

Romans 12:2

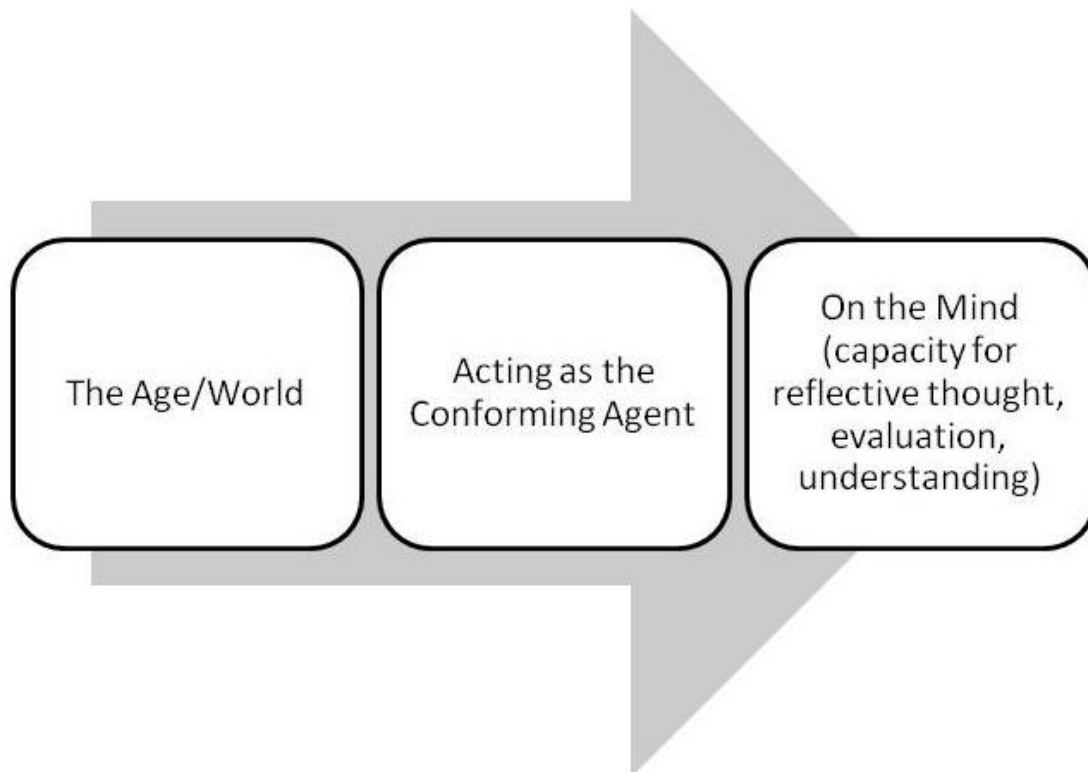
“What is it that impairs our walk with Lord and permits us to incline toward the world?”
We should understand two important truths:

1. The Nature of Conforming to the World

The command “do not be conformed” is an order to stop imitating the pose of the world. It has the sense of allowing your behavior to be influenced in such a way that you take on the form of the influencing agent. In this case, that agent is “*the world*,” a word indicating everything in this present fallen world system that is in conflict with the will of God (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Matt. 6:24).

Two Processes

1. Worldly Influence



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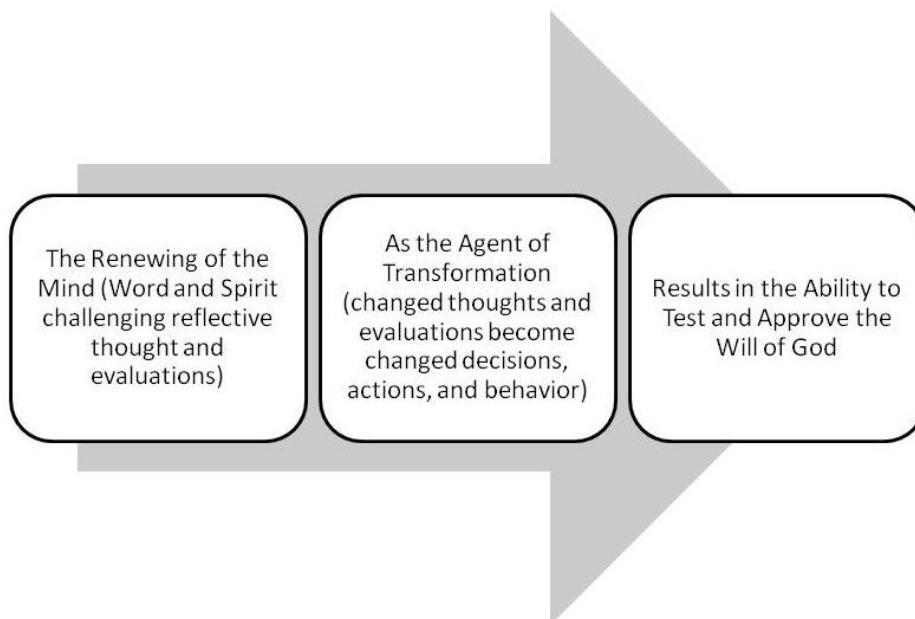
2. The Need of Transformation through the Renewing of the Mind

In contrast to worldly behavior, there is the need for a “metamorphosis.” The command to “*be transformed*” refers to change that effects our essential being. It is not what happens to me that must be permitted to alter my personality, but rather what happens in me. The manner of change is “*by the renewing of the mind,*” (more on this in a moment) the agent of change is the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5-9). So, let’s go back to our original inquiry. Is Paul merely warning believers against the dangers of worldly behavior? No. This is no mere warning.

This is an exposé on the self-inflicted damage we sustain by allowing ourselves to be influenced by the world. It is a charge to stop this destructive process that is engaged by the “*mind*” and involves the absorbing of thought patterns contrary to the revealed Word of God, and that become rooted in our personality, causing us to evaluate events wrongly and conform our behavior accordingly. It is not our behavior that Paul takes aim at here, but our thinking. The solution for Paul is to learn “right thinking” in order to choose “right behavior” so that we may experience “right feelings.”

Since human personality is a mystery to many of us, it is necessary to perform some exploratory surgery in order to better understand our thought process that lies at the base of all hope for that changes that will effect our transformation.

2. Influence of Renewal



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I. The Mind: Evaluation

We must understand that as created by God man possesses both material (body) and immaterial (spirit-soul) aspects to our being (1 Thess. 5:23). The “soul” may be thought of as the seat of personality that has the capacity for both higher and lower affections. The higher affections concern the “spirit” of man that when responding to the truth of God can relate to God. The “soul” relates to this world via the “body” through the lower affections.

The degree to which the believer is governed by either the higher or lower affections will depend on his/her concerted effort to stop the permissive influence of the world and start the process of transformation “*by the renewing of the mind.*” What is meant by the word “mind”?

A. Conscious Mind: The Court of Public Opinion

The word “mind” is *nous* in the Greek and has reference to reflective thought and a host of moral judgments that come from consciously evaluating the sequential events of day-to-day living. As such, the *nous* (or, conscious mind) acts like a personal “court of public opinion,” by which we interpret every event either positively, negatively, or indifferently. The “positive” or “negative” conclusions we draw are based upon:

1. Whether our mindset is oriented toward “deficit motivation” (every event either adds to my need bank, takes away from my need bank, or has nothing whatsoever to do with my need bank).

Imagine a husband and wife who both evaluate their relationship according to “deficit motivation.” What follows is a never ending series of attempts to change each other, or manipulate each other in order to have their “need bank” filled to capacity.

2. Whether our mindset is oriented toward “expression motivation,” a consideration of every event in terms of a Scriptural response aimed at expressing a functional and healthy Christian life (Rom. 12:9-13).

Imagine the same married couple in the same circumstances, but motivated not by personal needs, but by expression (Rom. 12:10).

There is another significant element that affects our ability to evaluate-interpret events:

B. Unconscious Mind: The Reservoir of Basic Assumptions

The “unconscious mind” is represented in the New Testament by the Greek word *phronema* (Rom. 8:5). The word refers to settled mindset that develops and holds on to

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deep assumptions (worldview). It is a “reservoir of basic assumptions” that people hold firmly and emotionally as to how their basic needs of significance and security will be met.

In Romans 8:5, the natural man (or the man unaided in His reason by the Spirit of God) is programmed by the notion that happiness, personal worth, and all good things in life depend on someone other than God. On the other hand, the spiritual man (the one whose reason is aided and programmed by the Spirit of God) possesses a set of core assumptions that are grounded in the truth of God’s Word regarding all things that pertain to life (Matt. 6:33). Therefore, there is...

1. The need is for a reality check to counter the “guiding fiction” by which we live our lives.

We draw from the “reservoir of basic assumptions” when an event occurs. This is what we truly believe at the core of our being. This is our interpretation of the event as it affects us in the moment. The interpretation becomes a “sentence” in our conscious mind, one that translates into either a positive, negative, or indifferent response, influencing our behavior and consequently our feelings.

If I believe my significance depends upon success in business, personal appearance, athletic ability, musical talent, job performance, parenting skills and I experience failure; how will I interpret this failure? If I am “deficit motivated,” I will take failure as being personally threatening (i.e., a disruption in the perception of who I am and ought to be). I will either:

- work harder to avoid failure;
- make excuses to protect my worth from further injury (mask), or
- retreat into depression and a crippling sense of worthlessness, secure in the fact that if I “pack it in,” at least I won’t fail again, or have to risk trying.

Some “wrong assumptions” that form our “guiding fiction” include:

- “I must be a financial success in order to be significant. Financial worth = personal worth.”
- “I must not be criticized if I am to be secure. Everyone must approve of me in everything I do.”
- “My security depends upon my spiritual maturity.”
- “My significance depends upon how successful my ministry is.”

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- “I must not fail (come short of some arbitrary standard of success, usually bordering on perfection) if I am to honestly regard myself as worthwhile.”

Imagine a husband, whose security is based upon success and positive reinforcement, being constructively-criticized by his wife. How will he respond? Or, imagine a wife who regards her significance according to her ability to maintain an orderly home, the first time her husband tracks mud across a freshly mopped kitchen floor. While he may be incredibly inconsiderate, if her personal worth is tied to an orderly home, he just tracked mud on her, not the kitchen floor.

2. The pain of self-discovery and the wall of resistance (Jn. 16:8).

The notion of “self-discovery” is how the experience of coming to terms with our “wrong assumptions” feels to us. It is a painful realization. For the believer, this takes the form of a “self-admission.” It is the Holy Spirit who “discovers” the truth of our “wrong assumptions” and exposes it in such a way that we become consciously aware that something is wrong. The word “convict” gives us the figure of someone being “cross-examined” for the purpose of refuting false testimony. It is then that we have the opportunity to respond, either “admitting” the truth of our “wrong assumption,” or “defending” our “wrong assumptions” to the point of “self-deception.”

Conclusion

It is not enough to merely “admit” the “wrong assumptions” that have guided our interpretation of circumstances, people, and events; we must replace them with “biblical truths” in order to live positively and productively as believers in this world.

1. The Bible says that believers “*we have the mind [nous] of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:16). This means that have a similar capacity for understanding spiritual truths as the Lord Jesus. This is a gift of God to aid our thinking in accordance with Scripture.
2. In addition to having the capacity for understanding “biblical truths,” believers have the direct involvement of the Lord Jesus in instructing them by His Spirit (Lk. 24:45; Acts 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:7; Jn. 16:13).
3. We are commanded to adjust our “basic assumptions” [*phronema*] according to those of the Lord Jesus Himself (Phil. 2:5).
4. The pattern of living for the believer who adopts “biblical truths” as the “basic assumptions” of life will be:

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- a. To use the Scripture when tempted to accept “assumptions” that are “worldly” (i.e., contrary to the promises and purposes of God), Matt. 4:4, 7, 10.
- b. To meditate on the Word of God as the means for drawing all that is necessary for the mind to prosper and withstand worldly attacks (Ps. 1:1-3).