



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

“Make Up Your Mindset”

Romans 12:2

Donald Grey Barnhouse, in his commentary on the Book of Romans, made the following summary observation about verse two of chapter twelve:

In order to understand all that is meant here, it is necessary for us to take two words from our text and place them beside a third word which is to be found in the eighth chapter of Romans. The three words have this in common in English; they are all based on our word form, although in the original Greek they are quite different from each other.

In Romans 8:29 we were told that God’s purpose in saving us was that we might “be **conformed** to the image of His Son.” Here we are told that we are not to be **conformed** to this age, but that we are to be **transformed** by the renewing of our mind... To put the words in their spiritual order we must recognize that we are to turn away from our past (not being conformed to this present age); that we are transformed (as God makes us like the Lord Jesus Christ, conforming us to the image of His dear Son); and that all of this will come to maturity when He returns for us.

With that in mind, let’s take this amazing verse a phrase at a time.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world...

We need first to know what is meant by “world.” A better translation choice would be “age.”

But what is an “age?” The Germans have a word which best captures what is meant by “age”; it’s the word *zeitgeist*. It means *the spirit of the times* or *the spirit of the age*.

Here is something important. If I think *zeitgeist* applies only to the age in which I live - the particular fads and fashions popular in my lifetime - then I’m not thinking biblically enough.

The “age” that the Bible is talking about is at least the entire time we call the Church Age. It is called in Galatians 1:4, “this present evil age.” In Second Corinthians 4:4 Satan is referred to as “the god of this age.” In Ephesians 6:12 his demonic helpers are referred to as “rulers of this age.”

This “age,” then, means a way of living that does not include Jesus Christ but does embrace values more typical of the devil and his demons. To put it in strictly biblical language, the “age” ruled by the devil values the lust of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.

As to the word “conformed,” we turn to Kenneth Wuest, who was an outstanding Greek scholar. He said of this word that is meant “the act of an individual assuming an outward expression that does not come from within him, nor is it representative of the inner heart life.”

It assumes you’ve been regenerated - saved - and should therefore express your new inner heart life in all the attitudes and activities of your everyday life rather than expressing the former values you embraced that belong to this present evil age.

When it says, “do not be conformed,” it means “stop being conformed.” It is a definite possibility that after you’ve been regenerated and have a new inner heart life you can still choose the values of this present evil age and go on being conformed by them.

It’s easy to see you’ve chosen this present evil age when and if your actions are definitely evil. If I am in direct disobedience to the revealed Word of God; if I am involved in ongoing behavior that is clearly identified as sin in the Bible; then it’s plain I am being conformed.

It’s not so easy to see you’ve chosen this present evil age when there is no obvious disobedience or sin.

We live in a capitalist society. We want to; its great! There’s no reason in the Bible why you shouldn’t possess a fortune - provided you gained it honestly.

There are, however, many warnings to the wealthy. It's not good to pursue fortune for its own sake, as something to be desired, rather than as a by-product of your living for the Lord and serving Him.

A wealthy Christian, therefore, may be so because God has chosen to bless him; or he may be so because he has put wealth as his goal. In other words, God may be transforming him and, in the process, he just happens to be wealthy. Or the individual may be conforming to this present evil age, accruing wealth for its own sake, feeling secure, and thereby be "assuming an outward expression that does not come from within him, nor is it representative of the inner heart life."

Similar arguments could be made regarding fame and power and pleasure. There is a zeitgeist, a spirit of this evil age, that promotes fortune and fame and power and pleasure as worthy in and of themselves. And then there is the example of Jesus Christ who showed us what real fortune and fame and power and pleasure really are.

No suggestions are made here as to exactly how you might determine these subtle but serious differences. That's because the words themselves are powerful. James said encountering the Word was like looking into a mirror. You **can** and **do** see what is reflected there. But then it's up to you whether you walk away with your hair uncombed and food between your teeth... Or if you walk away looking more like Jesus.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

"Keep on being transformed" is the idea; it's a continual process by which God is changing you from glory-to-glory into the image of His Son.

Following so close on the heels of saying "stop being conformed" tells us that it's one or the other. The minute I get saved and have a new inner heart life, God starts transforming me. If I keep allowing myself to be conformed to this age, the transformation process grinds to a halt. I might put on a good Christian front, but it's all flesh and no Spirit.

“Transformed” is where we get our word *metamorphosis*. The Christian life is as much more beautiful and graceful from the life of a nonChristian as is a butterfly from a caterpillar.

Your and my Christian life might not seem that dramatically different from nonChristians. Remember, though, God is transforming us to be conformed to the image of Jesus. His life most definitely stands apart, and we are headed for His likeness.

Again I’d have to appeal to Jesus Christ. His life as a man - the sum total of it - was and is the most beautiful life ever lived. He was in perfect submission to God and He completed the greatest mission ever - dying to be raised from the dead so that a lost race of men and women might live forever with their Creator.

If I can even in some small way reveal that life to others I am indeed blessed!

We are to go on being transformed “by the renewing of our minds.” Before we talk about exactly what this means, note that the inward change produces the outward change. I live inside-out as a believer; or at least I should. God is not interested in outward form, and certainly not with hypocrisy. Jesus must reign in my heart and then my life will express His rule in my conduct and habits.

Here is another way of looking at it. Nonconformity to certain things in the world is not equal to transformation. A person can avoid all kinds of worldly behaviors but not be being transformed.

The big question, then, is, “How is my mind being renewed?” We have some help answering that question. This isn’t the first time in Romans Paul has mentioned our minds in a significant way.

Romans 8:5 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.

Flesh versus Spirit certainly is part of conformed versus transformed.

- If I am being conformed to this present evil age I am living according to the flesh.
- If I am being transformed I live according to the Spirit.

The present evil age, run by the devil and his demons, is actively trying to get me to be conformed. One translation says, “Stop being pressed into the world’s mold.” That’s what the devil wants to do - press me into a mold.

God has His own mold - to make me more like Jesus until the day I awake in His likeness.

In the midst of all this molding you and I must decide where we are going to “set” our minds.

- Previously it was set on this present evil age; it was set by the values of sin and selfishness. If we aren’t careful, it will default back to that worldly mindset.
- Or we can set our minds on “the things of the Spirit.”

There is a cooperation in the renewing of our minds. The Holy Spirit is the only agent who can renew our minds. But we must set them on the things of the Spirit in order for His work to be fruitful.

Your mind has what we call a *mindset*. Our mind can be set, first, by what it is we choose to think about.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.

What we think about is an important way we set our mind. But so is **how** we think about things. For example. I find myself in a trial. There are at least two ways I can think about it.

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

1 Peter 4:13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

I can “think it strange” that I am in a trial, that I am suffering, that I am being persecuted. Or I can “rejoice.” James said, “Count it all joy” when you are in various trial.

It’s up to you; it’s up to me; how we are going to think about the trial. How I choose to think, coupled with what I think about, are two powerful ways I set my mind.

The Bible tells me how I ought to think about everything - and it’s different from what I used to think before I was a Christian. It’s different from the way a nonbeliever thinks.

It is here that so many lives are made shipwreck because we don’t think we can think about things differently!

Romans 12:2 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.

The word “prove” is the action word in this last phrase. One of it’s possible meanings is *to approve*. It’s opposite (obviously) is to disapprove.

You find yourself in some situation, some circumstance. In fact, think of yourself - right now - in the various circumstances you are in. Do you approve of the circumstances you are in?

Or do you disapprove of them and are trying to get out of them? Are you trying to change them?

Here is what I think Paul was saying. Most likely your circumstances - unless you are in sin - are God’s “perfect will” for you. They may be adverse and involve suffering, but that doesn’t mean they are not God’s “perfect will” for you.

In fact, your circumstances are “good and acceptable,” meaning they are for your ultimate good for God to go on transforming you and they should therefore be acceptable, meaning *well pleasing*, since they are a means to mold you into the image of Jesus.

If you set your mind properly, then you will approve of God's "perfect will" and He can be about the important business of transforming you.

If you disapprove, then you've set your mind on lesser values and will become 'set' on abandoning your circumstances - even to the point of disobeying a clear directive in God's Word.

I'll close with a homespun analogy. If you use devices that utilize Bluetooth technology, you know that they usually come with a preset passkey. Afterwards you should change the passkey for security purposes.

As a human being, you are preset to be conformed to this world. Then God saves you and He resets you to be transformed in order to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Don't allow yourself to be reset to the default settings!