

Growth

Healthy spiritual growth is a product not of passivity but of diligent and disciplined involvement in the things of God.

Our natural State:

Our natural inclination is opposed to God's way of doing something.

Solomon wrote,

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.” (Pr. 3:5,6).

Our tendency is to trust in the Lord with most of our heart,
and lean on our natural instincts for areas of compromise.

When faced with financial challenges our tendency is to worry.

- results in stress, sleeplessness, and a strained countenance.

Whenever we sense changes in health, job, or circumstances,

What is our first response? (or even delayed reaction) -- fear.

When mistreated by harsh words, or when our rights are violated,

we may react with anger to counter the inconvenience or abuse.

These natural responses, are the penalty flags of spiritual violation.

Why should we change our ways to trusting obedience?

The answer is “mercy,” God's mercy and compassion.

One section that looks holistically at this is Romans 12:1-2,

“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.”

This exhortation describes the Christian life in terms of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...

Why? What is the reason? “in view of God's mercy.”

I. Obedience and Mercy.

God's warning to Israel...

"...then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Deut. 6:12)

Just before giving the ten commandments God spoke these words,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the house of slavery."
(Ex. 20:2)

Over and over again reference is made to God's compassion and gracious act of delivering Israel from their bondage in Egypt. It is on this basis that Paul appeals to the saints to offer themselves in total obedience to God.

"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.

In a very real sense believers have been delivered from Egypt – bondage to sin and death. Based upon what God has done on our behalf, he wants our total obedience. Jesus died in our place, bearing the punishment of God for our sin so that we would not have to bear it. In view of what God has done, is anything too much to ask?

What Paul means by bodies as a sacrifice, is offering to God all that we are. God is interested in the whole person, not just Sunday believers,
...but body and soul.

In the letter to the Thessalonians Paul wrote,

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23).

God wants all believer to be sanctified in every area of their lives. He wants them to be morally pure.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God...For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." (1 Thess. 4:3-5).

II. Obedience and Sanctification

Sanctification means to be set apart from sin to God.

The context usually had to do with service or sacrifice.

Jesus spoke of moral purity in the strictest sense,
 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt. 5:27-28)

Moral purity was not merely physical but also involves the mind and emotions. If we look at this in view of dedicating our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, it means that we live holy with our bodies and minds.

The Pharisees were the hypocrite champions of their day. Jesus said that they were like whitewashed tombs – on the outside they were painted and looking beautiful, but on the inside they were filled with dead men’s bones. Matthew records Jesus’ scathing reprimand of the scribes and Pharisees, who stopped others from entering into the kingdom of heaven by their teachings and lifestyle.

One comment in particular was especially caustic,
 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.” (Matt. 23:25)

This is far from the approach that is so common today by which believers seek the key to the abundant life.

We are told that victory in the Christian life is to have more of God
 and to have more from God.

One woman spoke of her pursuit of God’s blessings through meetings and experiences, with frustrated results,
*“I’ve tried to get everything from Him that I can,
 but I’m not satisfied. I’m still miserable and want more.”*

The key to spiritual victory and true happiness is not in trying to get all we can from God but in giving all that we are and have to Him.

MacArthur writes,

“Countless thousands of people today, including many genuine Christians, flock to various churches, seminars and conferences in search of

personal benefits – practical, emotional, and spiritual – that they hope to receive. They do just the opposite of what Paul so plainly emphasizes in Romans 12:1-2.”¹

In response to God’s great mercies in our lives He wants our submission and obedience, starting with offering our bodies as,
 living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,
 which is your spiritual service of worship.

Worship – *latreuo* – refers to service of any kind – according to prescribed Levitical ceremonies – used to describe divine worship.

The only spiritual service of worship that honors and pleases God is the sincere, loving, thoughtful, and heartfelt devotion and praise of His children.²

Peter spoke of growing as a newborn believer through the word of God and then being built up as a ‘living stone’ into a holy house

“...you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5).

Notice that acceptable worship to God begins with us offering ourselves wholly and continually to the Lord as living sacrifices.

III. Obedience and Mind Renewal

Verse 2 stipulates the requirements of our commitment:

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.”

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 138-139.

² MacArthur, p. 148.

The mind is the battlefield

– our new nature and our old humanness are intermixed.

The mind is where we make choices as to whether we will express our new nature in holiness or allow our fleshly humanness to act in unholiness.

Conformed –suschematizo

- an outward expression that does not reflect what is within.

- Masquerading, or putting on an act

– following a pattern or scheme (schema).

The idea of being transitory, impermanent, and unstable.

The negative (*me*) makes the verb prohibitive. [Passive Imperative verb]

‘Don’t let it happen to you!’

Being conformed will passively happen to you. [just float downstream...]

Being transformed will only take place through diligent mental participation.

[like any skill or discipline]

J. B. Phillips translates this phrase:

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.”

Kenneth Wuest paraphrased this clause,

“Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God”³

World – aion – age – the present sinful age

--the world system dominated by Satan.

Don’t be conformed to the world, but be transformed...

Be Transformed – passive imperative – metamorphoo – changed in the outward appearance – Positively , we are commanded to allow ourselves to be changed outwardly into conformity with our redeemed inner natures.

³ Kenneth Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 1:206-7.

“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” (Col. 1:28).

“...you have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him...” (Col. 3:10).

“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.”

(Col. 3:16)

Renewing our mind produces change:

- outward transformation is effected by an inner change in the mind.
- The Spirit’s means of transformation is the Word.

The transformed and renewed mind is the mind saturated with and controlled by the Word of God. The renewed mind that spends as little time as possible even with the necessary things of earthly living and as much time as possible with the things of God.

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.”

Col. 3:2

Richard Dalstrom has described the Word of God as that which causes dissonance whenever we receive it. A transition chord to the next key change.

The more we respond the more we are transformed; then the more we receive. This pattern continues throughout our lives conforming us to Christ’s image.

“...for when you received the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs it work in you who believe.”

(1 Thess. 2:13)