***The Church, No. 5  
  
Colossians 1:15-20  
  
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Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth."

Romans 15:4: "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of Scriptures, we might have hope."

Luke 8:11: "For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable; that is, through the living and abiding Word of God."

2 Timothy 4:2-4: "Preach the Word then. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

2 Peter 3:18: "To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Please open your bibles this morning to the Word of truth. Our subject is "Hymn in Honor of Christ," number 18 in Colossians 1:15-20.

Colossians 1:18 says, "He is also Head of the body, the church." Today, God is gathering together a special body of believers, from Jews and gentiles, called the church. The saints who make up this special body of believers are classified in the Bible neither as Jews nor as gentiles, but as Christians, or the church. This is indicated in 1 Corinthians 10:32, where the apostle says, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks, or to the church of God."

I once pointed this out to a pastor from a reformation church, a church that originated in the reformation era, and who believed in amillennialism as the relationship between the church and the kingdom that the Old Testament speaks about. And I pointed out to him, because he had the position that God has no further use for the Jews, and that they have lost their place with Him because they rejected the Messiah, and the church has replaced them. I said that that would be an odd thing for the apostle Paul, if that were true – to say, "'Do not give offense to Jews or to Greeks, or the church of God,' because you're saying that they don't exist. And he gave some idiotic, absurd, convoluted explanation, at the bottom of which was, "Well, that doesn't mean exactly what it says." And there we go again, letting the Bible say what it says, or inventing what we think it should say.

There are distinct groups in God's dealings, and one of them is the church. When you become a Christian, you're no longer a gentile. When you become a Christian, you're no longer a Jew. You are in a totally different group of believers. It is very important that you understand that. Christians of the church age have a unique relationship to Jesus Christ, Who is the head of the church body, which no other believers in the previous dispensations ever had. The church and Israel are two totally different groups in God's plan of the ages. And God does not replace unbelieving Israel with the church. The church has a precise relationship to the future Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is predicted many times in the Old Testament, and which Jesus Christ actually came to set up on this earth when He came the first time.

**Historic Premillennialism**

The relationship of the church to the future Millennial Kingdom upon this earth may be classified under four categories. For the first 300 years of the Christian era, we may refer to it as historic pre-millennialism. They taught what the Bible teaches – that Jesus Christ is going to come before the 1,000-year period begins, and He will reign over all this earth. They did make the mistake of thinking that the Christians would go through the tribulation. The catching up should have been before the tribulation. But otherwise, they were all on target. And whatever the apostles believed and taught; it was very close to that.

**Amillennialism**

Subsequently, the Roman Catholic Church, when it began corrupting doctrine, also corrupted the premillennial teaching to the early church, and came up with amillennialism, which meant there was no literal kingdom on this earth. Christ would never rule over a world government. There was not going to be an antichrist. And the only kingdom was the kingdom of the Roman Catholic Church, made up of the hierarchy which were its princes.

**Post-Millennialism**

Then in the 1600s, along came a Unitarian who invented another idea – that Jesus Christ was going to come after a millennium where the world had been conquered by Christianity. He came up with the idea that every nation would be conquered by Christianity. Islam would be gone. Hinduism would be gone. All the religions of the world would be gone. And only Christianity would exist for 1,000 years. It would be the golden age. Then Jesus Christ would come, and that would be the end. That isn't true either.

As anybody who reads the Bible, and gives its literal respect for its words knows what the Bible teaches, there is going to be a church age (2,000 years almost now). We're probably near the end of it. Jesus Christ will catch us up to meet Him in the air. And then, for seven years, Daniel's last week of the 70 weeks (the 490 years) predicted for Jewish history – this last seven years, which was never fulfilled (it stopped on Palm Sunday), has to be picked up, and will be fulfilled. The church is in heaven, getting evaluated for the works that we have done in the fulfillment of our life's mission. The wrath of God is poured out upon this earth. And remember that it's going to be terrible wrath. The Bible says that conditions in the world will be just like it was when the Noahic flood wiped out that original civilization. Things are going to be a disaster, and God's anger is going to go from one end of the universe to the other.

Then begins Christ's return (premillennialism – before the millennium), and we reign with Him for 1,000 years. Then there is the great white throne judgment, when all the second resurrection takes place, which is of all unbelievers, from Adam on down. And they will stand before that great white throne. There will be a huge multitude of humanity in perfect silence, because that's their last chance to give a defense, and there'll be none, because God has all the records and all the books, and they do not have absolute righteousness. They have a lot of good works, but not the good work they needed, which was the work that Christ did upon the cross. They've all rejected Him.

So, the great white throne judgment finishes off God's history for the human race. He makes a new earth and a new heaven, and eternity begins. And we're off to the ballgame. We have life like we never knew it. And the nicest thing about it is that we Christians are in a special close relationship to Jesus Christ.

Now, the church dispensation was never revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. But periodically, as I will show you in time, there were breaks in the prophetic pattern. They didn't understand why the breaks were there. Now we know that there God was going to insert this era of the church in Daniel's timetable. Church-age doctrine was revealed to the apostles, and particularly to the apostle Paul. All this came after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You cannot find church-age doctrine in the Old Testament. Therefore, the minute you spot a church that does things out of the Mosaic Law, you know that they're not operating under the era of the church. They're trying to put the church back into the Old Testament. There never was a whisper of information about church in the Old Testament.

The apostle Paul, in Galatians 1:11-12, says, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to men – the gospel of the grace of God." He said, "I didn't get it from some man who explained it to me." What could he mean by that? "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul said, "What I know about the gospel of the grace of God, I received directly from Jesus Christ." When did this happen? After he was saved, on that Damascus road incident, and he realized how wrong he was in persecuting the Christians, and that the Christians were right, and that God was not saving people through keeping the Mosaic Law, but through the grace of God, dependent upon what Christ had already done to pay for our sins, and we accept Him.

Then the Jews turned against Him. They had to let him down in a basket over the wall in Damascus. He had to flee for his life. And then God took him out for three years into the Arabian Desert, and there, he and Jesus Christ met daily, and the great vistas of church-age doctrine were conveyed. That's why it's so hard for you and me to get all of this. There is so much that is so magnificent that's found no place else except in the epistles of the New Testament.

This is also indicates to us (the distinctiveness of church-age doctrine) in Ephesians 3:1-6. Paul says, "For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace (or the "dispensation" is the word in the Greek – the dispensation of the grace of God; that is, the church age), which was given to me for you, that by revelation, there was made known to me the mystery as I wrote before in brief (the secret – the secret about what?) And by referring to this, when you read, you can understand my insight into this mystery of Christ – a secret directly from Jesus Christ." About what? About this whole new body of believers called the church: "Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men." It was not found in the Old Testament – not a whisper of it: "As it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Was it known in the Old Testament that Jews were going to be saved and go to heaven? Yes. Was it known in the Old Testament that gentiles could be saved and were going to heaven? Yes. But was it ever told in the Old Testament that Jews and gentiles would be brought into a brand new body, and the two of them made something uniquely distinctively different than ever in the history of the world? No. That was the secret. And at first they couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe that Jews and gentiles were going to be made one single body in Christ that was special from anything that God had ever done before.

**The Rapture**

So, that's what we're talking about. And when Paul says that Jesus is the head of the body, the church, that statement is fraught with immense significance. This church dispensation will end with the rapture of the church, when all living and dead Christians from Pentecost on will be taken up to meet Jesus Christ in the air, and go to heaven with Him. Christians then will receive their glorified bodies. They'll be free of the sin nature – no longer subject to death. And they'll never be able to sin again. Their physical bodies will be restored to prime-of-life perfection.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

In heaven, the church saints will stand before Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ, to have their lives evaluated for fulfillment of their divine mission. At that time, they will receive rewards that they'll enjoy for all eternity, or they will find that they suffer loss of rewards for all eternity. This is going to be a time of great happiness for some, and a time of not such great happiness for others. But as it says, they'll all be saved, but they won't all be rewarded.

The biblical teaching about the church and the millennium then is stated by the pre-tribulation rapture. The church does not go through the tribulation – the premillennial Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

**Church**

Now, we told you that all this is based upon a Greek word. The word "church" looks like this in a Greek Bible: "ekklesia" (ek-klay-see'-ah), E K K L E S I A. This word "ekklesia" has two basic meanings. To the Greeks, it meant the self-governing democratic body. They called their political city states "ekklesia." To the Jews, it was a theocratic society subject to God who was their heavenly King.

So, the Holy Spirit took this word out of the ordinary Greek language of New Testament times, and He gave it a special New Testament meaning based upon these two concepts. So, what we have is a theocratic democracy. A church congregation, in the local church, gets together; they vote; they decide what to do; how to conduct their business; and, that's how they conduct the Lord's ministry. But the person Who is in charge and Who is the head of that local church body is the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a theocratic democracy. It is a group of people who are called out from the mass of Jews and gentiles to form a new and separate body of believers.

In Ephesians 2:14-16, we have it placed this way: "For He Himself (Christ) is our peace, Who made both groups (Jews and gentiles) into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity which is the Law of commandments, contained in ordinances, that in Himself, He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace." The Mosaic Law created a barrier between Jew and gentile. Christ fulfilled everything that the Mosaic Law required, and He did it for everybody.

Then Ephesians 2:16 says, "And might reconcile them both (Jews and gentiles) into one body to God through the cross by it having put to death the enmity."

So the church is a group of special human beings, Jews and gentiles, brought together in a new relationship to Jesus Christ, and called His body. So it's not a civic assembly, as the Greeks had, nor is it a Jewish congregation or synagogue. And, as I showed you in 1 Corinthians 10:32, these three groups: Jews; gentiles; and, church, are separate. They're always treated separately. And in eternity, you get to the book of Revelation, and guess what you find? You find the final acts upon the Jews; the final acts of God's program for gentile; and, the final acts of God's program for the Christians. They're distinctively different.

So, it is a serious but common mistake among churches to transfer elements of Jewish religious practice into the church age: Altars; religious rituals; holy days; a priesthood as mediators between you so you can get to God; legalisms so that you can gain God's favor; Christian Sabbath – calling Sunday what it cannot be; tithing as a way of giving; and, assuming the blessings of the covenants that God made with Israel but not its curses. All of this is a mixture of the two.

Now, you may not think that this is all that big a deal. That's because you come here. Some of you grew up here. You've never been contaminated by this nonsense. You don't have relatives to look at and to observe in their enslavement to the legalistic system of the Old Testament, when they could be free, and enjoying the grace of God, and the power of the Spirit of God that enables them to do right. The Word of God makes Christ the Head of this body.

**Apostles**

We've seen it in Colossians. We've seen it in Ephesians 4:11-16: "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers." God, to inform the people of God concerning the mind of God, has given four classes of communicators. One are the apostles. They were selected by Christ. To be an apostle, you had to see Jesus Christ personally alive after the resurrection. We have no apostles today. The Roman Catholic Church claims that they are apostles. The Episcopals claimed that they're apostles. The Methodist say that they're apostles. The Mormons claim that they're apostles. But they're all kidding themselves. The Bible is very clear. You have to have been able to see Christ personally alive after the resurrection (after His crucifixion). You have to see Him in His resurrection. Then you could say that you are qualified to be an apostle. Nobody can qualify today.

**Prophets**

We no longer have prophets. We no longer have people who are giving messages from God. Yes, we still have religions who claim that they have prophetic utterances from God. But when the Scriptures were written, that was the job of the prophets. Everything they had to say is now recorded in the Bible.

**Evangelists**

And some are evangelists. The evangelist has a specialized message. He preaches the gospel. He has a gift from God to be able to make clear how to go to heaven. And God help the local church that makes a mistake of accepting as a pastor a man who has the gift of evangelist, because what they're going to hear in every sermon is going to be how to go to heaven. And they don't need to hear that. Most of them who come to church are Christians. They've already heard that doctrine, and they believe it. What they need is what Paul calls the full counsel of the Word of God. That, an evangelist can't give.

**Pastor-Teacher**

Then it comes down to a pastor-teacher. In the Greek language, this is a combined gift. You can be a teacher of the Word of God without being a pastor-shepherd, leading a flock (an assembly) of the local church. But you cannot be a pastor without being able to be a teacher. And it doesn't mean that you're somebody who has the gift of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. It means you have a peculiar ability that only comes from God, to take spiritual things, and be able to transmit it so that it hits the target of the intellect of the people who are listening. They go, "Bingo! I see what you're saying. I understand that." And all of a sudden, a truth of the Word of God gets up in the brain; gets down in the soul; and, is restored in the human spirit. You cannot just do that because you're a good school teacher. It takes the pastor-teacher gift of God, and every local church is assigned one by God. He is what the Bible calls the elder. There's only one elder in every congregation. He is the elder-pastor-teacher. And the word "elder," means his authority of instruction.

So Ephesians 4:12 says, "He has given us these communicator gifts for the equipping of the saints." This is a military term: "For equipping the saints, for the work of service, in order to do the work of the church (the service to God), in order to build up the body of Christ." In the Greek language, these three acts of the pastor-teacher are hooked together by three prepositions. And it goes like this.

If a pastor does not equip the saints, and there's only one way he equips them – by teaching them the principles of doctrine. If he does not do that, then they cannot do the work of serving God. And then if they can't do the work of serving God, then you cannot build up the body of Christ. You cannot strengthen Christians, and you cannot increase the numerical strength.

Now you can see why it is so terrible, and why my heart goes out to this huge church in Irving that I drive by every week. It is sort of a religious mission that I go through for my own edification, because I want to look at their outdoor sign to see what the sermon title is; what the subject is; and, what the Scripture is for next Sunday. And every Sunday, the Scripture has to do with how to go to heaven. And it's never in the same book. People never get much of a consistent instruction through a book of the Bible. You get a spot here and a spot there, because all he's interested in is getting more members to walk down that aisle. So, what does he do? He preaches the gospel.

You husbands have a duty before God that you do not allow your children to go to a church that preaches the gospel at every service. Now, what would I do if there were a large number of hundreds of people in a church that I had to preach to? I would preach to the believers. I would do what the Bible says. I would explain the Word of God. And I would feed them the only way you can feed the Word of God to people – by going through a book of the Bible. But at the end of the service, I would say, "Now some of you may have come in this morning, or this evening. You are without Christ; you are without hope; and, you are without a destiny to heaven. You are lost. And what has been said this morning in no way applies to you. The point of information that you need is how to become related to Jesus Christ, and to come alive spiritually." And I'd give a brief explanation of the gospel, and encourage them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ before we close the service. I wouldn't even ask them to raise their hands. And I certainly wouldn't ask them to embarrass themselves by walking down an aisle.

However, this is so ingrained in people's minds that this is what churches do, that husbands blandly let their families go off into churches where: what are they hearing? A corruption of the duty of the local church.

Now even if you've been taught the Word of God, you may thumb your nose at it. That's right. And you may go negative toward it. But at least, in heaven's name, you had a chance to do better. But if all you're hearing is the gospel every service, you are going to be a sitting duck for the devil. Your mind is going to make every wrong decision it can make. Your emotions are going to be as fouled up as they can be. Your will is going to be distorted. There is no way that you can be fellowship with God your Father, and under the guidance of the Spirit of God, if you have not fed upon what Peter calls "the nourishing food of the Word of God."

So God says, "I've given you a pastor-teacher. If he does not do his work of equipping you by teaching you doctrine, you will not be able to perform your Christian service with your spiritual gift, and you will, therefore, not be able to serve God with divine good works to build up the body of Christ. Do you want to be responsible for putting someone in the position of a church ministry like that so that they stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and find that they're poor dogs, because they have got no rewards, because they never got to where they could even serve God, and do divine good. And you did it when you had authority to do something differently? When you are in a position of influence over their lives, and certainly over the influence over your own life?

Ephesians 4:13: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Now you tell me, do you honestly believe that somebody who sits in church and listens to the gospel being preached to them every service is going to grow to be a mature Christian, as the maturity of Christ is to be reflected in us? You know very well that that's not possible. How foolish to deny ourselves that kind of maturity in the devil's world. How foolish to deny it to someone who maybe stupidly doesn't know any better. And, of course, those who are not versed in doctrine, and who are not in sync with fellowship with God the Father – they don't know anything. Every decision of their mind is going to be wrong.

Ephesians 4:14: "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming." And that's exactly what happens, and you know it. When Christians are not well versed in doctrine, whether they're young or old, they blow back and forth with every wind of doctrine. Anybody can con them – trickery of men. Get some charismatic preacher up there, and let him play on their emotions. And by his craftiness and his deceitful scheming, he'll become a very rich man, and they will become very poor spiritually for all eternity.

Ephesians 4:15: "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him Who is the Head, even Christ." Who is the "we?" We, the church. We are to grow up into what our head Jesus Christ is.

Ephesians 4:16, "From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Christians all have a service to perform in building the body of Christ through instructing them in the Word of God. That's the bottom line: to instruct them about salvation; to instruct them on how to grow to a spiritual maturity; to build a spiritual maturity structure in the soul; and, to move on to super-grace level of living. Christians are equipped to do this if the pastor-teacher is doing his job in instructing them in the local church service. It is his business to learn; to know; and, to explain the doctrines of the Word of God, as he leads the church organization. He is the elder. He is the position of authority.

Read Jake and Donna Turnbo's letter. As Jake says: the thrill of studying the Word of God. And he knows the thrill of studying the Word of God, and the strength that comes from feeding upon the Word of God, and being oriented to the Word of God. He knows what that is, because he's surrounded by the enormous darkness in Russia that exists spiritually, where the demons of hell run loose unrestrained by a government who, for 75 years, told everybody: "There is no God." And Jake knows what it is to come to the exhilarating power of having the Word of God.

You and I are a little jaded because we're not surrounded by that darkness. It's more sophisticated here. We've got the darkness, but it's a lot more sophisticated. But we are so used to being instructed in the Word of God that we don't know what it is to suddenly get the impact of knowing Christ for what He is. And this is why I resent any religious activity for any of us to be involved in, where Christ is demeaned; where he is degraded; and, where He is not honored and exalted for the person who He really is, as if he were just some good old person, and some nice guy on a human level.

The Christian who is equipped for service with the Word of God. And, of course, that's a two-way street, isn't it? You can't be equipped. Every one of these empty chairs here this morning, and those that will be here tonight, because some Christians should be sitting in them, is not going to be equipped. It is your business to equip yourself. You have to be here to get the instruction.

It is our call to be what we are – the body of Christ, not to be like the world. Now that brings me to a very critical passage in the Scripture about not being like the world. I used this text at the academy graduation to explain to our parents why Christian education was important, and to commend them for the fact that they had provided that for their children. And what we had seen in the student body we had this year, par excellence, over any we've probably ever had in a long time. And it was all because of one thing. The minds of these children were oriented to the Word of God, so that things happen in their bodies; things happened in their associations; and, things were evident in their academic life. Their minds were oriented to the doctrines of the Word of God.

**Living Sacrifices**

Please turn with me to Romans 12:1-2. For 11 chapters here in the book of Romans, the apostle Paul has been teaching basic doctrinal principles primarily about the concept of justification by faith for salvation. It is the most accurate, formal dissertation on how to go to heaven. When he concludes Romans chapter 11, at Romans chapter 12, he now proceeds to the end of the book, to apply doctrine in the experience of the Christian. And he calls in Romans 12:1 upon church age believers to do something immediately as their first step for getting on track for the will of God, and the maximizing of their lives and their eternal rewards: "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

He calls upon church age believers to present their physical bodies as a living sacrifice to God. It is the members of our physical bodies which are the instruments with which we do God's work on this earth. How much access has he had to your physical body this week? Our Christian service is performed through the body, which includes the brain, because the brain is what determines what you're going to do with the body. The brain (the mind – the mentality of the soul) is what determines what kind of emotions you have. It is the mentality of the soul that determines what choices you'll make.

So, here, the facets of your soul: the mind; the emotions; and, the will are all under the control of something that's in the mind. This divine appeal for the Christian's body he says, "Is based upon the mercies of God." These mercies he has laid out in the first 11 chapters of Romans. And they have basically been about justification – about keeping that body that you have from going into the lake of fire forever. This body is to be offered to God as a living sacrifice, but also, please notice, a holy sacrifice.

Now we come to the rub in all this. A Christian and a holy body. We are to preserve these bodies from the debilitating effects of sinful activities – careless use. The body, which is to be preserved in holy living and good condition, is well-pleasing to God. The better physical shape you are in as a Christian, obviously the greater freedom you have for Christian service. As age encroaches upon your body, you will not be able to do as much as you have done in the past. But you should remember that when you are in the prime of life. All Christian service is dependent upon the capacity you have at that point in life with your body. And proper care and use of that body, therefore, is the will of God. It is important to God to have you in good physical condition so that He may perform His mission for your life through you.

So, if you give God a damaged or an abused body, it's an insult to Him. And it invites suffering now, and it invites a loss of rewards in heaven. Many Christians make the great mistake of not realizing that the body is God's instrument of service. And they don't respect it for what it is, as a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, to be kept in operational condition, and to be eager to use it. This is the offering of one's body. It says in Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies a living holy sacrifice." It says that: "This is acceptable to God," which means that it is well-pleasing to Him. And it says, "It is your spiritual service of worship."

The Greek for "spiritual worship" ("latreia") (lat-ri'-ah) means that it's the rational thing to do. And it is, in fact, an act of worship. It is smart to think about what you do with your body when you wake up in the morning, and you go through the day, in terms of the service of God. It is an intelligent thing to do, because the sacrifice of one's body by a believer who is in temporal fellowship results in that day storing eternal treasures in heaven, because of the divine good works that we perform through the Holy Spirit.

When you give those financial gifts to the Lord, that is a very big contribution of your body. It took the activity of your brain and of your physical body in order to earn the money that you're giving to Him. And you're giving something of yourself.

Now, the control center in all this is the mind. What one believes determines the treatment that you will give to your body, and the use you'll make of it. The mental attitudes determine your standards and your values. What you have in your mind is either Satan's human viewpoint, or you have God's divine viewpoint. The human viewpoint of Satan's world promotes self-destructive habits and lifestyles. The divine viewpoint of God's Word promotes ennobling, self-preserving habits and lifestyle. The difference between these two is a direct result of what is in your mind.

The mind saturated with doctrine goes with divine viewpoint. The mind saturated with Satan's world opinions goes with human viewpoint. That's why it is so important that you're constantly flushing out the human viewpoint. You can't turn on your television set without being injected with some human viewpoint. You can't read anything in a popular magazine without being injected with human viewpoint. You can't rub shoulders with people at school; at work; or, wherever you are, without having them pop their human viewpoint at you. And it has to be flushed out by the Word of God.

It is no fun to see a Christian go down in flames. And while it's appalling, and we must wonder, it's not very complicated. It's a mind that has lost touch with the divine viewpoint of the Word of God. Can that happen to you? Just think back a year ago. Think back in your association of people a year ago, and you will often find somebody that was right on track with God, that now is at the bottom of the pile – in one year. So quickly, such a thing can happen? Yes. All you have to do is think that you don't need the Word of God, and that you don't need, in the church age, to be feed as the body of Christ through the pastor-teacher ministry of the local church.

Now, in Romans 12:2, Paul reveals the tremendous truth about how to be a winner in life through the holy use of your body. I'm glad he didn't just give us an inspirational talk in verse 1. In Romans 12:2, he says, "I'm going to tell you how to do this."

**Do not be Conformed to this World**

First of all, it says, "Do not be conformed to this world." The Greek word for "conformed" looks like this: "suschematizo" (soos-khay-mat-id'-zo), and I give this so that you know that I'm not making this up. I didn't put this word in here. This little word "schema," right in the middle of that word (skhay'-mah) refers to what is outward. Do not outwardly pattern your life after this world. Do not fashion yourself after this world. It refers to the external appearance of something. It is like a woman cutting out a dress. She puts down the cloth, and puts a paper pattern on it, and what does she do? She cuts it out according to the pattern. She cuts the dress to the external pattern. You and I are surrounded by external patterns of people all the time, with all kinds of influences. And we have to be on guard that it's the world. The fashion industry: is that a Christian activity. It's the world. I used to love it. They can hit men very often. I used to love it when the ties would go from wide to little narrow ones. Remember those little narrow string ties? I would wear those big wide ones. I saved my ties forever. And then they'd go to the big wide ties, and then I'd wear the little string ties forever. I was my own fashion plate.

One time, I had a discussion with this lady who worked in the fashion industry. I said to her, "Yep, there's nothing like the fashion industry to make women look ugly." She was appalled. She looked horrified at me. And I said, "Just look at the styles." And some women don't have enough sense not to wear the styles of the world, because they're not suited for her for one reason or another. But some people so love the world that even if it makes them look like clowns, they will follow the styles of the world. And they will degrade their womanhood, and degrade Christ and His body of whom they're a part. God help us to have some courageous Christians in this decrepit, deceitful age.

This word "suschematizo" is used one other place in the New Testament, and it tells us a lot. 1 Peter 1:14: "As obedient children," you Christians who are in the body of Christ, "do not be conformed (there it is) to the former lusts, which were yours in your ignorance." Those are the two times that it's used. And here it says, "Don't imitate the evil lusts of our society." It's everywhere, from the highest echelons of government to the lowest garbage collector – the evil lusts of our society.

You're hearing a lot about this in the military right now. And people are saying, "Well, it happens all the time. We can't be so hard on people." People murder each other all the time. I don't think we should be so hard on people just because they murder somebody. It happens all the time. Well, the problem is that God says, "Don't do that." You can't murder people. And it says, "Don't do these sexually evil, immoral things, because it violates the temple of the Holy Spirit." So, it says, "Don't conform yourself externally in your conduct to the world.

I've heard Christians say in business, "Well, when you deal with the world, there are a bunch of shysters and low life. You got to deal with them the same way." You, a child of God, a member of the body of Christ – you're going to become the shyster and low life, and you think you're going to be a winner in the long run? You explain that at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

This word "suschematizo," not patterning yourself on an external form which is godless – this word is in the Greek language in such a way (Greek present tense) that it indicates that these people were already doing it. So, a better translation is: "Stop doing it," which is probably applicable to many of us: "Stop doing this." In comes the shorty skirt routine now. I'm always worried about some lady bending over with a shorty skirt. I sure hope that they have a lot underneath. And they demean and degrade themselves. Why? Because that's the style. Oh, great god of Giovanni Pacini, the great fashion man in New York. How we thank you for making fools of all of us by these styles that you create.

God says, "You're a princess. You're a prince of the royal family of God. Why do you want to subject yourself to these low-life clowns? For a while, they started making suits with vests, just to change the style, so that men would go out and buy other suits, like they do with ladies. I'm proud to say that I have three brand new (never worn) vests hanging in my closets. The suits are pretty well gone, but the vests are perfect, because I didn't want to go with that style of wearing the vest, just because somebody decided that this is going to be the style now.

This word is also in the Greek language in the middle voice, which means that if you don't pattern your life after the world's external, it's going to be to your personal great benefit. And then, believe it or not, it's a command. It's not an invitation. It's a command to every Christian in the body of Christ. And it says not to pattern yourself after this world. Well, the world is okay. That is conveying the idea. But actually, the concept here is a little different. It's not the word for "world." It's this Greek word "aion" (ahee-ohn'), and the word "aion" means "age" or "era." This is the era of time. This is the age in which we live in. And what kind of an age do we live in? It is set by Satan's standards.

**This World**

This is to be understood as the age of the world system of Satan. Galatians 1:4 says that this present age is basically evil. Ephesians 2:2 says that this age is evil because it is controlled by Satan. 1 John 2:16 says that the primary motivations of this world are the lusts of the sin nature; the lusts of the eyes; and, the pride of life – all against God's standards. 1 Corinthians 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 2:6-8 say that the wisdom and intellectual conclusions of this world are basically stupid. Ephesians 6:12 says that the world system of Satan is the unrelenting enemy of the Christian. James 4:4 that any friendship and compatibility with the world's lifestyles is an act of enmity against God. If you want to be friends with the world, then you're going to be God's enemy. Do you want to be friends with the world system? You're going to be the enemy of God. Are you going to do things religiously the way the world of Satan's religion does it? You're the enemy of God. Titus 2:12 says, "Christians are to live unspotted from the evil of this age, because it's dominated by Satan.

The all-time great biblical example, in 2 Timothy 4:10, is Demas. Paul shook his head and said, "I know it can happen. I know when people get off away from the issues of doctrine, but I'm still sad. Demas was such a great guy. He was so valuable to us." In 2 Timothy 4:9, Paul is asking Timothy, "Come to me soon, Timothy – as soon as you can. This time Nero's going to execute me. God has told me I'm not going to get through this time, so come on down. I'd like the comfort of your association before they take me to the executioners block."

Then, he says, in 2 Timothy 4:10, "For Demas, having loved this present age (world – the same word 'aion': present age) has deserted me, and gone to Thessalonica," where there was a lot of good time living in the world system. He was a terrible deserter of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have to wonder why any of us would want to follow him. Don't take the world society in which you live as your fashion plate: in its speech; in its habits; in its dress; in its goals; in its recreation; in its values; or, in its viewpoint. In short: "Don't live like the devil. Live like Jesus Christ."

At this point, the apostle Paul says, "This is the way it should be. Now I'm going to tell you the positive way. I've told you not to be like outside. I don't want you to pattern yourself after the outside world. That's very hard to do." But he said, "I'm going to tell you how you can do it." Tonight, we shall look at that.

Thank You, Father, for this Your Word.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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