

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 12: 2

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 12. We will read verse 2 today.

After a Christian is saved by grace, they must join the church to experience God's corporate salvation. In church life, the primary responsibility of every saint is to present their bodies as a living sacrifice together with all the saints. This is our reasonable service and also our worship; it is holy and pleasing to God. For every saint, this is our most reasonable way of life, for we have received a new identity as children of God and therefore should begin to live a new corporate life.

In the past years, we may have been just like the people of the world—busy every day without knowing why; striving endlessly, seeming to gain something yet finding it all turns to emptiness in an instant. Together with the rest of the world, we were walking on a road leading to destruction—noisy, crowded, full of scheming against one another, without peace, without joy, and without satisfaction. But thanks be to the Lord, after receiving grace and salvation, a new chapter of our life has begun; therefore, we must also learn to live an entirely new life. The first step of this new life is to present our bodies as a sacrifice—this concerns the outward aspect. Then Paul tells us that the second step is the inward transformation that should take place within us.

Verse 2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This verse is also very rich, and we must unpack it slowly and examine it in detail; first, looking at the whole sentence, Paul speaks in the imperative and gives us two

commands—one telling us what not to do and the other telling us what we must do—and from those two commands a result follows.

Let us first look at the first command: “Do not be conformed to this world.” The word “conformed” in Greek is a compound verb made up of two parts. The first is the preposition, *sun*, meaning “to identify with”; the second is *schematizo*, from which the English word “schematic” is derived, meaning “outward form” or “shape.” Therefore, this compound verb means “to be molded or shaped into a certain form or appearance.” In this verse, Paul uses a present-tense negative imperative, which expresses a sense of urgency: do not be molded into the form or appearance of this world—or we could put it even more strongly—stop immediately from being shaped into the likeness of this world.

The Greek word translated as “world” in the Chinese Union Version is *aion*, which actually means “an age.” Therefore, it refers to this present age, and a more accurate translation would be “age” rather than “world.” The Greek word for “world” is *kosmos*. The world is a system constructed by Satan using quantifiable values to form an organized environment designed to usurp and control the human beings God created; thus, Satan is the ruler of this world. Within this world that he controls, there are many ages, and each age has its own unique trends and culture. In Paul’s understanding, each age is like a mold into which the people of the world are pressed, compelling every person to express its values within the limited span of their lifetime.

This value system is usually defined by three dimensions. The first is money—along with the material enjoyment and sensory satisfaction that money brings. The second is fame—being popular, accepted by others, and admired by the crowd. The third is power—the influence one has over others and the desire to control them. The mold of this age creates constant pressure, causing people to be unconsciously shaped into the likeness of this generation. Every saint, before being saved, lived within an age and, to some extent, was molded into the image of that age. Therefore, Paul urgently exhorts the saints to stop immediately—do not continue being shaped according to the likeness of this age, but instead be restored to God’s original purpose and mission for mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is also a lesson that every saint must learn: do not bring the trends of this age into church life—whether they are cultural, political, or economic—because the values of this age change over time and are often in conflict among different groups. But God’s values are eternal; they do not change with time, and they are righteous and just, unaffected by race or cultural customs.

Not only should we not actively bring the trends of this age into church life, but Paul here goes even further, requiring that we ourselves not be conformed to the pattern of this world. That is to say, we cannot passively allow the trends of this age to influence church life, because every saint must offer themselves, together with all the saints, as a living sacrifice. If our lives are stained with the patterns of this age, we will defile this living sacrifice. Therefore, when we come to church, we must undergo what Titus 3:5 speaks of, that is, “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Only after washing away the defilement on us and removing the influence brought by this age can we suitably be built together with all the saints, becoming a living sacrifice.

Next, let us look at the second command, which is to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. First, let us consider the word “transformed.” This is also a compound verb, composed of two parts: “meta,” which means change after being with, and the second part, “morphoo,” which refers to form or essence. The meaning of this word is a change of essence brought about by being with the Holy Spirit, resulting in a new form. The shaping of this age focuses on outward appearance, whereas the transformation brought by the Holy Spirit is a change in inner essence. We move from following worldly external standards to developing a character that aligns with Christ. This change does not come from ourselves, but is brought about by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit transform us? It is through the renewing of the mind. The word “mind” in the English translation is better understood as “thought” or “thinking.” Our soul has three main functions: thought, emotion, and will. Thought enables us to think, emotion enables us to love, and will enables us to make decisions. Among these, thought is the most important function of the soul,

because through thinking and weighing different considerations, it helps us make proper decisions.

Before salvation, our thinking is guided by the value system of this age, and thus is essentially bound by the three dimensions set by the world system: money, fame, and power. Like many others, we pursue the value that can be realized in this life within these three dimensions. However, when we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, the original meaning of repentance is “a change of mind,” indicating that our thinking begins to shift. This is the first time our thought in life is transformed. We are connected to eternal values and have touched the spiritual reality beyond the material. Perhaps at that time our thinking could not fully comprehend it, but our emotions experienced unprecedented joy and peace, leading us to decide to accept Christ as our Savior for life. That was the beginning of the transformation of our mind.

If we carefully consider what has happened within us, what causes us to have a completely new way of thinking, we see that when we believed, the Holy Spirit came in, quickened our spirit, and dwelt within it. Between our spirit and soul, there is an interface called the conscience. When we first confessed and repented, our conscience was cleansed, opening the channel between spirit and soul. The Holy Spirit can then move through the conscience into our soul, and we sense that the peace and joy we experience come from the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also works on our thinking, giving us a renewed way of thinking. The Greek word for “renewing” is a compound noun made up of three parts: “ana,” which means up, indicating a movement from low to high; “kaino,” which refers to the quality or nature of the mind; and “sis,” a suffix that indicates the result of a process. In English, it is usually translated as “renewing,” meaning that through a process, we experience a renewal in our nature from low to high. Our thinking, which was originally guided by the standards of the world, is now renewed. With the help of the Holy Spirit, our mind is elevated, enabling us to perceive values that transcend time and to consider things from an eternal perspective.

Our repentance and faith constitute the first renewal of our mind; however, Paul here tells us that we are to be continually renewed. This ongoing renewal of the mind has a prerequisite: the channel between spirit and soul must be open, meaning our conscience is clean. The conscience can be seen as the eye of our heart; through this eye, we can perceive spiritual riches and reality. As the Holy Spirit flows continually through this eye, our mind can be constantly renewed, and this renewing produces our transformation, which can be seen as a metamorphosis.

Just as a caterpillar originally lives in two-dimensional space, able only to crawl on leaves, yet by eating and growing, it begins to undergo metamorphosis. After spinning a cocoon and emerging as a butterfly, it receives a completely new life, able to spread its wings and fly, breaking free from the limitations of two-dimensional space and ascending to move freely in three-dimensional space. Likewise, a Christian, as the mind is continually renewed, experiences a transformation of life, enabling us to live a holy life.

Paul first gives us two commands, and if we obey them, a result will follow: we will be able to discern God's will. To "discern" involves a process of testing that produces evidence; the KJV translates it as "proof." God's will refers to what pleases God, His good and perfect will. Paul here seems to indicate that seeking God's perfect will is not easy; it requires a process of testing and examination in order to obtain proof.

If we look at Romans 12:1-2 together, Paul exhorts us to present our bodies, together with all the saints, as a living sacrifice, and to discern God's will. Here, the will refers not to God's will for an individual, but to His will for the church. For each saint to follow God and seek His will individually is relatively easy, but when saints gather together to form the church, they must collectively seek God's will for the church in order to understand God's mission, commission, and guidance for it. When people gather, they often follow worldly principles, deciding by majority rule. Therefore, Paul specifically tells us here not to be influenced by the trends of this world, but that each saint must be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so

that together they can discern God's will and understand His guidance for the church at the present time.

The church is not governed by majority rule, but by all submitting to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, with everyone following the Spirit's leading. Generally, spiritually mature saints are humble and willing to yield, whereas those full of the flesh and natural tendencies are prone to pride, self-righteousness, and gathering companions to create an illusion of majority. Therefore, it becomes especially important for the church to be able to discern God's will.

Each church, according to its structure and the tendencies of its saints, may have many different ways of making decisions: in some, the pastor decides; in others, the elders decide; in some, the elders and deacons decide; and in others, the entire congregation votes. Regardless of the decision-making mechanism, handling the divisions that arise after a decision has been made has always been a difficulty for the church.

Personally, I prefer a church model that does not rely on voting, but is based on consensus. Such a church requires several essential conditions. First, the church must have the form of a family, ideally not exceeding one hundred people, so that no one is unable to call another by name, preserving the reality of a family. The entire church focuses on God's Word, following a set reading schedule, striving to bring every saint to a unified understanding of the Scriptures, and generating a shared burden according to God's Word. When the congregation comes together to seek God's will, action is taken not by voting but by reaching consensus; if consensus is reached, action is taken, and if not, prayer continues and seeking persists. This may seem inefficient, but so what?

The church is God's household, a place where the Holy Spirit has sovereignty. It is better to move slowly, allowing the Spirit to work in each saint; and the renewal and transformation of each saint's mind is the growth of the church. The church is not measured by the size of its ministries or the number of its activities; its value lies in its ability to bear witness for Christ. True witness occurs when all are of one mind and one accord, united as one.

To discern God's will, beyond achieving unity of mind among all the saints, Paul also gives three objective standards. First, it must be good—not simply what people consider good, but what is good according to God's nature. Morally, it is without defect, causing no harm to others or to things; it moves away from darkness toward light and aligns with the natural order God created.

Second, it must be perfect or complete. The original meaning is "complete in all parts" or "fully grown up," indicating maturity. This shows that God's will concerns life and calls for growth to maturity. In other words, if we follow God's will, the church will reach a stage of life maturity. God's will for the church is that the life of each saint may grow and mature.

Third, it must be acceptable or pleasing, meaning that it brings delight to God. The church is to bear witness for Christ, and only when Christ is exalted, magnified, and glorified does God's heart rejoice. Jesus also said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." A church where brothers and sisters love one another not only pleases God, but also fills the congregation with joy, so that even unbelievers who come among them can recognize that God truly is in their midst.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you long for your church to discern God's will and act according to it? Then you must start with yourself. Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you can come together with all the saints to discern God's will for the church.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You. Through the reminders Paul gives us, help us to understand that in church life, we are not only to present our bodies, together with all the saints, as a living sacrifice, but each person must also refrain from actively bringing the world into the church, and from passively being conformed to its pattern. Instead, we are to experience the transformation of life through the renewing of our minds. Only in this way can we gather together with all the saints to seek and discern God's will for the church. Bless the church I am part of, and all the saints within it, that we may be willing, as Paul instructed, to learn together to discern what Your will, commission, and guidance are for our

church. Bless my church so that the Holy Spirit may have sovereignty, and that all may be of one mind and accord in fulfilling the mission You have entrusted to the church. I pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.