

## St. Paul's Appeal To Christians For A Sanctified Life.

Text: Rom. 12:1-5

Suggested Hymns:

597, 261, 433ALHB, 291,377

- 1) His Appeal To Present Our Bodies  
A Living Sacrifice To God
- 2) His Appeal Not To Be Conformed To This World But  
To Be Transformed By The Renewing Of Our Minds
- 3) His Appeal To Think Soberly Of Ourselves,  
About Our Gifts Of Service

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 12:1-5, *<sup>1</sup> 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.*

*<sup>2</sup> 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.*

*<sup>3</sup> For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

*<sup>4</sup> For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This is the finest appeal for a sanctified Christ-life that Paul ever made. It is an appeal for the noblest kind of Christian living. It is an appeal to the noblest motive that can be brought to bear upon a Christian.

With a worldling the strongest motive is reward. With a Christian the strongest appeal is love and gratitude. *“Therefore,”* says the Apostle, *“I beseech you ... by the mercies of God.”*

Paul wrote about these mercies in the previous chapters. It is to these that the *“therefore”* refers. These chapters deal with the great doctrines of

Christianity, and later chapters, with the life of a Christian. For a Christian, doctrine and life are never separated. They are joined together like a happy married couple, in the most intimate, inseparable union.

What we really believe will, yes, must, influence our character and conduct. It is the creative power, it is the controlling, shaping influence of life. Men are what they believe. It is the creed that makes the deed. The slogan in objection to creeds: "*Deeds not creeds*," is sheer stupidity.

In the earlier chapters the great theologian among the Apostles dwells upon the mercies of God, His mercy to the Jew and to the Gentile. He enlarges upon that mercy, its character and greatness. It is a mercy so great that it exceeds all human thought and expression. It is God's love to us lost sinners in Jesus.

To use St. Paul's own words, "*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"<sup>1</sup> Christ took upon Himself the guilt and penalty of our sins and so secured pardon for us, acceptance with God, and eternal life. This is offered freely to every one without any merit or worthiness on his part.

Paul expounds the mercy of God in the great doctrine of justification by faith, and not by works. Its blessings are peace, comfort, and hope. He dwells upon the mercy of God in the gift and work of the Holy Spirit, by whose free grace sinners are called, enlightened, and sanctified, become believers in Christ, children of God.

Paul's threefold appeal for sanctification is based upon the Christian's realisation and appreciation of these mercies. Because God has granted you such great mercies, I beseech you to lead out of love to God a sanctified Christian life. Let us consider *St. Paul's Appeal to Christians for a Sanctified Life*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. His Appeal To Present Our Bodies A Living Sacrifice To God**

Paul puts the appeal for presenting our bodies a living sacrifice on a high plane. The Christian is spoken of in the Scriptures under different aspects. The most familiar is that of a follower of Christ. Another is that of a child of God. Here the aspect is that of a priest.

To be a priest was the highest honour that could fall to a man. To be a priest was more than to be a king, because of the priest's special relationship to God, because of the sacred functions of his office. One of these functions was to offer sacrifice in the name of the people to God.

So Paul thinks of Christians as priests and calls upon them to offer their bodies a living sacrifice. Such a sacrifice, Paul declares, is holy and acceptable to God. It is holy because it is given to God. It is acceptable because it is done out of love to God, and in obedience to His will.

The Apostle speaks of it as a living sacrifice. The comparison is with the sacrifices offered to God by the Old Testament priesthood, which consisted of slain animals.

It may seem strange that Paul says nothing about offering our hearts. That is implied. He has, however, a special purpose in calling on Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice.

It is the body and its members by which we live our life in the world and perform our various tasks. It is the body by which we commit our sins, and do so much evil in the world.

But, on the other hand, it is our bodies by which we serve God and our fellow men, by noble living and righteous deeds. Paul emphasises the body in this appeal because of man's innate sinfulness; the body is under the power of evil passions; it is the body which men abuse in the gratification of the lusts of the flesh, and in all kinds of evil deeds, and in merely materialistic living.

This is especially true of the heathen. Read the first chapter of this Epistle, where the Apostle goes into detail. It is a fearful indictment of paganism. As you read it, you will also realise that these sins of the body in the gratification of lust and greed, in hate, and in the merely worldly life are the sins of our own day and are the evidence that Australia is dropping back into paganism.

It is such a life, such actions, that ought to disgust us and influence us to be all the more ready to give heed to Paul's appeal to use our bodies and their members in godly living and in holy deeds; our minds in thinking only good thoughts; our hearts in loving only pure things; our eyes in looking only at beautiful objects; our tongues in speaking only kind words; our hands in doing only good deeds; our feet in walking only in godly ways — our whole body and

its members controlled and guided in life and action by the good and gracious will of God and dedicated to His service.

This is beautifully expressed in the familiar hymn:<sup>2</sup>

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love;  
Take my feet, and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my king;  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my intellect, and use  
Every powèr as Thou shalt choose.

Such a consecration of our bodies to God is the reasonable service of God's priests, of Christians, who have been redeemed from sin, now belong to Christ, and are members of His kingdom.

Oh, let us use our bodies and members in such a way that in our life and actions we will glorify Christ and serve our own and our neighbour's welfare.

## **2. His Appeal Not To Be Conformed To This World, But To Be Transformed By The Renewing Of Our Minds**

The second appeal is that we Christians should not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Although we are in the world, we must always be conscious of the fact which Christ emphasised, that we are not of the world. As Christians we have a different spirit, different principles, a different faith, and a different goal and destiny.

How inconsistent it is for us to live and act according to the spirit and pattern of the world! And yet many professing Christians follow the world in leading worldly lives. To them the things of this world are the supreme things, despite their outward connection with a church. Their lives are unspiritual. There is no living for Christ and the things of Christ. God's will has no real place in their thoughts and consciousness.

Christians are to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Sin has darkened man's understanding, perverted his mind; yet, through faith, Christians have a new mind, the mind of Christ.

The appeal of Paul to the Philippians when he exhorts them to humility is, "***Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.***"<sup>3</sup> We are to let that new mind transform our life by moulding our thoughts, controlling our conduct, and guiding our actions.

The word used by Paul is that which is used by the evangelists to express Christ's glorious transfiguration on the mountain. That renewed mind is the work of the Holy Spirit. He enlightens us by the Gospel and leads us into the knowledge of God's good and gracious will.

This is important, that we should know and be able to discern the will of God in all things. God's will in all matters is the great desire and aim of every true Christian, as it was Christ's aim. The petition "***Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven***" should therefore be the dominating principle of a Christian's life. God's will is also the criterion as to what he may do or may not do.

The question may be asked "*when is a certain action worldly?*" It cannot be worldly merely because the world does it. The world goes to football games. This certainly does not make going to football games sinful, nor does it impose upon us the necessity of staying away.

An action or a way of life becomes worldly only when it is in conflict with God's good and perfect will, or has an evil influence on a Christian's faith and life. So the criterion as to the permissibility of any pleasure or practice or action is the question "*Is it in accordance with or contrary to God's will?*" We should, of course, be suspicious of practices indulged in general by worldly people. They require special scrutiny.

Paul implies that the new mind, the mind of Christ, will give the Christian the ability to judge what under certain circumstances or in certain matters is God's will. That is not always so easy. Should I engage in this business? Should I go to this amusement? Should I marry this woman?

The renewing of the mind in a Christian is a growing experience. As he studies the Word of God and lives in fellowship with Christ, the Holy Spirit will lead him to a better understanding of God's will and a clearer knowledge of Christ's mind.

He will realise more and more what is God's good and acceptable will and be better able to apply it as the norm of the conduct of his life. Christ-like and transformed lives, how different and how noble they are in comparison with the type of life of the people of the world, who live only to please themselves and only for the things of the present life!

Another hymn shows the contrast very forcefully.<sup>4</sup>

The world seeks after wealth,  
And unto Mammon offers  
Its all, content if gold  
Is hoarded in its coffers;  
I know a higher good,  
Which e'er my joy shall be;  
My Jesus is my Wealth ——  
What is the world to me!

The world cannot extol  
Too highly sinful pleasures,  
And foolishly resigns  
For them the heavenly treasures.  
Let others love the world  
To please their vanity;  
I love the Lord, my God ——  
What is the world to me!

### **3. His Appeal To Think Soberly Of Ourselves, About Our Gifts Of Service**

Paul's third appeal is that Christians think soberly of themselves with regard to their gifts of service. It is an appeal for humility in judging ourselves. This appeal may seem strange. It will not appear so if we look at it in connection with what follows.

The Christian is to lead not only a life of Christian virtue, but also a life of Christian service. Like Christ, his Lord, he is not only to be good, but to do good to his fellow men in many different ways. The Apostle speaks especially of service to the Christian fellowship, the congregation, to fellow members.

The Apostle here uses a favourite figure. A congregation is like a body. It is composed of various members. They are joined together by faith in Christ into a spiritual body and are, as a rule, organised into an outward society, the congregation. The members are all bound to do service to the organisation as a whole, but also to the individual members.

We are not only members joined to the body, but we are also joined to one another, "members one of another." This great truth needs to be emphasised in our day of individualised Christianity. Men and women want to be Christians without congregational affiliation. There may also be church members who are interested only in the congregational organisation, but have no interest in their fellow members.

We need but read this chapter to the close to realise how unapostolic, how unchristian such a spirit and life is. We not only rob our fellow men of our love, sympathy, and help, but we also rob ourselves of the rich blessing to our souls in such brotherly sympathy and kind deeds, and we lose God's gracious blessing for works of love done for His sake.

Why does the Apostle appeal for a humble and sober judgement of ourselves? Some have great gifts and abilities for Christian service. Some can fill greater positions. Others can render only smaller service.

The danger is that those who have greater abilities may become proud and look down upon those who can perform only the lowlier forms of service. In their pride they may refuse to do any lowly service at all. To such pride a humble self-judgement will be an antidote.

Paul does not ask us to deprecate our gifts and assume a false humility, which is even worse than pride, but he wants us to think soberly about whatever

abilities we may possess. It will have a sobering effect upon us and keep us humble if we always keep in mind that these gifts are bestowed, not because of any superior worthiness or merit on our part.

They are the free, unmerited gifts of God bestowed on a believer in accordance with the measure of his faith. The gifts which the Apostle more particularly has in mind are spiritual gifts. He mentions some of these in the following verses, the gift of ministry, the gift of teaching, the gift of exhortation. What he says of the use of these gifts, namely, that they are to be used for the body as a whole and the members in particular is true of every other gift and talent which we may possess.

They are not merely for our own use and for our glorification. If we have any special ability to comfort the sorrowing, to console the bereaved, to encourage the downcast, to teach the ignorant, to admonish the erring, and to exhort the indifferent, to help the needy, to minister to the sick, we are under obligation as members of the body of Christ to use them for the good of our fellow members.

Such use of our gifts ennobles and sanctifies our lives and makes them Christ-like. Such use of our gifts is the will of God, who has given them to us.

As we sing, so let us do: What is the world to me!

Give me a faithful heart,<sup>5</sup>  
Likeness to Thee,  
That each departing day  
Henceforth may see  
Some work of love begun,  
Some deed of kindness done,  
Some wand'rer sought and won,  
Something for Thee. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>2</sup> Hymn 377

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:5

<sup>4</sup> Hymn 433 ALHB

<sup>5</sup> Hymn 370 v 3