

Romans: The Good News of God

The Pattern of This Age

Romans 12:2a

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Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying Romans 12:1-2. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, “In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?”

So, let’s carefully examine each phrase in Romans 12:1-2.
Let’s read Romans 12:1-2:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²**Do not be conformed to this world**, but 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. (Romans 12:1-2)

Introduction

The phrase that I would like to focus on today is Romans 12:2a: **“Do not be conformed to this world.”**

This phrase has two key words. This first key word is **conformed**, which means “to shape one’s behavior” or “to be conformed to a pattern or mold.”² The second key word is **world**, which means “this present age”³ in contrast to “the age to come,” “people,” or “place.”

So, the phrase means, “Do not shape your behavior to this

¹ Much of this material is taken from James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 71-82.

² J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic edition.) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), DBLG 5372.

³ T. Friberg, B. Friberg & N. F. Miller, *Vol. 4: Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 39.

present age.”

James Montgomery Boice translates the phrase as, “Do not let the age in which you live force you into its scheme of thinking and behaving.”⁴

Other Bible versions translate the phrase as follows:

- *New International Version*: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.”
- *New Century Version*: “Do not be shaped by this world.”
- *New International Reader’s Version*: “Don’t live any longer the way this world lives.”
- *The Message*: “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.”
- *J. B. Phillips*: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.”

Do you see what the Apostle Paul is driving at in this phrase? He is affirming that the world has its own way of thinking and doing things. But the Bible presents God’s way for Christians to think and do things. Paul is saying that Christians are not to think and act like the world. Instead, he says, Christians are to “be transformed by the renewal of [their] mind[s].” What Paul is presenting in Romans 12:2 is the clash of “worldviews.”

The term “worldview” is the English translation of the German term *Weltanschauung*. Simply defined, a “worldview” is “the way a person looks at the world.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines “worldview” as “the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world,” or as “a collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.”⁵

Now, it is important to know that everyone has a worldview. Whether you realize it or not, a worldview is an integral part of

⁴ Boice, 72.

⁵ worldview. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.classic.reference.com/browse/worldview> (accessed: June 06, 2009).

your life, as well as the lives of everyone else.

Worldview matters. Clarifying worldviews is not an academic exercise, intellectual theory, or a philosophical concept. A worldview is an integral part of everyone's life. It determines relationships. It determines successes and failure. It determines goals and motivations. It is at the root of all our thinking.

Lesson

In this message I want to note briefly several (though not all) worldviews that confront Christians today.

I. **Materialism: “The One with the Most Toys Wins”**

The first worldview I want to note is materialism.

Materialism is the worldview that says, “The one with the most toys wins.”

Materialism can be summed up in one word: *more*.

Materialism says that the only thing that really matters in life is acquiring things. Those who subscribe to this worldview live to collect things.

An example of materialism is given by Jesus in Luke 12:13-21. Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”

But Jesus said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

Then Jesus told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not

rich toward God.”

Jesus’ response to materialism, which he calls “covetousness,” is given in Luke 12:15, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Do not be conformed to this world of materialism. Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions but, rather, in being rich toward God.

II. **Selfism: “I’ve Got to Think of Me First”**

The second worldview I want to note is selfism.

Selfism is the worldview that says, “I’ve got think of me first.”

We live in a “me first,” serve-yourself world that says it’s all about you. Commercial slogans cater to this viewpoint. Slogans like, “have it your way,” “we do it all for you,” “obey your thirst,” “you’ve got to think of what’s best for yourself,” and “you deserve it.”

For the last 60 years, the Baby Boomer generation has been called the “Me Generation.” This “me first” idea has infected entire communities.

For example, selfism has torn up marriages. This is illustrated by the person that says, “I don’t care how divorce impacts my spouse or children; it’s all about me.” Of course, it is not usually stated so crassly. But when a person will not honor his marriage vow of staying married “for better or for worse,” but wants to get out of the marriage for “personal reasons,” it is usually because of selfism.

Selfism has destroyed workplaces. The employee who says, “I don’t care how my laziness impacts my co-workers; it’s all about me,” is a living example of selfism.

Selfism has even ruined churches. People come into the church and say, “I want you to serve my needs.” Frankly, these are often the people who are not involved in any meaningful ministry

in the church. If you press them, they will say, “I work a busy schedule and I don’t have time for ministry in the church. I have children, and I want a place that they enjoy.”

Do you see that selfism is a self-centered, individualistic way of life that says our needs and desires should be served at the expense of others?

Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25).

Do not be conformed to this world of selfism. Jesus says you only begin to live when you give your life away. Significance in life does not come from serving yourself; it comes from serving God and others.

III. Hedonism: “Do What Feels Good”

The third worldview I want to note is hedonism.

Hedonism is the worldview that says, “Do what feels good.”

Hedonism is the belief that the most important thing in life is how we feel. The number one goal of a hedonist is to feel good, be comfortable, and have fun.

It’s the worldview that Hugh Hefner founded *Playboy* magazine on. He willingly acknowledges he is a hedonist.

It’s not just playboys who are hedonists, though. In fact, someone who lives for the goal of retirement is a hedonist. If the whole goal of a person’s life is to simply do nothing, live a self-centered life, and make no contribution to the world, that’s hedonism.

The Bible’s answer to hedonism is found in Proverbs 21:17. Let me read it in version of the Bible known as *The Message*: “You’re addicted to thrills? What an empty life! The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.”

Do not be conformed to this world of hedonism. Mick Jagger’s been singing “I can’t get no satisfaction” for 40 years. Why?

Because the pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.

IV. Relativism: “True for You but Not for Me”

The fourth worldview I want to note is relativism.

Relativism is the worldview that says, “True for you but not for me.”

This worldview says it doesn’t matter if it’s right or wrong. It doesn’t matter if it hurts anybody or not. If it works for you, fine. As that great theologian Sly Stone says, “Different strokes for different folks.”

In our culture today, this is a very popular worldview. Nobody wants to tell someone else that what they are doing is wrong. In fact that’s the only way you can be wrong in our society today—if you tell someone else they’re wrong.

Some years ago Professor Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago wrote a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*, in which he said, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”⁶

What that book set out to prove is that education is impossible in such a climate. People can learn skills, of course. You can learn to drive a truck, work a computer, handle financial transactions, and do scores of other things. But real education, which means learning to sift through error to discover what is true, good, and beautiful, is impossible, because the goals of real education—truth, goodness, and beauty—do not exist. And even if they did exist in some far-off never-never-land, it would be impossible to find them, because it requires absolutes even to discover absolutes. It requires such absolutes as the laws of logic, for example.

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” The fact is that there is truth in the world, and it is found in God and in his Word. Anyone who

⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 25.

opposes God and his Word will discover the way to death.

Do not be conformed to this world of relativism. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Truth is not relative.

V. **Atheism: “God Doesn’t Exist”**

The fifth worldview I want to note is atheism.

Atheism is the worldview that says, “God doesn’t exist.”

Atheists don’t believe in a grand creator or a grand design. They believe we are all accidents of nature or evolution. They believe that everything in life is a result of random chance.

If there is no God, there’s no plan or purpose for life. If there is no purpose, than your life doesn’t really matter. For atheists, life has no value, meaning, or purpose.

It takes more faith to be an atheist than it does to believe in God. When you look at creation and how the world is set on an axis, it proves the existence of God to me. If it were one degree one way, we’d freeze up. If it were one degree the other way, we’d burn up.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:18-20, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” In other words, we can look at nature and see a lot about God. We know God is creative, powerful, organized, and likes diversity. There are lots of things we know about God and his existence just by looking at nature.

Do not be conformed to this world of atheism. The Bible says that the fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Only fools think that there is no God.

VI. Humanism: “You Are Your Own God”

The sixth worldview I want to note is humanism.

Humanism is the worldview that says, “You are your own god.”

This worldview is very popular in the Western world. It says we are the master of our own fate, the determiner of our destiny. You’ll hear this in the new age movement as well: “You’re divine. You’re a god.”

It’s ironic. God wired us to worship something. And if we don’t worship God, we end up worshipping ourselves.

That is why Paul says in Romans 1:25, “. . . they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” You can go all around the world and find people worshipping little idols that they made—stone idols, rock idols, crystals, and wooden idols. They’re worshipping something that they created themselves or somebody else created. In America we have our own idols—they’re called cars, homes, and status symbols. The Bible is clear that God is God, and we are not.

Do not be conformed to this world of humanism. Submit your thinking to God’s Word and learn who God is and who you are in relationship to God.

VII. Biblical Worldview

The seventh worldview I want to note is the biblical worldview.

If Jesus were to ask, “Who do you say I am,” the question he famously asked his disciple Peter, he would be disappointed by some of the answers he’d receive from contemporary Americans. A new nationwide survey conducted by The Barna Group among a representative sample of adults explored how many have what might be considered a biblical worldview.

For the purposes of the survey, a biblical worldview was de-

defined as follows:

- believing that absolute moral truth exists;
- the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches;
- Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic;
- a person cannot earn his or her way into heaven by trying to be good or do good works;
- Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and
- God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.

In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.

Overall, the current research revealed that among born again Christians less than one out of every five persons (19%) had a biblical worldview.⁷

Practically, that means that only the people in the overflow section of this sanctuary today have a biblical worldview; the rest of us are being conformed to this world.

Not surprisingly, the Barna research found that adults without a biblical worldview and those with such a worldview had vastly different views of immoral and unethical behavior. For instance, those without a biblical worldview were:

- Around 100 times more likely to endorse abortion (46% of those without a biblical worldview believed it to be okay, compared to less than 1% of those with a biblical worldview).
- Around 80 times more likely to say exposure to pornography is morally acceptable (39% vs. less than one-half of 1%).
- 31 times more likely to believe living together before marriage is morally acceptable (62% vs. 2%).

⁷ See <http://barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>.

- 15 times more likely to believe homosexual sex is acceptable (31% vs. 2%).
- 18 times more likely to endorse drunkenness (36% vs. 2%).
- 12 times more likely to accept profanity (37% vs. 3%).
- 11 times more likely to say adultery is okay (44% vs. 4%).
- 8 times more likely to gamble by purchasing lottery tickets.

“The primary reason that people do not act like Jesus is because they do not think like Jesus,” says Barna. “Behavior stems from what we think—our attitudes, beliefs, values and opinions.”⁸

Conclusion

All worldviews have consequences. Every day we’re affected and influenced by them. We’re often not even aware of it. These worldviews affect the happiness and success of all people. They matter greatly.

There’s only one worldview that is consistent with the Bible. The biblical worldview says God made us for his purposes. It says that we exist for his pleasure. It’s 180 degrees different from the other worldviews above.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, “**Do not be conformed to this world**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Come back next week and learn how to be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you will not be conformed to this world. Amen.

⁸ See http://www.pastors.com/blogs/ministrytoolbox/archive/2003/12/02/Barna_3A00_-Biblical-worldview-held-by-only-4_2500_-of-adults.aspx.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord, you call us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Help us to understand what the various worldviews are, and enable us to develop a biblical worldview.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.