

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 12:2A

Study Notes

- A holistic view of our submission to God:

Verse one: Paul encouraged us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Now, in verse two he speaks about our minds. Paul sees no division between these elements and our submission to God's Word in both.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Two critically important words: "Presentation" and "Transformation".

John Stott: "This is Paul's version of the call to nonconformity and to holiness which is addressed to the people of God throughout Scripture."

Ancient Judaism was very distinct from the pagan cultures of the world. This is exactly what God called for from the very inception of Israel's covenant with Him.

Leviticus 18: "You must not do as they do ... in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws..."

Given their long stay in Egypt, it was only natural that they the Israelites had adapted to much of the Egyptians' culture and traditions. But there was a very dark side to that acculturation.

The Mosaic Code told the people of God to live apart from their pagan neighbors. Their culture, their religion, their community were all designed to represent their distinct relationship to God.

Almost all these commands are in the negative. In Leviticus 18 we read, “You must not do as they do.” Similarly, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus references both the Pharisees and Pagans when he says, “Do not be like them.” – Matthew 6:8

- **A New Distinctiveness:**

Paul gives Christians the same instruction. We are not to be like our world culture. As one person put it, “We are not to be like a chameleon which takes its color from its surroundings.”

Paul is urging us not to conform to the prevailing culture that is on display all around us, but rather to be transformed. Using these critically important words, “present” and “transform”, the verbs Paul chose speak to a continuing attitude on our part. See: Ezekiel 11:12

One of the realities of being human is that, either consciously or unconsciously, we tend to look for role models. We are, as one scholar pointed out, “imitative by nature”.

As believers, Paul tells us there are only two major models we may choose to conform to. One is the world – better understood as – the world culture. The other is the Will of God – which Paul describes as “good, pleasing, and perfect.”

- **Stop Being Conformed ...**

Paul says, “Do not conform **any longer** to the pattern of this world ...”. Paul was addressing people who lived in the empire’s capital. He was writing to people who had been heavily influenced by Rome’s pagan culture.

He tells them, “Stop being molded” by this age, by this godless culture;

instead, choose to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

We often picture this molding process as passive. Paul isn't buying that view. He's telling us that being molded by the world or molded by God's Will is a choice. If we pretend it is a passive process, we have already decided to let our world culture make us into its image.

- **A Theological Debate**

In both English and Koine Greek, the words “conform” and “transform” are two different words. Many early commentators insisted that the Greek word form “conform” had to do with outward conformity, while the Greek word for “transform” denoted inward change.

The greater issue: Using the idea of an outward and inward conformity, many Christians have tried to live a two-tiered type of sanctification. While focusing on outward avoidance of sin, the inward transformation was largely ignored.

1. This led to all kinds of legalism in the Church.
2. Sanctification was stressed with regard to the obvious outward sins, but the inward sins were barely addressed.

- **Another Rendering:**

“... Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” can be translated as, “... Be transfigured by the renewing of your mind”?

Paul uses a unique verb for transformed; one that Matthew and Mark used to describe Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus' whole body became what we might describe as “translucent”. It was something none of them had ever seen before and wouldn't see again until Jesus' Resurrection.

This is the kind of change Paul is envisioning when he says, “... Be transfigured by the renewing of your mind.” It is much more than a cerebral agreement; it is a supernatural transformation of our thinking.

John Stott: "It is a fundamental transformation of character and conduct, away from the standards of the world and into the image of Christ himself."

Paul will only use that Greek word for "transfiguration" one more time in the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 3:18: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

- **Divergent Systems:**

The world's value system is not only incompatible with the Word of God, it is in opposition to it. The Word of God and the world's philosophies are not compatible on a single important subject.

If we honestly allowed our thinking to be so radically transfigured it would change our views about all the major questions such as, the purpose of life, the measure of life, the goal of life, the standards of life, and the sanctity of life.

To what degree have 21st- century Christians simply accepted the world's values?