

Romans 12:1-2

“Your Reasonable Service”

The book of Romans follows a pattern that's not unfamiliar to us as it pertains to Paul's writings. There are 2 major sections to the book of Romans and it's plausible to see 3. But almost invariably as Paul penned his letters he followed a particular pattern (and I point this out because its worth getting a grip *on*, and gleaning *from*), before he spoke on a *practical* level, he spoke on a *positional* level, before he informed us of proper *duty*, he instructed us in proper *doctrine*. Before he made the transition into how we need to *behave* he established the position of how with what we need to *believe*. and Then *there comes that point* when our *learning* needs to translate into our *living*. That's the proper order, unfortunately that pattern, or that approach is all too often ignored in much of the church world today, which creates a problem. Because when you get the order mixed up, or if in reality all you hear about is what you need to do for God rather than what God has already done for you, it results in a legalistic guilt trip which couldn't be more foreign to the gospel message of Jesus Christ But you see, when the *concept* of doctrine precedes the *call* to duty, then I understand the work is *done*, that my righteousness is of Christ, it gives me proper perspective, there's nothing I can do to get closer *to* the Lord, or receive a blessing *from* the Lord, all I can do is rest and rejoice in the finished work *of* the Lord.

That invokes a response in me, when I get even a small grip, or a slight glimpse (and I use those terms because I'm not sure we'll ever understand the depths of what Christ has done for us) into what God has done for me, how Jesus has laid down His life on behalf *of* me, has become sin for me that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him, I realize that the least I can do is say, “Lord here's my life it belongs to You, use me as You see fit.” But it's important that you understand what just took place there. In that position I'm not serving the Lord to try and get closer *to* Him, or some sort of righteous standing, or favoritism *from* Him, but simply out of the overflow of my love *for* Him. and That's the place where Paul is taking us now, the 1st 11 Ch's dealing with doctrine, Ch 12 makes the transition into duty. I mentioned 2 major sections in the book of Romans Ch's 1-11 deal with and discuss doctrine, Ch's 12-16 deal with duty. Those who see 3 sections in this book will say, “Ch's 1-8 are doctrinal, Ch's 9-11 are dispensational (dealing with God's plan concerning Israel) Ch's 12-16, duty” either way you choose to understand that you're in good company.

But illumination before application, revelation before exhortation, it's just a healthy approach to our walk and relationship with the Lord, keeps us serving Him out of love rather than legalism. Because one thing is for sure, we're to be doers of the Word, but *why* we do what we do is critical. If we serve out of a sense of legal obligation we've missed it, if we serve out of the overflow of love due to understanding and illumination, that's right on. That's what God desires of us, a love relationship, a willful surrender of our lives to Him that He might use us for His glory.

So far the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul has given us illumination concerning doctrines such as *condemnation, salvation/justification, sanctification, and glorification*, Ch's 9-11 dealing with *dispensation*, now comes the *exhortation*, the practical *application*. The idea being, "This is what you've *learned*; now this is how it's to translate in your day to day *life*." Another reason illumination needs to precede exhortation is because not only in doctrine do we learn of all that God has done for us, making our "duty" a small thing at best, but it's also in doctrine that we're given the understanding that God has given us the necessary resources in His grace to make practical application *of* the exhortation.

If we're unaware of the resources God has availed to us in Christ, what's the result? A seeking to do the work of the Spirit in the efforts of the flesh, we're right back into legalism. So Paul has spent a considerable chunk of this letter regarding doctrine, teaching us these various principles, now he begins to make it practical. Exhorting us how our lives are to be led in the light of what we now know, how we're to interact with one another and the world around us as believers.

But the 1st order of business that Paul approaches (and that we're spending our time on today) is making sure our priorities are proper in relating rightly to God 1st. Because even though positionally we're right with God in Christ, if on a practical level we don't have the proper priorities it's going to impact and effect virtually every other area of my life. In other words, if on a practical level I don't have a right relationship with God, I won't have a right relationship with you, but a right relationship with God will translate into a right relationship with you as well. So though Paul is going to spend the remainder of this epistle exhorting us unto right relationships with our bro's and sister's and even how we're to relate to the world around us, before he does that He exhorts us to get right with God 1st.

Vs1-2

So Ch's 1-11, "This is what you've *received*," now as we get into Ch 12, "This is how you're to *respond*." and Quite frankly the way we're to respond is to serve God with the totality of our being, all that we are. We're to *serve* Him, offering up ourselves *to* Him as an act of worship wholly and continually as a living sacrifice.

Paul says, "I beseech you," the word "beseech" speaking of an urgent request, it could be used in the sense of begging, or exhorting and instructing, and it's probably a bit of all of the above in the present context. It's an instruction, an exhortation, yet at the same time there's compassion behind it, he's telling us, "This is the right thing to do, and you need to do it, but not just because I'm telling you to do it, but because you yourself *realize* you need to do it." He's an apostle, full authority to command it of us, but rather in love he appeals *to* us. Much like when he wrote to Philemon and said, "...*though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you...*" Philem 8-9 and that's much the same flavor as what we have happening here.

Though he could be very bold in Christ to *command* us what is fitting, yet for love's sake he rather appeals to us. and That's exactly what this is, it's an appeal to our will, he's calling on me to make a choice about the way that I'm going to lead my life for Christ. and God is continually confronting us in this manner; you've got to decide how it is that you're going to lead your life before God. and Paul is here instructing us on the more excellent way, how it is that we're to rightly respond in the light of all that God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ

He says, "I beseech you *therefore* brethren," and before we get into the "therefore" I suppose we should take a moment to establish that this exhortation goes out specifically to the brethren, which is a generic term for the believer in Jesus Christ. If you don't know the Lord, or claim to lead your life *for* the Lord, this exhortation is not for you, because before you can worry about leading your life *for* the Lord, your life needs to 1st belong *to* the Lord. and Of course in that thought is the appeal to *surrender* your life to the Lord, if you don't know Jesus, have never given your heart to Jesus, God's offer of everlasting life, forgiveness of sin, being made brand new goes out to you *in Christ*. Believe on the Lord, give your heart to the Lord and you'll be saved, spared from the penalty of your own sin in that Jesus already took care of it *for* you, and will be glad to impute His righteousness *to* you by faith in Him. But the rest of us here, if you claim to be a Christian, consider yourself a member of the body of Christ, this exhortation is for you.

Paul says, "I beseech you therefore," what's this word, "therefore" in reference to? Well he tells us, but to say it specifically this is a reference to everything we've learned throughout the entire 11 Ch's so far. (and Remember I've shared with you before how that the word "therefore" is so often key being where a principle is made practical). and So what Paul is saying here is, "In light of every principle that we've taken in and understand so far, this is how it's to translate in the practical, here and now. Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God," Then he goes on to amplify that in Vs 2. But this is what he's referencing here in Vs 1 when he uses this phrase, "By the mercies of God." Rather than rehashing all 11 Ch's, he summarizes it all in this phrase, "By the mercies of God." In light of all the mercy that God has shown us, and poured out unrelentingly upon us in Christ, this is how you're to rightly respond.

Let's review for just a minute what some of those mercies are that God has shown us. and We could venture outside of the book of Romans for more no doubt, but just keeping with what Paul has shown us so far in this letter alone we've come to realize right off the bat in Ch 1 that in Christ we're the beloved of God and recipients of His grace (which pretty much covers it all). But if you were to begin to dissect that and break it down just a bit we've learned how the mercies of God are reflected in the *power* of God to salvation for everyone who believes, we've learned of the mercies of God reflected in the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, how His mercies in Christ bring forgiveness and atonement *for* our sins, and also freedom *from* our sins.

We've received reconciliation, justification, we've been predestined by God's grace and mercy to be conformed into the image of His Son, not only have we been justified, but we've been promised we'll be glorified, the resurrection of our bodies, that we'll live forever with Him in awe *of* Him. We've received the mercies of divine sonship, and of the Holy Spirit who personally dwells in us, intercedes on behalf *of* us, and through Whom the love of God has been poured out in our hearts. In Christ we've received the mercies of faith, of peace, of hope, we share by His mercies in His righteousness, in His honor, we were dead in sin, but have been made alive in Christ, sanctified, made holy *by* Christ, a guarantee to never be separated from the love *of* Christ.

What Paul is saying here is that any *one* of those things is alone enough to stagger us, that God in His mercy would be so good to us, but God just keeps pouring it out, and pouring it out, in the book of Eph Paul said that God, "...*has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*" Eph 1:3 There is no good thing *for* you that God has or will withhold *from* you in Christ. These are the mercies that He's speaking of, in light of all of these things, "Guys, brothers, sisters, I urge you respond rightly, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God."

The word, "Present" there speaks of a once for all offering up or yielding to, in other words give yourself to God completely, in totality, and with finality, not just inwardly, but outwardly, your body, it belongs to the Lord. and It's so important that we get a grip on what it means to give our bodies to the Lord because I've found, (and I believe you have to) that the body makes a wonderful servant, but it makes a horrible master. If my spirit rules my body, things go well; I become a wonderful tool, a finely calibrated instrument in the hand of God. But should my body rule my spirit, my world gets made a mess in a quick, if I serve the appetites of my body I wind up in huge trouble, but if my body serves and is subject to the desire of my spirit (my spirit seeking to please the Lord) than things go well, one way helps, the other hinders, one way builds up, the other tears down. and Our body is really the vehicle through which our inner man expresses himself, so Paul is saying here that yes it's a matter of the heart, but where you're at inwardly, will express itself outwardly through the body.

So who you are inwardly, and the way you lead your life outwardly are not 2 different worlds as some may believe, they're very much connected. That's why we're to give God the whole of our lives, not only the inner man, the outer man as well. We're to glorify God with our bodies, Paul told the Corinthians "...*do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*" 1 Cor 6:19-20 To the Philippians he said, "...*according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*" Phil 1:20

In 2nd Cor he wrote that we're, "...*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*" 2 Cor 4:10 and Again, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*" 2 Cor 5:10 Over and over and over again the bible makes reference to our body, what we do *in* them, the way we represent God *through* them, and that we'll be held accountable for the activities we partake in *by means* of them.

We're to present our bodies to the Lord h-o-l-y, and w-h-o-l-l-y, with out blemish, above reproach, the reference here is to the burnt offering, the dedication/consecration offering of the OT. There were numerous types of offerings made under the law, some were in part, part given to God, part given to the priest, and part to be partaken of yourself, a peace offering, whereby you were partaking together with God, He received part, you received part. Not so with the burnt offering, it was given entirely to the Lord, every ounce of it belonged to Him, Paul says this is how you're to present yourself, every ounce of who you are inwardly and outwardly is to be dedicated, consecrated to God as a living sacrifice. It's your reasonable service.

That word "Service" is with in the context of the Levitical sacrificial rituals, the rituals they partook in, in the sacrificing of that burnt offering was a form of worship. What Paul is saying here to make it simple is that your giving of yourself to God entirely, holy, and with out fault, inwardly and outwardly in your body is your reasonable worship service to God. Your worship of God isn't limited to an hour and a half on Sunday morning and an hour Wednesday evening, those times are certainly included in it, but not limited to it. Your worship of God consists of the giving of your whole life to Him day in and day out, leading your life in a manner that's pleasing to Him, being holy and with out blemish, dedicated and consecrated to Him perpetually, continually. We're seeing here that after all that God has done for us, the mercies He's poured out *on* us and provided *for* us in Christ, the only logical, rational, and reasonable response is to give ourselves completely and entirely to Him every waking moment, of every day. We're not our own, we've been bought at a price and we're to glorify God in our body.

Notice it's a sacrifice, your worship of God will cost you something, we jest at times about how it was a great transition for us to make the move when we came to this new facility of not allowing food and drink (outside of water) in the sanctuary. But listen if all it cost you to worship God was to "sacrifice" coffee and doughnuts in the sanctuary, count your blessings. At some point and in some way, worship demands sacrifice, remember David said that he refused to sacrifice to God, to worship God by that which cost him nothing. If it costs nothing, it means nothing, what's your worship to cost you, your life, the whole thing. and There are those whom God calls upon to make the ultimate sacrifice of dying for Him, martyrdom. But here's the deal, if you're not willing to *live* for Him, you can rest assured you're not willing to *die* for Him. How many people think they'd be willing to die for God if push came to shove, yet these same people are so often unwilling to simply live for Him when there is no push, there is no shove. You see the way Jesus asks us to lay down our lives *for* Him, is to die *to* self.

To crucify the flesh, and in dying to self, we *live* for Him, remember He said, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* Matt 16:24-25 But as we well know the problem with “living” sacrifices is that when the fire gets hot, we want to crawl off the altar, but don’t fear the cleansing, consuming fire of God, let Him consume you, take all of you, melt away the dross, burn away the chaff, and purify your life. Worship of God is sacrificial, but again remember the difference between Christianity and every other “religion” in the world is that others sacrifice reaching out for mercy, the believer sacrifices in response to receiving mercy.

Vs2

What does a living sacrifice look like? What does our reasonable worship of God consist of on a practical level? Not being conformed to this world, but being *transformed*, realizing that God’s will for my life is what is good, and acceptable and completing for me, satisfying *to* me.

When he speaks of being “conformed” to this world, the word there speaks of being “pressed into a mold” the world wants to pressure you to be *like* it, conform *to* it, squeeze you into it’s mold of what’s cool, relevant, important, standards of right/wrong and all the rest. Paul says, “Resist that” don’t allow yourself to be squeezed into that, resist being *conformed* but rather receive being *transformed*, by the renewing of your mind. (Seems like every word in these Vs is just pregnant with meaning) This word, “Transformed” is a word that describes a metamorphosis, from the caterpillar to the butterfly, it’s the same word that was used to describe Jesus’ transfiguration when the reality of the glory in Him was allowed for a brief time to shine forth *from* Him. That’s what Paul is saying here, let the glory that God has placed *in* you by the power of His Holy Spirit begin to radiate and shine forth *from* you, be transformed. You see you only have 1 of 2 choices, to be *conformed*, or to be *transformed*, you’re either a thermometer changing with the climate of the pop culture, or you’re a thermostat, allowing the Holy Spirit to set the standards of godliness in your life that stick to regardless of what’s happening around you.

How does that happen? How are we transformed? By the renewing of your mind, the battleground between conforming and transforming takes place in my mind. We’re not to think as the world thinks, we have a whole different set of standards, and priorities. and Where are our priorities found? In the Word of God, you see I can give my body *to* Him, and that’s a huge key, but still yet my transformation will be incomplete unless I keep my mind *on* Him. and Let me just tell you plainly that we keep our mind on Him, by keeping in His Word, the bible tells us of Jesus, *“Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-”* Heb 10:7

You see we're to be people of the Word, not just for the sake of knowing it *academically*, the letter kills, but so that we might touch Jesus *personally*, grow to know Him *intimately*. If you give your body to Him, keep your mind *on* Him, spend time in His word with the desire to *know Him*, your life will begin to shine with the reality *of* Him being seen in and through you. If you spend time gazing *at* Him, simply being in His presence *with* Him, you can't help but be changed *by* Him. We read in 2 Cor 3:18 where it says, "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"

To bring this full circle, a transformation on the inside will evidence/demonstrate itself on the outside. "That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The word, "prove" speaking of discerning, discovering genuine, the idea being that if we're not right with God, allowing ourselves to be transformed by the Word of God, we're not going to be able to properly assess the will, or way of God for our lives.

But when your mind is transformed, your thinking ability, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding are going to properly assess, not that you'll never make a mistake, but you'll walk in sensitivity to the Spirit of God, not willfully step into situations that aren't the will of God, or the way of God for your life.

You see the mind that's not thinking right, not being transformed, not spending time in God's Word, will more than likely *resist* God's will, not really being able to discern it as what's best for them, because the flesh rebels against the Spirit. But what Paul is saying here is that when we're thinking straight, spending time with the Lord, being changed, made more *like* the Lord, we'll begin discern that in reality God's will is what is good for me, it's what's acceptable to Him, and is perfect and complete in every way. and Not only will we discern it, we'll actually *desire* it, want to live by it, and walk in it, it's our reasonable service as unto the Lord.

It's a road map to walk in the will of God, so many people are curious about discovering God's will, and they make a mystical, super spiritual event out of it. Paul says it's simple, remember the overwhelmingly rich mercies of God towards your life, make a willful choice to *surrender* your life entirely, inwardly and outwardly, to the Lord as a living sacrifice, resist being shoved and squeezed into the mold of this world, spend time in the Word of God, that you might come to know God more intimately, and you'll discover yourself walking in the will of God for your life personally. God will just be moving in and working through your life, you'll be busy about your Father's business, your reasonable worship.

Prayer Points: Lord being reminded of all that You've done for us, how good You are *to* us, we want to respond rightly, we desire to dedicate and consecrate our lives to You completely. So help us to lead lives set apart to you not only inwardly, but in an obvious way outwardly, that we be not conformed to this world, but that we be transformed by the renewing of our minds, spending time with You, being changed *by* you, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices *to* You. Holy, acceptable, not on the basis of what we do, but on the basis of what You've done for us, may we do the reasonable thing, worship You with all that we are, the totality of our being.

If God's calling out to you today, desiring to make you new, allow Him to transform you as well, if any man be in Christ he's a new creation, old things pass away, behold all things are made new, brand new. The mercies of God are waiting for you in Jesus Christ Who is the way the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him. Do the right thing, the reasonable thing, "Come let us reason together says the Lord, though you sin are like scarlet They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool." It's a reasonable offer, your sin for His righteousness, your wretchedness, for His righteousness, the offer is there, respond today.