

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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God Has Called Us To Be A Transformed Community

by Dan Trygg

"I invite y'all, brothers [and sisters], by means of the mercies of the God to offer the bodies of y'all [a] living sacrifice, ...dedicated, well-pleasing to the God, ...the logical religious-service of y'all; and do not be-outwardly-shaped-together-with this age/do not assimilate (for yourselves) to this age, rather be transfigured/radically-change-(for yourselves)-your-form by the renewal/remaking of the perception unto (for the purpose or direction of) y'all to test-out-by-trial what [is] the desire/will of the God, ... the [thing] good/profitable and well-pleasing and fully-grown/complete/mature.

"For I say to y'all, by means of the grace given (at a point in time) to me, ...to every individual being among y'all..., not to think beyond what it is necessary to think, rather to think unto/toward the to-think-soundly, ...to each one as the God has distributed/portioned-out a specific portion/a limited measure of faith. For even as in one body we have many limbs/parts, but all the limbs/parts do not have the same function, in the same way the many [individuals] we are one body in Christ, but the according to each one [we are] members of one another.

"But having gifts according to the differing grace given (at a point in time) to us: whether prophecy, according to the right-relation/proportion of the faith [he/she has been given]; whether service, in the service; whether the (one) teaching, in the teaching; whether the (one) coming-alongside-to-help, in the coming-alongside-to-help; the (one) giving, in simplicity/singleness; the (one) standing-before, in earnestness; the (one) expressing-mercy, with joyfulness. (Romans 12:1-8, a primitive translation.)

From verses 1-2: "I urge y'all ...to present the bodies of y'all (plural) a living sacrifice (singular)"

1. We have a corporate calling -- These verses are talking about the body, not primarily about individuals. The use of the plural form of you ("y'all") means that Paul was speaking to them as a group, not just as private persons in pursuit of spirituality. Paul has in mind not just the personal pilgrimage, but the development of a larger organism, with its own larger identity and calling.

2. Without our individual commitment, the corporate ministry God intends will not take place. Note that he urges them to devote their individual bodies ("bodies [pl.] of y'all [pl.]") toward this end, so that together they might become a single living sacrifice, a body of believers choosing to give themselves in joint service to God. He did *not* say, "Present your bodies as living sacrifices." That would have kept them focused on their individual devotion and pilgrimage. By asking them to offer their bodies to become a single living sacrifice, he brings up the reality that without individual commitment to the corporate organism, and God's intended plan for it, the power and effectiveness of that larger team will be undermined. Without commitment to the team effort, there will *be* no team effort, no team ministry. God has a *team* agenda, a ministry that can only be accomplished on a team level. We must recognize that, and be willing to present ourselves to serve God at this level.

"Don't be shaped (or shape yourselves) by this age"

**3. Watch out for pressures,
programming,
and preconceptions.**

We must recognize up front that we Christians are *not* to follow our culture's expectations and methodology. We are supposed to be different. The Greek is actually capable of being understood in two very different ways here. The verb "don't be shaped by" or, "don't be conformed" is typically rendered as though it were in the passive voice, i.e., the subject is being acted upon by pressures of this age to squeeze him or her into a mold. The same form could be understood as a middle voice. In this case, the subject is doing the action to or for him/herself, or the action affects him/her in some way. The option offered in the parentheses above reflects a middle voice rendering. This translation recognizes that there is a strong pressure to conform ourselves to the

world around us. *We* make the choice to do what is expected of us, what is rewarded by our peers, or by society. We are not just unwittingly shaped, we also adapt ourselves to fit in order to be accepted. In order to forestall this process, we must first become aware of its relentless influence, and begin to resist being unconsciously compliant to its suggestions. We must take responsibility for our own lives, and begin to evaluate what we do. "Does this attitude, or behavior, come from the values of this age, or does it reflect the kingdom of God?"

When you stop and think of it, you begin to see how much we are taught to simply comply, to conform to accepted rules of conduct. From the time we were little children we have been schooled to sit still, to be quiet, to not question authority, to do as we are told. Some of this is necessary in order for society to function, but part of it can easily become unhealthy, controlling and manipulative. Conformity is the great enemy of our individuality. Furthermore, the agenda of the "god of this age" (II Cor. 4:4; cf. Eph. 2:1,2) is to steal, kill, and destroy whatever he can of our God-like-ness (cf. Jn. 10:10). Any way that he can oppose us, or defraud us, of our potential for Christlike maturity will be implemented to keep us from becoming a threat to his dominion. Once we become aware of his manipulations, and his agenda, we can begin to take initiative to *evaluate* and *resist* the propaganda and pressures meant to keep us under wraps.

It is sad to say that in many ways the church has utilized the same kind of "conforming dynamic" to enforce its own culture. The problem with this is that it keeps us immature. We give others the power to decide what God's will for us is to be. We are not required to develop a relationship with God ourselves, nor is it necessary for us to become wise and discerning in our own right. We give others the authority that really was intended to belong to us. This not only stunts our own personal growth, but a "conformity dynamic" clearly would, by definition, run counter to the diversity which is inherent to body-life and the kingdom of God (I Cor. 12; Eph. 3:10).

"radically-change (for yourselves) your form"

4. Pursue transformation -- We are to be proactive, self-involved participants in the process of change.

I have chosen to reflect the middle voice option in my translation of the Greek here. I believe it more accurately reflects the reality of what must take place. We are not just passively transformed. Even to say, "be transformed" is almost non-sensical. Are we being changed by some outside force? If so, why am I commanded to "be transformed"? If my will is part of this equation, shouldn't this be reflected in the translation? The middle voice indicates that I am doing the action to or for myself. I am either intensely involved in the action, or in some way changed or limited by it. Doesn't that really reflect a more accurate picture? I am not magically changed. There is some choice made on my side. Otherwise, would not God be responsible for my lack of growth, my lack of maturity? No, it is not God's fault. We must understand that transformation does not "just happen" to us. It is a process that requires our involvement, our conscious effort, and the investment of time and energy.

"by the renewal of the mind/perception/worldview"

5. The point of attack is our perception of reality --

Change will come from the inside-out, as we see and respond to life differently.

The Greek word, often translated simply as "mind", describes more the faculty of perception, or one's outlook of the world, not just one's intellect. It is important to see that it is not just about knowing facts, or memorizing Bible verses. The root of the word translated "renew" means to make something of an entirely new quality, of an unused, unheard of, unknown character. In other words, we are to train our faculty of perception to function in an entirely different manner. We are to come to perceive and process reality in a way that we have never experienced before. This root is prefixed by a preposition that communicates repetitive, habitual

action. This tells us that this is an ongoing, lifelong process, an attitude of learning and seeking that continually is open to growth and a clearer perception of life. As we see life differently, we ourselves will begin to respond to what we see, and we will be changed from the inside-out. The word for transformation also means to change to a completely different form. It is not merely about controlling outer behavior, e.g., restricting sinful desires by force of will. It refers to being different through and through, e.g. to no longer have those sinful desires, but to truly have godly ones. Thus the transformed person can simply be him/herself, because he/she truly does want what God wants.

"unto y'all to test-out-by-trial/discover-by-experimentation ...the desire of God"

6. The discovery of God's will is an active process, not just "Book learning".

It will involve an ongoing process of assessment, sharing ideas, taking risks, and *making mistakes* in order to find out what works and what it is that God wants us as a body to be doing.

The word translated as "you might prove" in the NASB does not mean to intellectually prove, as in building a theological case for something. It is the Greek word dokimazo, which means to test-out-by-trial, to-discover-by-experimentation. The "will of God" is not about God's prescriptive moral will, but rather refers to God's situational desire for us in our context. Remember, this passage is written to a group of people in Rome. The thing they are to be looking for is, "What does God want for us to do?" This is discovered through a trial-and-error process, a process fraught with stumblings, frustrations, mistakes, and dead ends. It is very much like a child learning to walk. It is impossible to learn this skill without making attempts, and thus discovering what works and what does not. God does not expect that we will get it right on the first try. In fact, the mistakes and errors are as much a part of the learning process as the successes. Every attempt stands for progress, if we can learn from our mistakes. Cf. Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10.

"the good/beneficial/profitable, well pleasing/pleasant, and mature/fully-grown"

7. The will of God is ultimately to be a "good-news thing" to us, and will develop *over time*.

The rendering of the text in most translations (e.g., "to prove the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" -- NASB) tends to support the impression that we are to intellectually prove out from Scripture what the moral, prescriptive will of God. This is comprised by the things that are good in God's sight, acceptable to Him, and which meet His standard of perfect righteousness. His moral will is absolute and timeless, since He does not change His standards.

I believe this kind of interpretation is exactly *backwards* of what was really intended by Paul. I think he intended the Roman Christians to discover-by-experimentation the desire of God *for them as a group*, in their particular time-and-place setting. ***God's desire will be learned through active experimentation.*** The reason for pursuing a knowledge of God's desire for them is not just from a sense of obedience or obligation. It also comes from the fact that God, as a loving Father, wants what is best *for them*. His desire will be what is beneficial and well-pleasing *to them*. It will also be mature, because God, as Father, desires them to grow up and develop more skills and perspective over time, and through experience. The use of this word also implies a process of growth, change and development moving toward a culmination, or end point of skill or fruitfulness. From this perspective, discovering God's desire is not a duty, but a growth adventure.