

Glorifying God as a Living Sacrifice (Rom. 12.1-2)

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I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Introduction

Romans 12:1-2 is a *classic* New Testament passage, very familiar, and often memorized. And this is good because the text gives a very penetrating *summary* of the Christian life. The use of “therefore” early on ties this passage like glue to the grand perspective that ends chapter 11. In a word, because God’s glory is His chief end for all that exists, then our thoughts must go from contemplation to exaltation and doxology: **Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! ...to him be all glory forever, amen** (11.33, 36). On this basis, **by the mercies of God**, Paul appeals to the brothers and sisters at Rome back then and to you here today with these words **present your bodies as a living sacrifice...to God**. In context, this is a call to glorify God as a living sacrifice and this call directs us in two ways: to glorify God by worship and to glorify God by godliness.

1A. Glorifying God by worship

We can follow through on this main idea by considering four things.

1) First, the call to worship

Paul says, on the basis of the manifold and tender mercies of God, *I warmly entreat you fellow family members* who make up God’s household, to go to a new temple with a new sacrifice and worship the Lord your God. We have a warm call to worship based on the warmth mercy. As we saw in Hebrews, God’s mercy leads the way in forming a redeemed family...of worshippers.

2) The sacrifice of worship

On the basis of God’s mercy and the grand perspective he gives on all things, Paul focuses the worship to which he calls us. There is sacrifice when you come to the altar in worship. The sacrifice to be presented is “your bodies.” This is interesting to think of worshipping *God* by a focus on the *body*. In other words, worship is very earthy and down to earth. It is bodily. It involves all that we are and do wherever we go. Where your body goes you go. What your body does, you do. Wherever you present your body to the activities of life, there you are to present yourself in worship to God in all that you are and all that you represent. This is very practical; worship is relevant and touches down where the rubber meets the road.

This offering of our bodies as living sacrifices puts our daily work in a very elevated position. In the workplace, doing our sometimes tedious and sometimes trying tasks on the job, we are to present our bodies there as living sacrifices to God. Present your aches and pains, limitations, abilities, desires, hungers, emotions, organs of speech, organs of sight and organs of sound (vocal cords, lips, eyes and ears) all to the Lord who has given and given again in Christ. The sacrifice of worship is living; it is your very life. Cf. Take my life...hands...feet...

3) The character of worship

It is to be not only a living sacrifice but also a holy, and an acceptable sacrifice: **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship** (12.1b).

That the sacrifice of your body to God is to be holy is a matter of dedication. There are different ways you can *start off the day*. You might say in prayer: “Lord, I dedicate this day to you.” Or, “I dedicate myself to your service today.” What this passage does is focus that prayer in the presentation of the body, which is very fundamental, comprehensive, and concrete: “Lord, I present my body to you today in all I do wherever my feet take me. I set myself apart for you. I dedicate my body to holiness.”

It *continues through the day* task by task. You carry with you a sense of the sacredness of all that you do in and through the body. At times when the going gets rough, you may utter that commitment again: “here, in this office, on this scaffold, in this store, on this fork lift, I present my body to you.” This is a great summary way to focus the use of your body in daily life.

There is encouragement in the notion of an acceptable sacrifice **present your bodies as a living sacrifice...acceptable to God** (12.1). In other words, making this commitment pleases the Lord despite your failings. He is pleased with the presentation of your bodies to Him in an act of worship and in a life committed to His glory. It is acceptable to your loving heavenly Father.

4) The depth of worship

He says it is “**your reasonable service**” (KJV; NIV has “**your spiritual worship.**”).

The word translated “spiritual” directs our attention from the outer man of the body to the inner man of the heart. Additional to what has already been said about the comprehensiveness of this down to earth worship, we are further directed to the realm of thought and reflection deep within ourselves. Worship is to be thoughtful. It is not a matter of simply going through the motions, of being there in the body and acting out worship as an outward performance. It is a matter of the heart and mind.

Of course, this is the right thing to do, the reasonable thing in light of all the facts. Meditation motivates worship. Pondering the mercies of God, the great realities that stand over us in all of our existence upon this earth, and the mystery of our very being as body and soul, leads naturally to the presentation of our bodies to God. It is not only reasonable, it is right, it has a depth, it is spiritual, it is continual and it is thoughtful. Thus mercy’s demand of worship is a demand that is as deep as it is comprehensive: logical on one hand, and knitty-gritty on the other.

2A. Glorifying God by godliness

Here we have the negative then the positive.

1B. Mercy’s Demand of Godliness Stated Negatively

In 12:2, Paul presses home the demand of a life patterned after the will of God as something inseparable from worship: **Do not be conformed to this world** (12.2). Mercy, Paul tells us, demands godliness. This is simply God-like-ness, which means that we seek to conform our lives to a pattern, to God’s pattern, and thus to God as His image bearers.

The negative injunction (**Do not be conformed**) has an active sense: “**do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world**” (NIV). It is a command that expresses a duty. And as such, this is a matter in which *we are actively involved*.

“**World**” is literally “age.” Therefore the duty that is grounded in the mercy of God can be summarized like this: “you are not to pattern your life along lines dictated by a preoccupation with this transient evil age.” “Worldliness” has to do with modes of conduct and attitudes of heart flavored and determined by a dominant concern for this world. It has to do with this time, this temporal realm, the time between the comings of Christ. Worldliness is not a matter of involvement with the things or people of this world. It is not a matter of being involved with the affairs of this life, and with work and possessions. Worldliness refers to conduct, attitudes, and principles that lack the long-term look and the upward look. It means, for example, to have more concern for a high standing in retirement than for a high standing in the judgment to come. Godliness here does not mean that no one should give any thought to retirement. Instead, it means that retirement is viewed in the light of eternity and in the light of God’s will for the present time between.

Concern for this age is autonomous conduct in which principles of expediency and necessity for self-preservation are upheld *for their own sake*. They may be good in themselves. The problem is that they are pursued as final ends.

This kind of worldly life is an undercurrent that tugs at the feet of the Christian. It is a constant threat. Hence there is a warning here of an enemy, a pitfall, a snare, and a trap. We must be vigilant and watchful.

So how do we do this? How are we to be vigilant and watchful? The focal point being made here by Paul is that we must test our life principles *for the taint of the shortsighted outlook* in order to avoid fashioning and shaping our conduct accordingly. We have to ask, “Where am I guided by the counsel of the ungodly?” “Where am I standing on the pathway on which sinners stand?” This means that we have to live a repentant life *always acknowledging our need as sinner-saints*. The starting point is a sense of need due to an honest recognition of the impact of the temporal outlook.

The bottom line of the negative demand here is that we are called to godliness *not worldliness*. And we must remember that worldliness is not a matter of living in this world and participating vigorously in the affairs of life. It refers to *attachment*. God-like-ness refers to *detachment*, to seeing life from the perspective of the age to come which is present now in part. Here “selling all you have and giving it to the poor” means selling all you have to possess the kingdom (Matt. 13); you serve God in all earthly things transferring all into a relation to the kingdom of God to be guided by the King. This is a picture of a pilgrim on the earth traveling to the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. So figuratively, we only attach ourselves to this world with tent pegs! We thus aim high; we set our sights on God’s chief end.

To complete the picture we must turn to the positive side of this demand of mercy.

2B. The Demand of Mercy Stated Positively

Paul says, “**Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**” This involves some important considerations.

1) First, there is a distinct orientation

The positive duty enjoined upon us is oriented *from the inside out*. It is moral renewal of the *mind* and thus of the principles and attitudes that govern how we see things. The concern here is with how we think about life as we live it. How we think structures what we do. It is like the operation that is performed today on the eyes that changes one’s vision. Transform the eye and you alter how you see. Things look different before and after the transforming operation. This gives an element of expectation, surprise, and wonder to the Christian life. We have only touched the hem of the garment. This is the excitement about learning; there are things on the other side of the operation that we cannot see now. The good, the true, the beautiful is out there right in front of our eyes but we have trouble seeing. The problem is internal to the eye. By analogy, the problem is internal to the mind and heart. Be transformed in your mind, heart and thinking. What an encouragement this is to open-hearted-ness!

2) Second, there is a distinct goal

It is all about learning what the will of God is: **that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.** The will of God is a practical synonym for the law of God. Recall the emphasis of Paul on the law in Romans 7, where it is described in ways similar to how the will of God is described here in Romans 12. The law is spiritual, holy, righteous, and good (7:12, 14). The goal is to learn how approved it is, to learn how good, acceptable, and perfect it is. The law of God is spiritual, holy, and good and the commandments are exceedingly broad not narrow, not a burden (1 Jn. 5:3). Cf. My Dear Redeemer: I see thy beauty in thy law.

Testing (**by testing**) does not mean tempting the Lord or putting Him to the test. It is going through a testing process of learning the will of God in order to know it and experience it piece by piece (removing the fog piece by piece, cutting away the branches that obscure vision of the majestic oak of God’s perfection given in His law).

The implication is that you must test to learn. Why learn? It is in order to conform your thinking, and thus your life, to the will of God.

The point is that we are not to be conformed to worldliness but to the will of God. Moral renewal includes discerning how suitable and fitting God’s will is. It fits. It is a good guide.

God's will, what he prescribes, what He commands is good. In the context of the gospel, the law is a marvelous wonder. Under the rule of our gentle prophet, priest, and king, the imperatives, the precepts, the laws, and commandments of God with all their austerity, weight and holiness, are our friends. There is no harm; only safety. God's laws are not a burden. They are a delight and joy. As we take them in to our hearts and souls, they are the surgeon's tools in the hand of God to correct our vision and give us insight into the beauty of our Lord and His creation, insight into the treasures of truth and righteousness. It is all out in front of us waiting to be seen, waiting to be experienced, waiting to strike awe in our hearts and worship on our lips.

This is motivating. The goodness, acceptability, the perfection of God's law encourages us to pattern our lives after this marvelous summary of the moral excellence of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. Here we look on His face and are transformed into His likeness. My what a journey! Only the half has been told us.

Let's put all of this into final perspective

1) Consider the mercy of God to you

It is mercy, divine mercy that makes demands on us, that makes these demands on you. Because His chief end demonstrates full, free, pure, inscrutable, and sovereign grace, and because full, free, pure, inscrutable, and sovereign grace powerfully displays the riches of God's wisdom, knowledge, judgments and ways, then what can you say? What can you do? You must present your soul, your life, your body, your all to Jesus Christ who set you free by His sovereign, saving grace. The risen Savior came to you when you were in your dungeon of death and bondage. Thus, "Long your imprisoned spirit lay... fast bound in sin and nature's night. But His eye diffused a quickening ray. You woke. Your dungeon flamed with light. Your chains fell off. Your heart was free. So you rose went forth and followed the one who gave Himself for you on the tree."

2) Worship the Lord thoughtfully and heartily.

Paul shows us how to engage in heartfelt and thoughtful worship. He is deeply engaged in exultant exclamation: "O the depth... O the riches" of God's thoughts and ways (**Romans 11:33-35** ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"). We must raise our voices and acknowledge our utter dependence, and God's absolute independence and sovereignty. We must meditate on the past, the present, and beyond the future of all of created reality, and leap in thought into the unending future: "**From Him, through Him and to Him are all things. To Him the glory, forever, Amen.**"

3) Place your body on the altar to the Lord

Mercy demands worship in which you come face to face with the living God and present your body as a sacrifice to Him continually, and thoughtfully. It also demands godliness in which you face the perfect will of God as it bears on every movement of your body in every moment of life, and that from the inside out.

Therefore, I exhort and entreat you, brothers and sisters, by these mercies of God that are so rich, so full, and so past finding out. Enter continually into worship with the sacrificial gift of your body to God for transformation by conformity to the perfect, acceptable and holy will of God! Thus, **whatever you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.**

To the triune God belongs all glory now and forevermore, Amen!