

How Your Life Can Be Different

Romans 12:1-8
Matthew 15:10-20

August 27, 2017
Faith Community

“Let’s call him Bill. He’d attended church his whole life and was now in his sixties. He was known by everyone, but no one really knew him. He had difficulty expressing love for his wife. His children could not speak freely with him and felt no affection from him. He was not concerned for the poor, had little tolerance for those outside the church, and was critical of those on the inside.

“All that spoke of a deeper and more tragic reality; he was not changing. He was not being transformed. But here’s what is most remarkable; no one in the church was surprised by this. No one called a special meeting of the elders to consider this strange case of a person who wasn’t changing.

“There were other expectations in the church. People expected that he would attend services, would read the Bible [when he got around to it], would affirm the right beliefs, would give money and do church work. [Bill had those down cold.]

“But people did not expect that day by day, month by month, decade by decade, he would be more transformed into the likeness of Jesus. People did not expect him to become a progressively more loving, joyful, engaging person. So they weren’t shocked when it didn’t happen.”¹

On the surface he did all the right things, but in the process got it all wrong.

Today’s Gospel passage begins with church leaders going out of their way to complain and criticize. Jesus’ disciples weren’t following certain ritualistic guidelines, and these leaders were upset about it.

A few things we can see right away:

The church leaders must’ve been really mad, since traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee was a big deal.

Jesus was becoming more popular, for news to travel that far and these leaders to make such a trip.

¹ John Ortberg, Laurie Pederson, Judson Poling, Fully Devoted: Living Each Day in Jesus’ Name (Pursuing Spiritual Transformation Bible Study Series) Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000, pp. 15-6.

What they were upset about was not something from the Bible itself. This is how they put it:

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” (Mt. 15:2 NIV)

This wasn’t about personal hygiene. It wasn’t even spelled out in the Bible. Instead, it was a ritualistic thing that developed over time and included cups, pitchers, and kettles.

Whereupon Jesus, for his part, threw it right back at them:

“Why do you use your rules to play fast and loose with God’s commands?” (v.3, The Message)

And with that he lit into them with how they were turning a living faith into a dead system of control and predictability.

Look at what was going on thanks to Jesus’ arrival on the scene:

- Lives were being changed.
- Bodies were being healed.
- People on the margins of society were being brought into intimate community.

As wonderful as all that may have been, it apparently didn’t matter as much as going through a religious routine, and Jesus told them so.

Friends, you can do the right things and still get it wrong. The spirit of Bill is alive and well. You can go through the paces, support the right causes, belong to the right organizations and still suck the life out of noble visions and dreams. You have to go deeper.

Listen to Romans, chapter twelve:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Ro. 12:1-2)

Way back in my younger years, I was a Jell-O fiend. If it had little bits of fruit in it, I was translated to glory. I still like it, of course, but today, I’ve greatly matured in my gastronomical interests, and the throne of my highly discerning palate is now occupied by gooey desserts.

Part of Jell-O's appeal, of course, is how cute and squiggly it is, and how it can be made in any form. You want a Jell-O horse? Get a mold, pour in the goop, and you've got a strawberry Seabiscuit. You can make it any way you want.

Friends, that's exactly what Paul meant when he said, do not conform. Jell-O's cute and squiggly, but you're not nourished by it. There's no substance there. That's conforming to the pattern of this world, as Bill would say.

The alternative? Be transformed. The word Paul uses is where we get our word 'metamorphosis.' It's an internal thing that shapes our external lives. Instead of Jell-O, think of a blacksmith who heats the steel to where it can be molded and shaped by his hammer.

It's how you respond to heartaches, pressures, demands, and expectations. You become Jell-O or a strong tower that holds the searchlight of God's love.

"-The conformed seek a promotion; the transformed seek a ministry.

-The conformed seek more stuff; the transformed seek the right stuff.

-The conformed seek the comfort of the body; the transformed look for the renewal of the mind.

-The conformed invest in the temporary; the transformed invest in the eternal."²

Jesus' vision was for the church to be the most revolutionary, radical, life giving organization in the history of the world. He also knew that bold, passionate, life transforming dreams can get watered down to where all that matters is keeping things the way they've always been. That's where the Bills of the world come in. Friends, that breaks God's heart. I hope it does yours as well.

Friends, when you are gripped by a transforming vision, everything else becomes a means to an end, a way of achieving that goal. Anything that gets in the way of that vision is treated like the obstacle that it really is.

How might you move from a religious routine to a relationship, one that makes all things new?

² [Homiletics Online](#) re Romans 12:1-8, accessed September 25, 2003.