

Escaping the World's Conformity: The Great Transition From Factual Information to Practical Application

By Jeff Copeland

The theme for the 2024 CPFI Annual Conference and National Student Retreat was "Transforming Pharmacy Through Spiritual and Professional Renewal" based upon Romans 12:2(b) – "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Let us explore this theme using a series of questions as we examine Romans 12:1-2: "Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect." (NET Bible translation, as are all Scripture references in this article).

What is the "Therefore" there for?

According to Merriam-Webster, the word "therefore" may be defined as "for that reason, because of that, on that ground, to that end." Of the 442 times the word "therefore" appears in Scripture (NIV), Romans 12:1 is one of the most important appearances. Its use indicates a shift in Paul's teaching – it's the pivotal word. In chapters 1-11 of Romans, the indicative verb mood is used to communicate facts in use. In chapters 12-16, the imperative verb mood is used to issue commands. The commands issued are based upon the facts communicated. In order to understand the applications of Romans chapters 12-15, we need to understand the facts of chapters 1-11.

Paul communicates his identity and purpose in Romans 1:1 – "From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." Our life is a service to a master:

righteous service to God or unrighteous service to sin. These options are communicated in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 6:13-14 – "You must revere the Lord your God, serve Him, and take oaths using only His name. You must not go after other gods, those of the surrounding peoples." and Joshua 24:14-15 – "Now obey the Lord and worship Him with integrity and loyalty. Put aside the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt and worship the Lord. If you have no desire to worship the Lord, choose today whom you will worship, whether it be the gods whom your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But I and my family will worship the Lord!" These options are also communicated in the New Testament, in Matthew 6:24 – "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." The 2 options (righteous service to God or unrighteous service to sin) are also communicated in Matthew 12:30 – "Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters" and virtually all of Romans chapter 6. The key verses in Romans are 1:16-17 which communicate Paul's reason for preaching the Gospel – "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, 'The righteous by faith will live.'"

What are the highlights of Romans 1-11?

The summary statement for Romans 1 is that sin condemns the unrighteous. In other words, sin condemns the "Do Badder." The primary passage is 1:18 – "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness." The result is communicated in 1:28 – "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what should not be done."

The summary statement for Romans 2 is that sin condemns the moralist; in other words, the "Do Gooder" and the Jew. The primary passage is 2:1 – "Therefore you are without excuse, whoever you are, when you judge someone else. For on whatever grounds you judge another, you condemn yourself, because you who judge practice the same things." The result is found in 2:11-12 – "For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law."

The summary statement for Romans 3 is that sin condemns the world, both Jew and Gentile. By using "all," Paul includes the entire human genetic profile. The bad news is that all are under the same condemnation. The primary passage is 3:23 – "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The good news is that all believers have the same justification. The result is in 3:30 – "Since God is one, He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Justification is a legal term whereby God legally declares a person

not guilty when the person is guilty.

The summary statement for Romans 4 is that justification is by faith alone. The primary passage is 4:3 – *“For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”* The result is found in 4:23-25 – *“But the statement it was credited to him was not written only for Abraham’s sake, but also for our sake, to whom it will be credited, those who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was given over because of our transgressions and was raised for the sake of our justification.”* For clarification, the book of Romans discusses faith apart from works saves... while the book of James discusses the faith that saves does not stand apart from works.

The summary statement for Romans 5 is that justification by faith results in eternal peace with God. The peace of Christianity is *“the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is.”* (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament). The primary passage is 5:1 – *“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The result is communicated in 5:19-21 – *“For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man many will be made righteous. Now the law came in so that the transgression may increase, but where sin increased, grace multiplied all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The summary statement for Romans 6 is that the believer is free from sin’s domination. The primary passage is 6:10-11 – *“For the death He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life He lives, He lives to God. So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* The result

is 6:12-14 – *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness. For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace.”* We are no longer sin’s slave (the worst position), but now we are in the honored position of being God’s slave (the best position). Heroes of the faith referred to as God’s slave/servant are Moses (Joshua 14:7), David (Psalm 89:3), Elijah (2 Kings 10:10), and Paul (Romans 1:1).

The summary statement for Romans 7 is that although the believer is free from the law, the believer still sins. The primary passage is 7:6 – *“But now we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code.”* The result is found in 7:21-25 – *“So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. But I see a different law in my members waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”*

The summary statement for Romans 8 is that the believer, free from sin’s condemnation, fully justified, and eternally secure in God’s love, escapes the world’s conformity by living according to the Holy Spirit’s leading. The primary passage is 8:27 – *“And He [God] who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God’s will.”* The result is communicated in 8:12-17 – *“So then, brothers and sisters, we are under*

obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh (for if you live according to the flesh, you will die), but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if indeed we suffer with Him so we may also be glorified with Him.”

The summary statement for Romans 9 is that although Israel is God’s chosen people and had every advantage, many erroneously pursued righteousness by works rather than by faith. The primary passage is 9:32b – *“Because they [Israel] pursued it [righteousness] not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works.”* The result is located in 9:32c-33 – *“They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, ‘Look, I am laying in Zion a stone that will cause people to stumble and a rock that will make them fall, yet the one who believes in him will not be put to shame.’”*

The summary statement for Romans 10 is that salvation is available to both the Jew and Greek by faith. Recall from Romans 3 that sin condemns both Jew and Greek. In Romans 10, we read that salvation is available to both Jew and Greek. So, regardless of a person’s genetic profile, salvation is available. The primary passage is 10:1-4 – *“Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation. For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth. For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for everyone who believes.”* The result is in

10:18-21 – “But I ask, have they not heard? Yes, they have: Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. But again I ask, didn’t Israel understand? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous by those who are not a nation; with a senseless nation I will provoke you to anger.’ And Isaiah is even bold enough to say, ‘I was found by those who did not seek me; I became well known to those who did not ask for me.’ But about Israel he says, ‘All day long I held out my hands to this disobedient and stubborn people!’”

The summary statement for Romans 11 is that during Israel’s temporary and partial rejection of God, Gentiles are entering God’s family by grace resulting in Israel’s jealousy, leading to their future return to God. The primary passage is 11:5-6 – “So in the same way at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” The result may be seen in 11:11 – “I ask then, they [Israel] did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous” and also in 11:25 – “For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”

How may “therefore” be interpreted in light of Romans 1-11?

“Therefore” serves as the great transition from factual information to practical application. In order to better explain the “therefore” in Romans 12:1, an interpretive translation is proposed – “Because sin condemns all rendering all fully incapable of justifying ourselves, God mercifully provides eternal peace with Him by grace through faith freeing believers from sin’s and the law’s domination over us and enables us to escape the world’s conformity by living according to the Holy Spirit’s leading, I exhort you, brothers and

sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable service.”

What are some practical applications of Romans 12:1?

Based upon the facts, we have an action to take. In other words, our faith is to be put into action. In Paul’s words, this faith in action is our “reasonable service.” After all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us, surely our only reasonable response is that we serve Him. “Reasonable” indicates a careful, detailed, thoughtful conclusion. Paul made it clear that this service is not an attempt to earn justification by works. This service is an outworking of our justification.

We are to give a sacrifice to God. A “sacrifice” by its very nature is costly. The giver offers something of value to the receiver. The giver determines if a gift will be made, the item to be gifted, and who receives the gift. The receiver determines if the gift will be received or rejected. The Lord Jesus discusses the cost of sacrifice in Luke 9:23-26 – “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone wants to become My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’”

Paul says we need to “present your bodies as a sacrifice.” Therefore, our entire being is the sacrifice – “bodies.” Everything that I am, on the outside and the inside, is to be a sacrifice to the Lord. Jesus states that we are to “Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength” (Mark 12:30). Paul informs us that “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you

have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.” (1 Cor 6:19-20) and “Indeed, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all things.” (Rom 8:32). It is only reasonable that we give God everything.

Our sacrifice is described as alive, holy, and pleasing to God. Rather than the dead animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, we are to be live sacrifices that are ongoing, continual offerings. An old saying attributed to D.L. Moody highlights the challenge: “The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.” This living sacrifice is to be holy. Holy is understood as being separated from all that is sinful while also being fully dedicated to God. Old Testament sacrifices were to be “without defect” for animal sacrifices, and “without leaven” for grain sacrifices. This living, holy sacrifice is to be “pleasing to God.” If it is pleasing to Him, then it is accepted by Him. Throughout Leviticus, we read that burnt, grain, and peace offerings were a gift of a “soothing aroma” to God. A self-administered sniff test may be in order. If we are living with a transformed mind, we are a soothing aroma to God. If we are living conformed to this world, we smell putrid. Our sacrifice is to be presented to God, as instructed in Romans 6:13 – “Do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness” and in Romans 6:19 – “For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”

What are some practical applications of Romans 12:2?

Romans 12:2 states, “Do not be

conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.”

A brief technical analysis of “do not be conformed” and “be transformed” is in order. The voice of the verb indicates how the subject relates to the action. For the active voice, the subject does the action. For the passive voice, the subject is acted upon or receives the action. For the middle voice, the subject does the action and receives the action. Both verbs are in the passive voice. A subcategory of the passive voice is the causative / permissive passive. This subcategory implies consent, permission, or cause of the action of the verb on part of the subject. Typically, these verbs are used as imperatives (commands). Based upon applying this analysis to “do not be conformed to this present world.”, we are commanded not to grant permission to or allow this world’s ungodly system to mold our moral thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and character to the values of this world system we live in, which is under Satan’s dominion. Based upon applying this analysis to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”, we are commanded to continually allow our moral thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and character to be changed in accordance with truth by the renovation of our ability to understand, discern good from evil, and make proper decisions by the transforming power of God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. Complementary passages include Romans 8:5 – “For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh [conforming to this world], but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit.” [transformation by the renewing of the mind]. Other complementary passages include John 17:17 (“Set them apart in the truth; Your Word is truth.”), 2 Corinthians 3:18 (“And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are

being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”), and Colossians 1:9-12 (“For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please Him in all respects – bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light.”). Such actions permit us to “test and approve” (understood as examining or scrutinizing something to determine that it is genuine and may be used) “what is the will of God” (how God desires us to act and what God desires us to do as we participate in His plans) and “what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.” “Good” refers to what is morally right; “pleasing” refers to what is acceptable to God granting satisfaction; and “perfect” refers to what is complete, lacking in nothing required to bring about our conformity to Christ’s moral character.

What are the practical applications of Romans 12:3 – 15:13?

Paul continues the practical applications for believers by describing the believer’s conduct in humility (12:3-8), conduct in love (12:9-21), submission to governmental authority (13:1-7), love debt to others (13:8-10), conduct during urgent times (13:11-14), and conduct with other believers holding differing convictions (14:1-15:21).

Conclusion

We are in a partnership with God. After all, a partnership is a relationship. God does the wooing and we do the coming. God does the calling and we do the responding. God does the leading and we do the following. God does the commanding and we do the

obeying. We cannot properly respond to God apart from the Holy Spirit. This is a God-centric partnership. God does the saving, justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying. Our salvation is God’s work. Our desire to serve God is God’s work. Our understanding of God and His ways and desires is God’s work. Our desire to study His Word is God’s work. Our desire to witness to others is God’s work. Our desire to meet together as believers is God’s work. Our desire to pray is God’s work. Our desire to sing unto the Lord is God’s work. Everything is God’s work, so we must give all the glory and praise to Him. Therefore, the best way to escape the world’s conformity is by achieving the great transition from factual information to practical application of God’s instructions.



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