

What is Church? A People who Change

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. 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.

THIS IS a hinge point in this letter, this collection of chapters that makes up the book of Romans.....THEREFORE.....Paul says...this is it.....given everything I've said to you up to now in the first 11 chapters concerning faith, who Jesus is and what he's done, mysterious ways of God's working in the world, and his utterly amazing grace.....given ALL OF THAT how are you going to respond?..... How are you going to live? What difference is it going to make to your lives, to the orientation of your thinking and your living it out?

I URGE YOU IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY he says.....I'm not just telling you what to do.....It's Jesus's mercy that demands a response.

"Look I've experienced it" he could have added, "Do as I have done".....he's gone before us in responding to a revelation of Jesusremember? on the road to Damascus, which brought about a radical transformation in his life. He is not urging us to do anything he hasn't already done.

I love that. Informing all his writing is a real experience of transformation and the process of moving out of conformity to his world.....his Jewish heritage, the prophecies, the law, the histories INTO a life based on the realities of the Kingdom of God. He made massive changes which resulted in a transformed way of life. I think that's inspiring!

The particular word that is used in the NIV translation of verse 2 that encapsulates the sort of change we're going to be talking about is "transformed".
"Changed from the inside out." as the Message translation puts it.

It urges us to pursue transformational change. Now that's not the sort of change that's brought about by a little tweak here and there is it? What we're talking about is "Wow" factor, impact, a very unmissable change from the old to the new.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines transformation as "a marked change in form, nature or appearance".

My friend's kitchen.....my kitchen!

I went to visit a friend the other day. I hadn't been to her house for a few months and I was amazed at the transformation that had been wrought by the installation of a new kitchen. She was surprised at how different I thought it was.

The profound longing for, and continual pursuit of, transformational change is evident everywhere.....whether it is for a new kitchen (YES PLEASE), or politicians campaigning

for a better society and greener environment, or magazines and the media offering makeover tips to transform faces, bodies, minds, and self worths. How many times do you hear people express the desire to change in one way or another? When it comes to witnessing transformational change of that nature in our Christian lives and churches, amidst all the good things that are going on, there's SOMETIMES A sense that it isn't happening as much or as quickly as we would like.

I think ONE OF THE reasons for this is partly due to the fact that we just don't notice the impact of incremental changes that occur over a period of time when we live with them. The change is VERY DEFINITELY happening but we don't see it in a marked way or only occasionally.

So going back to the illustration of my friend's kitchenshe lived with the day to day process of that change - the mess, the noise, the disruption of normal routine, the demolition of the old and the building up of the new until it was completed? She was involved in the incremental process of the change so didn't quite see the dramatic impact it had in the same way I did. I saw none of that processjust the massive difference between the old and the new which was a transformation.

I think if you asked her now she'd say she really has seen a huge change though since she started living in it and using it and doing things she couldn't do before. We don't all get the opportunity to have a new kitchen....that bothers some more than others.....I am actually very grateful for my kitchen by the way! But I think we do all get frustrated and disappointed sometimes when we don't experience truly transformational power in our lives and churches. We can find ourselves hoping we can live up to something like "Christian standards" by tweaking things here and there like I do in my kitchen, but never actually come to terms with, or experience the real transformation that he talks about here in Romans 12:2.



I love what Dallas Willard brings as a solution to this He says,
"There's nothing wrong with the church that a clear minded, resolute application of discipleship to Jesus would not cure".

That's what we're going to have a look at today.

Romans 12:2

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.

Let's look first at some of the implications of what is said in this verse

Implication 1: Understanding the WILL OF GOD seems to require the renewing of the mind

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The implication is BE TRANSFORMED

It's actually present tense in the Greek meaning we need to KEEP BEING



TRANSFORMED.....it's a process not a one-off event like the frog who was kissed by the princess and instantly changed into a prince!!

"THEN you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is" - we're encouraged that we will know more clearly what God's will is as a result of our minds being renewed.

So the bottom line is..... Can you know the will of God in your life without the renewing of your mind?

Consider what it says in 1 Corinthians 2:14,

"The man without the spirit (in other words conformed to the culture to their world) does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned".

Can you know the will of God without the renewal of your mind? This verse suggests not.

Interesting in the context of our title "the church being a people who change", the Greek word for YOU used here is the word "hoomas" which is plural for you. Paul is not emphasising the individualistic I'VE got to determine.....or what God wants for ME in MY life.....he's speaking to the church.....to Christians together.

Now of course individually we are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds so that we can break free from the false values of the world. BUT Paul is using the plural you here to emphasise where he gets to in verse 5 "so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others".

It's not all about ME but it's all about us individually as a part of a family together as the church we will be able to test and approve what God's will is. Imagine the impact of doing that and living it out in our community here.

The following chapters are all about what living together as this family could look like as Paul lays out instructions living TOGETHER IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....and we won't be able to live like that without God's renewing.

Implication 2: "do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world BUT be transformed by the Renewing of your mind"

The implication here is that we can't be being transformed into the likeness of Christ and have our minds renewed IF at the same time we're conforming to this world. Where in your life.....in your thoughts, actions, heart and soul are you conforming and accommodating to this world?

The challenge here is "how should we live ?" because if you're being conformed to this world you're not being transformed. And if you are being transformed then you won't be conformed.

You can't be both.

The transformation we're talking about is OUT OF conformity of one way of occupying and using our mind INTO a different conformity. From the world's ways of thinking and doing things on one hand to the alternative realities of the Kingdom of God on the other.

BOTH HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST.

And the implication here is that you need to ACT.....

If you are going to be transformed out of conformity to this world INTO the likeness of Christ IT WILL BE BECAUSE YOU HAVE DONE CERTAIN THINGS.....and continue doing those things.....and similarly if you're not being transformed it will be because you have done other certain things.

IT IS NOT A PASSIVE PROCESS THAT JUST HAPPENS TO PEOPLE IT HAPPENS TO A DISCIPLEONE WHO IS UNDERGOING A LIFELONG PROCESS OF INCREMENTAL CHANGE - ONE WHO IS LOOKING TO JESUS AND LEARNING FROM HIM HOW TO LEAD THEIR LIFE. ONE WHO IS RESPONDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD AND WHAT HE HAS DONE.

Given that you have to DO something.....that this change won't just happen to you and neither will you be instantly changed like the frog into the prince.....how do you do it?



Implication 3: Address stinking thinking

Joyce Meyer says,

"If you don't like your life go home and have a meeting with yourself and think about what you've been thinking about. Instead of blaming it on everything else, have a meeting with yourself and just ask yourself if it's time to get rid of your stinking thinking"

How do we do that? Here are 3 things we can do to start getting rid of the stinking thinking.

1. Make some decisions

Decisions that WILL lead to transformation not conformity to this world. Verse 2 in the Message translation says "don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit in without thinking" Don't be like a frog which when sitting in cold water that is VERY VERY slowly incrementally being heated up boils to death because it's completely unaware of what's happening to it!!!

Am I going to pursue this journey of being transformed by the renewing of my mind? Or am I going to be like the frog, comfortably accommodating to the world, not even aware of the effects of what's going on around me?

If the answer to being transformed is yes, then am I going to be willing to be different.....markedly different? We don't want to be different do we

We don't like the disapproval that may come with that from family, friends. It's so easy to go with the flow, even if we're not really convinced, because we just don't

want to be different. But Paul is saying that if we want to be men and women who are intentional disciples of Jesus and not our culture, WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE WILLING TO BE DIFFERENT.....TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MIND.

2. **Commit to study the bible**

Am I going to take a step towards becoming a diligent student of the word of God?then take another and another and keep taking steps. Am I prepared to reorganise things in order to make it a priority? ...to study it as a way of life?to become a genuine disciple of Jesus? Am I going to start walking in the word of God and keep on putting it into practice the best I can with every choice in every situation? And am I committed to doing that with others not just on my own although that is important?

We need to take this calling seriously and answer those questions of ourselves.

You know, Scripture.....the word of God is a powerful force in us and a resource to us. It CHANGES us....from the inside out.....if we let it.

Jeremiah 23:29, *"Is not my word like a fire declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces?"*

Hebrews 4 in the Message reads, *"His powerful word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defence, laying us open to listen and obey".*

COMPARE THAT to Hello magazine to the latest self-help books! Unlike these the word of God takes on a life of it's own when you take it in and, with the help of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation begins a natural process of transformation.

The Message translation of Romans 12:2 says *"fix your attention on God"*behold Him in order to be transformed. What is your attention fixed on? What are your eyes looking at? What are your ears listening to? What are you giving yourself to? What needs to change?

The fact is we don't think in the way God wants us to think but we can be transformed if we learn to. It is possible. We can control our thinking with the help of the Holy Spirit and a lot of leaning on himbut not until we've thought about what we've been thinking about and taken every thought captive.

We've got to stop putting the wrong things in and start putting the right things in..... and we need to keep doing it until we are really good at it!

It gives you a sense of really hard graft doesn't it.....like the builders will have had to do building my friend's kitchen.....clearing the old ground for the new build. I doubt that the builders will have turned up each day with no tools in their van.....or with the wrong tools. They will have chosen just the right tools for the job!

In the same way our builder has chosen just the right tools for the job of clearing

the ground in our lives and building the new."OUR TOOLS ARE READY AT HAND it says ...All we need is there in the scriptures.

3. **Don't put off till tomorrow what God shows you to deal with today**

In Exodus 8: 9-10 Moses asks Pharaoh when he wants to get rid of the frogs..... "Set a time, when do you want the frogs out of here?"
"Make it tomorrow" was Pharaoh's reply!



When God shows you it's time to deal something in your life there's an anointing on it to deal with it. Will you be like Pharaoh and put it off till tomorrow, pulling back from God's NOW and the grace that meets us in the NOW just because you've just got used to the frogs being around? Don't let's make excuses, put it off because it's inconvenient, or wait until it will be easier. Learn to recognise when God is touching things in your life that you need to take seriously and DEAL WITH IT. TODAY.

If it's unforgiveness and bitterness.....deal with it.

If it's stinking thinking leading to destructive habits.....deal with it.

If it's false beliefs about yourself, others, God, the church.....deal with it.

Stages of brokenness that we often go through when God is renewing like that ARE REALLY IMPORTANT.....because they provide an opportunity for a changed perspective. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit we see the lies and false thinking for what they are. We become aware of our own inadequacy and we have no confidence in the old way.....the world's way any more.

BECAUSE beyond that we catch a glimpse what God is like, the reality of his truth and a new confidence in the Holy Spirit and in God emerges.....and so the transformation continues.

Philippians 3:8-9 Message translation,

"Compared to the high privilege of knowing Jesus Christ as my master (ie being a disciple of him) firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant - dog dung. (NICE! That's what Paul thinks of worldly ways!.....no wonder he tells us not to conform to it!) I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him. I don't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness (that the world offers) that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from TRUSTING Christ - righteousness." (the Kingdom of God alternative).

So in conclusion what shall we settle for?

Romans 12:2

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.

We long to see transformation in our own lives, our churches and our society. Don't you love seeing that happen.....isn't that what we're in this for? The promise here is that we

can and will see it. Let's decide to commit ourselves, individually and as a community of disciples, to doing all we can to move from being conformed to this world into a life lived out as a disciple of Jesus.....giving ourselves to His word, to being in His Presence, to be quick to deal with the issues he shows us and to being transformed into His likeness, more clearly able to know what's God will is and to do it.

Alison Flowers
19 April 2015