



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

It's Always Time for Change

Romans 12.1-2

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Introduction

1. "It's always time for change." I suspect that title has prompted different responses, not merely because of the word "always", but also because of the word "change."
 - a. Some embrace change: "If your religion does not change you, then you should change your religion" (Elbert Hubbard).¹
 - b. Others see no good in it: "Any change at any time for any reason is to be deplored" (The Duke of Cambridge).²
 - c. Most are somewhere in between, recognizing that our steady routines make life manageable, but also knowing that our habits can trap us into hurtful ruts.
2. But, even with a balanced view of change, why add the word "always"? Because it's what Paul said in Romans 12.2
 - a. Every definition of "transform" begins with the word "change."³
 - b. Paul used command language in the present tense; v. 2 could be translated, "keep being transformed," or, "always be transformed [changed]." Paul's intention in this context supports this understanding.
 - c. Obviously, we need to understand what Paul meant and the implications for us.

Body

I. Challenge.

A. Paul used the language of the altar to refer to the entirety of life.

1. He used words that had been typically used to refer to sacrifices in the performance of religious rituals.
 - a) It's most obvious in the word "sacrifice" (θυσία, *thusia*) (e.g., Matt 9.13; Luke 2.24; Heb 5.1; 7.27; 8.3; 9.9, 23, 26; 10.1, 5, 8, 11, 12, 26).

¹ Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 141.

² Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 37.

³ From a standard English dictionary: "1. to change in form, appearance, or structure; metamorphose. 2. to change in condition, nature, or character; convert. 3. to change into another substance; transmute." transform. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/transform> (accessed: July 11, 2013).

- b) But, the word "present" (παρίστημι, *paristēmi*) was also sometimes used in a sacrificial sense (cf. Luke 2.22).
- 2. Paul labels the kind of sacrifice he has in mind as "true and proper worship" (NIV, 2011) (λογικὴν λατρείαν, *logikēn latreian*).⁴
- 3. But, the key word is "bodies" (σώμα, *sōma*), better translated "selves" in this verse.
- B. Paul said that the level of commitment and service in all of life is to match the special commitment and sacrifice most associate with religious ritual.
 - 1. God always wanted such a commitment, but his people had often failed (e.g., Hos 6.6 [cited in Matt 9.13; 12.7]; Isa 1.10-17; etc.).
 - 2. Paul's appeal would have been met with as much incredulity (and resistance) then as it is now; the word many would choose for what he calls us to is "fanaticism."
- C. We must see both the lofty nature of Paul's appeal and how we can water it down.
 - 1. We can use the wrong standard to measure our commitment, comparing our religious practice ("every Sunday" or "every time the doors are open") against the lesser commitment of our world rather than the absolute commitment for which Paul appeals.
 - 2. We can do the same with our weekday lives: we reason that we're not like so many in the world and we do pretty well at living a "good Christian life," so we may not be open to the idea that there is more God needs to do to us (see Luke 18.9-14).
 - 3. But, Paul's use of "present" in Romans 6. 13, 16, 19 confirms that this more casual approach is wrongheaded.

II. Reason.

- A. An online article at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee noted that people resist change "when the reason for change is unclear" and "when communication about the change . . . has not been sufficient."⁵
- B. Paul gave the reason we should yield to transformation.
 - 1. Our willingness to let God transform us is the sensible response to "the mercies of God" which rescued us from our sin (12.1).
 - 2. Furthermore, the result of being transformed is "so that (εἰς, *eis*) you can work out what God's will is, what is good and acceptable and complete" (12.2, translation by N. T. Wright).⁶
 - 3. The two ideas go together.
 - a) The way from which God rescued us (sin) leads to death (6.23).
 - b) It is possible to let that way re-enslave us (6.12-16).
 - c) We need a way to learn what God's better will is: the Spirit assists (8.9-11), but we must let him transform us (a word that is passive in 12.2).
- C. Paul doesn't just generalize; in chapters 12-15 he mentions specific areas of change..

⁴ This phrase has been much debated and variously translated, but the word for worship or service had religious overtones in the ancient world. Coupled with the other sacrifice words Paul used, it is reasonable to translate it something like the NIV 2011. (NIV 1984 has "spiritual act of worship".)

⁵ "Resistance To Change," www4.uwm.edu/cuts/bench/change.htm. Accessed July 11, 2013.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2, Chapters 9-16* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Page 67, Location 1051.

1. He answers the question I sometimes hear when I speak of change: what exactly do we need to change?
2. Do not miss how specific he is in 12.3-15.13; these are areas of life that should be radically different from the worldly norms.

III. Method.

- A. Continuing our submission to the way of God is necessary, as we've already seen from Romans 6.12-16, a submission Paul accentuates in 6.17-18.
- B. Resist the ways and priorities of "this age" (τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, *tō aiōni toutō*).
 1. The language Paul uses is forceful: it could be translated "stop conforming."
 2. We must always remember that Satan has not given up on capturing us; active resistance will be necessary (Eph 6.10-18; 1 Pet 5.8; Heb 12.4).
- C. That requires the use of our minds, for it is by their renewal that we are transformed.
 1. This makes sense since futile thinking lies at the root of sin (Rom 1.18-32).
 2. But, "many Christians in today's world never come to terms with this. They hope they will be able to live up to something like Christian standards while still thinking the way the rest of the world thinks. It can't be done" (Wright, p. 68, loc. 1084).
 3. The kind of mind we need is "awake, alert, not content to take a few guidelines off the peg but determined to understand why human life is meant to be lived in one way rather than another" (Wright, p. 70, loc. 1091).

Conclusion

1. Seeing its challenge, understanding the reason for it, and grasping the method involved in change — all are necessary to live the life that keeps changing.
2. But, none of that will matter unless you and I are willing to admit that we are always in need of more transformation, more change. For as Leo Tolstoy understood, "Everybody thinks of changing Humanity and Nobody thinks of changing Himself."⁷

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⁷ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/c/change.htm>. Accessed July 11, 2013.