My initial assignment with the Air Force following basic and technical training was at Royal Air Forces Base Lakenheath 70 miles northeast of London, England. Originally, I had orders to a base in Arizona, but I was diverted to England because of an urgent manpower shortage there.

I reported for duty with the 48th Security Police Squadron at Lakenheath the day I turned 18. From that point, it was drummed into me that because we Security Policemen were the first people visitors to the base saw, we had to look sharp – spit-shined boots that looked like black glass, heavily starched uniforms with prominent creases in our sleeves and pant legs, and very short haircuts. I soon realized the one who looks professional, also performs professionally. We fancied ourselves a cut above the other squadrons on the base because we marched to the beat of a different drummer.

Whose drumbeat do you march to? Do you know God’s will for your life? Perhaps you can relate to the wanna be preacher in this illustration:

A middle-aged farmer who longed for years to be an evangelist worked in his field one day when he decided to take a short rest under a tree. As he looked into the sky the farmer saw that the clouds seemed to form the letters P and C. The farmer finished his work, later sold his farm, and then went out to P-reach C-hrist, which he felt was God’s leading.

Unfortunately, the farmer was a horrible preacher. After one of his sermons a neighbor came to the farmer and whispered, “Are you sure God wasn’t just trying to tell you to P-plant C-orn?

We’ll come back to the topic of God’s will later in this message. But, we’ve some ground to plow before we come back to that. Last Sunday’s sermon text, Romans 12:1, is the first of two verses that summarize the Christian life. The other verse is today’s sermon text, again just one verse, Romans 12:2. These two verses (Romans 12:1 & 2) are a transition in the teaching focus of this letter. Where the first 11 chapters of the New Testament book of Romans give us several major biblical doctrines, the last 5 chapters of Romans are application of those biblical truths.

Paul addresses the Church in this letter: the Roman church by name, and all churches by implication. We, Trinity Church of Aledo, are recipients of this letter; therefore, we, too, are to understand its contents and apply them to our particular situation and time.

I’m going to read both verses so we have the context fresh in mind, but I’ll be emphasizing verse 2 in today’s message.

Romans 12:1-2:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Here’s verse 2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
There is a massive need in our culture for mind renewal and transformed lives. The pressure to conform to the world’s agenda is very great for the believer in Jesus Christ. What confusing times we live in! I sometimes wonder if our country’s founding fathers were to observe modern-day America what their reaction would be. Maybe they’d say, “No, no, no! You are totally missing the point!” Freedom doesn’t mean we can do whatever we want, regardless of the impact on others. Freedom means we, as a nation, have self-rule – we are able to govern ourselves because we honor and respect each other; we treat each other with dignity. We can have self-rule because “divine Providence” (one of the names for God in our Declaration of Independence) has offered such for His children.

*What might, for instance, John Adams, our nation’s second President, and one of the leaders of the American Revolution say?* Among his great quotes is this, “Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” I think he’d look around today and say, “See, I told you so!”

_Romans 12:2_ begs three questions we’ll answer in this message. **The first question is, “What is it to be conformed to this world?”** Paul writes, “And do not be conformed to this world…”

Paul used the word “conformed” earlier in this letter. _Romans 8:29_ is where you’ll find it – “For whom He (God) foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” In the context of _Romans 8:29_, a person cannot be conformed to the image of Christ unless he/she is first a believer in Jesus. A Christian’s eternal home is determined by God long before he/she is born. According to the Bible, for a person to “be conformed to the image of Christ,” he/she must first have been loved by God who predestined those whom Christ would redeem.

Conformity is an external concept; it is not an internal one. By our speech and by our conduct, we give outward proofs where our hearts truly lie. If we are caught up in the pattern of this current age (‘the world’), we have ceased resisting being squeezed into the world’s mold. We are profane, crude, and wicked when at the same time we think we’re the opposite of those. Such is the depth of sin and our capacity to deceive even ourselves. On the other hand, if you’re a Christian, then your life will surely show it!

This ‘world’ is me-centered and self-oriented. Its’ values are exactly opposite of the Christian worldview, which is Jesus-centered and other-oriented. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah summarized our day in his own, some 700 years before the birth of God’s Messiah, Jesus. This is _Isaiah 5:20 & 21:*

> “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; 
> Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; 
> Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” 
> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, 
> and prudent in their own sight!”
Let’s apply those verses to today’s America. A large percentage of Americans call what is evil good. Instead of referring to abortion as killing preborn life, some call it ‘health care.’ How can it be health ‘care?’ It’s the removal of health from the baby in utero. If it truly was health care, then two people, mother and preborn baby, would leave the abortion clinic at the end of their visit, not just one of them! Because we as a nation confuse what actually is life, we also struggle with what life consists of.

Conversely, there are many in America calling what is good evil. The true Church stands clearly for what is good, yet some who hate Jesus Christ and His people strive mightily to extinguish our flame. As American citizens we are promised in our Constitution, in the very first Amendment, that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Yet, the Church is seen as non-essential, unnecessary, even antiquated. To such people, the church is an option, not a requirement. Unfortunately, there are many people within the confines of the church, perhaps even this one, that the church is not a priority, if it’s even one at all.

As we’ll see when we get to Romans Chapter 13, God ordained both the Church and the State - to work together, not in opposition to one another.

God has shed His light on what a biblical marriage is to consist of – one man and one woman cleaving to one another in a new, distinct life as one. But, our culture celebrates the darkness of two men or two women joining together in unholy matrimony! That aberration cannot be celebrated as beautiful since God created marriage for entirely different purposes, like the birth of children and to prevent sexual immorality. Nor can such “marriage” be an expression of love to be admired because God is love, and He defines what love is in accord with His Word.

None of these issues should be understood as mere opinion – unless we are advocating that God’s opinion is what matters. Certainly, these issues are not simply political positions on a party plank. These are life and death creation ordinances of the living God. As such, they are the very foundation of Christian living.

The second question this verse provokes is, “What is it to be transformed by the renewing of one’s mind?” “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The late Dr RC Sproul notes here, “The goal of the Christian life is not merely nonconformity, which is the easy part, but transformation.” (Sproul, 410)

Transformation is inner change. It is accomplished through mind renewal. It means to get a new mind. “The avenue to the heart is through the mind.” (Sproul, 411)

Maybe you’re familiar with the Transformers action movies like “Dark of the Moon” or “Age of Extinction” – the most recent movie was “The Last Night.” Transformers are living, human-like robots with the unique ability to turn into vehicles or beasts. Their names are probably familiar to some here today – Optimus Prime, Megatron, Bumblebee, Soundwave, Arcee, Jetfire, and Devastator among many others. What the Bible means by transformation is pretty close to these Transformers changing into something different.
The renewing of our minds comes through the Word of God, the Bible. Only the Holy Spirit working through the words of God Almighty can bring about life transformation. The person I was before the grace of Jesus invaded my life was only concerned with how other people thought about me. I lived for them and pleasing them, instead of God. It’s not that I no longer care what other people think of me, I do. But, it is no longer the driving force in my life – I have more to be concerned with God in Christ. For those who remember what kind of a person you were before God saved you, what is now different? Are you a kinder, gentler, more joyful, and loving person? There will be evidence of a life change if indeed you have experienced one.

Peer pressure to conform to this world is intense; but it is possible to be holy if you stayed plugged in to the church, and begin to form relationships and friendships – beloved people whom you can count on when the call of this adulterous world goes out.

The third question is, “What is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God?”

“That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

To “prove” is to approve. And the three adjectives listed here at the end of verse 2 apply to us as Christians. As we refuse to be conformed to this present world and its morals, and, as we are further transformed from the inside out, we discover God’s good, acceptable and perfect will. It is good because God is good.

Further, God’s will is “acceptable.” Paul used that word “acceptable” in the previous verse (Romans 12:1) we studied last Sunday – presenting our bodies to God as living sacrifices...holy and “acceptable.” Synonymous to acceptable is ‘pleasing.’ We find God’s will is not only good, but it is acceptable and pleasing to us.

The late Dr. Jim Boice shares an illustration that is helpful. The mother of a Christian man he knew was dying. The mother was not a Christian, and she had become very bitter, although she had not been a bitter person before. She felt that everyone was turning against her, even her children, who actually were trying to help her.

The man said, “I am convinced that Christians and non-Christians come to the end of their lives very differently. Those who are not Christians feel that they do not deserve to end their lives with failing health and pain, and they think their lives have been wasted. Christians are satisfied with what God has led them through and has done for them. It is better to die as a Christian.” (Boice, 1559)

Finally, we see that God’s will is perfect. That makes sense since God is perfect. Here it means that those who do the will of God discover that it is not lacking in any respect. There is a satisfying wholeness about it.

We should want God’s will, and not our own. We don’t know ourselves as completely as God knows us. A renewed mind leads to a transformed life that knows God’s will. Or to put it mathematically – a renewed mind plus a transformed life = God’s will.
I close with 1 Thessalonians 4:3, where Paul writes to the church, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” He goes on to show that God didn’t call us to be sexually immoral, unclean, nor to take advantage of and defraud others.

The Christian life is to march to the beat of a different drummer. Jesus is our Drummer. He aim to be like Him. *Can we keep on marching together?*