

Chapter 56

‘Work Out Your Salvation’

(Romans 12:1–2)

Romans 12:1 is the great turning-point in Paul’s letter. *‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – living, holy, acceptable to God, your intelligent worship . . .’*

1. **The first question is: how does Paul preach godliness?** He begins with the mind. The appeal for godliness is a matter of applying what we know. The Bible’s way is to remind Christians who they are, what they are, and what they have. We are the children of God with the power of God working on our behalf. We are in the kingdom of God and have ‘died’ to the dominion of sin. We have the Holy Spirit, we have Jesus’ intercession working for us, we have the power of God ready to come to our aid. New Testament preaching points to the resources for a godly life and then says ‘therefore . . .’. There is something logical about the preaching of holiness.

The New Testament appeals to our sense of gratitude. Paul uses the phrase ‘by the mercies of God’. Not only do we see the **logic** of living for God; the New Testament also appeals to our feelings and emotions and our sense of gratitude. ‘What shall I render to the Lord for all his mercies towards me?’ (Psalm 116:12).

He finally addresses the will. He addresses the need for action via the mind and via our sense of gratitude. He says, ‘I appeal

to you'. He is not using heavy authority. But he is asking that they will take action.

2. He asks for total commitment in body and in mind. The New Testament deals with generalities before it deals with particulars. We put our bodies at the disposal of God. The word 'body' really does mean 'body' (as in 6:12; 7:24; 8:10, 13). The body is to be a 'living' sacrifice (in the Mosaic law the sacrifices were dead, but the Christian is 'alive unto God' – as Romans 6:11, 13; 8:13 said). It is to be a 'holy' sacrifice. Daily we renounce our ownership of ourselves, and accept that we are specially set aside for God's service. It is 'acceptable to God'. In ancient Israel the great question concerning any sacrifice was: will God accept it? Such a sacrifice will be 'intelligent'. The word here means 'pertaining to the mind'. It means that the worship is a reasonable and intelligent response to God's love. We consciously and deliberately give the bits and pieces of our entire physical life to God: our feet (where we go), our sexual life, our habits of eating and drinking, our physical energy, our mouth, our tongue (what we say), our voice, our ears (what we like to hear), our appearance, our eyes (what we like to look upon, to read, to watch), our brain (what we like to think about, how to plan our lives). We give ourselves away. The person who loses his life will find it.

Having urged the Christian to give his or her body to God, Paul turns next to the mind: *and do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed through the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect*. There is something forbidden: 'do not be conformed to this age'. The Christian lives in this world at this time; yet he really belongs to the future kingdom. The world's 'mind' is preoccupied with pleasure, with power, with success, with money, with entertainment, with its glory and self-image. It is either anti-religious or over-religious, either wanting no God to disturb its self-centredness, or alternatively a 'god' who will conveniently attend to man's pleasures and anxieties.

Commitment to God begins with the body but then involves a refusal to follow the 'mind' of fallen man. We have to radically re-programme our thinking. There is something encouraged: 'be transformed through the renewing of your mind'. The Christian's guide is the enlightened mind, led by the Spirit, guided by Jesus and by apostolic revelation. It avoids legalism. It distrusts harshness towards the body or monastic avoidance of ordinary life. On the other hand it is not un-guided and without restraints. Its guidance is from the illumination of the Spirit working in a new mentality given by Jesus, but it is guided and checked by Jesus' teaching and the first-generation teaching of the apostles.

Be transformed! We must be ready to change our opinions and our attitudes. Daily we request from God the newness of mind that he wants to give us. We renounce what he shows us is not from his Holy Spirit. It means that we become diligent students of the Scriptures.

3. **There is something promised.** By submitting to God in body and mind, by a willingness to change our attitude and convictions, we get to know the will of God. We discover what pathways of love, 'the law of Christ', we are required to walk in. As we seek the 'mind of Christ' we make three discoveries about the will of God. The will of God is 'good'. He has a habit of spreading around the atmosphere of love, guiding us into ways of discipline, compassion, mercy, generosity. We discover that the will of God is 'acceptable'. Once we had the feeling that God was somehow against us and that his will for our lives would not be acceptable to us. But we find that the will of God is pleasing after all! Then we discover that the will of God is 'perfect' – perfect in itself, perfect for God, perfect for us, perfect in every way.