

Citizens in Heaven

Part 1

Romans 12:2

Dr. Matt Cassidy---- March 10, 2024

We have a tradition at our house (it's not really "we"—it's "me"—I have a tradition at my house) where we'll be someplace, let's just say a restaurant, and suddenly I will just say, "Hey, everybody, look around, enjoy, take it all in, because we are never coming here again. This food was terrible! So, don't you worry. We're not going to come back and to have to endure this. Let's go."

Now the reason I say that is because when I look back at the year 2020 (remember that?) with the pandemic lockdowns and the cities on fire and then that election, I want to say, "Look around, we're not going back there. Let's go!"

As a matter of fact, with the men and women who are involved in giving input to the preaching schedule for the year, I think it was all but unanimous—*You've got to do a few lessons on how to live as civil Christians in civil issues ... how to be a civil Christian in civil issues.*

So, we're going to do that in three sermons. I already did one two weeks ago when I did part of the series *Encounters with Jesus*. The sermon was on encounters with politicians. And then these next two weeks I think I had a total of thirty-seven points. I've gotten it down to three this week, so we've got, what, thirty-four next week. It's going to be a humdinger.

All right, so here we go. We're going to start now. Undisputed, the single most densely theological book in the Bible is called the Book of Romans. It is overflowing with thick truth about the nature of God and the nature of man and the nature of salvation.

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul writes that book, and then after eleven chapters filled with those topics of theology, he pivots and answers the question that we're asking: How do we live? How do we apply all that

truth and wisdom in our lives? And he all but summarizes it with a single sentence, Roman 12: 2. He says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Do not be conformed to this world. That is the key to understanding how to become like Christ in all of life in politics.

And it’s a simple outline today. **The first point is going to be what it means by “this world.”** How do you know if you’re just being a puppet to the worldly system? How do you know if you’re marching to the noise of the evil one versus dancing to the music of God Almighty. We’ll look at that.

And then a second point is, what are the three areas this world is out to destroy? And the last part will be, how do we get out of this world?

1. What Is “This World”?

So, there’s our three-point outline. Here’s the first point. What does “this world” mean? “Do not be conformed to this world ...” Start here, right here. We are not alone. We are spirits that have bodies. And the Bible says clearly that we are at war. But it says that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but it’s a spiritual war. It’s against principalities and powers. And even the description of principalities and powers is a note to different ranks or even divisions. In this spiritual war the evil one has an army and an air force.

And what does the evil spirit of this world thrive on? What does Satan thrive on? Know this. I want us all to be looking for this in the months to come. He thrives on chaos and division and disorder, confusion. Confusion, chaos, division, disorder ... you see any one of those four and the spirit of this world is all over it. Confusion, chaos, division, and disorder ...

C. S. Lewis said it very succinctly. He said, “The devil loves noise. He hates music.” Let’s all say that together: “The devil loves noise. He hates music.” This is found one of his classic books called *The Screwtape Letters*. And *The Screwtape Letters* is a tongue-in-cheek book written by a demon to a young demon on how to become a better demon. Never mind that.

But here’s what he says about noise versus music. This is the senior demon. He says, “Hell has been occupied by Noise. Heaven is nothing but music and silence. Noise is the audible expression of all things ruthless and vile. And my plan”—this is the devil—“is to make all the universe nothing but noise in its end.”

Think about that—Satan’s plan to make all things noise—in contrast to the nature of God, even in the description of creation. Genesis chapters 1 and 2. God spoke. There was nothing and then there was something. But the something, it says, is formless and void. And so, the rest of chapter 1 and the following details in chapter 2 is Him just going through making a list and causing order to break out. Things are to work in harmony and unity with one another.

And then in chapter 3 when He creates man and woman in His own image (we’re made in the image of God), He says, *Hey, you know what? You should act like me. You should do what I do.* And He gives us the garden and says, *Make it into something beautiful. Make it harmonious. Make it work together in humility. Make music. Take the noise and make music.*

So, while God is making things beautiful out of dust, the devil and the spirit of this world are making beautiful things into dust. The spirit of this world thrives on it, and the principalities and powers love taking music and turning it into noise. That’s their goal.

It’s not even a fair fight when you think about it, with fair goals. It’s just such an easy job. All you have to do is break stuff. A monkey with a hammer could do this. Think about it. It takes three to five years to build a beautiful building. It takes five minutes to light it on fire.

I was watching an old western last month, and these people were just trying to get across the wild west to one of the civilized cities on the West Coast. It took hundreds of years to make that city out of the wilderness. And then watch, look what’s happening all around the world, in many respects. What took a hundred years to build takes months to ruin. It’s a wasteland again, in many respects.

So, the next question is how? How does the spirit of this world, how does the devil, make noise out of the music? Here’s what he does. Look for this. It’s everywhere all the time. Once you see it you can’t un-see it. You’ll see it everywhere. He does it by fueling the primary emotions of hate and fear. These are not just primary emotions; I’d say they are primal emotions, because they’re part of every mammal’s instinct toward danger. Fight or flight. And it’s so simple to manipulate these two primary or primal emotions, because you don’t have to make people think to get them all excited. As a matter of fact, you don’t want them to think. You literally don’t want a person to stop and think, because by stopping and thinking, they could put out the fires of hate and fear. Their anxiety could come to a sudden stop if they’d just say, *Now why am I so afraid?*

So, the plan is to keep everybody just drowning on their emotions. So let me say, just to summarize here, the spirit of this world, the evil one ... we're in a spiritual war, and the plan is to divide and destroy by causing people to be seething in their anger and completely debilitated in their anxiety. That's the goal for the spirit of the world. "Do not be conformed to this world ..."

There's nothing new about this. There are a lot of examples, but 3,500 years ago, Moses has already led all of Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery, and while in the desert, one of the puppets of the spirit of the world says, "He's taken us out to the desert to kill us! There were not enough graves in Egypt for us."

Now if you're in the desert and you hear that, without thinking (please don't think, or you'll miss this), how do you feel? You're very angry or you're very afraid. It's trying to divide this newborn nation of Israel by stirring up and fueling and fanning the flames of fear and anger. *Don't think. Never mind those ten plagues we just survived. Never mind the goodness of God and all the acts that point to that. Keep them drowning in these two emotions.*

Now listen ... I want you to look for this. In the next twelve months the puppets of this world are going to invent or allow or cause whatever is necessary to stir up these primal, primary emotions of hate and fear. And there's a bigger purpose. And the purpose is for division, for destruction. Because the puppet master loves noise, but he hates music. And many people just go along.

Think of the devil as a drug pusher. And what are his drugs? Hate and fear. Are we buying it? Are you part of the spirit of being conformed to this world?

Here's the last little point in this one section that's informative and important. It's the nature of the verb "conformed." Remember eighth grade grammar. It's a passive verb. When a verb is passive it doesn't do anything. It's not like you throw a ball, you just receive it. It would be synonymous with saying, "Don't get sunburned." To get sunburned you don't do something. The sun does all the work. You just lay in the sand. It'll take its course.

And so, Paul here is saying that if you do nothing, if you just turn a blind eye to this world, you will be conformed by it. This world will make you what it wants. Satan, the devil himself, the puppet master, will have you marching to his noise. Think about it. In the last three years, the last two months, have you been more angry or more anxious? Are you ready to fight?

Are you ready to flee? Are you causing division? Are you walking into rooms and saying, *It's us versus them?* That means you're being conformed to this world.

2. What Are the Three Areas "This World" Is Out to Destroy?

That's the first part—what is this world? The second point of our outline here is, what are the three areas this world is out to destroy using hate and fear? I want us to all be looking at this in the future as well. Look at the three institutions that God has brought to us by His grace and mercy to allow us to civilize the formlessness and voidness around us. I would say that these three institutions are sacred. And "sacred" doesn't have to be a church word or some kind of ceremony. "Sacred" means to be set apart for a purpose from God. And these three groups were invented by God to glorify God and, generally speaking, to turn noise into music. That's what they do. They turn noise into music.

And I want you to notice not just how valuable they are but how essential they are. It's kind of like "the bigger they are, the harder they fall"—when these three institutions are corrupted, the more consequences there are. That's the point.

When we see the family unified and humble, we make a TV show about it, because there's a longing inside every heart to be part of a family that's loving and sacrificial and unconditional in their surrender towards one another. And we kind of say, "Ohhhh ... I want to watch that. I want to be part of that."

And what happens when a family is corrupt and evil and sinister? We make a horror movie out of that.

a. Government

The point is, look at the power of these three institutions. The first one is the government. God set up the government in Genesis 9, I think. And He sets up the government to protect the innocent and to restrain the evil. And the government works the way it's meant to when it works in unity, in mutual humility. When the government entities are humble to each other, working towards unity, the government makes music. When we are conformed to this world, it divides the government. The government starts speaking of hate and anger. If we're part of being part of this world, the way you look at the government is with emotions like hate and worry, instead of looking at it as something that maybe we can fix or participate in.

There are two applications that I came up with, and they're kind of on two poles. One is, in light of this being an institution given to us by God from heaven for civilization, we should get involved with government. If you can do that and stomach that, you should absolutely find yourself in that as much as you can... not as a politician who's a Christian, but as a Christian who's a politician. And we would all love to pray for you and care for you—whatever you need, we want to help you involve yourself, because it's God's institution.

The least we can do is vote. And when I say "vote" in the context of our time together, let's just vote. Just vote. It's how you stay out of the most trouble. Just vote. Do you know who you're going to vote for in November? I bet everybody does, don't you? Anybody needing any new information? No. So, now you don't have to listen to anything, because you've already made up your mind. You don't have to be involved in anything from now until that day. Vote early, get it done, any time someone brings it up, you can say, "I've already picked. I'm done."

And when I say "just vote", I also mean that four years ago people were saying, "Oh, I want no part of this. I'm not going to vote. It's a lesser of evils and Christians are not supposed to be involved in an ethic of the lesser of evils." Every election is a lesser of evils. Right? Every election ever is the lesser of evils. I know some of you guys were longing for Ronald Reagan's resurrection. He was evil. He was just the lesser of evils, okay? Because all men are evil.

If you think of the United Kingdom period, think of it as a republic. And the one candidate says, "Vote for King Saul. He's taller and prettier than anyone else." Vote for Gaston. And you think, "Oh, can we vote for someone else?" Yes, David shows up and says, "I'm David. I'm a man after God's own heart. Vote for David." We spent seventeen weeks this year on David. He's the lesser of evils. Remember all the murdering and all that? *Yeah, is there a third party candidate? Sure. Solomon.* "Vote for King Solomon, the wisest man in all the Old Testament." Have you read about his life? His second term he's offering sacrifices to other gods. It's the lesser of evils. All we have is the lesser of evils. That's all we'll ever have. Don't be blinded by hate or fear when you cast your vote. Just vote.

Now here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to walk to that ballot station, I'm going to write in ... (I'm just kidding) ... I'm going to cast my vote. I'll cast my vote, I'll quickly go to my car, look left, look right, make sure it's safe, and then just have a really good, long cry. And then I'm going to move on.

Being conformed to this world means that you're dividing a sacred institution using hate or fear. And in this case, that institution is the government. Don't be conformed to this world.

b. Family

Another target that Satan has that's a gift from God, that's a sacred thing that he hopes to destroy, is the family. Family is the place where you learn how to know a fellow human being and how to be known. It's a place where you find out and discover what love is, how to love and how to be loved unconditionally. The family is one of the most mysterious places because a man and woman come together and they create an eternal being. It's one of the largest mysteries of all creation. It's a place where we find the deeper meaning of words that apply to our salvation like "child" and "adoption." Wow. It's a holy place. It's a sacred place. And a family makes music when they work together in unity in the context of humility, when they're just out to serve one another.

We're conformed to this world when we enter our family using words of anger or words of anxiety and we divide a family. Proverbs says there are six things, no seven things, that are detestable to God. Do you know the seventh thing is, the most detestable? A man who divides his family. That's the spirit of this world.

c. Church

The third institution from God is the Church. It is especially sacred because it is eternal. It makes it to the other side of Revelation. And it glorifies God by giving the honor and privilege of bringing the Gospel to all men. We get to spread the good news that it's Jesus and only Jesus—salvation is only by the grace and mercy of Jesus, and it's only by faith in that gift. That's the Church.

It's called the bride of Christ. That's how special and set apart it is. It is the place where we become like Christ in all of life. And the Church makes a melody. It makes beautiful music when the Church humbly works together for unity.

John 17:20-21, 23

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You.

²³ I in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me.

Jesus prayed that the church would be unified. This is Jesus' prayer for us in chapter 17 of the Book of John. "My prayer is not for (the disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." That's us. "... that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me. I am in them and You in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me."

A healthy church makes beautiful music by being one with one another, and the world gets to hear it. This is a healthy church. This is the sign of a beautiful church surrendering in mutual submission for the sake of unity—when you have multiple ethnic groups, you have multiple economic groups, you have different nationalities, you have different political backgrounds and different political leanings, and you have different ages. You have nothing in common except one thing in common: Jesus is our King. And that brings a real unity, not a superficial, mushy, vague, ambiguous unity, but one that is rock solid, one that is supernatural, because we focus on Jesus the King and the unequivocal teachings of the Bible. A healthy church cares less about more and more about less. A healthy church, one that makes beautiful music, cares less about more topics, and cares a lot more about a very few topics.

If I think back to 2020—and I try not to—but I would say that the people involved in leadership, the men and women who had to sit down with people, in summary, came up with two questions that were at issue. And it sounded like this. One, "Why do you care so much about this little thing?" And I bet somewhere in there the answer was "Because I'm angry" or "Because I'm afraid." And the second question that desperately needed to be answered was, "Why don't you care more about a big issue? Care more about fewer things. Why don't you care about your brother and sister in Christ? Why don't you care about the unity of the church? Why do you care

more about your thing than the unity of the church?” And sometimes it’s because people are just selfish or proud, conformed to this world.

And what’s interesting is that in Romans, when Paul talks about all these differences in chapters 13 through 15, they were having a lot of disagreements. And some of them had to do with what day of the week is the Sabbath, what kind of meals should we have, the diet. And I know many of you are thinking, *Oh my goodness, care less about more*. But if they were writing us, they’d say, “Now look, in 2020 you were caring about what? Why did you care so much?”

But the point of this is that Paul doesn’t say, “Okay, work out all these differences and come to a unified conclusion and be all alike.” He does not say that. He says this: “Okay, look, you just care too much about too much. Go to the Bible, find out what the principles are, apply it to a particular issue, and then talk to each other.” And the words are, “with family affection and mutual submission.” He says to walk in love. He says to play nice. Play nice—same team. Unity and humility are how you live. He’s saying to enjoy all the differences.

You must agree on the fundamental convictions. Some of these beliefs—you’re arguing over that? You’re causing division? You’re causing destruction to one of the sacred things of God? You’re conformed to this world.

So, we treat one another with honor and respect. We listen to other people’s points of view, not to argue the point, but to maybe learn from them. We’re brothers and we’re sisters in Christ. We’re family. We’re on the same team. That’s how we make music.

So, let’s ask the question: Are you conformed to this world? Do you bring division and destruction into sacred things? Satan loves noise. Have you heard it? He loves noise. And he hates music. So, buckle up. In the next twelve months the puppets obeying the puppet master will invent, allow, or even cause whatever is necessary to cause a viral spread of fear and worry, or anger and rage. And that won’t be the end. The end will be so that the things that are sacred before God, like government and family and churches, are torn apart and destroyed and are loud with noise.

There’s the summary of the first two points. This is being conformed to this world: when division, through the addictive nature of the emotions hate and fear, comes and divides and destroys government, family, and church. It takes fifty years to build a church like ours. It will take one afternoon to tear it apart. Do not be conformed to this world.

3. How Do We Get Out of “This World”?

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

So, the third point: How do we get out of this world? Yeah, how do we not do that? Well, the rest of the verse helps us a lot. Look at verse 2 again of Romans 12. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you might prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

a. Think Right

Do you want to know the will of God on a particular issue? Don’t be conformed to this world and transform your mind. The first thing you have to do is study your Bible. You have to think right. And let me emphasize, you have to study your Bible and have the thoughts of God more than a newsfeed. You need more time with your Bible than with the drama out there.

Let me say it a different way: more time studying the Bible than even your devotions. It doesn’t matter what Tozer said; it matters what God said. Study your Bible to find the mind and the emotions and the will of God. Be transformed by renewing your mind.

b. Do Right

The second thing we need to do for unity and humility besides thinking right, is that we have to do right. We have to do right. We have to be committed to one another for the sake of unity and mutual humility back and forth. I mean, I could turn to any epistle in the Bible and, boom, it’s going to jump off the page, once you see it, what evil is up to. Once you see what God is up to, it’s the exact opposite. Watch how many times in six short sentences Paul is going to be emphasizing unity, humility, the idea of everything working together purposefully—music.

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Listen to how we are to work with one another in Ephesians 4: “I therefore ...” (I love this part) “...as a prisoner for the Lord ...” (literally, he’s in prison, and he’s hearing about churches having disagreements over petty stuff. *Are you kidding? I’m doing time for Jesus and you’re fighting over what?!* So when he says “prisoner for the Lord” he’s just kind of inserting that there. *I’m a little busy. Could y’all get along?*) Look what he says: “I urge you ..”—I’m begging you—“...to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and all gentleness...” (that’s how it’s written in Greek) “with all patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

And here’s this big theological treatise: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

In the next twelve months let’s all be eager. Let’s all bend over backwards to help one another become unified in this one faith, this one hope. What’s the hope? Jesus.

James would interject here on not just thinking right but doing right by saying, “Watch your tongue.” It is atomic in its power. It can fuel a city and it can destroy a city. He’ll say things like, *It’s like a little bit this big, and you can put it in a Clydesdale’s mouth, and then a little bitty man can steer that Clydesdale wherever he wants to go. The tongue is like a rudder. Proportionately, it’s so small compared to the entire ship that’s being kicked around by heavy winds. But that ship will go wherever the rudder points. That’s the tongue—power.*

James 3:5

In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

So he warns us, “In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.” His next sentence is that it’s like a single spark that can burn down a forest that’s taken two hundred years to grow. Pump the brakes. You don’t have to say everything.

c. Take Responsibility

Think right, do right. The last way to get out of this world is to take responsibility.

James 1:19-20

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

James is writing us again, and it’s like he wrote it last week. “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak ...”—slow to post, slow to watch others’ silly videos—“... and slow to become angry (or afraid), because human anger (or fear) does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

Anger and fear are the demonic face cards. Those don’t bring you the righteousness of God. But peace and hope—those things do. Have you heard this? Satan loves noise and he hates music. Will you say that with me? Satan loves noise and he hates music. And it’s because God takes noise and He turns it into music. In his humility, with the Son submitting to the Father and the Spirit submitting to the Son and the Father submitting to the Spirit—in humility they work together to cause beautiful things to take place.

Here’s what we’ll say in 2024. Here’s what we do at our house sometimes. When Melinda and I are going back and forth having an argument—and quite often confusion and chaos is taking place, until she figures out that she’s wrong—[audience laughs and groans]—(yeah, I know, I’m going to need a place to stay. Anyone? We took two cars.) Here’s what we’ll

say sometimes. And honestly, because we realize it's not about flesh and blood; once we realize it's not about flesh and blood, but it's a spiritual war, and confusion and chaos and division and destruction is the goal for this little interchange that we're having in the kitchen, this far away, how do you get that confused? Someone will say, "Same team." And when that phrase is used, the argument dies immediately, because we look at each other and say, "You are my very best friend, and I love you. And this is trivial. Whatever it is, it's trivia compared to you and me being us. Same team."

We've got to care less about a lot more things. And we need to care more about just a few things.

Hey, Grace, same team. Same team.

Here's a logo for our miniseries, if you take a look. Look what it says: Citizens in Heaven. Look at that. Hey, Grace, look at your passport. Check it out. We're citizens of heaven. This is not our home. *I feel like such an alien.* Good. *I feel like an outsider.* You're supposed to. *What am I supposed to do?* Be an ambassador. You don't belong to this world. You belong to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And you are to be holy like He is holy. We don't have to be involved in all this other.

This is the lighthouse of evangelism for 2024. How are you so peaceful in all the chaos? How are you and your friends, who seem to have nothing in common, getting along so well? Because we're not conformed to this world. We're transformed by the renewing of our minds. We know what the good and perfect will is because we surrendered to Him. It's because we're on the same team.

We're going to vote for somebody for a short period of time. But we have a King, and we'll spend eternity with Him, because He made it possible. And that is one of the very few things that we care almost everything about. Less about more and more about less ...

Come back next week. We'll talk about what to do with these infectious emotions of anger and fear and how God answers that. Until then, let's pray. I found some verses that I thought we could pray together.

1 Peter says, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." That belongs to this world.

Lord, we pray that. We pray that we would have, like newborn babies, this craving for pure spiritual milk, the milk of our salvation that tastes like the goodness of the Lord, and we care a lot about that. We care about other things in a very little way.

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord,” Paul says, “urge Grace to walk in a manner worthy of her calling that she’s been called to, with all humility and all gentleness, and with all patience, that we would bear with one another in love, that we would be eager to maintain the unity, the harmony, the music that’s in the Spirit, the spirit of peace.” Because there’s just one body, and Lord, we understand that there’s just one Spirit. We only have one hope. It’s in You. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Father, you are over all and you are in all. And that is what we share. Everything else—what difference does any of that make?

I’d ask that we would be a church like that on this hill, that we would be a shining beacon when the chaos breaks, that we would show the way by our love for one another, just as You prayed. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.