

The Christian's Attitude Toward God

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:1-2

Preached on: Sunday, August 19, 2012

In the providence of God we now find ourselves in the 12th chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans. So will you join me by turning there? And the title of my discourse to you this morning is "The Christian's Attitude Toward God."

Let me read the text, Romans chapter 12 beginning with verse one.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.¹

As always, when we come to the word of God we must bring our lives to it. And I would ask you to begin this morning by answering a question in your own heart and that is: How would I describe my relationship with God? There are typically three different categories of answer. Perhaps you would describe it in the first category that your relationship with God is rich. It is intimate. It is exhilarating, deeply satisfied. You are in constant communion with him. His Word is your daily source of comfort and your heart is filled with the kind of doxology that Paul has just used to describe God's saving grace at the end of chapter 11. Praising God occupies your heart and mind. Maybe that is how you would describe your relationship with him.

Or maybe you are in the second category. The answer would be, well, it is just so so. Not real bad, but certainly not rich and intimate, if I am honest with myself. Your conscience even now begins to accuse you of neglect and apathy. Your relationship with him is a bit distant and strained. Certainly it is not exhilarating and deeply satisfying.

Or perhaps you are in the third category and that category could be summarized by simply saying, you know, for me the fire is gone. It once burned hot, but now there are only a few embers. God is like a forgotten friend to you. You are out of touch. You seldom think about him. You have no real desire to commune with him, to get together. You could say that you live in a different world, that your relationship with him is something in a parallel universe and even right now your conscience convicts you and you are experiencing shame.

Well, sadly, many Christians live in the realm of B and C that I just gave you. I very often hear Christians describe their relationship with God as being one that is strained, one that is not rich and they describe their life with terms like defeated, discouraged, depressed. The psalmist tells us in Psalm 34:1.

¹ Romans 12:1-2.

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“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD.”²

But for many Christians that is not really true. And Matthew five that we read earlier, verse 12, the Lord says:

“Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.”³

But for a lot of Christians, they experience very little joy. Peter describes our salvation in 1 Peter one and in verse six he is excited and he says:

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”⁴

But many Christians know very little of this kind of rejoicing. The apostle Paul was imprisoned and he reminds his fellow workers in Philippians four that their names are in the book of life. And he says:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”⁵

But for a lot of Christians that is foreign. The question is: Why? Well, for most it is because of habitual and many times unwitting sin that dominates their life. The way they function in their life grieves the Spirit. It quenches the Spirit. They are ruled by the flesh, not by the Spirit. And in ways that you might not even realize you are loving the world and you have become spiritually lazy. You are undisciplined. You are self centered. For many people their doctrinally illiterate or they have been deceived by false teaching. So there is not much spiritual fruit on the vine, not much love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. You just don't see a lot of that, because of sin. But for others they are not really ruled by their flesh and they love the Lord and yet they don't enjoy that deep soul satisfying relationship with him.

So what is missing? Where is the abundant life? And the answer in a nutshell, my friends, is that you are living for yourself not for him. And you may not even realize it. And as a result God is dishonored. You forfeit blessing and relationship and deep down at the core of your being after you have come to church and sung your hymns and heard your sermon, you go back to your life and the emptiness is still there. It is gnawing at you, an uncomfortable void, a disappointing distance in your relationship with the God who loves you. Ah, but we have 1000 ways to somehow fill the void. We can quickly run to our televisions. We can purchase another movie or we can even go to church or do

² Psalm 34:1-2.

³ Matthew 5:12.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:6.

⁵ Philippians 4:4.

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some spiritual thing. My goodness, we can even do a mission trip. We can sing in the choir and like a lot of people we can look for some legalistic hoops to jump through because maybe if I do those things I will experience some kind of a rich soul satisfying intimacy with my God.

But when it is all said and done you still feel defeated and discouraged and depressed. Some people will blame it on demons. It is very common in our culture. So they go to deliverance seminars and have some self proclaimed guru teach them some mystical incantations divined to rebuke demons and if that doesn't work, for a few dollars more they will personally exercise that demon from you, that demon that is robbing you of the victorious life.

But still for them—and I have talked with many of them—when it is all said and done the joy is not there. The richness is not there. The power in their spiritual life is not there. Others subtly and perhaps unwittingly think that the answer is that they need to get something more from God. They need to learn how to get him to bless them more, somehow do something internally more than he is doing. Boy, that was the same lie that was presented in the garden, wasn't it?

“Oh, come on,” the serpent said to Eve. “Eat the fruit. You surely shall not die. For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.”

Boy, that sounded good. Think about it. Adam and Eve, they weren't feeling defeated or discouraged or depressed. Far from it. But it is human nature to be takers rather than givers. And by nature we are self centered and so we can subtly see God as the one who exists for us rather than we existing for him. So we can subtly expect more from him. We are always trying to find some way of getting that, so that we will experience more of him.

Many people will treat him like some spiritual Santa Claus and learn how to name it and claim it. Unleash the power of faith. Maybe then I can experience the abundant life.

I have heard many people tell me down through the years, “Well, what is missing is the second blessing. That is what you need. You will never fully enjoy God's blessing in your life until you are slain in the Spirit and you speak in tongues.”

Really? Think of all the how to experience the abundant life books that are in our Christian bookstores. You would think by now that every believer would be enjoying just sheer ecstasy with God. So the assumption is for many, you know, I am just missing out on something here and there must be more that God has to give me and I could just wish I could find that combination so somehow I could enjoy a rich, vibrant, soul satisfying intimacy with the God that loves me.

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Really? Its her something missing? You really believe that? That is not what Scripture teaches. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians one and verse three that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Scripture teaches that we have been united with Christ. We are united to him.

In Colossians two and verse 10 Paul says, "In him we have been made complete. "In chapter three verse three he says our life is hidden with Christ in God. And Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:3 that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of him.

Dear struggling Christian, listen to me. The reason you are experiencing this is not that you need more from God. He needs more from you. And most of the time we don't understand what that looks like. Most of the time what we have been giving him is far short of what we read here in this Scripture. We are to give him our all. We are to present our body as a living and holy sacrifice. So rather than expecting him to give us more and rather than us giving him some unacceptable sacrifice, we have got to learn what it means to offer ourselves completely to him. And, frankly, I have discovered over the years that very few Christians really understand this.

But this is precisely the issue that the apostle Paul addresses here in this text, our attitude toward God.

May I remind you of the context here. Paul has spent 67 verses at the beginning of this epistle from chapter one verse 18 through chapter three and verse 20 explaining the condemnation of man that makes him subject to the wrath of God, explaining why man is an enemy of God. And then from chapter three verse 21 through the end of chapter 11 that we just finished last week, he describes the way God has provided for man to be reconciled unto himself, the marvelous doctrine of justification that culminates in that magnificent doxology in the last four verses of chapter 11. And now in light of the riches of God's mercy and grace he addresses issues concerning the Christian's attitude towards God in the first two verses of chapter 12. And in following weeks we will see that he also addresses the Christian's attitude toward fellow Christians in verse three through verse 13 and also towards non Christians in verse 14 through 21.

But today we are going to look at the issue of the Christian's attitude toward God.

Thus far in the first 11 chapters we have seen him give us basically an exposition and now in these last chapters he will shift from exposition to exhortation where apostolic command will really dominate these chapters. So let's turn our attention to this issue of the Christian's attitude toward God which will give us great insight in how we can be pleasing to him and fully enjoy every spiritual blessing that he has already lavished upon us. We are going to look at this in three categories: what to sacrifice, what to shun and what to seek, very simple.

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First of all, what should we sacrifice? Notice verse one. He says:

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...”⁶

I am moved here by the apostle's tone. He uses the word urge. It could be translated exhort. It is from a Greek term παρακαλεω (par-ak-al-eh'-o) which carries the idea of coming alongside someone and earnestly asking them to consider something that is very important that will be of great help to them. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as another helper, the παρακλητος (par-ak'-lay-tos) who would take his place in this life, the one who would dwell within believers and come alongside us as our divine comforter and counselor and advocate, the one who would come along side and encourage and exhort and strengthen and intercede and convict and so forth.

So here Paul having the full authority of apostleship is coming alongside the saints of Rome with an urgent message. He is coming alongside us as well with an urgent exhortation, a loving command, one that is inspired by God himself designed to help us love the Lord with all of our heart, mind should and strength, something very different than many believers understand and do. It is something every true believer, I think, really wants to do, but is often distracted from doing and confused about how and what.

But I give you a picture of a father coming alongside his son, putting his arm around his son and saying, “Son, I am going to share with you right now some very important information. This is a non negotiable. You have got to do this. I am expecting you to be obedient here, but I am telling you that this is for your good and for God's glory, so please hear me.”

Dear Christian, we must learn and obey these kinds of exhortations. To do otherwise, frankly is rebellion. And when we ignore these things as we typically do, we just kind of read over them and say, “Well, wasn't that a nice passage of Scripture?” Rather than saying, “God, help me to lay my life before this and understand this completely and absolutely radically change my life so I live consistently with this.” Rather than that, we typically just kind of breeze on by. Please don't do that.

Our total surrender to God needs to be seen as something that is joyful, a willing sacrifice, not some onerous obligation. So this is more than just the apostle Paul coming down and slamming his fist on a pulpit and saying, “You do this.” But it is rather a gentle urging. There is a softness to it, a tenderness to it.

Now to be sure the loss of reward and divine chastening are very important motivations for obedience, but the greatest motivation of all should be our never ending gratitude for saving us.

⁶ Romans 12:1.

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So he says:

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...”⁷

In other words, in light of all that God has done for you, in light of all the things that I have exposed to you in the first 11 chapters, in light of his compassion to forgo what you deserve, punishment for sin, and give you instead what you don't deserve, forgiveness and justification, in light of all of that, I want you to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.

Now the imagery here would have been very dramatic to the early saints, because they would have been used to seeing sacrifices, seeing animals cut in various ways, seeing their blood manipulated upon altars, seeing them placed upon altars, seeing them burnt and the smoke rising to their pagan deities. So they understood the concept here, that what Paul is referring to is something far greater than just a casual relationship with God, the type of relationship most Christians in our culture have. But rather he is referring to a whole hearted commitment. He says, “Present your bodies,” *παριστημι* (*par-is'-tay-mee*) in the original language, a very important word. It was often used in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament as a technical term describing a priest placing an animal on an altar for sacrifice. And what are we to present? He says, “Your bodies.” What is that referring to? It is referring to the totality of who you are. Not just our physical shell with all of the organs and bones and blood and brain and all of that, but the sum of our humanness, our sin and all.

Now remember. Our souls belong to God. He has redeemed them, but we remain incarcerated in these unredeemed bodies, which remain the instrument of both good and evil. Our body houses, shall we say, our evil longings. It is the seat of our flesh that is always at war with the Spirit, Galatians five.

Paul said in Romans seven verse five:

“For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.”⁸

You see, our unredeemed body has the power to exert enormous influence over the desires of our redeemed soul. Paul tells us in Romans seven verse 22:

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of

⁷ Romans 12:1.

⁸ Romans 7:5.

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my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.⁹

Can't we all identify with that? While our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, bear in mind, dear friends, that it remains unredeemed. It houses our fallen flesh with all of its sinful desires, that part of us that is drawn to sin like a moth to a flame. So it is crucial for us to continually present the totality of who we are to God that he might convict us and discipline us and teach us and comfort us and empower us and bless us and sanctify us.

In Romans six verse 13 Paul says:

“...do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”¹⁰

Practically speaking, because I know some of you are saying, “What does this look like?” Practically speaking we must maintain an attitude of total surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ realizing that we are his willing and loving slaves, that he is our master. We must maintain an attitude of preoccupation of all that is pleasing to him. We must have an attitude that says, “Lord, I want to know you and I want you to use me for your glory.” It is a commitment to know and to use your spiritual gifts so that you could put his glory on display in your life. It means that everything else in life is secondary. The primary goal in your life is to be a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God so that you can give him great glory and in return you will experience great joy.

So he says:

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.”¹¹

Now worship has always included sacrifice. We see that all through Scripture. But the form of the sacrifice has changed under the new covenant. You will recall in the Old Testament there was the offering of dead sacrifices. And in the new covenant there is the offering of living sacrifices. In the old covenant the people were to, quote, make a sacrifice. And now in the new covenant we are to be a sacrifice. Hopefully you see the difference. So we are to be a living sacrifice. And the word living just suggest the voluntary nature of the act, which is to continually, not just a one time thing, not just every now and then, this ridiculous idea of always rededicating your life. If you are having to do that on a routine basis, there is something wrong with your spiritual life. But

⁹ Romans 7:22-23.

¹⁰ Romans 6:13.

¹¹ Romans 12:1.

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it is the idea of continually making a decisive, deliberate choice to voluntarily surrender every aspect of your life to God on a moment by moment basis, to be like Abraham. You remember he was promised a son through his wife in her old years. It was hard for him to believe, a son that would be the one in whom God would bring about his covenantal promises.

But then God comes along and says, "I want you to sacrifice that son." Abraham was willing to trust the Lord with all. He was willing to give him even that which he held most dear, to give up all of the promises of the covenant if that is what the Lord wants. Lord, if that is what you want, I will give it. That is the idea of being a living sacrifice, to trust him, come what may.

But notice he says we are to be a living and holy sacrifice. And in this context the term holy means to be set apart from sin, to be set apart from the world, to be set apart from all of our dreams and ambitions, to be set apart from our own agenda, our selfish passions and to be set apart unto the Lord. We are to be set apart from all of those other things and set apart unto the Lord. This is total, voluntary surrender of all that we are. But even as the Old Testament animals were to be without spot and blemish, so, too, we must present ourselves with purity of heart, a heart solely devoted to the glory of God.

This, my friends, is the kind of sacrifice that is acceptable to God. They are pleasing to him. They bring pleasure to him. Think about that. Don't you want to be pleasing to the God of glory that has saved you by his grace? What a powerful motivation to surrender ourselves completely to him. But this is where most Christians just don't get it. We tend to compartmentalize our lives, especially our spiritual life. We are willing to offer to the Lord some, but not all.

Lord, I will offer you some when it is convenient. Lord, I will serve you some when it doesn't interfere with my agenda. Lord, I will give you some when it doesn't jeopardize my ambitions. Lord, I will give you some when it doesn't cost me too much. I will give you some as long as I can stay comfortable and on and on it goes. In truth, my friends, we are selfish people. Every single one of us, myself included. And the Lord knows that. We are like a five year old boy who is going to share his M&Ms with his little sister. You know how that works. One for you, five for me. That is how we treat God. You don't think so? How embarrassed would you be if you were to show the whole church how much money you spend on yourself versus what you give to the Lord? How embarrassed would you be if you were to let us see how much time you spend watching television versus spending time in prayer? Do you realize that most Christians spend more time watching television in one week than what they will spend in prayer in one year? And you wonder why the Lord seems foreign to you. It is not an acceptable sacrifice. That is not a living and holy sacrifice.

You know, we know so little of sacrifice. Therefore we know so little of our God. We

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tend to give him that which costs us nothing and then we convince ourselves that our sacrifice to him is pleasing.

I hear people say, in essence, “Well, now wait a minute, pastor. Don’t expect me to...” And then fill in the blank. They may not come right out and say it, but this is the attitude. Don’t expect me to obey all of those one anothering passages. That is just not for me. Don’t expect me to step out of my comfort zone and be a witness for Christ. Don’t expect me to be devoted to prayer. Don’t expect me to discipline myself for godliness. Don’t expect me to meditate on the Word of God more than on Sundays. Don’t expect me to regard others as more important than myself. Don’t expect me to be putting to death the deeds of my body. Don’t expect me to be like Paul and buffet my body and make it my slave. After all, I give to missions. After all, I go to church fairly regularly. And I even went on a mission trip one time. What more does he want?

Isn’t that how we think? My friends, he wants every part of you to be devoted to him, to be willing to give all, not that he always takes that, to be willing to give him the very best of our years, the best of our strength, the best of what we have, not what is left over, not what is second best, not that which costs us nothing.

We should be like David. You will recall Ornan had a threshing floor that he wanted to give to David, a threshing floor on Mount Moriah on which the future temple stood. In fact, the very flat rock under the Muslim mosque, the Dome of the Rock today. But David told Ornan in 2 Samuel chapter 24, “No,” verse 24:

“No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing.”¹²

How often we give to the Lord that which costs us nothing and then prance around like a proud peacock thinking that we have done some great thing. But, my friends, when we are willing to give him our all, he doesn’t discard our gift. He refines it. He purifies it. And he multiplies it in ways that we cannot imagine. Why? Because we serve a God who loves to lavish upon his children every imaginable spiritual blessing. He loves it when we give him glory.

History is filled with living and holy sacrifices acceptable to God, men and women who really cared nothing for themselves, but were willing to give all that they had. The amazing African missionary David Livingstone was one such man. He wrote this in his journal. Quote, “People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of the great debt owing to our God which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward of healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind and bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter?”

¹² 2 Samuel 24:24.

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He went on to say, “Away with such a word, such a view and such a thought. It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say, rather, it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger now and then with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause and cause the Spirit to waver and sink, but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice which he made who left his Father’s throne on high to give himself for us,” end quote.

The apostle Paul was persecuted in ways that we cannot imagine. Yet nowhere in Scripture do you see him whining about being defeated and discouraged and depressed other than only for a short period when things were overwhelming to him. But that was certainly not the pattern of his life. He suffered for Christ until he was martyred. He never lost his joy. In fact, as you read about his life, his joy increased.

Isn’t it interesting? What a correlation. The more the suffering, the more the joy. Philippians two and verse 17 he says:

“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.”¹³

Beloved, this is what it means to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God. Notice he says:

“...which is your spiritual service of worship.”¹⁴

This is a curious phrase. The term spiritual in the original language is λογικός (log-ik-os’). We get our word logic from that or logical. And it basically means pertaining to being genuine in the sense of being true and real with respect to the nature, the essential nature of something. It is the idea of being rational, genuine, true. So he is saying, you could translate it this way. “This is your true worship. This is your reasonable worship,” as the King James puts it. Offering up one’s body as a living and holy sacrifice is a spiritual or a rational, logical service of worship in light of all that he has done.

I like the way Knox paraphrases it. He says this, quote, “This is the worship due from you as rationale creatures.”

That makes sense. What a contrast to the senseless idol worship of irrational people that are dead in their sins. But rational, reasonable believers understand that it is altogether fitting to be loving monuments of redeeming mercy. Surely that is the most rational and noble occupation of God’s reasonable creatures.

¹³ Philippians 2:17.

¹⁴ Romans 12:1.

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Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5 we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I like the way Robert Mounts puts it. Quote, “In view of God’s acts of mercy, it is entirely fitting that we commit ourselves without reservation to him, to teach that accepting the free gift of God’s grace does not necessarily involve a moral obligation on our part. It is a heresy of gigantic proportions. The popular cliché he is Lord of all or not Lord at all, is absolutely right.”

Beloved, if you are not offering up your total being to him as a living and holy sacrifice, your sacrifice is simply unacceptable to him. He is not interested just in your external religion. He wants all of you, he wants your inner man, the very core of who you are, he wants both a secret as well as a public devotion to his lordship. He wants intimate communion. He wants a wholehearted commitment, not half hearted tradition. He wants you to love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might, Deuteronomy six verse five. This is our spiritual service of worship.

The word service is a term that really encompasses the full range of Christian character and conduct.

You might ask, “Well, how will I know what I really presenting myself as a living and holy sacrifice?”

Can I give you just a very brief answer? Beloved, you will know it because serving Christ will be your deepest desire. Serving Christ will be the preoccupation of your mind. It will occupy your thinking. It will motivate your decisions more than anything else in your life.

Moreover, your greatest joy in life even beyond your spouse, your children, will be the Lord himself. He will be your supreme satisfaction in life. And you will experience a rich and vibrant relationship with him come what may. Again, nothing else in life will really matter. The most important thing is knowing and loving and serving him.

Now how can we do this? Aren’t you glad that the Word of God doesn’t just leave us with these things we are to do, these admonitions without telling us how? Well, Paul answers in very practical and profound, very simple way. And, frankly, an impossible thing to do on our own with the Spirit’s help. And he answers this by telling us what we must shun and what we must seek. And I might add that as I was thinking through this text again, this is probably a text that has had one of the greatest influences on my life out of all of the passages of Scripture. Notice he says:

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“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”¹⁵

So he is going to tell us here that this is how you can give him your mind. The mind in the original language refers to our way of thinking, our disposition, our attitude, our manner of thought. Here is how you can give yourself to him. First of all, he tells us what we must shun, verse two.

“And do not be conformed to this world.”¹⁶

Now I would submit to you humbly that most Christians have a very superficial understanding of what this means. The word be conformed comes from a Greek word συσχηματιζω (soos-khay-mat-id'-zo) and it is used in other places to describe a masquerade. We all know what a masquerade is, putting on a mask, playing a role, putting on an act according to a script, a schema, a pattern. And it is really divided in kind of a compound word in the original language. συσχηματιζω (soos-khay-mat-id'-zo) refers to assuming an outward expression or form that does not come from within, nor does it reflect an inward reality.

Let me say it very simply. It is being something on the outside that is inconsistent with who you are on the inside. Does that make sense? And then the prefixed preposition συν, S U N, adds to the meaning of the verb the idea of assuming an expression or a form that is patterned after something, in this case the world.

So what he is saying here in this phrase, do not be conformed to this world, is simply this. Do not choose to allow something outside of you to shape or mold your outward life in a way that does not reflect your inner nature. To say it even more simply, don't be on the outside something you are not on the inside. Who are you as a believer on the inside? You are a new creature in Christ, right? You are hidden Christ and you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are united to Christ. On the mount of transfiguration you will recall the Lord peeled back some of his flesh and the effulgence of his glory burst forth. Do you realize that that is ultimately your glorified inner nature? He is saying, “Don't be something on the outside that doesn't reflect that. That is the point.

But it is interesting. We don't see this in the English, but you do in the original language. It is not in the active voice. It is in the passive voice. You might remember your English grammar. I hit the ball is active. The ball hit me is passive. This is in the passive. And so what he is saying here is that the shaping, the conforming, the molding is not something that you will choose to do. It will be something that you will allow to happen to you. And what is that? Well, if you are not careful, the world will shape you into its image.

¹⁵ Romans 12:2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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Satan loves to counterfeit God's plan, right? He knows that God wants us to be shaped into the image of Christ. He wants us to be shaped into his image. Well, what is the world? It could be translated age. We know that the world's system is dominated by Satan, the age, this side of glory.

2 Corinthians 4:4 Satan is the god of this world, small g.

1 John 5:19.

"... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."¹⁷

He is saying here, "Don't let the world, ruled by the enemy of your souls, the one who opposes God and all who belong to him, don't let the world cause you to wear its mask so that you look like it." That is not who you are on the inside. If you're going to be a living and holy sacrifice, you have got to understand this. So stop allowing yourself to be shaped into Satan's image. Stop masquerading in the garments of this world adopting its styles, its habits, its attitudes, its mannerisms, its speech, et cetera.

G. C. Trench described the world this way as, quote, "That floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral or immoral atmosphere which in every moment of our lives we inhale again inevitable to exhale," end quote.

And I love J. B. Philips' famous translation. He says it this way. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Very simple.

And Lenheart puts it this way. Quote, "What madness it is to join in this puppet show which is displayed on a tottering stage. Christians have been introduced into the life of the world to come. What a tragedy, then, if they conform to the perishing world they left."

Now, beloved, remember, Satan orchestrates this world system so that he can destroy non-believers and so that he can defeat believers. He wants to rob you of power, of blessing. He wants to ruin your marriage. He wants to destroy your family. He wants to turn your children into monsters. And we want to somehow allow all of that to conform us? He is a genius in his deceptions. Deceptions, temptations that are seemingly irresistible to our flesh. And he does this in a myriad of ways. Certainly the media, I believe, is the most powerful. Television, Hollywood, music. And it is sad to see Christians who think and act and talk and look like the world. They have chosen to be a living and unholy sacrifice, to be pleasing ultimately to Satan. It sounds awful to say. Think about it. The most ungodly, vile, wretched, immoral people in our society are those that we see in

¹⁷ 1 John 5:19.

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By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 12:1-2

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Hollywood. I think of things like some of the rap artists that you {?} rap and that type of wickedness, inmates in prisons and yet Christian young men many times want to imitate them.

Do you know where the sagging pants that we see? Do you know where that came from? Homosexual inmates in prison that were advertising themselves. And you want to conform to that? Are you kidding me?

Worse yet there are churches that deliberately imitate the world and call it, well, we just need to be all things to all men, which, by the way, is a terrible misunderstanding of that text. Or we just want to celebrate our freedom in Christ. We want the unchurched to feel comfortable here. Really? Yes, we want to reach them with the gospel.

My friends, that is not the gospel. The Lord says, "If you want to come after me, you have got to be willing to deny yourself, take up the cross, follow me." The gospel is about self denial, not self fulfillment. It is about seeing a holy and a righteous God that we have offended and being so struck with our sin that we cry out to him for mercy that he might save us. That is the gospel.

So Paul was saying in order to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, don't be conformed to this world. Don't allow the world to shape you into its image. That is what we are to shun. And, beloved, may I pause here for a moment and just say, "Please guard yourself and guard your children against the ingenious seductions of the world and the world's power to seduce you into something that you don't want to be."

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14:

"...what fellowship has light with darkness?"¹⁸

The answer is none. And if you are among those that I mentioned earlier that is feeling discouraged and defeated and depressed, I would say in all love, you have already fallen prey to the world's deceptions and your life is not pleasing to the Lord. That is what to shun.

Thirdly, he tells us what to seek. He says:

"...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."¹⁹

Oh, this is a fantastic concept. The word transformed translates the Greek verb μεταμορφωω (met-am-or-fo'-o). We get our word metamorphosis from that. And it

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

¹⁹ Romans 12:2.

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connotes change in outward appearance that reflects an inner nature. Think of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. That is a transformation. Matthew used this word to describe Jesus' transfiguration, same word. In Matthew 17:2:

“And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.”²⁰

And, again, there we read of just the effulgence of Christ's glorified inner nature suddenly and briefly being manifested, a magnificent illustration of our inner redeemed nature that we are to manifest in our lives to whatever degree possible. But, again, this is not in the active voice. It is in the passive voice. So he is saying that we are to allow ourselves to undergo a radical and thorough change where we become on the outside who we are on the inside, conforming to the world is being something on the outside that is inconsistent with who we are on the inside. Being transformed by the renewing of our mind is the opposite. It is becoming on the outside who we really are on the inside. I hope that is what you want.

This speaks of our outward conduct reflecting our inner redeemed nature that, by the way, will one day shine as the brightness of the sun just like the ineffable glory of Christ in whom we have been hidden.

Now how does this happen? He says, “By the renewing of your mind.” Renewing means to cause something to become new, something to become different with the implication of being superior. Now this is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. He is the agent of regeneration, the agent of transformation. He animates this outward transformation where we reflect accurately who we are on the inner ... as with our inner nature. He animates this inward, this outward transformation by an inward transformation of the mind, our way of thinking, our attitude, our disposition.

You will recall in 2 Corinthians three verse 18 Paul says:

“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”²¹

So this is the work of the Spirit.

Now, beloved, you cannot present yourself as a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God if you are allowing yourself to be conformed to this world and if you refuse to renew your mind to allow the Spirit of God to change you. It is only when your mind is absolutely saturated with the Word of God that you will automatically do the will

²⁰ Matthew 17:2.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

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of God. It is very simple. Lazy minds produce weak wills. Paul spoke of this often in the New Testament. Colossians 1:28 he says:

“And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”²²

And in chapter three verse 16 he tells us to:

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”²³

So there is both a moral as well as an intellectual component to this transformation, this continuous process of renewal that will ultimately culminate in us being conformed to the image of Christ. And you will recall in John 17 Jesus prayed to the Father:

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”²⁴

So this is the key, the Word of God. Is this a priority for you? You must ask yourself that question. You see, my friends, we don't just drift towards holiness. We must decisively commit ourselves to it and we do this by submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit of God on a moment by moment basis as he has revealed himself to us through his Word.

David said in Psalm 119 verse 11:

“Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.”²⁵

Now, friends, you will never be a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship unless your mind is constantly being renewed by the Spirit of God through the instrument of the Word of God. Don't kid yourself.

Notice the result.

“...that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”²⁶

Prove literally means to put to the test so as to approve. You see, the renewed mind can know the will of God and live the will of God and thus prove it, demonstrate it to a lost

²² Colossians 1:28.

²³ Colossians 3:16.

²⁴ John 17:17.

²⁵ Psalm 119:11.

²⁶ Romans 12:2.

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and dying world and, thus, give God great glory. His will is good. It is acceptable. It is perfect, it says. And when his will becomes our will, our living and holy sacrifice is pleasing to him. It is acceptable to him. Why? Because it is an expression of his nature. And whenever we are pleasing to him, he lavishes his blessings on us. And I close with this verse in Psalm 112 verse one and I hope this will resonate with your heart and be the expression of your heart. The psalmist says:

Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, And his righteousness endures forever. Light arises in the darkness for the upright; He is gracious and compassionate and righteous. It is well with the man who is gracious and lends; He will maintain his cause in judgment.

For he will never be shaken; The righteous will be remembered forever. He will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.²⁷

Beloved, this is the stuff of the living sacrifice, of a living and holy sacrifice. I pray that this is your attitude toward God in light of all that he has done for you, for me. How can we give him anything less than all of who we are? Let's pray together.

Father, we rejoice in these eternal truths and we pray that you will cause them to bear much fruit in each and every heart. And, Lord, for those that do not know you as Savior, how we pray that you will consume them with guilt that they might come to you and beg for mercy, that mercy that you will so richly provide for those who are broken and contrite of heart and tremble at your Word. We commit them to you, Lord. We have family members, loved ones, friends and certainly there is probably people within the sound of my voice that know nothing of you. We pray, Lord, that by your grace you will save them. We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus our Savior and for his sake. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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²⁷ Psalm 112:1-7.

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