

LIVE A TRANSFORMED, SACRIFICIAL LIFE

(SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2013)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 53; Rom. 12:1-2

Introduction

There is a pattern that you can see especially in some of the NT books written by the Apostle Paul. Some describe Ephesians and Romans as beginning with theology and then ending with practical application. I like the description better that Douglas Moo gives. He writes that the change is not from “theology” to “practice” but from the *indicative* side of the gospel to a focus more on the *imperative* side of the gospel. These two aspects are not two distinctive stages but two sides of the same coin.¹ I think this is a good explanation. It is never that the writers of Scripture leave behind theology to focus on practical application. Rather it is the case that true theology always involves an appropriate response. If you have been saved by God’s marvelous grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then this is how you must live. Yes, there is a focus in the book of Romans on who you are in Christ, first, but this is not then discarded as Paul moves on to talk about other “practical” matters. Sadly there is much demand by Christians for tips on practical living and very little interest in true theology. The two must never be separated.

As we continue our study in the final main section of Romans, it is important to keep in mind the links between the opening verses of Romans 12 and earlier chapters. There are two key links that are important to see.

The first link or connection is with Romans 1. Romans 1 paints the disgusting picture of the downward spiral of men and nations who do not glorify or give thanks to the true God. In the words of Romans 1, men, women, and children in this condition are futile in their thoughts, their foolish hearts are darkened. Though they think of themselves as being wise they are in reality fools. Romans 12:1-2 presents the great contrast to this picture with a renewed mind, a body offered as a living sacrifice, a life focused on worship to the true God because of His great mercy.²

The other text connected with Romans 12:1-2 is Romans 6. In Romans 6 Paul gives important instruction to the true response to God’s grace. Rather than thinking we may sin without any guilt because God’s grace will just cover it up, we are called to consider what it means to be united to Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Reckon yourselves to be dead

¹ Douglas Moo, 745.

² Moo, 748.

indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³ Three times in chapter 6 Paul uses a verb that is also found in Romans 12:1 – present.

Paul then has no intention of somehow leaving behind the glorious truth he has presented as he focuses on other needs of the Christians in Rome and the needs that you have today. Rather in perfect agreement with the glorious truth of the gospel, you are given instruction on what the pattern of your life should be in response to God's mercy.

There is a beautiful harmony presented here – a life sincerely focused on Jesus Christ that resists the temptations of this world and that seeks to be continually transformed by God's truth. This is living with the totality of who you have been created and redeemed to be – not merely some intellectual, monkish pursuit but also not a pursuit driven by vague emotional feelings.

In light of the mercies of God, live a transformed, sacrificial life.

We will consider three main commands from Romans 12:1-2.

1. BECAUSE OF THE MERCIES OF GOD, OFFER YOUR BODY AS A SACRIFICE, v 1.

Rom. 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.

Let me make an important statement relevant to the two opening verses of Romans 12.

God does not call you to do something that is unachievable and yet you will never reach a point where you are doing more than you are called to do. There is no sense of paying God back and yet you will not out serve, out give, or sacrifice too much in response to the mercies of God. You have a life-long, meaningful calling, that should keep your focus constantly upon the faithful God we serve.

In Greek grammar, the word therefore, cannot begin a sentence and this is reflected in some English translations. What does the word **therefore** mean? It means there is a connection with all that Paul has presented in the opening chapters and the discussion that follows starting in chapter 12. As best as you can, you are to keep in mind the discussion of Romans 1-11.

The word beseech is a good translation. Beseech is a strong word. We don't often use it in normal conversation. Paul is not acting as a dictator but he is not just offering suggestions here. Paul, a pastor, missionary, evangelist, filled with the Holy Spirit, passionately describes what your life should be.

³ Moo, 748.

And importantly Paul beseeches you based on the mercies of God. This is another indication that we must not forget any of the rich theology of the earlier chapters. In light of all that God has done for you a miserable sinner, once at war with God, you who have been called, regenerated, justified, adopted, now being sanctified, you are called to present your body a sacrifice.

It is very important to keep in mind the connection between your duty and the mercies of God. There is absolutely no thought of paying God back. Rather the call that you offer your body as a sacrifice will only happen when your focus is on the many mercies of God shown to you. This is always the foundation of a life of sacrifice to our Triune God. This is why the Lord's Supper and Baptism are such important gifts that God gives to you. If you have been baptized into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if you frequently take into your hand the symbols of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, how can you not respond but by saying, faithful and loving God, I offer my body to you in response?

Look at the words a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Some translations differ slightly and read a sacrifice – living, holy, and pleasing to God. I think it is best to see that Paul gives a three-fold description of what a life of sacrifice is to mean.

I touched earlier on the word **present** which is used three times in Romans 6.

Rom. 6:13 And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

The word **present** especially as it is used here in Romans 12 is a technical term used in the language of making a sacrifice. Offer your body as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God.

Alive or living speaks that it is a life-long calling given to you. Romans 1:17 beautifully describes how that the just shall live by faith. Romans 6:11 calls us to think of ourselves now as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. You are called to offer your body as a sacrifice not just occasionally or in some great act of martyrdom – but every moment, every single day. This is a life-long pursuit.

I noted recently a CLA graduate from 1987 who later became a Roman Catholic has written a book about living as a Roman Catholic with the goal of becoming a saint. He said that as a Protestant, the idea of sainthood was never encouraged. Sadly he must have never studied Romans 12:1.

You are called to offer your body as a holy sacrifice. Sainthood or holiness is not reserved for some special class of Christians who attain some special position in life and therefore are elevated above us. Every Christian is called to live a life of holiness.

Now sadly, it seems that so many Christians fall far short of this. The solution is not to encourage some false sense of pursuing sainthood, but to give focus on what Scripture commands. You must live a holy life. If you are not living a life described as being holy, then you must take seriously your failure and sin, and seek by God's grace to live a life of holiness as defined by God's word.

No one lives a life of perfection. The more focused actually you are on living as God demands the more you see how you fall short. So how can you live a holy life if you are constantly falling short? I think part of the answer is found in terms of the direction of your life and what you are seriously pursuing.

For example think of someone who wants to play in the NBA. You might laugh at such a person and say, you will never make it. But perhaps this person has been given talent and every morning he gets up early to practice a couple of hours each day. You can see his life is directed to a goal.

The question every professed Christian must ask and answer is similar. Is there clear evidence that you are directed to holy living, that others could see some evidence you that are seeking to offer your body as a holy and living sacrifice? Would others laugh at hearing you say this is my true intention or would they see evidence that this is the direction and basic pattern of your life in response to God's abundant mercies?

The final description pleasing or acceptable is also taken from the language of sacrifice. Can you think of the first place where the idea of a pleasing sacrifice is found in Scripture? Though the language is not identical, I would say it comes from Genesis 4 and the sacrifice of Abel in contrast to the sacrifice of Cain.

Phil. 4:18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, **well pleasing to God.**

Col. 3:20 ¶ Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is **well pleasing** to the Lord.

It is beautiful to understand that although our works can never match up to the standard of perfection as demonstrated by our Lord, we can please God. Never would we hold up our own obedience and say, Lord this is perfect. And yet Scripture does confirm that actions done for the glory of God are pleasing to God. This is not just God acting like a used, car salesman in order to seal a deal. No, the sovereign God who has made you and redeemed you finds pleasure in the sincere obedience of His people. Children, when you obey your parents, this is well pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not written to make us feel good about ourselves in some superficial way. But what a wonder, what a beautiful reality is presented here.

Offer your body a sacrifice that brings pleasure to our merciful God.

Verse 1 ends with the expression, this is your reasonable service or **worship**. The word reasonable could be translated as either reasonable, logical, or spiritual. There is some debate on the best translation and understanding. I think the best idea is that a life of sacrifice is the only appropriate response and that such a sacrifice is not just going through the motions but is a true form of worship to God.⁴

Sincerely offer to God your body as a sacrifice – living, holy, and pleasing to God.

2. DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, V. 2A

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world...

Two other commands follow in verse 2 – one negative and one positive. You see the word **and** that begins verse 2. It probably makes the most sense to see that verse 2 describes what must not happen and what must happen if you are to offer your body as a sacrifice.⁵

So if you want to offer your body as a sacrifice to God then you must make sure you are not being conformed to this world.

The verb conformed is used only one other time in the NT.

1Pet. 1:14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance;

If you look closely at the language of Romans 12:2 you should notice that the verb conformed is passive. There is a question about what exactly that means. The NET Bible comments the

⁴ Moo, 752-753.

⁵ Moo, 755.

language might suggest that being conformed is something that happens subconsciously or without your actual awareness. In the same note it also states that a passive can be called a permissive passive. Perhaps it is best to understand the language reflects a combination of both.

Sadly many are not aware that the world is shaping them or if they do they don't really care.

Do you consider the things that are shaping you?

The danger of so much entertainment is not that it makes you do bad things in such a way that you can blame TV or music. But there is a shaping power that entertainment has. Either you are being shaped by this world or you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind as Paul next commands.

This negative command or warning must be taken seriously.

3. BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND SO THAT YOU CAN TEST AND APPROVE WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, 12:2B

Rom. 12:2b but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Here is the positive command so that you can sincerely offer your body as a sacrifice. The final words of verse 2 have three parts:

1) you are to be transformed - command

2) by the renewing of your mind – the means

3) so that you prove what is the will of God – that which is good, acceptable, and perfect – the goal which is connected with offering your body as a sacrifice.

The verb transformed in Greek is probably one you know from your study of science, the basis for our word metamorphosis.

Paul has already made very clear that believers are not justified through their own works. It is God alone who justifies His people and gives them faith to believe and rest alone in Christ for salvation.

It is God who also sanctifies us. And yet Scripture also makes clear there is a duty given to every believer to grow.

The language that Scripture uses is not always identical but there is a connection.

2Pet. 3:18 but **grow in** the **grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

So appropriately you are given the command to be transformed, to be changed, more and more into the image of Jesus Christ as Romans 8:29 describes.

The tense of the verb is present which means this is an ongoing command for you. This is a life-long duty.

The way that you are to be transformed is through the renewing of your mind. Your mind is renewed through the working of the Holy Spirit but also as you intentionally submit to God's truth and seek that your mind is renewed, so that you will desire more and more to think as God would have you think.

Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and **renewing** of the Holy Spirit,

Again it is very important to keep in mind that this command is given to those who have already been regenerated and justified by God's grace. This is not in anyway self-salvation. What Paul is commanding is your duty in light of God's gracious work.

What Scripture is commanding here I think so beautifully is described in the Old Testament in Psalm 119.

Psa. 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.

As we all know very well and as I have pointed out before, the world which we live most differs from the past in the possibility that you can constantly receive either information or entertainment. Now, it is not that this stream of infortainment⁶ happens without our will. Young people especially but adults also submit themselves to this constant stream through our

⁶ A new word I coined on 3/23/13.

choices, mostly involving the internet, TV, radio, and now increasingly our cell phones. I point out the obvious because if you are going to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, you must intentionally seek such. It doesn't just happen on its own. No, just as people give themselves over to superficial things, you must commit and seek that your mind be renewed.

And far from being some boring path, what Paul presents here is a call to the most meaningful, truly joyful life. I am not talking about superficial happiness but deep joy. Why do I say that?

Because Paul talks about the knowing the will of God. Knowing the will of God is the greatest thing to know.

I think we can say the will of God as Paul describes here consists of two things. It means that you are aware of what God expects of you in terms of basic moral living and then also the ability to apply God's truth to situations that aren't directly described in Scripture. You know the will of God in terms of how you use your time, energy, and talents.

God's will is described as that which is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Psa. 40:8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law *is* within my heart.”

What did Jesus say was His focus?

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Offering your body as a sacrifice, seeking to know and do the will of God – this is the best description for a life worth living, a life full of meaning, joy, and purpose. A life lived for merely self-pleasures and entertainment – that is a boring, restless, purposeless life.

CONCLUSION

The challenge of the end of Romans 11 and the beginning of Romans 12.

Prayer

Hymn: 492

Benediction – Jude 24, 25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.