

The following commentary of Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 4:17-20 will demonstrate the necessity of Torah obedience in the life of the believer, NOT for salvation, but solely *as a result of salvation*. The believer through faith experiences not only forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the distant future, but the believer's salvation also extends to his/her present day life and provides the framework under which spiritual formation is developed. Having been empowered by the regeneration of his/her spirit, the believer is enabled to offer him/herself as a living sacrifice through obedience to God in the same manner demonstrated by Christ on earth (particularly with regard to Christ's specific *halachah*, or "walking out" of the commandments). Through simple acts of obedience God is able to transform the *whole person* (although this is a life long process) and redeem them from the *darkness* and *ignorance* of their sins today as well as in the future world to come. God also enables the believer to walk (i.e. live) in the manner of Christ today such that they bear good fruit, are a light and salt in the earth, reveal the continued validity of the gospel, and prove the reality of God's eternal reign on earth today even as it is in heaven right now.

Ephesians 4:17-20 "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**, 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**; and they, having become **callous**, have given themselves over to **sensuality** for the practice of **every kind of impurity** and **greediness**. But you did not learn Christ in this way." [Emphasis mine]

What is the key point of this passage as it relates to a believer's spiritual formation? Paul is clearly telling Gentiles not to walk in the way they did previously as gentiles which included ignorance, but not just any ignorance. Rather, it was an ignorance of the kind that "excludes them from the life of God;" only God's Torah does this (for those who are without the inclusion provision God provided through faith in Christ). While this *ignorance* manifests certain qualities such as futility of mind, darkness or lack of understanding, ignorance of truth, hardness of heart, impurity and greed of every kind; it is the "plumbline" of truth, i.e. the Torah of God that is

doing the defining by which these qualities are then seen for what they really are, i.e. sin.¹ Only God's Torah provides the definition of right and wrong, holy and unholy, purity and impurity, and is the exact opposite of a "gentile" way of life and thinking. Therefore, if a believer (one who has already exhibited faith in Christ) wants to quit thinking like an ignorant gentile and start living the way Christ lived he will listen to and apply the commandments of God to his life. However, once forgiven of his sins, salvation continues to occur through the ongoing sanctification of the body, just as the soul/spirit of the believer has also been sanctified in reality (made *clean* by the Words/gospel of Jesus Christ).² The opposite of no longer *walking* like an ignorant gentile is to *walk* in the wisdom of the Lord. That wisdom was given as a light to the path of the believer,³ and it is able to shine the *way* even today.

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**." [Emphasis mine]

The chapters preceding this verse have already laid a foundation as to why believers in Jesus, whether Jew or non-Jew, will desire to live a life of obedience. This "obedience of the faith" is now the primary topic that connects the necessity of *correct thinking* with *correct doing* or actions.⁴ The verse opens with the connective "therefore," and should be taken with its full force "showing that the present exhortation is based upon what has just previously been taught."⁵ The previous teaching itself is summed up in the phrase above, "by the mercies of God" which extend to both Jew and gentile. "It is based then upon the sure mercies of God...that one is

¹ See Romans 7 and 1 John 3:4.

² See John 15:3.

³ See Psalm 119:105

⁴ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Vol 2, Chapters 9-16*, (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2007), 369.

⁵ Ibid.

compelled to obey Him, not from a perspective of “have to” but from a heart of “want to.”⁶ And by mercies it is not meant all kinds but rather answers to the Hebrew plural *rachamim*, “compassion.”⁷ Paul’s exhortation here clearly should be taken as authoritative that believers should present their bodies as *living, holy, acceptable to God* sacrifices. His use of *body* in this verse indicates the *whole person* include both body and soul/spirit. The imagery used throughout this section of Scripture clearly has the idea of the worshipper in the Temple context, where the act of worship itself is a demonstration of a heart submitted to God, “willing to give up what otherwise would be considered dear, for the sake of worship and service to Almighty.”⁸ In the Temple context, sacrifice itself is viewed as “God’s property”, it is “sacred” *korban*, dedicated to Almighty and therefore belonging to Him in every way just as the believer himself is.⁹ The connection with 1 Cor 6:19-20 can not be missed in which the idea is conveyed that believers were bought with a price that renders them God’s property.

There are three important adjectives that modify verse one, all of which follow the word “sacrifice” in the Greek.¹⁰ They are “living,” “holy,” and “acceptable to God.” The Greek is clear even if the English is not as clear that these adjectives describe the **character** of the sacrifice, not the **manner** in which the sacrifice is given.¹¹ While the manner in which a sacrifice was given in the Temple was prescribed by the priesthood, it was the worshiper’s responsibility to ensure the animal being brought was without defect. The sacrificial animal

⁶ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Vol 2, Chapters 9-16*, (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2007), 369.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 370

¹¹ Ibid., 370.

needed to be holy, without blemish and therefore, would only “be acceptable to God,” in that state. The order of these three adjectives is instructive:

In a number of English translations, “living” is put first as though to give the idea that this “living sacrifice” (as opposed to one slaughtered) is to be “holy” and “acceptable” to God. But the sacrifice to which Paul refers here is that of a believer in Yeshua whose righteousness is demonstrated through his new life in Messiah, a life founded in his resurrection with Messiah. “Living sacrifice” thus means “a sacrifice demonstrated through how one lives.” Thus the new life of the believer (cf. 1:17; 6:4, 11, 13; 8:13) is one characterized by self sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Messiah. But then, this self-sacrifice must be characterized as “holy” and “acceptable to God.”¹²

Therefore, a believer can not view his self-giving as *acceptable to God* if it is not at the same time *holy*. And what is defined as *holy* is that which is *acceptable to God*. However, only God defines what is *holy* and thus *acceptable to Him*. Consequently, believers can not set their own agenda or believe that everything they do or learn in man’s religious systems are necessarily *holy* and therefore, *pleasing to God*.

The final clause “*which is your spiritual service of worship*,” points toward a metaphor Paul clearly had in mind related to the Temple *service*, and the word *service* in Greek is tied to this Temple context.¹³ However, it is *conformity to God’s directives* that is primarily in view, whether speaking of the Temple service itself (which was still going on at this time in Paul’s day) or the act of worship by a believer at any point in history. The proper intent and purpose of that *service* is the heart of the directive and that is what makes *service* in both cases *acceptable to God*.

Also, by use of the term “spiritual,” the believer should not understand this to mean something only inward, as some commentators incorrectly assume. Rather, as Cranfield notes, “...the worship which is consonant with the truth of the gospel, is indeed nothing less than

¹² Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Vol 2, Chapters 9-16*, (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2007), 370.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 371.

offering of one's whole self in the course of one's concrete living, in one's inward thoughts, feelings, aspirations, but also in one's words and deeds."¹⁴

In the final verse, *conformed* and *transformed* are used as synonyms, and as such Paul:

Is not emphasizing so much the issue of outward "fashion" as he is the inward motivation of the heart which, of course, inevitably shows itself in outward things. His point is that the believer is involved in both guarding against conformity to the perspective of the "age" and submitting to the Ruach (Spirit), seeking conformity not to "this age" but to the "age to come." That the two imperatives (commands) are in the present tense may indicate that something happening is to stop, while on the other hand the action enjoined is to be a continual one. Thus, conformity to the world is to stop, while transformation in line with God's ways is to be an ongoing reality. Here Paul teaches us that the life of sanctification is not something that is finished in an instant, but is life-long. To recognize this is an important foundation for our whole approach to seeking holiness in our lives. To believe that a certain part of the battle for holiness is finished when in fact it is not, is to leave oneself both unprepared for and thus vulnerable to the enemy's attack... Therefore, the transformation that Paul calls for is based upon a "renewal of the mind." The word "mind" should not be understood in a pure philosophical sense, i.e. as pure intellectual pursuit. The "mind" as the place of moral decision-making and formulation of worldview answer to the Hebrew "heart." As such, it is both the "knowing" as well as the "doing" that brings about the desired transformation.¹⁵

Both sections of Scripture then fall in line with each other as teaching a fitting illustration of what Paul means to communicate to believers. Namely that, "as long as those who claim the name of Yeshua as Messiah live as conformed to the world, the promises of transformation made by Yeshua Himself (e.g., John 12:24) fall to the ground and He is falsely accused as being a liar and worse."¹⁶ In other words, if believers live "un-transformed" lives, they prove or give evidence to the world (either by ignorance, neglect or willful neglect) that the will of God does not mean what Christ claimed it to mean; however, "proving the will of God" here implies not so much that one proves it to oneself, in this context, but that those who witness the believer's life see God's sanctification in it. Finally, by using the term "acceptable" (in conjunction with two other adjectives "good" and "perfect") Paul clearly emphasizes the standard of "good" he is referring to, which is none other than God Himself.

¹⁴ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Vol 2, Chapters 9-16*, (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2007), 371.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 373.

“Goodness” as it relates to the will of God is not anthropocentric (man-centered) but Messiah-centered. If one wants to know what God defines as good, he must look to the Torah and to the One Who demonstrated its precepts in life here upon the earth...For the child of God, everything in life is to be viewed from the perspective of God’s will.¹⁷

Therefore, both verses point to the same simple conclusion that is brought to bear also at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, “*Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard everything; fear God and keep his mitzvot (commandments); this is what being human is all about.*” (CJB)

How much more clear and simple could God be throughout His Word? Yet believers today, like Adam and Eve before them, still buy into the same old lie of the enemy—did God *really say/mean that*, and does it *really apply to you*?) Yes, Christ said obey my Commandments, which are in fact the same Commandments of God, and if a person is a believer, spiritual formation can only occur through the training, development, lessons and instruction they receive as they walk according to the Commandments of God by the Spirit of God. In practical terms, this means studying God’s Word, understanding the meaning, and bringing the meaning to bear in his/her life. This process should start with the simple external commandments, which are “training wheels” for the believer. These “training wheels” form a basis on which the believer’s faith is further developed and strengthened. Only when the believer is able to combine specific faith actions to their heart felt love of God will the life of the believer truly resemble the life of Christ and also become clearly distinguishable in the “right ways” from the world (itself) and world system (religions of men).

¹⁷ Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans Vol 2, Chapters 9-16*, (Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 2007), 373.