

SEPARATION FROM SIN:
The Neglected Doctrine
Message 2
Text: Romans 12:1-2

INTRO: Our subject is the believer's separation from sin. In our last message we said that when a person becomes a Christian, he is separated by the Holy Spirit of God from the domain of Satan, to the kingdom of the Son of God's love, Christ. The believer is moved from an unholy domain to a holy domain. He is moved from sin to righteousness. He is moved from ungodliness to godliness. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

So the believer is to be separated from the sinful practices of the world. We will look at some of those practices in later messages. But separation goes beyond that to being separated even from worldly appearances. At this point it becomes much more difficult for us. And so, before we begin this message I want to give you opportunity to remake the commitment of the first message. The commitment I am recommending would be something like this: "Lord, help me to discern between what may be this speaker's personal views and Your will. And Lord, if You speak to my heart in any matter that needs changing, I am committing myself to You to make that change. I want You to speak to me in anything that needs speaking to in my life."

Then let me mention one other matter. I will mention this word only once and then immoral in its place. I do not like to use the word 'sex' in preaching. When I will refer to this word in all its various forms, I will simply substitute the word immorality. If I should need to speak of that in a positive light, I will do so in other terms. That way the thoughts projected will be kept in their proper place.

I gave this message many years ago and will give it with some changes now. In light of the subject of these messages I am titling this message, "Separated In Bodily Presentation." We are to be separated from the world with regard to all sinful practices. But we are also to be separated from the world in our bodily presentation to other people.

B. From Worldly Appearances

1. Our bodies presented a living sacrifice (12:1)

a. The exhortation - I beseech

Our passage is Romans 12:1-2 (read). We begin with verse 1. Paul begins this section by saying, "I beseech you brethren..." We have here an exhortation. 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? I need to talk to you about something." Paul is saying, "I beseech you, Come here, I'd like to talk to you about something."

Years ago, when I originally gave this message, my wife and I had just been in a certain home. When we saw the operation in the home with the 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 be my task to approach them about this problem. That is a very hard thing to do, in a very precarious matter. And one does so in trepidation. It is in that kind of a mood that this exhortation is set.

b. The Recipients - you brethren, Christians

Now notice whom Paul is calling to his side. He writes, "I beseech you brethren..." He is speaking to Christians. And this morning we could say that Paul is calling each of us aside to have a little talk with us on a delicate issue. May you hear him say, "Would you come with me? 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 information to you."

c. The Means - by the mercies of God

But we note further now by what means he is beseeching these believers. It is by the mercies of God. This word *mercies* might well be translated, *compassions*. The matter Paul is going to talk about

is a serious and delicate matter, and calls for the mercies of God. I define mercy as a feeling of sympathy or pity toward someone. 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 now will come the request, "that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God..." Now the matter Paul deals with is regarding the Christian's body. We are to realize that our bodies do not belong to us and so we are to present them as a living sacrifice to God. What is a living sacrifice? It is someone who says, "God, you own my body. It is not mine. I am a Christian. It is Yours. You do with it exactly as You want. Ask me to dress differently, or not to wear certain things, or to start wearing certain things, and I will do it. I am a living sacrifice. My body is Yours."

Now notice that this body that we sacrifice to God is to be a holy body. That means it is to be separated from that which is not proper and separated to God in such a way as is proper for those professing godliness. When a sacrifice in the OT was brought to God it was to be without blemish. Our bodies are to be surrendered to God without blemish. It is to be a holy sacrifice, a holy body. You see, what that means is I cannot say, "Lord, here is my body. You can have it, but I want to wear what I want to wear and do what I want to do with it. 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, we are to come as we are.

When we offer our bodies a living sacrifice to Him, now it is to be a sacrifice that is acceptable to Him, not to me. And I must learn what He wants.

We might say, "Well, that's unreasonable. Who can do that?" By the mercies of God we all can and ought to do that. But notice that 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 for anything from me that He wishes.

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. Well, the folk who did the NIV later also made a gender non-specific Bible 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.

Now let us see what our bodies are to be like:

2. Our bodies presented a godly sacrifice (12:2)
 - a. Regarding conformation

For that, we go now to verse 2 (read). Not only are our bodies to be a living sacrifice to God. Here in Romans 12:2, two further things are given us with regard to our bodies. First, our bodies are not to be conformed to this world. In the first message we covered this word *world*. The word *kosmos*, means world; and the word *aiwn* means an age. I mentioned

that they may be used to express very similar ideas. The word used here is *aiwn*, normally meaning an age.

Of the word *aiwn* Vine's Dictionary says it speaks of "a period of time, marked in NT usage by spiritual or moral characteristics..." It refers to the spiritual and moral characteristics of the world. The Bible speaks of the sons of this age. Those are the lost (Luke 16:8). It 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 demonic forces (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 of the fashions of this evil age. That is worldliness as far as our external appearance is concerned. In the last message I mentioned the German word *zeitgeist*, meaning the spirit of the time. The spirit of the time keeps changing, and that is, I believe, what is meant by this *aiwn* or this age.

Now notice what it says, "Do not be conformed to this world, or age." So we ask, what then is worldliness? 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 is not necessarily evil, but it may be *in*. There was a time when it was *in*. It is not *in* today but it probably will be *in* again in the future. And when I wear that which is *in* to be *in*, then I am saying,

"Look at me. I want to be *in*. I want you to know that I love the world!"

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 you couldn't wear this or that?" And they laughed. Well, I was fearful of siding with those of the past but felt it necessary to speak up. And so I pointed out this aspect of worldliness. Now I don't know if anybody agreed with me but the damper certainly fell over that table.

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.

So, let us now consider 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 internally, that is *in* character. It speaks of internal form. 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 2:5-8. Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus was *in* the *form* of God. Well, was that externally or internally? Internal of course. People did not see Him as God externally. Isaiah said Christ had no form or comeliness. Externally you would never have known He was divine. But He was, *in* essence, truly God. And the word used to describe this is the word *morphee*. But in Philippians 2:8 it says, "And being found *in appearance* as a man..." The word *appearance* is *scheema*. He was found *in appearance* as a man. Was that what He was on the inside or on the outside? It was what He was externally. What people saw, 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 the Bible mean when it says, "Do not be conformed to this world...?" Well, there can be little argument that it refers to the Christian's 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 affect for ladies. 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..." Let me just mention that the NKJV word 'merely' is an interpretation, not a translation. It is not there in the original. So the 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." I have pondered this for years. I have to say I am not certain it means to wear no jewelry. But I do know for certain it speaks against being decked out in jewelry.

So let me ask, if I put on jewelry, how am I going to not let that be my adornment? And maybe you say, "Oh, it is not wearing the jewelry that Peter

discourages, it is the attitude of heart that is important." Have you ever noticed anybody getting decked out in jewelry and then wearing a sign that says, "Don't look at my jewelry, you should see my heart"?

There is a sense in which hairdos, jewelry and clothing are like some of the arts or musical instruments. For example, when you allow drums in church, and I believe drums are not a sin, but when they are allowed they are harder to control than almost anything else. Modest jewelry wants to grow into more jewelry.

At Prairie Bible Institute, years ago, they loosened the rules a bit on jewelry, and the next thing there were ear rings that hung almost to the shoulder. I can remember one time sitting in church and thinking, "Wow, that would make a good char lure." Do you know what size mouth a char, a big lake trout, has? Back in my home town we took the young people to a lake one time and we were fishing for Char, Lake trout. And I caught one and one of the young people was going to net it. It was a big char and it had its mouth wide open. He dropped the net and scampered to the other side of the boat. A Char's mouth is something like these Jack fish we have here. Some ladies ear rings literally shout, "Look at me! I love the world!"

Do you remember what I asked you to pray before I began these messages? You see, if I am just giving you personal views, scrap it and don't worry about me. But, if perchance the Lord is talking to you, listen to Him. He died for you and He wants you to be a living and holy and acceptable sacrifice to Him.

The third area Peter talks about is clothing. His instruction to ladies is, "Do not let your beauty be that of clothing". It 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.

Consider clothing for a moment. I have attended some of the local events here in summers gone by. I have concluded that there are those of our Mennonite ladies who need to be instructed on how to cover their bodies. You see, Paul says here that women are to dress in modest apparel. May I further ask you, does modesty change from cold in winter to when it is hot in the summer? May I ask you, do modesty rules change at the beach? At the pool?

Our family still laughs about a time when we went to La Shoppe A La Tilly. That is a fancy name for where donated clothing was gathered for Bible school folk. And one of our children was checking out a certain article of clothing, and asked what I thought. And I said, "And what would you wear that under?" Some clothing is meant to wear under other clothing.

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. The "in" thing. Some versions call it plaited hair. The ladies would braid their hair and use strands of gold and braid it into their hair. It was the latest hair do. Then 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 recommend, do not 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."

CBC just did an article on "Market Place", called, "Restaurant dress codes: *Immoral* outfits for female staff may be discriminatory." The subtitle was, "Could dress codes at Moxie's, Earls, Jack Astor's and Joey Restaurants violate human rights?"

In this article women spoke out. Here is the question that was asked, "Should you have to dress *immorally* to keep your job? Many women working at some of Canada's popular restaurant chains say they do." And what are some of the issues addressed? The article said, "But dress codes for female staff at some restaurants – which can include high heels, tight skirts and heavy makeup – may violate women's human rights, according to some experts." Now listen, that is the world, and their concern is not worldliness. There is another matter they clearly recognize. We need to tell our wives about that sometimes.

May I ask you, whom do we dress for, man or God? Whom does my body belong to? And if my body belongs to God, then why not ask Him what impresses Him? Our text 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 these three words rule when it comes to dress: modesty, propriety, and moderation.

Are men immune to worldliness? No! The problem is not quite as common with men as with women. Men, why would we get caught up with worldliness? Listen to what I said some years ago when I gave this message, "I see these pants that boys want to wear. 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 worldiness. Some

men want the skateboarder look. What do you think of the cowboy look? My wife and I just observed a couple, they were so surely Mennonite, no one would ever mistake it. You could clearly see it on the children, much more clearly on the woman, but you could not see it at all on the man. He was 100% a Texan cowboy.

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). How serious is this matter?

I have wondered men, do we demonstrate a form of worldliness when we have to put our bodies in the fanciest car or pickup truck or house or whatever else the world offers? When we set our bodies in that vehicle, does it do something worldly for us? How about my house? My yard? Is that a form of worldliness? Would it not be OK for me to ask the Lord those questions?

Now there is something very interesting about the imperative verb in our passage. It says, 'do not be conformed' and then it tells us that it is the world he is talking about. Here is the point. When a present tense imperative is negated by the Greek word *mee*, it means to stop an action already in progress. It does not mean, "Don't start doing it." It means stop doing something that is 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 that it is an action already in progress. Worldliness is such a natural thing that almost everyone that gets saved is caught up in. To correct it, it has to be stopped.

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? Remember he is the god of this. Well, Paul will tell us that as well. 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 worldiness. He says, "Stop being conformed to this world, 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? Well, there is a biblical way to do it. 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 to 'transform'. 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 a 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. I recommend it is the same success rate that requiring a certain pattern of dress has. But give the internal forces of nature time, and out of the cocoon will come a beautiful butterfly. Metamorphosis has taken place. Internalize the Word of God, and it will make amazing changes on the outside.

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. In order to change that, we have to have placed in our minds that these fads and fashions are not cool, they are worldliness. 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?" 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? I like being conformed to this world. I don't like being different. Why should I change? Notice how carefully Paul answers that question. Here is why, "...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

You see, the implication here is that if I live in worldliness, I will not be able to discern the will of God as I should. What does worldliness hinder? 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 to me.

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." Certainly the right to do with our bodies what we wish, is a very modern teaching. But 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 your soul and spirit."

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 fulfilling to us and acceptable to God. 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 we conclude. There is a very serious question each one of us must ask ourselves. Here it is: Do I truly desire to be like Christ? If I truly desire to be like Christ, this world will lose its glamour. An old preacher, old John Vasser said, "When I laid little Jimmy Vasser down (he had died), this world and I forever parted company." Separation from sin! The neglected doctrine. Scripture says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." There is separation, not only from sinful worldly practices but from worldly appearances.

And I ask you, do you want to be like Christ? Ask God what He would have you to wear or how He would like you to appear. I gave this message years ago. A young woman heard it, went home, and went through her wardrobe and put out everything she felt was not godly.

And let me say this: do not change anything because I believe or to please me. You wouldn't do that, would you? Ask the Lord what pleases Him. You see, if you please me, you might not know the will of God any better than you do now. But if you are a living sacrifice for Lord, you will be able to test for yourself what is good before God, what is acceptable to Him, and what His perfect will for you is. We hardly touched on those things, but

these things will be the benefits of being a living sacrifice for God.