

THE CHRISTIAN'S BODY  
AND WORLDLINESS  
Romans 12:1-2

INTRO: This morning I want to redo a message I did in 2002. It will save our sound technicians from converting it from cassette to cd, and I think it is in order at any rate. I would like you to take your Bibles and turn to some familiar verses (Romans 12:1-2 read). Paul's letters are usually divided into two major sections, the first covering some doctrinal truth and the second dealing with various duties of Christians. Romans is a little different. It does have the doctrinal section and that is chapters 1-8. We might summarize chapters 1-3 as, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." So, it basically spells out mankind's need for salvation (1-3). Then he tells us how to get justified, or saved in chapters 4-5. Then he tells us how to live the saved life, or how to be sanctified in chapters 6-8. Then in chapter 9-11 he deals with a dispensational matter related to the Jewish race. Then in 12-16 we have many practical instructions given for daily Christian living.

Chapter 12 begins with two very powerful verses and the teaching of these two verses has to do with the Christian's body and how to live in that body in the world. Paul writes in 12:1, "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice..." And so in verse 1 we will look at our bodies as a living sacrifice. In verse 2 we will look at our bodies as a Godly sacrifice.

Before I begin this message I want us to bow our heads and I want to tell you the prayer I would like you to pray. I will tell you what it is before we pray so you can decide if you want to pray this prayer or not. Here is the prayer I would encourage you to repeat in your heart after me: "Lord speak to me this morning. Help me discern any area where this preacher is off track. Grant me the wisdom to see any such area and keep me free from unnecessary bondage. Where he is in tune with You and Your Word, speak to me. And if you speak to me, I will obey Your voice."

I. OUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE (Rom. 12:1)

A. The Exhortation - I beseech

Paul begins this section by saying, "I beseech you brethren..." The word to beseech is the word that means to call to one's side. It is to call someone to one's side in order to correct or comfort in quiet tones for the benefit of that person alone. Let us say someone has seen me live in a way that needs

correction and that person says, "Would you come with me for a little talk." I beseech you, Come here, I'd like to talk to you about something.

Some years ago my wife and I had been in a certain home, not in our area, and when we saw how they handled their children we were deeply burdened. We discussed it and decided that if that family did not do something in a short time, they would pay a very big price. It was a very hard decision to come to but we decided that it would fall to us to talk to them about it. That is such a very hard thing to do and it is that kind of mood in which we find the apostle in this passage. "I beseech you therefore.."

B. The Recipients - you brethren, Christians

Now notice whom he is beseeching. "I beseech you brethren..." He was talking to the Roman Christians, but no doubt we can say Paul is calling each of us aside to have a little talk with us this morning. May we hear him say, "Would you come with me for a moment? I have something on my heart that I want to share with you. Let's go off privately so I can pass on this important bit of instruction to you."

C. The Means of beseeching - by the mercies of God

But we note further now by what means he is going to beseech us. It is 'by the mercies of God'. This word mercies might well be translated, compassions. The matters Paul is about to talk about are serious matters and would be dealt with harshly if it were not for the mercies of God. I define mercy as a feeling of sympathy or pity toward someone in need. Now Paul is saying, "Come with me for a moment. I need to talk to you about something. It is a matter God feels strongly about but because of His great compassion for you, He has been patient. But now I feel you need to be alerted to this matter."

D. The Request - that...

Now notice Paul's request, "I beseech you by the mercies of God THAT..." And here is the rest of the story, "...THAT you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God..." Now the first matter Paul deals with is regarding our bodies. We are to realize that our bodies do not belong to us and so we are to present them as living sacrifices to God.

What is a living sacrifice? It is someone who says, "God, you own my body. You do with it exactly as You want. Ask me to be a missionary and my body will go to China or India or wherever You want. If you want me to be a SS teacher, or do some work in the church, here I am. Do whatever you want. My body is Yours. If you want me to dress in a certain way, I will do it. My body is yours"

Now notice that this body that we sacrifice to God is to be a 'holy' body. To be holy it has to be separated from sin and separated to God. When the one who offered a sacrifice in OT times brought a sacrifice to God it was to be without blemish. Our bodies are to be surrendered to God without sin. It is to be a holy sacrifice. You see, what that means is I cannot say, "Lord, here is my body. You can have it except I want to continue to do this and that. There are a few things I am not willing to give up, but You can have my body."

Furthermore, my body is to be a living sacrifice that is 'acceptable to God'. You see, if we surrender our bodies to Him and we are caught in some vice, that is not an acceptable sacrifice. When we come to Christ for salvation, then we are to come as we are. But when we offer our bodies a living sacrifice to Him, it is to be a sacrifice that is acceptable to Him.

We might say, "Well, that's unreasonable. Who can do that?" By the mercies of God we all can and ought to. Our text says this is our reasonable service. The word reasonable means that we can figure it out for ourselves. Well, let's do that. I was a sinner. I was doomed to hell and deserved to go there. But God gave His only Son to die on my behalf. He took my full punishment. So He has purchased me and I have accepted His offer. Now it is simply logical (that's what is meant by the word reasonable) that He has a full right to ask anything from me that He wishes.

Now the NIV translation says that this is our 'spiritual act of worship'. The reason it says that is because, as someone has said, it is the Nearly Inspired Version; NIV. Did you know that the newest NIV is a gender non specific Bible, and that is to satisfy those who do not like the maleness of the Bible? At any rate, the words spiritual and worship are both not found in the original text. There is a little ground for that translation but I do not

believe it is correct.

No, to present our bodies a living sacrifice is not our 'spiritual act of worship'. It is our 'reasonable service'. We owe it to God! We can figure it out for ourselves. If God gave His only Son to be mocked and scourged and spit upon because He took my sins and then died for me so that I might have life, is it not simply logical that I owe my all to Him? No doubt, it is!

So, we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God.

## II. OUR BODIES AS A GODLY SACRIFICE (Rom. 12:2)

### A. Regarding conformation

Now you may wonder whether verse two continues to speak about our bodies. I think the exposition of this verse will bear that out. Not only are our bodies to be a living sacrifice to God. Here in Romans 12:2 two further thoughts of instruction are given us with regard to our bodies. First, it says, "And do not be conformed to this world." Our bodies are not to be conformed to this world. What does that mean? Well, there are several words we need to understand in this verse.

So, let us look at the word translated world first. It comes from the Greek word *aiwn*. It does not mean world, I think. The word 'kosmos' means world. This word *aiwn* means an age. Vine's Dictionary says *aiwn* speaks of "a period of time, marked in NT usage by spiritual or moral characteristics..." It is the spiritual and moral characteristics of the present age that are in view. The Bible speaks of the sons of this world, or literally 'this age'. The sons of this age refers to the lost (Luke 16:8). Then the Bible speaks of the god of this age. That is the Devil (2 Cor. 4:4). It speaks of the rulers of this age. Those are the unsaved leaders (1 Cor. 2:6-8). It speaks of the wisdom of this age. That is the wisdom of lost mankind (1 Cor. 1:20, 2:6 etc...) Then it speaks of those who have been delivered out of this present evil age. Those are Christians (Gal. 1:4). And Romans 12:2 speaks, I believe, of the fashions of this age. That is worldliness as far as our external appearance is concerned.

What then is worldliness of appearance? Of some words someone has said they are better felt than told. Some words are easier to sense than to define. In question form, L. E. Maxwell describes it like this: "Is the world, to which fashioning ourselves is here forbidden, easier for a spiritual believer to sense than to define?" The answer of course is, "Yes!" There is something about worldliness that is identifiable by sense. It is identifiable as that which is "in". You cannot explain how it is in but you know it is in. Worldliness is not always morally evil, but it is always in. You see, a wide belt for men, what is wrong with that? Well, it depends if it is 'in' or not. There was such a time when it was 'in'. And what is 'in' is not necessarily evil, but when it is in and we use it to be identified with the 'in' age, we are doing what this passage warns against. A wide belt is not 'in' today. It has been in in the past and it probably will be in again some day. And when I wear that which is 'in' in order to be 'in', then I am saying, "Look at me. I want you to know that I love the world, or this present wicked age!"

I sat at a table of Bible school teachers one day. They were having their laughs about that particular school in years past and they said, "Do you remember when students were not allowed to wear wide belts?" And they laughed. Well, I was new to staff and felt very intimidated and fearful of siding with those of the past but I felt it necessary to speak up. And so I pointed out that when those things were forbidden it was because back then those things were an aspect of worldliness. Now I don't know if anybody agreed with me but the damper certainly fell on that topic.

I find it amazing about things that are in. It may be clothing that is very uncomfortable. If it wasn't in, you would never get anybody to wear it. Then it is in and all of a sudden it is amazing how comfortable it has become. But Paul here writes, "Do not be conformed to this age."

Let us consider another word in verse 2. It is the word conformed. What does it mean? There are two related words in the original language, both of which are used in this passage. There is the word, morphee, which speaks of what people are like in character. It speaks of internal form. It is what they are like on the inside. Then there is scheema, which speaks of what people appear like on the outside. It is external

form. These two words are used in Philippians 2. Turn to it. Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus was in the form of God. That is what He was on the inside. People did not see Him as God on the outside. On the outside, according to Isaiah 53, He really wasn't much to look at. But internally, in actual essence, He was truly God. That is the word, morphee. But if you look further in verse 8 it says, "And being found in appearance as a man..." The word appearance is scheema. He was found in appearance as a man. To see Him on the outside, He was merely another man. So, what people saw when they saw Jesus externally, was a man, and so the word is scheema.

Now look at Romans 12:2 which says, "Do not be conformed to this world..." What is it talking about? Does it speak of what we are to be on the inside or on the outside? Well, it is the same word that is translated appearance in Philippians 2:8. So what does it mean, "Do not be conformed to this world...?" Well, there can be no argument but that it refers to external appearance. When it says we are not to be conformed to this world, it refers to external appearance.

No doubt, the largest area affected in worldliness is how we adorn our bodies. You see, our bodies are to be a godly sacrifice. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:1-3 gives three major areas that worldliness wants to work in. In 3:1 Peter indicates that unbelieving husbands may be won to the Lord by the behavior of their wives. Peter then tells these wives, "Do not let your adorning..." The word translated to adorn is the word kosmos, which would normally be translated world. We get our word cosmetics from this word. The meaning of world when used like this means orderly arrangement. It says, "Do not let your adornment be outward... (the word merely is a translators addition not there in the original). Adding the word 'merely' gives permission to external adornment. The actual instruction is, "Do not let the orderly arrangement of your body be the arranging of your hair." The hair is the first area where worldliness wants to manifest itself. The instruction here is to not let our adorning be that of the hair.

Second, is jewelry. The instruction is quite simple. Do not let jewelry be your adornment. Now people tell me, "Oh it's OK to wear jewelry. This passage does not teach we should not wear jewelry. It just means we are not to let that be our adornment." Now you tell me, if

I put on jewelry, how am I going to not let that be my adornment? "Oh", you say, "it is not wearing the jewelry that Peter discourages, it is the attitude of heart that is important." And so if my body is decked out with jewelry I should wear a sign saying, "Don't look at my jewelry. Look at my heart?" How do I not let my adornment be jewelry when I am decked out with jewelry? May you discern whether this is my own conviction or the mind of the Lord.

The third area Peter talks about is clothing. His instruction to ladies is, "Do not let your beauty be that of clothing". Now this certainly does not mean women are not to put on clothing. The plaiting of the hair was for attention. The gold or jewelry was for attention, and what Peter is speaking about here is clothing that is worn for the purpose of drawing attention. The Apostle Paul speaks about these same things in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 (read). Now this passage explains what is meant by Peter. Paul says that women are to dress their bodies in modest apparel.

When you attend local events here in Mennonite laden La Crete in summer, I have concluded that there are a good number of those ladies need to be instructed on how to cover their bodies. You see, Paul says here that women are to dress in modest apparel. But note further that the covering of their bodies is to be with propriety and moderation. Well, what does that mean? Paul is careful to answer. First, it is not to be with braided hair. We are not talking about normal braids here. This is an attention getting hair do. This was the "in" thing. Some versions call it plaited hair. I understand the ladies would braid their hair and use strands of gold and braid it into their hair. It was the latest hair do. Second, it is not to be with gold or pearls. And third, it is not to be with costly clothing. Here is a commentary on what Peter meant when he instructed women to not let their outward adorning be that of clothing. It speaks of fancy or attention getting, expensive clothing.

I would like to make some recommendations here. The Lord has instructed us to let our bodies be a living sacrifice for Him. And then He has instructed us to let our bodies be a godly, living sacrifice. Our bodies ought to be surrendered entirely to God with regard to how we dress it. So I believe that when it says we are not to be conformed to this age, it means we are not to follow the fads and fashions of the

world. When you buy clothing ask yourself, "Am I buying this to be 'in'?" This holds as true for guys as girls. Always aim for modesty. Always ask, "Why do I want to wear this?" Oh that we might say with Amy Carmichael, "Dead to the world and its applause; All its customs fashions and laws."

Ladies, I beseech you refrain from short dresses, short shorts or skin tight clothing. My recommendation is to refrain from paint. I do not know why ladies use paint. I do not think most men are attracted to paint. "Painted eyes and painted nails, Rings in nose and rings on toes", what, I ask, have these to do with godliness? Who do we dress for, man or God? Who does my body belong to? And if my body belongs to God, then why not ask Him what impresses Him? 1 Peter 3:4 tells us what impresses God. It is the hidden person of the heart. It is the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:4). So, in the words of Paul, let me give three biblical principles when it comes to dress: modesty, propriety, and moderation.

Men, why would we get caught up with worldliness? There was a time when boys, and sometimes men wore very ridiculous pants. I heard of one man in our community who said to his son, "Close your zipper, I can see your knees." Now I know of only one reason why males would wear something like that, and that is because of a love for this present age, of which the Devil is god. And when we wear that which is in, then we are saying in body language, "I love the world!" And the Lord says in Scripture, "You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Now there is something very interesting about the imperative verb in this passage, "...do not be conformed..." When a present tense imperative verb is negated in the Greek language by the word mee, meaning 'not' it means to stop an action already in progress. That is what we have in this text. The command then goes like this, "Stop being conformed to this world..." The idea is not that we should not love this present age. The idea is we should stop doing something we are already doing! It is an action already in progress. Worldliness is a natural thing. It is something people naturally do. And when they



become Christians, they are here instructed to bring it to a stop.

Now what is it that makes us desire to be like the world? How does the evil one get at us so that we want to be like the world? The battle is won or lost in a very key area as we will see in the next point.

## B. Regarding transformation

### 1. How

The instruction has been clear. Do not be conformed to this world. Now Paul will give a clear answer how we can overcome worldliness. First he says, "Stop being conformed to this world..." And then he tells us how like this, "...but be transformed by the renewing of the mind." How does the devil get us to desire to be worldly? Through the mind. How do we change the outside appearance to be conformed to God's liking? How do we conform our bodies externally into a godly sacrifice? Well, there is a biblical way to do it, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The word transformed here has as its root, the word morphee. You see, to effectively change the outside, something must happen on the inside. Something has to happen to our character. Some change has to happen inside.

Our English word, metamorphosis comes from this Greek word. Metamorphosis is an internal event that changes whatever it is, from the inside, so as to affect the external appearance. It is the change experienced by a tad pole when it becomes a frog or a chrysalis inside cocoon that turns into a butterfly. It is the change experienced by Christians when they recognize worldliness and acquire an inner desire to be like Christ rather than to be like the world.

Take a tad pole. See if you can apply external pressure and stretch it into a frog with legs. Take a cocoon and open it and stretch the chrysalis into the form of a butterfly. Guess what the success rate is. But give the internal forces of nature time, and out of the cocoon will come a beautiful butterfly.

Now take a Christian. How can he or she be transformed from worldliness to godliness? Can you

do it by requiring a certain standard of dress? Can you change them from the outside in? No. It is the application of the truth of God to the heart or mind that brings about real change. And in order for God's truth to be applied to the heart, this matter must be taught and preached.

We are worldly because we have stored information in our minds sold to us by the devil that says it is cool to be like this or like that. And our flesh, our sin nature gravitates to that bill of goods. In order to change that, we have to have placed in our minds the facts that these fads and fashions are not cool, they are worldliness. They are identification points with the god of this age. They are things that God is not well pleased with. When the mind grasps these things, then God begins to change us from the inside out.

## 2. Why

Now our natural question is, "Why should I not act like this or like that? Why should I not wear this or that? Why should I not be conformed to this world? To be quite honest with you, I like being conformed to this world. I don't like being different. Why should I change?" Notice how carefully Paul answers that question, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed, IN ORDER THAT..." In order that what? In order that, "...you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

There is a very strong implication here. It is this: If I live in worldliness, I will not be able to discern the will of God as I should. What does worldliness hinder? It hinders knowing the will of God. What does giving my body as a living sacrifice benefit me? God will be able to reveal His good and acceptable and perfect will. You see, worldliness blinds my eyes to what God wants!

We might say, "Lord, my soul and my spirit are yours. Do as You wish. But my body is mine. Let me do with it as I wish." And the Lord says, "If I may truly have your soul and spirit, then I will also have your body. And if I do not have your body, I do not truly possess every area of your soul and spirit." You see, our text speaks of living sacrifices! Godly sacrifices!

Notice from this text that if we can but discern God's will, we will find that it is good. We think that giving up this or that will be bad for us, but we will find it is good. We think that if we fully walk in the will of God, that it will be something we do not like. But we will find that it is acceptable. As a matter of fact, if we but learn His will and do it, we will find that it is perfect!

You see, one of the reasons we do not give ourselves to these things is because we do not yet fully trust Him. We do not really think His will is good and acceptable and perfect. We think that we know better than He does! Oh, for a heart to trust God!

CONCL: And so, in conclusion, what is the call for you and me from this morning's text? We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. A sacrifice is giving up something we find hard to give up. Will you surrender the rights to your bodies this morning? Will you say, "Here I am Lord. Have me, spirit, soul and body. Grant me Your mind on how I should dress my body. I surrender my body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to You." You see, when we weigh it all out, we find that God's request to have the rights of our bodies is a very reasonable request. He gave the body of His only Son to die the most cruel death so that we might have life. Is it now not simply reasonable to say, "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee."

But we have been further instructed in this text to stop being conformed to this world. That non-conformity extends to my clothing. God wants to have the right to choose my clothing. Will I surrender that right to Him? When it comes to these three great areas: hair, jewelry and clothing, can I surrender them to Him? Or do I not trust Him enough to surrender them to Him?

But oh the blessing of following Him! When I am surrendered to Him in such a way as to trust Him with the appearance of my body, then I open the way for Him to reveal to me His good and acceptable and perfect will.

I want to give you an opportunity to respond to the message this morning: First, if the Lord has spoken to your heart and you say, "Yes I have allowed myself to become worldly in an area I know about. I am willing to stand and identify before people that I rededicate this area to God. I identified with the world openly, I now want to identify myself with the Lord openly." If

the Lord has spoken to you and you wish to publically identify with the Lord in rededicating your life, you may do so by standing. I am not going to ask anything further. It is simply identification.

Second, you may say, "I cannot say that I feel I have erred in this area. But the Lord has spoken to me and caused me to realize this is much more important than I had thought. I want to live true to the Lord in this area and will instruct my family with regard to the external appearance of their bodies." Stand only if the Lord spoke to you. If you remain seated it has nothing to do with your spiritual status. Stand only if the Lord spoke to you.