

**The Difference-Maker**  
**Romans 12:1-2, Part 4**  
**#45 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans**  
**Faith Community Church – September 24, 2006**

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*Objective: To encourage our people to be constantly at work allowing the Word of God to shape their minds so that their thinking follows after the heart of God.*

### **Introduction**

“Why did he do that?” That’s probably a question you’ve asked more than once. What makes people behave the way they do?

A debate over that question was the subject of the 1935 film *Hoi Polloi*. One professor claimed that behavior was the product of heredity, while another said that behavior is the product of environment. The discussion results in a bet over whether three simple sanitation workers can, through the right lessons, be turned into society gentlemen. But alas. When the moment of truth arrives, Larry, Moe and Curley turn a society ball into chaos.

There are a number of factors that certainly shape us, and they include heredity and environment, but the Bible is clear that the primary factors that governs our behavior comes from within.

In these first two verses of Romans 12, Paul is talking about change, and he urges us to be transformed in our behavior and our thinking. Let’s look at what he has to say this morning.

### **Transformation: The Difference-Maker**

1. Transformation is the answer to conformity.
  - a. Paul tells us “Do not be conformed to this world . . .” (12:2a) We identified the meaning of “this world” as the “spirit of the age” in which we live. John MacArthur writes that this word *refers to the system of beliefs, values—or the spirit of the age—at any time current in the world. This sum of contemporary thinking and values forms the moral atmosphere of our world . . .*<sup>1</sup>
  - b. To conform to “this world” is to adopt the thinking, values and attitudes of the culture in which we live.
  - c. So what is wrong with that? Is there something wrong with fitting in? The answer is that fitting in violates our calling as followers of Christ. “This world” is not friendly with God. While he uses a different word, James tells us (4:4) that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God.

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Ro 12:2). Nashville: Word Pub.

- d. The emphasis on living differently is found throughout the New Testament. We are always called to a higher standard of living. See Col. 3:1-5a; 1 Thes. 4:1-8; 5:5-8; 1 Peter 2:11-12; 4:1-5, as examples. So how does that happen? The answer is through being transformed.
2. How transformation takes place.
    - a. The meaning of the word transform means to change. It is used only three other times in the NT. Two of them relate to the transfiguration of Jesus, where there was a radical change in appearance. See Matthew 17:1-2.
    - b. I want to look at this word and how Paul uses it here. The word “transformed” is a verb. Verbs have properties that are identified as tense, voice and mood.<sup>2</sup>
      - i. The tense of a Greek verb indicates not only time of action, but type of action. The tense here is the present tense, which means that it is an ongoing action. We are to keep being transformed.
      - ii. The voice of a Greek verb tells us the relationship between the subject and the action that the verb describes. We are the subject, and the voice of the verb here is passive, which means that we are not transforming ourselves, but we are being transformed by something external to us.
      - iii. The significance of the mood of a verb is a little harder to describe, but the mood here is called the imperative mood, which means that the speaker is saying that it must happen.
      - iv. What Paul is saying, then, is that you and I must, without question, continuously allow ourselves to be transformed. It’s not an option, it is not something that we do to ourselves, nor is it something that takes place at once. So what is involved?
    - c. The target or goal of transformation is Christlikeness.
      - i. We know what God’s plan is – Romans 8:29 – conformity to the image of Christ.
      - ii. How does this take place? 2 Corinthians 3:18.
    - d. The means of transformation is the renewing of our minds.
      - i. Dr. John Piper writes that “*transformation is not just external.*” He says: *I point this out for one reason: to make the point that the nonconformity to the world does not primarily mean the external avoidance of worldly behaviors. That’s included. But you can avoid all kinds of worldly behaviors and NOT be transformed. . . . Transformation is not switching from the to-do list of the flesh to the to-do list of the law.*<sup>3</sup> And he is right. External change is important, as we see from the various commands of the NT, *but* it begins elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ntgreek.net/lesson12.htm>. I’m also indebted to the insights of William Hendricksen in his commentary on Romans in the Baker New Testament Commentary.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2004/178\\_The\\_Renewed\\_Mind\\_and\\_How\\_to\\_Have\\_It/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2004/178_The_Renewed_Mind_and_How_to_Have_It/)

- ii. That is why Paul tells us to be transformed or changed by the renewal of your mind. The mind – the way we think – is the key battleground. We see this in Ephesians 4:17-24. Notice how many times words relating to thinking or the mind appear.
- iii. How can we renew our mind? The primary tool of the Spirit is the word of God.
  - 1. Biblical evidence: Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Psalm 119:11
  - 2. This should explain to you why I am so obsessive about your learning. If you're not letting God's word form your thinking, being transformed just is not going to happen.
- e. The result of a renewed mind is the ability to approach life with a clear understanding of how to live in "this world." Paul says *"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."*

### **Responding to God's Word**

God's Word in the hands of the Spirit is the difference-maker in our lives. I want to encourage all of us to recommit ourselves to letting the word of Christ live in us richly (as Paul says in Colossians), so that we are being shaped into the image of Christ.