

## **“Transforming People” Romans 12.1-2**

Did you know: This month, almost 2 million first-year students will head off to college campuses around the country. Most of them will be about 18 years old, born in 1990 when headlines sounded oddly familiar to those of today: Rising fuel costs were causing airlines to cut staff and flight schedules; Big Three car companies were facing declining sales and profits; and the president was increasing the number of troops in the Middle East in the hopes of securing peace. However, the mindset of this new generation of college students is quite different from that of the faculty about to prepare them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Did you know: The class of 2012 has grown up in an era where computers and rapid communication are the norm. These students will hardly recognize the availability of telephones in their rooms since they have seldom utilized landlines during their adolescence. They will continue to live on their cell phones and communicate via texting. Roommates, few of whom have ever shared a bedroom, have already checked out each other on Facebook where they have shared their most personal thoughts with the whole world.

It is a multicultural, politically correct and “green” generation that has hardly noticed the threats to their privacy and has never feared the Russians. GPS satellite navigation systems have always been available. Coke and Pepsi have always used recycled plastic bottles. Gas stations have never fixed flats, but most serve cappuccino. Electronic filing of tax returns has always been an option. WWW has never stood for World Wide Wrestling. The Warsaw Pact is as hazy for them as the League of Nations was for their parents. Clarence Thomas has always sat on the Supreme Court. Wayne Newton has never had a mustache. In fact: Who’s Wayne Newton? IBM has never made typewriters. McDonald’s and Burger King have always used vegetable oil. They have never been able to color a tree using a raw umber Crayola. The Tonight Show has always been hosted by Jay Leno. They played with Nintendo Game Boys in the crib. Authorities have always been building a wall along the Mexican border. Lenin’s name has never been on a major city in Russia. Macaulay Culkin has always been *Home Alone*.

Caller ID has always been available. The Green Bay Packers (almost) always had the same starting quarterback. Soft drink refills have always been free. The Hubble Space Telescope has always been eavesdropping on the heavens. 98.6 F or otherwise has always been confirmed in the ear. Off-shore oil drilling in the United States has always been prohibited. Radio stations have never been required to present both sides of public issues. There have always been charter schools. And students always had *Goosebumps*.

From this *Beloit College Mindset List* we are reminded that the days, years and times are rich with change—whether we like it or not! I'd like to focus on our graduates today, with collateral thoughts for all of God's people.

First we need to define transformation. Transformation: 1 a: to change in composition or structure (water to ice) b: to change the outward form or appearance of (the makeover) c: to change in character or condition (the most difficult but the most true transformation). It is the last area, character or condition, that God has specific plans for His children.

Where do we start in the transformation process? I would like to share with you my three C's of transformation or change. The first is to be Controlled. Being controlled begins with a Renewal of the mind—just when you thought you had enough of high school! This is about the education you are about to receive now that you've taken one step closer to adulthood, and most of it takes place outside of the classroom. You are about to be bombarded from all sides regarding your social life, and participating in everything the world holds important to growing up and experiencing life. God has called you to be a person who transforms society by being a person in the world and not of it. Paul encourages us in not conforming to the pattern of the world that awaits.

How do we do this? How do we stay controlled when everyone around us says, “Let go! It’s your time!” Paul helps us think this through in chapter 12. In verse 3 and onward he suggests having sober judgment about your life, God’s grace and passion for your place within the Body of Christ, and then staying busy practicing your spiritual gifts and serving.

Paul is introducing a new thought to the religious people of his day. To those people a sacrifice was dead. It was given with a specific intent, lifted up to God, and then the ram/goat/animal was killed. Paul brings the idea of a living sacrifice to the people which we preach today—to live for God is to put to death the yearnings of the flesh and the temptations of this earthly life and live in His Spirit. *1 Thessalonians 4; <sup>1</sup>Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. <sup>2</sup>For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup>It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup>that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup>not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup>and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. <sup>7</sup>For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

In Galatians 5 we discover what life in the Spirit brings; *<sup>16</sup>So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. <sup>19</sup>The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, sexual licentiousness, and the like (that sounds like a college campus!). I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit*

*the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control.*

We can only be people of transformation by offering ourselves as living sacrifices to God, putting on His spirit and allowing Him to control us.

### **The second C is to be content.**

What are the marks of contentment: happiness with one's situation in life, emotions experienced when in a state of well-being, the contentment one feels when one has fulfilled a desire, need, or expectation. Mark Twain writes in Tom Sawyer,

“When the last crisp slice of bacon was gone, and the last allowance of corn pone devoured, the boys stretched themselves out on the grass, filled with contentment.

Doesn't that just sum it up?

In From Clutter to Clarity: Simplifying Life from the Inside Out 2007, Nancy Twigg writes: For many years, I was able to think of contentment only in terms of material possessions. During that time, if you asked me why people are not content, my automatic answer was, "Because they want more and more stuff without appreciating what they already have." Unfortunately, my canned response didn't bring me much comfort as I worked through my own issues with contentment. I never struggled with wanting a larger home or fancier car or designer labels in my closet. My challenge was fretting over whether our lives would work out the way I thought they should. My husband, Michael and I both were raised with the belief that if you work hard and stay out of trouble, you will get ahead in life. As good as this notion sounds, unfortunately it has not always been our experience in real life. When we left our jobs a decade ago to begin working for ourselves, our businesses grew slowly despite all our hard work. Michael studied for years to get a PhD but has not able to consistently find work in his area of specialization. We suffered several other setbacks beyond our control. On many occasions, I complained to God, "Why is life so hard sometimes?" In the same way, your contentment

issues may have nothing to do with material possessions but rather with circumstances challenging situations in life that haven't improved despite your best efforts. Although we hope and pray for healing from illnesses or resolution for difficult conflicts, the reality is, these prayers are not always answered as we hope. Contentment means running the race when things are going well and continuing to run even when they are not.

The attributes listed in Romans 12 are only revealed in the contented life! Paul encourages us in 1 Th. 4:11; *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.* He speaks from personal experience about contentment in Philippians 4.11-12; *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* <sup>12</sup>*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* <sup>13</sup>*I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

Paul learned from his own recession, what has the recession taught us? The thought that we have just what we need is widespread. We've re-evaluated and are learning to live content! Contentment spills over. Some may ask, "How can I become content?" We begin by **allowing God's transforming power to move in and give us peace.** If you ask God for help being content—he will grant it, and others will notice. Hebrews 13.5 says, *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."* That is a promise! Have we allowed Him to rearrange our priorities, to restructure and change our lives as He would have them? As this happens, others take note. It is the contented soul that **effects lasting change on others.** This is lifted up in Proverbs 15.15, *"All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast."* It is the cheerful heart that transforms the world, cheer comes with contentment.

### **The third C is to be convinced.**

What are the marks of conviction: Confidence, purpose, clarity, resolve, passion, bold speech, unwavering determination, and fortitude. Who are some people who were convinced: Paul in most of the N.T., Peter in Acts, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Abe Lincoln, Rosa Parks, 1985 Chicago Bears, Michael Jordan (after this it's a bit fuzzy as to who is really convinced in these uncertain times).

To be agents of change in an uncertain world we have to be convinced that **Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow** (Hb. 13:8). Our lives have got to reflect a Christ-like transformation that speaks clearly to the confidence we have in Him. The Psalmist writes in 52:8; *"But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever."* Paul writes in Romans 8.28; *"And we know that in **all things God works for the good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* And he declared to Timothy (2 Timothy 1.12); *"That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."*

**Why should we live this way?** So that (verse 2) *you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Did you know that His pleasing will also pleases us! Psalm 40; *"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."* Psalm 143.10; *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."* Hebrews 13:15-16,20-21; *15Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.* I John 3.23-24; *"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he*

*gave us.* When our thoughts and actions are aimed at knowing His will—He is pleased and the Spirit within us is pleased. But that has to be the definition of our lives!

Kent Crockett writes in *Making Today Count for Eternity*; “We have let the world define greatness for us. Our society has built itself on the philosophy of the devil instead of on the wisdom of God. As long as we believe Satan’s big lie that our lives are insignificant unless we are on top, we will live in constant state of dejection, worthlessness, and strife. To overcome this incorrect way of thinking, we must change audiences. Which audience are we trying to please: people in this world, or God in heaven?”

If we’re going to be transforming (convincing) people we have to live life sold out to pleasing God for this is His will for us! His pleasing will leads to His perfect will: **1) Saved souls singing in the Heavenly Kingdom!** 2 Peter 3.9 says; “*The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” The heavenly audience is alluded to in Hebrews 12.1; “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*” Luke 15.7; “*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*” Saved souls singing in the Heavenly Kingdom...

And **2) Saved souls servicing in the earthly kingdom.** Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew 20:25-26; “*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,<sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave<sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Saved souls singing in the Heavenly Kingdom, and saved souls servicing in the earthly kingdom; *this* is God’s pleasing and perfect will for us! If we devote ourselves to this we ultimately help in the transformation of others and this is His good will; *that others may know*—not necessarily from what we say but more from what we do!

Writer Claudia Mindes Weinze puts it this way in a conversation entitled:

And God Said “NO”

I asked God to take away my pride and God said, “No.” He said it was not for Him to take away, but for me to give up.

I asked God to may my handicapped child whole, and God said, “No.” He said her spirit is whole, her body is only temporary.

I asked God for patience, and again, God said, “No.” He said patience is a byproduct of tribulation, and it isn’t granted but earned.

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, “No.” He said He gives me blessings, and that happiness is up to me.

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, “No.” He said suffering draws you apart from earthly cares and us closer to Him.

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, “No.” He said I must grow on my own, but He would prune me to make me fruitful.

I asked God if He loved me. And God said, “Yes.” That He gave His only Son who died for me and I will be in heaven someday because I believe.

I asked God to help me love others as much as He loves me, and God said, “Ah! Finally you have the idea.”

*Closer:* Graduates, and people of God: the world is counting on you to let God’s love and power transform you to go and do likewise. Closing prayer.