

Christ Culture: You Are Transformed!

A sermon based on Romans 12:1-2.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What a time to be alive! Wouldn't you say? And I don't just mean Summer Solstice time in Fairbanks (although, the warmer temps, the constant daylight, being able to do so much outside certainly has me feeling happier these days...maybe you, too). But I'm talking about living in 2018 America, the lower threats of war, the technological advances, the many freedoms we get to enjoy,

Much better than at least the 1960's, right (not that I lived back then, but based on reading I've done and just knowledge of American history)? I mean, back then, you had the tensions surrounding the Civil Rights movement, the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, the whole hippie movement with their "free love" and "fight the establishment" movement. I was reading an article from the Washington Post from a couple of years ago sharing reflections from readers who had lived through that decade, and here's some of the issues they remember: **"In the 1960s, many Americans openly encouraged violence against protestors." "Racism was openly practiced and enshrined in law." "Social divides were deeper back then." "Much of the '60s tumult was colored by the experience (the quite unpopular experience) of the Vietnam War." "The mass media transformed things."**

I don't know about you, but hearing those headings...now, 50 years later, has America really been made great again? Are we that different? Racism may not be enshrined in the law, but doesn't it still exist? Protesters themselves being encouraged to use violence to further their cause? Have we gapped the social divides, even just a little bit? The unpopularity of foreign affairs continues. And, finally, the mass media transforming things...can I just leave that statement as is? Really, any better?

I'm not surprised. Are you? The Bible tells us there is **"nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again...Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time."** You know, we're lying to ourselves if we're convinced that we, as a society, have undergone some great transformative change and have somehow improved in the last 50, 20, 10, even 2 or 3 years.

Some of the same buzzwords that get people riled up today can certainly be used to describe society in generations past...words like acceptance, tolerance, entitlement, self-gratification, subjectivism or moral relativism (the idea that I choose what's right, what's good, what's moral, what's most beneficial for me). Any other words that come to mind for you. Take a moment and write them down.

That is our culture. Those words, that kind of mindset...that's what drives us as a society.

Is that what drives you?

Right now, in our church year, we're in the season of Pentecost, a season that typically last over twenty weeks, almost half the year. But it's a very general time of the year where we get to discuss and focus on our spiritual growth...the growth the Holy Spirit gives us as believers as he strengthens our faith in Jesus. It's a time where we receive constant encouragement to live out our faith in different ways...which is Paul's intent with our verse from Romans 12 this morning, again, **"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and**

pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform 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.

If you listened closely, you may have heard Paul alluding to two different cultures. You know what they are? 1) Being ***“living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God,” following “his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** Let's call that Christ culture, and 2) ***“the pattern of this world,”*** or our society/culture, which we started defining a couple of minutes ago, with words like self-gratification, tolerance, entitlement, I choose what's right for me.

What does Paul say about that second option? ***“Do not conform*** (literally, form into the mold of the way the rest of the world thinks and works).” In the book of Galatians, he explains why not, ***“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** That's the world's culture. That's life without Jesus.

Conforming to the world is all unregenerate worldlings know. It's their usual pattern to rebel against God and go their own way. And even in their better moments when they try to serve God, they do it badly, for they try to earn favor with God and influence him by buying their way into his good graces.

Again, is that what drives you? “I go my own way. I do what I want, whatever gets me ahead.” “I can do enough to earn God's favor. I can make myself worthy for eternal life.” Again, that's how the world thinks.

And friends, I think you already know, but I'm going to tell you it is so dangerously easy for us believers living in an age that is soft on sin to share the same lax attitude toward sin—be it immorality, greed, materialism or some other form of lovelessness. And sometimes, that's even after Paul and others in Scripture or with the use of Scripture warn us against that attitude, how conforming to society, to the way of the world and it's rebellion against God and his Word is...it's off limits.

“But if it feels good, do it!” “Whatever it takes to get ahead, to move on up.” “But I deserve this.” “It's not that big of a deal if I do _____ (this).” “I think God would be ok with this.” Again, the worldly way of thinking. And we've been there.

All of this, it's a first commandment issue...self-gratification, “what makes me feel good, what makes me feel better about myself, what do I want, what do I think is best, what do I think is right.” And the Bible says, ***“There is a way that appears to be right (to a person), but in the end it leads to death.”*** Let that sink in. There is a way that seems right (and appealing to the worldly way of thinking), but in the end it leads to death.

That is what you were. That is what I was. But I have been transformed. Say that with me, “I have been transformed.” That is, we've undergone a complete change...a 180. The Greek word for transformed here is where we get the word for “metamorphosis,” which makes us think of what takes place with a caterpillar, how in the cocoon, it completely changes into a beautiful butterfly.

Spiritually speaking, that's what's happened to you and me. Once living according to our sinful flesh and conforming to the ways of the world, to that culture, which, if you study sociology or cultural

anthropology, you'd learn your culture involves everything about you – your religion, race, work ethic, food choices, family life, and so forth. In that culture, everything was about you and satisfying your sinful flesh.

But you and I have been transformed...completely changed...***"in view of God's mercy."***

With that phrase, Paul reminds us why this transformation has taken place...again, in view of God's MERCY. In his mercy, in his compassion, in his love, God looked down from heaven, saw you and me following the ways of the world, a way that seems right and favorable to us, a way that leads to eternal death, and he offered a sacrifice...he offered Jesus...Christ, who his culture was faithful obedience, willingness and eagerness to follow God's will, and success in following his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Christ, whose culture was not self-gratification but selflessness, offered himself on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins, as the substitute taking on the death we were on the path towards. Christ, who came out of the grave three days later completely changed, no longer dead but alive, no longer humbled but exalted as our victorious Savior. In view of God's mercy, Jesus lived, died, and rose for us so our eternal future would be transformed from an eternity in hell to eternal life in heaven. He transformed you from sinners to saints...holy, pleasing, perfect to God.

It's a transformation that comes by the ***"renewing of your mind,"*** as Paul writes. It's like God has hit the reset button on us. We get to start over again with a clean slate...from here on out, we're different. It's a renewal that took place at your baptism, as God put to death your sinful nature and brought to life a new Man who loves and longs to leave behind the pattern of this world and to instead conform to Christ culture and follow God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

It's a transformation that's ongoing, not yet complete. Right? At least in God's eyes, in view of his mercy and in view of Christ's cross, we are perfect. In reality...right now, we still have that sinful flesh longing after the ways of the world. How can we move past that?

Again, ***"in VIEW of God's mercy."*** What is the focus of your life? Again, what drive you? In view of God's mercy...always keeping Christ's sacrifice in focus moves and motivates us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

When we think about the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice for us, we will readily see how our own personal sacrifice should be more than even what the Israelites did in their sacrifices...a waving of wheat or an unblemished goat. Our sacrifice is more than few dollars set aside for the work of the gospel outreach. Though their sacrifice might include that, in view of God's mercy, it's so much more. It's life for life. Christ gave us his. Now we give him ours in service...a LIVING sacrifice.

That's Christ culture, which, as you can probably infer, is counter-cultural. It goes against everything our world holds as valuable and strives for because it points away from us, from the individual, and it points to Christ. That's our culture!

Over these next few weeks, we're going to mine the depths of that culture. Jesus will paint for us the picture of what Christ culture is as we look at his interactions and listen to his teachings. In that, we'll compare different aspects of the world's culture and Christ's culture. It may lead to us having some, somewhat uncomfortable conversations (with issues like racism, real truth, sexuality, money, the

government, entitlement, and others). It may lead to some harsh but fair criticisms of practices or ideas we have that may not be fully in tune with God's Word. It may lead us to take walks to the cross with repentance in our hearts, yearning to hear that word of forgiveness from Jesus' lips.

But it'll also lead us to be more prepared to have valuable/worthwhile/effective conversations with people who are conforming to the pattern of the world...to understand where they're coming from but to refuse to condone sinful lifestyles or ideas or actions...and even more, to be ready and eager to share the love of Jesus with them and to let our lights shine as living sacrifices for God. That's Christ culture.

What a time to be alive! Culture, society, may not have changed all that much in the last 50 years...you could probably even take it back to the culture of Jesus' day and see it was the same. But we've changed. We've been transformed by Christ's loving sacrifice. We are continually being renewed by God's mercy and transformed by his power to be living sacrifices for God. That's Christ culture. And we're ready to live it! Amen.