



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 37



LIVING SACRIFICES TO GOD

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

INTRODUCTION

The chief benefit gained by the truth is salvation – *“salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). We receive *“the love of the truth”* that we might *“be saved”* (2 Thess 2:10). Salvation begins with extrication from sin, and will be brought to its culmination when Jesus returns and we are gathered to Him.

No aspect of spiritual life is divorced from salvation. To put it another way, there is no such thing as moving on to higher things after we have been saved. If something is separate from salvation, we must be delivered from it. God has nothing good to give us that is not integral to His great salvation. This consideration is fundamental to sound thought.

In salvation we are delivered from both the guilt and power of sin. We are freed from the penalty of sin and released from the wicked one who promotes it. We

are moved from the “power of darkness” into the marvelous “kingdom” of God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13).

All of this relates to *“the righteousness of God”* that is announced in the Gospel, and *“imputed”* to us by faith (Rom 1:17; 4:22-24). As you know, this righteousness has been the matter of exposition from the first chapter of Romans through the eleventh chapter. A brief recap of the relevance of this righteousness will serve to set the background for our text.

- ❑ **1:16-17, A righteousness from God.** The Gospel reveals a righteousness that comes from God through faith.
- ❑ **1:18-3:18, A righteousness that is needed.** Both Jew and Gentile stand in unquestionable and consistent need of this righteousness.

- ❑ **3:19-20, The need confirmed.** The Law was given to confirm man was totally unrighteous.
- ❑ **3:21, Without the Law.** The righteousness of God is now revealed without the law, although it was witnessed to by both the Law and the Prophets.
- ❑ **3:22-23, By faith, for all.** This righteousness is realized by faith for all who believe.
- ❑ **3:24-25, Justification.** Justification, which is the Divine act whereby men are made righteousness, comes freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
- ❑ **3:26-26, Just and Justifier.** Because of Christ’s propitiatory death, God is both just and the Justifier of the one believing in Jesus. That is, He Himself is righteous in pronouncing men righteous.
- ❑ **3:27-31, Apart from the Law.**

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE (12:1a)
- II. THE PRESENTATION OF YOUR BODIES (12:1b)
- III. PRESENTED TO GOD (12:1c)
- IV. IT IS ONLY REASONABLE (12:1d)
- V. THE CONFORMITY THAT IS CONDEMNED (12:2a)
- VI. THE REQUIRED TRANSFORMATION (12:2b)
- VII. PROVING THE WILL OF GOD (12:2c)

Justification comes independently of the Law.

- **4:1-5, The example of Abraham.** Abraham is the initial and premier example of God justifying men by faith.
- **4:6-8, Confirmed by David.** David confirms that God imputes righteousness to men independently of their works.
- **4:9-25, Imputed righteousness.** The imputation of righteousness to Abraham shows that righteousness comes before acceptable works, and not because of them.
- **5:1-11, Spiritual life.** The realization of this righteousness from God introduces spiritual life, which is sustained by our relationship to Him through faith.
- **5:12-21, Only two men.** Both sin and righteousness are ultimately traced to one man: sin to Adam, and righteousness to Christ.
- **6:1-5, Baptism into Christ.** In our baptism, we are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
- **6:6-23, Presentation required.** This unity with Christ demands the presentation of our whole persons to God.
- **7:1-25, Inner warfare.** Justification, or being made righteous by God, has created a fierce inner conflict in the believer. The flesh wars against the spirit, and the old man against the new man.
- **8:1-4, Justification confirmed.** The inner warfare confirms that we have been justified by faith, and are not condemned.

- **8:5-8, The liability of flesh.** Our condition demands that we refuse to listen to the flesh, or old man, for his dominance over us will condemn us.
- **8:9-27, The ministry of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is given to assist us in subordinating the flesh. He does this by leading us in the fight, and by interceding for us when the infirmity of ignorance plagues us.
- **8:28-39, The overall purpose.** The entirety of salvation is of God, who purposed it, implements it, and will bring it to a glorious consummation.
- **9:1-11:36, The example of Israel.** Israel is given as an example of the total working of the Lord. In them, salvation is seen to be of the Lord, yet involve the participation of those who are saved. In them we see that *“of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.”*

AN UNDENIABLE EMPHASIS

In chapters one through eleven there has been an undeniable emphasis upon Deity. **God** is seen as the one who has purposed salvation in all of its aspects. **Jesus** is declared as the One through whom that purpose is being implemented. His atoning death satisfactorily and justly addressed all of the liabilities inducted by sin. His present ministry ensures that our faith is not in vain, and that the purpose of God will be brought to its intended conclusion. **The Holy Spirit** works with the believers, directing, interceding, and empowering them to live in harmony with God’s purpose and for His glory.

The work of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are central in all of these considerations. In view of these things, to point the hearts and minds of men toward the capabilities and contributions of men becomes an utter absurdity. The absolute impotence of men is what necessitated the total involvement

of Deity in their salvation. This was satisfactorily demonstrated in four thousand years of human history. Two thousand five hundred years without Divine direction confirmed the Gentiles were incapable of correcting their condition. One thousand five hundred years with Divine direction corroborated the Jews were equally incapable of correcting their condition.

It is, therefore, a sin of the greatest magnitude to rely upon human wisdom or power to initiate or maintain spiritual life.

THE MATTER OF FREEDOM

There is also the matter of the freedom which is experienced when we *“know the truth.”* As our blessed Lord said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). That freedom involves freedom from sin, delusion, and Satan’s power. It involves ultimate deliverance from corruption, the grave, and the wrath of God. To put it another way, we do not need the world’s input to sustain spiritual life. In fact, it cannot be sustained by that means. We have been liberated from the dominance of the temporal order because it consistently tends to death, not life.

Whatever was impotent to bring you to Christ, is equally powerless to keep you in Christ. The order from which we have been liberated can in no way promote life in the *“heavenly places,”* to which we have been raised and in which we have been placed (Eph 1:3; 2:6).

SALVATION’S PRACTICALITY

Although this is not its greatest advantage, **sound doctrine is practical.** It interfaces with every aspect of life. There is no facet of life that is not impacted by the salvation of God. It empowers and moves the saints to

Whatever was impotent to bring you to Christ, is equally powerless to keep you in Christ. The order from which we have been liberated can in no way promote life in the “heavenly places,” to which we have been raised and in which we have been placed

separate themselves from defilements. It also constrains them to appropriate all things pertaining to life and godliness, given to them by the Lord. This great salvation impacts upon private, domestic, and social life – to say nothing of spiritual relationships.

The Devil's Strategy

One of the most effective strategies employed by the "old serpent" involves the undue exaltation of academics. In this approach philosophy, speculation, and formalism spring forth and demand dominancy. All of them are offered as adequate guides for "practical" matters, which appear to be the stress of the contemporary church. Faith is thus relegated to the background, and profession is equated with possession.

Under this arrangement, reconciliation to God is taken for granted, and the wisdom of men is employed for the correction or improvement of personal, domestic, and social aspects of life. The preacher or teacher who deals with the practical aspect of life in Christ is thus thought to be the most profitable. Conversely, the preacher or teacher who deals with justification, sanctification, reconciliation, etc., is considered to be impractical – a sort of theological oddity that is beyond the capacity of the masses. There is hardly a place in the Western world where this imagination is not prominent.

Dreadful Complacency

Few professed Christians challenge this approach to life because of its remarkable popularity. Problem solvers and counselors have been added to church staffs, and even exalted to places of prominence, often supplanting those who preach and teach the Word of God. Religious organizations are filled with frolicking youth and spiritually indifferent

adults, nearly all of whom are abysmally ignorant of both the Person and ways of God. Such people have been brought into the "church" by entertainment programs, shallow teaching, athletics, and self-help programs.

The number of religious organizations that are contributing to this situation is staggering. They include music, publishing, career development, motivational direction, education, and a staggering array of entertainment specialists. The number of *Christian* businesses operating for profit boggles the mind.

All of this may appear quite innocent, and those who raise questions about it are often viewed as negative, and even cultist, in their objections. After all, it appears as though these thrusters have been highly successful. Who would dare to question them. However, hardly any of them could exist in a strong godly environment. They would soon die out were the people of God conversant with Divine manners, intent on laying hold of eternal life, and determined to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. **A sterile spiritual environment has enabled such groups to surface and appear successful.**

THE TEXT BEFORE US

Our text, verses one and two of the twelfth chapter, are **not** the thrust of this book. Nor, indeed, is it the loftiest doctrine. It is **not** the heart of the Gospel, or where we are to place our emphasis. Here is where the human spirit intersects with the purpose of God. It is where faith is revealed and eternal life made known. **If we have ingested what the Spirit has said in the first eleven chapters, it will be evident to our hearts that this text is the only proper**

conclusion, and the only appropriate response.

This is an exhortation that is based upon the solid foundation that has been put in place. That foundation is, from one view, the Person of Christ (1 Cor 3:11; Acts 4:12). It consists of His accomplishments and present ministry. From another point of view, that foundation is the fact that we have been "made righteous" by the God of heaven, because we have believed the record He has given of His Son.

As individuals who are in Christ, we ourselves are the "workmanship" of God (Eph 2:10). The exhortation that follows is a summons to bring our lives into conformity with that work. The Spirit has informed us that we have been brought into Christ, and that our "members," or human capacities, are to be presented to God (Chapter 6). He has already dealt with the fierce inward struggle that has been induced by faith (Chapter 7). He has further shown us that men cannot be made acceptable to God by their own independent efforts. They must hear and embrace the Gospel (Chapter 10).

Now the Spirit will admonish us to formally and determinedly present our bodies to God. **This is not an option, but is necessitated by the very nature of salvation.** The text will further confirm to our hearts that unless this is done, the will of the Lord cannot be known.

God will not bring us to glory while we allow our bodies to dictate the manner in which we live. Such a stance contradicts both the nature and power of salvation. It denies the effectiveness of salvation, and reveals that sin yet dominates the individual. This is a most sobering passage.

I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE . . .

" ^{12:1a} ***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God . . .*** "

THEREFORE

Here is an impassioned plea – an exhortation – that is spiritually logical. It

is in the nature of a conclusion to the doctrines that have been affirmed, namely those related to the appropriation of the righteousness of God. This means that the matters unveiled in the previous chapters are, in fact, designed to bring us to this

conclusion. Sound exhortations must be based upon the truth of God, not upon human reasoning or raw emotion. When that truth is seen, the heart will be powerfully motivated to yield a response that will bring glory to God.

In this regard, the New Covenant differs significantly from the Old Covenant, which was founded upon Law. Under the Old Covenant, the word “*beseech*” most often is used of men speaking to God. Frequently men pled with God to spare them, preserve them, hear their prayers, and a few times for God to reveal Himself (Ex 33:18; Num 12:13; 14:17,19; 1 Sam 23:11; 2 Sam 24:10; 2 Kgs 19:19; 20:3; 1 Chron 21:8; 2 Chron 6:40; Neh 1:5,8,11; Psa 80:14; 116:4; 118:25; 119:108; Isa 38:3; 64:9; Dan 9:16; Amos 7:2,5; Jonah 1:14; 4:3; Mal 1:9).

Under the First Covenant, “*beseech*” is rarely used to urge people to walk acceptably with God. Through Moses and Joshua God did urge His people to “*choose life*” (Deut 30:19), and whom they would serve (Josh 24:15). Once God spoke of the eunuchs who did “*choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant*” (Isa 56:4). You will search in vain for repeated admonitions of choice under the Law. They simply are not there.

statement that immediately precedes the exhortation. “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36). Faith can take hold of that word, being convinced of both its truth and relevance. When that is done, an immediate and favorable response will take place. Fulfilling the word is thus seen as possible as well as necessary.

Circumstances Unveiled

Also consider the things the Spirit has unveiled to us. Some of Israel were blinded and cast away because of their unbelief (11:20). What is more, we Gentiles will also be cut off if we are guilty of unbelief (11:22)). When men cease to theorize about those statements, choosing to embrace them, they will enter into the activity toward which we are now exhorted.

God’s Predestination

Contemplate the many preceding references to God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and election.

- ❑ “*Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth*” (9:18).
- ❑ “*Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*” (9:19).
- ❑ “*Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*” (9:21).
- ❑ “*Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha*” (9:29).
- ❑ “*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (11:6).
- ❑ “*God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day*” (11:8).
- ❑ “*As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes*” (11:28).
- ❑ “*For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*” (11:29).
- ❑ “*For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all*” (11:32).
- ❑ “*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*” (11:36).

These are unquestionably powerful statements. Some have taken them and formed a rigid theology that has neither heart nor sense. They imagine such words mean those in Christ cannot possible lose their status. Others are convinced human responsibility is totally unreasonable – that God will do what He has determined without any regard whatsoever for those with whom He deals.

This is certainly not the place to deal with such absurdities. It is enough to note the nature of the exhortation before us, and to acknowledge it is given against the backdrop of the above declarations. **Among other things, that means Divine foreknowledge, predestination, election, and purpose do not exclude the fact that there are things for which we are responsible.** It means that it is not only in order, but it imperative, that we plead with the people of God to engage in such

You will search in vain for repeated admonitions of choice under the Law. They simply are not there.

Things are quite different in redemption. A change has been wrought in those who are in Christ Jesus, so that they may now be exhorted to give themselves more fully to the Lord. Fourteen times the Epistles use the words “*I beseech thee,*” or, “*I beseech you*” (Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:2; Gal 4:12; Heb 13:19,22; 1 Pet 2:11; Phile 10; 2 John 5).

In Christ, it is reasonable to urge believers to become active in the will of the Lord. They have received the capacity to do so, and their reconciliation to God demands that they do so.

God and All Things

In this particular text, ponder the

- ❑ “*Whom He did foreknow*” (8:29a).
- ❑ “*He also did predestinate*” (8:29b).
- ❑ “*He did predestinate*” (8:30).
- ❑ “*God’s elect*” (8:33).
- ❑ “*The purpose of God according to election*” (9:11).
- ❑ “*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*” (9:13).
- ❑ “*I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*” (9:15).
- ❑ “*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy*” (9:16).
- ❑ “*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth*” (9:17).

holy activities as God requires.

All of this is in the word *“therefore.”* This means that failing to do what is said is totally unreasonable – it is a form of spiritual insanity. The lack of response to this exhortation reveals a corrupt heart, the presence of unbelief, and imminent danger.

BRETHREN

This is not an exhortation for sinners, but for saints. It is a word to those who have been justified, and have peace with God (5:1). It is addressed to those who are dead to sin and alive unto God (6:11). This is a word to those who are not condemned and are in Christ Jesus (8:1). Those who imagine that those in Christ Jesus can be ignored are in serious error. When no words of comfort are addressed to the saints, and no words of exhortations given to them, they are harmed, not helped.

Many a local congregation rarely hears a word of admonition to the believers. Sermons are prepared for those who are alienated, and appeals are made to those who are at a distance from the Lord. From whence does such a propensity come? Certainly not from Scripture. The words before us are addressed to people whose faith had been spoken of *“throughout the whole world”* (1:5). They form a reasonable transition from the doctrinal to the practical. They are a spiritually natural conclusion to what has been said.

BESEECHING

“I beseech you . . .” Other versions read, *“I urge you,”* ^{NASB/NIV} *“I appeal to you,”* ^{NRSV} *“I call upon you,”* ^{YLT} and *“I plead with you,”* ^{NLT}

Beseeching assumes reconciliation to God, and a sensitivity to His will. It does **not** mean that what is urged will take place without further impetus. The perceptive minister knows God works in His people both to will and do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:13). He is confident that God will *“perform”* a good work in them *“until the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:6).

He also realizes the Lord does this, among other things, through admonitions, exhortations, and beseechments.

There is a sense of urgency and immediacy in beseeching. This is not something to be put off, or thought upon for a lengthy period while hesitating to do what is said. *Beseeching, urging, or pleading,* are presented in the contexts of both danger and blessing. The danger is that the hearers will not engage in the action that is urged, thus putting themselves in jeopardy. The blessing is that the intended activity will produce spiritual results that can be realized in no other way.

BY THE MERCIES OF GOD

“. . . by the mercies of God.”

Other versions read, *“in view of God’s mercy,”* ^{NIV} and *“by the compassions of God.”* ^{DARBY} Some versions refer to the

of the Lord” (Psa 89:1), *“great mercies”* (Isa 54:7), and *“sure mercies”* (Isa 55:3). Our great God is also referred to as *“the Father of mercies”* (2 Cor 1:3).

“The mercies of God” refer to the **plentitude** of God’s mercy as well as its **frequent expression**. His tender consideration and pity are neither sparse nor infrequent.

What Does This Mean?

What is the meaning of this expression? Is the exhortation given because of the mercies of God, as though Paul said, *“Because of God’s mercies, I am pleading with you to . . .”*? Has the mercy of God prompted the Apostle to plead so strongly with the people? I do not doubt that the awareness of God’s rich mercies constrained the Apostle to so write. However, that is not the meaning of this passage.

Many a local congregation rarely hears a word of admonition to the believers. Sermons are prepared for those who are alienated, and appeals are made to those who are at a distance from the Lord.

The meaning is that the exhortation is to be carried out through *“the mercies of God.”* That is, what believers are asked to do, [i.e., present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God], is to be accomplished *“in view of God’s mercy.”* ^{NIV} It is to be accomplished *“through the compassions of God.”* ^{YLT} One version says to make the offering while *“remembering the mercies of God.”* ^{NJB} Still, the expression seems a bit vague to some.

“mercies of God” in the singular: i.e., *“in view of God’s mercy.”* ^{NIV} The plural form is, however, the correct one: [οἰκτιρημάτων] *“mercies.”* This word emphasizes the abundance of God’s mercy, and is used several times in Scripture. Jacob confessed to God, *“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant”* (Gen 32:10). David declared *“for His mercies are great”* (2 Sam 24:14). Solomon prayed, *“remember the mercies of David thy servant”* (2 Chron 6:42). Nehemiah spoke of God’s *“ manifold mercies”* (Neh 9:19), and the Lord’s *“abundant mercies”* (Neh 9:27). There is also reference to the Lord’s *“tender mercies”* (Psa 25:6), *“the mercies*

The *“mercies of God”* have been declared in the previous chapters. They have to do with His gracious intentions and activities toward us. They reveal His desire to bless us.

- The saints are beloved of God (1:7a).
- God called us to be saints (1:7b).
- Grace and peace come to us from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:8).
- God has provided the Gospel as the power to accomplish salvation (1:16).
- God’s righteousness has been revealed (1:17).
- God revealed Himself in His creation (1:19).
- God is rich in goodness, forbearance,

and longsuffering, which lead men to repentance (2:4).

- ❑ There is no respect of persons with God (2:11).
- ❑ In spite of man's total unworthiness, the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law (3:21).
- ❑ The righteousness of God is given to all who believe (3:22).
- ❑ Justification is free to those who have sinned and come short of the glory of God (3:24).
- ❑ God set Christ forth, evidently and effectually, as a propitiation for sin (3:25).
- ❑ God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (3:29).
- ❑ God imputes righteousness without works (4:6).
- ❑ God quickens the dead (4:17).
- ❑ The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5).
- ❑ God commended His love to us in Christ's death for us while we were yet sinners (5:8).
- ❑ God reconciled us to Himself through Christ's death (5:10).
- ❑ The gift and grace of God has abounded to many (5:15).
- ❑ In Christ God condemned sin in the flesh (8:3).
- ❑ God provides for our needs through the interceding Holy Spirit (8:26-27).
- ❑ God works everything together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose (8:28).
- ❑ God has determined that all in Christ will be glorified (8:29-30).
- ❑ God has provided a constant Intercessor for us in heaven (8:34).
- ❑ God shows mercy (9:16).
- ❑ God makes vessels for honor (9:20).
- ❑ God endured with much longsuffering vessels suited for destruction (9:22).
- ❑ God has not cast away Israel (11:1-2).
- ❑ God concluded all in unbelief and disobedience that He might have mercy on all (11:32).

All of these are evidences of Divine mercy. From His longsuffering toward Israel to the conferment of righteousness upon Gentiles who did not seek it, He has made Himself known. He has extended Himself to redeem humanity, sending His

Son to do what Adam's offspring could not do. He empowers and sustains His people through the Holy Spirit. He provides for their protection and sustenance in the interceding Savior.

As we consider these great proclamations, we derive strength and encouragement from them. God has shown us He consistently honors faith. Those who are willing to trust Him will be helped by Him. That includes Abraham in a spiritually primitive day, and Paul responding to His call while in a nation that had rejected Christ Jesus.

There is no word in Scripture that would lead us to believe the Living God is not kindly disposed

There is no word in Scripture that would lead us to believe the Living God is not kindly disposed toward those who earnestly seek to do His will.

toward those who earnestly seek to do His will. Anywhere and everywhere men have chosen to seek the Lord and obey His will, God has undergirded their efforts. **Wherever faith is found, Divine favor will be experienced.** Further, hearts convinced that God is merciful will be disposed to trust Him. Those who consider that God "is good," and that "His mercy endures forever" (1 Chron 16:34; Psa 136:1), will be encouraged and empowered to do His will. While they live within the influence of that dominant consideration, Divine exhortations make perfect sense. To fulfill them becomes the preference of those who have no doubt of the reality and accessibility of "the mercies of God."

Wrath and Beginnings

The wrath of God and the imminence of the day of judgment can also have a powerful constraining force upon the heart. However, they are not intended to be a permanent constraining factor. **The soul cannot advance toward glory by**

being surrounded by "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb 10:27). That often induces a beginning, but brings precious few, if any, souls into glory.

A Prevailing Consideration

At some point, the soul must be brought under the prevailing contemplation of the "mercies of God." It is only through them that we will be able to fulfill exhortations, such as the one we will now consider. If God is not good to us, we will not be able to make this presentation. If He does not pity our frail frame, we will not be able to make a "living sacrifice." If His favor is not upon us, and His grace does not sustain us, we will prove too weak for this challenge. **It is "by the mercies of God" that this will be accomplished, or it will not be accomplished at all!**

A FINAL OBSERVATION

I cannot leave this section without making one additional observation. Where the people of God are not constantly reminded of the "mercies of God," it is not likely that "living sacrifices" will be made. **Constant diets of Law, external disciplines, entertainment, and social and domestic issues, and the like, will not produce a God-glorifying harvest.** When the church becomes the focus, sacrifices are diminished. When the family becomes the center of attention, sacrifices to God are no longer the issue. **When Law is the thrust, what is given to God is rarely seen in a personal way.**

The people of God must wisely and consistently be given a regular diet of grace and mercy. The Gospel of Christ, which is the supreme carrier of these Divine bestowments, must be at the heart of preaching and teaching. Nothing should be allowed to move us at such a distance from the Gospel we are no longer inclined to declare it. No matter how deplorable the condition into which professed believers have fallen, even if they have left their first love like Ephesus, room must be made to declare, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is

in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). Even if a church is lukewarm and repulsive like Laodicea, after the rebukes have been issued, the incentives of grace

must be held before them. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his

throne” (Rev 2:21). Do not underestimate the power of “the mercies of God!” They will accomplish in people what no moral code, however lofty, can do.

THE PRESENTATION OF YOUR BODIES

“^{1b} . . . that you present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . ” It is interesting to speculate what practical application of the truths expounded in this book would be made by our religious peers. What kind of admonition would come to their mind when hearing of a Sovereign God who loves Jacob and hates Esau? What sort of reactions would be expected when hearing of God raising up Pharaoh, cutting some branches off of the tree of Israel, and grafting in some branches from a wild olive tree? How would men be expected to respond to the promise that God would turn away ungodliness from Jacob, or that He was able to graft them in again? What are believers expected to do when they hear about righteousness being imputed, or faith being the basis of acceptance, or God working all things together for their good?

I do not doubt that some imagine no response is necessary at all. Some simply thrust all of these things from their mind, perceiving them as too deep for them, and thus proceed with their own private agenda. The mind-set of the average Christian is far removed from making any association between the profound declarations of the Lord and the response of His people to them. **However, God does require a response from us, and will exhort us to see to it that it is accomplished.**

If we do not approach this text with that in mind, it will appear to be a mere option – something we may or may not do. It may even be perceived as something that separates advanced believers from juvenile ones, or leaders from followers. Although quite common, such conclusions are all delusions, bringing death to the soul and separating the individual from the Lord.

No one can afford to embrace them.

The fact that this exhortation is to be fulfilled “by the mercies of God” accentuates its indispensability. The appeal to God’s mercy does not suggest He will be tolerant of a refusal to do what He says. It does not indicate what is admonished is really not necessary, or that He is willing to remain and work with the deluded soul who ignores this requirement. Rather, “the mercies of God” confirm that He will work with us in this area. And will do so because of its absolute necessity. **Neither the Law, its ceremonies, nor grace, remotely suggest that God will ever receive what is not presented to Him.** His “mercies” provoke and enable that presentation to be made. This confirms how necessary the presentation is, else

religion becomes intensely personal. When the exhortation “that you present” is read or heard, the sensitive soul immediately translates it into “that I present.”

The “you,” a supplied pronoun, is the “brethren” in the first clause. It is “beloved of God” and “the called of Jesus Christ” 1:7. It is those who are “justified” in 5:1, and those who “are not under the law, but under grace” of 6:14.

Responsibility Does Not End at the Beginning of Spiritual Life

As elementary as it may seem, our responsibility toward the Lord does not end when at the beginning of newness of life. Although it is not fashionable speak in this manner, God is calling His people to higher ground. Our text is an excellent example of this. In view of many religious emphases, it is interesting to consider what the text does **not** say. Remember, this is the beginning of a new section of the book, and it is the very first exhortation constrained by the lofty truths we have contemplated.

Depending on the church environment to which you have been subjected, you may very well have heard one or more of the following priorities. “Begin witnessing to everyone,” “Get the baptism of the Holy Ghost,” “Assume the proper role in your home,” “Get involved in politics,” or some similar emphasis. Whatever place may be assigned to these things, it is not one of priority.

“PRESENT YOUR BODIES”

“ . . . present your bodies . . . ” Other versions read “offer your bodies,”^{NIV} and “give your bodies.”^{BBE/NLT} The Amplified Bible reads, “make a full decisive

The mind-set of the average Christian is far removed from making any association between the profound declarations of the Lord and the response of His people to them.

God would not underwrite it with His own nature and gifts.

“THAT YOU” – IT IS PERSONAL!

A legalistic religion tends to emphasize what is required in others. It moves those who are unaware that a log is protruding from their own eye, to seek to remove a small sliver from the eye of a brother. However, when the grace of God consciously surrounds the heart, one’s

dedication of your bodies – presenting all of your members and faculties.”

The word “*present*,” or “*offer*,” means to place beside or near, to place something at the disposal of another. It involves the invitation for another to examine as well as accept what is offered.

Presentation, or offering does not assume acceptance by God, but earnestly seeks it. When something is offered to God, an appeal is made for it to be received. This reception is not assumed. In such presentations God looks upon the heart and the thrust of the person’s life, as well as the conformity of the offering to His requirements. There have been things offered to God that were not accepted.

- Cain’s offering was not accepted (Gen 4:5).
- King Saul’s sacrifices were not acceptable (1 Sam 15:22).
- The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God (Prov 21:27).
- Israel’s sacrifices became an abomination to God (Isa 1:11-14; Jer 6:20; 14:12; Amos 5:22).

Under the Law, for example, there were certain requirements for offering of an animal to God.

- It had to be at least eight days old (Lev 22:27).
- It has to be offered with salt (Lev 2:13).
- A male without blemish (Lev 22:19).

In the days of Malachi God upbraided the priests for offering unacceptable things to Him. This included “*polluted bread*” and “*blind*,” “*lame*,” and “*sick*” animals (Mal 1:7). Thus the quality of the sacrifice as well as the one making the sacrifice was judged.

This reasoning is to be applied to the offering now before us, for they were written for our learning. Those ancient sacrifices, and the rules pertaining to them, revealed the mind of the Lord concerning better sacrifices. He meticulously fulfilled them in the offering of His only begotten Son. We do well not to ignore them in the presentation of our bodies to God.

What the Spirit Says of Our Bodies

A novice might imagine that God would ask us to offer our hearts, or our minds, or our wills to Him. Instead, He asks us to present our bodies! Here is the weakest part of our beings, the most culpable member of our makeup. He does not ask us to ignore our bodies, but to present them to God! He knows they are, from one perspective, “*vile bodies*” (Phil 3:21). That, of course, is precisely why they are to be “*presented*” or “*offered*” to Him. It is in prospect of this presentation that the following is said of our bodies.

- The Spirit quickens our “*mortal bodies*” (Rom 8:11).
- Our bodies are “*the members of Christ*” (1 Cor 6:15).
- In baptism, they have been “*washed with pure waters*,” thus dedicating them to the Lord (Heb 10:22).
- The body is “*for the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:13).
- The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).
- God is to be glorified in our body (1

of presenting our bodies to God.

In delineating this aspect of spiritual life, the Spirit continued, “*yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God . . . even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness*” (6:13,19). Our “*instruments*” are all of our capacities of expression. These were formerly devoted to sin. This is described as the “*throat*,” “*tongues*,” “*lips*,” “*mouth*,” and “*feet*,” being given over to iniquity. **Whatever is employed to think, speak, and do iniquity is now to be presented to God!**

The Body Belongs to God, Yet Is Yours

Strictly speaking, the body belongs to God, both by creation and redemption. He “*formed*” the body “*in the womb*” (Isa 44:2), and purchased it in redemption (1 Cor 6:19-20). Yet, the body is also “*your body*.”

It is “*your body*” by stewardship, not

We cannot, therefore, be indifferent about our bodies. If they are “the members of Christ” and are “for the Lord,” who will dare to treat them with indifference. They are to be “presented” or “offered” to our God.

Cor 6:20).

We cannot, therefore, be indifferent about our bodies. If they are “*the members of Christ*” and are “*for the Lord*,” who will dare to treat them with indifference. They are to be “*presented*” or “*offered*” to our God.

What Is Our “Body”?

Our body involves more than the skeleton and flesh in which we live. Earlier, the Spirit spoke of our bodies in a broader sense, setting the stage for this commission. The sixth chapter declared we were not to allow sin to “*reign*” in our mortal bodies (6:12). That is the opposite

by ownership. The advocates of abortion are completely wrong in affirming the woman has rights over her own body. It is **not** her body, but belongs to the One who formed and purchased it. No person is except from the declaration, “*and you are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*.”

Those who take this text and apply it to dietary practices and other aspects of health are in serious error. They detract us from the truth. Such people would never advocate fasting from both food and water for forty days – but Moses did (Ex 34:28; Deut 9:9). Jesus *also* “*fasted forty days and*

forty nights" (Matt 4:2). In both cases, the body was offered to the Lord.

Some also criticize believers who are tireless in their labors for the Lord, saying they are "burning the candle at both ends." Whatever element of wisdom may be found in that saying, it is not worthy of extensive pursuit. Epaphroditus, for example, wearied himself "for the work of Christ," nearly to the point of death. It is said of him, "for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life" (Phil 2:30). Paul referred to this type of attitude as being glad to "spend and be spent" for the souls of men (2 Cor 12:15).

While these examples are extraordinary, they reveal the extent to which the body can be presented to the Lord. Such noble souls are acutely aware that their bodies have been purchased by the Lord and belong to Him. There certainly is room for decided improvement in this area among believers.

Present Them!

Armed with an awareness of, and sensitivity to, these realities, our bodies are to be "presented" to God. There is an element of formality in this presentation, although that does not exhaust the meaning. This is not merely an attitude, although that is involved. The presentation is something like the response of Isaiah when He "heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Having been purged of his iniquity, he immediately responded, "Here am I; send me" (Isa 6:8). He presented his body for Divine employment! When Jesus revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus, "putting" him "into the ministry" (1 Tim 1:12), his response was immediate. He set about to conform his life to the calling he had received. Of this Paul said, "immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal 1:16-17). He presented his body to God that Christ might "be magnified" in his body (Phil 1:20). God received it, and he was blessed.

The Western world has been plagued with a spirit of casualness – an attitude of simplicity and informality that requires little focus or rigor of mind and body. It is reflected in how people regard the work of the Lord, the fellowship of the saints, and personal holiness. It is seen in the way they speak, how they dress, and where their prime energies are spent. **There needs to be a revival of presenting the body to God.**

It is quite true that we are to give our

Most of the sacrifices under the Law were killed. The offering of animal life generally involved its termination. But this is not the type of sacrifice we are to make. Our bodies are to be "a living sacrifice."

hearts and minds to the Lord, our thoughts and our wills. It is also true that we are to "present" our bodies to God. After all, they are only a stewardship to be occupied for a short season. They are also the weakest and most vulnerable part of our constitution, all the more requiring that they be presented to God. **Our bodies are to be placed at God's disposal, ready for His employment.** It appears to me that this requires a certain aggressiveness that will separate the individual from the religious masses.

This presentation involves a persuasion of the reality of God and the supremacy of His will and work. **This is not a matter of mere discipline, but of insightful commitment.** The Spirit is not calling us to a routine, but to personal involvement with God. Philip had to marshal the energies of his body to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29). I suggest that may have appeared far too challenging to a casual disciple (if there is such a thing). After all, the chariot was apparently moving, and it was in a desert.

The man in it was also a stranger to Philip. Philip was not told what to say, or how to join himself to the chariot. However, having presented his body to God, he "ran" to the person in the chariot, "heard" this government official reading, and asked him if he understood what he was reading (Acts 8:30). His body had been presented to the Lord.

But the presentation of our bodies to God is not always attended by such favorable circumstances. The bodies of Peter and John were "beaten" because of their presentation. However, they did not complain about the difficulty and pain related with that beating. They had presented their bodies to God. Thus, "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42). They knew why they suffered. They also knew the ultimate outcome of that suffering – reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

"A LIVING SACRIFICE"

" . . . present your bodies a living sacrifice." Every major version, and all more liberal translations and paraphrases, read the same way.

Most of the sacrifices under the Law were killed. The offering of animal life generally involved its termination. But this is not the type of sacrifice we are to make. Our bodies are to be "a living sacrifice." That is, the body is to be used in service to God, and as a means of bringing honor to Christ.

The heathen offered the bodies of their children to idols by causing them to "pass through the fire," thereby being consumed. God forbade such sacrifices to be made by His people (Lev 16:21). When their sacrifices required the taking of life, it was animal life, not life that was in the image of God. Even then, they were to be totally consumed, with nothing left for any other purpose (Heb 13:11). However,

our text does not say we are to offer our bodies a “burnt offering,” but as a “living sacrifice.” The consumption of our bodies is not the objective, but their profitable employment for the glory of God.

Foreshadowed in the Levitical Priesthood

This type of sacrifice – “a living sacrifice” – was foreshadowed in the Levitical priesthood. They were not given an inheritance in the promised land. They were devoted exclusively to the Lord – living sacrifices. As it is written, “*But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance*” (Num 18:23). The tithes of the people were given to the Levites for this reason, because they had “no inheritance” among the people (Num 18:24). Even then, they were required to give a “tenth part of the tithe” back to God, for they spent their lives in exclusive service to Him (Num 18:26). Like Aaron the high priest, they were to “have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them.” God Himself was their inheritance: “*I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel*” (Num 18:20). How strongly the words come through, “*Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance*” (Deut 18:2). They were living sacrifices, totally devoted to the Lord.

Depicted in the Live Goat and the Living Bird

The sacrifices made under the Law prefigured the thoroughness of Christ’s sacrifice. They introduced us to salvation by both the death and life of Jesus. After all, “*if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be*

saved by His life” (Rom 5:10). This twofold aspect of salvation is seen in two different sacrifices.

The goats. The day of atonement included the presentation of two goats.

One was for the Lord, to be offered on the altar of burnt offerings. The other was a scapegoat, eventually to be released in an uninhabited place, removed from the flock and mundane use. In the case of the Lord’s goat, the life was forfeited. In the case of the scapegoat that life was preserved, but separated from all other uses (Lev 16:5-10).

Thus we have a picture of the nature of spiritual life. First, the “old man” is to be put off, mortified, and not allowed to express himself. Second, remaining life is to be removed from commitment to other uses – a “living sacrifice.”

The birds. In the cleansing of leprosy, whether in man or a house, two clean and living birds were to be taken. One of the birds was killed over running water. The living bird was then dipped in the blood of the other bird, and the blood sprinkled on the leprous person or house. The living bird was then to be loosed “into an open field,” where it could fly free (Lev 14:1-7; 35-53).

Once again, the Spirit has provided a depiction of a “living sacrifice.” This is nothing less than the offering of life itself, with all of its expressions, to the Living God. How appropriate for the mighty God to be given a “living sacrifice.”

A Continual Sacrifice

A “living sacrifice” is a continual one. It is not occasional, like those offered under the Law. **Spiritual life is consistent, not cyclical.** When the soul is erratic, and commitment to God uneven and sporadic, the individual is not helped

A “living sacrifice” cannot be offered unconsciously, or without an acute awareness that it is being done. It cannot be offered accidentally or inadvertently. It is not the result of happenstance. To offer a “willing sacrifice,” you must be both willing and deliberate.

and God is not glorified. Faith cannot operate on an emergency basis alone, and spiritual life cannot be lived occasionally. If the offering of our body to God is not continual, it will not be received. Such a sacrifice is inconsistent with both the nature and the purpose of God.

A Conscious Sacrifice

A “living sacrifice” cannot be offered unconsciously, or without an acute awareness that it is being done. It cannot be offered accidentally or inadvertently. It is not the result of happenstance. To offer a “willing sacrifice,” you must be both willing and deliberate.

A genuine commitment of the body is made to the Lord in a full and dominating persuasion “*that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day*”^{NKJV} (2 Tim 1:12). Such a commitment exerts a great power upon us.

PRESENTED TO GOD

“^{1c} . . . holy, acceptable to God . . .” Other versions read, “holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,”^{NASB} “holy and pleasing to

God,”^{NIV} “sanctified, acceptable to God,”^{YLT} “holy sacrifice-- the kind He will accept,”^{NLT} and “dedicated and acceptable to God,”^{NJB}

As I have already indicated, all sacrifices are not acceptable to God. Both the nature of the sacrifice and the heart of

the one making it can disqualify the offering. For example, under the Law, the *“hire of a harlot and the price of a dog,”* could not be offered to the Lord (Deut 23:18). Also, the blood of the sacrifice could not be offered *“with leaven,”* or yeast (Ex 34:15). The sacrifice had to be proper, else it would not be accepted. Sacrifices offered under the Law were separated from common use. They were devoted to God, and were not to have the least spot upon them, or deficiency within them. They could not be blemished or diseased, sick or lame. These requirements foreshadowed the type of sacrifice Jesus made, and the type we are to make.

The verse before us emphasizes the nature of the sacrifice – the presentation or offering of our bodies to God. It deals with a responsibility we have – a responsibility that involves the preparation of the sacrifice. Under the Law, extensive preparations were made before the sacrifice was offered. A drink offering was prepared to be presented with the burnt offering (Num 15:5). Wood was to be laid in an orderly manner on the altar (Lev 1:7-8). The priest who made the offering has to wash himself (Ex 30:20). The burnt offering was to be flayed, the head and the fat laid upon the altar, and the inwards and legs washed with water and laid upon the altar (Lev 1:6-9).

All of this prefigured the manner in which Jesus prepared Himself to be offered, and the manner in which we are to prepare to present our bodies to God. Sacrifices are not to be offered on the spur of the moment or with no thought and preparation. This is one of the manners of the Kingdom.

“HOLY”

Holiness is a quality *“without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). *“Holy”* means blameless and dedicated. It involves being pure and consecrated.

Bodies presented as a living sacrifice to God must be *“holy,”* dedicated to Him and separated from the world. Those who labor for the Lord must themselves be

clean. The words of the prophet Isaiah are appropriate here. *“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”* (Isa 52:11).

This very point is powerfully made in Second Timothy. *“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work”* (2:21). The particular purging involved in this text is separation from false teachers (vs 16-18). The principle, however, applies to all forms of iniquity, particularly sins of immorality and bodily defilement. Human theology may allow for defiled individuals to engage in the work of the Lord, but God will not.

Our bodies are to be holy as well as our souls! How poignantly the Spirit states the case: *“therefore glorify God in your body”* (1 Cor 6:20). They are *“the members of Christ”* and are not to be given to uncleanness (1 Cor 6:13). A body that is *“holy”* is an *“instrument of*

Sacrifices are not to be offered on the spur of the moment or with no thought and preparation. This is one of the manners of the Kingdom.

righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13). They are bodies devoted to *“holiness”* (Rom 6:19).

Those who have given their bodies to sin are not to be received by the church. As it is written, *“if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat”* (1 Cor 5:11). These are matters that disqualify a person from Divine acceptance. *“Know ye not that the*

unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10).

There is a noticeable lack of holiness in the professed church, and it is a most serious condition. The irony of the situation is that *“praise and worship”* is being emphasized by some of the very people who have little apparent regard for holiness. Above the noise and clamor of the religious world the Spirit shouts out, *“But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Pet 1:15-16).

The truth of the matter is that a holy God cannot walk with an unholy people. A holy work cannot be fulfilled in an unholy body! When, therefore, we are called to present our bodies to God, it is understood that they are to be holy, devoted to Him, and uncontaminated with the manners and fashion of this world. Lips that speak guile and profanity ought not to seek to speak truth. Eyes filled with covetousness will not be able to see the things of God. Hands that fashion sinful things cannot minister in Jesus’ name. Feet that run in the way of transgressors cannot carry the Gospel of peace.

Let no one entertain the notion that God will receive the presentation of an unholy body. Nor, indeed, are we to imagine that God will receive us if we do not present our bodies to Him. Although these thoughts are revolutionary in some circles, they are very fundamental.

“ACCEPTABLE TO GOD”

“ . . . acceptable to God.” Other versions read *“pleasing to God,”*^{NIV} and *“the kind He will accept.”*^{NLT} The idea of *“acceptable”* is WELL pleasing, or especially satisfying. This is not an alternative *“pleasing,”* as though God will

accept sacrifices from men with which He is not pleased.

You may remember there were some Israelites with whom God was *“not well pleased.”* It is said of them, *“they were overthrown in the wilderness”* (1 Cor 10:5). On the other hand, those who present their bodies a living sacrifice to God will enjoy Divine acceptance.

The idea here is that what God receives He uses in Divine employments. Bodies that are appropriately presented to Him are *“sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work”* ^{NKJV} (2 Tim 2:21). Again it is written,

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). Those so characterized can enter into the *“good works”* for which they have been created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10).

By its very nature, the presentation of our bodies to the Lord is not a casual matter. They cannot be given to sin and presented to God. Our *“members,”* which include our bodies, cannot be yielded simultaneously *“as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,”* and as *“instruments of righteousness unto God”* (Rom 6:13). Only one master can be

served at a time, whether we speak of the mind, the soul, or the body.

Make it your aim to present your body to God, and for that presentation to be acceptable to Him. If sin necessitated the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son, you may be sure no place will be made for it to continue in the believer.

Personal and resolute war must be declared against all forms of sin in the individual before our bodies are presented to the Lord. We must, at all costs, keweep under our body. Once that is done, the presentation will be accepted, and overcoming grace will be experienced.

IT IS ONLY REASONABLE

^{1d} *“... which is your reasonable service.”* It is my understanding that a comparison is here made with the Jewish ceremonies of the Law, and idolatrous practices of the Gentiles. This statement is also to be compared with our former manner of life, when we were *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph 2:1-3), *“foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another”* (Tit 3:3). The Spirit will now show us that what is required of us is not an impossible yoke or burden. Nor, indeed, is it to be considered unreasonable, or something impossible to comprehend or do.

IT IS ONLY REASONABLE

Some versions use the word *“spiritual”* in the place of *“reasonable”* (NASB/NIV/NRSV). The difference between the two words is not as large as at first appears. Although it is a bit technical, a brief explanation is in order.

The word *“reasonable”* comes from the Greek word λογικήν [logikan], from which the word “logic” is derived. Lexically, the word means “rational,” or “spiritual,” or “belonging to the real nature of something.”

The meaning here is that what is

asked of us conforms to the real nature of life in Christ Jesus. Or, to view it from the opposite side, to fail to present our bodies to God in the manner prescribed is contradictory of spiritual life. In other words, it is spiritually insane to fail to present our bodies to God. There is a form of reasoning that belongs to the Holy Spirit. It is called *“the mind of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:27). In the sense of our text, anything that conforms to that mind set, *“the mind of the spirit,”* is *“reasonable.”* Anything that does not is

mind of the Lord. This we read, *“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace”* (Rom 8:6). This may be thought to be too shallow, giving license to imagine a person can think in harmony with the Spirit, but live in contradiction of the truth. If we are tempted to think in this manner, it is well to remember the words of Solomon, *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he”* (Prov 23:7). Jesus confirmed this was the case by declaring *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man”* (Matt 15:19). Again He said, *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,”* and *“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things”* (Matt 11:34-35). Again it is written, *“with the mind I myself serve the law of God”* (Rom 7:25).

The Spirit will now show us that what is required of us is not an impossible yoke or burden. Nor, indeed, is it to be considered unreasonable, or something impossible to comprehend or do.

Thus, the word *“reasonable”* emphasizes how this presentation makes perfect sense to faith. The word *“spiritual”* underscores how it perfectly blends with the nature of life in Christ Jesus. There is nothing about the presentation of a holy body to God that conflicts with sound thought. There is also nothing about it that interferes with spiritual life, or retards our response to God.

unreasonable.

From this perspective, true spirituality does not consist of certain forms of human conduct. Rather, it is a condition where the individual is brought into accord with the

Sacrifices Under the Law

The sacrifices imposed under the Law were not intended to conform to either human nature or the nature of spiritual life. They were appointed shadows and prefigurements, designed to point us to ultimate sacrifice that would precisely conform to Divine purpose.

Sacrifices made under the Law *“could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience”* (Heb 9:9), and were never intended to do so. Neither, indeed, could those sacrifices *“make the comers thereunto perfect”* or purge the conscience of the *“worshippers”* (Heb 10:1-2). Also, *“it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”* (Heb 10:4). From this point of view, they were **not** reasonable.

I am careful to say that from the standpoint of obedience, those sacrifices were reasonable. It would have been the epitome of ignorance to refuse to offer them unto God. Yet, there was a certain abrasiveness about them, for they did not accomplish what God desired. Rather, they were preparatory in both substance and nature.

It was *“necessary”* that required cleansing be accomplished *“with better sacrifices than these”* (Heb 9:23). To confirm what I have just described is the case, it is written, *“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure”* (Heb 10:6; Psa 40:6). They were unreasonable as final sacrifices, and as a means of procuring a cleansed conscience. They were reasonable from the standpoint of foreshadowing the greater and effective sacrifice of Christ.

Sacrifices under the Law were, in a sense, impersonal. Although animals were taken from one’s own flock, yet the personal life of the sacrificer was not offered to God. From the standpoint of routine, a technically qualified sacrifice could be offered while the heart remained aloof from God. Further, following the sacrifice, made in strict accord with revealed procedures, the conscience

remained contaminated by sin, forbidding the individual to enter into the presence of the Almighty.

In this regard, the sacrifices, and other aspects of the ceremonial Law, were *“weak and beggarly elements”* (Gal 4:9). They were in order until Jesus came, but are totally unacceptable in this day of salvation.

Gentile Sacrifices

All of the sacrifices made by the Gentiles are covered in the phrase, *“worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator”* (Rom 1:25). That is surely the epitome of unreasonableness! Elsewhere, the Spirit is even more precise on this matter: *“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God”* (1 Cor 10:20; Deu 32:17).

completely unreasonable.

“SERVICE”

“Which is your reasonable service.” Other versions say, *“which is your spiritual service of worship,”*^{NASB} *“this is your spiritual act of worship,”*^{NIV} *“which is your spiritual worship,”*^{NRSV} *“which is the worship it is right for you to give Him,”*^{BBE} and *“that is the kind of worship for you, as sensible people.”*^{NJB}

The word *“service”* comes from the Greek word *λατρείαν*, which means *“religious service based in worship of God, divine service, worship.”* Thayer’s Greek lexicon defines the word as *“the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law,”* and *“to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God in the observance of the rites instituted for His worship.”*

But, what of the sacrifice that is urged in our text? How reasonable is it to present your body to God, holy and completely? To those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit, this presentation makes perfect sense.

Israel’s “Service”

This precise word, in both English and Greek, was used in the ninth chapter, and will serve to more precisely define its use here. In the itemization of the advantages given to the Jews, the Spirit mentioned *“the service of God”* (9:4). Other versions read, *“the temple service,”*^{NASB} and *“the temple worship.”*^{NIV}

The *“First Covenant,”* we are told, *“had also ordinances of divine service (λατρείας), and a worldly sanctuary”* (Heb 9:1). This service was not accomplished by the people in general, but by the priests, who *“went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service (λατρείας) of God”* (Heb 9:6).

Their sacrifices, therefore, were fundamentally and totally unreasonable.

It Makes Sense!

But, what of the sacrifice that is urged in our text? How reasonable is it to present your body to God, holy and completely? To those who live by faith (Heb 10:39) and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), this presentation makes perfect sense. To those who are in fellowship with God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9) and are walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7), it is totally unreasonable not to present their bodies in a state of holiness to God. To put it another way, halfheartedness, under whatever guise it may be presented, is totally unacceptable to God. It is also

In this case, *“service,”* or *“worship,”* related to approaching the Lord. The approach was summarized into four categories.

- Offering appropriate sacrifices. The various sacrifices, and the procedures related to them, are defined in the book of Leviticus (Lev 1:9,13,17; 5:8; 14:12; 17:5).
- Receiving guidance. Special knowledge for judgment was appropriated by the use of the Urim and Thummim, two

stones that were placed in the breastplate (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6).

- ❑ Regular ministry in the Lord's presence, the holy place (Ex 28:43). The priests were to keep twelve cakes of bread upon the table of showbread (Num 4:7-8). The candlestick in the holy place was to be kept burning (Ex 27:20; 35:14). Incense was also to be kept burning upon the altar of incense (Ex 30:7-8).
- ❑ Unleavened bread and the flesh of the sacrifices that were given to the priests were also to be eaten "in the holy place," the place of regular priestly activity (Lev 6:16,26; 7:6; 10:13; 24:9).

These procedures were "the service" given to the children of Israel. They were merely external because the people did not have new hearts or spirits. They were fundamentally alienated from God, their hearts being "far from Him" (Isa 29:13). In fact, they did not have a heart to do what the Lord required of them, even though they said they would. Thus God Himself lamented, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut 5:29).

A Different Kind of Reasonableness

Under the Law, the reasonableness of the "service," or "worship," was of a different order. The fact that God required it was what made it reasonable. In the minds of the people, nothing else made the service "reasonable." Neither the priests nor the people knew they were dealing with shadows and prefigurements. That was not spelled out to the people. The coming Savior, His sacrifice, and the justification that would come from it, were, at the very best, hazy and without spiritual substance to them.

The primary motivation for following the procedures of Law was not the reasonableness of the deed. Rather, it was "that he die not." When Aaron went about to minister, he was told to wear the priestly vestments "that he die not" (Ex 28:35). Aaron was not go within the veil at unappointed times, "that he die not" (Lev 16:2). On the day of atonement, incense

was to be appropriately burned, with the fragrance covering the mercy seat, "that he die not" (Lev 16:13). Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and their feet before entering the tabernacle "that they die not" (Ex 30:20-21). It is no marvel that it is written of those under the Law, "those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb 2:15). Under the Law, "reason" was of a different order than it is in Christ!

A Stark Contrast

What a remarkable contrast there is in "reason" under grace and "reason" under the Law. The scope of God's purpose is more clearly seen, thereby compelling the insightful person to enter more heartily into the service of God. Now, it is "the love of Christ" that "constrains" us, rather than the fear of death. It makes perfect sense to faith to cease to live for self and to live wholly for the Lord, presenting our bodies to Him. As it is written, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again"^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Our service to, or worship of, God, then, is a matter of personal judgment. That does not mean it is optional, or that we may choose to ignore God with impunity. Those with a propensity to Law have great difficulty understanding this. They cannot conceive of a person preferring to serve the Lord without the constraint of Law. But God will have none of their foolish reasoning. A person knowingly reconciled to God does not think like one who is not. They have received a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). God has written His laws into their minds, and put them into their hearts (Heb 10:16). To such people, it is perfectly reasonable to present their bodies, in a state of holiness, to God. It is also refreshing and satisfying.

"Reasonable service," or "spiritual worship" is the same as worshiping "God in the Spirit" (Phil 3:3). In fact, the word "worship," in the Philippians text, is precisely the same root word translated "service" in Romans 12:1 (λατρεύοντες).

The Point

The point of our text, is that the presentation of our bodies to God is not a mere ritual. It is one attended by spiritual insight and deep devotion. We do not serve God by rote, or empty routine.

Real worship consists of living for the Lord, wholly committed to Him. It is taking what we have, what we are stewards of, and presenting it to God. It is living in concert with heaven, and in harmony with the Divine agenda. What is more, it is doing this willingly, insightfully, and with great joy.

Our whole persons are involved, spirit, soul, and body. All of them were purchased, and all of them are given to the Lord. Salvation involves all of them, and all of them to be offered in service.

Real worship consists of living for the Lord, wholly committed to Him. It is taking what we have, what we are stewards of, and presenting it to God. It is living in concert with heaven, and in harmony with the Divine agenda. What is more, it is doing this willingly, insightfully, and with great joy. To put it in words that the Holy Spirit teaches, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3).

Ponder the Blessings

In view of what God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus, it is totally irrational not to give ourselves to the Lord without reservation. The Son has made us "free indeed" (John 8:36), and we are no

longer debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh (Rom 8:12). Our enemy has been cast down, and is thus no longer able to hold us captive (Heb 2:14; Col; 2:15). Our nature has been changed (2 Cor 5:17). We have become heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ as well (Rom 8:17). We are partakers of Christ and of the Divine nature (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). We have been “*made the righteousness of God*” in Jesus (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:19). Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Heb 12:23). An eternal inheritance is reserved for us in heaven (1 Pet 1:4). We are

presently kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet 1:5). Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). Because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal 4:6).

In view of these things, and more, what possible reason can be adduced for failing to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God? This is our “*reasonable service*,” or “*spiritual worship*.”

The presentation of our bodies to God ought to be as direct and formal as the

presentation of the Gospel of Christ to us. The Gospel left nothing to conjecture, but told us precisely what Jesus had accomplished. When we present our bodies to God, we should avoid generalities and ambiguities. It should be clear that we intend to live for the Christ and be willingly and insightfully employed in the execution of His will.

That is what is involved in presenting our bodies a living sacrifice – **or a sacrifice of life** – to God. It is a resolute presentation.

THE CONFORMITY THAT IS CONDEMNED

² **And do not be conformed to this world . . .**” Here is a Divine requirement of which we hear very little in this day. What does it mean? Other versions read, “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world*,”^{NIV} “*be not fashioned according to this world*,”^{ASV} “*let not your behavior be like that of this world*,”^{BBE} “*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world*,”^{NLT} “*Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world*.”^{NJB}

AND . . .

The requirement stated in this verse is one of the implications of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God. By that I mean the presentation of our bodies requires this determination. **To put another way, to become like the world voids any commitment to the Lord.**

THERE ARE MATTERS TO BE AVOIDED

Just as surely as there are things to be done, there are things that are **not** to be done. There are benefits to be appropriated, and curses to be shunned. Just as surely as we are to love God, we are **not** to love the world (1 John 2:15). Not only are we to place our affections on things above, we are not to place them upon the earth (Col 3:1-2). We are to not only love the Lord, but hate iniquity (Psa 97:10). This is an aspect of

spiritual life that is not popular, but it is absolutely essential if we are to please God.

“CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD”

“*This world*” is a “*present evil world*” from which Jesus has delivered us (Gal 1:4). Because “*the world is passing away, and the lust of it*” (1 John 2:17), its present “*fashion*,” with all of its

is “*not of this world*” (John 18:36). The “*wisdom of this world*” has been totally repudiated by God (1 Cor 1:20) because it is “*foolishness*” to Him (1 Cor 3:19).

When men do not believe the Gospel, it is because “*the god of this world*” has blinded their minds (2 Cor 4:4). Walking, or living, according to “*the course of this world*” is what necessitated salvation. It constitutes alienation from God and dominance by the devil (Eph 2:1-2). Satan’s hierarchy includes personalities described as “*the rulers of the darkness of this world*” (Eph 6:12).

To be “*conformed to this world*” is to absorb its manners. It is to adopt its way of thinking, and to see life from its perspective. It is to be dominated by the seen, and be oblivious of the unseen. Being “*conformed to this world*” means we live for the here and now, without regard to the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment, and our eternal destiny. A person who is “*conformed to this world*” has its set of values, and lives according to its priorities. The “*wisdom of this world*” ranks high with such people.

To be “*conformed to this world*” is to be assimilated by its culture – to become one with it, so that one is no longer in fundamental variance with it.

Just as surely as there are things to be done, there are things that are not to be done. There are benefits to be appropriated, and curses to be shunned. Just as surely as we are to love God, we are not to love the world

associations, is also “*passing away*” (1 Cor 7:31). “*This world*” is the realm of temporality, and it has been infected by sin and cursed by God. The cares and concerns of “*this world*” actually choke out the Word of God (Matt 13:22; Mk 4:19). Satan is the “*prince of this world*” (John 12:31; 14:30), and thus presides over its manners. Christ said His kingdom

“Friendship” with the world constitutes enmity against God. Whoever, therefore, “wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” ^{NKJV} (James 4:4). Such are people who “mind earthly things,” and for that very reason are “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:19).

If the grace of God teaches us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit 2:12), those who are “not conformed” to the world have been effectively taught by the grace of God. Those who are conformed to the world have spurned that grace, seeking to turn it “into lasciviousness” (Jude 4).

It is written that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). What folly, therefore, to be conformed to it, thinking like it, and adopting its values! An order from which men must be delivered is certainly unsuitable as a pattern for thinking and doing. A realm that is expressly said to be “evil,” has nothing of value to give to us, either for the mind or for the body. Its assessments

are unworthy of our embrace. Its praise is not to be sought, and its approval is to be seen as utterly worthless.

If the world loves someone, it is because that individual is conformed to the world. We know this is the case because of the words of our blessed Lord.

If the world loves someone, it is because that individual is conformed to the world.

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

A SERIOUS ADMONITION

I cannot overstate the seriousness of

this exhortation. The Western world is plagued with a church that is conformed to this world. It obtains its credentials from the world, and courts the world with its approach to the things of God. The exaltation, for example, of academics over faith is nothing less than conformity to this world. An emphasis upon worldly credentials is evidence of conformity to this world. Much of what is called “contemporary Christian music” conforms to the world. The counseling thrust of the Christian community is the result of conformity to this world.

Conformity to this world puts one at variance with the world to come, and at war with God. The only way survive the destruction of the world, which is an irreversible appointment (2 Pet 3:7), and dwell at last with the Lord, is to energetically avoid conformity to it. The world does have a pattern of thought, and a way of doing things. As a person in Christ Jesus, it is your business to NOT be conformed to the world.

THE REQUIRED TRANSFORMATION

“^{2b} . . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . . ” More is involved in spiritual life than not doing certain things. There is a fullness in spiritual life that causes one to leave one realm for another.

LEAVING AND OBTAINING

When we are admonished to shun some things, it is in order that we may take hold on other things. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in order to go to a land God would show him (Gen 12:1-3). Israel left Egypt in order to go to Canaan (Josh 5:9-10). Elisha left plowing with twelve of oxen in order to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-20). Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their fishing trade in order to follow Jesus (Matt 4:18-22).

This is the manner of the kingdom. There are things that cannot be

appropriated until other things are forfeited. There are lofty climes that cannot be entered until other ones are abandoned. Many a timorous soul has never gained higher ground because of an unwillingness to abandon lower ground. The stunted growth of many professed believers is directly traceable to their unwillingness to leave the realm of flesh for the realm of the Spirit.

Thus we leave the realm of the dead to live in the domain of the living. We “*sin not*” in order that we might do righteousness. We cease to serve Satan that we may serve God. We leave the domain of darkness that we might walk in the light as He is in the light.

In our text, we refuse to be conformed to this world, in order that we might be transformed. There will be no genuine

transformation until there is a determined and consistent refusal to be conformed to this world. And, let it be clear, a change of the magnitude described in the word “*transformation*” must take place if we are to ever be with the Lord!

TRANSFORMATION, THE MODE OF THE KINGDOM

God is not calling men to reformation: i.e., to simply change their habits. The summons is not simply to a different way of doing things – a discipline of life, so to speak. In transformation the individual becomes different. It is more than living by a routine, it is living with a different set of preferences, loves, and hates.

The word “*transform*” comes from a word that means to transfigure, or change. The Greek word is μεταμορφοῦσθαι (metamorphose), from which we get the

word “metamorphosis.” The change described by this word is like that of a lowly caterpillar into a lovely winged butterfly. It is a change like that of a legless tadpole into a leaping frog, or a loathsome larvae into a flying noisy locust.

Here is a total change that God has imprinted in the natural creation. The similarities between a caterpillar and a monarch butterfly can hardly be found. Neither, indeed, can we study a tadpole, deducing from its appearance that it will someday leap from water lily to water lily, leaving the water and croaking loudly. There is nothing in the larvae that suggests it will be a locust. These crawling creatures go into a cocoon and rot, only to emerge in another form. Interestingly, the larvae cannot reproduce. That can only take place after the transformation to the winged creature has taken place.

Here, however, is a most interesting observation. Those in Christ Jesus, already made “*new creatures*,” are admonished to “*be ye transformed!*” Our change, then, is not yet complete. While we are presently being “*transformed*” (same word) *into the same image from one degree of glory to another*” by the Holy Spirit ^{NRSV} (2 Cor 3:18), we do have some responsibility in the matter. We must seek to free ourselves from simplistic views of the Kingdom that leave us sitting in the easy chair of the flesh, expecting everything will turn out well for us with very little effort on our part. Our text will allow no such conclusion. Solemnly we are admonished, “*be transformed!*”

An alternate word for “*transformed*” is “*transfigured*,” which comes from the same word (μετεμορφώθη). When Jesus was transfigured, a significant change took place. His face “*did shine as the sun*” (Matt 17:2a). His clothes “*became white as light*” (Matt 17:2b). As He prayed, “*the*

fashion of His countenance was altered” (Lk 9:28). In effect, His inner glory burst through His flesh and clothing, showing Him as He had never been seen by men before. In that state, He blended so well with the eternal order that Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in glory, speaking with Him “*of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem*” (Lk 9:31). There you have a vivid picture of transformation!

“RENEWING OF YOUR MIND”

And how is it that we are to be transformed? Rest assured, you cannot go through a moral and spiritual metamorphosis by simply changing your habits. This cannot be accomplished by rote – a heartless execution of some mere routine. Nor, indeed, can it take place as long as one is conformed to this world.

Sin has taken such a toll on the mind, that even after we have been born again, it must be “*renewed*.” The mind is much like a sieve when it comes to the things of God. Without due attention, they are soon forgotten, and life is viewed without a due regard for the truth. The renewing of the mind is a renovation project. It is like a dilapidated structure that needs to be refurbished throughout.

The word “*renew*” means a complete change for the better. It speaks of a lifting of the mind into the domain of the heavenlies. If this does not take place – if we are not transformed by the renewing of our minds – we will “*faint*” in our minds (Heb 12:3). Through subtlety, Satan will corrupt the mind that is not renewed (2 Cor 11:3).

For those in Christ there is “*the law of*

my mind” that must be strengthened and refurbished with the truth of God (Rom 7:23). It is, after all, with the mind that we ourselves “*serve the law of God*” (Rom 7:25). No wonder we are admonished, “*be renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (Eph 4:23). Such a renewal results from girding up “*the loins*” of your mind, and hoping up “*to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:13).

Thinking must not be the weak point of the believer. In fact, believing

The change described by this word is like that of a lowly caterpillar into a lovely winged butterfly. It is a change like that of a legless tadpole into a leaping frog, or a loathsome larvae into a flying noisy locust.

and thoughtlessness cannot mix together. Those who “*live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires*” ^{NIV} (Rom 8:5). They have a “*sound mind*” (2 Tim 1:7), and “*think*” upon pure and holy things (Phil 4:8). As their minds are wrapped around the Word of God, pondering it and delighting in it, they begin to “*live by every word of God*” (Luke 4:4). They are transformed by the renewing of their mind.

There is, in my judgment, far too little of this in the average church. There is little transformation because of fundamental deficiencies in the mind. And, there are deficiencies in the mind because of conformity to the world. It is time for this admonition to be sounded and heeded, spoken and received.

PROVING THE WILL OF GOD

“^{2c} ... *that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and*

perfect will of God.” Just as we refuse to be conformed to the world in order that

we might be transformed by the renewing of our mind, we also are transformed in

order that we might comprehend the will of God. An unrenewed mind cannot discern the will of the Lord, regardless of its seeming keenness. A wrong mind cannot take hold of right things. An unholy mind cannot benefit from holy things. An ungodly mind cannot perceive what God desires or is doing.

A person has to cut loose from the world to know what God wills. There must be a renewing of the mind before His purpose can be perceived.

PROVING, A HOLY ACTIVITY

“... that you may prove...”

Other versions read, “Then you will be able to test and approve,”^{NIV} “so that you may discern,”^{NRSV} “so that by experience you may have knowledge,”^{BBE} and “so that you may discern for yourselves.”^{NJB}

“Proving” is an aspect of judgment – of arriving at a proper conclusion, and being able to discern, or distinguish, something. It is to be compared with rule keeping, where discerning is not the point, but merely adhering to a set of regulations that are not understood – like a child obeying its parents. God is not honored by an inability to test and validate what is right and wrong, good and evil, or acceptable and unacceptable.

A person who does not present their bodies a living sacrifice to God will not be able to renew their mind. The one who does not renew his mind, will not be able to properly test, or examine what is set before him. **Such a person will not be able to arrive at a proper conclusion concerning critical things – things pertaining to life and godliness.** It does not appear as though this is generally known. Nevertheless, it is true, and there can be no effective contradiction of it. A person cannot be spiritually discerning while their mind remains unrenewed, riveted to the earth. Those who insist on leaving their minds in a state of spiritual stagnation are thereby confined to ignorance concerning the will of God. There is no way to avoid this. It is foolish to attempt to do so.

WILL OF GOD

“... the will of God.” It is the will of God that is to be tested and proved. Thus I will address this first, while touching upon the various attributes of that marvelous will, or purpose, later.

The point of this text is the establishment of “*what the will of God IS.*”^{NASB} It is not to determine if the will of God is really good, or necessary, but what it really is. What does God want?

A person has to cut loose from the world to know what God wills. There must be a renewing of the mind before His purpose can be perceived.

What is God doing?

Immediately you see that what man wants is to be given the lower place. It is God’s will that is to occupy our attention. Further, knowing His will is not simply a matter of academic definition. The very fact that it is to be discerned or comprehended confirms that it immediately related to us. The will is not impersonal, even though it does not revolve around our persons. We profit from the will of God, but we ourselves are not the center of it. Therefore, as soon as our own wills sit upon the throne of our mind, the will of God becomes obscure. The renewing of the mind, in this case, involves the purging of purely selfish interests.

The truth of this text is stated by Jesus in yet another way. His words are most arresting, unveiling the reason for the discernment of some and the ignorance of others. “*If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority*”

^{NKJV} (John 7:17). That is yet another way of saying men “*prove what is... the will of God.*” Being willing to do God’s will comes from the renewing of the mind.

It is fashionable to hear this expression in certain circles: “*the will of God for my life.*” I do not question that the will of the Lord is intensely personal. However, that perspective can be carried too far, giving the individual greater worth than the eternal purpose of God. God’s will for your marriage, home, vocation, and the likes, is never the focus of Scripture. Moses and the Prophets did not speak in this manner. John the Baptist avoided the snare of such approaches to the will of God. Jesus certainly did not deliver the truth of God from that perspective, nor did the Apostles.

This does not mean there is no Divine direction on a personal level. It does mean that is not the focus of God’s will. If God orchestrates the selection of a wife for Isaac, it is not merely for Isaac’s sake, but for the larger matter of His great salvation. Whether it is Joseph, David, or Daniel, the involvement of the Lord with them personally was never just for their sakes. There was a larger context to His workings with them, as ought to be evident. Godly men always spoke of their participation in the will of God that extended far beyond their persons.

In the case of Abraham, it was to bless “*all families of the earth*” (Gen 12:3). With Joseph, it was to “*save much people alive*” (Gen 50:20). With John the Baptist it was to “*make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (Lk 1:17). In the case of Paul, it was to “*open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*” (Acts 26:18).

The people of God must learn to think beyond the narrow perimeter of their own personal lives. The “*will of God*” has infinitely larger boundaries than our lives. It is knowing that will that is the point of this text. Although this will be greatly

misunderstood, our assemblies must be noted for a proper emphasis. They should not make us more familiar with one another than with God.

The fact that our minds must be renewed in order to recognize God's will proves how hostile they are by nature. They must be refurbished by grace and truth in order to their proper and profitable use.

GOOD

The will of God is basically "good." That goodness pervades every facet of His will. It is "good" by nature, not merely by definition. There are poor souls who do not see God's "will" as good. Like Israel in the wilderness, they murmur against their lot in life, unable to associate it with the good will of the Lord.

By saying the will of the Lord is "good," the Spirit means God's intentions are good. From the personal view, God says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" ^{NKJV} (Jer 29:11). From a global point of view, God said to Abraham, "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen 12:3). From the perspective of His intention in Christ Jesus, "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

What God wants is good. It is good for His glory. It is good for angelic hosts to behold. And, it is good for you. But your mind must be renewed before this can be seen. And you must not be conformed to this world before your mind can be renewed. And, your body must be presented to God before you can come

away from the world.

ACCEPTABLE

God's will is not only "good," it is "acceptable." Other versions read "pleasing." ^{NIV/BBE/NAB} The word "acceptable" means "well pleasing," "giving satisfaction," and "serving well." This is the sort of thing Jesus described to the woman at the well of Samaria. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:14). He proclaimed the same thing to the multitudes he fed with a few loaves and fishes. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

There is a deep and abiding satisfaction in perceiving and embracing the will of the Lord. Jesus said who ever did the will of God was His brother, sister, and mother (Mk 3:35). Those who realize that will surely do "the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6), for they know God will do good to them. God's will is referred to as "the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5). If it brings pleasure to Him, it will surely to so to you!

It is not coincidence that "good and acceptable" are joined together (Rom 12:2; 1 Tim 2:3; 5:4). It is the goodness of God's will that makes it "acceptable." It makes it pleasant and satisfying to the soul.

However, as apparent as that may seem to you now, if your mind is not "renewed," the goodness of God's will is not apparent. His salvation will not appear to be preeminent. His blessing will not appear worth seeking. His Word will not seem indispensable.

Thus, you will not be able to associate

your life with what the Lord is doing. There will not seem to be a connection with preparation for glory, refinement, and being changed from glory unto glory. O, there is a great and dreadful penalty to not being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Further, it is totally unreasonable not to be.

PERFECT

"... perfect ..." God's is also "perfect," and needs to be so seen. Although the word "perfect" comes from a rather common Greek word (τέλειον), it certainly does not have a common meaning here. Etymologically speaking, the word can mean full grown or mature. That, however, seems to me to be a vulgar way of looking at God's will – as though it developed over a long period of time, or was at some time immature, infantile, and undeveloped. We do well not to drag Divine traits through the slime pit language. Too much of earth and the wisdom of men then cling to these words.

The idea here is that the will of God is free from any defect – and has always been. It stands complete of itself, and does not obtain power or effectiveness by being mixed with something else. Nothing about God's will is out of balance, unjust, or incomplete – nor has it ever been so characterized. It is absolutely consistent, never varying, never being updated, and never requiring adjustment.

Nothing can be added to the will of God, and nothing can be taken from it. It stands wholly sufficient of itself. It only remains for it to be recognized and received for what it is. That requires revelation on God's part, and proving on our part. He has already revealed His will in the "record of His Son" (1 John 5:10-11). Apart from Christ, His will is hidden.

CONCLUSION

These short, yet pungent, verses are the spiritual conclusion to the first eleven chapters of Romans. They represent the proper response to the things that have been revealed. The announcement of a righteousness from God by faith, when

seen, will provoke this reaction (chapter one). The fact that all have sinned, and can make no claim of personal uprightness before God, will compel men to fulfill the admonition of our text (chapters two and three). Once the

imputed righteousness of God is received, the exhortation makes perfect sense (chapter four). The effective nature of faith will confirm this to the heart (chapter five). When the realities accomplished in our baptism are

comprehended, we will enter joyfully into the fulfillment of this text (chapter six). The reality of the fierce inner warfare between the flesh and the Spirit will confirm the necessity of this work (chapter seven). The fact that we are justified by faith, are not condemned, and have been given the Holy Spirit will encourage us in this work (chapter eight). The inscrutable working of God with the Jews and the Gentiles will assure us of the effectiveness of God's will (chapters nine through eleven).

Does this not constrain you to see your body from a new point of view? Can you not present it to God in expectation of good things to come? Your body is what will be employed to minister to God's people. It will be used to glorify God by letting your light shine before men. Present it to God as a "living sacrifice," the offering up of your life to the great

God of heaven. When it comes to this world and the devil, be stingy with your body. Do not give it to the world for its enjoyment and your condemnation. The world and the devil have had enough of your body. Give it to them no more. Present your whole body to God, together with every form of expression of which you are capable.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind daily, even hourly. When you sense your mind gravitating to the lower regions of the earth, renew it by the consideration of the things unseen. Thus you will be transformed, gloriously changed to a new stage of glory. When you are taken up with cares of this world, renew your mind. Ponder the promises and thus be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When you are tempted, drawn away of your own lusts, renew your mind. Neutralize the temptation by

pouring the Word into your mind and meditating upon its implications. Thus you will be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

It will not be long until you will be able to test and prove the will of God. You will see how good it is, and how accessible it is by faith. In the glow of that will, what the world offers will not appear good at all. The will of God, like the sun in its zenith, will outshine all other wills, including your own. You will see how acceptable and pleasing the will of God is. It will bring lasting satisfaction to your heart, thereby diminishing life's difficulties and challenges. You will see the will of God as perfect, without any flaw. It will never bring a disadvantage to you, or hide anything good from you. From every vantage point, it is good. In every experience of it, it is acceptable. Now, enter into the fulfillment of the text.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 6/29/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 3-8 of the twelfth chapter. The theme will be, "**SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SERVING GOD.**" New life in Christ comes with personal heavenly endowments. These are spiritual gifts, designed to benefit the people of God. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah/Jason Hutchcraft (Email Temporarily disabled)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

**WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>**