

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages	Pastor/Teacher
Text:	Romans 12:1-3	Gary L. W. Johnson
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APOSTOLIC IMPERATIVE (Part 3)

“It is obvious,” observed Martin Lloyd-Jones, “that we do not fully realize what the state of the world around us is when we speak of religion tomorrow, because our ideas and our aims for the future depend to a great extent on the way we interpret our present situation. Moreover, there is nothing which shows our spiritual condition more clearly than our ability to comprehend the signs of the times. Do we realize that the problem of religion today is very different from what it was, say, forty years ago, and even twenty years ago? Today, we are producing men who are almost totally ignorant of the Bible, and from the point of view of morality, the problem is not so much immorality but the total absence of morality – amorality, a tendency to doubt all types of moral standards. Indeed, some would go so far as to say that all those who acknowledge moral standards live an incomplete life and do an injustice to their personalities. These people claim that what was once called sin is nothing but self-expression. The old foundations are being shaken, and the old boundaries and hedges are being swept away. From the point of view of the claims of religion, the problem is not that men are anti-religious, as they used to be, but that they ignore religion completely, and do not think about it at all.”¹ This can only take place if our minds are renewed. The great Presbyterian theologian W. G. T. Shedd highlights the need for having our minds renewed because of the noetic effect of sin. “The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are filled with the praise of a kind of knowledge which they represent sinful man to be destitute of and which is the gift of God. Christ the great high priest *has compassion upon the ignorant* (Heb. 5:2). Scoffers are *willingly ignorant* (2 Pet. 3:5). Unbelieving Jews were *ignorant of God’s righteousness* (Rom. 10:3). Before regeneration, men fashion themselves *according to their lust in ignorance* (1 Pet. 1:14). The sinful condition of the pagan world is called a *time of ignorance*, which God *in his forbearance temporarily overlooked* (Acts 17:30). Sin is often denominated folly. The psalmist mourning over the remainders of sin exclaims: *So foolish was I, and ignorant* (Ps. 73:32). St. Paul explains the difference between the knowledge of the natural man and that of the regenerate in 1 Cor. 2:14: *The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto him.* ‘There is a wide difference,’ says Owen (*Holy Spirit* 3.3), ‘between the mind’s receiving doctrines notionally and its receiving the things taught in them really. The first, a natural man can do. It is done by all who, by the use of outward means, do know the doctrine of Scripture in distinction from human ignorance and effort. Hence men unregenerate are said *to know the way of righteousness* (2 Pet. 2:21).’ This true and real reception of divine truth, according to Owen, denotes (a) an apprehension that these *spiritual things* agree with the divine attributes and express them; the doctrine of gratuitous justification, for example, when received by the regenerate mind is perceived to accord with all the attributes of God and thus to be a manifestation of the glory of God; and (b) an apprehension that the particular *spiritual thing* is suited to the end proposed; the death of Christ, for example is adapted in every way to meet the demands of God’s holy nature and of man’s sinful nature. It is not *foolishness*, but wisdom, or an

adaptation of means to ends and is so perceived and understood by the spiritual man, but not by the natural. That there is this power of illuminating the understanding is proved by the fact that good men pray that it may be exercised: *Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law* (Ps. 119:34); *teach me your statutes* (119:68). Third, regeneration with respect to the human will is *renewal*. Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 67 describes one part of effectual calling as the *renewing and powerfully determining* of the will. Biblical texts that prove this are the following: *I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh* (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27); *renew a right spirit within me* (Ps. 51:10); *may the God of peace make you perfect to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight* (Heb. 13:21); *it is not of him that wills, but of God that shows mercy* (Rom. 9:16); *God works in you to will* (Phil. 2:13); *your people shall be willing in the day of your power* (Ps. 110:3); *the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God* (2 Thess. 3:5).²

REVIEW:

I. **THE NEED FOR MIND RENEWAL.**

- A. Paul's Appeal:** The word *therefore* at the beginning of verse 1 is important. The Apostle is referring back to the whole of his epistle and is exhorting the Christians at Rome to respond accordingly. And what is the substance of this appeal? God's Mercy. "This illustrates what is characteristic of Paul's teaching, that ethics must rest upon the foundation of redemptive accomplishment."³
- B. Paul's Injunction:** *Offer your bodies as living sacrifices.* The word *offer* (*parastesai*) was the proper term for bringing an offering to the Lord (Lev. 16:7; Luke 2:22; Col. 1:22, 28). The language here is clearly that of sacrificial ritual. But note the difference. In the Old Testament, the sacrifice is slain and its blood is shed. Here, the body is presented as a *living sacrifice* (cf. Rom. 6:13). This is characterized as being *holy and pleasing to God*. Since we are the Lord's, we ought for this very reason to be holy. "It is an affront," wrote Calvin, "to God's holiness to offer Him anything which has not first been consecrated."⁴
- C. Paul's Rationale:** This is our *spiritual worship*. The word translated *spiritual* in the ESV Bible is *logiken* (used only here and in 1 Peter 2:2) and frequently means "rational" or "reasonable" (as in the KJV). The thought is of worship with understanding (as captured by J. B. Phillip's translation: "intelligent worship"). The word "worship," *latreian*, refers to either worship or service. The point is clear: We are called to serve God in a way that is described as conscious, consecrated devotion. This must be done with knowledge and understanding. It is necessary that we know and apprehend the state of things between us and the true and living God (cf. 2 Tim. 1:12). This is done with serious consideration, as a matter of great importance. It is, in the Apostle's mind, the *expected* thing to do.

- ### II. **SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD: NONCONFORMITY.** The antagonism or opposition between God and the world is strongly asserted in the word. Thus John, the beloved disciple, speaks, "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. 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. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he

that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” John, it will be observed, fastens upon one feature as characteristic of the world, whose friendship, as another Apostle testifies (James 4:4), is “enmity with God.” “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.” The Apostle Paul, also, singles out the same feature, in summing up his argument as to the bearing of Christian faith on the relations and arrangements of the world: “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:29-31). “The fashion of this world passeth away;” – “Be not conformed to this world;” – the statement and the exhortation are intimately connected. The verb, “be not conformed,” is a derivative of the nouns, “the fashion.” The admonition literally is, -- Be not co-fashioned with this world; take not the fashion of this world; the fashion which passeth away.⁵

III. ***EXAMPLES OF HOW THIS CONFORMITY POSES A THREAT.***

A. *Marriage.* In 1 Cor. 7:29-31, the Apostle specifically mentions marriage. In the Greco-Roman world, marriage was not held in high esteem. The Roman world debauchery is captured well by Holland: “And not only the householders. In the great parties thrown by Nero for the Roman people, the subversion of tradition sponsored by the emperor had manifest limits. The nobleman’s daughter obliged to work as a prostitute, and serve whoever might demand to use her, was the emblem of a brute truth that most in the capital took for granted: the potency of a Roman penis. Sex was nothing if not an exercise of power. As captured cities were to the swords of the legions, so the bodies of those used sexually were to the Roman man. To be penetrated, male or female, was to be branded as inferior: to be marked as womanish, barbarian, servile. While the body of a free-born Roman was sacrosanct, those of others were fair game. *It is accepted that every master is entitled to use his slave as he desires.* Nero, by depriving the aristocratic women who worked at his parties of the inviolability that was theirs by right of law, was certainly – even if only for one night -- making scandalous play with the Roman class system; but not with a far more fundamental proposition. In Rome, men no more hesitated to use slaves and prostitutes to relieve themselves of their sexual needs than they did to use the side of a road as a toilet. In Latin, the same word, *meio*, meant both ejaculate and urinate. To the presumptions that underlay this, however, Paul brought a radically different perspective. *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?* So he had demanded of the Corinthians. How could any man, knowing his limbs consecrated to the Lord, think to entwine them with those of a whore, mingle his sweat with hers, become one flesh with her? But Paul, by proclaiming the body *a temple of the Holy Spirit*, was not merely casting as sacrilege attitudes towards sex that most men in Corinth or Rome took for granted. He was also giving to those who serviced them, the bar girls and the painted boys in brothels, the slaves used without compunction by their masters, a glimpse of salvation. To suffer as Christ had done, to be beaten, and degraded, and abused, was to share in his glory. Adoption by God, so Paul assured his Roman listeners, promised the redemption of their bodies.

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”⁶

B. Human Sexuality. In our culture, the woke mentality says that if there is a sin, it is outdated orthodox views on the subject. The worst thing, we are told over and over, is that there is no such thing as sexual sin. Sadly even some professing Christians are saying this as well. “Benjamin Petty, a pastor and regular contributor to the leftist Christian periodical *Sojourners*, went viral on Twitter in 2020 when he wrote, *Queer communities offer a beautiful lens through which to view the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The lines between affection, attraction, intimacy and sex are far blurrier than white evangelicals would like them to appear. Let’s talk about a bisexual Christ.* He went on to say that all theology is sexual and that we have crafted Jesus out of our assumed heterosexual constraints. Then Perry asks, *But what if we cast these assumptions aside? The neat, clean lines between ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’ are modern convention. They try to enforce order and discipline on unruly appetites – love and lust.* Perry proceeded to speculate blasphemous things about our Lord and his apostles, and then concluded, *Evangelical homophobia clearly violates Christ’s teaching, but we less frequently interrogate the host of heteronormative assumptions we ascribe to biblical texts.”⁷*

CONCLUSION: Today we are witnessing on a massive scale the collision of worldviews. Owen Strachan has documented this: “Wokeness is a system we do well to study, think about, analyze, and critique; but it is not a system we should endorse, adopt, or embrace. In the final analysis, wokeness as taught by many is less a direct response to the Gospel and more a reworking of justice and equity to form a this-worldly religion. Wokeness is akin to the Protestant liberalism of roughly one hundred years ago, but with a less supernatural frame. Wokeness sits loose in a philosophical sense but is connected to the following modern ideologies:

- Wokeness has little grounding in a theistic system; it is this-worldly from the start.
- Wokeness uses the categories of Marxism, with people being either oppressor or oppressed.
- Wokeness champions the neo-pagan sexual ethic, one distinct from a biblical sexuality.
- Wokeness is a utopian justice movement at its base; it syncs with both Enlightenment revolutionary movements and liberationist theological camps and connects in different ways to each.

“A more technical description of this new religion, in my view, is *Utopian Judicial Paganism*. Here are the basic commitments that run behind and through wokeness (or UJP more descriptively):

- Anthropology: Neo-paganism (no Creator, no creation order, we are our own rulers)
- Sexual ethics: Compulsive libertinism (we express our desires, and all should approve)
- Political theology: Marxist Statism (we trust the state to rule us and make things right)
- Metaphysics: Postmodern Darwinism (evolution explains life with no absolute truth)
- Theology Proper: Mystic Selfism (we should follow our hearts, not any authority)
- Soteriology: Therapeuticism/Ritualism (we become our best self by doing the work)
- Eschatology: Utopian Earth-Centrism (we’ll make the earth right through social justice)

“What does all this mean? It means that the worldview of wokeness is not a Christian one where God is Creator and Ruler, but an atheistic one where man is divinized. Though the categories mentioned above blur and bleed over in some respects, the tenets of the system that opposes Christianity in our time nonetheless stand out in certain respects. Humanity thus has no script for sexuality; we may all follow the lusts of the flesh, and in fact must be ironically compelled toward a libertine sexuality, such that sexual wildness becomes the law of the land. The world is not made up of different institutions that embody and correspond to divine creation order; instead, the world should and must become a globalist whole, a divinized secular kingdom where utopian statism rules. Fairness and equity define the public order, with equality of outcome guaranteed. Social justice reigns supreme.”⁸ I close with the warning of the Apostle John: *Little children, guard yourselves from idols.* (1 John 5:21).

ENDNOTES

¹ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing The Times* (Banner of Truth, 1989), p. 17.

² W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Third edition, ed. A. W. Gomez, P & R, 2003), p. 765.

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 110.

⁴ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries VIII* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 263.

⁵ As cited by R. S. Candlish: *Studies In Romans 12: The Christian's Sacrifice and Service of Praise* (rpt. Kregel, 1989), p. 50.

⁶ Tom Holland, *Dominion: How The Christian Revolution Remade The World* (Basic Books, 2019), p. 99.

⁷ N. Mering, *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response To the Cult of Progressive Ideology* (Tan, 2021), p. 192.

⁸ D. Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness* (Salem Books, 2021), p. 125.