



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. 2 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 just completed another election cycle. You won't be seeing anymore political ads with the opponent painted as a devil skewering children with a pitchfork. But in light of Wisconsin politics, do you happen to know the total of our state budget? I didn't know either and even though it's a lot of money, it was less than I thought it would be. The total is \$68 billion. That's a ton of money. Actually, if you used twenty dollar bills, that would equal over 37 tons of twenties. Puts it into perspective, doesn't it? But the Wisconsin state GDP is almost 4 times that amount at about \$240 billion. But then that staggering amount is dwarfed by GDP of the U.S. which is \$14 trillion dollars.

What's this got to do with Romans 12? If you recall from two weeks ago, verses 1-2 and arguably the rest of Romans is powered by the phrase "the mercies of God." Paul wants us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices "by the mercies of God," or "because of the mercies of God." In view of what Christ has done for us by rescuing us from eternal punishment and bringing us into a perfect relationship with himself, we should offer ourselves to him as a living sacrifice.

So here's what I want you to do. What if you had \$14 trillion to spend every year--could you do it? I would argue that it would be literally impossible for one person to spend that much money. That's the right way to think about the mercy of God. To live your life in view of God's mercy is like have 14 trillion dollars worth of mercy. The amount of mercy that you have is actually infinite but it may be easier to think of it in terms of huge sums of mercy rather than infinite sums. I don't know about you, but I have a hard time wrapping my mind infinity.

So to paraphrase Paul, we would say, "I beg you to spend your 14 trillion dollars worth of God's mercy by presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." You can spend all you want every single day and never run out? isn't that an awesome picture of God's mercy? I want to move beyond the foundation of God's mercy but I wanted to establish it again since it had been two weeks since we looked at it last.

Now that we have established the first half of verse one, *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God*, we need to see how it relates to the second half of the verse- *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*. if you were a first century Jewish believer reading this letter from Paul, there is no question that you would immediately think of the Jewish sacrificial system. Obviously, we have the word sacrifice here, but there is also the words holy, acceptable and worship, which are all intimately tied together in old covenant ideas.

In this example from Exodus, Aaron's high priestly clothes, which he used exclusively for worship, are described.

36 "You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the LORD.' 37 And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban. 38 It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD (Exodus 28:36-38).

And understand that these words all hang together. A sacrifice is acceptable because it is holy. It's holiness--the fact that it is purified and without sin--makes it acceptable to God. The word acceptable carries the meaning of "well-pleasing." The NIV translates this word as pleasing and the NASB has a footnote indicating it can also mean "well-pleasing." This word is used 17 times in the book of Leviticus and almost all of its uses look something like this verse. *And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD (Lev. 2:9).*

Here is how it all holds together. Sacrifices are a form of worship and are offered by the priest, who has already been made holy. If they are performed in the right way, they will be pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. This is a summary of all old covenant practice. You've read this stuff. You've been to the Tabernacle to capture a vision of what it was like. So all of these words In Romans 12:1-2 are old covenant words for the sacrificial system. So as soon as you read these words, you are supposed to think of the entire idea of the sacrificial system--priests, the sacrifices, being made holy, pleasing to the Lord, blood, death, etc.

So if this is purely old covenant language, how does it apply to us? Most people focus on the phrase "living sacrifice." We understand that the actual blood of bulls and goats is no longer required so Paul must be putting a Christian spin on the old covenant language. It's like he is using an illustration from the old covenant and giving it a new covenant flavor. That much is true but it is so much more than just that.

Why was the old covenant sacrificial system put into place? To atone for the sins of the people, right? So, if done correctly, what did the priests and people receive as a result of their sacrifices? They received mercy. So if sacrifices were done properly, mercy was the result. But do you see how Paul has turned this idea completely upside down? Remember our first phrase--in view of God's mercy. What comes first--mercy or sacrifice? Mercy comes first and the sacrifices flow out of the mercy we have received. So under the old covenant, acceptable worship would result in mercy but under the new covenant, acceptable worship results in sacrifices.

The obvious driving force in this upside down world of sacrifices is the death and resurrection of Christ. We do not work to receive mercy but rather we work because we have received mercy. This is the foundation of the Christian life to which we must turn again and again. But here is another piece that lies behind living sacrifices, and that is the fact that you and I are priests.

*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a **spiritual** house, to be a **holy** priesthood, to offer spiritual **sacrifices acceptable** to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).*

This what we call the doctrine of the "priesthood of believers." We don't need a priest to mediate for us because as our High Priest, Jesus has already done that. But in doing so, God has taken all of these old covenant ideas and roles and placed them into our daily lives. Every believer has the same level of access to God. It is described better nowhere than in Hebrews 4.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

A priest under the old covenant never could have dreamed of this level of unlimited access to the throne of God. The throne of God was contained within the Holy of Holies and approaching it in this manner would have consumed you. But now we are priests who make sacrifices of what? Of ourselves. Living sacrifices. But what in the world does that look like? I think we first have to bring verse two into the equation. I think verse two is the explanation about what it means to offer your body as a living sacrifice. Verse two tells us how to live out verse one.

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.

Most of you have played with silly putty, am I right? What do you get when you have the Sunday comics and an some silly putty? You can flatten the silly putty on the newspaper and the image will transfer to the silly putty. I rarely had an egg of silly putty as a kid, but when I did, I always did the newspaper trick. Did you also realize that silly putty was a non-Newtonian fluid? fancy stuff, eh? But the magic of silly putty is that whatever you push it against or into, it takes on that shape. The silly putty conforms to the shape of any object.

Left to our own devices, this is exactly what you and I do. We are human silly putty that conforms to what is around us. Specifically, Paul warned, *Do not be conformed to this world.* The most common Greek word for world is kosmos. You know, Like Carl Sagan's anti-God BBC series, The Cosmos. The world, the universe. But the word here is aion, from where we get

the English word eon. It just means ages. So what Paul was saying is do not be conformed to this age, or the spirit of this age. The spirit of the age is what kind of spirit? It's an anti-Christ spirit. In this sense, the world represents the very opposite of Christ and his will for us. So we could say, Do not be silly putty to the anti-Christ spirit of this world. Do not conform to all that the world is because all that the world is, is not what God is. But that's what we do--we conform. We mold ourselves to the world around us.

Here is where the Amish communities have one up on us. Their entire existence is committed to not being conformed to the world. The most conservative Amish disdain even a hint of worldliness. We haven't chosen that path for our lives because we obviously don't think that God requires it. But then what does conformity to the world look like? How do you know it when you see it and how do you recognize that you have conformed to it, that your life is molded to the wrong thing?

Identifying exactly what this looks like is a sticky wicket, it's a conundrum, it's a literal mine field of legalistic tendencies and licentious temptations. This is why legalism is so easy and common among Christians. If I give you a list of rules, then we can divide the world into two clean columns. In one column we have worldliness and in the other column is godliness. So what goes in each column? We could work our way through Scripture and put all kinds of things in the worldliness column, but are there worldly things that aren't precisely addressed in Scripture? I think we know that there are, but making a precise list is not only really hard, it's really dangerous. On the other hand, it can be quite easy to make a list of do's and don'ts.

We've all seen these lists and many of you have lived under these lists. It's easy and safe to live under these rules. The lines are clearly marked and there are no gray areas in this black and white world. Last week we talked about Machen's doctrinal fences. What we are talking about here are moral fences. The problem is that these fences have been built so high and so narrow and always end up being much more restrictive than Scripture. Some people who use these restrictive lists mean well, but their application results legalistic and loveless living.

This past week I came across an unfortunate illustration of this. many of you have appreciate the ministry of VCY. I don't mean to imply that their whole ministry is bad. They've done a lot of good over the years. But sadly, Vic has been purposefully estranged from his family for several years. He recently fired one of his son-in-laws and no he is threatening to sue his two daughters. So here's the relevance to legalism. On the one hand, Vic would say that drums and Christian rock music is sinful--something that the Bible does not expressly condemn. But on the other hand, he is flat out refusing to reconcile with his family and is not bringing a lawsuit against them, which is expressly forbidden in Scripture. That is legalism at its worse.

How do some people react to these enormous moral fences? Instead of thinking carefully about the fences, they take the opposite and equally easy way out--they tear down the fences completely. You've seen Christians who live like this, haven't you? No doubt some you lived like this. It tends to be expressed in later high school and early college years. Young people stand back at look at the moral fences put up by their parents and think, "I don't have to live like that? After all, what's wrong with "fill in the blank"? In over reacting to legalism they fall into

libertinism. Libertinism is an abuse of Christian freedom. It is taking our Christian liberty to an extreme.

So if we are not to conform to the world, how do we determine the exact standard by which to live? If both legalism and libertinism are not acceptable options, what standard do we use? Thankfully, Paul told us. The opposite of being conformed to the world is not being conformed to some other standard. The opposite of being conformed to the world is being transformed by the renewal of your mind. *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.* Here's the bottom line. The process of transformation will result in us knowing the will of God.

You have no doubt heard that the word for transformation is the same as our word metamorphosis. Now that's a good word and we certainly understand it in terms of a butterfly. And I wish the Christian life were as simple as crawling in a cocoon for two weeks and coming out forever completely different than when I went in. Now there is a true metamorphosis that takes place at the moment of conversion. I am perfectly happy using that word to describe what happens to us then. A heart of stone is removed and it is replaced with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). We pass over from death to life (John 5:24). We are no longer under the wrath of God (John 3:36) and instead become God's friend (James 2:23) and a child of God (Gal. 3:26). That and much more that God does to us is clearly metamorphosis. We may not feel so different right away but the Bible declares that we are very different.

But this ongoing transformation is not as simple or as immediate as that. It's not a once and done type event. In fact, it is quite clear that it is an ongoing process until our last breath in this life. This word is also used in Matthew 17:2 and I think this gives us a different viewpoint of transformation. *And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.* Every translation I could find uses the word "transfigured" here and not transformed. I think that's probably good because Jesus did not become something different on that mountain. He didn't change or become better in some way because it's impossible for God to do those things. What happened in Jesus' metamorphosis was that his true nature was revealed. His full glory was exposed.

In a sense, this is what happens to us in our transformation. Positionally, we are holy. In Christ, we have perfect righteousness. So the process of transformation is becoming what we already are. Transformation is the process of living out our inner nature. We are holy in Christ and we are actually being transformed into increasing holiness. So in this sense, our transformation is like a slow transfiguration.

But it is not a two week cocoon kind of experience. The key to transformation is the renewal of your mind. So in order to present your bodies as a living sacrifice you need to renew your mind. So in other words, your body follows your mind. And that makes total sense, doesn't it? I'm not going to have my body follow after God's ways unless my mind has already decided to follow after God's ways.

The important part of renewing your mind is the word renewal. The word means "to make fresh again." Last year I discovered the little trick to put your dish sponges and dishrags in the microwave to kill the bacteria. Dishrags contain about 10,000 bacteria per square inch. then when you wipe of your counters with that rag, the crumbs may be gone but you have just spread bacteria all over your countertop. If you put a wet dishrag in the microwave for two minutes it kills all of the bacteria. What you are doing is renewing the sponge. You are making it fresh and clean again.

Our minds are like that. They are in need of continual renewal. It's not as easy as microwaving a dishrag but it is a daily necessity. So what are the steps to this daily renewal? Here's as simple as I can make it.

1. Continually expose yourself to the Word of God.

There are no shortcuts. If you are struggling in your life and you're not daily exposing yourself to God's truth--reading, meditating, perhaps memorizing and in all ways simmering in its truth, then there's not much someone can do for you. It's as simple as that. If you want to grow and change but you refuse to do the hard work of a daily Bible bath--not a quick shower but a Bible soaking--then you will be eternally stuck. Pastors, counselors and friends can give you good advice and listen to your problems, but you absolutely cannot replace a daily simmering in God's truth.

2. Fail miserably at doing the will of God.

I could have said, step one--know the will of God and step two do the will of God. That's all well and good, but life doesn't work like that. Until you come face to face with the impossible commands laid down in Scripture, if you do not recognize your complete inability to do what God has commanded you to do, you will never understand the necessity of the power of the Holy Spirit. Did you catch that? God commands you to do what is impossible to do. Now please understand that I am not saying you should go out there and willfully disobey the will of God. That would be utterly sinful and just crazy. But we do fail miserably at doing the will of God, more than we'd like to imagine. God wants us to hit this brick wall so we will cry out to him in desperation.

Why do you pray? I can tell you why I don't pray enough. Because I am not desperate enough. At our leadership training a week ago, I was sharing with the guys the struggle with my prayer life. Jim Boisen looked at me and said four words to me. "Are you a fixer?" It didn't take me long to say "Yes." When faced with an issue, problem or dilemma, my first reaction is to fix the problem. I don't feel desperate enough. The only reason to pray is to get hooked into the one who can do what you can't possibly do.

It's that simple. It's kind of like the instructions on a shampoo bottle. Wash. Rinse. Repeat. (Blonde joke) Simmer in the Word of God. In prayerful desperation, do the word of God. This continual process will renew your mind. The second half of verse two says that you will strengthen your discernment muscles: *that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* You see, when you start this process, you don't know the will of God. But through the renewal of your mind--a type of "testing"--you will discern the will of God.

Discernment is very close to the Biblical idea of wisdom. Wisdom is knowing how the will of God applies to every area of life. Of course we want good preaching and teaching that shows us how to apply God's word to our lives. Some Christians sit in church and are not tuned into the sermon until the preacher says, "Now here are some applications of this Bible passage." They just want someone else to tell them what they should do but they don't want to go through the hard work of figuring this out for themselves.

This past Thursday morning I taught inductive Bible study principles during the chapel time at Cornerstone Christian Academy. I began by talking about fossils .I asked how many had seen dinosaur fossils. Everyone had seen dinosaur fossils and everyone had seen them in a museum. Not too surprising. So I asked them, would you rather see dinosaur fossils in a museum or half sticking out of the ground in an actual dinosaur dig out in Montana? Of course they all said it would be much cooler to see where it was actually dug up. Then I asked them, would you rather go on a tour of a dinosaur fossil dig or would you rather discover your own dinosaur fossils as you carefully chip away at the soil and rock? Again, everyone said it would be much better to actually find your own dinosaur fossils.

This is all I am saying to you. Wouldn't you rather discover your own truths in the endless depths of God's word? Would you rather have someone else point out the truths to you or would you rather discover them on your own? If you'd rather sit back and have someone spoon feed the Bible to you, then please, just forget about transformation. It's not going to happen. There won't be any renewal of your mind. Your discernment and wisdom muscles will be about as strong as a toddler's.

But if you want the thrill of discovering these truths on your own, then and only then can you experience transformation by the renewal of your mind. And this will change you. It will change your worldview. You will begin to think very differently about everything. You see the world very differently than you did before. It will change the way you spend your time and the way you spend your money. It should even change your personality. You will become someone else altogether. That's transformation.

But Hebrews 5 tells us that takes practice. *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil* (Hebrews 5:14). It takes time to develop your wisdom and discernment muscles.

Let me leave you with a final quote. "When you are transformed in Christ you love to do what you ought to do. That's freedom."¹ If your mind is renewed, you will know more fully what God commands and you will *want* to do what God commands. It will literally effect every decision throughout your daily lives.

Rich Maurer
November 9, 2014

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/the-renewed-mind-and-how-to-have-it>