

12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

The word “mercy” in the OT (and here) implies not only forgiveness for the guilty, but especially tenderhearted compassion for the helpless and desperate.

“Therefore” points backwards. In Romans 1-11 Paul had written about God’s wrath, our unrighteousness, and judgment. But then he wrote about Christ’s death and resurrection, crediting His righteousness to us, our death to sin, justification by faith, the coming of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, and God’s absolute sovereignty in His faithfulness to the elect and to Israel. The great reality that sums all these things up is *mercy*. *Therefore*, because we have come to understand God’s mercy in the manifold ways expressed in Romans 1-11, we should have the desire to live as consecrated people. The theology of the gospel is what motivates us to live godly lives.

Our calling as believers is to build a life that is rooted in the mercies of God. The mercy of God is the foundation for Christian behavior. That is, we should present ourselves to God *because of* the mercies of God. Later, in Romans 15:8–9 Paul says, “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and *in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.*” God’s desire is that we might glorify Him for His mercy among the nations.

The terminology that follows comes from the OT sacrificial system. In the OT, only animals that were free of any blemish could be offered to God as a sacrifice. But we are to offer a nobler, more spiritual sacrifice – ourselves. Though the expression “your bodies” is nearly equivalent to “yourselves,” Paul probably used it deliberately, not only to make a stricter analogy to the OT sacrificial system, but also to emphasize that our total being is to be offered (1 Cor. 6:20).

Our sacrifice is to be living, holy, and acceptable.

In contrast to the sacrifices in the OT where the animal was slain before it was offered, our sacrifice is to be living. A living sacrifice is perpetual. It is not offered once and consumed upon the altar, rather it continues as long as we have life. There are at least three reasons our sacrifice must be a living sacrifice. First, because unlike the sacrifices in the OT, Jesus’ sacrifice was perfect and complete; His sacrifice put an end to any future sacrifices of death. Secondly, Jesus rose from the dead, and according to Romans 6:4 we have died and been raised with Him; therefore, as those raised with Christ, our sacrifice must be living. Thirdly, it must be perpetual; we cannot offer ourselves once to God but we must continually offer ourselves to Him as long as we live.

It is also to be a holy sacrifice. A *holy* sacrifice could refer to one of two things:

1. It could mean that it should be free from anything that is unacceptable to God.

Every sacrifice had to be free from sickness and deformity to be acceptable; it had to be the best of the flock. Our lives should be free from anything that would defile us in God’s sight.

2. It could mean that it is set apart for God. Something that was holy could not be used for anything other than what it was dedicated for. That which is holy to God is His. The life that is consecrated to God alone is the life that becomes an acceptable sacrifice. This seems to be the more likely meaning. When we offer our lives wholly to God we will not be conformed to the world (Ro. 12:2).

Lastly, Paul says that our sacrifice is to be “acceptable” (i.e. well-pleasing). In sacrificial terms this is comparable to a “sweet-savor” sacrifice. These were sacrifices in which God took particular delight, for they were free will sacrifices of worship and praise (as opposed to non-sweet savor sacrifices that were offered for sin) – cf. Eph. 5:2; Phi. 4:18.

When we offer ourselves to God in this way, it is a “reasonable (or, spiritual) service of worship.” “Reasonable” in English can mean that God isn’t asking too much of us. But in Greek, the word means that it is rational. It is worship that comes from the mind. The opposite of rational worship is worship that is mechanical, automatic, or ritualistic. The lesson to be learned from the word “rational” is that we are not “spiritual” in the biblical sense unless our worship is characterized “by conscious, intelligent, consecrated devotion to the service of God” (Murray, 112).

12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Not only is God to be worshipped in our minds, there is to be a corresponding holiness of life. Verse 2 tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

The “world” (literally, “age” – αἰών- *aion*; not κόσμος – *kosmos*) draws attention to the characteristics of the period that we live in. It is the moral environment, not the physical environment. Satan is called the God of this world (age) in 2 Corinthians 4:4 (cf. Eph. 2:2). “Conformed” means to be squeezed into a mold. Being “conformed to this world” stresses sharing the same character, values, morals, aspirations, impulses, etc. with the unbelieving.

“Transformation” is a change of appearance from one thing to another (Haldane, 556; Matt. 17:2; II Cor. 3:18). Instead of looking like the unbelieving, the Christian is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Paul often uses the word mind to connote a person’s practical reason or moral consciousness (Moo, 756). We do this by allowing the truth of the Word of God to change our thinking so that our life matches the new spiritual world into which we have been introduced (II Cor. 3:18). This does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process (Moo, 757). (Notice, the word “transform” is a passive verb. We don’t transform ourselves, rather it is God who transforms our conduct through the renewal of our minds. We are commanded to cooperate with this transformation process.)

The result of a transformed life is that “you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The word “prove” in Greek can have the meaning of “discern,” “test,” or “approve.” In this case, the believer is not testing God’s will to see if it is good or bad, rather, through the renewal of the mind the

Christian is able to recognize (discern - ESV) God's will which is described as "good and acceptable and perfect." The same thought is found in Ephesians 5:8-10 – "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving (finding out by experience, recognizing, discerning) what is acceptable to the Lord."

"This passage involves two facts: first, that God had a plan for our lives, which He is very willing and desirous that we should discover; and, second, that only those who surrender themselves to Him, rejecting conformity to this age, can discover that will" (Newell, 456). "The renewed mind, enlightened by the Spirit, and tuned by regeneration to seek God's glory, will compare the options and thereby perceive what course of action will best please God" (Packer, Rediscovering Holiness, 172).