

**“Women and the World”**  
***Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 8, 2022***  
***by Rev. Norwood N. Hingle III, Ph.D.***

Sometimes it is not easy to know how to balance wise living in the world. E.g., I recall several years ago we were looking to buy a minivan. It was an exciting time. We test drove some vans, and the salesman allowed us to test drive a used van, a couple of years old, which had all the bells and whistles— leather seats, automatic opening and closing side doors, GPS on the console— this van had it all! The only problem was, we figured since we were on a budget, we wanted to get the biggest bang for our buck. And this used van with all the luxuries was about the same price as a brand new van at the base level. I.e., no leather seats, no automatic side doors, and no GPS. What should we do? What was the wise decision? We could hear the financial guru Dave Ramsey’s advice ringing in our ears saying, “Only buy used-- the new car depreciates by thousands as soon as you drive the car off the lot!” But we also felt like Dave Ramsey might approve our buying a new one if we got the base model and kept it for several years. And that is what we did! Such decisions are what all of us face from time to time. And we are balancing living wisely in this present world. As we reflect on Mother’s Day we especially appreciate the struggle women face today to live wisely in the world. What types of clothes should women purchase today, and wear? How should married women interact with men? How should single women interact with men? What types of conversations should women have with other women? Our passage today will provide great help.

READ Romans 12:1-2 (pp. 161-162)

**CONTEXT:** In his typical fashion, Paul begins his letter of Romans by going over doctrine— that we are saved by grace through faith, that God has reached out now to the Gentiles, and God will continue to reach out to Israel, even in its rebellious state. Now Paul turns to talk about how such doctrine applies to daily life.

READ v 1. “Paul gives essentially three commands to believers and their relationship to the world. First, they are to make their bodies available to God.” We notice that Paul begins our passage with “therefore” . Paul is drawing a conclusion from what he has discussed on the basics of the Christian faith in chapters 1-11. Our NRSV translation, “I appeal to you” is recognized by commentators, correctly, as too soft. The stronger translation “I exhort you” is much better, coupled with encouragement. Have you ever been exhorted? E.g., I recall a Mrs. Emma Brown, an elderly, godly woman from my home church, Lake Vista UMC, and when I would come to church on Sunday mornings she would say to me that I was Timothy, especially when I once came to church when my parents were out of town, and as I found out more who in Scripture Timothy was that was a great encouragement to me! That is what Paul is doing here— he is addressing his readers, including you and me, in a very serious way— with exhortation— in how we are to live. Paul exhorts his readers to present their bodies— i.e., their whole selves— as a living sacrifice to God. And they are to do this by the mercies of God— in other words, by the saving good news of the gospel of Jesus dying for our sins and rising again and mercifully making salvation available to us. So, by the inworking of the message of Jesus, we are to offer ourselves wholly to God. Now, our NRSV translation, as does the RSV, NIV, REB, TEV, and KJV, says “living sacrifice”. The problem is that the original language reads literally, “present your bodies a sacrifice— living, holy, pleasing to God”. I.e., the word

“living” is not the focus on the sacrifice with afterthoughts of “holy” and “pleasing to God”. The sacrifice— our sacrifice of ourselves— is to be equally living (with Christ’s new life in us), holy (separate from the world), and pleasing to God (not to the world). How do we do this? E.g., I am reminded of a conversation a pastor friend of mine and I had years ago, when he explained to me how he saw Jesus’ Lordship in his life— it was as though when he came to follow Jesus, the Lord said to him, “The rest of your life is none of your business”. Now, that does not mean we don’t make our request made known to God— in fact, Jesus encouraged us to do so in Matthew 7:7ff.— “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find. . .” But we rest in whatever the Lord’s final decision is, for He is in charge. That means our jobs in the secular world are now expressions of God’s will for us— we are not driven solely by money and prestige, but by the way God wants to use us. “Where, O Lord, can you best use me for Your Kingdom’s work” should be the constant prayer of our hearts. And sometimes that will lead us to dangerous places. E.g., I recall Corrie Ten Boom’s Dad, Casper, who, during the Nazi control of The Netherlands, was asked to care for a Jewish baby, and neighbor scolded him and said he could lose his life for that baby, and his reply was in effect, as he held the baby in his arms, “It would be an honor to lose my life for this baby”. I am reminded of the words of Keith Green in his song, “Make My Life a Prayer to You”: “Make my life a prayer to You/I wanna do what You want me to/no empty words no white lies/no token prayers/no compromise”, and he goes on to say, in acknowledgment of how difficult this is, “Well I wanna thank You now for being patient with me/Oh, it’s so hard to see when my eyes are on me/I guess I’ll have to trust and just believe what You say/Oh, You’re coming again coming to take me away”. Paul says at the end of v 1 “which is your spiritual worship”. But, again, I don’t like the NRSV’s translation here— which also reflects that found in the RSV, NIV, and NASB. To

the NRSV's credit, there is a footnote on the word "spiritual", which is not found in the RSV, and that footnote says "reasonable" as another translation. The word used here, λογικὴν, a word that comes from the word λόγος meaning "word" and "reason", is more naturally translated here "reasonable". The KJV has, to my surprise, a rather good rendering: "which is your reasonable service". C.E.B. Cranford (*Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, pp. 294-295) has "which is your understanding worship"— i.e., your intelligent worship based on the truth of the gospel, and this seems to render correctly what Paul was saying.

READ v 2a. "Second, they are not to conform themselves to the values of the present world." This command is in the present tense, and so it to indicate a continual resistance to conforming to the world. Have you ever seen a Christian conform to this world, to the spirit of the age? E.g., I recall some years ago when we would take youth on mission trips there was a dress code for the girls as to the length of shorts they could wear— the shorts had to be below their finger tips when their arms were at their sides. At times they would come back and say they could not find any shorts that long, but I encouraged them to keep looking, and they eventually found them! The pressure to conform is great. Unfortunately, we all know what it is like to desire to conform to this world and be accepted, and we also probably have ourselves succumbed to the spirit of the age. E.g., I know what it is like to be in social settings and the focus of my attention is myself, whether I am fitting in and how to please others. What defines our view of what a success is-- God, or our culture? What defines what a good retirement is? God, or our culture? E.g., I recall when I was pre-school age my Mother attempted to re-enter the work force as a Physical Therapist, and she would work some days and drop me off at a day school— but I hated the day school! It was chaotic, and I knew no one. So eventually she gave up the idea and sacrificed her career so I would have a more pleasant childhood— which I did!

READ v 2b. “Third, they are, rather, to be transformed, renewed, so they can discern where the dolphins/roaches are!” Again, this is a present tense imperative, so we are talking about a day by day transformation. We are to discern what is good— like finding a dolphin in the sea! E.g., Norwood and Tiffany were in Pensacola recently on the beach, and they saw dolphins, and it was so cool! It was something good, not scary. We too are to look for and test and discern what is good in this world. E.g., the other night I was looking on Amazon Prime for a good movie, and found a documentary on Corrie Ten Boom and her family-- and it was free!! But we also have to watch for the roaches. E.g., the other night when I was about to go to bed and was working on something in my home office, I hear Elena shriek, and I knew what it was— she saw a roach! Despite everything we have in our kitchen, she saw this roach move a little and hide under our crockpot on the counter. I was called in immediately to save the day, while Elena took safe cover in our bedroom in our bed! By God’s grace, I was able to kill the little invader. We, too, should have discerning eyes and minds to know what is not holy, pleasing to God, perfect. E.g., I recall after Katrina we lost half our worshipping congregation. As I spoke with people who were relocating to new cities and finding new home churches, I encouraged them to interview their pastors and find out what they believe about such things as the authority of the Bible, the bodily resurrection, Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross, the Trinity, marriage, abortion, etc. We need to be discerning what is wrong about the world-- the roaches— and what is good and pleasing to God— the dolphins.

“Three ways this text can build up women-- and men! (1) Intimacy with God— are we spending daily times with God in prayer and His Word?; (2) Inner beauty or outer beauty-- which is our focus. I have heard it said that the way women dress for an event is not so much to impress men but to impress other

women; we need to dress in a way that pleases our Heavenly Father, who is more impressed with a woman's inner beauty than outer beauty; (3) Investigate what we are hearing on the radio, television, internet, podcasts, social media, etc.—investigate what God's Word says about such things.