

Breaking the sacred and secular divide
Isaiah 6:1-8 and Romans 12:1-2

When growing up I had the idea that my life in church, and my life outside of church, were two different worlds.

Going to church with my parents, I realised quickly that it was a time to be neatly dressed and to be on one's best behaviour. It was a time when people seemed rather serious. It was clearly very special, but different to the everyday life that we lived on the other days of the week. I understood this to some extent. On Sundays we were in church to worship our mighty God. This required proper behaviour. There was after all, plenty of time to relax during the other six days of the week.

Looking back, I perhaps had the idea that it was only on Sundays that we worshiped God, prayed, sang hymns and practised our faith life.

It seemed to be okay to relax during the week and to play around, and do things with my friends that might not be appropriate for Sunday.

Young people are perceptive. I got to know some of the older people in the congregation and had to do with them outside of the church. It really seemed to me that some were different people in the week, compared to the way they behaved and carried themselves on Sunday.

Can you relate to that? Did you experience that or see this in persons around you?

Then, one Sunday when I was in church this view was challenged. A member of the congregation, an advocate I respected and knew¹, stood up and said that he thought members of the congregation should be given turns to share how their Christian faith was practised in their workplace, home or school. This made me sit up. I was just training as a young lawyer and it didn't seem that law practice was a place where my Christian faith could be put into action. At church I was surrounded by like-thinking people who were there to worship God. In the workplace there were pressures, hostilities, and I had no idea whether those around me were Christ followers.

How I would address the congregation? I realised that I had no idea what I would say. But over the years I've come to see what a valuable question that was.

Have you ever thought about this? One author wrote this:

"Do you believe that Sunday is more important than Monday through Saturday? Do you think the only work worth doing happens in a church or ministry setting? Do you see a sharp divide in your life between the things you do for God and the things you do everywhere else? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may suffer from a very present problem called the sacred-secular divide."

If we think like this we put our spiritual life (attending church, Bible reading, praying and serving) on one side and the rest of our lives (our work, our money, home and everything else we do) on the other side.

What does the Bible say about this? The Bible breaks down this spiritual-secular divide. God cares about every aspect of our life. God wants us to respond to Him in everything we do.²

In Isaiah we read:

¹ Francois Junod SC at St Francis Waterkloof

² In an article on the sacred and secular divide. The author says this. "Most importantly, the language of Scripture doesn't allow for the sacred-secular divide. In his book "Discovering our Spiritual Identity", Trevor Hudson highlights a handful of passages that push back against this divide. He writes, "Gradually it dawned on me that the people in the Bible saw things differently. Repeatedly the Scriptures witness to the presence of God being encountered everywhere and in everything." In other words, the Bible breaks down the sacred-secular divide; God cares about every aspect of our lives, not just the parts we do within the context of a church or ministry." See: <http://intersectproject.org/faith-and-work/4-bible-passages-to-break-the-sacred-secular-divide/>

"And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;

The whole earth is full of his glory!"

Isaiah 6:3

Do you hear that "The whole earth is full of his glory!" It is not just the church that is full of God's glory on Sunday mornings. It is the whole earth 24/7.

Worshipping together as we are doing this morning is essential and very important. But this is not the only time when God is present or when we need to respond to God. We read in Ephesians 4:6. The following:

"There is... one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."

And a final passage from Psalm 27 read by Charlotte last week:

"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

God does not only meet us within these four walls - He is everywhere we go.

Trevor Hudson, minister at Benoni Methodist Church, writes this:

"This way of understanding God's relationship with the world has profoundly altered my understanding of the Christ-following life. No longer is the Holy One to be encountered only within particular places, special times in certain states of mind. His living presence pervades all things in every experience, and waits only to be invoked. Wherever we may be standing-in the kitchen or at the workplace-is holy ground."³

The first two verses of Romans 12 have become central to my journey of faith.

No one knew the challenges we face better than the apostle Paul.⁴

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome not only setting out the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but also instructing them, and us, how to respond.

Paul had not been to Rome.⁵

He had tried but had not met his audience but now he writes to them.

In chapters 1 to 8 Paul sets out the gospel message.

Paul teaches about the sinful nature of all men and woman in the eyes of God⁶, and justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

³ Trevor Hudson-Discovering Our Spiritual Identity

⁴ [2 Corinthians 11:24-28](#)

⁵ The letter was most probably written while Paul was in Corinth, and probably while he was staying in the house of Gaius and transcribed by Tertius his amanuensis. There are a number of reasons Corinth is most plausible. Paul was about to travel to Jerusalem on writing the letter, which matches Acts[Acts 20:3] where it is reported that Paul stayed for three months in Greece. This probably implies Corinth as it was the location of Paul's greatest missionary success in Greece. Additionally Phoebe was a deacon of the church in Cenchreae, a port to the east of Corinth, and would have been able to convey the letter to Rome after passing through Corinth and taking a ship from Corinth's west port.[7] Erastus, mentioned in Romans 16:23, also lived in Corinth being the city's commissioner for public works and city treasurer at various times, again indicating that the letter was written in Corinth. The precise time at which it was written is not mentioned in the epistle, but it was obviously written when the collection for Jerusalem had been assembled and Paul was about to "go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints", that is, at the close of his second visit to Greece, during the winter preceding his last visit to that city. The majority of scholars writing on Romans propose the letter was written in late 55/early 56 or late 56/early 57. Early 58 and early 55 both have some support, while German New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann argues for a date as early as 51/52 (or 54/55) following on from Knox who proposed 53/54. Lüdemann is the only serious challenge to the consensus of mid to late 50s.

⁶ Romans 3:22-24. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

He teaches about how through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross we have a bridge that ends our separation from God.

Paul then goes on in chapters 9 to 11 to explain God's sovereignty and how, as individuals, we can come into a right relationship with God.

*" ... if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"*⁷

It is by faith, through grace that we are saved as we respond to the good news of the gospel message.⁸

Summarised the Gospel Message is this:

- God is our holy creator and righteous judge;
- Sin separates us from God;
- God sent Jesus to die for us;
- Christ's death and resurrection - the bridge to end our separation from God;
- We are to respond and repent if we are to be saved; and
- Our lives are to reflect that we follow Christ.

And so after 11 chapters of instruction, we get to Romans 12 and Paul's instructions on how we, as Christians, are to live a holy lifestyle.

"Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters..."⁹, says Paul, take everything that I have been teaching you, and put it into practice now! There is an urgency in the call to action by Paul.

It is a call to action because of what God has already done for you. You are to do this "... In view of God's mercy". "With eyes wide open to the mercies of God ..."⁹ Do this not only in our own strength but God helping you.

What are you to do? "To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."¹⁰

A personal call?

This teaching would have surprised those reading Paul's letter. They would have been accustomed to offering dead animals as a sacrifice in order to obtain forgiveness.¹¹ What Paul wrote was startling: no slaughtering of an animal as a sacrifice: Paul was calling upon the readers to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. "Living" as opposed to dead, but "living" also in the sense of having the new life of the Holy Spirit¹².

One writer says: "The problem with living sacrifices is that they squirm on the altar."¹³ And then we begin to strike bargains.

⁷ [Romans 10:9-13](#)

⁸ See <http://www.thegracevine.com/romans.html>

⁹ From the JB Phillips translation.

¹⁰ From footnote to NIV Study Bible page 726: *Living sacrifices* in contrast to dead animal sacrifices, or perhaps, "living" in the sense of having the new life of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 6:4). *Spiritual act*: not merely ritual activity but the involvement of heart, mind and will. *Worship*: obedient service

¹¹ [Deuteronomy 12:6,13,14,27; 27:6](#)

¹² Footnote in the NIV Study Bible page 1726: "Not merely ritual activity but the involvement of , heart, mind and will

¹³ http://www.sermoncentral.com/Articles/Article_PrintFriendly.asp?ArticleID=746 8 Preachable Marks of a Transformed Life

"God I will do this if you will ensure that.... If you will grant to me this, I will obey."

But the call is to surrender to God's plans not to strike bargains.

Paul calls on his readers, and on us, to place God at the very centre of our lives. I want to share a picture.

One large circle with a smaller circle in the centre. In the one picture I am in the centre. I allocate my time to different segments. In the segments you find: my family, my work, my recreation, my finances, serving the community, participation at church, and magnanimously, even a segment for God. I allocate my time between these different segments. Work seems to absorb most of my time but where there is time left my family get some of me, I have some recreation, and an hour or two on Sundays at church (but don't push me by going over that) and yes, if there is time left, God you have a place.

Compare this with another circle. In this circle God is in the centre. I still have the same segments. Family, work, recreation, finances, community and church: but God radiates out and finds a place in each of these segments. This is a very different picture and one I believe that Paul had in mind.

God in each part of your everyday life.¹⁴

In the Message, Eugene Peterson writes this:

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering."

Take your everyday, ordinary life ... and place it before God as an offering.

Then Paul goes on to say that: "... this is your spiritual act of worship."

This blows apart the idea that worshipping God is restricted to what we do in our time here at the church on Sunday mornings. Of course that time is vital. In Hebrews¹⁵ the writer urges that we are not to give up meeting together as some are doing. But that is not where our worship ends.

Then Paul warns us that the world will try to squeeze us into its mould.¹⁶ The world will try to force us into its pattern.¹⁷

¹⁴ See John van de Laar Daily Worship for 27 October. <http://sacredise.com/daily> and [Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 20-25](#) . Travel on your journey through life with God at the centre. The two Commandments given to us by Jesus come from the book of Deuteronomy. The call is to love the Lord our God "...with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength." This is not an add-on. It is to be part of every aspect of our lives. Did you hear what was said in the passage? Repeat this instruction to your children. Speak about it constantly where ever you are. Tie it to your hands so that it will be part of your work. Wear it on your forehead so that it will be part of your thinking and attitudes, and make it part of the structure of your home.

¹⁵ Hebrews 10:25 - 25 Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging, and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching.

¹⁶ J B Phillips translation

¹⁷ NIV translation and in the Amplified Bible - The world will put pressure on us in order to fashion us, and adapt us, to the external and superficial customs of this world.

It is difficult not to conform to the patterns of this world. We are bombarded by advertising, the Internet, books, magazines and peer pressure.

What is wrong with you? Try it! Don't you want to be cool? Think of yourself, no one else will! Steal a little. Cheat a little. Everybody else is doing it. Do you want to get left behind?

The danger is we fit in without even thinking.

And it is easier to conform than to stand against this pressure.

It is easier, at least externally to conform, even if inside you there is a strident scream: "You know that this is not right!"

Paul knew this. He tells us what to do. To change from the inside out.

To have a different mind-set. To move out of the centre of the circle and place God at the centre. He says that we are to

"Be transformed by the renewing of our minds".¹⁸

In everyday language Peterson puts it like this:

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

This calls for a conscious choice on our part.¹⁹

Paul urges us to see that while salvation is life-critical, the journey doesn't end there. Why should you do this? So that "... you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." "... so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good ..."²⁰

So what is the challenge to you? I believe it is this that you are to:

- ❖ respond,
- ❖ put God at the centre,
- ❖ resist the pressures of the world, and
- ❖ pray for renewing

so that you can experience and understand that God's will is "good, pleasing and perfect."

Journey with God at the centre of your lives and find that you are not what you used to be. You will be transformed. You will become more and more the "you" that God created you to be.

¹⁸ Paul uses the word transform only twice. The second time is in this passage In 2 Corinthians 3:18 - "17 The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. 18 All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

¹⁹ You can't sit on the fence. You can't do a bit of this, and a bit of that. It is not the average that counts. In a talk I heard on Thursday a speaker said that if you have one foot in a bucket of burning coals, and the other foot in a bucket of ice it is little comfort to say that on average the temperature is acceptable. You can't sit on the fence without suffering severe pain.

²⁰ The NIV and the JB Phillip's Translation.

Start each day with a short prayer: "Thank you God for this day. I put all I will do this day in your hands. Lead me as I walk today. Let me know your presence in all I do and in my dealings with all the people I will meet. Amen"

You and I can't change the whole world.

But we can change relationships and attitudes in those around us. In our families, at school and at work. This can have a ripple effect in our community and beyond. Picture that.

Being changed is not something you do through your own efforts. But you do need to start with yourself. What are you to do to meet this challenge? I believe this:

1. Review honestly the way you have been living.
2. Identify honestly the pressures from the world that keep you from having God at the centre of your life.
3. Ask for forgiveness for these things. Pray to be changed from the inside out.
4. Change one thing each day that you would not have done if God was not at the very centre of your life.
5. Respond urgently to Paul's call but be patient with yourself as you follow the call. Change will come from the inside out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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