

Sermon Title: Renewal of Your Mind
Biblical Text: Romans 12:2a
Teaching Series: Justified by Love
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Preacher: Jason C. Helveston

Romans 12:2a

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...

Everyone worships something. We talked about that last week. And Paul's instruction to his first-century audience was to offer their bodies, their whole lives in worship to God, because of his countless mercies. That's Romans 12:1. Now, on to verse 2. This week we need to consider that *everything shapes our worship.* Or we might say we are always being disciplined. We are always beings shaped and guided. Whether we are watching a commercial, listening to a podcast, or gathering with the Church ... we are always being disciplined. And I think our health and well-being, our faithfulness to the call of Jesus is predicated upon our wakefulness to to this truth. The fidelity of our worship depends on our awareness of what we are being taught and how we are being shaped.

Today Paul is going to give a us a two-fold command: don't be conformed, be transformed. He's saying, we're always being disciplined. Our worship is always being shaped. The question is, *by what?* Last week we realized we can't help but worship but we can help who or what we worship. Today we will learn, we can't help but be disciplined but, by the grace of God, we can help who or what disciplines us. That's what I'd like to talk about. Paul says, *Read Romans 12:2a ... Do not be*

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...

Don't be conformed, be transformed. You will either be conformed to the world. Or you will be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

I think everything hinges upon the meaning of "***this world.***" It's a familiar phrase in the New Testament, and yet often sorely misunderstood. So, let's organize our time together around this idea

- The ***nature*** of this world. *What does "this world" mean?*
- The ***power*** of this world. *What does "conformed" mean?*
- The ***hope*** in this world. *What does "transformed by the renewal of your mind" mean?*

Our worship is being shaped by this world and its power, but in Christ there is hope for us to be transformed right in the middle of it ...

[Prayer]

Movement 1: The Nature of this World (v.2a, 2

Corinthians 4:3-4, Romans 8:5, 2 Timothy 4:10)

*What are we talking about when we talk about "this world?" What's the ***nature*** of this world?*

I'll let the great preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones give us some guidance here. He took over a year to preach through Romans 12—from October 1965-November 1966. In his mind, when the Apostle Paul (and all NT writers) speak about "***this***

world" he is speaking about three things: life apart from God, life after the Fall, and life in the flesh (*Romans 12, 73*). *With me?*

Life apart from God.

Life after the Fall.

And life in the flesh.

That's what *"this world"* means. To be sure in some case and contexts the meaning is the physical and visible planet we call home, or the people themselves (see John 3:16). But more often the biblical writers are seeing through this tri-focal spiritual lens, if you will.

Let's consider all three in order to more fully grasp what Paul and others are saying

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- First, this world is about life apart from God. Lloyd-Jones says, *"by 'world' the New Testament means life as it is thought of, organized, and lived apart from God, without reckoning on God, without being governed and controlled by Him"* (73). There is a way of living without considering God. We don't even think about him. We are not mindful of him. We do not pray to him. Therefore we do not submit to his way and his will. And we're not talking about those who don't believe in a god. Author David Tripp warns that we can all live as what he calls "functional atheists" ... *"we believe that God exists, that he created the heavens and the earth, that the Bible is accurate, and that paradise awaits, but we often live—at a functional level—as if there is no God"* (*Are You A Functional Atheist?*, February 26, 2020). *This world lives as if God is not real.*

- Second, this world is about life after the Fall. The Fall is the moment in history and Scripture when our first parents, Adam and Eve sinned (see Genesis 3:1-7). They rejected God's good world on his terms and welcomed all that's broken in this world. We're told their "fall" led to the fall of all human beings; we are now all born with sin and this world is riddled with sin (we considered this in Romans 5:12-13, *sin came into the world through one man*). That's what we mean by "the Fall." Lloyd-Jones describes this aspect as an existence controlled by the devil. While this means many things—sin, shame, fear, destruction, and so on—Lloyd-Jones draws our attention to 2 Corinthians 4, *Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 ...* ***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.*** The one who Paul calls, "*the god of this world*" is Satan. He blinds our minds. He keeps people from seeing light. He shields them from understanding and trusting God, and knowing themselves in view of the gospel. In our modern time this aspect of the meaning of "this world" is hard for many of us to swallow. Conceiving of some spiritual villain who terrorizes people and controls world events seems silly. Famously, French writer Charles Baudelaire said, "*One of the artifices*" or schemes, "*of Satan is, to induce men to believe that he does not exist: another, perhaps equally fatal, is to make them fancy that he is obliged to stand quietly by, and not to meddle with them ...*" (*Quakerism Examined*, 239). This is what he does. Satan deceives. Which leads us to sin and shame and fear. And while he is a defeated adversary, it's clear, because of the Fall he still exercises influence and power in this world. *This world lives as if Satan is not real.*

- Third, this world is about life in the flesh. We learned about 'the flesh' when we studied Romans 8. African theologian, St. Augustine famously explained life in this world as a matter of how we order our loves. In the flesh and in the Spirit, we order what we love and how we love differently. Paul says there's two ways to live, ***Read Romans 8:5 ... "those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."*** Life according to the flesh is a life which loves this world ... what it offers ... what it loves. On his journey and work Paul was abandoned by a man named Demas. And Paul says the reason Demas deserted him was because he fell, ***Read 2 Timothy 4:10 ... "in love with this present world"***. Life in the flesh and in this world centers on self, my comforts, dreams, longings, and feelings. It's a life in which virtue and love and beauty and truth are ultimately determined by self or society. We are lords unto ourselves. *This world lives as if Truth is not real.*

If you noticed, this world is ultimately about a kind of spiritual blindness. It's living life as if God, Satan, and truth do not exist. That's what we're talking about when we talk about "this world." *Now, why would we take such time to consider the meaning of a singular phrase and idea?* Well, because our worship is being shaped by this world every single day ... and we often don't even see it.

Movement 2: The Power of this World (v.2a, 1 John 2:15-16, Romans 12:1)

That's the *nature*, *what's the power?* *What power does this world possess?*

Paul doesn't simply tell us that 'this world' exists. He warns us not to be conformed by this world. In other words, this world is not merely an idea but a force with an agenda. Specifically, I believe, to shape our worship. Look at it again, ***Read Romans 12:2a ... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...*** *Do not be conformed. Do not be deceived by the lies about doing life as if God, Satan, and truth do not exist.* Our friend, Marva Dawn has written extensively on Romans 12. In considering the power of this world, she explains that the idea of conform is ***"to form or mold [our] behavior in accordance with a particular pattern or set of standards"*** (*Truly the Community*, 30). This world seeks to form you ... make you .. and shape you in its image. Paul wants us to see this and not let it happen.

In fact, the tense of the Greek texts stresses that this is not a one time act of refusing to be conformed. This is an ongoing rebellion against the powers of this world. I hope you find that encouraging. Another lie many of us believe is that we're the only ones or that we should be stronger or holier than we are. We believe good Christians don't have to resist these daily urges to be shaped by the world. Paul knows better. To be a Christian is to daily refuse sin, to resist the allure of the lies Adam and Eve believed in the Garden. Puritan preacher John Owen put it this way, ***"Be killing sin or sin will be killing you"*** (*Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 50). Or in the language of our investigation today, *be transformed in Christ's image in this world or this world will be conforming you in its image.*

How does this happen?

How does the world conform us?

What specifically is shaping us?

*What's this **power** look like?*

Well, the **power** of this world is ultimately deception and fear. Those are the exact tactics of Satan in the Garden ... *is that what God said? Yeah, he doesn't want you to be like him!* There are specific ways the lies that God, Satan, and truth do not exist practically express themselves and conform us. They seek to shape our worship. And all these lies are inviting you to give your heart to this world, like Demas. This world is after your love.

Meet me in 1 John 2:15.

The Apostle John saw a love for this world as central to being conformed by this world. In other words, we are shaped by what we love. Or in as St. Clare of Aissisi wrote, ***“We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.”*** This is what John understood and so he warned his readers, ***Read 1 John 2:15-16 ... Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*** John says, when we love the world we are wrapped up in the desires of pleasure ... desires of what someone else's life look like ... and, really, a desire for possessions.

The **power** of this world is to use fear and deception to woo us to love. It does this by promising to satisfy our desires. In some respects John is talking about three differently things. But in another way he's speaking about one thing. We look to the world to satisfy our deepest desires. *Right?* That's the issue. That's the lie. That's the power of this world. When we love this world we trust that this world can

satisfy our deepest desires. When we are deceived into believing that God, Satan, and truth don't exist, we don't question our desires we seek only to satisfy them. And that's what this world promises ... and we love this world for that promise.

This is what begins to effect our worship. You see, whatever or whoever gives us satisfaction, gets our praise.

- Politics shape our worship because our favorite candidates promises to satisfy our desires for control and our preferred future.
- Money shapes our worship because it promises to satisfy our desires for comfort, pleasure, and safety.
- Religion shapes our worship because it promises to satisfy our desires for order and specialness.
- Brands shape our worship because they promise to satisfy our desires for beauty and acceptance.
- Education shapes our worship because they promise to satisfy our desires for wisdom and understanding.
- Families, friendship, and our various tribes shape our worship because they promise to satisfy our desire to be loved and belong.
- Work shapes our worship because it promises to satisfy our desire for meaning and value.

Whatever we trust to satisfy our deepest desires, we worship. And we have just been instructed, *Read Romans 12:1 ... "by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"*. We are meant to worship God, because of his great mercy. We were made to worship. But whatever or whoever we trust to give us satisfaction, gets our

praise. My brothers and sisters, we are deceived. It's killing us. We are being conformed by this world. *We are always being disciplined. Everything shapes our worship.* Everything disciplines us and so Paul instructs us to not be conformed to this world, everyday.

Movement 3: The Hope in this World (v.2a, 2

Corinthians 3:18, Luke 24:31, John 1:18,38, 21:17)

The *nature* of this world is deception ... that God, Satan, and truth are not real. The *power* of this world is fear ... that aims for your heart. *What hope do we have over the powers of this world?*

The best way to not be conformed by this world is to be transformed into Christ. Paul concludes his thought, *Read Romans 12:2a ... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...* The word Paul uses for transformed is the Greek word, *metamorpho*. It's where we get our word *metamorphosis*. It means to change. And the only other place that Paul uses this word is in his letter to the church in Corinth; a place where a great deal of worldliness and love of this world was going on at the time, even, if not especially amongst Christians. Paul tells them, *Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 ... 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.* Oh, this is so good. So helpful. Notice, first and foremost the transformation is *"into the image"* ... that is into the image of Jesus Christ. We are not meant to be shaped into the image of this world, but in the the image of Jesus Christ. Notice further, transformation takes place when two things happen.

- First, we need our faces to be unveiled. We are blinded by this world. And therefore we can only resist the world's conformity and be transformed when we can see the truth; when we can see reality clearly. Please notice, this is something which happens to us. This is a gift. We do not unveil our faces. God does. Like the couple headed home to Emmaus whose, ***Read Luke 24:31 ... "eyes were opened and they recognized [Jesus]"***.
- Second, we need to look to the Lord. This change takes place only when we are ***"beholding the glory of the Lord."*** We become what we love, what we adore, what we behold ... what we worship. Similarly we do not simply behold Jesus on our own. This too is a grace. We do not behold what has not been revealed to us. John explains, ***Read John 1:18 ... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*** God reveals himself, that's the only way we can behold him.

This too is an ongoing process. We must be transformed daily. Specifically, Paul tell us our minds must be renewed in order for transformation to happen. Here *mind* is not limited to what we might think. Scholar Leon Morris explains that, ***"Paul does not envisage a mindless emotionalism, but a deeply intelligent approach to life, as characteristic of the Christian who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit. The term mind is not confined to intellectual pursuits (it includes an important moral element), but it certainly embraces them."*** (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 435). In fact, I think Paul still has the whole self in mind. Our whole bodies, those living sacrifices are renewed when see clearly and behold Christ. That is to say, our minds are renewed when by the power of the Spirit we learn to tell the difference between a truth and a lie ... and the difference between fear and love. Practically speaking I think that means we interrogate our desires.

The Christian does not simply look for their desires to be fulfilled and then worship whatever satisfies. Real love and worship responds to mercy not emotional and physical gratification. We interrogate our desires. The Christians asks, *is this desire from the Lord? Will this desire fulfilled glorify God? Did Jesus wrestle with this desire? How did he face it? What does my church family think about this desire? What fears are motivating these feelings? What lies am I believing that are telling me to trust and love this world?*

In one of the first scenes of John's biography of Jesus, Jesus calls his disciples. John the Baptizer was there. He says, **"Behold, the Lamb of God!"** He says, open your eyes. See. Behold, look, worship, love ... Jesus. Two people heard this and started following Jesus. Jesus saw them start to follow. And the very first thing John records Jesus saying is a question. Jesus' question summarizes all we've explored today. Jesus asks in John 1:38, **"What are you seeking?"** Or, *what do you desire? ... what do you want?* What's more, if we race ahead to the conclusion of John's gospel account, we'll find that one of Jesus' last questions is in John 21:17, **"Do you love me?"**

The bookends of John's gospel are questions of desire, of love ... of the center of worship. The beauty of these bookends is what is situated in the middle of them. Lesson after lesson. Truth after truth. Reminder after reminder. Story after story. Not about humanity's love for God, but God's love for people amidst their deception and fear. The Son of God's invitation to love him comes in the context of demonstrating his cosmic love for you. The Son of God's invitation to be transformed comes in the context of his incarnation, his transformation as it were.

Jesus came and he was not conformed by this world. He was transformed and now by grace his love and truth can make us new as we learn to trust him and his love.

The *nature* of this world is deception ... that God, Satan, and truth are not real.

The *power* of this world is fear ... that aims for your heart.

The *hope* in this world is incarnation ... that love and truth have come in the flesh to transform this world.