

# Transformed not Conformed

## *Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time*

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### Sunday, August 27, 2023

Over the last few weeks, we have been listening in our Epistle readings to Paul's developing argument about the faith. In a nice, orderly fashion, he presents a beautifully reasoned argument and builds a systematic theology about salvation. Today's reading continues, but based on the reasoning before, Paul now appeals to the readers to respond. The head knowledge is one thing, but there is little value without a response. Christianity is not about education but about responding to the information in what Paul calls a Spiritual Sacrifice. – A Sacrifice is an exciting thought. It is not a time-share arrangement. The sacrifice is a commitment of life and for life – Total commitment; this is not about 'going into the ministry' as I have done, but the call for every Christian to live out their lives in Total commitment to our Lord. I know that around 1985, this came for me. I ceased to think of myself as a person working for BHP who happened to be a Christian and began to think of myself as a Christian who happened to work for BHP at the time. At this time, I date my becoming a full-time Christian worker. I turned my back on the corporate game and made my faith the basis of my decisions. If we read Paul correctly, this is how we are holy and acceptable to God – this is how we are to give God his worth – THAT IS THE MEANING OF WORSHIP.

Paul makes it clear that there are two ways – conformed to the world or Transformed. Paul says, "Do not be conformed but be transformed – This is more than just a lovely saying, but a commentary on what it means to be a Christian. The essence of Christianity is this: we do not fit into the world's mould, but we are now in the spiritual realm. We are to discover a new attitude through a new thought pattern. We are to change our relationship with God by accepting the challenge of thinking of ourselves in a new way. As I said, this idea of seeing ourselves as Christians first and foremost. And here is the thing – the result is that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This is, of course, the ultimate aim not only for the individual but also for the corporate body. For the church to function efficiently, Paul realised that this was important. Harmonising the individual's will with that of God would mean that we can know the way forward corporately. Indeed, many of the problems the church experiences are due to the lack of unity of purpose. So Paul continues as the outworking of this.

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each

according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. The danger is that although we might find ourselves in the right framework with God, we do not see that this also requires us to be in the proper framework with each other. Each has faith, and each has a measure of faith, and the danger is that we overestimate our own faith. The concept of the Church as Christ's body and working like a body is a reminder that each has a part to play, not all equal, but all of equal importance. The organisation is not by ourselves but by God, who gives us various gifts through the Spirit, and our role is to find God's mind and discern these gifts among the members. As we use these God-given gifts, we will begin to function as the body. That we will need to discover these gifts goes without saying. Paul gives us here a short list for us to think about – I do not believe they are exhaustive but rather indicative.

- prophecy, in proportion to faith;
- ministry, in ministering;
- the teacher, in teaching;
- the exhorter, in exhortation;
- the giver, in generosity;
- the leader, in diligence;
- the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**Prophecy** – telling what God thinks of the situation.

**Ministry** – Care and support for God's people.

**Teaching** – Opening up God's word and helping people understand.

**Exhorting** – Encouragement to do God's will.

**Giving** – Sharing with others our time and resources.

**Leading** – Taking responsibility to get others to where God wants them.

**Compassion** – Responding to human needs.

Dimensions of our Christian faith are shown in this list of Paul, but they beg the question – which of these are our part? And are we doing it?

My vision and that of Paul is that we each find our place and work together, discern God's mind and work out his purposes. It begins with us – Being transformed, not Conformed, continues with a Sober estimate of our faith and ends with the world being changed through the faith ministry of its people.

This is our challenge together. Will you join me in this?

**AMEN**