

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
October 29, 2017

Always New

Romans 12:2

12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1. The Reformation

On October 31st, the day before All Saints Day, Martin Luther posted “95 Thesis” on the door of castle church in Wittenberg, and this became the beginning of Reformation. It was 1517; therefore, this year is 500 year anniversary. Consequently, there are so many events and ceremonies all over the world to celebrate the 500 year anniversary of Reformation.

Any kinds of organizations, they will have various corruptions over decades. The churches were not exceptions. In Luther’s time, the positions in churches were sold, and you could buy it if you pay the money. There were some protesting voice of “reformation” before Luther. The Reformation changed the existing system, and also created the totally new system. That was the Protestant churches which have various kinds of organizational systems such as bishop system (episcopal), elder system (presbyterian), and congregational system. However, the goal of the Reformation was not to change the system. If it was just institutional change, it would not name the

reformation of “religion (faith).” The goal was returning to the gospel that Lord Jesus taught and the apostles proclaimed, and recovering the true faith rooted in the Word of God with pure and passionate attitude. The “Reformation” was not outside and systematic change, but it was the spiritual change in faith.

Because of that, we should not stop the Reformation at 500 years ago. We should be a continuing reformation. What if the Protestant churches believe “Our church is reformed church” and do not check their faith and spirituality on them through the Word of God? Their faith will become lukewarm, and the church will be more secular, and they will stay away from the teaching of the Bible. No “perfect church” exists on earth. Every single church needs to be reformed in faith and spirituality.

When I say “church,” I mean “believers” who are bound to the body of Christ by true faith and baptism. Therefore, you can convert “church” to “Christians” or “me who were baptized.” Please listen this message personally. Unless each member of the church changes, the church will never change. True reformation is not the change of the organizational system, but the change inside of each Christian.

2. Influence From the World

Then, what and how should today’s churches and Christians make a change? We should change the way we feel, think, and act that are influenced by worldly values. We have to be cleansed and changed so that we can live our life following God’s will.

Christians were saved from this world and became citizens of heaven. We are here on the earth until we get to heaven, but we have

to live our life according to the rule of God's Kingdom, not by the rule of this world. Christians who were allowed to have a citizenship in heaven should begin to live their lives by the heaven's rule, not when we get there but when we live in this world.

To follow the heaven's rule does not mean to ignore the rule of this society. Instead, we adhere to the social rule with a higher standard by acting with true love from Christ and following God's will. No matter what, Christians must work with honesty and become good neighbors as well as good citizens. Christians have to testify Christ and show the Kingdom of God through good life.

But this world is not the place where Christians should be deeply rooted. This world, even though it is getting closer to the day before Flood in the era of Noah, is still maintained by God's mercy and Christian's testimonies and prayers. America has not yet become like Sodom and Gomorraa just prior to the destruction. There are still ten righteous men. But you have to be careful. Even though there are so many good things, the principle of the world is based on denying God and putting human first. Many people follow this principle of the world, which is "there is no God, the center of the world is me". Even those who believe God sometimes live as if there was no God in their real life. Often the case, they follow their own ideas and opinions rather than following God's words and they become "the master" of themselves.

God's children do live in the world, but not according the world. If they don't sincerely repent and grow in their faith of believing in Jesus Christ, they cannot get rid of the old thinking and keep following the earthy rules. Especially, in the present era of the

Internet, there are so many information indiscriminately coming from this world. The worse thing is that they are often biased. SNS is convenient to keep interactions with your friends, but it puts you in a closed echo-chamber where you only listen to the people who share similar philosophy, and prevent you from hearing different opinions and deepening your thoughts. Just like you tend to buy something you have previously seen on commercial messages, the influence of this world is quite big. We unconsciously receive the message appealing that “there is no God, human is the best”. Even if we are Christians, we sometimes follow the the principles of the world and live our life according to the pattern of the world. There are many teachings look like a “Christian” from the outside, but the inside may insist “human first”. So, we have to be cautious.

3. Asking for His Presence

So, how and what should we do to live in the world and yet not to be swallowed by the world. The Bible teaches, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” In this sentence you see a verb, “be conformed to.” In the original language, the verb can be translated into “be shaped by”, and “live after the pattern of”, as well as “be conformed to.” We were “children of the world” until we were born again as “children of God,” and were shaped by the principles and rules of the world, and lived according the pattern of life which expelled God. Therefore, we have to be transformed and live according the pattern which God designed.

In this verse you see the contrast between “be conformed” and “be transformed.” The verb, “conform,” meas that we become the same

form of the world, but another verb, “transform,” means that we become the different form to the world. English word, “metamorphosis” came from this word. “Metamorphosis” is the process butterflies become egg to caterpillar, caterpillar to pupa, and pupa to adult. They change themselves in the process of growth. The Bible use the word that shows such a big change, for transforming of Christians. Christians have already transformed to become children of God through born-again, but they should continue to be transformed to Christ-likeness, like children become alike to their siblings and parents as they grow. We call this process “sanctification” or “holiness.” The Bible teaches that born-again Christian should walks in holiness, by saying, “God transformed you to the new creature. Don’t go back to the old life. Do not conform to the world, but continue to be transformed to Christ-likeness.”

This transformation is brought by the renewal of mind, as the verse says, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” The word, “mind” means “reason” or “intellect.” in original language. To believe in God does not mean to deny “reason” or “intellect.” On the contrary, human intelligence becomes clear and it works properly by faith. “The renewal of mind” does not mean changing our mood. It means changing the way of thinking. In another word, it is to change the world view, philosophy of life, and value system. Unless we change way of thinking, we cannot change our feelings and actions. Though you are moved by the teachings of the Bible and change life a little, they just make you a little good and religious. Such change does not last long. As long as the old value system that you had since you were non-Christians, dwells in your mind, you cannot be transformed to the

true good.

When I was in Japan, there was a person who always said, “This is my fate that this bad thing happened.” in our church. I answered to the person, saying, “We cannot understand everything happens in our life. But, the happenings of life did not come to us by fate. They came to us by the will of God. Romans 8:28 says, ‘And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according his purpose.’ Those who love God and are loved by God are not submit themselves to fate, but are led by the God of love.” We learn about creation and providence through Sunday messages. The person gradually understand the truth, and were released from old world view and philosophy of life. The person changed the attitude to life and the daily life and human relationship was much improved. The person grow in Christian character.

“The God of love leads me and the world.” If this truth becomes the starting point and base of our way of thinking, we never loose the meaning and purpose of our life. We never give up our life. We will become compassionate with those who are wounded in their feelings and have sufferings. We will be careful in our speech and action for others’ benefits. We will have courage and confidence to do right things without fear or intimidation. We will be saved from inferiority or superiority feeling which comes from comparing ourselves to others. We will be healed the wounds of heart by forgiven sins and mistakes. When the way of thinking and feeling change, our speech and action will change, then the change of daily action will bring the change of life.

Romans 12:2 also says, “You may discern what is the will of God,

what is good and acceptable and perfect.” You can find “the will of God” and all of “ what is good and acceptable and perfect” will be found in the Bible. The Word of God gives us “the renewal of mind.” And, by the renewal of mind, we will be transformed to the grown form of God’s children more and more. The Reformation aimed this transformation. And this transformation is not one time change. We see it in our daily life, and confirm at the weekly worship service, and affirm at monthly Lord’s Supper. This continuing transformation is our Reformation.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, You saved those who believed in Jesus Christ from sin, death, and the world. You made us children of God, and are transforming us to Christ-likeness. We wish to keep this transformation by the renewal of our mind. Lord, renew our mind through the Word of God and help us to experience the grace and power of the transformation. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.