

**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. 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.** (Romans 12:1-2)

Notice the word “and” in between verse 1 and 2 of Romans 12. These two verses are joined together by the Holy Spirit who authored every word of Scripture. They speak about the same subject. Verse 1 speaks about what our calling is as Christians living in this world: to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Verse 2 speaks about how we are to carry out this calling, how we offer a holy and acceptable sacrifice to God: *the way to offer such a sacrifice that is pleasing to God is by not being conformed to this world, but by being transformed by the renewing of our mind.*

Now, before we begin to work through this passage we must understand what it means to offer to God an *acceptable* sacrifice.

- The word *acceptable* to God means *pleasing* to God. It means that we strive with all our hearts to please Him, as Paul says to the children in Colossians 3:20: **Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.** **Well-pleasing** is the same word as **acceptable** in Romans 12:1.
- It does not mean that by working hard to obey their parents, children can earn acceptance with the Lord. It means that because they are already God’s children, they are called to make it their aim to please their Father in heaven. In the same way, we do not work hard to offer our lives faithfully to the Lord so that we can get the Lord to accept us. Only Jesus can make us acceptable to God! Christ alone is that **Lamb without blemish or spot** (I Peter 1:19) **who offered Himself without blemish to God.** (Hebrews 9:14)
- What Paul is talking about is the calling and desire of the Christian to live a life that pleases God because He saved us and loves us, and we love Him. Offering an acceptable sacrifice is about living a life that agrees with His character and will.

So, once again, the question answered in Romans 12:2 is: how can we offer our bodies to God as a sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to Him?

**First, the way for a Christian to present his life as a holy sacrifice is by defying worldliness.**

**And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** (My apologies to those who did poorly in grammar!), but it is important to note that these verbs are *passive*, not *active*.

- Active would be this: **Do not conform to this world.** But the Holy Spirit put it in the passive voice: **Do not be conformed to this world.**
- Active would be this: **Transform your character by the renewing of your mind.** But God wrote it in the passive voice: **But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

This teaches us something very fundamental about human nature. In these two passive verbs we learn that we are not the ones in control of our lives, but we are letting someone or something outside of ourselves control us. Everyone is being controlled, being formed, being shaped by someone or something outside of himself. The two verbs **conform** and **transform** have very close to the same meaning – it means to be formed or shaped or squeezed into a mould 模具. And Paul is saying that there are two forces out there that have power to form and shape us into their image, two moulds which can give shape to our lives, and will determine the character of our sacrifice: the world or the will of God.

These two powers or moulds are completely opposite to each other, and Paul places them side by side as powers that are at war with each other, powers that do not agree at all, that are as opposite as darkness and light, Satan and God. To try to be formed by both powers creates an unequal yoke of two opposing powers that cannot work together.

- As Paul says elsewhere: **Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial 惡魔? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. So come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. (II Corinthians 6:14-16)**

**Do not be conformed to this world.** The **world** here does not mean the physical landscape and buildings you see outside. The world in this verse is the Bible’s word for *ungodly ways of thinking and living, ungodly pursuits 追求 and goals*. The world stands for the kingdom of darkness, for ideas and powers and behaviours that oppose God’s Christ and God’s Word. And so, while we are not in control of our lives, this is still a command which requires vigorous 精力充沛的 action on our part.

- We must not allow ungodly powers and ungodly ideas and ungodly practices and ungodly attitudes take control of our lives and direct our choices. Do not let your life-in-the-body be squeezed into the mould of worldliness.
- Instead, we must seek the power of the Spirit. We must constantly be filled with the Spirit so that we become more and more resistant to the corruption that is in this world due to sin.

The warning against becoming worldly is not something talked about a lot today. Christians in our culture have become very comfortable in this world. The *pilgrim* mindset – *that we are strangers and aliens here, and here we have no abiding* 永久的

home – has grown very weak and our attitudes toward work and money, our view of men and women and marriage, the way we dress, our view of government, our appetites in entertainment – is there a notable difference anymore in our culture between the church and the world? The church has taken on the shape of the world.

That is the challenge we face, and it becomes very serious when we put this in the context of verse 1 – *what kind of sacrifice are we bringing to God when we offer our bodies to Him?* What kind of body is sitting here in worship today – the body that has your name on it? Is it one conformed to this world, or transformed by the power of the Word? One power will produce a sacrifice that is worldly, unholy, not pleasing to God. The other power produces a sacrifice that is holy and pleasing! It all ends up in the sacrifice.

The issue for the Christians today as in every age is this: are you fighting worldliness?

- This can be hard to measure. How do you know whether you are becoming a worldly person? How do you know when you are drinking too deep from this world's brew 酒 and starting to have too much? How do you know that when you are beginning to drift from the Gospel? Have you become callous 无感觉的 to the clear and present danger of worldliness? *In our culture the issue is not so much persecution from the world but seduction 诱惑 by the world. We're not under attack from without; we're decaying from within.* (C. J. Mahaney, Worldliness). Can people still look at us on a Tuesday and see the clear difference between the church and the world, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness? Can they see it in your iPod playlists, on the jokes you tell, your Internet activity, your leisure time, the way you respond when things don't go according to your plan? Everyday (whether we realize it or not) we're making choices between love for a world that opposes God, and love for the crucified and risen Christ.
- The goal of worldliness is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather than vertically. It is to seek outward prosperity instead of holiness. Worldly people burst with selfish desires instead of heartfelt prayers. They crave the approval of those around them instead of the one above them. It is to put first what others will think or say rather than what God sees and says. It is more excited about the latest movie release than the upcoming worship service. It is more taken in by the world series, than the word of God. (Joel Beeke)
- We must fight this power that forms (or deforms) us because worldliness dulls your affections for Christ and distracts your attention from Christ. Worldliness is so serious because Christ is so serious. We are perfectly useless as Christ-exalting Christians if all we do is conform to the world around us. And the key to not wasting our lives in worldliness, Paul says, is being transformed. **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.”**

**Second, the way for a Christian to present his body as a holy sacrifice is by developing Christian character.**

***But be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*** Transformation means change, deep life-change, inside and out. The word is used when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration or Transformation. His appearance changed before the disciples' eyes, and He dazzled 耀眼 with the glory of God. Well, that is what must happen to us as we renew our minds: our appearance, our life, our speaking, our attitude must shine with the glory of God. Do not become like the world, but become like Christ!

The same word transformation is used again in 2 Corinthians 3:18: **“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”** Notice what Paul says here about being transformed:

- It occurs when we **behold the glory of the Lord**. As our minds dwell on the glory of the Lord Jesus, we are being transformed.
- Here too, Paul speaks of **being transformed**. Again, it is not something we do to ourselves. We don't have the power to change ourselves. But it is the work of the **Spirit**. We ask the Spirit of Jesus to go to work in us and do major work on us. As the Spirit feeds your mind (and heart) with the Lord's glory – that's how we are transformed.
- We ask: *what does it mean to behold the glory of the Lord?* How can we do that? Scripture says (in II Corinthians 4:4) **The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.** The mind “sees” the glory of Christ *in the Gospel*, that is, in the Scriptures as they are taught, read, and studied.

Do you see where transformation and reformation begin in the Christian life? Do you see how your life-in-the-body can change? **By renewing your mind.** That has everything to do with your body – because how the mind thinks, that's how the body behaves. So the mind (together with the heart) is what needs treatment, and that will cause transformation of our character and life. That's how you offer up your body as a holy sacrifice to God.

***Renewing the mind.*** Because of sin, the mind is a stubborn creature. It is naturally bent toward thinking and doing wrong, a bias 偏爱 toward error. It has much more of a craving 渴望 for lies than for truth. **The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.** (II Corinthians 4:4)

- Because our minds are blinded by Satan, they need first to be made new by Gospel of Christ (**You have been born again, not of perishable 易坏的 seed but of imperishable 不朽的, through the living and abiding word of God** – I Peter 1:23),
- and then constantly renewed by that same Gospel truth which reveals Christ's glory (**As newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word so that you may grow thereby** – I Peter 2:2)

Keep your mind, made new in Christ, renewed in Christ. The devil starts with the *mind*, and tries to take your *body* down with it. That's why many warnings and admonitions in Scripture to Christians have to do with guarding your mind:

- **Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.** (1 Peter 5:8)
- **Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.** (1 Peter 1:13-15)

If you want your sacrifice to be holy and pleasing to the Lord, you must keep asking Him and letting Him renew your mind so that your desires, your thinking, your attitudes, your language, your reactions, your handling of suffering and mistreatment, your credit card use, your spending time teaching your children – your whole person and all your ways are being transformed more and more into the image and truth of Christ.

In order to dull our fruitfulness as Christians, the world wants you to accept the lies and follow the behaviours it proclaims through the mouths of Elementary school teachers and university professors, from the pens of news commentators and the blather 废话 of talk shows, and in the toxins 毒素 of the Hollywood and Disney entertainment industries.

- It's okay to get drunk as long as you don't drive
- each person should choose the religion that's right for him, and keep it to himself
- there are six genders, and we should all accept each gender as good
- you have the power to create and recreate yourself
- Christianity does more harm than good in this world
- God is whoever you conceive him to be

But the Lord calls us to battle the world by steeping 浸泡 our minds in His Word. God says in Colossians 3:16 – **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.** Some like their tea very weak; they dip in the tea leaves and quickly pull them out again. But when it comes to dipping the Word into our minds, God calls for "strong tea." Or, to change the image, if we want to be prepared for holy action, we must gird our minds with the truth.

- Let us be faithful in coming to the worship services of the church not just with our body but with your mind, to hear the word, prayerfully coming with the goal of transformation.
- Read your Bibles. Go through it in a year or in two years, and go through it with your children. Read it carefully and meditatively.
- Learn and relearn the catechism as a way to engrave the trustworthy doctrine on your mind.
- Pray that as you do these things the Holy Spirit will apply it to your mind to renew it, that you may desire and approve the will of God, so that all of life will become worship to the glory of Christ.

There's a wonderful, powerful promise tucked into this verse. When you let the Word of Christ steep in your mind, it will spread into your character, into your body, and into your whole life. Transformation will happen. Christ will change you from one degree of His glory to another. Watch yourself grow, grow, grow! And your sacrifice will become more and more holy, and more and more pleasing to God.

### **Third, the way for a Christian to present His body as a holy sacrifice is by doing God's will**

This is the aim of this whole summons not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind: **that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

- That we may prove the will of God. The will of God is what He wants from us and commands of us. It is God's revealed will concerning our duty. In I Thessalonians 4:2-4 we read: **For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is God's will, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication, each one of you to know to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.**
- That we may prove the will of God. To prove means to test and approve, to discern, to figure out, to find out the will of God. **Walk as children of light...finding out [proving] what is acceptable to the Lord.** (Ephesians 5:8,10) Renew your mind with the Scriptures so that you may be able to discern in both the easy and the difficult situations of life how God wants you to speak and act. The goal is to develop and train the mind to understand and choose God's will, and the body to run in the pathway of God's commandments.

You know one of those beautiful and brave things that Martin Luther said when he stood before that Diet of Worms was "My conscience is captive to the word of God" and that's what the apostle wants for every Christian. He wants Christians whose consciences, their minds, their

inner man is captive to the word of God, because the Christian life flows from a renewed inner man. And when the mind is help captive, then we are ready to act in manner that agrees with God's good and perfect will and present our bodies as a holy and pleasing sacrifice to God. Often there's not any particular verse that can answer my problem, and then I need a Bible-filled, Spirit-filled mind to know, test, discern – to apply the whole word of God faithfully to my own situation that I may live holy!

Again we are reminded here of the words of Jesus who taught that the Christian life is not a matter of impressive religious showmanship 演技, but of simple, humble, everyday obedience to the will of God. God is not pleased with how beautiful a spiritual act we can stage, but with doing His will.

- **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:21-23)**
- **Saul did an impressive job of defeating a whole army, but it did not delight the Lord because of his disobedience. Samuel said to him: **Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams** (I Samuel 15:22)**

This is the sacrifice that God wants to see from us: that we are not out to please ourselves and live for ourselves. We are out to please God. We are being transformed by a mind that is set on searching, understanding, and applying the good will of God to our lives, not caving in to the pressures to make life easier for ourselves.

He doesn't want just your talk that you've given our heart to Jesus. He wants your body as a living sacrifice. He wants a body that does His will. That is the aim of the true believer, the one filled with the Spirit. The Christian is one who loves God's will, and delights in his will, and finds it good, acceptable, and perfect. For him the commandments are not burdensome, and the yoke of Jesus is easy. With the psalmist we confess: **Our delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law we meditate day and night.** (Psalm 1:2) **My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly.** (Psalm 119:167)

*But never forget that the source and power of our holiness in offering ourselves to God is not our own effort and Christian discipline. It is **by the mercies of God** that we may present our bodies a holy sacrifice to God. It is the power of Christ's death working in us that strengthens us to die to this world's influences in us, and it is the power of Christ's resurrection that strengthens us to live to the will of God. None of it is from ourselves. You must bank on the mercies of God to cleanse you from your sins when you fail, and to equip you with His Spirit when you faint. There is more than enough mercy in God through Christ to supply your every lack, forgive your every weakness, to pardon your every sin, and to strengthen you in every trial. So keep this command, brethren, **by the mercies of God!***