

The Supreme Act Of Spiritual Service

Introduction. Having concluded eleven chapters of profound and stirring teaching about what God has given Christians, Paul now charges those Christians with what they need to give God. A distinct break in the train of thought occurs as Paul moves from 11:36 to 12:1.

Eight chapters have been spent in establishing and developing the theme of the letter (Romans 1:16). Then, three chapters deal with how that theme applied to fleshly Israel, God's once chosen nation. Paul's thankfulness for God's mercies, his awe of the depth of riches of God's wisdom are his conclusion to his discussion of Israel.

That having been concluded, practical advice was needed and thus given to all Christians to illustrate how they were to live in various aspects of life. These two verses set forth the fundamental obligations we must meet before being prepared to face the challenge of living as Christians in this world.

I. The Body Must Be Given To God

- A. In the Septuagint, "present" was often used as a technical term for a priest's placing an offering on the altar. It therefore carried the general idea of surrendering or yielding up (cp. Deuteronomy 10:8; 1 Kings 17:1).
 - 1. Before a priest in Israel could minister on behalf of others, he had to present himself in a consecrated state and the sacrifices he offered were to be without blemish (Exodus 29:1-46; Malachi 1:8-13).
 - 2. As members of God's present "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5), Christians are here exhorted to perform what is essentially a priestly act of worship. Because the verb is in the imperative, the exhortation carries the weight of a command.
 - 3. The body is dead to sin (Romans 8:11). Our bodies, once dead in sin, are now made alive in the service to God; they are to be presented to God as living, active instruments in His service (Romans 6:11-13).
- B. The term "holy" is first used in the Bible as a verb in Genesis 2:3 and as a noun in Exodus 3:5. Anything taken out of common use and devoted to God is holy (Psalm 24:3-4).
 - 1. Our bodies are therefore important; in fact, no command can be obeyed and no kind of service to God can be rendered without the body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Genesis 17:1).
 - 2. There can be no sanctification, no holy living, apart from our bodies (1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 Peter 1:14-16).
- C. It is helpful to understand that dualistic Greek philosophy still dominated the Roman world in New Testament times.
 - 1. This pagan ideology considered the spirit, or soul, to be inherently good and the body to be inherently evil. Because the body was deemed worthless and would eventually die anyway, what was done to it or with it did not matter. For obvious reasons, that view opened the door to every sort of immorality.
 - 2. The body is not evil in itself; if it were, God would not ask that it be offered to Him. As an instrument, it is capable of expressing either sin or righteousness.

If we do the latter, then we give an offering “pleasing to God” (1 Corinthians 6:11-13).

- D. The living sacrifice we are to offer to the Lord who died for us is the willingness to surrender to Him all our hopes, plans, and everything that is precious to us, all that is humanly important to us, all that we find fulfilling (1 Corinthians 15:31; Philippians 1:21; 2:17). This sacrifice is to be everywhere: church, home, work, school and neighborhood (Psalm 139:7-12).
- E. This living sacrifice is equated with “spiritual service.”
 - 1. The main idea is that the sacrifice we render to God is intelligent and deliberate, in contrast to the sacrifices of the Jewish worship in which the animals had no part in determining what was to be done with them.
 - 2. “Worship” in the newer versions is perhaps too narrow a translation, for in the strict sense worship is adoration of God, which does not fit well with the concept of “bodies.” The term “service” is better since it covers the entire range of a Christian’s life and activity (cp. Deuteronomy 10:12).

II. *The Mind Must Be Given To God*

- A. Christians have been delivered from this present evil world, which has Satan for its god (Galatians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Our heavenly calling includes residence in this world, among sinful people, where we show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into God’s marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).
- B. “Conformed” refers to an outward expression that does not reflect what is within.
 - 1. The word is used of masquerading, or putting on an act, specifically by following a prescribed pattern or scheme. It also carries the idea of being transitory and unstable.
 - 2. This phrase has been translated as, “Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” We are to stop allowing ourselves to be fashioned after the present evil world in which we live.
- C. Regrettably, it is not uncommon for Christians to wear the world’s masks. They want to enjoy the world’s entertainment, the world’s fashions, the world’s vocabulary and many of the world’s attitudes — even when those clearly do not conform to the standards of God’s word.
- D. The Greek word translated “transformed” is translated “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2-3.
 - 1. The Christian is solely responsible for this transformation, and it can be brought about only by renewing the mind, the inward man, day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).
 - 2. “Renewing” means “the adjustment of our thinking to the mind of God.” The outward transformation is effected by an inner change in the mind, and the Spirit’s means of accomplishing this is the Bible (Psalm 119:11; Colossians 1:28).
 - 3. The word of God teaches us how to live and glorify God (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 4:17-32; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Timothy 2:1-5).

III. The Will Must Be Given To God

- A. The construction of the original language teaches that, when a Christian's mind is transformed, his thinking ability, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding are able to properly assess (prove, discern) everything and accept only what conforms to the will of God.
 - 1. A heart in love with the world is ill-equipped to appreciate the benefits of living according to the gospel.
 - 2. The reason why the heart is renewed is so we can appreciate and understand the beauty of God's will (Psalm 119:45-48).
- B. Three terms are used to describe the will of God.
 - 1. "Good" is what is pleasant in its character or constitution and beneficial in its effect (cp. Luke 10:42; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
 - 2. "Acceptable" again borrows from Old Testament sacrificial language to describe the kind of holy living that God approves, a "living sacrifice" that is morally and spiritually spotless and without blemish (cp. Leviticus 22:20).
 - 3. "Perfect" has the idea of being complete or mature; of something's being everything it should be (cp. Matthew 5:48; 19:21).
- C. Our will should desire only what God desires and lead us to do only what He wants us to do in the way He wants us to do it (Isaiah 55:7-8). Our imperfect will is always subject to His perfect will (Matthew 26:39, 42).
- D. Dedication leads to discernment and discernment leads to delight in God's will. An intimate connection between discerning the will of God and making oneself a living sacrifice is shown by the use of "acceptable" in each case (cp. Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:16).

Conclusion. Sacrifices must cost something (2 Samuel 24:24). Simon the sorcerer gave up his livelihood (Acts 8:5-24). Saul gave up his way of life (Philippians 3:3-11). A transformed mind produces a transformed will, by which we become eager and able to lay aside our own plans and accept God's, no matter what the cost.

Out of gratitude for God's mercies, we no longer love the world and what is contained therein. We must hate the world and the garments spotted by the flesh (1 John 2:15; Jude 23). Christ's inner divine nature and glory were, for a brief time and to a limited degree, manifested outwardly, but in our daily living, that nature should be manifested as completely and continually as possible (2 Corinthians 3:18). Are you striving to do what the apostle has told you to do?