

SERMON

Romans 12:1-8

Dedicate your Body and your Mind to the Lord

Nunawading and Waverley, 23-8-20

Dear friends in Christ,

How much does the culture affect us? We have been surprised by the rebellion during the pandemic. Over 30% of people self-isolating were not at home. Some people refused to have a Covid19 test. There were people in hotel quarantine that demanded to be let out for breaks. I am sure there will be many who will refuse to accept the vaccine when it becomes available. What we observe here is rampant individualism, a deification of the individual. Matthew Schubert wrote in The Lutheran Theological Journal recently about adult converts unwilling to be baptised because they knew it came with a commitment. He mentioned the cultural factors of our time: 'religious plurality, rampant individualistic spiritualism, non-commitment to social groups, and declining biblical literacy.' Clearly, culture does have an impact on each of us.

Dedicate your body and your mind to the Lord is our theme. The apostle Paul wrote: **In view of God's mercies, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform to this age but be transformed by the renewal of the mind.** Dedication in body and mind is something to be urged but not out of duty or compulsion. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul was well aware of the pressure of culture and so put before his hearers a string of **God's mercies**:

- The righteousness of God has been offered as a gift for everyone who trusts in the saving work of Christ with the result that they are fully justified before him (3:21-25; 4:25)
- Having been reconciled to God through Christ, Christians can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (5:2; 8:18-39)
- The power of sin in our lives has been broken by the grace of baptism, which joins us to Christ (6:4). We are no longer slaves to sin.
- We struggle against sin in our lives but God rescues us from our continuing weakness (7:25)
- Since we do not live under the condemnation of the law, we are now controlled by the Spirit through the renewing of our minds (8:5)

- God has made his offer of justification and glory to both Jew and Gentile and they are freely available in the preaching of the gospel to be received by faith (10:9,10)

All these declarations of grace compete with the thinking of our present age. However, since the culture remains strong, the mind needs **renewal**. It thinks in fleshy ways and wants to indulge the desires and appetites of the body. The way we use food today is so different to the way it was used in the first half of the twentieth century. When you look at photographs of pre-war Australian, bodies were much slimmer, then! If the mind is to exercise control over the body, how can it be trained?

When we come out of a pre-Christian phase, we take on the disciplines of Christ: he sought lonely places to pray, he attended synagogue, he taught others to know his Father, he reached the lost, he helped those in need, he learnt the Scriptures, he committed himself to his Father's will. Since Christ is being formed in each one of us, these things emerge in us, too.

Selfishness gives way to service, spending on self gives way to generous giving, looking after self is over taken by sacrifice, being deceptive and telling lies to owning up to the truth, making excuses for wrong changes to confessing sin, using skills and intelligence to get ahead is replaced by using spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ. Rather than our desire for attention and fame, the desire to honour Christ in our witness takes over.

There is also something happening to us that occurs deeper in the mind, where the Holy Spirit is speaking to our spirits, our inner selves. The Christian mind begins to seek nourishment in holy thoughts. Its highest delight is in the Lord and what he says in his word. When we dedicate our minds and bodies to the Lord, we find ways to hear him through daily devotions, perhaps a Bible reading programme, Christian podcasts, frequent worship and coming before him to receive his body and blood. Time is set aside for prayer; some may use ancient prayers and Bible reading methods such as lectio divina. Small groups and encouragement from other Christians become important. Seeking the will of God with your whole heart comes to dominate your thinking. The result is this: our minds and bodies are dedicated to the Lord.