

Romans

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Romans 12:1-2



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Vs. 1

- As we begin Ch. 12. Paul here is starting the conclusion to the letter. He has spent most of the previous 11 chapters debating with an imaginary opponent who is offering very real objections to Paul's theology of Christ, the Church, and of the ultimate outcome of the Jews. In these first 11 chapters we have seen Paul's mind soar to some dizzying theological heights and there have been parts that are difficult to understand, but as a good pastor, Paul cannot end the letter without some very practical words directed to the Christian life.
- How does the Christian life work? How does one go about being a Christian that reflects what we see in Scripture? First, we are to "present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...". Statements like this is how Paul can say in his first letter to the Corinthians that the Gospel is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). One, the Jews would be horrified at the idea of sacrificing your own body. This is why they slaughtered animals in sacrifice for their sins. Human sacrifice was something terrible pagans did. Two, the Greeks wouldn't like this either, for to the Greeks the body was nothing of any value. It was the Spirit that mattered, not the body. The body was the prison that caged the Spirit. The body was something to be ashamed of and despised and unworthy of sacrifice. But here it is: we are to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice.
- So what does this mean in the day-to-day life of a Christian? First, it means that our old life is dead, crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), but it also points out that you have been born again to a new life in Christ. So any argument that seeks to justify one's self that begins, "But I was born this way" fails before it even starts. What you were before Christ is of no consequence. You have presented your old life as a sacrifice and have died with Christ. Now you are a new Creature, your old ways have passed away. Second, we live this out in "our spiritual service of worship". This means that we are to take **all** that we do, all the tasks that you have to do every day, the ordinary work we do in an office or in a classroom or in a garage or in our house, wherever we may be and whatever we are doing, and offer all that as an act of worship to God. As we work in the yard, as we cook in the kitchen, as we sit at a computer, as we drive nails, we are to see all of this as an act of worship, giving everything we do and all that we are to God.

- We may say, “we are going to church to worship God”, but we should also be able to say, “We are going to the store, the shop, the office, the school, the garage, the field, the garden, to worship God”.

Vs. 2

- Further, in our day-to-day life as a Christian we are to demonstrate that we have in fact, been born again, reborn into a new life in Christ. Remember that the word Jesus uses for “again” in John 3:16 is the Greek word “anothein”, meaning “from above”. It is the same word used to describe how the veil in the Temple was torn when Christ was crucified: from the top down, anothein, from above. Essentially what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus is that when you are saved, God is going to do an attic to basement renovation of your life. So here again in vs. 2 it starts from the top. In part, the proof of our salvation is how our mind has been renewed. We no longer think as we used to, but we think with the mind of Christ.
- To say this in vs. 2, Paul uses two long Greek words that take nearly whole sentences in English to translate. First, when he says, “be not conformed to this world”, the word he uses relates to the outer appearance of a person. Our outward appearance is constantly changing, not only as we age, but even as we go through the day. What we look like when we’re cleaning house or doing yardwork is going to be different when we go to a fancy restaurant. So Paul is saying, “Don’t try to match your life to all the latest fashions of this world. Don’t be like some social chameleon, trying to fit in with all your surroundings. Stand out. Set a new standard for the world to see.”
- And to do that we must be renewed, born again, inwardly. What people see on our outside is a direct reflection of what’s on our inside. So Paul says to worship and serve God, we must undergo a change, not only or primarily of our outward form, but of who we are inside. By presenting our lives as a living sacrifice, by dying to Christ, Christ is able to enter our lives to resurrect us and change us. So as we are being changed from the inside out, the world begins to see how our outer change is coming from being reborn and changed on the inside.
- As William Barclay puts it, “When Christ comes into a man's life, he is a new man; his mind is different, for the mind of Christ is in him...When Christ becomes the center of life then we can present real worship, which is the offering of every moment and every action to God.”