

Romans 12:1-8

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

The Scripture is from the Apostle Paul, written to the Roman Christians before he had a chance to visit Rome. This part of letter deals with the Christian life. Paul's main doctrinal theme is the changed life that is devoted to the Lord once someone receives Jesus as their Savior. Paul can preach it because he lived it. When the Apostle Paul encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, his whole life changed from being persecutor to a witness. He had a complete change. That is what we are to have, a complete change in our lives, the old self with the old ways is gone and the new self is devoted to living by the teachings of Jesus. However, old temptations tend to creep in, but you now have power over temptation. Because the Holy Spirit is in you and you have the love of Christ and the love for Christ. You have power over temptation because Jesus loves you and because you love Jesus.

God's religion is pure and true. It is based on the covenant. Our God is the one true God. Our God created the heavens and the earth. Our God loves the creation, especially us. Since our God loves us, our God initiated a covenant relationship. This is a binding agreement like a contract, or a wedding vow. The relationship between God and humanity is built on trust and mutual respect. God's end of the deal is to care for the people. Their end of the deal is to worship and obey. It is not complicated. It is a simple and easy deal. God will take care of you and you will honor God. So, out of love, God gives plenty of warning. All you have to do is you're your end of the promise. God will keep God's promise. If the people keep their promise, they get to keep the Promised Land. God reminds them repeatedly. The Promised Land is a gift for you, keep the covenant and you get to keep it, break covenant and you will lose it. Israel gets the Promised Land but don't keep promise. So, the Exile occurred and they were conquered and deported. After the Exile the religion is reborn. It is a reformed religion that is focused on the word of God. The people had to reach bottom before they started recovery. The Exile is when they bottomed out. When they are released from captivity, they return to Jerusalem, and rebuild the temple. Now, they are ready to be true to God once again. However, over time problems developed and the religious establishment was so concerned about being righteous they swung in the other direction like a pendulum swings and became overzealous. The establishment instituted strict rules to follow in order to be righteous. Then religion became self serving and judgmental. They judge and criticize people instead of loving them. So, God sends Jesus into the world to

save us from ourselves and so religion is reformed once again. Therefore, we have a religion that is focused on love and devotion instead of judging and condemnation.

The Apostle Paul is an agent of reformation. He teaches the gospel of Jesus. It is necessary for the individual to be reformed. The Christian is to be reformed from the old life and a lifestyle of temptation and self gratification to a new lifestyle of devotion. We are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. This means that we are to be changed people. The old self is gone and a new self is devoted to the Lord. That does not mean that you will be perfect. People will test your faith. You are not perfect and you will never be perfect but God makes the perfect sacrifice to cover that. Now your journey is one of spiritual formation. Instead of conforming to the world, the Christian is transformed with a new attitude of discernment. The Christian appreciates what God has done and lives a new life in Christ.

During Old Testament times, the penalty for sin was a slaughtered animal. The animal sacrifice was a substitute for sin. It is like paying a fine, once the penalty is paid you are off the hook. The problem is once you do your time or pay your fine, you are free to sin again. All of this changed with the new sacrifice. This love offering from God is so great that it covers all sin for all people. Therefore, the Old Testament sacrifice is no longer valid. We now have a new covenant. God is still the one true God that loves us and sacrifices for us, we are to give back to God what God has always wanted – devotion, appreciation, respect, and love. God is in essence saying “Let me be your God. Let me be the focus of your life. Give of yourself to me and live your life my way.” We live in a world surrounded by evil and temptation and face daily challenges.

Look at what Christ has accomplished so that we can come to faith. Romans Chapter 12 is about living the Christian life; serve, teach, encourage, give, be kind, have genuine care for others, and help God’s people in need. Live in peace, as best you can, with everyone. Help those that may be weak in faith. Serve the Lord enthusiastically. But remember, the world is a dangerous place and Jesus sent his disciples out in teams of two. You have to decide how you will serve God in the safety of your environment. Your relationship with God is a personal thing; it is between you and the Lord. Giving of yourself is a living sacrifice; it is your spiritual worship. But you have to be careful. Satan came after Christ but could not defeat him. So now, Satan comes after the devoted followers of Jesus.