

I was a freshman in High School when the Lord first grabbed my heart with these verses. It was at a little Baptist church on the corner of Apple and Jordan Road. Pastor Ira Day was preaching. I hope you remember more of what I share this morning than I can recall of his sermon. It's not that it wasn't a good message. It was that the Holy Spirit so grabbed my attention with these verses that the words were all I could think about. If that happens to you this morning, if you forget the sermon but can't escape these words, that would be just fine with me. I'd prefer that you remembered both, but we'll leave that up to the Holy Spirit.

*<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* One of the causes of the Reformation was the preaching of men like Erasmus. These pastors studied the Bible from the Greek manuscripts and would just read a passage to their congregation and translate it into the local language. It was the first time many people heard the Scriptures in their native tongue. Prior to that, the Mass and Scripture reading had always been in Latin and very few could understand what was being said. In that tradition of the Reformers, I'll go slowly through this passage unpacking the original language so we can see its fullness.

The Apostle is making an appeal to the church in Rome and to all who will read the letter. Various translations for the word "appeal" are to urge, to exhort, to implore, or beseech. Paul earnestly desired that they hear and act on what he is about to write. It is a compound word in Greek meaning to call by one's side. It is the word that is translated The Comforter, referring to the Holy Spirit. He stands beside Christ followers, pleading with us to hear God's direction and comfort as we go through life. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul's words are those of the Holy Spirit urging us to hear what we are about to read (2 Peter 1:21).

When we see the word "therefore", we should go back and see... what it's there for. We recently studied that Paul and Jesus taught that this period of history in which we live is the age when the Gentiles would become believers. It is for a limited time. The day will come when the last Gentile will believe and the veil will be lifted from Jewish eyes. <sup>26</sup> *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";* Romans 11:26 The time of the Gentile church is limited, therefore Paul is urging us as his family in the Lord to act now (Romans 11:25).

This is a new section of the letter. The "therefore" may be appealing to the first two sections. In chapters 1-8 we saw some very clear doctrines of condemnation, justification, sanctification, and glorification. In chapters 9-11 Paul explained why the Davidic covenant and many of the prophecies regarding Israel had not yet been fulfilled

**Commented [notes1]: 2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

**Commented [notes2]: Romans 11:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

(1Kings 2:4). Therefore, because of these teachings, because we have been called by grace through faith, been made right with God, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live under the control of the Spirit (Romans 8:9) with all the glorious promises of what is yet to come (Romans 8:17), Paul urges us to take heed to this portion of the letter. Chapter 12-16 is an exhortation to live out "the exalted position in which chapters 1-8 place the believer," and in view also of the God given ability which the believer has to live such a life.<sup>4</sup>

The basis of Paul's appeal to us is the mercies of God. The word is also translated "compassion." God didn't have to do anything for us, but He had compassion on us. His compassion was merciful in that we deserved to be enslaved and destroyed by our sin because that is what we chose instead of God and His goodness (Ephesians 2:3). This mercy was expressed in God calling us. Then He justified us through His own Son bearing the wrath we deserved. But what is even more, God glorifies us with the infilling of the Spirit and the fruit He bears in our life. And yet there is more. He will glorify our mortal bodies and make them like that of His Son so that we may live forever in His presence (Philippians 3:21)! That is the basis of the appeal. Because of the incomprehensible love God has bestowed upon us and the power by which He has enabled us, Paul is pleading with us. That is one strong appeal! It's almost as if the whole letter was to bring us to the urgency of this appeal.

Paul is appealing to us to "present your bodies a living sacrifice". The word for "present" is a technical term that the priests used when they brought the sacrifice to the altar facing the Holy of Holies. (Leviticus 16:10) It was in this way that the priest presented the living sacrifice to the LORD. We stand before the altar of sacrifice knowing we are facing the God who created all things, and we give our very body for His service. It also means to stand beside in a yielding manner for the purpose of serving. We stand ready to serve the Lord at His command now and forevermore.

If we didn't have the background of the previous chapters you might think this was a call to misery. Indeed, Paul does to say to die to ourselves that we might live in Christ. (Romans 8:36;6:8) But this is not some burdensome drudgery to which we are called. It is life eternal and full of glory! (1Peter 1:8) Paul has said the suffering we might endure is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Since Paul has called us to hear this appeal on the basis of God's mercy, or compassion, the sacrifice he has in mind is one of thanksgiving (Psalm 27:6). Listen to the Psalmists express it. <sup>23</sup> *The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!* Psalm 50:23 <sup>22</sup> *And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!* Psalm 107:22 We present our bodies to God to use as He pleases out of gratitude for all He has done to redeem us and make us fit for heaven. It's a joyful sacrifice! The abundant mercy and grace of God that we have received can only be properly responded to by the yielding

**Commented [notes3]: 1 Kings 2:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

**Commented [notes4]: Romans 8:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

**Commented [notes5]: Romans 8:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

**Commented [notes6]: Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek Volume 1, Eerdmans p.204**

**Commented [notes7]: Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**Commented [notes8]: Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

**Commented [notes9]: Leviticus 16:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

**Commented [notes10]: Romans 8:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

**Commented [notes11]: Romans 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

**Commented [notes12]: 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

**Commented [notes13]: Romans 8:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**Commented [notes14]: Psalm 27:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

of our life in service (Psalm 40:6-8). Life is a gift from God in the first place. We should count the cost (Luke 14:28). But we should also realize we are only giving back what was given to us, and the reward for doing so is incomprehensibly glorious! So can we really call it a sacrifice? Perhaps we can call it sacrifice only in the sense that we surrender our life to God for His use, but not really in the sense of a great cost to us. What do we have that didn't come from God in the first place (1Corinthians 4:7)? Besides that, Jesus promised to return to us 100 times what we give up for Him (Matthew 19:29).

What does your body as a living sacrifice look like? The hands are not used for evil but are yielded for service. I have a dear brother who was so crippled with arthritis that he would duct tape his framing hammer to his hand. When his wife came to Christ he decided to ask Jesus for healing. The next morning he awoke and his arthritis was gone. He became a believer and follower of Jesus. When we were in the same church, anytime there was a work day or something that needed to be done, he was there. He said, "God gave me back the use of my body. Now whenever He needs it, I'm there."

A living sacrifice looks like eyes that refuse to look on evil, but also that see the need around them. They are eyes that see God at work. It is feet that refuse to walk into temptation, but instead go wherever God sends, whether it is to a Bible study, to a neighbor in need, or across the world to minister the love of Jesus. It is the soul that hears God's call and responds like Isaiah, "Here am I; send me (Isaiah 6:8)!"

The next word in our text is "holy". The sacrifice must be holy. That simply means it is for God's use alone. Everything we do is for the glory of God (1Corinthians 10:31). No mixed messages about our priorities should come from our life. That is the only way our service can be acceptable to God. God doesn't want part of you. He won't settle for partial commitment. There is no such thing as partly holy. You give yourself without reservation or you don't.

ESV translates this act of giving our self without reservation as our spiritual worship. The Greek words literally mean rational service. The reason they translated it "spiritual worship" is that the same words are used to describe a priestly worship activity. In other words, this is how you serve God. By giving your body to serve at His command, you are worshipping God with your being. But let us consider the translation "rational service" as well. If God made us to know Him and find our fulfillment in Him, and if that is the only way our soul will be fulfilled, and if that is the path to true joy, isn't it our rational service to surrender our body to His service?

Paul continues his appeal to us.<sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* We are not to conform to this world. The word for conform is the Greek word from which we get schematics. Paul is telling us to

**Commented [notes15]: Psalm 40:6-8 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: <sup>8</sup> I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

**Commented [notes16]: Luke 14:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

**Commented [notes17]: 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**Commented [notes18]: Matthew 19:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

**Commented [notes19]: Isaiah 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

**Commented [notes20]: 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

stop acting after the pattern of the world which is so different from the new life within us (John 8:23). We've been changed on the inside. Now let that change be seen on the outside. It will be quite different from the way the world acts. The world is self-serving, duplicitous, and pleasure seeking (1John 2:15-17). It may even be religious and appear generous at times but the motives are self-glorification. We are to be like Christ, like His Spirit that resides within us. We are to demonstrate His love, genuineness, graciousness, forthrightness, and truth (2Corinthians 2:14). That difference will definitely attract attention from those who want to use you and those who will mock you. Do it anyway! It is what is right. It's our rational service.

Then Paul tells us how to make that change to non-conformity with the world. It is a tough change because we have established patterns, and by nature, we humans want to fit in. However, we can't be acceptable to the world and acceptable to God. We must choose one or the other. Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Transformed in Greek is the word from which we derive "metamorphosis". Worldings are caterpillars crawling around gorging themselves with all the world has to offer but never satisfied. New creatures in Christ are butterflies that soar on the wind and flit from flower to flower of Scripture being nourished by the nectar of the Word (Psalm 119:103).

That transformation takes place by the renewing of our minds. This is such an essential lesson and is often overlooked. Jews had the idea. They memorized large portions of Scripture. They sang the Psalms. They debated the meaning of passages and compared one passage with another. If you look at some of the conclusions of the rabbi that immersed their life in the word of God, you will see that even though they did not know Jesus, their knowledge of the word brought them many right conclusions. Many were led to Christ through the word. The brother of the great Rabbi Akiba, who was himself a rabbi, became a believer because of the power of the Word.

My concern is that in this age fewer and fewer are reading and even fewer are memorizing the Scriptures. If it is the renewing of our thinking through the Word of God that transforms us from caterpillars to butterflies, how will the world see Jesus in a generation that does not meditate on the Word? As it is the Word that sets our thinking straight, is a light to our feet, and keeps us from sin, where will the church be without individuals that hide that word in their heart and mind (Psalm 119:9,11,105)?

I'm so pleased that many of you are memorizing Scripture. I can see the change in your lives. It literally changes your countenance. It helps you to agree with God's thoughts and keeps you from conforming to the ways of this world. It changes you from caterpillars to butterflies.

"Renewing" is defined by Trench as the gradual conforming of the man more and more into the new spiritual world into which he has been introduced, and in which he now

**Commented [notes21]: John 8:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

**Commented [notes22]: 1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.  
<sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.  
<sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

**Commented [notes23]: 2 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

**Commented [notes24]: Psalm 119:103 (ESV)**

<sup>103</sup> How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

**Commented [notes25]: Psalm 119:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

**Commented [notes26]: Psalm 119:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

**Commented [notes27]: Psalm 119:105 (ESV)**

<sup>105</sup> Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

lives and moves; the restoration of the divine image; and in all this so far from being passive, he must be a fellow-worker with God." The Holy Spirit applies the Word to our thinking and we see the world in a new light. Paul described it another way. <sup>16</sup> *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* Galatians 5:16

I have found the last portion of verse two to be very helpful at describing our growth in this transformation. *...that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* People often ask me how to hear from God, or how does one know the will of God? For most of us there is no audible voice. We know much of God's will from Scripture. But as to the details of life, we often have a difficult time knowing what God would have us do. Paul is telling us here that when our mind is renewed and our outward life is transformed, we can test things and thereby discern the will of God. We step out in faith and try something we think may be God's will, and we begin to see from the fruit or the confirmation or warning of the Spirit in our spirit as to whether or not it is indeed God's will. We seek out the good and acceptable and perfect will of God by testing things (John 7:17).

Our goal is to walk in that perfect will of God obedient to the Spirit, like Jesus. (Matthew 5:48). We won't arrive in this life, but the closer we come to it, the more rewarding life will be. That's not easy. In fact it is quite a challenge, and an increasing one the closer we come to that perfect will of God (Acts 14:22).

I will close our study of these two verses with Wuest's expanded translation from the Greek. "I therefore beg of you, please, brethren, through the mercies of God, by a once and for all presentation, to place your bodies at the disposal of God, a sacrifice, a living one, a holy one, well-pleasing, your rational, sacred service. And stop assuming an outward expression that does not come from within you and is not representative of what you are in your inner being, but is patterned after this age; but change your outward expression to one that comes from within and is representative of your inner being, by the renewing of your mind, resulting in your putting to the test what is the will of God, the good and well-pleasing, and complete will, and having found that it meets the specifications, placing your approval on it."<sup>21</sup> Will you respond to Paul's appeal?

#### Questions

- 1 How did the reformers preach?
- 2 What is therefor there for?
- 3 What is the basis for Paul's appeal?
- 4 In what sense is it a sacrifice?
- 5 What kind of sacrifice are we to make?
- 6 What does a living sacrifice look like?
- 7 What does transformation look like?
- 8 How is it accomplished?
- 9 What does "renewing" mean?

#### Commented [notes28]: John 7:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

#### Commented [notes29]: Matthew 5:48 (ESV)

<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

#### Commented [notes30]: Acts 14:22 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

#### Commented [notes31]: Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Eerdmans p206, 209

10 How do we know the will of God?