



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 12: 1-2

Romans

“Living Sacrifices”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, this morning we come to one of the best-known texts in the Bible. It’s short, but it’s so full of meaning – Romans 12:1-2. Paul writes:

“Therefore I urge you, 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, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s pray.

Father, it is a great privilege to gather as we do on a Sunday morning, and to open the Bible; to read a text of Scripture, and then together spend time considering its meaning. That is a great privilege. That is a necessary work that we do for ourselves, and yet it would come to nothing were it not for the work of the Spirit of God, and what a blessing it is to have him within us. You have given us the gift of the Spirit of God, who teaches us and guides us in our thinking, and we pray for that ministry this morning.

As we come to this great text of Scripture, this very significant, life-directing exhortation from the apostle Paul, that the Spirit of God would give us a deep sense of its meaning, and a sense of the urgency that it should have as it applies to us, and that we might act upon it and we might be living sacrifices for you. So bless us to that

end. Teach us. Build us up in the faith through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and may he open our hearts to receive the ministry that's given this morning.

Father, we are a needy people. Spiritually, we are dependent upon you for everything, and we can praise you because you have us firmly within your hand. You'll never let us go. We can never be taken from your hand. We are absolutely secure in you. We are in Christ, and that means we receive the life of Christ, and so we are blessed constantly spiritually, and we need that constant nourishment, because we are completely dependent upon you for all that we have.

But that applies also to the material things of life as well, and so we pray regarding that, too. We pray that you'd bless those who are in particular need; who are afflicted, who are struggling with illness, who are recovering from medical procedures. We pray that you'd give relief, and you'd give comfort, and you'd give health. It comes from you, and we who enjoy good health enjoy it only because you've extended that goodness to us. We have employment, we have friends, we have so much.

We can list the bounty that you've given to us, and we should do that routinely. We should always remember, Father, it comes from you, and we should be grateful. One of the main issues of our text is that we should respond to you out of gratitude and thanksgiving, and so Father, we pray that you'd make us thankful. We pray for those that are in difficulty, that you'd give them thankful hearts.

We pray for those of us who experience no particular difficulty at this time that we may realize it's all because of your goodness to us; every good and perfect gift comes from above, and make us grateful and thankful people. We can be thankful that you've put us in the land in which you have. By your providence we live in this country that has been blessed so abundantly by you, with so many freedoms, and so much material wealth, and so many advantages.

We thank you for that, and we pray for this land. We pray for our government, that you bless our leaders with wisdom, and particularly at this time of war. We pray that you'd bless them, that they'd guide our nation well, and that you'd bless our servicemen and women in the field; that you'd protect them and give them success in what they're doing. We pray for our nation most particularly, Father, spiritually; that at this time you'd awaken people to the need of souls for you.

The need of repentance and drawing close to you, and a turning to you, and we pray that you'd bless us that we might go forth from this place to be effective in that ministry. So build us up and equip us for that this morning. This is the function of a church – to equip the saints for the work of ministry – and we pray that all of us would be well-equipped this morning to go out and be witnesses for Christ.

We pray for ourselves as we return this evening to remember our Lord, remember what he's done for us at the cross, and remember that he's coming again; we pray that you'd bless that as well. And bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray that it would be a time of blessing for all of us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

When people think of John Calvin, they usually think of predestination, and with good reason. He firmly believed in it, and he taught the doctrine clearly. But Calvin was interested in more than one doctrine – about the whole counsel of God, and was very concerned about the spiritual life and Christian godliness. Far from being a man of cold logic, Calvin was a man of warm devotion to God. His personal seal pictured a hand holding a heart as an offering to God, with the motto “Prompt and sincere.”

That is the kind of people we are to be, and that is what Paul urges us to be in Romans 12:1-2, where he states that we are to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. This begins a new portion of the book of Romans in which Paul moves from doctrine to duty, from belief to behavior, from creed to conduct. That is Paul's pattern in many of his letters. He expounds truth, and then he applies the truth, and so the emphasis now shifts from explanation to exhortation.

He begins, “Therefore I urge you,” and as is often said, whenever we see the conjunction “therefore” we should always ask ourselves what it is there for. It's an important word because it points to a conclusion drawn from what preceded. So the exhortations that Paul will give are based on the theology that he has taught in the previous 11 chapters. And what he taught in those previous chapters is the grace of God – the mercies of God in our salvation.

A brief review helps us to see that. In the first two-and-a-half chapters of the book of Romans, Paul makes it very clear that the world is fallen. Mankind is guilty and disobedient, and the law is of no help in changing that. “By the law no flesh will

be justified before God,” Paul said. The law exposes sin; it shows us, it reveals sin, it reveals us to be sinful. Man needs a Savior, and God sent that Savior in his Son. He is our Redeemer, as Paul explains in 3:24.

He bought us out of sin and out of spiritual death, and delivered us from future judgment. He did that when God put him forth as a propitiation, Romans 3:25. That word “propitiation” is a very important word; it refers to the satisfaction of God’s righteousness, the satisfaction of his justice that Christ secured for us by dying in our place. And having satisfied God’s justice, he has turned away his wrath from his people. The penalty has been paid.

So now all a person must do to receive the blessing of eternal life is believe, like Abraham did, who upon faith was declared righteous. He was justified. He was fully accepted by God. And all who do that are new creatures. We have new abilities. We are being sanctified. We are being made holy by the Holy Spirit, and we shall be glorified in the future. Paul explains all of that in chapters 6 through 8. God has done it all, and all because of his sovereign grace, his electing love.

We would never have elected him. We would never have chosen him. “We were by nature haters of God,” Paul says back in chapter 1. In fact, we can find that theme of our rebellion against God in chapters 1, really in chapter 2 as well, but in chapter 3, and in chapter 5. We are enemies by nature. That’s what we are. So we would never have chosen God. God chose us, and Paul made that plain in chapters 9 through 11. It doesn’t depend on us, but on God who has mercy, and he has mercy on a multitude.

He has saved both Jews and Gentiles, and he’s not finished. In the future he’s going to save all Israel, and bless the entire world. Salvation, in all of its parts – election, justification, sanctification, glorification – salvation in all of its parts is all of God, and that calls for a Christian response. That’s what Paul now urges in chapter 12. By the mercies of God, because of all that God has done, present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. The mercies of God are the motivation for that response.

In one of his books, F.F. Bruce quotes the Scot Thomas Erskine, who said, “In the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude.” That’s an excellent statement. In the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics, morality – conduct is gratitude. But to have gratitude, we must understand what God has done, and how

undeserving we are. We can never offer a sincere heart to God until we understand how indebted we are to his mercy.

That is the reason that doctrine is so practical; it is foundational to conduct. Belief always affects behavior. The way we think will affect the way we live. Knowing that, Paul spent 11 chapters on doctrines pertaining to man’s ruin and God’s remedy. Now he says those who have received that remedy, those he calls “brethren,” those who are believers in Jesus Christ, are to respond by being living sacrifices. The idea of bloody sacrifices was common in Paul’s day.

A person would bring an animal to the priest, his sins would be confessed over it, and the animal would be slain on the altar. Sacrifices were common. Sacrifices were slaughtered. But Paul turns that image into a new image, a new idea, that of a living sacrifice. We are to offer up our bodies to the Lord for spiritual service. Ultimately, we are to present our entire self to God, body and spirit, but here, the emphasis is on the physical part of our being; on our bodies, literally.

There was good reason for Paul to put the emphasis there, because Greek philosophy, which was dominant in that day, devalued the body. The expression was *soma sema estin*, the body is a tomb. They considered the body a prison of the soul. The body was bad. You remember Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill when he spoke to the philosophers of Athens, and they listened with curiosity at what this individual was saying. They didn’t have much respect for him, but they didn’t have much to do anyway.

And so they listened to what he had to say, and they paid attention until he came to the conclusion and the resurrection of the body. And when they heard about the body being resurrected, they began to scoff, and that ended it all. They walked away, because they disparaged the body. That is a wholly unbiblical thought, contrary to Scripture. The body is of God. The body is good. The body is part of our person. It is important. It will be resurrected. Sanctification, therefore, involves the body.

So Paul emphasizes that here, but there’s also a need to emphasize the body because of the depravity that was so common in that day. Gentiles were notorious for sexual immorality and degrading behavior. We covered that way back at the beginning of our studies in Romans, in chapter 1. So Paul addresses that. He knew

that if sanctification didn't involve the physical, it would be canceled out from the beginning.

There can be no service for God unless the body is brought into conformity with the ethical demands of the gospel. Paul's already urged that. In chapter 6 he said that we are not to let sin reign over our mortal bodies; we are not to present the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. Instead, he wrote, present your members as instruments of righteousness to God. That is how we present our bodies as a living sacrifice – by offering each part, each member, to God.

We do that by using our minds in his service, but our minds are affected by what we see and what we hear, and so our eyes and ears must be offered to God. We need to be careful about what we read, and what we watch, and what we listen to. We need to focus these parts of our bodies on what is spiritually beneficial. We need to be reading material and listening to conversations and instruction that will advance us in the faith, and make us useful in God's service. We need to keep good company.

Our tongues should be presented to God for beneficial service, not for gossip, but for truth and wise counsel and encouragement. Our hands should be put to work and not left idle. Paul gives some very significant counsel in that regard to the Thessalonians. Evidently they had individuals in the assembly there that were idle, were lazy, were not working.

And so Paul writes to them in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 that they were to make it their ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind their own business, and to work with their hands. In other words, God's servants, the brethren, Christians, are to be disciplined and industrious. The grace of God affects every aspect of our lives. It is not, as Leon Morris wrote, “some remote, ethereal affair.” It's not some heavenly idea, this idea of grace, that doesn't really touch us here in the real world. It does.

Grace affects us in every detail, and every detail is to be offered to God. We are to be helpful and beneficial to other people. We are to be living sacrifices, active sacrifices. We are able to be sacrifices that are that way because of the grace of God, and we are to be not only living sacrifices, but also holy sacrifices; sacrifices that are acceptable to God. The idea here, this idea, this picture Paul gives of holy and acceptable sacrifices is probably drawn from the Old Testament and the spotless lamb, the lamb without defect.

That was the standard for offerings in the Old Testament, so our lives are to be like that. They are to be holy. And that involves the whole person. We cannot present our bodies as living sacrifices until we first offer our hearts to God in sincerity. So this is what we are to strive for: purity in our thoughts and in our behavior. That is the kind of life that we are to offer God, and we can do that because we are living sacrifices, alive with the life of God within us. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

As Paul said in Romans 8:14, those who are the children of God are led by the Spirit of God. Constantly; he's with us constantly; he's leading us and guiding us, and so we must be a people that are following his leading. We must be a people bearing fruit in our lives that is holy – the fruit of the Spirit Paul speaks of in Galatians 5, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are the virtues that should be seen in the life of the believer.

In John 15:16, the Lord says something very similar to that; uses a different analogy, different picture, but the idea is much the same. He told the disciples that he chose them and appointed them so that they would go and bear fruit. So that they would go out, they would be active in the world, and they would be fruitful, and they can do that, and we can do that, because we are in him, like branches in a vine. That's how he begins that chapter, chapter 15.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Apart from me, you can do nothing.” But in him, we can do everything – everything that he calls us to do. We can bear fruit. We have the life of Christ within us because we have the Holy Spirit within us, transferring the life of Christ into us. So that is our condition. That is the people we are; people who are alive with the life of God. But we are to also strive to express that life. We are to strive to be holy in heart and conduct.

And when we do that, when we live like that, then we, then our sacrifice, will be acceptable to God, meaning it will be well-pleasing to God. Now, that is amazing when you think about it – that we who are by nature dead in our sins, we who are by nature haters of God, enemies in rebellion against him, could become pleasing to him. But that's the grace of God, and again, that's the motive for offering ourselves as living sacrifices – God's grace.

An obedient life is the best life. It is an orderly life. It is a safe life. It is a productive life. It's the life that God blesses. Proverbs 10:27: The fear of the Lord

prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened. That’s a good reason to present ourselves to God in this way, but that’s not the reason Paul gives. We are to be sacrifices for God out of gratitude for what God has done for us. That’s our motive. Not personal advantage, but thankfulness.

One of the best examples of that is found in Luke chapter 7 and the sinful woman who entered a dinner party to express her gratitude to Christ for all that he had done for her. She wasn’t invited. She wasn’t wanted. She knew that, but she was completely indifferent to others and what they might think. She wanted to worship Christ because she loved him, and so she entered the house of Simon the Pharisee. She knelt down at Jesus’ dusty feet and began to weep over them.

And as the tears fell upon those feet, she wiped them with her hair, she kissed them, and anointed them with perfume. The host was indignant, and he thought to himself, “This doesn’t say much for Jesus. He doesn’t know and doesn’t realize that this is a sinful woman. Obviously, he wouldn’t let this go on.” And the Lord read that man’s thoughts, and he told Simon what was happening. He explained her actions, and he said, “She loved much because she was forgiven much.”

That’s to be our motive for worship and service. Paul calls it “our spiritual service of worship.” Now, that can be translated, as it is translated in the King James Version, “reasonable service,” and the reason it’s translated like that is because the Greek word is based on the word *logos*, which means “word” or “reason.” And so it is thought to speak of reasonable service, and that makes good sense because it’s reasonable for a child of God to be obedient.

It’s reasonable for one who has received grace to offer himself or herself as a living sacrifice to God. But it’s really not that simple; this word is found only twice in the New Testament. It’s used once by Paul here, and it’s used once by Peter in 1 Peter 2:2, and the real way to understand the meaning of a word is by its usage in various contexts. And in 1 Peter 2:2, Peter writes of the “pure milk of the Word.” A better translation for that, in the context, is “pure spiritual milk.”

And that is probably the better translation here. In contrast to external worship, as in the worship of Israel, really even in the worship of the Gentiles, worship that is external, our worship is spiritual. Our worship is inner worship, and that has in it the idea of that which is reasonable and rational because it involves the mind, it involves the heart. It is that which is inner, rather than a mechanical, routine

kind of worship that merely goes through the motions of doing things. It is thoughtful. It comes from within. It is spiritual.

God is not pleased with worship that is only outward. He is not pleased with worship that's only inward, either. We must present our bodies to him as a sacrifice. But that action must be the result of a sincere heart. Paul explains this further in verse 2, where he speaks of the renewing of our minds. That's where worship begins; it is essentially inner. It is essentially spiritual. It begins in the mind. It's an act of the heart, of the mind, of the will, in which we present our bodies to God for service.

That exhortation by Paul that we present ourselves a living sacrifice is put in the aorist tense, which is grammatically a simple past tense; very common verb in the New Testament in Greek. And here it looks at a definite act of dedication. Bible teachers sometimes make a lot out of the aorist tense, and I mention it here because I'm sure that many of you have heard sermons or Bible lessons in which the aorist tense has been mentioned, and it has been described as a verb, or a tense that represents once-for-all action.

And teachers have taken that interpretation here, and drawn as Paul's instruction the idea that this is referring to a once-for-all act on our part; a once-for-all act of dedication. But the aorist doesn't mean that. It speaks of an act; it's really an indefinite past tense. The context determines whether that act is once-for-all or not, and here there's nothing in the verse that would suggest that it is. In fact, everything would suggest that it is not – that we must do this repeatedly. We must do this daily.

And that's supported by the commands of verse 2, which are in the present tense, and which indicate continuous action. So daily, regularly we are to be offering our hearts and bodies to God for spiritual service. This is not something we can do once and for all – no one can do that. We do this daily. That's what Paul exhorts us to do, and in verse 2, he gets specific on what we must do, and what we must avoid, in order to present our bodies and offer our hearts as genuine sacrifices to God.

We can do that only if we do not conform to this world, and we are being transformed by the renewing of our mind. In his paraphrase of the New Testament, J.B. Phillips rendered verse 2, “Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” That's the constant battle that we face as God's children. Believers in Jesus Christ, those whom Paul calls “brethren,” are new creatures, and so we have a new relationship with the world.

We're not the people we once were. We are new creatures and so we have a new relationship with the world around us. Paul explained that at some length in chapter 6. Through Christ's sacrifice, through his death in our place, our old self died – was crucified when Christ was crucified – so as I said, we're not the people that we used to be. We are now in Christ. We share in his life. We are new people.

We have been transferred out of the old realm of sin and death, and we have been transferred into the new realm of righteousness and life. You were slaves of sin, Paul said, but having believed in Christ, you became slaves of righteousness, and that is where our new loyalty lies. It lied with Christ. It lies with obedience to him, and righteousness, and that is what we are now to live for – to live for that righteousness. But while the transfer into the realm of righteousness and life is real, it's not final.

We are still in the world, and sin is still in us, and so we continue to live under the influence of the old realm and the old life. It affects us all the time. There's still enough of the old life with us, still enough of the old nature, that the world continues to have an appeal to us, and it is able to exert pressure on us, and to squeeze us into its mold. Well, what is the world that Paul speaks of here? What is it that he's warning against? It's not the material world.

It's not the earth, it's not the globe, it's not the creation itself that Paul spoke of in chapter 8. This world is literally this age. I don't know if Paul intended a contrast, but at the end of chapter 11, he wrote, “To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Forever is literally “to the ages.” In other words, age upon age throughout eternity, without end. Here, it is simply “age,” singular, one age; not an eternal succession of ages. In other words, it is a limited period. The world that Paul warns of is temporal; it is short-lived.

It doesn't last – nothing that it promises lasts. It is temporal and doomed because of sin, and sin is what characterizes it. Douglas Moo, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has written a very good book, commentary on the book of Romans, and in his commentary he defines the world, or this age, as “the sin-dominated, death-producing realm in which all people who fell in Adam belong.” That's what we've been taken out of, but it still has its influence upon us.

So it is a realm, it is an atmosphere, it is an influence, a way of thinking and acting, that tries to mold us into its shape, to make us live in conformity to itself. And this, as I said, is the Christian's great struggle. It is, to put it simply, the struggle

against worldliness, and we are under pressure to conform or to become worldly constantly. Well, what is worldliness? I think it's different things in different places. For us, it is largely materialism. It's the desire for things, the desire for possessions, for power, prestige.

For position, for acceptance in the eyes of the world, but basically it is self-centeredness. It is putting self first and living for this age, the very opposite of Matthew 6:33, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” A worldly person is what John Murray called “a time server.” It is a person who has self, and the temporal, as the center and motive of life. James Boice expresses the values of our day as “be as healthy as you can, live as long as you can, get as rich as you can.”

Now, there's nothing wrong, essentially, with either one of those three points. Nothing wrong with being healthy, or trying to live long, or accumulating wealth, for that matter; what's wrong is when that becomes preeminent, when that becomes the goal. And we are constantly bombarded by the world's propaganda that that is to be our goal. That that is the way we should be, and we are to adopt those values as our own, and have that as our goal in life. It's appealing; it's very appealing. It's very attractive.

And constant exposure to it has its effect. I got an illustration of that last year when I took my daughter to Paris. We saw all of the typical sights, but there was one that was a little different. We took a tour of the Paris sewer; maybe not a typical sight, but it is famous. It's the longest sewer system in the world, and there is a little romance connected with it. It was through the sewers of Paris that Jean Valjean escaped in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*.

So we paid our money, and we descended into the sewers of Paris, and very shortly after, we realized that we were in a real sewer. We pressed on, but it wasn't long before my daughter had wrapped her scarf around her face, and she was looking a little distressed, and I was becoming a little wobbly myself, and so after about 15 or 20 minutes, we made our way out. But as we were leaving, we stopped at a gift shop; seems like a strange thing to have in a sewer, but there it was, a gift shop.

And as I looked at the man in charge, I thought, “This guy seems perfectly fine down here. He is completely unaffected by the atmosphere.” But then, he was there all day. He had acclimated to it. He had conformed. And I'm sure if I had remained long enough, I would have conformed as well, but I didn't want to. I knew that there

was something much better above: blue skies and clean air. So we didn't stay. Now, there's an analogy in that, because the same is true for us spiritually.

The best things are above, and yet the strange thing is we still have a longing to stay in the spiritually subterranean realm of this world. It is attractive to us. We're always tempted to look back, to go back, like Lot's wife; but if we do, if we linger, we soon acclimate. We begin to conform. Paul understood that. Paul knew the power that the world has, the attractiveness of the world, the effect that it has, and so he warns against that here.

He gives us some negative instruction: “Do not be conformed to this world – to this age.” That's all he says; doesn't elaborate on that, doesn't give us a description of this age, as he might have. He doesn't go on and give the deleterious effects of this age. He just says, “Do not be conformed to this age.” A simple statement, but as we reflect on it, the force of the warning is powerful. This is just an age. It's temporal, it's fleeting; nothing that it promises lasts, and nothing that it promises satisfies.

It can't satisfy us, because as believers in Jesus Christ, we are new creatures. We're round pegs, and the world is a square hole. We don't fit. We cannot fit. This world is not our home. It isn't our natural environment. We breathe different air, the spiritual air of the Spirit. The atmosphere of this age is now stifling to us, and so it's foolish to conform to it. That's the warning: don't conform. Instead, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

This speaks of our sanctification, the spiritual change that occurs within us. The word that Paul uses here for “transformed” is familiar to all of you, even if you've never seen a Greek word. It is the word *metamorphoō*, as in metamorphosis – a change of form, as when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. This is the same word that both Matthew and Mark used in their gospels to describe the transfiguration of Christ.

Peter and James went up on a high mountain with our Lord, and he was transfigured, or transformed, before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. It was a complete change, and it suggests what is to be happening with us, and the kind of people we are to be. Nonconformity is not enough; that's the negative side. The positive side is transformation; it is becoming increasingly like Jesus Christ, increasingly obedient, increasingly good, righteous.

Now, that’s a process. Paul puts this command in the present tense, which indicates that it is a continuing process. That’s what sanctification is – a process that continues throughout our lives. We will never reach perfection in this life. It is a false and a frustrating hope to think that we will. Glory is to come, and it is certain. Look back to 8:30, and Paul speaks of glory, and he puts it in the past tense; we spoke about that in our lesson.

He puts future glory in the past tense to make the point that it is as certain to come for the child of God, you are certain to be glorified, as if it already happened. And so glory is to come – that is the end of the process, and it will be immediate. But in the meantime, in this lifetime, the process goes on, and that is both humbling and encouraging. Humbling because we never arrive – we can never take pride in what we’ve done, and feel that, well, we’ve finally arrived; we’ve reached that level.

Because it’s never complete, our achievements are never complete. Christianity, in the minds of some, is all about doing, and not doing, and being proud about it; of gaining some kind of approval with God by what we’ve done or what we’ve not done – very often, what we’ve not done. The reality is none of us have made any achievement that is perfect. None of us has arrived, and none of our achievements, as I said, are complete.

And they involve far more than deeds; they involve the motive and the heart. But the things that we do are never complete, and never a reason for pride, so it should humble us in that sense. But also there’s reason for encouragement in all of this, in the fact that it’s a process, because we are being changed. That is occurring. It’s gradual. Sometimes it’s not perceptible to you, but it’s taking place. It is going on. It is taking place. It is happening.

And so we are to be encouraged by that, and we are to strive toward that, and keep striving to be transformed, changed inwardly and outwardly, made more and more like Christ, and less and less like this age. The way we do that is by the renewing of our mind. By changing the way we think, or what one commentator called “the reprogramming of our mind.” And that occurs by setting our minds on the things of God; by thinking about that which is right.

Paul told the Colossians in Colossians 3:2 “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” That doesn’t mean don’t think about politics, or business, or current events; we need to think about those things. We need to be

informed. We need to be conscientious about our work. We need to know all about it. We need to be good citizens. We need to know about these things, of course. But those are not to be the primary focus of our attention.

Paul means that we are to have as our chief pursuit the things of God. We are to be filling our minds with the things of God. And when we do that, then we will think correctly about the other things of the world. We set our minds on the things above in the way we've already indicated or suggested. We do that by reading the Bible, by studying it, by putting ourselves under the ministry of the Word.

We are to be seeking to know God and know the deep things of God; not be satisfied with a superficial understanding of things – of singing some happy hymns, and feeling like we're okay if we feel good, and that's kind of the Christian life, living a pretty good life, and feeling pretty good about things. No – it has to do with pursuing the deep things of God, and knowing God, knowing his truth. As we do that we nourish ourselves spiritually. We nourish our minds.

Just as we would nourish our bodies with physical food, we nourish our minds with spiritual food, and as we do that, we are transformed. Paul speaks more fully about this in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where he wrote, “But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed” – and that's our word again, *metamorphoō* – “transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

In other words, the Holy Spirit transforms us as we see the glory of God reflected out of the Word of God, as light is reflected off a mirror. And as we see the glory of God, as we see Christ, as we understand the things of God, as we take that into our minds, we are transformed. The Spirit applies that to our hearts, he applies that to our lives, and transforms us, and turns us into the very likeness of that which we see, Christ himself. Our minds are redirected in that way; they are reprogrammed.

Our thoughts and desires become increasingly like those of Christ, so that our characters change, and our lives become different. We live differently. Why would a person want to leave the dark tunnels and noxious fumes below the city for the bright skies and clean air above? Why would a person want to do that? Because he knows that what is above is far better, and he desires it.

It's the same spiritually. We gladly leave behind the things below for the things above, the spiritual things because we know that they are better. And how do

we know that they are better? By learning of them through the Word of God, through the ministry of God’s Word; we know they are better because our minds are renewed as we do that, broadened and deepened in their understanding. God’s purpose in transforming us by the renewing of our minds is so that we will then seek him.

So that we will then offer our bodies as living and holy sacrifices – that’s the purpose of this transformation. You are being transformed, Paul says, so that you may prove what the will of God is – that which is good and acceptable and perfect. God’s will for us is that we be obedient to him, and as we do that, we will prove by our experience, by our obedience, that his will is good; that it is far better than conformity to the world.

That what God offers us – that what God requires of us – is far better than what the world can offer. We will prove that it is pleasing, that God’s will is perfect, by the things we do. The Christian who offers his or her body to God as a living sacrifice will not come to the end of life and feel cheated, will not feel that he or she has missed out on something along the way. We will come to the end and be fully satisfied.

John Murray wrote, “If life is aimless, stagnant, fruitless, lacking in content, it is because we are not entering by experience into the richness of God’s will.” The world tells us there’s no fulfillment in that; fulfillment is here, in Vanity Fair. Sample all that it has to offer, and that’s where you’ll find happiness. That’s the lie of the world. The reality is fullness of life, and really, adventure in life, is in following the leading of the Spirit; it is doing what God would have us to do; it’s conforming to Christ.

Being transformed – that’s where we find fulfillment. So how are you living? What are you conforming to? To the world’s mold or to Christ’s? You’ll never find satisfaction in this life until you offer your heart to God and present your body as a living sacrifice. And if you’re here without Christ, if you have not believed in him as the Savior who died for sinners, you should know that you are living a hollow life, and a doomed existence.

John wrote, “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” So do his will – believe in Christ. Those who do, receive from God the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting; that is the promise for all who do. So if you doubt that, put it to the test – prove it by believing. As the

psalmist said, “O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” You will find that to be true if you put your faith in Jesus Christ.

May God help you to do that, and help all of us who are brethren, who have believed in Jesus Christ, who are new creatures – may God help all of us to offer ourselves, our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to him. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank you for your goodness to us. As we come to this transition in the book of Romans and reflect back on all that Paul has said, all the great doctrines that he has touched on, doctrines regarding man’s ruin and your remedy, we are reminded of the amazing grace that has saved us, your mercy that has saved us, and we thank you for that. Father, the exhortation is appropriate.

Mercy requires a Christian response, and it is that we offer our hearts as a sacrifice to you, that we offer our lives as a living sacrifice to you, and we pray that we’ll do that. May we do that. Enable us to do that, that we might live lives that are pleasing to you – well-pleasing to you and helpful to others. Make us men and women who go out from this place as lights in the midst of a dark world. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.