

ROMANS 12

Having the Best Is A Simple Choice

One day two American businessmen were visiting in Korea. They were surprised and amused at a sight they saw in a field. They noticed that a young man was hitched to a plow and was pulling it to plow the field. He was being guided by an older man. Later these businessmen were talking to a missionary about what they had seen. The missionary told them that these two men were father and son and both of them were Christians. They had sold their only ox and contributed the money to their church for a new building.

One of the businessmen responded in an awed voice, “*What an incredible sacrifice!*”

The missionary replied, “*They didn’t feel that way about it. They counted it a great joy that they had an ox to give to the Lord’s work.*”

What’s your reaction when you read in the Bible, or hear a preacher calling for “*sacrifice*”? Does it strike you as being deprived of something, or of enduring misery, or of being called upon to do that very thing that you least want to do? Or do you consider it an opportunity to serve God and give Him something special? Paul begins chapter 12 of Romans with a call to Christians. Let’s read it from two translations in order to get the full flavor of what he is writing.

I’ll first read the verses from the NRSV and then from the more contemporary NLT:

*1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, **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 renewing of your minds**, so that you may discern what is the **will of God**—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

NLT:

1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept.

When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

2 Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

Here Paul is referring to **consecrated bodies** and **renewed minds**. The Korean father and

son illustrate this. Whereas the businessmen called what they'd done a sacrifice and gave it a negative connotation, the two farmers considered their gift a joy and a privilege. Their minds had been transformed. To consecrate something is to dedicate it to a sacred purpose. Paul is telling us here that as saved believers in Jesus Christ, **we are to dedicate our bodies to His service.** You will note that right away Paul refers to GOD'S MERCIES. For the first eleven chapters of the book of Romans, Paul has been unwrapping the mercies of God for us. And what have we learned about God's mercy?

That the Gospel message is God's mercy to undeserving sinners, in giving His Son to die for them, in saving them by faith, in sending them His life-giving Spirit, and in making them His children.

You'll remember, we hope, that the key word in Romans chapters 9-11 was "**MERCY.**"

Salvation does not depend on the desire or effort of human beings, but on God's mercy (Romans 9:16), and God's purpose is "*to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy* (Romans 9:23)." The objects of His mercy are those that accept and trust in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sins.

It is in view of the mercy of God that Paul issues His appeal to the moral principles and values of those who claim to be followers of Christ. Paul knows and believes that there is no greater motivation to living a holy life than the mercies of God. God's grace is the foundation of righteous behavior. IN MAKING HIS APPEAL, PAUL REFERS TO BOTH OUR BODIES AND OUR MINDS. When we go to the original Greek translation we find that what Paul in effect is saying here is that offering ourselves, mind and body, to God is the only sensible and logical response in view of God's mercy. Therefore, if a person considers themselves to be a logical being, they would simply have no choice but to praise God.

When you think of "*sacrifice*" what comes to mind? Something easy? Something free? No, a sacrifice is costly. It suggests giving up something valuable and precious. Why would a person do that? It's an offering to Someone more worthy than ourselves. It's a gift of love, and yes, it may cost us. But the results of the sacrifice are well worth any cost involved. A sacrifice is purposeful and requires effort. It requires our decision. It is our choice. That is why Paul is pleading with us to present our bodies and our minds to God as living sacrifices.

It's frightening the way the body can dominate the redeemed soul. For those of us who are saved people with saved souls and who possess within us the Holy Spirit of God, **isn't it remarkable how much power there still is in the body to retard the work of the Holy Spirit of God.** The body is the center of desire, the body is the center of disease, the body is the center of depression, the body is the center of doubts. And IT MUST BE BROUGHT IN SUBJECTION TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says:

27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Paul says that in order to represent Christ as He should be represented, he has to control his own body, the human part of him that wants to surge with human desires and take control.

It's important to know that vice and immorality are so wide spread that people become tolerant of those kinds of sins. It is amazing how many Christians will go and watch a movie that is filled with adultery. They will also sit and watch a program on television that is filled with adultery, or listen to music that is sung about fornication. Isn't this being caught up in the world's system? We've come to tolerate such things and such toleration is an abandonment of our responsibility to God in light of what He sent His Son to do for us. We need to be reminded of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 13:

12 You may say, "I am allowed to do anything." But I reply, "Not everything is good for you." And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

13 You say, "Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them. But our bodies were not made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.

"*I must not become a slave to anything*" in verse 12 needs some further consideration. How contrary this idea is to our culture today which is filled with addictive behaviors. We are addicted to computers, to video games, to food, to alcohol, to tobacco, to drugs, to chocolate, to pornography, to gambling—to almost anything. We are controlled and compelled by things and substances. Truly that is slavery. If we are enslaved to anything, then our bodies are not living sacrifices to God.

The Lord can't work through you if He can't work through your body. If you're going to speak you have to speak through your mouth. If you're going to hear you have to hear through your ears. If you have to see you have to see through your eyes. If you have to go somewhere you have to go with your feet. If you're going to help someone you have to help with your hands. If you're going to think you have to think with your mind. Therefore, there is no salvation that does not include the body. That is God's desire.

When Paul refers to a "*living sacrifice*" he is referring to a commitment to God that never dies. It's always offered to God, always. God wants your physical body and all your humanness. He wants it brought into subjection and offered to Him. We have become so comfortable in this society. We hold things so irresponsibly in our hands. We're willing to serve God if it doesn't cost us too much time and if we don't miss our favorite television program. We can't think that we can offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, if we want to hold onto what the world offers us in its multiple forms of indecent entertainment. What God wants is a complete self sacrifice. Many people claim they want

to be the Lord's servant and go into ministry, and they're no where near a total unblemished self-sacrificing offering to God. It must be difficult for God to get His work done through half-hearted people. It is with goodness, virtue, and generosity that God is satisfied.

Real worship is not elaborate prayers, it is not liturgy, it is not candles, ropes, stained glass, or spiritual goose bumps in a church service. Real worship is the intelligent giving to God of our bodies, totally set apart to God. That's what God wants. God isn't looking for your talent or for your gifts of leadership. God is looking for you to give of yourself. So the believer who would offer himself/herself as a "*living sacrifice*" begins with the offering of their soul and the offering of their body.

And this "*living sacrifice*" that Paul refers to is not something that is done in a church building, but in home life and work life and social life. No worship is pleasing to God that is only inward. **Our worship must express itself in real acts of service performed by our bodies.** Listen to what James wrote in James 2:14-26:

14 Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone.

15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing,

16 and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. FAITH THAT DOESN'T SHOW ITSELF BY GOOD DEEDS IS NO FAITH AT ALL—IT IS DEAD AND USELESS.

*18 Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but **I will show you my faith through my good deeds.**"*

19 Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror!

20 Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

*22 You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. **His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions.***

23 And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God."

*24 So you see, **we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.***

25 Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

*26 Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also **faith is dead without good deeds.***

Paul made it clear back in Romans 3:13 that human depravity also reveals itself through our bodies, Romans 3:10-18:

*10 As the Scriptures say, “**No one is good— not even one.**
 11 **No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God.**
 13 “**Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their speech is filled with lies.**” “**The poison of a deadly snake drips from their lips.**”
 14 “**Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.**”
 15 “**They are quick to commit murder.**
 16 **Wherever they go, destruction and misery follow them.**
 17 **They do not know what true peace is.**”
 18 “**They have no fear of God to restrain them.**”*

On the other side of this, Christian holiness demonstrates itself by the things that they do with their bodies. So Christians are to offer the different parts of their bodies, not to sin, but to righteousness as we see in Romans 6:13, 16, 19:

*13 **Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.***
*16 **Don’t you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval.***
*19 **I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand. Before, you let yourselves be slaves of impurity and lawlessness. Now you must choose to be slaves of righteousness so that you will become holy.***

Don’t be put off by the term “*slaves of righteousness*” because in reality that is the ticket to joy, peace, and a true freedom in Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17).

When we do these things, our tongues will speak the truth and spread the Gospel message and bring healing. Our hands will lift up those who have fallen and perform many daily tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, sewing, health care, and building houses. We will put our arms around the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the needy, and our eyes will always look to the throne of God and remain focused there.

So the first of Paul’s appeals is to present our bodies to God. The second appeal relates to a transformation of what we’ve been to what God would have us be. In order for that to happen A PERSON MUST GIVE THEIR MIND TO GOD. Romans 12:2 says not to “***be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***”

One of the basic elements that allows a person to be able to offer their body is to be sure that their mind has been renewed. The mind must be presented for renewal.

God is telling them not to go along with what the rest of the world is doing outside the will of God, but rather to conform only to the will of God. That theme runs through all of the Bible. A man by the name of J.B. Phillips translated Romans 12:2 in this way: *“don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within.”* Isn’t that great? We all look for a mold to conform to in one way or another, don’t we? Kids in school want to be like their friends and be accepted as part of the group. Even if it means doing what they know to be wrong. Men find themselves wanting to be like famous athletes or movie stars and today many women want the same thing. Some want to be great scientists when they look at the great discoveries that are being made in various fields. Whatever it is, most of us want to be like what we admire and respect. In the long run this takes only two directions. One is to model oneself after the things of this world, and the other is to model oneself after the things of God. As for the change that takes place in the people of God (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18), it is a basic change in character and conduct, away from the standards of the world and into the image of Christ.

These two value systems, this world’s and the will of God are completely incompatible. They are on a collision course with one another. Whether we are contemplating the purpose of life or the meaning of life, about how to measure greatness or how to respond to evil, about ambition, sex, honesty, money, religion or anything else, the two sets of standards divide so completely that there is no possibility of our allowing both in our lives. Our mind becomes renewed by a combination of the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

First our mind is renewed by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, then we are able to understand and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.

It’s in the mind that one’s new nature and humanness meet. It’s in the mind that one makes choices as to whether they will express that new person in holiness or allow our flesh to act in worldly sinful behavior. If the body is to be holy, the mind must be renewed. So let’s break this down to a simple form that anyone could understand. Do not be taken in by the false, unsaved philosophy of life. Do not be misled by the floating mass of thoughts, opinions, speculations, hopes, impulses, or aspirations that are current in the world. Do not be misled by this whole collection of the world’s stuff, the spirit of the age, **of which Satan is the prince and ruler**. The world is an instrument of Satan to promote his goals and ambitions. You can see it everywhere. We live in an age of pride, boastfulness, and ugly egos, such as those we see in professional athletes and entertainers.

I can remember something that happened several years ago that absolutely nauseated me, and as I relate this to you, be assured that things have only gotten worse since then. There

was an article written by a columnist in the Chicago Tribune. He wrote that there was a radio station in San Antonio that decided to give away tickets for an evening with “*The Motley Crew*,” a heavy metal, hard rock group. They had a contest on the radio station, KISS fm, in San Antonio. The teenagers were to write: “*I will do the following for the privilege of spending an evening with The Motley Crew.*”

I can tell you that you would be shocked out of your socks by what these teenagers between the ages of thirteen and seventeen wrote. I’ll give you just one that was kind of mild compared to the others. A rhetorical masterpiece that makes me proud my tax dollars can help support the development of their young minds: This one teenager wrote: “*I would shave their bodies and where they bled I would suck the blood out of them.*” Believe me, you don’t really want to hear the rest. This is only a small sampling of the frightening spirit of this world. It comes through the music, it comes through the movies, it comes through the media, it comes at us from everywhere, and we are called by the Spirit of God through the apostle, Paul, here to not allow ourselves to become conformed to the purposes and ethics and standards and moralities of our time, which are Satanic according to John in 1 John 3:19-21:

*19 We know that we are children of God and that **the world around us is under the power and control of the evil one.***

20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God. And now we are in God because we are in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.

*21 Dear children, **keep away from anything that might take God’s place in your hearts.***

Stop allowing yourselves to be influenced by this evil world. Don’t masquerade wearing the costume of the world, which is not a true reflection of what’s in you. Don’t wear the mask of the world. And so many Christians do just that. They really get wrapped up in it. They want to wear the same kind of clothes that the world wears. They want to run right down to the store and buy every new thing that comes along. They want to be a part of all the systems that are created. They want to have the same entertainment and stay current with all the new things that come along. Then they wonder why God doesn’t bless them more. Kenneth Wuest said it well when he said: “*Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after the age, an expression which does not come from within, and is not representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God.*” Stop the masquerade. Change the outward appearance to match what you have become on the inside. When Matthew 17 spoke about Jesus being transfigured, that is exactly what happened to Jesus. Matthew 17:1,2:

1 Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain.

*2 As the men watched, Jesus’ appearance changed so that **his face shone like the sun, and his clothing became dazzling white.***

Jesus' outward appearance was made to conform to what He was on the inside. He was God in human flesh and for just a few moments His human flesh became like the person of God. You also are to be transformed on the outside to reflect what your redeemed self has become on the inside.

And whose job is it to do all this? It's the job of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18:

18 And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

How does the process work? It's a two-step process. First, you must yield to the Holy Spirit as Paul had indicated earlier in chapter 6:13, 16, and 19. People sometimes have the idea that there has to be something extraordinary about being filled with the Spirit, but that is not the case. You do not have to fall over backwards, or become overly emotional, or speak in other tongues in order to be filled with the Spirit. Sometimes people do become emotional, because of the extreme joy they experience, but God deals with us according to our personalities. The important factor is whether or not you are asking God to constantly guide you, to love others through you, to accomplish His will in your life. This is not a one-time occurrence. You receive Christ as Savior once and for all, but when it comes to living by the Spirit, that is something you do daily. It is important to begin each day, and sometimes to renew your request during the day, by asking the Spirit to fill you and to control you. That is step one.

Step two is to put the right things into your mind so that the Holy Spirit will transform you. If you put the wrong things in your mind, the Holy Spirit won't transform you. **The key ingredient for the renewing of the mind is the Word of God, the Bible.** Do you want to become all that God meant for you to be? You can't do it without knowing your Bible and those things within it that tell you what to put in your mind. If you want to study God's Word and put his thoughts in your mind, you will become more like him. If you want to fill your mind with reality TV, late night talk shows, trashy music, and other things of this world, then you will become like the fools who promote such things. Colossians 1:28,29:

*28 So everywhere we go, we tell everyone about Christ. We warn them and teach them with all the wisdom God has given us, for we want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ.
29 I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ's mighty power that works within me.*

A perfect life comes out of perfect knowledge. Colossians 3:8-16:

8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.

9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds.

*10 In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, **who created this new nature within you.***

11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

*12 Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, **you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.***

13 You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

*14 And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. **Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.***

15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16 Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.

The renewed mind is a mind that is filled and controlled by the Word of God. Do you spend as much time in the Word of God as you do in participating in the attractions of the world? When something happens in your life is your immediate, involuntary response biblical? That's a renewed mind, a renewed mind that resists conformity to the world.

Finally, we must present our will to God. When we've presented our body and our mind to God, we will approve what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. We will say, "*I approve of your will, God.*" We will give our will up and say, "*I desire your will, God. I don't want what I want. I want what you want.*"

A renewed mind will be expressed in a submissive will and in a body presented as a living sacrifice. It all comes in one package. You can't present your body to God unless you have a renewed mind. Without a renewed mind you won't have the will to do that. But when you have a renewed mind, your will will be submissive to God and you will offer your body as a living sacrifice.

The key to all this is a mind filled with the Word of God, an obedient will, and a body presented for service to God.

By the way, this isn't something you do just once in your life. You do it every day. Every

waking moment. Give God your mind renewed by the Word. Give Him your will, submitting to His will as the only thing you want. Stop exercising your will all the time. Stop grabbing for this and stop grabbing for that, saying I need it and I want it. You never need to fear the will of God, do you? Verse 2 tells us it is GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.

The renewed mind, the submissive will, and the consecrated body go along with the redeemed soul. What beautiful simplicity. God boils down everything we need for a good life into these two verses. Give Him your mind, your body, and your will, and you will hardly be able to handle the blessings that come back. Why not get started right now?