

ON MORTIFYING SIN – PART 4

Romans 12:1-2

A Holy Sacrifice

Romans 12:1 ~ 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

- Chapter 12 marks the beginning of the implications of all that Paul has stated in chapters 1-11
- For 11 chapters Paul has been explaining the “mercies of God”
 - Chapters 1-3...the great need for the mercies of God
 - Chapters 3-5...the mercies of God in justification
 - Chapters 6-8...the mercies of God in sanctification (freed from the power of sin by union with Christ)
 - Chapters 9-11...the mercies of God in God bringing salvation to the Gentiles through Israel’s disobedience but not rejecting his people
- The word “mercies” is plural because God has lavished us with mercy...one mercy after another
- As a result, these mercies should compel a response from God’s people
- There are consequences to these great truths...doctrinal truths have consequences...these truths should impact how we live...doctrine and practice can never be divorced
- Romans 12 marks the transition from doctrinal to practical...there is always a connection in Scripture between what we believe and how we live...between right doctrine and holy living
- The moral imperatives in Scripture usually are derived from doctrinal indicatives
- “I have often defended the notion that doctrine is inherently practical. What we believe determines how we think, how we behave, and how we respond to life’s trials. Abstract beliefs never remain abstract; they inevitable manifest themselves in behavior. A right belief system therefore lies as the foundation of all truly righteous conduct.”¹
- It is because of the mercies of God that Paul “urges” (*parakaleo* = “to call alongside”) believers
- The idea is “to beseech...implore...exhort you...appeal”
- He is not offering a suggestion or a recommendation...this is not just good advice or a good idea
- Paul is bringing the weight of his apostolic authority to bear on this issue
- He urges us “to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God”
- Our “bodies” are to be offered to God in the pursuit of holiness
- The word “bodies” likely represents the totality of one’s life and activities, of which his body is the vehicle of expression...it’s a reference to all we are
- “We experience God’s mercy as a power that exerts a total and all-encompassing claim upon us: grace now reigns over us. It is therefore entirely fitting that our response is to be one that is equally total and all-encompassing: the presentation of our entire persons as a sacrifice to God.”²

¹ John MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of forgiveness*, 8.

² Doug Moo

- Prior to Christ, our bodies were totally dominated by sin:

Romans 3:10-18 ~ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” 13 “THEIR **THROAT** IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR **TONGUES** THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR **LIPS**”; 14 “WHOSE **MOUTH** IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; 15 “THEIR **FEET** ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, 16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, 17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” 18 “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR **EYES**.”

- But now that we are in Christ, every faculty of our existence is to be employed in service to the Lord and the pursuit of godly living:

Romans 6:12-14 ~ Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal **body** so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on **presenting the members of your body** to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but **present yourselves to God** as those alive from the dead, and your **members** as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:15-18 ~ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 16 Do you not know that when you **present yourselves** to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you **presented your members** as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now **present your members** as slaves to righteousness, resulting in **sanctification**.

- Our bodies now can be utilized for God’s purposes rather than their former sinful purposes
- Our bodies now become vehicles for the demonstration of God’s righteousness

1 Corinthians 6:15-20 ~ **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?** Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, “THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.” 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 **Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?** 20 **For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.**

- We are to offer ourselves as “living” sacrifices...not like the animal sacrifices in the OT which were killed
- His point here is not on taking the life as in the OT but in giving our life
- He gave himself for us and we are to respond by giving ourselves to him
- We are to offer ourselves as “holy” sacrifices...just as OT sacrifices were to be animals without spot or blemish, so too believers are to offer themselves unto God without blemish
- We are to be given over entirely to him since we are his alone
- We are to live in conformity with his holy standard and in contrast to the ways of the world
- We are to offer ourselves as “acceptable” sacrifices
- The kind of sacrifice we make to live for the Lord ought to please him
- Living this way is an act of worship...a “spiritual service of worship”
- “spiritual” (*logikos*) = “rational or reasonable”...or even “logical”
- Those who are mindful of the mercies of God have only one logical response which is complete and total sacrifice to God...a believer’s offering of his total life as a sacrifice to God is therefore sacred service

- True worship is offering all of yourself to be used by him at his disposal and for his glory
- Worship is what we were created for...to exalt and magnify God is our highest calling
- Worship is our ultimate priority...it is to be the defining characteristic of who we are as children of God
- Worship is the defining mark of progressive sanctification

A Transformed Sacrifice

Romans 12:2 ~ 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.

- We must avoid being “conformed to this world” (*suschematizo*)...we must avoid being pressed into a mold
- It’s a passive verb meaning “don’t allow this to happen to you”...resist the external pressure
- This “world/age” Paul is referring to here is not the physical world...rather it’s referring to the way the world thinks, the mindset of the world, and the worldview of the world
- The “world/age” is the outlook of mankind as it ignores God and does not recognize him as God
- It is the outlook of those who have rebelled against God and turned their back on him
- It is those who only think of this world and this life...the perspective of life that is exclusive of God
- It is a view that puts man at the center of things rather than God
- “Worldliness involves love for earthly things, esteem for earthly values, and preoccupation with earthly cares.”³
- “The world stands for everything that opposes the will of God.”⁴
- “The goal of worldly people is to move forward rather than upward, to live horizontally rather than vertically. They seek after outward prosperity rather than holiness. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. If they do not deny God, they ignore and forget Him, or else they use Him only for their selfish ends. Worldliness...is human nature without God.”⁵
- “Worldliness is that system of values, in any given age, which has at its center our fallen human perspective, which displaces God and his truth from the world, and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. It thus gives great plausibility to what is morally wrong and, for that reason, makes what is wrong seem normal.”⁶
- “All the danger is when the world gets into the heart. The water is useful for the sailing of the ship; all the danger is when the water gets into the ship; so the fear is when the world gets into the heart.”⁷
- Paul is exhorting believers to resist a mindset that embraces a worldly perspective
- We know that because of the next phrase in v. 2 to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”
- This means that he is concerned about a way of thinking rather than merely behaving...he has more in mind than just actions and conduct
- He is concerned that we as believers not allow ourselves to think like the world thinks...to not allow ourselves to adopt a worldly outlook on life...to not allow the evil world system to infect our thinking
- Because worldly thinking leads to a lifestyle drift

2 Timothy 4:10 ~ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica

³ John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven*, 48.

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 37.

⁵ Joel Beeke, *Overcoming the World*, 16.

⁶ David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, 4.

⁷ Thomas Watson

- “Are the lines between Christianity and worldly conduct blurry in your mind – and more importantly, in your life? To put it another way, is your lifestyle obviously different from that of the non-Christian? Imagine I take a blind test in which my task is to identify the genuine follower of Jesus Christ. My choices are an unregenerate individual and you. I’m given two reports detailing conversations, Internet activity, manner of dress, iPod playlists, television habits, hobbies, leisure time, financial transactions, thoughts, passions, and dreams. The question is: Would I be able to tell you apart? Would I discern a difference between you and your unconverted neighbor, coworker, classmate, or friend? Have the lines between Christianity and worldly conduct in your life become so indistinguishable that there really is no difference at all? If the difference is hard to detect, you may be in danger of drifting down the deserter’s path with Demas.”⁸
- Paul gives the antidote to worldly living in v. 2 which is transformed thinking...we are to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind”
- “transformed” = *metamorphoo* = to undergo a change
- This only happens as a person’s “mind” changes through a continual reprogramming of the mind...through a life-long process of habitually putting worldly thoughts to death and replacing them with godly thinking

2 Corinthians 10:1-5 ~ Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ

Ephesians 4:17-24 ~ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Philippians 4:8 ~ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Colossians 3:1-2 ~ Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

- The battle against worldliness is primarily won by focusing on the knowledge of Christ
- “What makes holy people holy? What makes unholy people unholy? To a large degree it is what fills their minds and their hearts. This is why the battle for holiness is first a battle to flood your mind and heart with the right things, the best things, and why it’s equally a battle to avoid flooding your mind and heart with the wrong things, the worst things. So let me ask you, when it comes to what you see, what you watch, what you read, what you ponder, what you enjoy, what you find entertaining, what fills your mind and thrills your heart—what is your standard? What do you invite into your mind, your heart, your life? What do you deliberately keep out? What is your standard?”⁹

⁸ C.J. Mahaney, *Worldliness*, 24.

⁹ <https://www.challies.com/articles/whatever-is-false-whatever-is-dishonorable-whatever-is-unjust%e2%80%a6/>

- Only as believers live this way will they be able to “prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
- When we live according to these verses, we will be able to “approve” that God’s moral will is best
- To “prove” in this instance is not to test so as to find out whether the will of God is good or bad; rather, Paul has in mind here a testing which will lead to an approval as a result of the testing
- The idea is a “testing with a view toward its approval”
- In other words, to “prove” the will of God is to examine it and, as a result, come to the conclusion that it is “good, acceptable, and perfect”
- You conclude that this is the best way to live...you conclude that the way God says to live is better than the way you want to live
- Doing God’s will is the only thing that will please God and be pleasing to you

2 Corinthians 3:18

2 Corinthians 3:18 ~ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- More than any other single verse, this one describes the foundational dynamics of sanctification
- It reveals how God works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure
- In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the fading glory of the Old Covenant under Moses with the unfading glory of the New Covenant

We are Sanctified by Beholding the Glory of Christ

- Paul wants us to understand in v. 18 that the sight of the glory of God shining in the face of Christ lies at the heart of our sanctification
- As we behold the glory of Christ with the eyes of their heart, we are thereby progressively conformed into his image
- Our primary problem before coming to Christ is that we are blind to the glory of Christ
- Before salvation, the glory of Christ means nothing to us as we were completely uninterested in the person and work of Christ
- We don’t see how precious and glorious Christ really is because we are blind to it and ignorant of how satisfying Christ is
- This is the essence of spiritual death: to be blind to the glory of Christ

2 Corinthians 4:4 ~ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- Prior to salvation, we could not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ
- This is how Satan works...he doesn’t need to send demons to keep people from being saved
- All he needs to do is blind sinners to the glory of God and the truth about Christ
- His blinding of peoples’ minds makes it impossible for them to see the light of the gospel
- But that all changes when Christ removed the blinders

2 Corinthians 4:6 ~ For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- This is what happens at conversion...God floods the sinner’s blinded mind with the spiritual light necessary to behold Christ in all his glory
- This is a supernatural work of God...because only God can remove the blinders that Satan had put in place
- When that happens, a person can see for the first time just how glorious Christ is
- And when a sinner gets sight of the glory of Christ, they run to him for salvation
- Thus, salvation begins with the saving sight of the Lord Jesus to which we were previously blind to
- So we might say that the glory of Christ is the foundation of the beginning of the Christian life
- And the glory of Christ is the foundation of the end of the Christian life as well

1 John 3:2 ~ Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

John 17:24 ~ Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me

- So, the sight of the glory of Christ brackets the Christian life...it is what starts the Christian life....and it is the focus of the end of the Christian life
- Looking to Jesus is the grounds of our justification...and looking to Jesus is the ground of our glorification
- Thus, it should not surprise us that the sight of the glory of Christ is also the foundation of everything in between
- Looking to Jesus and the sight of his glory is also the ground of our sanctification
- It is the sight of Christ’s glory that sanctifies us and grows us and matures us and make us more holy
- And that is exactly Paul’s point in v. 18 ~ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.
- Gazing upon the glory of Christ has a “transforming” (*metamorphoo*) effect on believers
- This results in them being changed “into the same image from glory to glory”
- That is a description of progressive sanctification...God moves believers from one level of glory to another level of glory...moving us further and further along holiness
- At times it seems painfully slow but he is transforming us into his image, ever closer to the likeness of Christ
- The spiritual sight of Christ supernaturally causes us to increase in holiness
- The reason for this is that we become what we behold
- The spiritual sight of Christ shows us the beauty of his glory...it captures our affections...it causes us to admire him in such a way that we are satisfied by him
- Continual gazing upon the glory of Christ informs our minds and enflames our hearts, such that we hate what he hates and love what he loves
- We are drawn to him in such a way that garners our affections
- Like going to the mountains further captivates us and increases our affections for the mountains

- That's the way it is with our sanctification...the more we behold of his beauty and glory, the more we are captivated by him and made like him
- Beholding Christ's glory has a way of drawing our affections to him in sanctification
- "Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, and virtue will proceed from Him to repair all our decays, to renew a right spirit within us, and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience. ... It will fix the soul unto that object which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction. ... When the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ and his glory, when the soul thereon cleaves unto him with intense affections, they will cast out, or not give admittance unto, those causes of spiritual weakness and indisposition. ... And nothing will so much excite and encourage our souls hereunto as a constant view of Christ and His glory."¹⁰

We are Sanctified by Appropriating the Power of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:18 ~ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of God's sanctifying work in the life of the believer
- Progressive sanctification is the Spirit's work...it is ultimately the Spirit who is responsible for the inner transformation that is necessary for our sanctification
- He does this by helping us see the glories of Christ
- "It is the peculiar prerogative and function of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ by taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto the people of God. It is as the indwelling Spirit that he does this and as the advocate with believers."¹¹
- However, the Spirit doesn't do this in a vacuum...he doesn't zap believers into holiness...or wave a magic wand
- He always accomplishes his sanctifying work through means which the believer must appropriate
- "Sanctification depends greatly on a diligent use of scriptural means. The 'means of grace' are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshipping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no 'spiritual gains without pains.' Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them."¹²
- This means that we must be putting ourselves in the way of the means by which the Spirit sanctifies us
- We work out our salvation with fear and trembling by making diligent use of the means the Spirit employs in effecting our holiness
- This puts the spiritual disciplines (Word, prayer, fellowship, confession) in a whole new light...they become not religious boxes to check, but the very means by which we come to behold the glory of Christ!

¹⁰ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:460–61.

¹¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 148.

¹² J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*

Philippians 2:12-13

- Whereas our regeneration and justification are monergistic, our pursuit of holiness is synergistic, involving both our effort and God's work
- We work out what God works in...because our sanctification requires both diligent effort on our part and divine energy on God's part
- "Our sanctification is like an airplane. It takes both wings to fly. On one wing you have discipline. On the other wing you have dependence on God. Airplanes are designed to fly on one engine, but airplanes are not designed to fly on one wing. Both are wings are absolutely necessary."¹³

Our Part in Our Sanctification

Philippians 2:12 ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling

- Paul doesn't say "work **for** your salvation"...he says "work **out** your salvation"
- Believers are to put forth effort in their relationship with Christ
- Believers are to make a continuous, sustained effort to work their salvation until it is complete
- Living the Christian life is not a matter of passively yielding to God and surrendering all effort; rather, it involves striving and laboring and working out the salvation God has graciously granted us
- We are to put forth maximum effort in our relationship with Christ
- This is to be done with "fear and trembling"...there ought to be a fear of the Lord in our progressive sanctification, a holy fear that characterizes us
- There ought to be a holy concern to give God the honor that He deserves...a serious dread of sin and yearning for what is right before God
- We should have a healthy fear of offending God and a righteous awe and respect for him
- That is necessary because it is that fear that protects against temptation and sin
- Godly fear protects us from falling into sin and grieving the Lord

God's Part in Our Sanctification

Philippians 2:13 ~ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- The "for" is the reason why we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling
- The basis or the ground of the command to "work out our salvation" is the objective reality that it is God who works in us what we are working out.
- We work out because God works in us...progressive sanctification is fundamentally a supernatural work of God
- God works in believers so that he shapes our will and our works
- When our wills and desires are all transformed by God's work in us, then what naturally follows will be works that manifest those new desires...as a result, our external conduct becomes increasingly holy
- This ultimately results in greater pleasure to him!

¹³ Jerry Bridges

Titus 2:11-14

- These verses shows that God's grace is necessary not just for salvation but for holy living
- They form one long sentence...and Paul's point is that the real fruit of divine grace is a holy life
- God's grace clearly results in salvation through the coming of Christ: Titus 2:11 ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men
- But it also promotes our sanctification in four ways

Grace Teaches Us to Avoid Worldly Temptations

Titus 2:12 ~ instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

- Not only does God's grace save in the past, it sanctifies in the present
- God doesn't save us just to leave us in a sinful lifestyle...those whom God saves, he also sanctifies
- In other words, where there is justification there will be sanctification
- Negatively, his grace teaches us to "deny ungodliness and worldly desires"
- Grace is not some license to relax spiritually...it is active!
- Grace does not eliminate our need for holiness...it encourages it by urging us to turn from sin to holiness
- Rather grace teaches and trains us to run away from sin

Grace Teaches Us to Pursue Godly Virtues

Titus 2:12 ~ instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

- Positively, grace instructs us to be sensible, righteous, and godly
- Grace teaches us to pursue righteousness...to run after holiness...to strive for godliness...to put in effort
- In this sense, grace is not cheap...it is a demanding grace fueling not passivity but persistence in holiness

Grace Teaches Us to Anticipate Christ's Return

Titus 2:13 ~ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus

- Grace teaches us to not live for what is temporal and earthly but ahead to Christ's return
- This has been called the blessed hope, the imminent return, the Second Coming
- For centuries, Christians have been encouraged and motivated by the hope that at any moment they could find themselves in the presence of Christ

Grace Teaches Us to Practice Good Works

Titus 2:14 ~ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

- Christ came for two reasons: 1) to redeem us; 2) to purify us
- The good works that result are not the root of salvation but they are the fruit of it