

## THE WILL OF GOD -- TESTED AND APPROVED

Romans 12:1-2

**Intro:** If we are to get the full impact of these verses, we should read the whole epistle up to this point, and then we would see that this is nothing more than we should expect. What we used to be, would be freshly impressed upon our minds. What God has done for us, and how we have been changed, would also be seen again as the most amazing truth in all of the universe. But even more than that, the ultimate goal of our salvation would be viewed as the most amazing object of God in saving us. Then it would be very difficult for us to think that anything less than this would be expected in the light of all of "the mercies of God" which have been bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But for one who is merely a professor, and not a possessor of salvation, the opposite will be the effect. There are those who say they are Christians who warn us that we should not be to extreme in our religion. They cannot understand such teaching which makes us different from the people who are around us. They like to pick and choose that which will make them the most comfortable in the presence of the people of the world, and which will not make us appear so different. Some of the older writers spoke of "the singularity" of some Christians who seek to live all of the time in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. By this they meant that quality of character which means that you are willing to stand alone if that is necessary. And it is necessary all of the time. There was a time when we "walked according to the course of this world," but that is to be a thing of the past for everyone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation. We are new creatures, *a new creation*, and we are called by God to live a new life, a life of obedience to the Word of God. And it is not a life in which we are constantly holding ourselves back from what God tells us to do in His Word, or not to do, but a life in which we, like our Lord, delight to do the will of Him gave His Son for us.

These verses which I want to consider with you are, for most of us, two of the most familiar in all of Scripture. In my case, they were among the first verses of the Bible that I memorized, but I will have to say that I am still learning what they mean. The Apostle Paul has brought together in these two verses the very root and fruit of what it means to be a Christian -- the kind that Lois and Eunice were in the text we had this morning.

As you look at these two verses, you will notice that the Apostle Paul has given us three exhortations or commands. Two are positive; one is

negative. By that I mean that he has told us two things we are to do, and one which we are not to do. But we can't completely do what he tells us to do if we are ignoring what he tells us not to do.

The first command is that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

The second is that we are not to be conformed to this world, or *age*.

Instead, as the third command exhorts us, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we move *test and approve* that God's will is "good, and acceptable, and perfect."

Let us begin our study by noticing:

### **I. THE MANNER OF THE APOSTLE'S APPEAL.**

He wrote, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God."

Speaking as an apostle on behalf of God he had every right *to demand* what he was about to say. But he didn't do that. Instead, in a loving manner he *urged* them to do what he went on to say.

This was the manner in which Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus.

Let me read what he said:

8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds (Ph.8-10).

Such an entreaty was to win a favorable response from the people, as was the title that he used in addressing them. He addressed them as "brethren." And this would also include the women and children among the people of God. The Apostle knew that the Lord had to prompt them to listen to his words, and to respond to them. But he wanted them to know that there were certain responsibilities which were incumbent upon them because of their salvation. That is what Paul was referring to by his use of the phrase, "the mercies of God." In support of this see 11:30-31. Such a loving approach to a most important matter would be inclined to make the people more accepting of his message. If we are going to preach grace, we need

to learn to speak with grace.

Now I have mentioned that there are three exhortations which the Apostle gave in these two verses. Let me distinguish between them for you:

- 1) The first has to do with God.
- 2) The second has to do with the world.
- 3) The third has to do with the Word of God.

Let us examine these in as much detail as we have time for.

## II. THE APOSTLE'S THREE EXHORTATIONS (Rom. 12:1b-2).

### A. The first has to do with God (v. 1b).

Notice that "God" is mentioned twice in verse 1. The mercies are God's mercies, and the offering we bring, we are to bring to God.

The thought here comes out of the OT where the presentation of sacrifices to God was well known. The people may have given their gifts to the priests, but the offering was made to God.

Earlier in this epistle the Apostle Paul had touched upon this subject, and that was back in chapter 6. The same word that Paul used here for "present" he had used in Rom. 6: 13 (2x), 16, and 19 (2x). Either *present* or *yield* is a good translation because believers are called upon *to give themselves to the Lord*. And we need to remember that when sacrifices were offered to the Lord either all was offered to the Lord, or part was offered to the Lord and part for the priests, *but none of it was returned to the people!* So this was to be the gift of a lifetime, and this idea is even in the aorist tense of the verb, "present," in Rom. 12:1.

But why should the Lord make such a request of His people? There are several reasons that should come to us immediately.

1) God has purchased us for Himself. Do you remember what Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth about this? Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20:

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

We belong to God. We were bought with the precious blood of Christ.

2) A second reason is that if the Lord has our bodies, He has all of us. That is the sense in which the word "bodies" is used in Rom. 12:1. We

belong to the God body, soul, and spirit. That is the reason why Paul prayed as he did in 1 Thess. 5:23-24:

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

3) A third reason that we need to give our bodies to the Lord is because it is in our bodies that sin has taken control, and the first step in deliverance from sin is to give ourselves to the Lord.

4) A final reason is because it is in our bodies that we are to experience the gradual transformation, completed when the Lord comes, when we will be made like our Savior.

But unlike the sacrifices of the OT, ours is to be a living sacrifice, and our whole purpose in life is to be “holy” because it is only by holiness that God will be pleased with us.

“Reasonable service” has been rendered many ways, but this probably conveys the idea in the sacrifice as well as any translation. Of course it is a spiritual service, but it is reasonable in the sense that if the Lord purchased us at such a great price, it is only right that we should give up our rights to ourselves to life only and always for the glory of God.

But let us move on to the second part.

### **B. The second part has to do with the world (v. 2a).**

Paul used the word *age* here instead of *kosmos*, but the meaning is the same. *Age* simply speaks of the world with reference to time. The world today is the same that it has always been, and it never will change. It causes man to be God-less in his living, and to focus attention upon himself. Charles Simeon described the world as being “self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-confidence, and self-complacency” (Vol. 15, p. 472). And you will find that an expression that has become very popular today was just a few generations back a word which described worldliness and sin. And I am speaking of self-love. The world favors man. It focuses attention on glorifying man. It is out to please man and all of his lusts.

Now what did Paul say about the world? He said that we are not to be conformed to this world, to this age. What did he mean by “conformed”?

He meant that we are not to adopt the fleeting fashion of this world,

according to Sanday and Headlam, p. 353. Peer pressure, and all the pressure that the world can exert on us is designed to make us conform. The world has no patience with people who live to please God, and so the pressure is always on to change.

Every child of God needs to answer the question, "What is worldliness?" It often seems that to most Christians there is not such thing anymore because Christians today are doing almost everything that the people of the world do -- at least that is true of those who profess to be Christians. The world with its methods and programs has found its way not only into people's lives, but into the church itself. And perhaps this is one reason we are making so little headway in turning people to the Savior. People in the world see so little difference between the world and the church that they can't be bothered with the church.

These are basic issues that we all have to face, and Romans 12:1 and 2 are sorely needed by the Lord's people in these days.

Remember those searching words of the Apostle John, found in 1 John 2:15-17:

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

But I must hurry on to the last point:

### **C. The third has to do with the Word of God (v. 2b).**

I am referring to the last part of verse 2: "But be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

But you may say to me, "Where do you see the Word of God in that?" And I respond by saying, "And how do you think that you are going to get your minds renewed if it is not by the Word of God?" And where else can we find the will of God?

What did Paul mean by "the renewing of your minds"? He meant that the

reason that people do what they do and live the way they live, is because they aren't thinking straight. God is not in all their thoughts. How often do you hear people speak of God except to use His Name in vain? How often have our politicians asked about any issue, "I wonder what God's will is about this"? No, they want to know if such a such a thing is going to be pleasing to their constituents, but they give no thought about what is pleasing to God. But what a different it makes when a person is saved, and I mean *genuinely saved!* Then God suddenly becomes the all-important One! And the more we read the Word, the more our thinking changes, and the more our thinking changes, the more our behavior changes because the Word is changing us.

In another of our memory verses, 1 Thess. 2:13, Paul had something very important to say about the Word of God. Let me read it to you:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Notice that last part of the verse, "Which effectually worketh also in you that believe." You may not think that the Word is doing much to you, but it is! And the more you read it, and memorize it, and hear it taught, the greater is going to be the effect. That is why the Word must have a major place in our daily schedule all of the time! And this is why we want you to come to church as much as you can. The more you and I get of the Word, the better! It is a living word, sharp and powerful, and it transforms us from within.

My final word:

### **III. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF WHAT PAUL WAS SAYING WE SHOULD DO.**

**"That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."**

God wants us to put His Word to the test, and by this word "prove" He means that if we really put it to the test, we will give it our wholehearted approval! The giving of our bodies to God is "acceptable," well pleasing to Him. And His will when put to the test will be pronounced "good, and acceptable, and perfect" to us!

**Concl:** Does this describe the way you and I are living? It should, if we

really know the Lord. When we have the right response to God, and the right attitude of rejection toward the world and its sin, and are feeding our minds and hearts daily on the Word of God, seeking to be obedient to all that the Lord has commanded us to do, the result will be blessing, great blessing, and great usefulness as our lives touch the lives of others. May the Lord enable us to make these two verses our verses every day that we live.