

*An  
Exposition  
of Romans  
12:1-2*

A Living  
and  
Holy  
Sacrifice

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# A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE

*An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2*

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***“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [as] a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” –Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)***

**I**n all simplicity, our above text says what it means and most certainly means what it says. How often do we hear these verses fall off the lips of fellow believers who presumably mean well? And yet, there is more to be attended to than merely quoting words when it comes to a proper handling of the Word of the True and Living God.

Thus, we shall tend to this matter as the Lord permits us, keeping in mind that in order to truly appreciate what God has uttered through His Spirit, we must truly understand what He has spoken and then apply His words to our hearts, in Christ Jesus, through His Spirit that we may so live and do as He requires of us, for our benefit and His glory.

There are several points we must attend to in regard to our text, and we shall proceed in this order:

- **First** – What does it mean to “present” oneself to God, and how is it done?
- **Second** – What is a sacrifice, why must it be “a living sacrifice,” and Who and what makes us alive?

- **Third** – What is holiness, and what is it about “holiness” that makes things “acceptable” to God?
- **Fourth** – What is reasonable, what is service, and what is the beauty of the combination of the two?
- **Fifth** – What is the meaning of the word “conformed,” and why should we not be conformed to this age?
- **Sixth** – What is the heart of being “transformed by the renewing of our minds?”
- **Seventh** – What are the fruits of a “renewed” mind, and how are we thereby enabled to “prove” what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect?

Finally, we shall meditate upon our text that we may lay hold of such a mindset, and that we may put into practice the very matter of our text, that by word and in deed we may urge others also to present themselves in like manner.

Obviously, the importance of our task cannot be over-stated; therefore, let us now pray to be led and taught by the Holy Spirit of God, for our edification and His glory, through Jesus’ name. Amen.

### *What does it mean to present oneself to God?*

**T**he Greek word translated as “present” literally means “bring forth, to shew, and to show.” Our word carries with it the notion of

displaying oneself before God, coming forth unto Him as if to be examined and found to be this or that. How we go about doing this is simple, for we know that we are ever in His presence; therefore, it is only God's grace as shown through scripture that allows us to approach God. We go in Christ Jesus, our Lord, boldly before the throne of grace, to stand and acknowledge that we are indeed always in the presence of God, that His eyes are upon us, and that His mind rests on our beings. We stand before Him as subjects before the King, to be seen, examined, looked upon and found out. This is what we do when we go to church on Sundays: we go to present ourselves before God and His Son, Jesus the Christ our Lord.

***What is a sacrifice, why must it be a living sacrifice that is offered to God, and Who and what makes us alive?***

**I**n the Bible "sacrifice" has two meanings depending on whether the context is objective or subjective. Subjectively, the word "sacrifice" represents the "act of offering," while objectively it has to do with "that which is offered." To sacrifice is to offer, to render up, or to give away something that belongs to oneself.

In the Old Testament there were many sacrifices made during the course of a year; God detailed what should be sacrificed, when, and where. When it came to the sacrifices of animals, no dead thing could be brought before God as a sacrifice. It had to

be living, and it had to be without blemish, meaning that it could have no flaws or birth defects.

It is because of our Old Testament examples of sacrifice that we can appreciate what the Apostle Paul was given to write for our instruction. For, as touching men, life can only be had in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, no such admonition as our text gives could be given to the unredeemed – they do not qualify, seeing that they are yet dead in their sins and trespasses. But we who have been quickened by the Spirit and made alive unto God by the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ must now, too, offer ourselves just as Christ Jesus offered Himself as a living sacrifice – having not only a natural life, but most importantly a spiritual life.

***What is holiness, and what is it about holiness that makes things acceptable to God?***

**T**o be “holy” means “to be set apart, separate, and sanctified” – that is, undefiled by this world and the pollutions of sin. The Old Testament clearly and emphatically teaches that God is “Holy.” He is the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 1:4), He is the Holy God (Isa. 5:16), and He is the Holy One (Isa. 40:25). God’s name is Holy: “For thus saith the High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is ‘Holy;’ I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa.

57:15). From this last verse of scripture we see how the Lord Himself uses the word “holy” as it relates to Him and His “holiness:” He is separate from sinners, wholly other than, and completely undefiled by any unclean thing. It is to the separateness of holiness that we may attach the idea of purity. In scripture, our word emphasizes its moral and spiritual significance as being separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred and not for secular use.

It is one thing to esteem oneself as holy, but a different matter altogether when the Lord God of heaven considers one as holy and belonging to Him. Many places in the New Testament, including our text, the Greek word “hagios” is used of men and things insofar as they are related to God. Indeed, the quality as attributed to God is often presented in a way which involves divine demands upon the conduct of believers. Characteristically our word expresses “God-likeness,” seeing as our Lord Himself is the standard of holiness. “There is none [as] Holy as the Lord: for there is none besides thee: neither is there any rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2).

It is by this knowledge of God’s holiness that we may understand holiness is a prerequisite: in regard to things, if they are to be accepted by Him; and in regard to people, if we are to be received by Him. For the things that are acceptable to our God are those things He wills and recognizes (Eph. 5:10; Phil. 4:18).

*What is “reasonable,” what is  
“service,” and what is the beauty of  
the combination of the two?*

**T**he Greek word “logikos” is where we get our English word “logical.” It denotes “reason” or “reasonableness;” even more literally, it has to do with that which is rational, or a “rationalness.” Coupled with the word “latreia,” which means “service,” it occurs in only five different verses in the New Testament. This service may be understood as offering one’s body as an instrument to voluntarily or involuntarily do the bidding of another. That sacrifice is to be this type of service can be seen from Romans 9:4; 12:1; Heb. 9:1, 6.

When considered together, “reasonable service” is to be understood as that service to God which involves intelligent meditation or reflection, unlike the Old Testament cultic form of worship which had become mere thoughtless habit. Our service is to be offered with our hearts engaged and our faculties alert and attending to the matter dutifully, thoughtfully, and in earnest. The sacrifice is to be intelligent, in contrast to those sacrifices that were, and are, offered from ritual habit and religious compulsion. Our presentation of ourselves to God is to be in accordance with the spiritual intelligence of those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and who are mindful of the very mercies of God to which Paul the Apostle appeals in Rom. 12:1. It is the sum of these facts that show us the

beauty of our two words combined: “reasonable service.”

***What is the meaning of the word  
“conformed,” and why should we not  
be conformed to this age?***

**T**he Greek word “suschematizo” is translated “conformed,” which means “to fashion or shape one thing to resemble the fashion or shape of another.” By the Holy Spirit, Paul instructs us to not be conformed to this world. The reason should be quite obvious to the believer: the Lord Christ tells us in John chapter 17 that we are not of this world as He is not of this world. This means that we are separate from this world; even more so, we have been called out of it, that we may thus be other than the world. We are told that friendship with the world is enmity with God, and therefore he who would be a friend of the world is an enemy of God.

Let us look at what we mean by “world.” It is not the celestial sphere revolving around the sun that we are not to be fashioned as, for the word that has been translated as “world” literally means “age.” Thus, we are not to fall in step with the external vanities and moral perversions of our times. We are not to agree to disagree, but rather we are to disagree to agree with anything of this age that reflects its depravity, its sinfulness, and its rebellious disposition toward God. We are not to make ourselves appear “worldly” for the sake of

attracting the world to us, as some justify themselves by doing and participating in various things that are indeed contrary to the Spirit who works within us.

But if we say, “In order to reach the world we must entice the world with the world,” such foolishness is blindness! Do we not know that the world already has the world? How can we offer the world itself? Shall I smear mud on my face to attract pigs, or speak with profanity to draw the profane? Lord forbid!

Yes, we were of this world at one point, but not any more dear brothers; we have been delivered! We labor while it is day as fellow-workers with God, calling others out of this world, out of its bondage, away from its lusts and temptations toward God, toward Christ Jesus. It is not ours to point the world toward the world, but rather we are to push the worldly toward the Christ.

Peter, the Apostle, writes, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in **all your behavior**; because it is written; ‘**You shall be holy, for I AM HOLY**’” (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Brothers, need I say more?

### ***What is the heart of being transformed by the renewing of our minds?***

**T**o be transformed is to be changed; to undergo a change of condition which, under the power of God, will find expression in both conduct

and character. It is a qualitative change of an inward nature, a true and lasting change that converts a believer from one state to the next. It is hereby that we go from being dead to alive, and from being of this world to being not of it. I say this to emphasize the extent of real and lasting change, in that it is permanent and not temporary, inward and not merely external.

Therefore, seeing that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, we must understand “renewing” as qualitatively new. It is a renewing or renovation which makes a person different than they were before such a renewing occurred. In the context of our text, the “renewing of your mind” is the adjustment of moral and spiritual vision and thinking by which our mortal minds are brought into alignment with the mind of God. This will subsequently (as it is designed to) have a transforming effect upon a believer. This, beloved, is most certainly the heart of our admonition to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. As such we must be willing respondents to our Savior’s Word, which is shown through a diligent and delightful seeking of such transformation. For it is by this transformation that we are conformed to the image of God’s Son, Jesus the Christ, our Lord.

***What are the fruits of a renewed mind, and how are we thereby enabled to prove what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable and perfect?***

**T**he fruits of a renewed mind can be seen in its sprouting, which is the subsequent transformation that overwhelms the believer. It is in this transformed state that we may apprehend the mind of Christ by His Spirit, which dwells within us. His Spirit gives us the increase in abundance, as touching our reasoning, our judgment, our intellect, and our perceptions. We are shown that our understandings are not to be leaned upon, and we then draw closer to God in Christ. We learn to cling to the very mind that created all things, which results in a Spirit-filled, even supernatural comprehension of Biblical Truth and Spiritual Realities (*see* 1 Cor. 2).

Our mind is to be considered as the seat of the reflective consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding and those of feeling, judging, and determining. When brought under the power of God as an instrument led by His Spirit, it is fit to try, to prove, to discern, and to distinguish between those things that are worthy to be received and those that are not. Through the Bible, our Lord reveals to us His person and His will. We are shown by command what to do, and by prohibition what not to do. We are given examples of obedience and disobedience, and the wages of both. The totality of the information that we are provided through the Bible is what we formally call the “Revealed Will of God” or “The Counsels of God.”

The Greek word “thelema,” translated “will,” is not to be conceived of as a demand, but rather as an expression or inclination of pleasure toward that

which is desired, that which pleases and inspires joy. When “thelema” denotes God’s will, it signifies His gracious disposition toward something. Charles Hodge writes:

From beginning to end, [the Bible] speaks of the will of God, of His decrees, purposes, counsels, and commands. The will is not only an essential attribute of our spiritual being, but it is a necessary [component] condition of our personality.

Without the power of rational self-determination we would be the equals of bananas, electricity, or magnetism, a mere force and not a rational creature. Thus, of God, His will is His power and ability to act according to His good pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

As these truths relate to our text, God, by His will, has already determined what is right, what is good, what is perfect. Therefore, only through the lens of renewed minds, as new creatures created in Christ Jesus, are we able to discern what is well-pleasing in the sight of the Lord our God.

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**N**ow, let us meditate upon these truths. Let us incorporate the reality of God’s revelations into the way we view ourselves and the way

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, London: James Clark & Co. (1960), vol. I, pp. 402-403.

we view this world. Most importantly, let us pray to grasp the beauty of God's glory as shown to us through His word, and our obligation to present ourselves before the Glorious God who created all things through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The scope of this exhortation is to bring into full view the dedication required in our service to God. Our devotion to the Living Lord must be single and unwavering, as He has prescribed the way in which we are to serve Him, equipped us with various graces to carry out our services, and works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure.

Nevertheless, how many men and women who name the name of Jesus Christ our Lord go about wandering – and this the fruit of wondering within themselves concerning the will of God; more specifically, what the will of God is for their lives. Indeed, regarding a matter so intimate and personal, I dare not presume to draw all toward any one vocation, seeing that there are many callings. However, I would point all to the fact that upon all of us who are fellow-heirs with Christ Jesus rests a mandate to fulfill the great commission and to tend to the edification of God's building, His Church.

All spiritual gifts are designed for this end, which results in the ultimate goal – the glorification of God. This is why scripture says, “‘Come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And you shall be holy unto Me: for I the Lord am Holy, and have severed you from other people, that you should be Mine’” (Lev. 20:26). And Christ Jesus our Lord prayed, “I have given them thy Word; and the world has hated them, because they

are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is Truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:14-18). Brothers, we belong to God, we belong to Jesus the Lord. We thus must behave in accordance with His will, and so move others to respond in like manner. “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

In closing, I shall leave you with a literal translation of Romans 12:1-2: “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to bring forth your bodies [as] a living and holy offering, well-pleasing to God, [which is] your rational service. And do not fall in with external and fleeting fashions [belonging] to this age, nor be yourselves made like unto them, but undergo a deeper inner change by the qualitative renewing of your mind as the Holy Spirit of God alone can work in you.”<sup>2</sup>

Holy Father, I pray that you teach us to prize holiness as you would have us to, that we may live our days upon this earth as shining lights of your glory and unshakable pillars of your purity. I pray for discernment, that we may be able to prove what is your good pleasure, and that we mature to that stature of Christ whereby we too shall always delight to do your will. Forgive us for our neglect of

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<sup>2</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Key Word Study Bible*, Chattanooga: AMG Publishers (1990), N.T. Lexical Aids #4964.

holiness, for giving audience to worldly things and adorning ourselves yet again with those garments from which we have been cleansed. Help us to notice worldliness, and any hidden leaven in the things we give audience to, that would inspire us to live and be conformed to this age. May we all the more be transformed by the renewing of our minds. In Jesus' name, amen.

## *Soli Deo Gloria*







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*“The word of God is not imprisoned.” 2 Timothy 2:9*