

“Your Reasonable Service” (Romans 12:1-2)

INTRODUCTION – Man is born to work. The one who does not work is regarded as lazy, even in the eyes of the world. He is like a leech, sucking up the resources of the world, and pilfers from the hard labour of his fellowmen. Man used to live eight to nine hundred years. Can you imagine labouring for your food on earth for eight hundred plus years? Man was created by God to work. God put Adam in the Garden of Eden “to dress it and keep it.” It was enjoyable “work.” There were not thorns or thistles to choke the fruit trees and green plants. A mist from the earth watered the whole face of the ground, since there was no rain until the global Flood in Noah’s days. “Work” was without sweat. Adam and Eve enjoyed looking after God’s Garden which was man’s home.

Everything changed when Adam and Eve sinned against God. Paradise was lost forever. As a punishment upon man, God said that from now till he dies, “working” the ground will no longer be effortless: “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (cf. Genesis 3:18-19) Hard work became the new normal for all mankind.

But man has always found ways to make his life easier so that he can have time to “play”. If he could get out of work, he would. Is it not common that many would begin to plan for their retirement on the first day of their working life? The work-life scenario will forever be plagued with thorns and thistles. Is there no escape for sinful man from his depressing drudgery of unending labour till he returns to dust? Thank God, there is something much better than the day when Adam “worked” in the Garden of Eden, before there was sin.

I. By God’s Mercies – 12:1a

All was not lost. God gave hope to sinful man when He declared the first gospel to save mankind from his sin. **Genesis 3:15** “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” The seed of the woman here is the Lord Jesus Christ who was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus Christ bruised the head of the serpent, i.e. the devil, by destroying him and his evil deception that resulted in the fall of man into sin. **Hebrews 2:14-15** “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; **15** And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Romans 12:1-2 was written after a long treatise was given on what it means to be born again in Christ. Man was born a sinner and he needs to be saved by grace through faith. God’s law was given to declare to man that he is a great sinner. He is a great sinner because he sins against God every time he sins against his fellow man. He did not know that before the Ten Commandments was given. For example, he did not know that when he coveted another man’s belongings, he sinned against God. Having sinned against God and the knowledge that he will surely be sent to hell for his sins will definitely put the fear of God in his guilty heart. This will assuredly drive him immediately to his knees before the Lord Jesus Christ in genuine repentance and cry to Him to save him from his sins. Once he was saved, he could have been taken home to glory by God instantly like what God did for the malefactor who believed in Christ just a few short hours before he died.

But the LORD ordained that many of His newly born again children should remain on earth to witness and serve Him. Thus the use of the adverb “therefore” in Romans 12:1 to highlight the consequence and impact of being born again in Christ. There is a heavenly transformation in him that evokes a godly response that will eclipse the old sinful self, and a godly saint appears like

night turned to day inside his Christ awakened soul. "Work" becomes "service" unto God Most High! Servile work becomes kingly service. Washing the feet is turned into divine foot washing, for he knows that he is instead washing the feet of His Saviour.

When he serves with "reasonable service" it reflects a mind and heart that have been transformed by the power of God in Christ. The word "service" means "worship", i.e. divine service. He used to serve with "reasonable money" or "reasonable self-glory." Promotion and Mammon motivated him. Now the love of Christ constrains him. After salvation, which is what chapter 12 of Romans concludes as a result of having been born again in Christ, he is a new creature in Christ. The power of the gospel has transformed him from within. The Holy Spirit controls his mind and heart. He cannot help but live this new life in Christ! His heart is now pumping out blood that has been sanctified by the blood of his Saviour. The power of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ raises his body out of bed every morning. His feet are shod with the gospel of Christ bearing the good news of God's love everywhere he goes. He is convicted by the truth that not living this new life in Christ is not having salvation. He is propelled forward every moment of his life to live for his Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, "by the mercies of God."

Being saved from the bondage of sin and having the deserving penalty of sin forever removed from his life is the mercies of God that he will never forget or fail to be eternally grateful for. The dominion of sin no longer controls him, for he has the power of God to overcome all sins. The guilt of sin stops haunting him, for he knows that all his sins have been cast into the deepest ocean and God has assured him that He will remember them no more, for Christ's sake. He knows that he thoroughly deserved to be hurled into hell and tormented by the unending waves upon wave of fire and brimstone of the Fiery Lake; but God in His infinite grace and mercies spared him such an eternal damnation! How could such glorious mercies not evoke from his soul a hearty response of abject servile service? This is surely a reasonable service offered willingly from a blood cleansed devoted heart! Not to respond in such devotion would make him a most callous and ungrateful ingrate! "Grateful thanks to his God" ought to be poured out of his Spirit-filled soul with every deed done to the best of his God given ability.

II. By Obedient Offering – 12:1b

To accomplish the above devotion, he needs to present his body a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God. The emphasis of the word "present" is on the act of presenting rather than on the frequency. The meaning of the word "present" is "to place oneself at God's disposal." Different phases of our lives will mean that the act of presenting ourselves is emphasized again and again. We need to present ourselves as a student, as a worker, as a family man, as a husband or a wife, as a son or daughter, as a servant, as a friend, upon retirement, etc before God for His use as He sees fit. This act of "presenting" ourselves ends only when the LORD takes us home. The presentation of ourselves becomes harder with time. As we age, we may feel that we have done enough and thus take a back seat. This lethargy of soul and body becomes the playground for the devil to nullify the years of devoted "presentation." Laziness is a sin. The diabolical plan of the devil is that when we are close to the finishing line, he surreptitiously plants the deadliest snares. The fall would be from the highest point in our lives that creates the loudest sound when we hit bottom. We need to present ourselves for God to use actively and deliberately to the very end of our Christ-centred witness. This must be done in terms of being:-

- *A Living Sacrifice unto God* – Paul borrows this analogy from the Old Testament practice of animal sacrifices. These animals are killed and their blood shed as sin and burnt offerings before the LORD. In the case of the New Testament believers, we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, albeit like the animals in totality . . . body, mind, and spirit. A sacrifice once

offered cannot be taken back. To take it back is impossible to do, obviously. It belongs to God. It must be willingly offered and not grudgingly. This is how we must understand our bodies as willingly offered to the LORD. We cannot take it back. That is why when we stray away and backslide, it is a serious transgression. Loving the world is to hate God. Loving God is to hate the world. As a living sacrifice, all of us must turn our backs to the world. With our eyes focused on Christ's gentle face we must keep our backs toward the world even as we live in the world. The Holy Spirit will help us to do that to the end of our lives.

- *Holy unto God* – The manner in which we are to offer ourselves is holiness. This was made possible only through the finished work of Christ at Calvary. At the point of salvation, all our sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ. Jesus Christ heard and accepted our sincere confession made by faith and baptized us with the Holy Spirit. From henceforth we become holy ones with the Holy Spirit forever dwelling within us. He will never leave us. This enables us to present ourselves holy before God. It is the Lord's doing. This holiness is both positional and practical. The positional aspect is the basis for our eternal family relationship that cannot ever be lost as it has been immutably protected by the love of God in Christ. However, the practical aspect that impacts our holy service must be consciously maintained by us with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We need Him to fill us to serve the Lord faithfully, to lead us to remain in the path of righteousness and to illumine our minds when we study the Bible. We need Him to convict us whenever we sin against God so that we will not regard iniquities in our hearts that will result in the Lord not hearing our prayers (cf. Psalm 66:18). Whenever we sin we need to repent with all our heart to return to holiness. This we must do daily. We need to lean upon the LORD and pray that He will give us the wisdom and discernment to not lead us into temptations but to deliver us from evil all the days of our lives. Thus we must be seeking to please Him alone.
- *Acceptable unto God* –Serving Him to please man can easily lead to hypocrisy. Many well-meaning believers have transgressed privately even as they present a holy image of Christ publicly. The impact of such a hypocritical life is always devastating to the glory of Christ. Greatest harm to the cause of Christ has been done by God's people more within the church than outside. The perennial warning "be sure your sin will find you out" has often been ignored to our own peril. The cure is to make sure that our living sacrifice is offered to please only God always. In pleasing Him only, we may at times offend man just as Daniel offended his colleagues who snared him into being cast into the lion's den; and on another occasion his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego offended king Nebuchadnezzar when they refused to bow down to his image in worship and they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Seeking to please only God causes us to live in holiness privately and publicly since we know that He is the omniscient and omnipresent God of heaven and earth. We cannot hide from Him. He knows our hearts and minds and what we think even before we think them.

All the above cannot be done if our mind is not renewed.

III. By a Renewed Mind – 12:2a

When we become believers we are given the mind of Christ. The mind of the old man is completely replaced. We are no longer a natural man with a mind that can only understand the things of nature but not anything spiritual. We are become a spiritual man possessing the God endowed ability to understand all things spiritual. We now look at the world with spiritual eyes that were spiritually blind before salvation. **1 Corinthians 2:11-16** "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. **13** Which

things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14** But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. **15** But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. **16** For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Though every born again believer possesses the mind of Christ from the day of his salvation, he needs to fill this Christ-like mind with the knowledge of the Word of Christ, i.e. the Bible. All the ideas and philosophies of the world still fill this new mind like dirty rain water inside a brand new stainless steel water tank. The new mind needs to be emptied. The way to empty it is not by meditation or by some form of man-centred counsel or sheer will-power. It can only be done by the Spirit of God who will use the pure and omnipotent Word of God to sanctify it. The more the Word of God is studied, the faster the cleansing process works. There will never be a time on earth when the believer's mind will be thoroughly cleansed. For as he serves and witnesses for the Lord on earth, the harmful and evil spiritual forces of the devil continue to bombard and assault him. This bombardment is done through the mass media like the internet, radio, television, through friends that he meets, the shops and places he visits for daily food and groceries, and even in the home. There is no end to these spiritual battles between the constant filling of his mind with the knowledge of Christ versus the forces of the devil putting back in their devilish ideas the moment they are thrust out by the Word of God. The moment he stops, the ideas of the evil ones get pushed back in.

That is why believers continue to sin, albeit by God's grace lesser and lesser as we mature in Christ. The time when this battle with the evil one ends is when we enter heaven. With this blessed hope in heartfelt anticipation, we must keep renewing our minds through a diligent and faithful study of the Word of God. If we do not, the world's unceasing attempts to conform us will increase in potency. We have seen this in others and have experienced this as well. Thus the construction of the Greek phrase "be not conformed to this world" literally means "stop conforming to this world." Careless Christians will still succumb. Careful Christians who fill their minds constantly with the Word of God will not succumb. What is at stake is the holy Name of Christ that the devil wants to sully and cover with sin. This can only happen when we succumb. Our minds need to keep on being transformed by the powerful Word. In this way, our Christian life will be sustainably holy and acceptable to God.

IV. By Faith-filled Living -- 12:2b

To those who lacked faith, Paul urged them to "prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." The only way is to just obey the Word of God, every jot and tittle of it. Do not doubt it. Do not question it. Do not misinterpret it. Just obey as the literal Word of God commands. With a renewed mind filled with the knowledge of the Truths of God, the only step left to complete the life of obedience is to live out the Word of God faithfully. The LORD will send temptations along our narrow paths to help us as taught in **James 1:2-4** "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; **3** Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. **4** But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." As long as the knowledge of the Word of God is not translated into life changing Christ-centred experiences, we are still living in disobedience. Regardless of how sincere we are to live for Christ, if it is lived not according to Holy Scriptures, it will still be wrong and bring shame to the holy Name of Christ. As long as Jesus Christ's Name, the only Name under heaven that can save a sinner from hell, is not rightly presented to the sinner and is not the Christ of the Bible, the sinner cannot receive salvation.

- *Good will of God* – The word "good" focuses on the beneficial aspects of goodness. The good benefits begin with the believer's own walk with God in Christ. When he obeys the Word of

God, His relationship with Christ is enhanced and becomes real. He can count his blessings. He now has memories of the reality of Christ in his daily life. He will not be easily discouraged by the devil. His steadfastness in Christ is stronger. His holy life is more consistent. He prays more. He rejoices frequently. He learns to give thanks in all things as he is able to see the clear hand of God in all his relationships. His life is pleasing to Christ. His life will also benefit others, spiritually. He becomes holy in the eyes of others around him. Sinners who receive the gospel he shares will see Christ first before they hear Christ. The impact on them is tremendous. He brings encouragement to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and helps to build up their faith as they see the reality of the powerful impact of the gospel in him that can also be experienced by them. The good he brings is eternal. Is this not the good will of God for all believers as they sojourn on earth?

- *Acceptable will of God* – The word “acceptable” used here is the same as in verse 1. The difference is that in verse 1 it is the believer presenting his body in a holy manner that is acceptable to God. In verse 2 it is the will of God that the believer must experience so that he will see how acceptable, i.e. completely agreeable, the will of God is in his life. Every aspect of his life and all relationships he experiences must come under this will of God for this experience to be truly felt. The word “will” refers to “a deliberate determination” or “wilful choice.” The believer is urged by God to renew his mind to stop the conforming influence of the world in his life so that he can taste how good his new life in Christ can be. The believer needs to experience the blissful joy of living a holy life pleasing to God, and how gloriously and completely agreeable it is to his own soul. He will never want it to stop. The acceptable will of God will continue on when he enters his heavenly home. He does not have to wait till he arrives in heaven. He can live this glorious holy life now and know that it is indeed an acceptable will to his renewed mind and soul.
- *Perfect will of God* – Not only is the will of God holy and acceptable but it is also perfect to the child of God. The word “perfect” means “complete.” By obeying the Word of God, his life is complete. The emptiness in his heart is filled to the full. He experiences a sincere love that enables him to love even his enemies. His patience and long suffering towards others seems miraculous as he seldom gets angry for the wrong reason. His unbelievable temperance startles even himself when he is no longer addicted to the vices that had gripped his old life for decades. He is now kind, gentle, considerate, humble, and forgiving. This is the abundant life that characterizes him. He has tasted the perfection, i.e. completion, of the will of God in his salvation from head knowledge to heart-felt obedient Christian experiences.

APPLICATION

Believers are left behind after salvation to be the living breathing image of Christ. This is his God-given privilege. Surrendering his body, heart, soul, and mind to the Lord as a living sacrifice is indeed a reasonable service. This is his daily worship to the Lord. Everywhere he goes he is serving the Lord, morning, noon and night. There is no rest in his witness for Christ. Home, school, places or work and the church are all avenues of witness for his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His experiences with his Lord are genuine and real. He breathes, eats and sleeps Christ. Christ is everything to him. He confesses like Paul that for him to live is Christ and to die is truly gain. He knows that even at the end of his life of absolute devotion to his Lord, it is only a reasonable service.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you know that you are truly born again in Christ? Share two biblical experiences in your life that helped you know that you are a child of God.
2. Has your whole life been offered to God? Is there any area of your life whereby your will dominates instead of the holy, perfect and acceptable will of God?
3. How is your mind being renewed? Have you been studying the Bible sufficiently so that the constant bombardment of the carnal forces of the world has failed to penetrate the inner recess of your soul?
4. Can you truly confess that you love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind? Is this an impossible experience and demand from God?
5. Are you certain that where you are and what you are doing now (home, school, work and church) is the perfect and acceptable will of God for you? If it is not, are you prepared to do whatever it takes to make Christ-centred changes? If yes, what will you do to maintain it throughout this year of 2021?