

Transformed Not Conformed
Dr. Michael A. Cox
Original: 1-30-00; Revised: 8-29-04; 8-14-22

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Romans: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The New Life in Christ

Central Idea of Message: Be transformed by consecrating body and mind to God.

Introduction: All people have responsibilities toward God; Christians even more so.

In issuing a call to commitment, the Apostle Paul lists the greatest motivation man can ever have for worshiping and serving God, the greatest sacrifice man can ever give God, the greatest threat to offering that sacrifice, and the greatest discovery ever to be made by man.

These components constitute one of the most majestic calls to dedication found in the pages of Holy Writ. Here is our call to commitment to be transformed not conformed.

I. The Greatest Motivation (v. 1)

A. The greatest motivation to worship and serve God is his mercy (cf. MacGorman, *Layman's*, 82)

1. Paul is urging "brothers"
 - a) Note familial language
 - b) We believers are related by redemption
2. But why was Paul urging believers to present their bodies as holy, living sacrifices?
 - a) Had they not done so at conversion?
 - b) Had they done so but reneged somewhat?
 - c) Was Paul summoning them to a deeper commitment?
3. And what about us?
 - a) Was this not included in our so-called conversion experience?
 - b) Have some of us reneged?
 - c) Is God summoning us to a deeper commitment?
 - d) **Presenting our body as a living, holy sacrifice is something we should do at least daily, if not more frequently!**

B. Mercies

1. Intensive plural meaning "great" (Harrison, *Expositor's*, 127)
2. **The mercy of God is the abundance of God's compassion and saving grace in giving us what we do not deserve [grace] and not giving us what we do deserve [mercy]**
3. A most appropriate motivation for worshiping!
4. Gratitude for God's mercies should compel devotion (cf. MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)
 - a) No diluting of the gospel is allowed, because not demanding personal repentance and commitment degrades the gospel message
 - b) No lowering of God's standards is tolerated, because reduced standards produce no holiness
5. If thankfulness to God for his mercies does not prompt sacrifice, nothing will (cf. MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)
- C. This is our spiritual service of worship
 1. Worship is sacrifice of the self
 2. Worship is in spirit and truth
 3. Worship is logical (λογικός) service to God
 4. Worship is reasonably expected from all

II. **The Greatest Sacrifice (v. 1)**

- A. **The greatest sacrifice one can offer to God is "oneself" (MacGorman, *Layman's*, 82)**
 1. All people are commanded to present their bodies as a living sacrifice
 2. Present
 - a) Offer, yield, surrender, give up, place at the disposal of another [wedge buster on the kickoff team]
 - b) Verb tense [Aorist] suggests yielding once and for all time with regular reaffirmations
- B. Bodies: the total, material self charged with executing the wishes of our volition
 1. See 1 Cor. 6:19-20
 2. My will doesn't act or even speak, my body does, but my will is my body's puppeteer
 3. This verse explains that God is definitely interested in what is done with our body!
 - a) **"Christians believe that their bodies belong to God just as much as their souls" (Barclay 184)**

- b) **Surrendering the body to the Lord involves not doing what is harmful to it**
 - c) **Surrendering the body to the Lord involves using the body as a servant devoted exclusively to God**
- C. Living [e.g., Isaac and Jesus]
 - 1. Animals no longer suffice as sacrifices
 - a) "In Israel the whole burnt offering ascended to God and could never be reclaimed. It belonged to God" (Harrison, *Expositor's*, 127)
 - b) God wants no more slaughtered sacrifices
 - 2. **The only dead sacrifices God wants are those who are dead to the world, the flesh, and the devil!**
 - 3. The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar, like so many Christians [like cooking frog legs]!
- D. Sacrifice
 - 1. Reminds of the Jewish sacrificial system
 - 2. Not a reference to a redeeming sacrifice for sin, but rather to a sacrifice of praise, worship, and service
 - 3. **Paul does not simply say to give a sacrifice, but to be a sacrifice**
- E. Holy: truly holy, not ritually holy; set apart
- F. "Acceptable to God" is a lofty standard!
 - 1. Much that is done is unacceptable to man
 - 2. Much more that is done is unacceptable to God
 - 3. Acceptableness to God depends on the offerer and the sacrifice
 - a) Pure heart and proper motivation
 - b) **The acceptable sacrifices to God are broken and contrite hearts which are sorry and repentant regarding sin (cf. Ps. 51:16-17)**
 - 4. **Partial sacrifice was unthinkable to a Jew but seems to be acceptable to many Christians**
- G. "Spiritual service of worship"
 - 1. **The practice of righteousness is the Christian's deliberate, logical, and spiritual service of worship as we "work out" our salvation [not work for] (cf. Phil. 2:12-13)**
 - 2. Contrasts with physical offerings and sacrifices
 - 3. A life of worship which reflects sincere appreciation for the message of God's grace and mercy found in the gospel

4. The entire world is the Christian's altar of worship, not just church, for this should be done at the office, at the foundry, at the ballpark, at the restaurant, and everywhere else as well

III. The Greatest Threat to Self-Sacrifice (v. 2)

- A. **The greatest threat to self-sacrifice is pressure to conform to the world (cf. MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)**
- B. Conformed [Berns illustration]
 1. Gaslighting: deliberate manipulation through feeding people false information to make them question their own perception of reality and perhaps eventually doubt their own sanity
 2. Shaped, molded, modeled after, suggesting the "gradual process by which our alertness to evil is disarmed" (Cragg 582)
 3. Unlike Samson, do not let the world, or the pretty girls, give you a haircut!
 4. Too often, Christians masquerade around in the attire of the world
 5. The world, the flesh, and the devil want to control our minds, but God wants to transform them!
 6. **One obvious characteristic of believers in Jesus Christ is the unwillingness to be conformed to the world's mannerisms, expressions, gestures, immodest styles, habits, religious practices, music, morals, or anything else which compromises Christianity**
- C. "World" means this earthly realm, popular culture, the present evil age [and it is evil!]
 1. **Christians live as people of two ages: witnessing to one which is "dying" and walking toward one which is "dawning" (MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)**
 2. The world exerts relentless pressure upon all to conform to its perishing ways and values
 - a) Why conform to this world?
 - b) Why love this world?
 - c) The world found the precious Son of God to be "intolerable" (MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)
 - d) **The world reserves its "bitterest scorn" not for the wicked, but for those taking "the lordship of Jesus Christ most seriously" (MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)**

- e) Paul urged readers to resist the world's efforts to squeeze them into its mold
- D. All people conform either to the "Spirit of the ages" or to the "spirit of the age" (McBeth 233)
 - 1. We are not to value "customs" more than "commandments" (McBeth 233)
 - 2. We are not to prefer "good taste" to "good sense" (McBeth 233)
 - 3. **We are not to be politically correct at the expense of being spiritually corrupt**
- E. **Being conformed to this world results in an unfit mind (cf. Barrett 233; Rom. 1:28)**

IV. The Greatest Discovery (v. 2)

- A. **The greatest discovery one can make is finding the will of God (cf. MacGorman, *Layman's*, 83)**
- B. Be transformed [Mark 5:1-15 demoniac illustration]
 - 1. The Bible does not say "transform yourself"
 - a) Our role is to repent and believe
 - b) God's role is to transform us by the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit
 - 2. **Being transformed [an imperative] is the opposite of being conformed!**
 - 3. The word is μεταμορφώω [metamorphosis]!
 - 4. Transformation of the mind is an ongoing process which lasts a lifetime [get used to it!]
- C. Renewed: renovation, renewal in spirit of mind (cf. Eph. 4:23)
- D. Mind
 - 1. Genuine worship necessarily involves the mind
 - 2. God never invokes mindless worship!
 - 3. **Christianity necessitates use of one's rational powers in continually recollecting and reaffirming our original commitment to Christ**
- E. A transformed, renewed mind helps prove genuineness
 - 1. "Transformed" indicates change, not growth
 - 2. **Transformation and renewal of mind are most clearly demonstrated in one's spiritual and moral life as expressions of holiness**
 - 3. Proves
 - a) **Holiness is the greatest proof of grace having been received**
 - b) Our alleged transformation will be tested!
 - c) Tried by fire and proven genuine!

4. Proves what the will of God is (see Eph. 5:17)
 - a) Count it a blessing if you have a preoccupation with the will of God, and if you don't have this, pray that you get it!
 - b) The will of God necessarily means "moral direction" [good, acceptable] (Moo, *New International*, 757)
 - c) **God reveals his will [moral, theological, marital, educational, occupational, etc.] in order for us to do it, not simply to contemplate it (cf. Barrett 233)**
 - d) It is a renewed mind, not mind alone, that is capable of recognizing God's will, and even renewed minds need instruction (cf. Barrett 233)
5. Proves what the will of God is not
 - a) God gives us will power and "won't power" (Wiersbe, *Exposition*, 1:554)!
 - b) His will is good, not bad
 - c) His will is well-pleasing, not displeasing
 - d) His will is perfect, not imperfect

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) **God's will is good, holy, and perfect.**

(2) **It is only through spiritual regeneration, which happens at the moment of faith and repentance, that one can do the will of God.**

(3) **Following regeneration, believers ought to be, for the rest of our lives, in the process of being transformed in our minds and in the process of being conformed to the glorious image of Christ.**

(4) **As this transforming and Christ-like conforming occur, believers will be able to discern, desire, and approve the will of God.**

(5) **God's will should take the place of our human will and this can only happen through presenting ourselves as living sacrifices.**

Are you being transformed into the image of Christ or conformed to the likeness of the world? Hymn #361, "Wherever He Leads I'll Go."