

Have You Changed?

Romans 12:1-2

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The *Barna Group* is a well-known and well-respected organization; it bills itself as the “leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture.”
2. I’ve used some of their research material in our bulletin, “*Words of Life*.”
3. *Barna Group*’s research studies are polls they conduct; they are accurate polls employing sound scientific methods to reduce bias, skewing of data, etc.
4. Recently I ran across some *Barna Group* surveys focusing on the impact of Christianity on people’s lives.
 - A. In May 2006, *Barna Group* did a survey which showed that 51% said they had been greatly transformed by their faith.
 - (1) I find that to be a sad commentary on people claiming to be Christians!
 - (2) ****** Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted [“change,” NIV;] and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3; explain)
 - (3) Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ 4 Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ 5 Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” (Jn. 3:3-5; explain)
 - B. ****** Another survey showed many “Christians” don’t practice what they claim to believe.
 - (1) **3** In this survey (2004), the *Barna Group* published a report on the behavior of people of various religious beliefs. They divided their survey into four groups:
 - ① Evangelicals: 7%, people who believe:
 - ☛ The Bible is accurate.
 - ☛ That they have a personal responsibility to share their faith.
 - ☛ Their faith is very important in their life.
 - ☛ Jesus Christ did not sin.
 - ☛ God is the Creator and Ruler of this universe.
 - ☛ Satan is a real being.
 - ② **4** Born Again Christians: 33%
 - ☛ Accepted Jesus as their Savior.
 - ☛ Do not necessarily accept the Bible as completely accurate.
 - ☛ Do not always accept a personal responsibility to share their faith with others.
 - ☛ Do not always believe that Jesus was holy.
 - ☛ Do not always believe that God is the Creator.
 - ☛ Believe that Satan is symbolic.

③ **5** *Nominal Christians*: 33%

☛ Consider themselves Christian, but don't profess personal faith in Jesus.

④ ****** *Atheists & agnostics*: 12%

(2) ****** They selected 19 activities they thought would be affected by belief; they asked people if these behaviors were “morally acceptable” (here are 10 of them: gambling, cohabitation, lustful thoughts, abortion, fornication, pornography, profanity, getting drunk, homosexuality, recreational drug use).

(a) **6** Only *Evangelicals* and *Atheists/Agnostics* showed some consistency between their beliefs and their activities.

(b) *Born Again Christians* were not distinguishable from *Nominal Christians* or followers of *Other Faiths* (i.e., Islam, Buddhists, or Scientology). In other words, they were much like the world in general.

C. Below is a table summarizing most of the survey.

Percentage of adults who consider a behavior to be “morally acceptable.”

	<i>All Adults</i>	<i>Evangelicals</i>	<i>Born Again</i>	<i>Other Faith</i>	<i>Atheist/Agnostic</i>
Gambling	61%	27%	45%	69%	75%
Cohabitation	60%	12%	49%	70%	87%
Lustful thoughts	59%	15%	49%	71%	78%
Have an abortion	45%	7%	35%	47%	69%
Sex outside marriage	42%	7%	35%	47%	69%
Pornography	38%	5%	28%	49%	70%
Profanity	36%	7%	29%	46%	68%
Getting drunk	35%	8%	24%	44%	61%
Homosexuality	30%	5%	20%	41%	55%
Drugs	17%	6%	11%	25%	38%

Based on Barna Group reported dated November 3, 2003.

5. What do you think of these statistics?

A. In some ways they are exactly what would expect, especially when it comes to *All Adults* and *Atheist/Agnostic*.

(1) It seems logical *All Adults* would reflect the morality of society in general, and it seems that is precisely the case.

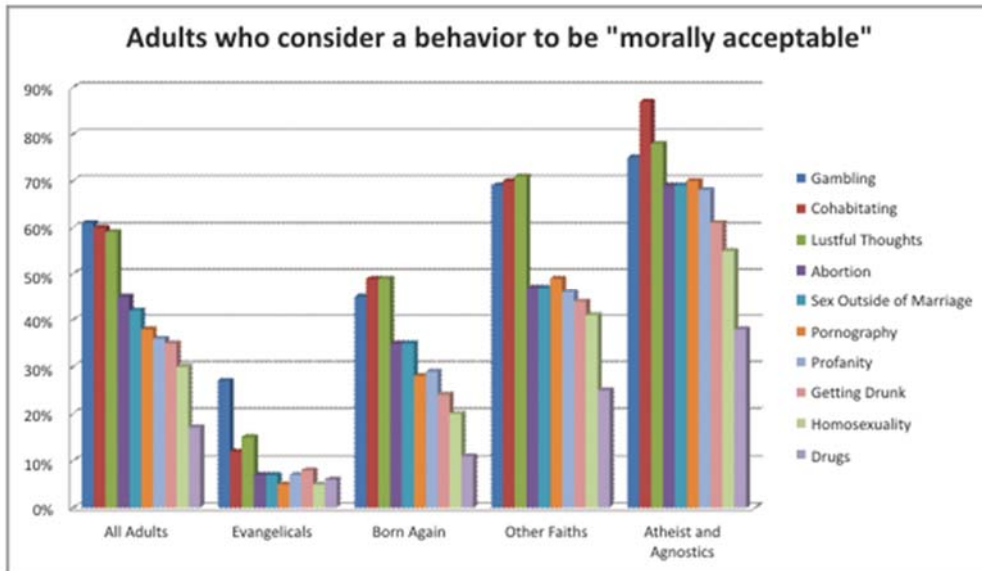
(a) Most people gamble (61%; e.g., lottery, casino gambling).

(b) Most people cohabit (60%; esp. millennials, e.g., Dustin Johnson).

(c) Many people believe abortion is “morally acceptable” (45%).

(d) Fornication (42%), pornography (38%), profanity (36%), drunkenness (35%), homosexuality (30%), drugs (17%).

- (2) Further, it doesn't surprise me *Atheist/Agnostic* have a much higher acceptance of immoral behaviors than the average adult.
- The "New Atheists" (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, the late Christopher Hitchens, etc.) love to crow that atheists are people of high morality.
 - This survey certainly explodes that myth; however, I'm confident the "New Atheists" would disagree these various behaviors are immoral.
- (3) ****** In some respects, I'm not surprised religious people, even what may be termed "very religious" (i.e., *Evangelicals*; although I hate that moniker!) condone every category of immoral behavior (at least to some degree). For example, Evangelicals:
- Gambling (27%; e.g., lottery, casino gambling).
 - Cohabit (12%)
 - Lustful thoughts (15%)
 - Abortion (7%).
 - Fornication (7%), pornography (5%), profanity (7%), drunkenness (8%), homosexuality (5%), drugs (6%).



6. **7** In view of these statistics; we should all examine ourselves to see if we have really changed.

II. DISCUSSION:

Being a Christian means we must:

I. **8** Fundamentally change:

A. **Born again:**

Jn. 3:3-5: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' 5 Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'"

2 Cor. 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

- (1) I would guess all of us at some time in our lives daydreamed about being born a different person than who we are.
 - (a) When I was a boy, many boys probably imagined themselves reborn as the next Mickey Mantle, Sandy Koufax, Bart Starr, Arnold Palmer or Gregory Peck.
 - (b) The girls may have thought about being reborn as the next Jackie Kennedy or Elizabeth Taylor.
- (2) I'm just making the point many would chose something different from what they are.
 - (a) That is exactly what is supposed to happen when we are "born again" spiritually.
 - (b) Morally, ethically, spiritually we cease being the "old man" and become a "new man," with a drastically changed character.
 - (c) What appealed to us before rebirth, should no longer appeal to the "new man."

B. **** Newness of life:** We are fundamentally changed in baptism:

Rom. 6:1-6: *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."*

- (1) The man who goes into the baptistry is not the man that comes out of it!
- (2) Paul describes the man coming out of the baptistry as having died and is being "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (v. 4).
- (3) Of necessity this spiritually resurrected person "should walk in newness of life" (v. 4).
- (4) Just like the new birth leads to a new life; our death, burial and resurrection in baptism is supposed to lead to a changed life: a life where "the body of sin...[is] done away...[and] we should no longer be slaves of sin" (v. 6).
- (5) Look at the survey results, it's obvious a significant number of people believing they are Christians are not changed, not reborn, not resurrected to "walk in newness of life."
 - (a) They engage in immoral behavior just as they did before!
 - (b) They condone and do things no different than people of the world.
 - (c) Their lives don't agree with what Paul said,

I Cor. 6:9-11: *"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such **were** some of you."* (Note: They would have to say, "And such we still are!").

C. **9 Conversion:** The Bible also refers to our fundamental change as "conversion" (To change one thing into another (e.g., currency); Thayer: "to turn oneself about, turn back; absolutely"):

Matt 18:3-5: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Acts 3:19: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,”

- (1) A “converted” person is changed from one thing into another; from “sinner” to “saint”!
- (2) It is synonymous with the “new birth”; it is synonymous with having “died to sin” and being raised to “walk in newness of life.”

- D. ** How about you and me? Is our life, values, desires consistent with me before or after:
- ☛ I was “born again”?
 - ☛ I supposedly “died to sin” and was raised to “walk in newness of life”?
 - ☛ I was “converted”?
 - ☛ I became a “new creature”?
- E. ** What would my profile of what I consider “immoral behavior” look like? Would it agree with God’s Word or be more like one of these categories on the Barna survey?!

Being a Christian means we must:

2. **10** Change our habits:

- A. We all have some bad habits, even after we become a Christian (1 Jn. 1:10).
- B. “Bad habits are like a comfortable bed, easy to get into, but hard to get out of.” (Unk.)
- C. We’ve already made the point that when we become a Christian we fundamentally change our life (i.e., born again, walk in newness of life, converted, new creature, etc.)
- D. Even though that is true, we still will struggle with some of our old bad habits.

Rom. 7:22-23: “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

- E. As Christians we must constantly examine ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5) and work on mastering our bad habits.

Rom. 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. 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.”

- F. ** How? I think Paul’s admonition in Romans 12:1-2 suggests some keys:
- (1) “present your bodies a living sacrifice”: When one sacrifices something, he gives up something he loves/values for something he loves/values MORE.
 - (a) “The secret to permanently breaking any bad habit is to love something greater than the habit.” Bryant McGill
 - (b) If we love the Lord more than ourselves, we can break our bad habits (Matt. 22:37).
 - (2) “which is your reasonable service”: The word “reasonable” is from the Greek word *logikos*, which is obviously where we get the English word logical.

- (a) Think about why it is only “logical” we “present our bodies a living sacrifice”?
- (b) Simply think of what the Lord has done for us by forgiving our sins and giving us the hope of eternal life!

2 Pet. 1:3-9: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith...virtue...knowledge...self-control... perseverance... godliness... brotherly kindness...love...”

1 Pet. 1:3-4: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,...”

- (3) “do not be conformed to this world”:

- (a) We need to develop a brutal sense of self-awareness and see ourselves as the Lord sees us; warts and all!
- (b) “The best cure for one’s bad tendencies is to see them in action in another person.” — Alain de Botton (British author)
- (c) We need to remind ourselves of how disgusting sin really is!

2 Pet. 2:22: “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’”

- (4) “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”:

- (a) The New Living Translation translates this phrase: “let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”
- (b) Human nature cannot be changed! “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).
- (c) It is no secret: only God’s Word can change our heart:

Psa. 119:11: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Psa. 119:50: “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.”

Psa. 119:133: “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.”

- (d) God’s Word can only renew our mind if we constantly read and study it: Matt. 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 10:13

Jas. 1:21-25: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

G. ** I would also add three other thought as we think of changing our habits.

- ❶ Avoid people, places, situations, etc. where you know you're likely to be tempted.

Rom. 13:14: *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”* (NLT: *“don’t make plans to enjoy evil”*).

- ❷ Don't worry what your old worldly friends think.

I Pet. 4:4: *“In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;”* (NASV)

- ❸ With God on your side you can overcome any bad habits!

I Jn. 4:4: *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”* (Phil. 4:13; Eph. 3:20)

Being a Christian doesn't mean we:

3. **II** Change instantly:

- A. Don't mistake this point: I'm not offering an excuse, not trying to let us “off the hook.”

I Pet. 4:1-4: *“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.”*

- B. What I'm acknowledging is habits are hard to break; especially bad habits.

- (1) It is a process of growth (**Prov. 4:18:** *“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.”*).

- (2) We are a building being put together for God (**Eph. 2:19-22:** *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*).

- (3) Grow up to be like Christ:

Eph. 4:15: *“...speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ —”*

2 Cor. 3:18: *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...”*

- (4) There's no doubt God gives us room and time to grow (**I Pet. 2:2:** *“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”*).

- C. ****** But we can't use this as an excuse to remain chained to the same old bad habits; we can't use it as an excuse our weakness in the faith.

- D. The day comes when we must “fish or cut bait”; we must “get with the program”!

- E. The problem is that day never comes for some.

- (1) We will always battle temptation; the problem of sin doesn't stop when we become Christians.

(2) That's why God has a "second law of pardon":

(a) Confess our sin to God: **1 Jn. 1:9**: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

(b) Repent: **Acts 8:22**: "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

(3) We must not abuse God's "second law of pardon":

1 Jn. 2:1: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

(a) The verb "sin" in both instances here in the original Greek is in the aorist tense.

(b) The aorist tense differs from the present tense.

(c) The aorist tense refers to a "snapshot" (●) whereas the present tense refers to a "movie" (▶).

(d) So, the forgiveness God offers in 1 John 2:1 refers to a sin which can best be described as an occasional "stumble" versus a course of life.

(e) God expects us to rely on Him to overcome our bad habits! We should "no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles..."

F. We must busy ourselves putting "on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:10-18).

Being a Christian means our:

4. **12** Goal is perfection:

A. Paul talks about this perfection:

Eph. 4:13: "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;"

Col. 1:28-29: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. 29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

B. The word "perfect" is from the Greek *telios* and means "having reached its end... finished, complete perfect." "It is used (1) of persons, (a) primarily of physical development, then, with ethical import, 'fully grown, mature'" (Vine).

C. As Christians we are ever a "work in progress" as we strive "to be conformed to the image" of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

D. ** Peter puts similar thoughts and ideas in his first epistle:

1 Pet. 1:13-16: "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

E. I was never a big fan of the WWJD movement, but there is a very important kernel of truth contained in that acronym.

(1) If by WWJD one means what Peter just told us in 1 Peter 1:13-16 I'm all for it.

(2) Think of WWJD as a “filter”; a filter through which we sift every thought, every attitude, every action.

(3) What would Jesus do?

- ☛ Would He look at what you and I look at? e.g., on-line
- ☛ Would He drink what you and I drink? e.g., social drinking
- ☛ Would He treat others as you and I treat them?
- ☛ Would He spend His time on as you and I spend our time? (recreation, TV)
- ☛ Would He have the habits you and I have?

F. As we consider conforming ourselves to Christ, it would serve us well to imitate Paul.

Gal. 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

III. CONCLUSION:

1. I hope this lesson “stepped on your toes”; it certainly stepped on mine!
2. Let us therefore, *“examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”* (2 Cor. 13:5)
3. But, let us also take great consolation God is not looking down on us from heaven as a stern taskmaster.
4. He is on our side! **Rom. 8:31-32:** *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*; cf. Eph. 3:20
5. God will not leave us “in the lurch”! Won’t you give Him your life, all of it!

Adapted from a sermon (Has Becoming a Christian Changed You?) found at the La Vista church of Christ (<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org>), La Vista Church of Christ; 8920 Granville Parkway; La Vista, NE 68128-2814.