

### **Romans 12:1-8**

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

**For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.**

Dear Children of God,

Today we want to talk about the word – change. Change happens all the time and is part of everything in our lives. One of the wonderful examples of metamorphism, or the change from one form of physical structure or being to another, from nature is the caterpillar that changes from being a worm-like creature, crawling on the ground, into a butterfly floating on the air. The reading for today from Romans 12 talks about how Christians, in the new life, go through the process of change from lives centered on sin, to a new life holy and pleasing to God. May this reading encourage you to:

#### **Theme: In View Of God's Mercy**

- 1. Offer yourselves as living sacrifices**
- 2. Be transformed by the renewing of your minds**
- 3. Have a proper attitude of your role and service to God!**

In this reading, God comes to us with imperatives or commands, we call gospel imperatives. These are gospel imperatives because they invite believers to respond not because we must, but out of love and in response to God's mercy. Paul says, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship.”** The word “therefore” means because of the forgoing statements the following is the natural result. Paul had been speaking in the previous verses of God's mercy and now says based on that great mercy the natural response is to offer yourself as a living sacrifice. The word for mercy here means to have compassion or to be sympathetic with a view towards helping others in absolute need, and refers directly to God's merciful act to save us. In this Paul strikes on the only motivation we have in offering ourselves a living sacrifice and that is the gospel message of God's great mercy expressed in the free forgiveness of sins.

God invites you to offer yourself as a living sacrifice. The offering is to be a living sacrifice offered continuously as long as we live. In the Old Testament a sacrifice once made belonged God. In context, Paul asks believers to offer themselves as living sacrifices and as such they already belong to God as members of his family. Thus, this sacrifice is offered in recognition that we already are his.

The Old Testament sacrifice was offered either as a picture of substitution, as in the sin offerings, or as a thanks offering given wholly out of thanks to God. Here the picture of a living sacrifice does not fit the substitute sacrifice for our sins have already been paid for by Christ. Rather the offering here is one given out of thanks to God for his great mercy expressed in our salvation. Thus, on a daily basis, God asks us to respond to his mercy by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. To offer yourself as a

living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God means to strive to obey him, for an obedient life is holy and pleasing to God.

God says **“this is your spiritual act of worship.”** Our best worship of God is obedience. We see that in the Garden of Eden where God offered Adam and Eve a way to show their love and worship of him by giving them the one command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. By obeying that one command, the two would show their true love and worship of God. Thus, as we obey this gospel imperative, it is pleasing to God, as an act of worship. It is holy and pleasing to him for what he asks us to do is live as he has made us to be, his holy child.

## **2. Be transformed by the renewing of your minds;**

To offer yourself continually as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God is not easy. God is hidden from us, we cannot see him and he does not speak to us as we speak to one another. So in any given situation, how are we to know what is holy and pleasing to God? Paul goes on to tell us how in this reading saying, **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”**

Paul gives another gospel imperative or command to us. If you want to offer yourself as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God, then stop being conformed to this world. Paul uses the world to refer to the way of life of this present unbelieving age, the way of sin and rebellion. Notice that God is telling you that you as a believer now have free will to make a decision to no longer be conformed to the world of sin. Understand that without faith no one has the free will to serve and obey God, for without faith there is only sin. Once we are brought to faith, then God gives us the new life in which we do have the freedom in any given situation to say no to sin and yes to God. This is a limited free will, for we still have the old sinful nature and so daily sin much.

You make yourself a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God by no longer being conformed to this world, but by being transformed by the renewing of your mind. The word for “to be transformed” gives us the English word “metamorphosis,” which means to change as a caterpillar does to a butterfly. You and I are transformed, metamorphosed, into a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, not by a physical change, but by a spiritual change, as we constantly renew our minds. As we grow in faith we are more and more transformed by the renewing of our minds. The renewing of the mind means to make new the mind, how we think, by learning to think as a Christian. You and I learn to think as Christians when we grow in the knowledge of what and how God wants us to think and live. That knowledge comes only from God’s Word. In knowing God’s Word, **“Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”**

To test something means to measure something against a standard. The standard by which we test something so that we can approve what God’s will is God’s Word. In any given situation, I can turn to the standard of God’s Word, to test what lies before me, and using that test, I can usually determine God’s good, pleasing and perfect will. If I am unhappy in my marriage and I have enough faith to care about what God wants, and I turn to his Word, then I will know that he commands me to stay married and in that marriage to love my spouse. Because of sin and rebellion, there will be complicated cases in which determining God’s will in a given situation will be difficult and in some matters, we will have to rely on all God tells us to make the best decision possible.

Does not God’s mercy compel you to want to be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you can daily offer yourself to him as a living sacrifice? If so, daily study his Word to learn what his good and perfect will is, and then live according to it.

## **3. Have a proper attitude of your role and service to God!**

Paul goes on to say, **“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”** How would a believer be able to offer him or herself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, if he or she has an arrogant attitude that he or she is better than other believers? God leaves no room for attitude that says, “I’m more important than you!” The phrase “think of your

self with somber judgment” literally means “it is necessary to have somber judgment in thinking of oneself.” This is necessary because of the power of selfish sin that tempts us to put ourselves before all others. An attitude that hardly permits us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to serve and obey God.

God’s standard to think of yourself is to think **“in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”** The measure of faith is not the amount of personal faith one has, rather the “measure of faith” is the measure that faith uses. Faith here means the Christian faith as it comes from God as taught in his Word. Thus, the measure or standard of faith is the Word of God. Think of yourself according to what God says in his Scripture. In this know that God says you a forgiven child, a new creation, a member of the Body of Christ, called to daily offer yourself as a living sacrifice to him.

As a member of the body of Christ you have a role and responsibility, for offering oneself as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God, also means to serve him and the body of Christ. Paul says, **“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”** Just as in the human body there are many different parts, with different functions, but only one body of flesh, so in the Body of Christ, there are many different parts, or Christians, with many different functions, yet there is one Body.

The different functions are called spiritual gifts and God assures each believer he or she has been gifted. Paul says. **“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.”** Then Paul lists some of the gifts, beginning with **“If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.”** The translation here would be truer to the Greek if it said, **“let him use it in proportion to the faith,”** meaning not personal faith, but the Christian faith. To prophesy means primarily to proclaim God’s Word. We do not have prophets any longer who proclaim new revelations from God, his Word is closed, but we all proclaim the Word of God as we share the Scriptures. If you have the gift of prophecy, use the gift to faithfully proclaim what God teaches us to believe.

Paul then says, **“If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”** Notice the key thought is that you have been spiritually gifted, so use your gift faithfully. We make diligent use of our spiritual gifts, not to be saved, but in view of God’s mercy and so constantly offer ourselves as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. We will use our spiritual gifts when we are transformed and renewed in our thinking as Christians.

When a caterpillar is metamorphosed into a butterfly, it really is becoming just what it was to be, a butterfly. While an amazing transformation, it is not as amazing as the transformation you and I undergo when God, in his mercy, makes us one of his own through faith in Christ Jesus, for then God transforms us from being dead in sin, to being alive in Christ. In this new life, **in view of God’s mercy we offers ourselves as living sacrifices being transformed by the renewing of our minds having the proper attitude of our role and service to God! To God be all glory, amen!**