

## You Can have a Christlike Character

### Romans 12:1-2

***“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”***

#### Intro:

**There is a tension within our culture.** On the one hand we see the need for and have a desire to change.

This is true about certain things, especially concerning ourselves.

We're bombarded with the message that **if we were only**

**slimmer,  
tanned more,  
better dressed,  
more "in style",  
better looking,  
better financed, or  
better perfumed,  
we would be happier, more satisfied.**

The media puts out the propaganda and we buy it.

Have you thought it through? Boy, sometimes we're suckers. Excuse that word.

We buy it because deep down inside there is so much we want to change about ourselves.

The desire to change for the better is one we all have.

I don't think there is anyone here today that is really – completely satisfied with yourself.

Talking about change: Listen to this

We need to understand that our world is a fast changing world.

**Change is not necessary bad** - in fact change is normal - Change is really a sign of life.

Do you know, what the medical definition of death is? a body that does not change...

During my sermon your body is going to change - about ½ million cells in your body are going to die and be replaced with a half a million new cells during my message time.

Our skin replaces itself every month... Did you know that 70-80% of the dust in your house is dead skin that has flaked off. Dru, all that dust on our furniture in the bedroom is my dead skin.

Your stomach lining undergoes a complete change every 5 days; your liver every 6 weeks; your skeleton every 3 months.... your whole body every 5 years for men & 7 years for women.... So you see, change is natural - **to not change is to die....**

But understand that our world today is in a warp drive kind of change...

Did you know that the digital watch you have on your wrist contains more computing power than existed in the entire world in 1961.

Your car? It has more computation power to get down the street than all the computers combined in the Apollo 11 space craft that carried Neal Armstrong to the moon.

And the pager they give you at the Olive Garden. **Listen**; we are now living in a world where it is cheaper, faster and safer to send a signal over 20,000 miles to a satellite and back again than it is

to walk the 20 feet to tell you that your table is ready...

We live in a fast changing world...

It has been estimated that more information has been generated in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000 years. The average consumer will see or hear 1 million marketing messages in a year - that's 3,000 per day...

Have your kids ever asked you, "Hey dad tell me what it was like in the olden days when you had to walk across the room to change the TV channel..."

Not long ago people cooked on wood stoves... And when grandma said, "Log On" she meant make the wood stove hotter." And when she said: download" she meant, "You boys go down & get the firewood off the pick up truck..."

When I was born the United Nations had about 60 member nations. There are now 185 nation states in the world, over a 100 of which did not exist when I was born.

When I was born, a "crack salesman" meant someone was really good at what he did.

When I was born weather forecasting was a joke - well some things never change.

5

I think you get my point - we live in a changing world.

On the other hand, there is a real hesitancy to want to change.

We are uncomfortable with the uncertainties that change may bring.

Paul is dealing with this issue of change in our spiritual lives.

Now one of the criticisms of the church today is that the people in the church are no different than all the other people in the world.

**Certainly, in one sense, we are just like everyone else.**

We've already established the fact that we are not perfect people by any stretch of the imagination and before anyone should get the wrong idea we are not a perfect church.

But somewhere along the line, people think we think that way and it's probably been through incorrect preaching and teaching in the church.

Don't we struggle?

Don't we fail?

Don't we get discouraged?

Don't we get angry?

And don't we do stupid things?

6

How many of you relate to that?

The saying is true: **“Christians aren't perfect, they are just forgiven.”**

**However, when people look at the church and see nothing distinctively different about it except it's rules something is drastically wrong.**

When they hear professions of faith but see no evidence of faith in the way people live in their every day life on the job, at home, etc, then there is a problem.

When people look at the church they should see  
people, who work at love and kindness,  
People who are more committed to their  
marriages,  
People who are more committed to their  
families,  
People who are committed to their job,  
and people who are more committed to their  
country than anyone else in the world.

As a matter of fact there are some Christian believers who need to work on their characters.

**Story:**

A man took his daughter to the carnival, and she immediately ran over to a booth and asked for cotton candy.

7

As the attendant handed her a huge ball of it, the father asked, “Sweetheart, are you sure you can eat all of that?”

“Don’t worry, Dad,” she answered, **“I’m a lot bigger on the inside than on the outside.”**

**That’s what real Christian character is – being bigger on the inside.**

And every one of us needs to work on being bigger on the inside.

You see – **Jesus had a winsome personality.**  
**Jesus had a sense of humor.**

One thing Jesus didn’t struggle with was self-centeredness.

Everything He did, He pointed to the Father God.

Jesus talked about seeing a splinter and tripping over a board.

He talked about straining a gnat out of your drink and then swallowing a camel.

Do you see the humor in that? Try to imagine those things in your mind without laughing.

The world has to see a change in us.

This is the message the Apostle Paul is trying to get us to understand in Romans 12.

8

He wants us to see that since we are believers who were made alive by God’s Holy Spirit that we should live different than the world.

Paul begins the twelfth chapter by challenging us believers to **respond to God’s wonderful mercy by giving ourselves to Him and His service.**

He doesn’t just want us to understand what Christians believe (as important as that is). . . .

**He wants us to learn how to walk with Christ in newness of life.**

Folks, listen to me, God loves us.

God sent Jesus to die for us to set us free from sin and the terrible consequences of sin and eternal death.

By His grace and great mercy He saved us.

Therefore in our Quest we are finding that we must respond to God and His commands, they’re not suggestions.

No longer can we sit comfortably in our chairs just on Sunday morning and watch others do the ministry of the church.

We cannot remain as spectators looking on.

We can't watch the 20% doing 80% of the work of the church.

**Someone once described a football game as twenty-two men on the field badly in need of rest being watched by seventy-two thousand people in the stands badly in need of exercise.**

While football may be a spectator sport for most of us, Christianity certainly should never be.

We must get involved in the action.

We must never take the mercy of God for granted. It ought to motivate us to get on the field.

Paul continues this idea in Romans 12 verse 2 when he says to us.

The New Living translation translates the verse this way:

***“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 know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect His will really is.”*** [NLT]

This verse is practical and to the point.

I want to take some time this morning to focus on **three questions** that this command of God raises in my heart and I hope in yours.

**What is the pattern of the world we are supposed to avoid?**

**How does one go about renewing their mind?**

**How does this process help us to find God's will for our lives?**

## **I. WHAT IS THE PATTERN OF THE WORLD?**

Paul tells us to not to be conformed to the world around us.

Unfortunately that is somewhat like telling me that I need to replace the timing belt on my car.

I can nod and acknowledge that it is a clear directive.

I can repeat it to others and memorize it.

However, if I don't know where the belt is located or how to repair it, I won't be able to do as I was told.

**It's important we learn to recognize worldly thinking.**

Here are **four characteristics** of worldly thinking:

**1. Man is the Center of everything.**

11

This is best illustrated by the obsession with the separation of church and state.

**The world says** it is OK to dabble in religious stuff as long as you don't allow it to impact your daily living!

**The secularist** does not believe in a God who oversees and rules the universe.

They don't really believe in an afterlife or eternal life.

The only thing that matters is **the here and now**.

In the last couple of weeks there was a verdict overturned in a court because the jury made reference to the Bible in making their decision!

This is a perfect illustration of the clash of world-views.

The Secular worldview has no room for a Christianity that impacts a life.

## **2. Experience is More Important than Truth.**

Our society tends to measure the importance of things by "**how it makes me feel**".

You hear people all the time say, "**Well, it works for me!**"

12

What matters to the world is not whether or not something is true, it is whether or not it meets my needs and makes me feel fulfilled.

**This is often called pragmatism.**

## **3. Images are Valued more than Words.**

People get more of their beliefs from television, the movies, and the internet than from books, Bible, or for that matter from the church.

We are living in a time that emphasizes sound bites over rational discussion.

Think about Presidential elections.

Candidates used the debate time to try to look confident, good, calm, and presidential.

Questions are asked and sidestepped in order to get "sound-bites" out to the audience.

The people running campaigns understand that a good image is better than a good program.

## **4. Values Are Relative**

In our present society morality and values are determined not by a Divine standard but by human opinion.

Values change according to the individual and with the flow of public opinion.

It's like the styles of clothing changing every so often.

**The world:** The key character trait is sincerity.

**The world:** The most important virtue in our society is tolerance.

**The world:** It is important that we are sincere about our beliefs and allow other people to be sincere about their beliefs . . . **even if they are contradictory to the Word of God.**

These values that the world establishes - open the door to:

**Immoral relationships** (I am more fulfilled....pragmatism)

**Ripping off your employer**

**Stealing from others** (I deserve more than I have been paid)

**In the case of taxes** (cheating on your income taxes)

**Billing your insurance company for something that didn't happen** (reasoning insurance companies are over-charging us)

**Lying to get ahead** (everybody does it)

**Terrorist acts are applauded** (those people are devoted to Allah, God is Allah!)

**Sanctioning and giving special protections to behaviors such as homosexuality.** (But they love each other)

**In each case (and in thousands of others) wrong behavior (according to the Bible) is rationalized in a way that makes it appear OK!**

## II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RENEW YOUR MIND?

Paul says we are to not conform to this way of thinking but we're to be "transformed". Changed!

The word for transformed is the word from which we get our word metamorphosis.

This is the word used for when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly.

### 1. It denotes a radical change.

**It is the same word used for the transfiguration of Jesus;** when Jesus appeared on a mountain with Moses and Elijah and His clothes and face became radiant in the eyes of the disciples.

## 2. How does this transformation take place?

I don't want to bore you this morning with this, but

To help us understand we need to learn some things from the grammar of the text.

Grammar can sometimes be a little boring **but in this case it is very significant. Would you agree English teachers?**

**Transformation is not a one-time event but a continuous process.**

**The command** in the Greek is in **the present tense**.

Paul is saying, ***“Continue to let yourself be transformed”***. Changed

This is not a decision we make one time; it is a lifestyle we pursue. We make this our life time Quest.

## 3. **This transformation comes by God's power.**

1) **The verb** is in **the passive tense**.

**Simply put it means the one being changed is being acted upon by another.**

The verse should read, ***“let yourselves be transformed”***.

God's Holy Spirit brings this change.

**So we need to let God do His changing work in us.**

2) Since the verb is in **the imperative mood** it means that though God brings the change **our responsibility is not cancelled**.

**There are things we need to do to allow God's Holy Spirit to work in us.**

As any deadly poison needs an antidote, so worldly thinking needs to be counteracted.

## **So How Do We Do This?**

4. **It begins with a different foundation.**

We must recognize that **we are not here by chance**.

The antidote to secularism is to believe the first four words of the Bible, ***“In the beginning God...”***

The world did not **“just happen”** it was designed by the Creator.

5. **We must have an eternal perspective.**

As believers we believe that right now counts forever.

What we do here and now has an eternal impact.

**The antidote to relativism is to recognize that God has spoken. (Relativism is a system based on circumstances.)**

God has given us His instructions in the Bible.

The Bible is our standard of authority.

We may not always understand and we may not always agree as to how to interpret certain passages, but what we do understand we obey.

Wouldn't it be great if Christians studied the Word of God as carefully as a football player studies his play book?

Consider how our thinking would change if we studied the Bible as carefully as we do the videotape of our golf swing or the medical report from our Doctor.

If the Bible is the standard of truth and we believe that - then we must become acquainted with the standard.

**Second, we must think critically.**

That doesn't mean we should analysis and criticize everyone all the time.

It means we should listen carefully to what people are saying, whether it is your pastor, an author, teacher, newscaster, or friend.

**Here are some simple principles for thinking more critically (or biblically):**

We need to study our culture diligently.

We need to identify the presuppositions of our society.

We must evaluate everything theologically.

In other words, in every situation we should start with a simple question: **“Has the Bible spoken to this issue already?”**

If it has spoken we must hear and obey.

Dr. Boice illustrates this kind of wise discussion by a conversation he had on a plane.

Notice how he confronts the worldly thinking not with aggressiveness but with a question.

After sharing the gospel, the listener responded with, “That’s just your opinion!” (a very popular retort among moral relativists).

Boice wisely responded, “You’re right that this is my opinion but that is not really what matters.

**What matters is: Is it true?”**

“Well” said the person, “perhaps it is true for you, but it is not true for me.”

Boice again said, “It is true that I feel that this is true, but the issue is not whether you or I feel it is true . . . the question is: is it truth.”

Sometimes when we say something is wrong behavior we will hear people say, “You don’t know the situation this person is in.

If you were in their situation, you might do the same thing.”

The proper response again is, “You may be right. I don’t always do the right thing.

The question is not what I might do . . . the question is, “What is the right thing to do?”

Others might say, “Hey, a person cannot help the way they are!”

It sounds noble but it’s wise to respond, “Do you believe that to be true about child molesters or psychotic killers?

Don’t all people have to control urges of some sort?

What is the standard of right and wrong?”

### III. HOW WILL THIS HELP US FIND GOD’S WILL?

Paul says, *“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Let’s turn this around and state it negatively: **if you do not renew your mind and do not turn from the thinking of the world, you will not be able to discern the will of the Lord.**

Paul seems to say the will of God is found when we hear what God tells us in His Word and begin to obey by faith.

It is not found simply through knowledge, but through knowledge that is applied!

Think of it like having a flashlight in a dark obstacle course.

You will only be able to see part of the course at a time, but if you move forward in the light you see you will navigate the course without trouble.

Gerald Sittser writes,

**“The will of God, as it turns out, is not something we need to discover, for it is as plain as the nose on our face. Rather, it is something we need to do.**

**In the rare moments when I am ruthlessly honest with myself, I realize that my anxious efforts to discover the will of God distract me from facing the real issue.**

**I simply do not do the will of God that is already clear to me.**

**I would rather assign the will of God to the far-off future, where I can safely or anxiously contemplate it as a range of options from which I must choose one.**

**That option seems far safer than treating it as it really is, a set of commands (e.g., the general principles of the Ten Commandments) that show me in no uncertain terms how I should live my life every day in the light of God's grace.**

**My problem is not that I do not know the will of God; it is that I do not do the will of God I already know.**

**It is not ignorance that plagues me; it is lack of faith and stubbornness of heart. I am like a child who worries about what she is going to do on the weekend as a convenient excuse for not doing the chores assigned for the day."**

Do you remember the time Jesus told his disciples, if you are not faithful in little things you will not be entrusted with big things?

One man said, **"To put it in today's terms: if you don't serve well in the mailroom you will never make it to the boardroom!"**

We discover God's will a step at a time.

We discover God's will as we follow Him on a daily basis.

As we follow and serve the Lord we find that His will opens up to us.

We begin to understand what He is doing and what He wants us to do.

We discover that God's will is good, pleasing, sufficient and fulfilling.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Every one of us is an imitator of sorts.

This is easy to see in little children.

A child hears someone say something and that child will mimic what he/she hears. Our little grandson is mimicking words now. It's great!

This is how we develop our language skills.

As we are growing up we like to pretend that we are our favorite athlete, musician, or celebrity.

We cringe when we see kids imitate our bad habits.

We recognize peer pressure among teenagers.

We've heard the studies that sex and violence on TV has an impact on the behavior of those who watch.

We continue to be imitators as we grow up even though this imitation may be more subtle.

If you travel down south for any period of time you will most likely find yourself beginning to speak with a bit of a drawl.

We tend to mimic the people we hang out with.

We adopt their catch phrases, pick up some of their idiosyncrasies, and can easily absorb their values (because we want to be accepted).

The Apostle Paul recognized the impact our culture has on us.

He challenges us to be alert to the influences around us.

His admonishes us to be deliberate in the models we imitate.

He calls us to hang out with God so His character begins to wear off on us.

He calls us to surround ourselves with Godly thinking so that others may see Christ in us.

If we want the world to notice the difference that Christ makes in a life, we need to consciously allow Christ to make that difference in our lives.

We begin this process by taking control of our minds.

In the last 5 weeks we have been on a Quest to find God's Holy Spirit and the Power to be free.

Have you responded yet? Have you felt a tug in your heart?

Do you want a heart that is changed?

Do you want a heart that is pure?

Would you be willing to give your heart to God unreservedly?

Because that is what we must do – Simply put – Lord, I give You my heart.