

TWO SENTENCES SET THE CHRISTIAN APART

I. In Living Life

II. In View of the World

Romans 12:1-2

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2021 | EPIPHANY

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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Romans 12:1–5 (CSB)

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Dear fellow redeemed: For eleven chapters now, Paul has been writing of the fallenness of man and of the mercy of God. Our Lord God created this world, including all humanity, but humanity rebelled and worshipped the creation, the creature, rather than the Creator, and so humanity was alienated from God. But (again, in His mercy) God invaded this rebellious territory, lived out our righteousness, atoned for our sins, and has bestowed this righteousness through His word and sacrament, so that through faith we are declared innocent before Him, and heirs of eternal life. So I can declare to you the forgiveness of all your sins.

He sums it up in a hymn of praise:

“Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33–36, CSB)

Therefore, because of all this, Paul tells us for the next few chapters how it is that we live in view of God’s mercy, but He introduces all of it in two sentences.

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Paul starts out using the language of sacrifice in worship. **Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.**

The aim of sacrifice was to offer to God the bodies of animals such as were pleasing to Him. The books of Moses tell us what kinds of sacrifices they were; it turns out they were the sacrifices that foreshadowed the sacrifice of God’s son for the sins of the world.

The sacrifices didn’t earn forgiveness; that was the pagan idea. The pagans aimed to appease the gods, to get them “off their backs” so as to forge their own destiny. But for the believing Jews, their hope was in the mercy of God, as David sang, Psalm 51:15–17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ **O Lord, open my lips,**

And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶**For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;**

You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷**The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,**

A broken and a contrite heart—

These, O God, You will not despise.

Because the sacrifices of the faithful were a shadow of things to come, and the reality was fulfilled in Christ, there is no more sacrifice for sin. Instead, Paul tell us, our worship involves

our whole lives; He has purchased us. So Paul teaches, **I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.** Instead of the dead bodies of animals prefiguring the death of Christ, we present our living bodies, reflecting the mercies of God in Life.

Let's look for a minute at what Paul would have us present to God.

These are our living bodies. This has to do with the way that we live. We live in a world in which worship is divorced from life. The governments of states like Colorado and Washington and Oregon (and others) tell us that we are free to worship as we please, so long as or worship stays in church. The new policy announced by President-elect Biden is that religious objections will no longer be accepted as a reason to refuse to do certain things – like performing a same-sex wedding, or placing children with homosexual couples, or teaching that the natural family is God's order for the world.

But if, as Paul says there, worship is the way we live, then it will be at odds with the unbelieving world because it is to be “holy and pleasing to God.” **How we discern that I will take up in a minute**, but the short version is that we live in such a way as to affirm the righteousness of God's law and also proclaim His mercy. **Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.**

First, the law. God has given every person a conscience, and Paul made it clear that the law of God applies to everyone, whether they have it in written form or not. **“Therefore, every one of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things.”** (Romans 2:1, CSB)

But we live in a society right now in which the anti-Christians teach that right and wrong are determined by results, not deeds, and by entitlement (a sense of injury or victimhood), not obedience. So according to modern ethical theory, a poor person with a disability is entitled to certain things, and therefore has moral authority, while a prosperous person without disability is morally inferior, and owes the other person. It's as though the righteousness or sin is a function of our identity.

But in this first sentence, God tells us that HE owns us, and HE is the ONE to whom all people owe themselves. **in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.**

Still, the law does not negate God's mercy. The law shows us our desperate situation, dying and deserving eternal death, so that we might repent and believe the gospel. To reveal the mercy of God was one purpose of the Old Testament worship (as ours today), proclaiming the “Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”

Living our life as living sacrifices to God isn't something we do to earn or deserve the mercy of God, but it is in gratitude, **“in view of the mercies of God,”** that we serve Him. Put simply, **“We love because he first loved us.”** (1 John 4:19, CSB)

II. In View of the World

While the first sentence of Paul's introduction to this part of Romans deals with how we live, the second sentence reveals how we (should) understand the world. We call this our “worldview.” Christ tells us through Paul, **²Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.** I mentioned earlier, we would answer how we discern the

way of live that is “holy and pleasing to God.” Here is the answer; it is by not being conformed to this age, but in being transformed, changed, from the old way of viewing the world to the new.

When we become Christians, there is a “renewing of our minds,” we think differently. As Christians we think differently from the unbelievers. This is something that we grow in so as to discern God’s will. Peter, the “specialist” in living counterculturally in this present evil age talks about the deceit rampant in the world and counsels, “***Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stable position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.***” (2 Peter 3:17–18, CSB)

So how do we think differently?

We are God’s creatures, not accidents of time, matter and chance.

We are immortal souls with a body, not just animals.

God speaks to all the world through our consciences to admit our wrongs and repent. He speaks to the world through His church, by means of His word and calls all to believe the gospel.

Every moment the world stands is a time of grace, but it will end at the moment the world ends, or at the moment your life ends, and at that moment you will either be covered by Christ’s righteousness, through faith, or be condemned in your sins.

God is our Lord and has the right to tell us what we should do, and not do, and how we are to be.

We understand that the problems of this world are primarily spiritual and therefore do not have political solutions.

When spiritual issues are concerned, the most important thing about a position is whether it is in accord with Scripture or not.

The most important thing to any person in the world is spiritual life, the life of faith, as Jesus says, “***For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?***” (Mark 8:36, NKJV)

The building block of society is the nuclear family.

The most important thing about a spouse is that he or she shares the Christian faith with us, and the first thing to seek for a newborn child is his/her baptism into the faith.

We serve God by serving our neighbors, whom He loves.

Each of these statements is rooted in Scripture, and the reason they are important to us is not that we think that we will always understand them correctly or apply them perfectly, but because our hope is in the one who is Himself the Word of God, the perfect revelation of God, Who is our Creator, and has redeemed us to God by His blood. It is because of His mercy and forgiveness that His word and will are important to us in how we live and how we view this world.

AMEN