

I don't know much about being in the church, he said to me. Like when it comes to money, how much to give.

I did not know what to say. I was tempted to say 10%. I knew he had a good income, we could use the money. But I knew what my answer would not be true. For ~~ix~~ his question would be like asking, how many hours a day must I devote to God? 2.4? Or ^{is} one hour of attentive worship ~~in~~ every Sunday, and a half an hour of daily prayer?

What does it take from us to pay the rent with God? I would sure like to know. How great it would feel to be able to say, "I'm done. I did enough, my full share."

Nothing. That is what I have to contribute toward my salvation. Nothing. Paul writes: For the wages of sin is death ~~and~~ but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Here, God says, I give my son for you that you might live with me forever. What could you do or I do that could in any way pay God back for Jesus suffering and dying. Nothing.

So how ~~should~~ ^{do} I answer the one who asks how much to give.

Everything? That is what God wants from you. Paul writes: appeal to you therefore bretheren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Not an hour a week of listening and prayer, or even a time each day, but your spiritual worship of God is the presentation of your whole life on the altar of his service.

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

Do not be conformed ~~by~~ ^{to} this world, or as the Greek says there, ~~by~~ ^{to} this age. To be given my shape, to be molded by that which has nothing to do with God. To that Paul says, , "No" But how often, how much I have been. In silly ways, like seeking more joy, more of my identity from what the Browns will do to the Steelers this afternoon, than from what the Lord does here this

morning. Or letting the amount of money I have, the amount I earn determine where I live, and by that who I will be with and talk to and receive as friends. They are like me, the poor are not, I wonder if that is how God sees it whose son took up his first residence in the stable.

Do not be conformed to this world, to this age. Twenty five years ago I would have been embarrassed by what we routinely see and hear on TV and in magazines and in our newspapers. Who forms ~~is~~ us? shapes us? The word of God? Scripture? Or is it Dallas or the Cosby Show, or ~~Our House?~~ ^{Guides}

Do not be conformed to this world. When Jesus told Peter he must God to Jerusalm and die and then be raised, Peter said, God forbid, Lord, this shall never happen to you." And Jesus said, Get behind me ~~Be~~ Satan. But when people come to me with tough choices to make, I still find it easy to say to them, Do what feels best. We are all greatly temped to play the part of Peter these days, nodding our heads in agreement as we are all being conformed to this age, even as we sense how this age offers us only death.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is Godd and accpetable and perfect.

Be transformed, metamorphicized. That's the word in Greek. Metamorphisis like what happens in that cocoon when the catapillar is transformed into a butterfly.

Be transformed.

I think of Donnie. When I moved here he sent me a letter, a copy of the citation he had received for service in Vietnam. He had received a number of medals , including the one just below the congressional medal of honor, the name of which I have forgotten. When I saw all of that I thought I understood Bonnie in a way I had not before. For he had remained calm in the face of crises that would have overwhelmed me.

An experience of his life had transformed him, Set its stamp upon him.

Be transformed. God intends the cross of Christ to transform us, to renew our minds.

We and all people are conformed by life in this world. An alcoholic father, a brother, a sister who was mean to us, poverty in the great depression, going to war at age eighteen, growing up in a world that could be destroyed by nuclear war, all these take us and twist us and bend us. In Jesus Christ God wants to let us go free. He takes our minds caught in habits of fear or greed or revenge, minds ~~xxxxx~~ bruised and batter by cruelty or simple indifference, and in Christ he renews them, us, that we might live as God intends. Be transformed by the renewal of your minds, that you might prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

From God's viewpoint, I think it all must look like this: God has a world, all twisted and broken and bent by sin, A world where death is the power that does the twisting and breaking and bending. In Jesus Christ God undid death. And through Jesus God is about the work of undoing sin and death in us. He is loving you and forgiving you into something new, and whole. Taking out all the bends and the twists.

But he does not do that just to put you on a shelf, but to put you right into the twisted and bent world to use you to love others into life. You are the assault troops, establishing a beachhead wherever you are at any moment. God rules wherever your body is. That is what God is about.

I appeal to you therefore, bretheren, by the mercies ~~XX~~ of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.