

“DO NOT BE CONFORMED.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:1-2

Introduction.

Let me ask for a show of hands. Who here liked to study and learn about grammar? Any grammar fans? Since we all slept through grammar lessons, let me give you a brief grammar lesson.

English has moods or modes, verbal signals the speaker uses to express their attitude or intention for what they are saying, how you want to come across, whether they are stating a fact or opinion, or whether they are making a request or demand.

These two moods or modes are called indicative and imperative. The indicative mood states a fact, it says this is true. The imperative says this must be done.

Romans 1-11 were almost entirely in the indicative mood, telling us truth about what God has said or done. Romans 12-15 are mostly in the imperative mood, moving us from what is true to what should be true. The imperative flows from indicative, this is true so now do this.

You are not going to like all these imperatives and let me tell you why you aren't going to like them. Because we are Americans, and Americans don't like being told what to do. It all started with English taxation without representation, and it hasn't stopped. There is deep resistance in all of us.

So much so that our world tries to avoid imperatives, our leaders try hard not to use imperatives. The whole gentle parenting movement is an avoidance of saying no. And the church in America is no different.

Pastors are afraid of saying do this and don't do that. We prefer to speak in the indicative. Lots of truth without any demands on us. What to think, but not what to do.

So what are we going to do now that we have come to the imperative section of Romans? Please don't take the imperatives for granted, don't resist or resent being told what to do. This is God's Word for the good of our eternal souls. He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and His church.

Romans 12:1-2 are the introduction for the rest of Romans. We can set it up like this.

The goal is to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God for His glory. The motivation for doing this is the Gospel, all the overflowing mercies of God to us.

The obstacle for doing this is the world and our constant conforming to it. The help for overcoming this obstacle is our transformation by the renewing of our minds.

The result is we will be able to discern the good, acceptable, perfect will of God.

Doesn't that sound like a desirable outcome? Don't resist or ignore or take for granted the imperatives that accomplish all this grace for us.

In our text this morning there are two imperatives, the two commands that are two sides of the same coin, the coin of being a living sacrifice to the glory of God. We can't have one without the other. Do not be conformed, but be transformed.

12:2 Do not be conformed.

The negative command comes before the positive command.

Do not conform to the pattern of the world.

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.

The world is a Jell-O mold and you are being poured into it.

Don't be like a chameleon that changes its color to match its surroundings, to blend in or fit in.

Don't try to match your life to those around you.

It is no shock or surprise when worldly people are worldly or act worldly. What is surprising and ought not to be is when Christians are worldly, are conformed to the ways of this world. Christians can be like chameleons, one thing at church, another thing at work or the gym.

We are not to be motivated by what everyone else is doing or saying. The challenge is to be able to discern and think critically about the world around us.

The world here is understood to be that which is under the influence and power of Satan, who is called the god of this age. This is the world dominated by sin and unbelief and idolatry and immorality, that which is contrary to Scripture.

Where are the pressure points to conform to the world?

It can be peer pressure to go along in order to get along, to be accepted or respected.

It can be the lure of money and materialism, trying to keep up with those around us.

It can be self-gratification at whatever cost.

It can look like resistance to authority. We see it in the on the news, in the streets, against politicians and presidents, against the police, teachers, bosses, parents, husbands, pastors and elders. We see it on social media, so much vitriol poured out against anyone in authority, anyone who dares to tell someone else what to do.

Think about how Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok are pressing us into the world's way of thinking. They are not making us better or more godly, but dumbing us down.

Anybody remember the deaf, dumb, blind kid, the pinball wizard, Tommy (by The Who, 1969).

I don't know which came first, being a pinball wizard or being deaf, dumb and blind.

Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, video games are today's pinball that are making us spiritually deaf, dumb and blind. Doom scrolling leaves you dumb and numb.

I have talked about influencers before, people who have gone viral on the internet, who have thousands or tens of thousands of followers. They are all trying to influence us or conform us to something.

Who are you listening to, who are you following, who are you imitating? What information are you filling up on?

We are not all as autonomous individuals as we like to think. It is amazing to see people who want to be non-conformist, but end up conforming to other non-conformist. Look at the whole fashion industry. They do so well because they know they can put out some new fashion or style or design, and everyone wants to jump on the bandwagon.

Human beings are conformist down to the bone, so the only question is what or who are we conforming to? We are natural imitators, we like to fit into or blend into our surroundings and with our peers. Most of us are afraid to be too different, to stick out.

Don't be conformed to the world. Don't be pressed into the world's mold. Don't talk the way the world talks.

Is there anything that can help us not be conformed to the world?

12:2 Be transformed.

The positive command follows the negative command, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. How does this happen? Here again grammar helps us. The verb is a passive imperative.

Passive means it must be done by someone else. We don't transform ourselves.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, sanctifying us, conforming us to the image and likeness of Jesus. This change comes from within. Only by the power of the Spirit can we be enabled to overcome our natural resistance to the ways of God. The Spirit changes our hearts, our desires, our interests.

II Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Christ came to create a new humanity with a new heart.

If our hearts and minds and manner of behavior are not changing, then we deceive ourselves in thinking we are Christ followers. Can you and others see a discernible difference between what we once were and what we are now becoming?

Is the truth of Romans 1-11 getting under our skin and into our hearts?
Are we submitting to God's Word, to Jesus and His authority?

By submitting we are allowing ourselves to be continually changed. This process involves a constant no to the world, and a constant yes to the Spirit.

Transformed is the word we get metamorphoses from, like what happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. God has given us in nature this incredible illustration of being truly transformed from one thing to something entirely different.

It is the word for what happens to people who become Christians and are being sanctified.

II Corinthians 3:18 We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being [passive] transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

But this work is constantly being battled and resisted by Satan.

II Corinthians 4:4 The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

When it comes to conforming you only have two options, you will either conform to the world or you will conform to Christ. You will either conform to the old man or the new man.

Renewing of our mind.

Why our minds? What's wrong with our minds that they need renewal? Our minds are fallen, bent, polluted, corrupted.

Some think we just need a better education, we need more information, or better information. If they had that they wouldn't do stupid or evil or sinful things.

This isn't about IQ or that we aren't smart enough, as if smarter people are more holy. This isn't about more education or more knowledge of facts.

It isn't even just about changed behavior. Lots of people can change their behavior, change their habits, try new things, for a variety of reasons.

How do I be the man, the husband, the father, the pastor God wants me to be? I can't do it, I keep falling short. So I keep humbly asking God. I used to ask for His *help*, but in my mind that implied sort of a 50/50 arrangement, He would help and I would help. I don't see it that way anymore. Now I ask Him for His *enabling* grace, that it would be by His enabling, and by my surrendering and submitting to His enabling grace.

Augustine once famously prayed to God. "Lord, command whatever you will and then will what you command." God, you gave this command, now make it possible by your grace and power for me to fulfill this command. Transformed me the way you have commanded me to be.

How do you get your mind renewed? By the Spirit through the Word of God. By reading and hearing the Gospel. By taking to heart the rest of Romans.

This is why we preach and teach and emphasize God's Word over and over. But you can listen and not be transformed. You must ask, seek, knock, pray and cry out to the Holy Spirit to make use of the truths of God's written Word to transform how we think and believe and live.

It's one thing to fill your mind and heart with Spirit-enlightened truth. But what good is that if you continue to fill your mind with all the corrupting influences of the world. Pay attention to what you read, the music you listen to, the movies you watch, the social media you drink from.

Romans 12:2 God's will.

In order to discern the will of God we have to have a renewed mind. Why is that? Because our minds are hostile to God and His will and ways, we stubbornly resist His will in the flesh. We must be renewed, transformed into order to have a mind able to discern God's will.

What is God's will? What is this talking about?

Does this mean like who should I marry, what career should I follow, where should I live? Should I chose door A, B, or C? God is not like a Magic 8 ball.

The will of God is discerned when we present our lives to Him as a living sacrifice, when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, when we worship and know Him, when we desire to please God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

He has revealed His will in Scripture, in His commands and prohibitions, like the Ten Commandments and Romans 12.

What does testing mean? How do we test things? This has been my prayer for you all this year, that this would happen for you in your life.

Philippians 1:9–10 It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve [test] what is excellent.

One simple test is, “Does what I am about to do or say or write or watch glorify God?”

And why would we desire this? Because it is good and acceptable and perfect. By the renewing of your mind you develop a spiritual taste for what is good, acceptable and perfect.

Shouldn't this be motivation enough. Who doesn't desire these things? What do you want for your life and for the life of your family? Do I want what God wants?

Implications and application.

Don't be conformed to this dying world. How?

By being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Why?

So you can discern what is the will of God, test and approve the things of God.

Which by the way are what?

Good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 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.