
“Do Not Be Conformed”

ROMANS 12:2

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AT A GLANCE

Following Jesus is not meant to be easy. But no one said it has to be drudgery! In today’s passage, we see that a person can get to a place where they want to do what the Lord wants them to do, even the really hard things. You can come to see that the Lord’s will for your life is good and acceptable and perfect. Life is sweet when you do!

INTRODUCTION

Last week we learned that true spiritual worship is laying down your body as a living sacrifice. Today we’ll see that the Lord is worthy of not only our bodies, but of our minds as well. In fact, worship is a matter of the mind. Since the Lord is not asking us to sacrifice our bodies, but use them in service to Him, presenting our minds to Him is coming alongside Him and agreeing that His ways are right and good and willingly, joyfully following where He leads.

Romans 12:2

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.

RESIST SECULARISM

Do not be conformed to this world is a prohibitive passive imperative. That means it’s a command to not *allow* yourself to be conformed. It’s also in the present tense which means it is an ongoing obligation. Conformity to the world is something we are always to resist.

The word **conformed** refers to masquerading, appearing to be something you are not. In Christ, we are children of God, new creations. That’s our identity, who we truly are. To **be conformed to this world** means to put on a mask so that we look like the world instead of like Christ.

When Paul says do not be conformed to the **world**, he uses the word we translate “secular.” Secularism says what we can see, feel, taste, hear, or otherwise experience is all there is. This is the only time that matters.

We should not be surprised when the secular world, blinded by the devil and by a depraved mind, approves what is evil and rejects what is good. The secular world teaches evolution, atheism, and nihilism, it loves abortion, materialism, and every form of sexual immorality.

We should not be surprised that these are the virtues of the secular world. But we should be surprised and disheartened when Christians conform to them. *“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:11*

ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE TRANSFORMED

Paul continues, **but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.** This is also written in the present passive. Paul is describing something that happens to us. We're either being conformed to worldliness or transformed to godliness. Either way, it's happening to us by an external source.

But since it's a command, it implies active participation. Paul is telling us to *allow* ourselves to be transformed. We don't do either one, conform or transform, but we allow it to happen to us; either by the world or by the Lord.

Transformed into what, though? *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." 2 Corinthians 3:18* As we behold the glory of Christ, we are being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another...better, more faithful, more like Christ every day!

How are we transformed? If it's not something we do, it must be something God does. It was the Holy Spirit who began our transformation, *"he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," Titus 3:5*

And it is the Holy Spirit who continues to transform us. *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18*

A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

And He uses the Word of God to do so. *"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Colossians 1:28* Maturity in Christ, another way of referring to transformation, comes through the Word.

This is why Paul wanted the Word to be more than just taught. He wanted it to dwell in the hearts of the hearers, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom..." Colossians 3:16* For the Word to dwell in you richly requires more than listening to a sermon. It means studying it yourself, reflecting on it, meditating on it, wanting to be changed by it in the way you think and the things you value.

As the Word of God begins to displace secular ideas and desires, increasingly shaping how we respond to the world, it renews our minds. Thus, Paul tells us to be transformed **by the renewal of your mind.**

As unbelievers, there was a veil over our minds. But in Christ, that veil is removed. *"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2 Corinthians 4:3-4*

That veil is no longer over our eyes, blinding our minds like it used to be. Rather, our minds have been awakened, we have seen the glory of Christ revealed in the gospel. This is why we need to be reminded of the gospel every day. It reveals the glory of Christ every day, and the glory of Christ renews our minds, and renewed minds transform our lives.

A CONSTANT PROCESS

Renewal implies a continual, regular, habitual process. You renew your driver's license. You renew your vehicle registration. So why do our minds need to be renewed if we've been saved? If the veil has been removed and we've seen the glory of Christ, why do we need to be in a regular process of renewal?

Because we live in the world with its fleshly trappings all around us. We're bombarded with immorality, materialism, secularism, and idolatry. Sensuality and sexuality are flaunted as if it's nothing. Abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, and body count; materialism, atheism, humanism, all of these are being marketed as good and virtuous. They inundate us!

These all work together to wage a war on your mind telling you that what matters is what you can see, touch, feel, or taste; and whatever makes you happy matters most. Media platforms are working overtime to convince you they have the product that will provide the hope and happiness, significance and security you've been seeking. As I said last week, that's idolatry. And Idolatry happens in the mind.

The world, under the influence of the Devil, is waging a war on your mind. It wants to influence how and what you think. Not simply so you think a certain way, but so you *live* a certain way. Our minds produce thoughts, but those thoughts influence our lives. Paul is likewise concerned about more than just what we think. He wants us to live according to the will of God, not according to the will of the secular world.

PUT IT TO THE TEST

Service to God involves **discerning His will**. We do this, Paul says, **by testing**. Testing implies a process of trusting, experiencing, sometimes failing, but getting back up, and ultimately discovering, or **discerning** the will of God.

When Paul says **what is good and acceptable and perfect**, I think there's a double meaning there. Obviously, God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect to Him. Thus, when we live according to His will, we're doing what He sees as good, what He accepts as perfect. But there's another sense, one that I believe helps us understand the phrase **by testing**.

I think Paul wants us to understand that God's will is not only good and acceptable and perfect to Him, but it's also good and acceptable and perfect to us. In other words, as we test God and His Word, as we put our trust in Him, as we follow Him through the trials of life, as we step out in faith and as we experience the fruit of that, bumps and all, what we find is His will for our lives is good and acceptable and perfect *to us*. What we find is that there really is no better plan for our lives than the one He has for us.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL

It's graduation season and discerning the will of God for your life is a big topic for graduating seniors as it is for a lot of people facing transition or opportunity. I'd like to give you four questions to help you discern God's will:

1. What doors are open? Consider the doors that God seems to be opening for you. If there's an opportunity, it doesn't necessarily mean it's the Lord's will, but if there's not an open door, it likely isn't. What I mean is don't beat down the door and call it the Lord's will.

You're trying to decide whether the Lord wants you to go to college...ask yourself, have I been accepted and can I afford it? You want to know if it is the Lord's will for you to marry this girl...ask yourself, does she know your name?!

Don't try to force a closed door open; you'll always regret that. Wait for the Lord to open the door. Trust Him with the process. Paul's missionary journeys were always guided by the hand of the Lord. He was restrained from going to Asia in Acts 16. He said he was going to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost because there was a wide door opened to him there. In Romans, he said he intended to come through Rome on his way to Spain.

Paul was looking for opportunities, but only took the one's he believed the Lord opened for him. This isn't an excuse to be passive. It's a restraint against presumption. Jesus taught us to say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that." The first step is seeing where He's opening doors.

2. What does the bible say? Does this opportunity or that decision violate the Word of God, either expressly or in principle? If it does, no need to proceed.

In order to know that the bible says about a particular opportunity or decision or problem, we must be in the Word regularly. According to the author of Hebrews, we strengthen our discernment by practice in the word of God. *"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice [in the word of righteousness] to distinguish good from evil."* Hebrews 5:14

Here's a couple low-hanging fruit examples: Should I move in with my girlfriend? The Bible already revealed God's will on this. *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;"* 1 Thessalonians 4:3

I'm an adult, should I get a job and provide for myself instead of expecting others to provide for me? The bible is clear, *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."* 2 Thessalonians 3:10b

But your opportunities may sound more like, "Should I go to this college or that trade school? Should I marry my girlfriend? Relocate for work? Find another church home? Buy a house? Have another child? At what age should we allow our children to date? Should I plan to retire and if so, when?" The Bible doesn't overtly give you an answer to some questions. So, you proceed to question three.

3. What do wise people say? *"Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."* Proverbs 11:14 Ask parents, elders, mentors, and trustworthy friends. Consult with people who walk with the Lord, who have proven to be wise in their own lives and you can see that by the fruit they produce. James 3:17 says wisdom will produce good fruit. Avoid those whose lives reveal they are not wise themselves. Pay special attention to wise people you do not expect to tell you what you want to hear. If it's still not clear, ask question four.

4. What do I want to do? You've got an opportunity or more than one that others feel pretty good about and you have a clear conscience about it biblically, now ask yourself, "What do I want to do?" You might be thinking, "Ah, don't follow your heart! It's wicked above all things!" Our emotions can certainly get the best of us, which is why I put this last. By now we've already gone to scripture, to wise advisors, and there's a door that the Lord may be opening. Now it comes down to the desire of the heart.

DELIGHT TURNS TO DESIRE

And this, I believe, is the heart of what Paul is saying here in Romans 12:2. Implied in this verse is a willingness to not only discern the Lord's will, but also a desire to do it. *"for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* Philippians 2:13 Praise the Lord, He helps us not only know what He wants us to do, but He helps us want to do what He wants us to do!

When we test God's Word and His will, walking by faith, and trusting Him, we find that the Lord's will is not only good and acceptable and perfect to Him, but it also good and acceptable and perfect to us. We increasingly want to do what He wants us to do.

Psalm 37:4 says, *"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* This verse tells us that generally speaking, when you delight in the Lord and trust in Him, He gives you the desires of your heart. Verse 23 says He also establishes the steps of the one who delights in Him. That means He generally makes things work out. This isn't a promise of ease, success, health, or wealth. It's a general rule given to us by the inspired Word of God. We ought to believe it and **test** it.

When you delight in the Lord, what you can expect is that the Lord is going to work things out for you and you are going to want to do the things He wants you to do, even really hard things. And why do you suppose He gives you the desires of your heart when you delight in Him? For one, He's a good Father and He delights to give us all good things to His children. And second, as we are transformed the desires of our hearts increasingly come from Him rather than from the world. We want it because it's what He wants us to want.

This is not a formula to be reduced to a few steps to guarantee success. It's a pattern of life that finds its footing on the goodness of God, that tests Him and finds Him and His will, good and acceptable and perfect. But as you're asking this final question, you must also ask, "Am I delighting in the Lord?"

This, I believe brings us right back to Romans 12:2. Are you delighting in the Lord? Are you being transformed by the renewing of your mind? If you're not, you can't trust your heart. I would be very concerned about life decisions, even daily ones, if I can't say I'm delighting in the Lord, because as I said before, the heart is deceptive above all things!

Who wants to live that way when we can have confidence that we can understand and do what the Lord wants for us? Who wants to grope around in the dark when the light of Christ can illuminate the path? Who wants to live their life hoping they're doing what's good and acceptable and perfect when they can discern God's will, what pleases Him and is best for them?

If you really want to discern the Lord's will, if you really want to go through life understanding what the Lord has for you, what honors Him, what glorifies Him, you must delight in Him; you must be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Don't get hung up on tapping into some mystical crystal ball that's going to reveal to you the major life decisions you need to make. That's not how this works. God desires that you delight in Him and when you do, He's delights to make His will the desires of your heart and then give you that which He wills and you desire.

CAN I REALLY WANT TO DO HARD THINGS?

Consider the missionaries we support. Do you ever wonder how it is that a young family could uproot their entire lives and move into a foreign culture and learn a foreign language in the hopes that someone there will come to know Christ and they can plant a church?

I'll tell you how someone gets there. They delight in the Lord; they're so thoroughly transformed by the Holy Spirit that when presented with the opportunity to go, not only do they not dread it, they are compelled by it. Their hearts are so captivated by the glory of Christ that the thing He wants them to do, they want to do, too. No, "want" is too soft a word. They are compelled to do it.

These missionaries don't go kicking and screaming, they go constrained, captivated, compelled by the glorious will of God. And this is true not only of missionaries, but of everyone who seeks to live a godly life and lay down their bodies as a living sacrifice.

Look at Jesus, our chief example. He willingly went to the cross. He could have saved Himself, but He chose to do the Father's will instead. Why? His mind was so perfectly in line with the Father's that what the Father wanted Him to do is all He wanted to do. "I came only to do the will of the Father," Jesus said.

And what the Father wanted Him to do was show you incredible mercy by taking your place on the cross at Calvary. That you, a sinner, could gain eternal life through faith in the Son of God. That God would credit Christ's righteousness to your account and your account of sin debt He would credit to Christ. Do you believe that? Do you feel God's mercy?

In light of that mercy, is it not reasonable that you and I would present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and present our minds to be transformed? I agree with Daniel Doriani who says, “it’s not only reasonable, it’s the only way to live.” What about you?

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