Study** – Acts 17:11 *“Now these Jews (he's talking about the Bereans) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the Word with all eagerness. Then they examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”* They didn't just listen and say: Okay, this is kosher, this is good. They said, “Now that you've said that, I'm going to go back to the Bible and check and see if indeed what you've said is true. I'm going to verify it in the Word of God.”

So they studied the Word and. How important it is today. There are so many voices out there claiming so many things that you look at it and say: Is that real? Is this the same faith? All we need to do at that point is to take it and check it out with the Word of God. What I'm preaching to you today, check it out against the Word of God, then take it and say, “If it's true, then I must live by it.” You can't check it out and then just walk away. They studied the Word, that's what the Bereans did. They had the same eagerness, but the Bible says they were nobler because they studied.

**Memorize:** Psalm 119:9-11 *How can a young man keep his way pure by guarding it according to Your Word? With my whole heart I seek You, let me not wander from Your commandments. I have stored up Your Word in my heart.* Why is it so important to store up God's Word in your heart? Because every day we come under assault. We come under the attack of Satan with all kinds of things, or even the world.

You may hear words like “You’re a nobody, you’re useless.” And you have to remind yourself that the Word of God says that you are God’s masterpiece. You can then tell yourself that you’re going to reject those words because God says that you’re His masterpiece. Why should you care what others think of you?

Sometimes we’re in free fall, and we think: I’m going to hit the ground; things are not going well and I’m about to crash. And then to remember that underneath are the everlasting arms. You can never fall below His arms. Never! Underneath are His arms. Just when you feel lonely and that nobody loves you, His Word is that because He cared for you, He sent His Son. “*I have loved you with an everlasting love.*” So beloved, you need to memorize Scripture so that when you face the issues in life, you can find that the Word of God refutes the things that the evil one or the world may try and label you with.

**Meditate:** Psalm 1:2-3 says,  
*“But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

That’s what comes from meditating, that we will be like streams of water that yield its fruit in season. Have you ever felt that there’s a part of you that seems so barren that in spite of going through all the things that you do, it doesn’t seem to bear fruit in your life? the psalmist is saying: You’ll be like the streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and like a leaf that does not wither. How often we find that there are moments in our lives when we wilt, when we are faced with a situation where we just wilt and wither? When we meditate on the Word of God, we will be like ones who do not wither.

so, we hear and we read and we study and we memorize and we meditate.

And he says, “If you do this, there will be a renewing of your mind.” What happens when you don’t conform and you are transformed? Then you see the will of God clearly. You will see that God’s will is good, it’s acceptable and it’s perfect. And because it’s good, it’s worth waiting.

And sometimes that’s God’s call. He says, “Wait, it’s not the time yet.” Wait for the Son of Promise. Wait for the Isaac. Don’t rush in and pay the price. It will be an acceptable will. You’ll see it and you’ll accept that this is the best for me. And he says it’s perfect. Of course it’s perfect because it comes from a perfect God. So he says: For you to really see God’s will for what it is and find that it is proven in your life, make sure that you don’t conform and make sure that you’re transformed.

So two things, beloved, from these two verses. let’s ask ourselves today: Am I an authentic worshipper, or am I a worshipper of convenience? Is my worship holy living? Or are my members instruments of unrighteousness? And then, do I acknowledge that God’s will is good? am I willing to wait for it? And if I don’t see it as good and acceptable and perfect, then wonder whether we need to make sure that we are not conforming in any way, and that we need further transformation that comes from allowing His Word to flow through in many diverse ways to renew us.

Amen.

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