

Heritage Seminary

Romans 12:1-2:
On true and appropriate worship

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It would be hard to overestimate the significance of Romans 12:1-2 for the lives of believers and the worshipping Church. In these two verses, Paul brings together the themes of his masterful epistle to the Romans, and points the community and its members towards an appropriate response to the grace and mercy of God. How these themes and exhortations fit together and are to be worked out in real life has been the subject of much important debate, to which I will now humbly offer some insight and effort.

In the following commentary, I will begin each section by presenting the New International Version translation of the corresponding segment of the Romans text. I will then address the text with insight from Douglas Moo and other commentators, highlighting various points of agreement and dispute. I will attempt to evaluate the evidence presented and establish my own interpretation of the text. From there, I intend to synthesize a paraphrase or expanded translation that would help to strengthen one who sought to teach from the NIV text – an important effort I believe given the developing prominence of the NIV translation in evangelical churches.

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.

What we now call Romans 12:1 stands at a significant point in Paul's letter to the Roman church. To this point, Paul has outlined the sinfulness of all mankind (1-3), the reality of justification by faith (4) made possible by Jesus' work (5), and the absolute necessity of responding in faith to that consequent free gift of salvation (6-8). Chapters nine through eleven outline this discussion in national/ethnic terms and close in doxology – calling all mankind to respond in worship to the mercy that God has shown to individuals and to nations (11:28-36). '12:1' then, in the original un-numbered letter, would have turned the discussion very naturally

towards response – how a believing community of individual Christians should live in gratitude for this mercy shown by God.

1 As Paul moves into chapter twelve, he shifts his approach and begins to describe what I will call an appropriate response to God’s saving work. Others have called it by different names: F. F. Bruce claims that this is one of many instances where Paul “...follows up an exposition of doctrine with an ethical exhortation”¹ while Douglas Moo is not comfortable with that distinction: “[this] is not, therefore, a transition from ‘theology’ to ‘practice’ but from a focus more on the ‘indicative’ side of the gospel to a focus more on the ‘imperative’ side.”² Ernst Kasemann agrees: “Pauline exhortation cannot be regarded as ‘ethics’ in distinction from a preceding ‘dogmatics.’”³ C. K. Barrett presents the most reasonable summary:

There is, of course, a measure of truth in this observation [that Romans 12 represents a shift from dogma to ethics]; but it is a serious mistake to treat the two parts of the epistle as distinct from each other. Paul’s dogmatic teaching is misunderstood if it is not seen to require ethical action, and his ethical teaching cannot be grasped if it is not recognized that it rests at every point upon the dogmatics... It is best understood as an exposition of the obedience which is an essential element of faith, and of the gratitude which redeemed and justified man is bound to feel towards the merciful God.⁴

Whatever Paul’s intentions were, it is clear from the particle οὖν (‘therefore’) that he has explained or implied something and now intends what he now describes (chapter twelve) to logically follow. Some commentators recognize the possibility that this could be a simple transitional particle,⁵ but most agree that ‘therefore’ communicates that 12:1 and following is to be heeded *because of* something – probably God’s mercy (hence the NIV’s translation ‘in view

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The letter of Paul to the Romans*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 212.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 745.

³ Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, Translated & edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 323.

⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2nd ed., (London: A. C. Black (Publishers) Ltd., 1991), 212.

⁵ For example, Moo (748) and Barrett (212) allow the possibility; the word ‘therefore’ is dropped altogether from Kasemann’s English translation (325) (ff326).

of God's mercy'). Barrett suggests that this 'mercy' could be linked to the discussion of 'mercy' at the end of chapter eleven, but notes that because different Greek words are used from eleven to twelve that Paul likely intends the response to be to the argument of "...the whole epistle and the whole truth of God."⁶ Moo argues that the response described in the remaining text is to be a response to the theology of chapters 1-11,⁷ and Cranfield writes simply that "...what is about to be said [Romans 12-16] is based on, follows from, what has already been said."⁸ Kasemann though suggests that the use of the plural in the Greek text (reflecting the Septuagint) at this point indicates that Paul is thinking in terms of the whole of God's salvation history.⁹ Whatever the case may be, the flow of Paul's argument seems to be: 'I've described in fullness the mercy God that has shown you; because of that mercy (therefore), act accordingly' and this seems to be the meaning that the NIV translation communicates. While other options are available¹⁰, this translation seems to carry the right force.

We have thus far established that Paul intends for the Roman church to live out chapter twelve *because of* God's mercies. 'Intend' is perhaps too weak a word because the verb used in the letter is a much stronger one: *parakaleo*. While the NIV uses 'urge', Paul in fact 'exhorts' believers to do as he has written – communicating a meaning somewhere between 'request' and 'command.'¹¹ Bruce presents this nuance as having a 'diplomatic flavour,'¹² while Moo writes that this is an exhortation that "...comes with ... [the] authority of a preacher who is the

⁶ Barrett, 212.

⁷ Moo, 748.

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans, a shorter commentary*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing. Company, 1985), 292.

⁹ Kasemann, 326.

¹⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A new translation with introduction and commentary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 638. Fitzmyer suggests that the phrase 'in view of God's mercies' could be translated 'by God's mercies' and tied not to 'I urge you' but to 'offer your bodies' (639). He accepts the 'NIV translation' but notes that perhaps this second option brings out the fact that our efforts to live out Romans 12 are not to be of our own and that our capacity for self-offering is based only on God's mercy to us first (a notion that reflects David Peterson's main thesis).

¹¹ Moo, 748-749.

¹² Bruce, 213.

mediator of God's truth rather than the authority of a superior issuing a command."¹³ Paul's exhortation is based on his duty as an 'apostle' and is thus the instrument through which God communicates this message to His people.¹⁴ Those people therefore need to pay attention and act on this 'authoritative summons to obedience issued in the name of the Gospel.'¹⁵ The NIV falls somewhat short here because it misses the nuance of 'authority' and 'command' – the message that follows must be heeded!

At this point, it would be wise to pause momentarily to consider the term that the NIV renders 'brothers' – those adelfoi whom Paul exhorts. First, Moo and Fitzmyer each specifically tie these 'brothers' to the Roman church,¹⁶ although most commentators would agree that this message could be reasonably extended to all believers. For that reason, Moo's rendering as 'brothers and sisters' seems appropriate. Secondly, given the flow of Paul's argument (especially as it seems to view the Roman church's spirituality in a positive light)¹⁷ and given that these adelfoi seem to be members of the Roman church, it is reasonable to establish that the 'brothers' are faithful believers who have already made commitments to the Lord. This point becomes significant in the next clause.

Let us now move on to what the adelfoi are exhorted to do. The NIV renders it: '...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...' which uses vocabulary that reflects a cultic context for sacrifice. The words for 'holy' and 'well-pleasing' were specific 'technical terms' within the realm of religious sacrifice¹⁸ while 'offer' is 'a standard Hellenistic word for the offering of a sacrifice.'¹⁹ In this text specifically, the word appears in the aorist tense,

¹³ Moo, 749.

¹⁴ *ibid.*; Kasemann, 326.

¹⁵ Cranfield 1985, 293.

¹⁶ Moo, 746; Fitzmyer, 637.

¹⁷ Moo, 755.

¹⁸ Barrett, 212.

¹⁹ David Peterson, *Engaging with God*, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 177.

prompting some scholars to believe that Paul had in mind a once-for-all offering.²⁰ Given though as we have just established that this letter was written to believers, it makes little sense to believe that Paul was writing to them to make that once-for-all offering, ‘after the fact.’²¹ It is more likely that Paul intends the ‘offering of one’s self to be a constant process, as is the renewing of the mind in v. 2.

Paul then exhorts his audience to give their bodies consistently as sacrifices, using language reminiscent of his earlier exhortation in Romans 6:13: “...Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” This use of sacrificial language both fulfills and extends Old Testament themes: Jesus’ atoning sacrifice fulfilled the Israelite sacrificial system but Paul’s use of sacrificial and ‘offering yourself’ language here demonstrates a continuity with the OT texts which reflect the importance of sacrifice and which recognized the supremacy of the offering of the self with right attitude over any animal sacrifice.²²

While the NIV is valid, various commentators have presented nuances which are not captured in the translation. First is the concept of ‘bodies’ which should be understood in a variety of ways. On one level, Paul surely means the offering of one’s physical self as seems to be addressed in Romans 6:13.²³ On another level, the bodies offered may also be thought of as ‘our being in relation to the world.’²⁴ Moo develops this idea stating that “...Paul probably intends to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person’s interaction with the

²⁰ Moo, 750.

²¹ David Peterson, “Worship and ethics in Romans 12,” *Tyndale Bulletin* Vol. 44.2. (November 1993): 281.

²² Peterson makes this point by appealing to Deuteronomy 10:14-22 and other texts (1993: 279); see also Moo, 750.

²³ Moo, 750.

²⁴ Kasemann, 327.

world.”²⁵ Fitzmyer simplifies the situation by identifying the sacrifice given as to be ‘yourself.’²⁶

In whatever way we understand Paul’s use of soma, two issues are significant to our understanding of worship – the nature of sacrifice given in worship and the context in which it is given. First, the nature of the sacrifice given has changed – “The sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices, but in giving one’s own.”²⁷ Secondly, the cultic act of sacrifice in worship, once sacerdotal, has been made open to all believers in all aspects of life. Moo writes “Paul is making a special point to emphasize that the sacrifice we are called on to make requires a dedication to the service of God in the harsh and often ambiguous life of this world.”²⁸ “Christians who strive to do what is right give a cultic or sacrificial sense to their lives, as they offer themselves and their conduct to [God].”²⁹ “What was previously cultic is now extended to the secularity of our earthly life as a whole.”³⁰

This must be at least in part what Paul was trying to communicate when he wrote about sacrifices which are living, holy and pleasing to God. There seems to be some disagreement though over how to best translate the relationship between the ‘sacrifice’ and the three adjectives that describe it. First, the Greek word for sacrifice is in the singular form, possibly communicating that the offering of all Christian’s bodies together is a sacrifice. In a footnote, Moo notes that this “...could indicate that Paul thinks of this presentation[/offering] as having a corporate dimension, involving the service of the entire Christian community together.”³¹ He

²⁵ Moo, 751.

²⁶ Fitzmyer, 639.

²⁷ Bruce, 213.

²⁸ Moo, 751.

²⁹ Fitzmyer, 640.

³⁰ Kasemann, 327.

³¹ Moo, 750.

simply dismisses the possibility though, claiming that the word is a ‘distributive singular’ without expanding that point.³²

Other commentators though are strangely silent on the issue, perhaps assuming the ‘distributive singular.’ Barrett, Bruce, Cranfield, and Kasemann all translate the phrase ‘a sacrifice,’ but none give consideration to the singular form of that word. Given a more in-depth study, I would like the opportunity to explore how Paul could think of the collective self-offering of Christians as a single sacrifice. It seems to me that Paul’s discussion about the body of believers in 12:3-8 would flow very naturally from such a connection.

A second issue is the relationship of the adjectives ‘living’, ‘holy’ and ‘well-pleasing’ to the ‘sacrifice.’ In the NIV, ‘living’ precedes ‘sacrifices’ while ‘holy’ and ‘well-pleasing’ appear in apposition to the ‘living sacrifices’ construction. Cranfield presents a solid case against this construction, arguing instead that ‘living,’ ‘holy,’ and ‘well-pleasing’ should remain together as they are in the Greek text.³³ He argues that the phrase ‘living sacrifice’ makes people think of ‘living’ in terms of ‘not to be killed’ instead of as being equally fully ‘living’ and ‘holy’ and ‘well-pleasing.’³⁴

Cranfield continues by explaining the significance of ‘holy’ and ‘well-pleasing’: ‘Holy’ communicates both that a person is set apart for God’s purposes, and that that person now belongs to God.³⁵ “Already God’s by right of creation and by right of redemption, he has yet to become God’s by virtue of his own free surrender of himself.”³⁶ It is precisely then this act of

³² Moo, 750.

³³ Cranfield 1985, 294; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 600.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ Cranfield 1975, 601.

³⁶ Cranfield 1985, 294.

free surrender which Paul is describing which is what God desires, thus making it a true and proper sacrifice, and that is indeed ‘well-pleasing.’³⁷

We now move onto the section of the text which the NIV renders ‘this is your spiritual act of worship.’ Commentators vary widely on this translation and so it is fitting to consider in depth what is intended by *thn logikhn latreian umwn*.

logikhn is a difficult word to translate, appearing only one other time in the New Testament³⁸ and thus having little biblical context by which to understand it. Etymologically, it means ‘pertaining to the logos, or reason.’³⁹ Moo presents four ways of understanding that meaning within the Romans 12:1 context⁴⁰ and I will briefly present his categories now. First, Moo writes that it is appropriate to translate the word as ‘spiritual’ in the sense of the ‘inner self’⁴¹ – “...a worship consisting not in outward rites but in the movement of man’s inward being, resulting in outward concrete action.”⁴² Moo points out a second possibility, which is that *logikhn* could mean “...appropriate for human beings as rational and spiritual creatures of God.”⁴³ James D. G. Dunn supports this view, commenting that *logikhn* worship is “...proper for man the creature – the logical expression of his creatureliness properly understood and lived out.”⁴⁴ Moo’s third option is ‘rational’ in the sense of ‘acceptable to human reason’⁴⁵ or as Fitzmyer puts it ‘suited to one’s rational nature.’⁴⁶ The final possibility that Moo presents is that *logikhn* could mean ‘reasonable’ or ‘fitting the circumstances.’⁴⁷ Building on Cranfield’s work

³⁷ See also Peterson 1993, 281 on this point.

³⁸ The word is also present in 1 Peter 2:2 where its meaning is not inherently clear either.

³⁹ Barrett, 213.

⁴⁰ See Moo, 752-753.

⁴¹ Moo, 752.

⁴² Barrett, 213.

⁴³ Moo, 752.

⁴⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 712.

⁴⁵ Moo, 753.

⁴⁶ Fitzmyer, 640.

⁴⁷ Moo, 753.

on this position, Peterson agrees that *logikhn* should be translated ‘understanding: “...the service rendered by those who truly understand the gospel and its implications.”’⁴⁸

Moo concludes that some combination of the first two possibilities are appropriate, but adds that the fourth option may also be implied,⁴⁹ a logical level of meaning which would connect the argument back to the ‘in view of God’s mercies’ clause. He opts therefore to translate the word ‘true’ instead of ‘spiritual’ in that only worship offered with the right attitude lived out in real life can be true, appropriate worship that God wants.⁵⁰ On this point, he sounds closer to Cranfield and Peterson than he seems ready to admit.

It seems to me that by looking at the words *logikhn* and *latreian* individually, it is possible to miss a level of meaning that the two words carry together. *latreian* itself is the word typically meant to connote cultic sacrifice,⁵¹ especially that which is offered by the people as a whole.⁵² This is significant given Paul’s exhortation to the people to offer their bodies – he understands the believers as a new priesthood who no longer give bloody sacrifices but offer themselves – ‘simultaneously sacrifice and priest.’⁵³ “Christian worship does not consist of what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times, and with sacred acts. It is the offering of the bodily existence in the otherwise profane sphere.”⁵⁴ “It implies that any cultic worship which is not accompanied by obedience in the ordinary affairs of life must be regarded as false worship, unacceptable to God.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Peterson 1993, 275.

⁴⁹ Moo, 753.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Cranfield 1975, 601.

⁵² Peterson 1992, 66.

⁵³ Kasemann, 329.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cranfield 1975, 601.

Various commentators uphold this reality and thus understand *logikhn latreian together* to be polemical against any kind false worship. The issue is not what *logikhn* means apart from *latreian* but how the two together represent true worship which is indeed well-pleasing to God.

A number of groups in the context of the letter to the Romans were guilty of false worship. Chapter two of the letter outlines the failure of the Jews to worship rightly and Moo suggests that Paul uses *latreian* specifically “...to create a contrast between the Jewish and Christian form of worship.”⁵⁶ Romans 1 alerts the audience to the danger of false worship practiced by the Gentiles:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised...⁵⁷

Various commentators note that both of these groups, Jews and Gentiles alike,⁵⁸ were familiar with the concept of *logikhn latreian* and that Paul uses it here to correct his audience’s way of thinking about it. *logikhn latreian* worship in its various manifestations exalted reason⁵⁹ and mysticism⁶⁰ and although the concept included various admirable virtues, it could have been a temptation or confusion away from true worship that is well-pleasing to God. Kasemann demonstrates how Paul borrowed the term for his own purposes: “From [the term *logikhn latreian*] he takes the guiding theme of spiritual worship [and drops the idea of reason]... Yet

⁵⁶ Moo, 753.

⁵⁷ Romans 1:21, 24-25.

⁵⁸ Cranfield 1975, 601-604 and Kasemann, 328-329 both give in-depth examples of the use of the concept in Hellenistic Judaism and secular philosophy.

⁵⁹ According to Kasemann, the term originated within Stoic philosophy as a polemic against the ancient sacrificial system. “According to this [animal sacrifice] is irrational and makes a mockery of the deity which permeates the world as spirit if his veneration takes place unspiritually... The citizen of the world has to give moral expression to authentic piety” (328).

⁶⁰ According to Cranfield, Hellenistic Judaism includes texts which speak of inward mystic sacrifices; for example: ‘For the true oblation, what else can it be but the devotion of a soul which is dear to God’ (*Vit. Mos.* 2.108; cited on 603).

Paul also parts company with mysticism by incorporating all life and stressing corporeality as the characteristic sphere of this worship. This makes clear the polemical edge implied in the infinitive.”⁶¹ Peterson uses somewhat more popular terms to describe the situation:

It is possible that the apostle chose to use the particular expression *logikhn latreian* as something of a challenge to the spiritualizing tradition... ‘Paul would thus be taking up, in quotation marks as it were, a religious slogan common in certain circles at the time. In so doing, he completely transforms the saying, while opposing it to those conceptions of spiritual worship so much in vogue at the time. Certainly no more the bloody animal sacrifices of the past, but nor either the pure interiority of the Mystic.’⁶²

Given our place in history, it is difficult to grasp what *logikhn latreian* would have meant to the Roman church, but Peterson and others mentioned here present an intriguing hypothesis. It could be as though Paul is claiming and redeeming a secular slogan for Christ. The force of Romans 12:1 then could be ‘Forget what you’ve heard about the superiority of reason, or of solely mystical experiences of God (that which ‘they’ call *logikhn latreian*); give your whole selves to the service of the Lord – *that* is your *logikhn latreian*.’ The NIV translators may be on to something here as they write ‘This is your *logikhn latreian*.’

At this point though, the issue becomes how to neatly communicate that idea through a concise and accurate translation. Whatever words are used to translate *logikhn latreian* they should in some way connote these themes:

Our true (i.e., well pleasing) worship, given as an appropriate response to the all-encompassing gift of mercy, must be equally all encompassing: the giving of our entire selves as a sacrifice to God⁶³ which implies that we transfer ownership of ourselves to Him and in so doing we are set apart from the world for service in the world. This total giving is not solely spiritual, as our bodies are required as well, but not solely material, as inward dedication is

⁶¹ Kasemann, 329.

⁶² R. Corriveau, *The Liturgy of life*, quoted in Peterson 1993, 274.

⁶³ Moo, 750.

necessary. The cultic aspect of worship is no longer limited to sacred spaces, but is extended paradoxically into the profane where God’s rule is manifested in everyday experience.⁶⁴

We might then expand the NIV translation for teaching purposes to say: “Therefore, I exhort you, brothers and sisters in Christ, in view of God’s mercies, to offer your bodies as a sacrifice: living, holy and pleasing to God – given your rational and spiritual nature, and acceptance of the truth of the gospel, this constant offering then is your true (as opposed to false) and appropriate 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.

2 Having then made a point something like what has been developed above, Paul begins to explain how exactly the offering might be made. Moo writes “We can present our bodies to the Lord as genuinely holy and acceptable sacrifices only if we ‘do not conform to this world’ but ‘are transformed by the renewing of the mind.’”⁶⁵

Let us begin by considering what is meant by the word translated as ‘world’ as we must understand it before we may understand how it relates to the worship outlined in the first verse. On one level, the NIV translators have made a good decision to translate the Greek word *aiwn* as ‘world,’ implying a ‘public’ connotation. Kasemann makes the point that the ‘not conforming/transforming’ action that allows true worship must fully take place in the world:

Since [Paul] is concerned with service in daily life and the secular world, he is unable to see in Christian existence a private matter. It has a public or eschatological character which is important for the world. When God claims our bodies, in and with them he reaches after his creation... Christian existence, publicly offered to God corporeally as a sacrifice is in all circumstances a pointer to the new world which has come in Christ, to the kingdom of Christ.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Kasemann, 327.

⁶⁵ Moo, 754.

⁶⁶ Kasemann, 330.

It is this ‘new world which has come’ though that makes the translation ‘world’ somewhat awkward. In English, we think primarily of ‘the world’ in terms of ‘the Earth’ or ‘the people who don’t believe in God,’ but Paul seems to be communicating something more about an ‘age’ or an ‘era.’ He is setting up a distinction between two ‘ages’: i. the world before Christ which is marked by sin and death and is now fading away to be burned up at the end of time, and ii. the Kingdom inaugurated by Christ which is characterized by grace and obedience to the Lord.

Kasemann recognizes this and understands that for a Christian, baptism means “...the change from the old to the new aeon.”⁶⁷ Moo indicates the shift in different words: “...those who belong to Christ have been transferred from the old realm of sin and death into the new realm of righteousness and life. But this transfer, while decisive and final, does not isolate us from the influence of the old realm.”⁶⁸ Knowing the influence that the passing age can wield, Paul then exhorts his audience to resist the pressure to conform, and to act instead as those who belong to the new age – Christ’s Kingdom.⁶⁹

At this point, Moo would seem to argue that the NIV translation which includes ‘do not be conformed *any longer*’ is inappropriate.⁷⁰ Cranfield however adds a helpful pastoral remark which could strengthen the case for accepting the NIV translation:

...This me suschmatizesqe is something which [the believer] needs to hear again and again... For the pressures to conformity are always present, and always strong and insidious – so that the Christian often yields quite unconsciously. And the implication of the present tense (that what is being forbidden is something which is actually happening) is always true.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Kasemann, 329.

⁶⁸ Moo, 755.

⁶⁹ Moo, 747.

⁷⁰ Moo, 755. He makes this argument on the basis of difficulties establishing the tense of the verb, and also based on Paul’s ‘positive view’ of the Roman church’s spirituality.

⁷¹ Cranfield 1975, 608.

The ‘any longer’ could stand as a constant reminder to ‘keep up the battle’ and to continually give oneself as a sacrifice. As Moo communicates, the ‘transfer’ of a believer into the Kingdom of God is a one-time action, but it requires a constant offering of oneself to God and away from the world. This process is described through Paul’s wording ‘Don’t be conformed, but be transformed.’ Cranfield’s translation of both verbs in the passive form here seems appropriate: we must resist being conformed by the insidious influences that beset us and instead be transformed by the Spirit who comes to renew us.⁷²

Some commentators believe that conforming to the world is simply a superficial disguising of a believer’s true nature, not nearly as significant as being transformed inwardly and made right for the Kingdom.⁷³ Barrett however rightly points out that this is not within Paul’s view: “Conformity to this age is no superficial matter.”⁷⁴ Cranfield adds that “...when Christians allow themselves to be conformed to this world, what takes place is not just a disguising of their real nature, but an inward corruption.”⁷⁵

Having then addressed the relation of conforming and transforming, let us turn our attention to how the necessary ‘transformation’ occurs. Fitzmyer states quite rightly that we are to let our selves be transformed as we give ourselves as a sacrifice ‘with the aid of God’s grace and the holy Spirit.’⁷⁶ The Holy Spirit does the work of transformation from within, as we cooperate with His leading⁷⁷: “The metamorphosis is not external but inward, involving the renewal of the nouV, that aspect of the human being which is considered the seat of intellectual and moral judgment.”⁷⁸ We are transformed through the renewal of this ‘mind’ (nouV) and we

⁷² Cranfield 1975, 608.

⁷³ For an outline of this argument, see its presentation in Moo, 756; Cranfield 1975, 606; or Barrett, 214. Moo and Cranfield conclude by agreeing with Barrett.

⁷⁴ Barrett, 214. He also points out that “Pauline usage does not support a difference between the two verbs.”

⁷⁵ Cranfield 1975, 606.

⁷⁶ Fitzmyer, 641.

⁷⁷ Cranfield 1975, 609.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

are given the capacity to think anew and increasingly in line with the way God wants us to think.⁷⁹ If *logikhn* from verse one specifically carries the meaning of ‘rational’ the connection becomes significant here. The renewing of the mind makes Christian offering of one’s body possible, which then indeed is rational worship.

We must also note here the significance of *nouV* in contrast to its other appearances in the letter to the Romans. In the first chapter as Paul describes the false worship of the Gentiles, he explains that God gave them over to a ‘depraved’ mind (*nouV*).⁸⁰ Moo translates the adjective that describes mind as ‘worthless’: i.e., unqualified in assessing the truth about God and the world he has made.”⁸¹ With that mind, the Gentiles are thus unable to rightly understand the truth about God and thus rightly accept and worship Him. In that same unbelieving state, people are helpless against the ‘tyrannizing forces’ of the passing age.⁸² If indeed the last half of Romans 7 is about a pre-Christian struggle, the attempt to rightly worship without the renewed *nouV* is there vividly painted. We thus recognize how crucial it is for us to allow God’s mercy to invade and renew us if we are to appropriately offer worship to the Lord.

The reason for this renewal of the mind is provided as Paul continues: the capacity to know and do God’s will. “Humanity is fundamentally impaired at the level of understanding and judgment because of the rejection of the true knowledge of God”⁸³ and so even post-conversion, renewal of the mind is necessary, so that one may finally act in God-pleasing ways.

The way that we distinguish such ways are by ‘testing’ and ‘approving’ with the renewed mind: “...When Paul speaks of *nouV* ... he always means as in the context [of] the power of critical judgment which can keep its distance for examination or accept something as

⁷⁹ Moo, 757.

⁸⁰ Romans 1:28, NIV.

⁸¹ Moo, 757.

⁸² Cranfield 1975, 608.

⁸³ Peterson 1993, 276.

fitting.”⁸⁴ Barrett explains that from this critical distance, we are able to test actions and attitudes for value and if they are found worthy, approve of and engage in them, on the basis of our renewed minds.⁸⁵

Still though, our minds cannot be entirely counted on, since transformation is a process and the effects of the passing age may still be felt. Therefore, Paul provides a standard by which to ‘test and approve’: the will of God.⁸⁶ The relation though of the three adjectives associated with ‘the will’ is contested by many commentators.

The NIV translation communicates that a believer ‘...will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.’ This translation describes God’s will as a good, pleasing and perfect will and suggests that the believer with the renewed mind should be able to discern what that is and how to fulfill it in a given circumstance. Fitzmyer presents this view: “Knowledge of what God desires becomes the norm of Christian conduct. The Christian judges no longer according to the ‘present world,’ but according to what God wills.”⁸⁷

Commentators such as Cranfield, Kasemann, Moo and Barrett though take the adjectives to be in apposition to ‘the will of God’ (rather than describing it), meaning that God’s will is not necessarily a specific action, but in general that which is good, pleasing and perfect. They render the passage instead something like: ‘...you will be able to test and approve God’s will – that which is good, pleasing and perfect.’ Moo concludes that ‘the will of God’ means his moral direction, and that by doing that which is good, pleasing and perfect, a Christian (as a sacrifice) fulfills the Lord’s will and pleases Him in any given situation.⁸⁸ Given the overall witness of Scripture, I am inclined to accept his position. This is also a joyous reality for

⁸⁴ Kasemann, 330.

⁸⁵ Barrett, 97 & 215.

⁸⁶ Moo, 757-758.

⁸⁷ Fitzmyer, 641.

⁸⁸ Moo, 757-785.

believers, as we are not locked into a choice-free actualization of God's will; rather "...it indicates the dignity of the individual Christian called on as he is to exercise a responsible freedom."⁸⁹

We must though note that that which is 'good, pleasing and perfect' may not reflect 'human' standards. Given that we are living as a part of the new age, our actions that fulfill God's will are those taken in utter obedience, not necessarily those which agree with human reason. Kasemann effectively presents this point:

Eschatological decision does not coincide with ethical decision. Christian reason is not self-evidently oriented to the standards which apply elsewhere. To ask what pleases God may concretely again and again agree with what mankind and the world regard as necessary and desirable... The claim is made [though] that in the light of the new aeon Christians can do a better job with reason than the world in general does. Paradoxically they do this precisely at the point where, corresponding to God's will, they oppose the trend of this world and do what seems to be irrational, as God himself did in sending his Son to the cross.⁹⁰

Those things said, it is perhaps appropriate now then to attempt to reformulate the NIV translation in order to reflect the work of these commentators. Paul may have intended for us to communicate Romans 12:2 in a manner such as this:

'And do not be conformed any longer by the pressures of this age that is passing away – allow the Holy Spirit to transform you from within as He renews the way you think. Then you will be able to discern and participate in that which God wills – all that which is good, pleasing and perfect.'

To which we might fittingly add – '*That* is how you live out your true and appropriate worship.'

⁸⁹ Cranfield 1975, 609.

⁹⁰ Kasemann, 331. Kasemann's view of this passage is deeply rooted in the concept of baptism transferring a believer's existence from the old age (where logic and human ethics through reason are the standard) to the new age (where obedience to God is the final authority). 'Ethical decision' then refers to actions taken on the basis of the wisdom of the former age; 'eschatological decision' denotes those made according to the wisdom of the renewed mind lived out in the offering of self in the Kingdom of Christ.

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