



**By the Mercies of God
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Romans 12:1-2

12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

12:2 do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Discussion of the Text

Romans 12:1-2 seems to be the center of a larger passage from chapter 9 through 15:13 that falls into two sections. In the first section (9:1-11:36) Paul discusses the mercy of God seen within the plan of God for the objects of His mercy—Jew and Gentile. As a consequence of the mercies of God, the second section exhorts us to actions that shows the will of God active in the lives of men (12:1-15:13).

Beginning in chapter 9, the unbelief of the Jews and the grafting in of the Gentiles are discussed in relation to the mercies of God. Paul said he could wish himself accursed -outside of the mercies of God- for the salvation of the Jews (v. 9:3; 10:1). These mercies have no association with the will or effort of man, but on God's mercy (Rom. 9:16). "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." (Rom. 9:18). To ask why then God still finds fault if no one can resist His will, is said to be answering back to God; and compared to a clay pot asking the potter why he formed it as he did (v. 9:19f).

While these verses in chapter 9 touch on the issues of predestination, free will and limited atonement, they also describe how the mercies of God proceed from His sovereignty. For God to be truly sovereign, He

must have the power to have mercy on, or to harden the heart of, whomever He so chooses. Sovereignty also means that God alone can exercise absolute free will. This absolute free will gives eternal significance for our salvation: He could have just as freely chosen *not* to write our names in the book of life! Within this context, the mercies of God are beyond comprehension.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33–36)

The initial section closes with this doxology to the sovereignty of God. The depth and riches of His wisdom and knowledge are extolled. Who can know His mind or be His counselor; who can give to God that He might then repay them? The answer to these rhetorical questions is of course that no one can. God's mercy does not depend upon the will or actions of man. As Romans 11:36 says, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." Recognizing that God has given us mercies that we did not deserve, Paul calls us to worship. The confession of the sovereignty of God should lead to the praise and glory of God, while encouraging a life obedient to the will and commands of God.

In Romans 12:1 the mercies of God is the foundation for both Paul's appeal to Christians and our self-presentation as living sacrifices. The Greek construction of the verse supports this, by placing the phrase "by the mercies of God" between Paul's appeal and the call to present ourselves as living sacrifices. Paul recognizes that he could not even say what he has said, except by the mercy of God. The proper response to such mercy is the presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices. Verse 12:2 further elaborates the living sacrifice which is our spiritual service as not being conformed to this world, while being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Verses 12:3 through 15:13 then specifically notes what that transformation of our mind looks like. Among the actions Paul specified were the following:

- Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought (12:3);
- Hate what is evil and cling to what is good (12:9);
- Honor one another above yourselves (12:10);
- Share with those in need and practice hospitality (12:13);
- Live in harmony with others (12:16);
- Don't be proud or conceited (12:16);

- Don't repay evil for evil (12:17);
- Live at peace with everyone to the best of your abilities to do so (12:18);
- Accept the person whose faith is weak without passing judgment (14:1);
- Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (14:19);
- Accept one another just as Christ accepted us (15:7);
- So that God may be glorified for His mercy (15:9).

All of these commandments, (indeed all the other commandments in Scripture), can be summed up in this one rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13:9–10) As a result of the mercy shown to us by God, we can offer ourselves as living sacrifices in these actions which are holy and pleasing to Him. As living sacrifices, we seek to make our will align with the will of God: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39b). The problem with living sacrifices is that they don't stay on the sacrificial altar; they keep trying to crawl off it.

Application of the Text

Even Christians who have confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in their heart that God raised him from the dead (according to Rom. 10:9) can be uncomfortable in this calling to be living sacrifices. They resist the process of transforming and renewing their minds and as a result miss the possibility of testing and approving (confirming) the will of God in their lives. But Paul has noted the process to which we may return again and again in order to be a living sacrifice.

We are challenged to not conform to the pattern of this world, to pursue righteousness and faith; for "the righteous will live by faith." (Ro. 1:17) By the renewing of our minds, we can test and approve God's good, pleasing and perfect will. Otherwise, we are subject to God's wrath; for although we know Him, we do not honor or worship Him. So we become futile in our thinking; our hearts become darkened. Claiming to be wise, we become fools, and exchange the glory of the immortal God for idols of our own choosing. We exchange the truth about God for a lie. (Ro. 1:18–25)

In our own strength, by the power of our own mind, we cannot do what we want. We may have the desire to do to do what is right, but will not have the ability to carry it out. "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Ro. 7:19) Jesus Christ can and will deliver us. He will renew our mind.

If the Spirit of Christ is in us, “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” (Ro. 8:11) And nothing can separate us from this gift; the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Ro. 8:35–38)

So consider the mercies of God, how He revealed Himself to those who did not seek or ask after Him. He held out his hands to a disobedient and obstinate people—us. He called us to be His sons and daughters, His loved ones. He promised to take away our sins. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. (Rom. 13:11–12) The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. To him be the glory forever! Amen.