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Conformation or Transformation?

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
Romans 12:2

Intro

This study deals with believers in Christ who are conforming to the world system and those who aren't. When we get into the passage we will find out what conforming is all about, how it comes about, and the doctrinal solution from God for the inner transformation of the believer's soul through the metabolization of Bible Doctrine.

1. *“And be not conformed to this world:”* - και μη **συσχηματιζεσθε** τω **αιωνι** τουτω – present middle imperative – *schematizo*

The first word we want to look at is *aioni*, which is the dative singular of *aion*, going from a simple definition to a more in depth understanding. It referred to an age, an era, a period of indefinite duration viewed in relation to what takes place in that period of time. It's emphasis was on its spiritual or moral characteristics.

When the Greeks wanted to refer to something of interminable duration, rather than that which came to an end, they used *aion*. It was used of that which is nature endless, such as God, his glory, his power, the rule of Christ, etc.. *Aion* signified time, long or short, and what transpires on earth in time in its unbroken duration. It does have an end, but it seems like it goes on forever.

It referred to a very long period of time, of time gone by, and time to come. And if it had no end, it was referred to as eternity, eternity past or eternity future. Looking backward in time it can refer to blocks of time in the past, (the exact number of years is not the issue), all the way back to eternity past before time existed. Looking forward in time it can refer to blocks of time, (again the exact number of years is not an issue), all the way into eternity future when time will no longer exist!

Aion was used to denote the eternity of God and the duration of the world. Our English word, eon, comes from it, although they have incorrectly used it to define it as one thousand years. It views time over a long and extended period as having a beginning and a conclusion. In viewing the world in its entirety with man on it, there is the Age, or the Great Age, *aion*, that is made up of a series of smaller ages. When viewing ages, one should not look at a strict beginning and ending of them, but rather there being a smooth transition from one age to the next.

The Greeks had words for time that was measured and time that was not measured. They believed that lasting time belonged only to God, while passing time belonged to man. When *aion* was used with God, it was endless time referred to as eternity. When *aion* was used in with man it was referred to as the ages, or *aion*.

When referring to a specific duration of time *chronos* was used to denote a linear expanse of time made up of varying and indefinite numbers of days or years. For time quantified in exact numbers it was denoted as an hour – *hora*, a day – *hemera*, a month – *men*, a year – *eniautos*, today – *semeron*, now – *nun*, and other designations.

One way of looking at this would be to view the days, years and ages of man on earth in comparison to the eternity of God, as the wind on the earth versus the gulf stream in the upper atmosphere. Man's time and the ages of man are as but gusts of air, from a simple gust of air that lasts only a few seconds to a wind storm that might last for hours. Compare that to the endless gulf stream that keeps on going, but with one addition, we take the gulf stream out of its circular pattern around the earth and make it linear going throughout the heavens having no beginning or ending. Man's time versus God's time.

Another aspect of *aion* was that there was a mystery religion celebrated in Alexandria centered around the personification of eternity called Aeon. The Gnostics and others believed that there were divine powers, aeons, who mediated between man and the supreme being whom they called Aeon.

But the aspect of time in *aion* is but one side of it. There is another aspect in *aion* and that is what transpires in it. This is where it gets into the thinking, practices, norms, cultural beliefs and viewpoints of people.

Various ages come and go and each age has its own cultural norms and standards, beliefs and accepted thinking, but the one thing they all have in common is that they are presided over by Satan. He is the god of this age. “*In whom the god of this world, (aion), hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,*” 2 Corinthians 4:4a Satan sets the tone for what the people on earth, the unsaved people of Adam's fallen race, think, believe and accept as truth. This is where we get into Human Viewpoint, which is Cosmic Viewpoint, which is really Satan's Viewpoint!

The term age does refer to a period of time, and in a certain context, that is what it might be emphasizing. But it usually gets into the idea of the thinking, practices, goals, drives, ambitions, opinions, perspectives, outlooks, attitudes, viewpoints, lifestyles, morals, pursuits and interstage of the unsaved under Satan. An old term would be the secular world from the Latin *saeculo*.

So being *conformed to the world* has this in mind. It's referring to the world of the unsaved as they live their lives and go their ways. We are not to think like them, or get caught up in the same pursuits in life as they do. The focus of our existence as believers in Christ is to be totally occupied with God through the teaching of His Word, and to live our lives to please him and do his will here on earth.

The next word that we want to look into before we get into the passage is *suschematizo*, from *sun* – with, and *schematizo* – to fashion. *Suschematizo* is to fashion or shape something so that it is like another. It is not used of inward transformation, but of outward fashion, shape, or form.

To form or mold into a pattern, to be formed like others, to be conformed, to be guided by, with the dative case it identifies the thing to which is conformed, and in this passage we have *aion*, the age, in the dative case. *Suschematizo* meant to conform, to adopt the external or public form, to assume the form of something, to identify oneself with a person, idea, viewpoint, group, standard, or ideal.

Schema denotes the exterior that is presented to the world, that which is seen, heard, or observed. It was used of the role played by an actor, the appearance as opposed to reality. While the *morphe*, the internal essence, was a different matter altogether.

Metaschematizo, to change, is used of the false apostles, and that would apply to all “ministers” who do not belong to Christ, who transform themselves into apostles of Christs and Pastors. “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming, metaschematizo, themselves into the apostles of Christ.*” 2 Corinthians 11:13

They cannot change their inner essence, they are not Christians and neither can they make themselves to be Christians, but what they can do is **appear** to be Christians and Christian ministers. And Satan does the same thing by transforming himself, *metaschematizo*, into an angel of light. “*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*” 2 Corinthians 11:14

Suschematizo has the ideas of: to change, not the inside, but how one appears to be to others, a pattern or mold, and an ideal or prototype after which one is being molded. Now one can have many things in the mold: plaster of Paris, clay, bread, rubber, even jello. The issue of molding is not what's in it, but the conforming of the thing to a particular shape or pattern.

Metaschematizo would look at that aspect of changing the outward appearance, while *suschematizo* would look at the aspect of changing something to be a copy of something else. It speaks of **conformity**, and not just the conformity of dress or appearance, although it was used for that idea, but the conformity of thought and the views of others.

The movies “Brave New World”, “1984”, and “V” for Vendetta bring out this idea quite well, where everyone has to conform, to think and speak along the party line. It was one of the tenets of communism and it is rapidly taking over the social and political life of the US and the UK, where conformity of thought and speech are legislated, with certain punishments being applied to those who refuse to conform.

Satan is the god of this Age, he is the ruler of the *kosmos*, and the prince of the power of the air. It is the viewpoint, the thinking of Satan that is the prototype to which all thoughts of the people are being conformed to in this concept.

Now the grammar tells us something else that is interesting. It tells us that the believers are not being conformed in their thinking to the perspective of the *kosmos* under Satan. For that to be the case the passive voice would have to be used. What we have instead is the use of the middle voice, which is reflexive, which tells us that **believers are conforming themselves to Satan's thinking!**

And they weren't helpless victims in the matter, nor did it just happen to them. The middle voice tells us that the subject produces the action of the verb and takes part in it. They exercised their volition in the wrong direction, and they did so by rejecting the teaching of the Word of God! **It is only Bible doctrine that can change our thinking from a worldly viewpoint to the divine viewpoint of God.** And if one rejects the thinking of Christ, then all they are left with is the thinking of the world under Satan.

One way of looking at this is from the perspective of the potter and the clay. He can form his clay into pots, cups, saucers, etc., but if wants them all to be the same, then he needs to make a form into which he can press the clay, so that each piece is exactly the same. This is *suschematizo*, or conformity.

But if he wanted to take ordinary clay that he would use for making a simple pot and turn it into bone china he couldn't do that because a different kind of clay is used for that. He could paint the outside of it to resemble bone china, *metaschematizo*, but he really wouldn't have the real item because the inner essence, *morphe*, would be different.

In this matter of believers conforming themselves to this world there are three things involved: one, the shape of the mold, two, external pressure and three, the imprint on us. The **shape** of the mold is the viewpoint, norms and values of the unsaved in the world system. The **external pressure** is the pressure put on us by people to conform to their way of thinking, living and acting. The **imprint** is now how we appear in life.

The influence on believers is usually unseen and unspoken, but you know that it is there nevertheless. And you also know that you are to conform to it, less you face the ridicule or ostracism of the crowd. Humiliation and rejection by the “group” are powerful tools in getting believers to conform to their way of thinking, their values and their viewpoints.

Suschematizo means to not only conform to an external form, (we can conform but the inner essence of believers will never change), but also to assume the form. That is, to essentially identify oneself **with** something else, or **as** something else! Believers can assume the form of being unsaved around unsaved people, but are saved inside! We can act like we're unsaved, we can talk like we're unsaved, we can have all the same values, speech, goals, drives and ambitions that the unsaved have, but inside we're still saved!

Now the subject is Christians and their wanting to conform themselves to the world around them, to be like it, to be one with it, to identify with it. It's going on in record numbers today and it was going on then in the beginning of the Church Age. And even if Christians do want to be like the people of the world, and many of them do, to identify with it and appear to be one of them, they cannot change what they are inside – saved!

People today wear the same style of clothes, have the same hair styles, drive the same kind of cars, live in the same kind of homes and apartments, watch the same TV programs, think the same kind of thoughts, have the same HVP perspectives, and basically do everything they can to conform to society in general, while operating under the delusion that they're different and independent.

And along comes the Christians who are doing everything in their power to be just like them! Not only in their outward appearance as to how they look, dress, act and talk, but even in their thinking. And this is where the main problem comes in, where the believer is adopting the thinking of the world system and not the thinking of Bible doctrine.

They are trying so hard to conform themselves, middle voice of *suschematizo*, to the world, so that they will appear to be one of them. They want to **look** like them, **talk** like them, **act** like them, **think** like them, have their **goals**, their **priorities**, their **ambitions**, anything they can do to identify with them and appear to be one of them. But they will never be one of them, because **their inner essence is different!** They are **righteous!**

2. “*But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*” - *αλλα μεταμορφουσθε τη ανακαινωσει του νοου υμων* – present passive imperative – *metamorphoo*

Here we now have the solution for the believer not being conformed to the thinking of the world and it all takes place in the **thinking of the mind**. It is only through the consistent intake of Bible doctrine, through a Pastor-Teacher faithfully and accurately teaching the Word of God, that we get the divine viewpoint of God that changes our thinking, so we will have the same viewpoint of God and not the world system under the devil.

The word *transformed* comes from the Greek, *metamorphoo*, which is from the combination of the words *meta* – to change, and *morphe* - the inner essence. But it is a little confusing when the two Greek root words, *schema* and *morphe*, are brought over into with the same English root, *form*. Obviously there is a difference between the two.

Schema would look at the outward appearance, that which is seen, heard and observed by others. And *morphe* also has that idea, but with something else; it brings out the idea of inner essence. We could say, 'he or she looks good on the outside, but what are they like on the inside?' They appear to be nice, they appear to be kind, they appear to be honest, but are they really that way on the inside?

With true *morphe* what one would see on the outside would be a true representation of what they are on the inside, but not so with *schema*. *Schema* could appear to be one thing outwardly, but not be that way inwardly. Satan's *schema* to the world is a god, but his *morphe* is still a fallen angel. God's *schema* is deity and so is his *morphe*.

Religious men wear religious clothes, use religious words and act religiously to convey the appearance that they are close to God; that's their *schema*. But inwardly they do not know God; that's their *morphe*. The Pharisees were white-washed sepulchers, their *schema*, but inside they were dead men's bones, their *morphe*.

When we look at Christians what we see is our *schema*, which is our fallen, sinful, flesh nature. But what we can't see with our eyes is our *morphe*. Our *morphe*, our true inner essence, is righteous, eternal, sons and daughters of God. But what we can see is the expression of our *morphe* in life in works of righteousness, love for Bible Doctrine, love, peace, etc.. One day, though, our outward appearance, which will be the true expression of our *morphe*, will match perfectly to our inner essence when we receive our new bodies.

There is the idea of form or appearance in *morphe*, but it recedes to the background behind the idea of inner essence. It is the inner essence of the soul that is to be emphasized. When we look at someone we have to look beyond what we see with the eyes and look at what's in the soul.

Some men and women are handsome and beautiful, that is their external appearance. And, at the same time, can have ugly and dark souls, that is their *morphe*. Others are ugly and plain on the outside, yet have beautiful souls. The ideal of *morphe* is to have the outside appearance match the inner essence, but that is not always the case.

In the *morphe* word group *morphe* was the embodiment or the essence, *summorphe* was one thing having the same essence as another thing, and *metamorphoo* was *the change that took place in all that*.

Metamorphosis would refer to the change of deity into human form, as with Jesus Christ, but the ancients also viewed it as the change of men into divine form. This entailed not just the change of the external appearance, but a change of the essential character.

Christ preexisted in the form of God, *morphe theou*, form of **deity**. But in his incarnation he now existed in the form of a **servant**, *morphe doulou*. *Morphe theou* characterized his existence **before his earthly life**, but not his existence **in his earthly life**.

Metamorphoo refers to the change of the inner essence, but what is it that actually changes the inner essence? The mystery religions taught that it was brought about by knowledge and their rites. They believed that they could be born again in their minds by participating in these rites.

Whenever there is a change in the *morphe*, it tells us that there is a *morphe*, that this *morphe* came from someone and that there is a goal, an ideal, or a type that the *morphe* is being changed into with an archetype in mind.

Galatians 4:19 tells us that Christ is being formed in us, “*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until **Christ be formed in you**,*” The passive voice is used here to denote that **God is the one who is forming Christ in us**.

Romans 8:29 tells us that God predestined us to be conformed, *summorphoo*, into the image of Christ. “*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*” This process of growth is to change us inwardly to the place of being **exactly like Christ's *morphe***.

The word **image**, *eikonos*, and the word **likeness**, *homoios*, give us insight. One may look exactly like another man, but have different fathers. That's likeness or resemblance, *homoios*. One egg may look exactly like another egg, but come from a different hen and rooster. That's *homoios*, likeness or resemblance.

To have **image**, *eikonos*, the one thing must come from another thing, which is the **prototype**. **Its essence must come from the archetype or prototype**, and the process of change that it goes through, its metamorphosis, is designed to make it like the prototype, with the result that it ends up as a copy of the prototype. And note, all this time its essence, **its *morphe*, was the same as the prototype who created it.**

In true, biblical Christianity this change in the *morphe* is brought about by the process of renewal, *anakainosis* as we have in the passage. Rites, religion, singing, programs, legalism, nor any of the other things so commonly found in churches today to keep Christians busy will do it, only *anakainosis*, **the renewal of the new man.**

In this verse there are two commands. One, for them to stop the action of conforming themselves, *suschematizo*, to the model of the world system and its people. And two, to keep on being transformed, *metamorphoo*, to the image of Christ, by the process of the renewing of their minds through Bible Doctrine.

One can take a mold of any shape and pour clay into it. The sides of the mold determines the shape of the object. You can also pour plaster of Paris into it and it will take the same shape of the mold. After they both set, they both can be painted in the same way and one would think that they're exactly the same thing. They may look exactly the same, but they're not because their inner essences are different. That's what happens with Christians who mold themselves into the world's model when they adopt the thinking of the world.

But Christians are different; their inner essence is different, for it is from God. There is to be no conforming to a mold as we have with *suschematizo*, but a continual transformation of the soul where the inner essence of the soul remains the same essence, but it keeps on going through a change where it ends up being like Christ, not like the world!

The inner essence of the butterfly was the same as when it was a worm, but through the process of metamorphosis, a change was taking place where it now became a butterfly! We could actually say that the butterfly was there all along and finally **became** what it was designed to be from the beginning.

A seed is planted in a pot and neglected. Its roots become bound, being restricted by the sides of the pot, the action of conforming, and its top is restricted. If it lives, it will never be what it is designed to be, instead it will be malformed, disfigured. Living things must have the freedom to grow and expand so they can become what they were designed to be!

The same for Christians; **we must have the freedom of the atmosphere of grace, and the two elements of truth and the spiritual dynamic for us to grow into what God has designed us to be, to be like Christ!** Not a pathetic caricature of the world.

Satan could never change himself into an angel of light, for he cannot change his inner essence. He can only change how he appears to others. The apostles of Satan cannot change themselves into Christ's apostles, for the same reason. All they can do is change how they appear to others so they can be regarded as Christ's apostles.

Unsaved people conform themselves to the model of the world system's way of thinking, and tragically so many Christians do the same thing. In the end they end up looking, acting and talking the same way as the unsaved do, except for one thing, they are different in their inner essence.

This verse gives us the key as to how believers can prevent themselves from falling into the trap of wanting to be like the people of the world, wanting to identify with them, and that is by having a continual inner transformation of the soul through the process of renewal, which occurs through the filling of the Holy Spirit and the metabolization of Bible Doctrine through faith.

In Greek thought the external blended and blurred with the internal, that is, one's actions and external appearance was shaped by what one was thinking. If in one's mind, one wanted to be like the people of the world, to identify with them, (his inner thought dynamic), then that's how he ended up.

The key to becoming like Christ is the same as the key to being conformed to the world, it all takes place in the thinking of the mind! Christians are being conformed to the world, its desires, views, goals – everything, because their minds are being shaped (molded) by the thinking and viewpoint that the people of the world have.

Their thoughts are not God's thoughts; their thoughts are the thoughts that the people of the world have; they have the thinking of the world, but not the mind of Christ. Human viewpoint, HVP, but not divine viewpoint, DVP. They are conforming themselves to the thinking of the world's model, with the result that they end up looking like them, talking like them and acting just like them.

If a believer is constantly exposed to a barrage of the world's viewpoint through the school systems, radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and the conversations of friends, family and coworkers, which is tantamount to brainwashing, then they will end up with a mind being conformed to the world system.

The only way one can get a different viewpoint on things is by having a different source of information! And if one wants to have DVP, then one has to avail himself of the teaching of the Word of God, which is the mind of Christ, which is the thinking of Christ! And, at the same time, turn off the sources of brainwashing.

If a believer wants to stop being conformed to the world, which is being conformed to Satan's model, (think about that), then they will have to stop the input of human viewpoint from coming into their souls, and at the same time start the process of the renewing of their souls through the intake and metabolization of Bible doctrine.

The word *anakainoo* meant to be reinvigorated, to be refreshed, to be brought back to its original fresh state. One opens up the windows in the house to refresh the air; he doesn't create air all over, he simply is letting the stale air out and the fresh air to come in. It's to bring something back to its original state, to refresh it, or to renew it.

And that's the idea with the believer's soul. **It isn't recreated, it's renewed.** Some church groups believe that the believer can lose his salvation. That would mean that they would have to be recreated time after time, thousands of times! But this isn't true because the Bible teaches that **there is one creation, but many renewals.**

When God created us via the new birth he made us perfect and holy inside; the essence of our new natures is spirit and truth. Everything that we are inside is of the truth, it is from God, it is spiritual in nature and it is eternal. Something that is eternal cannot just go out of existence. The process of renewal, *anakainosis*, simply refreshes, reinvigorates the new man on the inside.

But as time goes by, we often come under the barrage of the world system with all its influences, distractions and testings; we are influenced by the thinking of the world's people. Then combine that with our own flesh natures and our negativity to Bible doctrine and we end up with a believer being conformed to the world.

Anakainosis changes all that for it renews us on the inside; it brings us back in our new natures to the pristine state of when we were first saved. I like to think of it as that “magic paper” we played with as children. You could write on it and then pull up the page and it was new all over again.

We have also seen that the dynamic of renewal does not take place by merely sitting in church, singing, being entertained, attending a committee meeting of some kind, giving one's money, being good, laying down your cigarettes or some other bad habit; it comes only through the concept of *epignosis*. “*And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*” Colossians 3:10

It literally says that **we are renewed by means of knowledge, *epignosis***. Now *epignosis* is a technical term for when we take the teaching of the Word of God, which we call Bible doctrine, which is only in itself knowledge, *gnosis*, and we combine our faith with it, under the filling of the Holy Spirit.

All the religious activities we find going on in churches across America today are not only counter productive to the true spiritual life, but they become evil because they are misleading believers away from what true spiritual Christianity is all about!

So mixing one's faith with sound doctrinal teaching produces *epignosis* knowledge in the soul; and it is this *epignosis* knowledge that renews the mind bringing it back to its original fresh state; and it is this constant renewing that transforms our minds and thus keeps us from being conformed to the world!

Pastor Mike

