

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 19 AUGUST 2007: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 146:8

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 42:1+5

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 32:1.

Law

Psalm: 32:1

Prayer:

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

Amen

Hymn: 2-2:3

Scripture: Romans 12 and Ephesians 5

Text: Romans 12:2

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

In previous sermons we listened carefully to what the Bible tells us about a number of sins and their consequences. We heard in particular what the Lord feels about it:

- Every time we heard the exhortation by the Holy Spirit that the reconciliation worked for us by the Lord Jesus Christ demands of us not to participate in any sin: He consecrated us by His blood and sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us.
- Where we have sinned in any way we are called to remorse and repentance.
- As from the fall into sin the Lord gave the assurance that He would grant complete forgiveness of sin where remorse and repentance are found.

Hence the words of our text are so important: We must not conform to the pattern of this sinful world but we must be transformed by God by a renewing of our mind.

- When this happens we shall be able to establish what is the will of God and is good and pleasing and perfect to Him (Romans 12:2).

Note the following two matters that stand out in this passage:

1. **The danger.**
2. **The transformation.**

1. **The danger**

Romans 12:2 contain a contrast. Two worlds that cannot be reconciled are contrasted.

- The true believer must not conform to the pattern of this world.
- It is important to see what is being revealed here:
- The world shall not become the church.
- But the church shall become the world.
- That is the danger, for when the believer becomes worldly the church ceases to exist because church and world then become one.

Why is this warning spelt out so sharply?

- Because the devil wishes to destroy man's future dispensation.
- He wants the believers to give up their desire for and interest in the hope in Christ.

In that way the devil tries to paralyse the kingdom of God in history because the faithful are the citizens of God's kingdom who must in this dispensation fight for the Lord. That is why the faithful must guard against becoming worldly and by so doing become useless for the Lord.

- In the Old Testament a different term is used to denote this matter.
- The term used in the Old Testament is to humble yourself before God.

The first place we read of this is when the Lord sends Pharaoh a message.

- Moses was to go to Pharaoh and say to him: *"This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?'"* (Exodus 10:3)

Consider the gravity of the matter:

- If Pharaoh the heathen must humble himself before the Lord, how much more must we then not do so!
- And when the Lord destroyed him because he refused to do so – how much more will the Lord not do so to us who are part of His new people of the covenant?

Hence the Holy Spirit's message to us is clear – that is what we must do!

- We must humble ourselves before the Lord – every day we must subject ourselves to the Lord.
- In all that happens we must acknowledge the counsel and ordination of the Lord.
- And we must confess our opposition to the Lord.

We know that Pharaoh did not humble himself before the Lord. See what this meant:

- He conformed to this sinful world.
- He did not let God transform him.

That is why his mind was not renewed. He remained trapped in the customs and politics of his day.

- That is why he could not establish the will of God.
- He remained hardened – and bore the consequences.

In the Bible the Lord gives instructions about humbling that we must remember!

- We should not think that humbling or testing is something that occurs only once in a lifetime.
- The Bible tells us this must be a regular occurrence in one's life – every person must constantly examine and test himself.

We find this in the Old Testament where the Lord instituted regular days of humbling and said that such humbling was to be a lasting ordinance.

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you. On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work – whether native born or an alien living among you –" (Leviticus 16:19)

"It must be a Sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance." (Leviticus 16:31)

The occasion when this self-examination about our relationship with the Lord takes place is not just another day. To the Lord it is sanctified and holy.

"The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves and present an offering made to the Lord by fire." (Leviticus 23:27)

It is so important to the Lord that the faithful shall keep themselves true to Him that He orders that every one who fails to humble himself before Him shall be expelled from the people.

"Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people." (Leviticus 23:29)

2. The transformation

The Lord demands that the transformation shall be away from the world. (Romans 12:2)

This sounds like an order that is virtually impossible to execute, for who is able to bring about such a radical transformation in himself?

- Who is able to turn away from sin and immediately do what pleases God?
- Yet it is not that difficult when one bears in mind the words of Romans 12:1: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."*

The mercy, grace of God stands out in this verse.

- The reason is that Paul makes the mercy of God the reason for the repentance or transformation that must occur in everyone.
- The mercy of God is not something new. He is still merciful to sinful people.

From the New Testament we learn the greatest mercy.

- The Lord Jesus Christ is born into our world as man in order to fulfill God's justice.
- He dies on the cross for our sins and after His ascension He sends us the Holy Spirit.

Out of mercy the Holy Spirit brings about transformation in us.

- We call it repentance, but it is transformation, for repentance is only a word describing transformation back to God.
- That is the kind of change that occurs in a person who turns away from the world back to God – as it is described in our text.

The manner in which this happens is by making our body available to the Lord.

- God transforms us.
- It is written clearly that it is not done by us.

What is it that the Lord desires?

- The Lord does not want in His church somebody who is not aware of his sinfulness.
- He wants the church to confess its sins and to remorsefully turn away from those sins.
- The Lord wants in His church only people who unreservedly and prayerfully submit themselves to His authority. (See 2 Chronicles 33:23 and 36:12)

Humbling oneself does not necessarily start with one. There are cases where the Lord makes it happen.

- In Deuteronomy 8:3 we read of it.
- It is written there that the Lord moved the faithful to humility by causing them to hunger and then feeding them with manna.
- The Lord reveals that it was His purpose to make them know that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Humbling oneself before the Lord is also necessary when one has sinned in order to rectify matters with the Lord.

- We read of David doing this when the Lord told him that the child he had with Bathsheba would die.
- The Bible tells us that David prayed to God for the child.
- He humbled himself by fasting and going into his house spending the nights lying on the ground. (2 Samuel 12:16)

- He pleaded with the Lord and confessed his sins as we see in Psalms 51 and 32.

Humbling oneself before the Lord means that people who have sinned against the Lord must pray to the Lord and confess His Name.

- They must turn away from their sin and pray the Lord to hear their prayer. *"When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray towards this place and confess your Name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them."* (1 Kings 8:35)
- We read of Ezra getting up out of his self-abasement and with his tunic and cloak torn falling onto his knees with his hands spread out to the Lord in prayer. (Ezra 9:5)

When we humble ourselves before the Lord He takes it seriously. Ahab once humbled himself before the Lord.

- The Lord saw this and considered it so graciously that He rewarded Ahab by not bringing the disaster over his house during Ahab's life.
- The Lord decided to do so only during the reign of Ahab's son. (1 Kings 21:27-29)
- Consider the Lord's attitude in this matter – we all know that Ahab was ungodly but the Lord showed him mercy the moment he humbled himself.

There is also a danger that believers who become worldly can no longer distinguish between right and wrong.

- They do not know what is right in the eyes of the Lord and then do what is wrong.
- As it is written in Romans 6:13: *"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."*

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 the Lord promised the people that He would hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal the land if they humbled themselves and prayed to Him. There are more places in the Bible where the Lord says that He will bless and give deliverance when people humble themselves and show remorse. (2 Chronicles 12:7 and 32:26)

The issue of humbling is also important to our Lord Jesus.

- He expects each believer to humble himself before participating in Holy Communion.

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks from the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 12:28-29)

The Lord Jesus promised us that He would send another comforter when He ascends to heaven.

- The Holy Spirit is truly no one else than the Lord Jesus and God the Father who is in His omnipresence with us to guide us and teach us in truth and righteousness.

The practical result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit over us when we share in Holy Communion is that He engenders in us the knowledge that we may not conform to the pattern of this world.

- He shall transform our mind by renewing it so that we shall have and want the knowledge to test and approve what is God's good, pleasing and perfect will.

How will we know what is the will of God? We find the answer in his revelation in His Word. Then we shall learn that the Lord wants us to make ourselves available to God. (2 Timothy 2:15)

- We must be workmen approved by God.
- We must be workmen who need not be ashamed of our labour.
- We must be workmen who proclaim the word of truth purely.

Let us in our preparation for Holy Communion concentrate on these matters.

- We make time for seclusion in which we remorsefully and prayerfully confess our sin before God and put matters right between us and God.
- Then we may come to the table of the Lord Jesus frankly to receive from His hands the tokens of the forgiveness of our sins.
- Then we can joyfully look forward to entering His eternal and perfect kingdom.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 146:1+8

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

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