

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 21
“Present Your Bodies to God”
Romans 12:1-2
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Now Romans 12. And this begins a new section. Those of you who are familiar with the structure of the book of Romans will be aware that the first 11 chapters are primarily concerned with doctrine. By that I mean, they are teaching what it means to be in a relationship with God, why we need to be brought into a relationship with God. What our natural condition is apart from God. How to be reconciled to God. And the first 11 chapters teach this thoroughly. You could sum it up in four keywords. And the four keywords are reconciled, justified, crucified, sanctified. Reconciled to God, that's Romans 1-3. Justified by faith, that's Romans 4-5. Crucified with Christ, that is we're in union with Christ, that's Romans 6. Sanctified by the Holy Spirit, Romans 7-8. And then Romans 9-11 talks about God's strategy in human history, in particular, in his choice of Israel as his means of working. And we looked at that on the last occasion.

But after these 11 chapters of doctrine, now in Romans 12, Paul introduces five chapters of practical ethical instruction. In other words, you can read Romans 1-11, at the end of it say, "So what?" And Paul says in Romans 12, 'This is what it's going to mean in terms of your daily living as a result.' Now let me just point out it's important that we understand not just from Romans, but from Paul's writings generally, that his teaching on doctrine always precedes his teaching on the practical, ethical outworking of that. Now the end

product of the gospel is we're equipped to live differently. That's the end product. We're conformed into the image of Christ. We're able to go back to our places of work, back to our homes, back to our streets, back to our schools, back in our churches and live a life which demonstrates something's happened in us, which requires a divine explanation.

God is at work within us. And it works out in practical, daily living. But in Paul's writings, the doctrine always precedes the practical outworking, because right thinking is necessary in order to right doing, right living. In fact poor doing, poor living derives from poor thinking. And that's why without apology, we want to do some thinking when we meet here on Sundays as well as we study the word of God, that we understand what God intends. And then having understood his work in us... Let me put it this way - having understood his work for us, that's the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then his work in us, that's the work of the Holy Spirit who comes to indwells us. You must understand God's agenda through us, into the world at large. That's why Paul begins these verses with a word that I believe is a key word.

I have a marking system in my Bible. I have one color just for this word. It's the word, therefore. And I've said this to you before, and I'll say it again many times. Whenever you find the word, therefore always ask yourself, what is it there for? Because the therefore is there for a good reason. The word therefore is like a hinge on a door. One side is screwed into the post. The other side is screwed into the door. Now Paul's use of the word, therefore, means, now there's all this that's gone before that I've told you about. I hope

you've understood it. He's saying you got hold of that. Therefore, this is what it's going to mean in daily practical living. And so we're going to be very practical for several weeks now.

Some of you may say, well it's about time. But what I'm going to say in these next few weeks will only make sense in the light of what's gone before. That's why we have to have the whole picture. Because it's the out working at what God has done for us and in us and now does through us in daily living. Well, let me read you the two verses,'

"Therefore, I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy..."

That's what he has been talking about for the last 11 chapters.

"To offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will." (Romans 12:1-2)

Well, that begins what follows for five chapters and the rest of these chapters become an outworking of certain things that are contained in these verses. I want to suggest to you from these two verses, there are two requests, first of all, that Paul makes. We need to

understand those two requests. Then there are two reasons that he gives for those requests. And then there are two results which come from these requests. First of all then, let's talk about the two requests that he is making of his readers. First of all, in verse one, "I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices." This is the first request:

Request 1: Present Your Body as Living Sacrifices.

Now that's a contradiction in terms, isn't it? Living sacrifice. By definition, normally a sacrifice dies. That's what makes it a sacrifice. But Paul says, "Don't die, but live as though you had died." I want to explain what that means in just a moment. Somebody once described a true Christian as being a dead man on furlough. You follow that? Someone has died to themselves, to their rights, to their own agendas, but God has given them back life. That's why we had that verse read earlier. That's what that verse implies. I've been crucified with Christ, but I live but not I, Christ lives in me. I've given myself away to him. I've presented myself crucified with Christ, but I live. But I live a life that he has determined for me, he has planned for me. Saying, Lord, every day I'm available to you. This is the basic disposition of New Testament Christianity.

Now the imagery used here of course derives from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. And there were five offerings that a person could bring to the altar. The tabernacle initially, then the altar of the temple and through the priest could meet with

God. These five offerings had to do with two things, had to do with cleansing, had to do with consecration. By cleansing, I mean, getting rid of the sin and the guilt from their lives. By consecration, I mean, having been cleansed, they then made themselves available, set apart to God for his purpose. And both sides, the cleansing and the consecration were integral parts of the system of offerings under the Old Testament.

And here, Paul is talking about the consecration aspect. He's talked about the cleansing aspect earlier in Romans. Now he's talking about the consecration aspect, that if you want to take the Christian life seriously, he's saying to these Romans, you've got to present your body to God as a living sacrifice. You see, God is interested in your body. He's not just interested in our soul. Our body is the means by which our soul is able to express itself. And there were two qualifications for an Old Testament offering. They had to be firstly, holy, secondly, pleasing to God. In the book of Leviticus, Numbers, latter part of Exodus which talks about the sacrificial system, over 150 times, the word holy is applied to that which is brought to God for sacrifice.

The word 'holy' means to be 'set apart'. The way it was described in Leviticus of animals brought in sacrifice to God, is that they were to be without blemish, to be without defect. Now you say to me this morning, if being without blemish, being without defect is a prerequisite, you can count me out. But that's why you need to understand the first chapters of Romans, because the first chapters of Romans tell us, yes, we are defected, we are blemished, we are sinful. But Christ has come as our substitute, has satisfied the

just wrath of a holy God on the basis of his death on the cross. He forgives us, he cleanses us, he justifies us and covers us over with his righteousness. His righteousness is imputed to us. And as you and I stand before God this morning, we are holy. Not because we earn it, but because we receive it as a gift.

And if you've come to that point of being made righteous, which is what it means to be a Christian, one of the ways in which it's described, then we present ourselves to God, holy, not on our own holiness. We are fully conscious of that. Don't ever assume some self-generated holiness, where if you walk around with your bible at the right angle, your head at the right tilt, a nice evangelical smile on your face, you might manage to grow a halo. Holiness is derived in the presence of the Holy Spirit of God within us, working in us, working through us. We're to be holy and pleasing to God. He says, "...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." (Romans 12:1)

And again, back describing the sacrifices of the Old Testament more than 40 times, they were described as being pleasing to the Lord. It was to be pleasing to the Lord, 40 times. Now what pleases the Lord? That's an important question to ask and to answer. Paul in Ephesians 5:10 says, "Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord." For one thing, the Lord can be pleased. I know some of us live with a sense of what we usually do is upset the Lord and we offend against Him. But actually you can please Him. How do we please him? Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Meaning the only ingredient that pleases God is that which derives from faith.

Faith is dependency on God and a recognition of our need for him to be at work in us and through us.

You see what God calls us to do is not to go out and do things for Him. And he stands and says, "Wow, I'm pleased with the way you did that." He's asked us to go out in dependency on him and obedience to him and as we act in faith, it pleases God. Here's a man, here's a woman, here's a boy, here's a girl who's trusting me. Who's letting me work in them and through them. That's what pleases God. You see this call to present our bodies as a living sacrifice is not a call to go out and do things heroic for God. But to be available to God that he, as we trust him, can take us and put us where he wants us to be, plant us where he wants us to be planted and do through us what he wants to do through us.

It's the qualifications of the Old Testament sacrifice, it's the qualification of the living sacrifice. We're holy and we're pleasing to God. But the second request in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." So present your body as a living sacrifice and do not conform to the pattern of this world. "But be transformed," he goes on to say, "By the renewing of your mind." Now here is a call to none conformity to the world. Now conformity is a very easy thing to do. By conformity, it's doing what everybody does, thinking what everybody thinks, acting the way everybody acts. It can be as trivial as eating what everybody eats.

We were on vacation this last week in the United States. Driving down and driving back, trying to find food with some variety, it was difficult. Everybody eats the same things, hamburgers and fries basically, at these stop off places. It's easy to conform. We do it in all kinds of ways. And Paul said, "Don't conform to the world." Now what do we mean by worldliness here, by conforming to the world? When I was a boy, I was led to believe that worldliness had to do with things like the clothes you wore, the length of your hair, the kind of music you listen to, the movies you watched. And of course, all of these can be worldly, but worldliness is defined in the New Testament, not as something external, but as something inside, internal.

In 1 John 2:15-16 John says,

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him for everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life comes not from the Father, but from the world."

Now he says, if you want to define what the world is, don't fall into the trap of thinking the world is something out there. The world is actually something in here. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life and all of those things originate in the mind, the way we think about things. That's why we try to protect our kids as parents from influences in the world and so we must. But let's not be naive as to assume that if we can protect them from all kinds of influences out there that is going to make them okay.

Because the real influences are inside them. That's why you get shocked sometimes when your kids begin to be themselves. They were born that way.

And because these things originate in the mind, that's why the antidote, the only antidote that Paul speaks about here is don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed, by what? The renewal of your mind. The renewal of your mind, your thinking. So you begin to think about the world, the way God thinks about the world. You understand God's perspective and our minds are being molded. I like the way J.B. Phillips who paraphrased the New Testament paraphrases this verse. He said, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within."

You can be squeezed into a mold very easily, externally. It's very interesting, actually, that Jesus spoke as much, if not more, against religious conformity, the religious mold that we try to make people conform to as much as he did about the world's mold. You read Matthew 6, for an example, there are others, Matthew 23, other chapters, where Paul talks about the religious people of their day, whose preoccupation became conforming to an outward form. So the language they used, the particular words they used had to be right. The clothes they wore had to be right. The disciplines they engaged in had to be right. And there was nothing wrong with those things except Jesus said, "Do not be like them." (Matthew 6:8) For the simple reason, they've been preoccupied with the externals and never taken account of the internals.

So he says, you're like whitewashed sepulchres. On the outside you look beautiful and clean, but inside you're just dead men's bones. On the outside you look like a cup that's been washed externally. But you look inside, and there's all the gunge from somebody's last drink. You never wash the inside. He said you're like that. You can outwardly conform and everything looks good outwardly, but it's the inner reality that is the conformity that God is looking for. Sometimes we learn patterns of what we might call Christian behavior that don't always have much basis in scripture, but become simply part of the culture that we create. And we begin to slide into this and derive our spiritual securities from this kind of conformity.

I had an aunt, she died a couple years ago now, who was a missionary for 50 years in South Africa. I remember her when she came home one occasion telling us that there was a man that had been very interested in the gospel, very open, very interested. She said to him one day, "Why don't you come to our church?" Because he'd never been to a service. He said, "I'd like to, but I can't afford a jacket." That's what he said to her. And she was saying, of course, how sad and tragic it was that this had become his perception. But it had become his perception because he thought to be a Christian is not about something inwardly. It's also about certain external hoops I've got to jump through and I can't afford the hoops. So I can't jump through them.

You see, we must allow nobody to squeeze us into a mold, whether it's a worldly mold or whether it's a Christian mold even. Because whoever's mold you are squeezed by, you'll

become as moldy as them. And it happens. It happens. That's why Paul in Galatians 5:1 says, "It's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and don't let yourselves be burdened again by yolk of slavery." And interesting, you read the context in Galatians 5, he's saying to these folks, "you've become Christians, you've become free." Now he says, "Don't be burdened again with the yolk of slavery." What kind of yolk of slavery is he talking about? A slavery the Christians were putting on them.

That was not about the inner reality of the Spirit of God in their hearts and his work in them and through them, but external conformity to regulations and requirements, circumcision was one in Galatians, but other things were there as well.

Request 2: Do Not Conform To The Patterns Of This World

So there two requests he makes, "Present your body as a living sacrifice." That's a positive. And then there's a negative request he makes, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, instead be transformed by the renewing of your mind." But then there are two reasons why he makes these requests. Let me read them to you in Romans 12:1, the New International Version I'm using. Let me read the whole verse one, says, "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." Now that's what the NIV says. "This is your spiritual act of worship."

The King James Version says, and some others say this, "It is your reasonable service." Now both are legitimate translations, but both have different connotations. So I'll take each of these translations and look at them both as separate things. They're both legitimate translations of the word 'logikos', the Greek word 'logikos' from which have our word 'logical', meaning reasonable, rational, but also has connotations of being spiritual, which is why some translations call it spiritual worship.

Reason 1: It is Your Reasonable Service

Let me look at the King James rendering first. Paul says the reason why you present your body as a living sacrifice and you don't conform to this world is because it is reasonable. It's your reasonable service. It's as reasonable for a human being to live in submission to God this way as it is reasonable for a fish to swim in the sea, because it was made that way, for a bird to fly through the air, because it was made that way. And you and I were made for communion with God, you and I were made to know, and enjoy, and experience God. So Paul says it's not something unreasonable. This actually is totally reasonable to your being human. That you present yourself to God in this way. Now please don't protest that this is too demanding. Having your sin forgiven, going to heaven when I die is great. But this is pushing it too far. It isn't. This is reasonable. C.T. Studd, a great pioneer missionary said, "If Jesus Christ is God and gave himself for me, then nothing he may ask of me is too great for me to give to him." And if it is, let me tell you this, you haven't yet grasped the real gospel.

The history of the Christian Church is a history of people whose relationship with Christ has been such that no cost is too great. When he calls, I'm in obedience to serve him in some way. I remember several years ago, preaching at a conference of about 150 missionaries in Liberia in West Africa. Liberia in the last 10 years has known awful devastation and civil war. And the infrastructure of the country is just about nonexistent, I'm given to understand. But in Liberia, there has always been a strong church. And while I was speaking at this conference, one of the missionaries said to me one day, because I referred to the fact that the church in Liberia was strong numerically.

One of the missionaries came to me and said, "When you've got a free hour or two, I'd like to drive you into Monrovia," which is the capital city - we were just outside Monrovia - "I'd like to show you the reason why the church of Jesus Christ is strong in Liberia." I said, "I'd love to come with you." We drove into Monrovia and parked his vehicle and we walked to a cemetery. We went to an area of the cemetery and there were four or five, I think it was five tomb stones in a row. It was a family of a husband, a wife, and three dependent children that all died within six months of each other. They were on their first term of missionary service. Their bodies had not built the resistance to the diseases they became exposed to. This is back at the beginning of last century. And they'd all died.

We went to another part lot cemetery and he said, "Here's another missionary family. Here's another missionary and his wife. Here's another missionary." Some of these were young people in their 30s. Some of them had only been on the field for six months or so. And he said, "That's the reason the church is what it is in Liberia." Because these people came exposing themselves to risks they knew they're exposing themselves to, but they were laying a foundation that others came and they built on. And there's a saying that can be a bit trite, perhaps, but it's a very significant saying that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

There's no virtue in dying for its own sake, of course. None at all. There's no virtue in not seeking to resist death. Of course we do. I'm just stating the principle, the willingness to go all the way. And Paul says it's reasonable. Paul knew what he was talking about because of the environment in which he himself lived. Paul was not a Christian when he watched the stoning of Stephen, one of the brightest lights in the Jerusalem church. He was too young, legally to engage in the stoning. So he held the coats of the men who did, and without doubt, he cheered them on. And Paul, Saul of Tarsus as he was then, saw the body of Stephen broken by the rocks and stones until eventually he lay dead in the pool of his own blood. And Paul writing years later says it wasn't unreasonable because the blood of Stephen was the seed of something else.

I did a series of messages and studies some years ago on the content of apostolic preaching. In the Book of Acts, Peter's sermons, Stephen's sermon, Philip preached once

and Paul preached about nine times, Peter, about eight times. And I was intrigued to find that the way Peter and Paul preached was very different. Peter draws on Old Testament prophecies that this fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet. And he uses the Old Testament to identify prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. Paul doesn't do that. Paul sees Christ as the goal of Old Testament history. He says everything was moving towards this one goal. He doesn't just isolate prophecies, but the whole movement of history is towards Christ. I was intrigued to see that.

And then when I read Stephen's sermon, Acts 7, it was exactly the same style as Paul's preaching. And I have no doubt that Stephen's death had a huge impact on Saul of Tarsus. And when he came to Christ afterwards, his preaching very much influenced by what he heard from Stephen the day that he was part of the stoning of Stephen. And Paul can say, "Because of that, I know it's not unreasonable for a man to die." The point is this, I'm not asking you to die, of course. The Bible isn't asking you to die. It's asking you to be willing, to take away the restraints that are on our discipleship.

Now I'll tell you why this is so important, because until we are ready to die, we're not actually ready to live. Because if we're not ready to die, there are all kinds of preconditions about how we live. When you're ready to die, you're equipped to live. In fact, until you have a reason to die, you don't have a reason to live. And it's your reasonable service says Paul.

Reason 2: It Is Your Spiritual Act of Worship

The other translation of the same words in the original text, which has a different connotation, equally important, is it is your spiritual act of worship. It's not only your reasonable service, it's your act of worship is one way to translate those words. And the idea there is that this is our deepest response to God. The deepest response to God is presenting our bodies as living sacrifices. We have assumed that worship means singing songs before the preacher gets up.

I go to preach at places and they say, "we'll have 30 minutes of worship and then you're on." And what they mean is 30 minutes of singing. Well, of course, that is a right proper expression of worship. We call coming to church like this on Sunday morning, this is worship. And I hope it is. But it's much more than this. It's not something you go to do for an hour on a Sunday. It is a whole disposition of our lives. Do you know the first time the word worship ever occurs in the Bible? It's in Genesis 22. In Genesis 22, God had given to Abraham, a son having promised him for 25 years, then his son Isaac was born. And as Isaac began to grow, we don't know what age he was, God said to Abraham, "Abraham, take your son, your only son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah."

Abraham, early the next morning we're told, left with some servants. When they got the foot of Mount Moriah, he said to his servants, "You stay here." And then he said this, "I

and the boy will go yonder and worship." That's the first time the word worship ever occurs in the Bible. What did he mean? We're going up the hills, onto the mountain to sing together, raise our hands in adoration of God. All that is legitimate, of course, as an expression of worship. But he's saying, "No, I'm taking my son, my only son," when God told him to, he rubbed it in, whom you love. The dearest thing in your heart and offer him in sacrifice. And Abraham says this is worship. The detail of offering the son is not the worship. The worship is the obedience without reserve that does what God tells me to do.

I have a son whom I love deeply, and I have two daughters who I also love, and a wife who I love. We have two cats just in case you think anyone's left out. If I was given a choice of either to die myself or for my son to die, I wouldn't like to be presented with that ultimatum. But if I was, the choice would be very easy to make. I would die, that my son would live. It wouldn't be a nice choice, but it wouldn't be a difficult choice. Abraham is told, "Take your son and offer him in sacrifice." And as Abraham did going right to the end, by making the altar, laying his son on the altar, taking a knife, ready to slay him, God then intervened and said, "Now I know you fear God." That's the first time, by the way, it talks about fearing God in the Bible too. What does it mean to fear God?

"Now I know you fear God, since you've not withheld from me your only son." And Abraham defines this, or that text, Genesis 22, defines this as worship and the fear of God is not withholding that which is precious to us. You see if worship is coming and singing God songs and putting some money in the offering and listening to the message and

going home and just living to our own agenda, we're not worshipers. Worshiping is every day saying, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' You don't have to pray it every day, it becomes an attitude of heart. It's an every day attitude, a disposition. Lord I'm available today. I've got my plans and I get on with them. But if you want to divert me for any reason, that's your business. You're free to do so. You want to bring things into my life that are unexpected, that is your business. I won't complain. I'll allow you to direct my paths. And there are two results. Very quickly as we finish. Two requests, present your body and don't conform to this world. Two reasons, it's your reasonable service, it's your spiritual worship. And there are two results.

Result 1: Personal

The first is personal, because in the middle of Romans 12:2, having said, "Don't conform any longer to pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind," he says, "Then," and that's another word I underline in a special colour. It's another link word. Then. When? When you've done all of this, "Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will." Then you'll know what God's will is for your life.

You see, sometimes we like to think the will of God is something that we can get, maybe we're in prayer and suddenly God gives us a message and we write it down. Oh, that's what the will of God for my life is. Or there's some writing on the wall or something. And

all of that are ways in which God may well direct us and guide us, but you'll never really know the will of God until there's that abandonment of ourselves to Him. "Then," he says, "You'll know the will of God." Then you prove it and experience it. Sometimes I feel that we are curious to know the will of God for our lives, our personal lives, because then we can decide we want to do it or not. But God doesn't reveal it in advance like that.

Jesus said in John 7:17, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." That's John 7:17. If someone chooses to do God's will, then you'll find out what is God's will. But it's the doing of it that makes possible the experience of it and the knowledge of it. You say, how can that be? I'll tell you how it can be. You see, the personal will of God and one of the great things the scripture teaches is that God does have a personal will for every life, for your life and my life, an individual will and purpose and plan before we are ever born. He'd set us apart and planned our days, we're told that. But you'll never know the personal will of God outside of knowing and obeying the general will of God. You see, 95% of the will of God for your life is in this book.

When I worked with college students in England at Capernwray, often students would say to me, "How do I find out the will of God for my life?" And I'd say, "Well, I can tell you 95% of the will of God." They say, "Can you really?" "Yes." I'd say, "Go and read this book." If you live in obedience to the general will of God, you will then experience the individual leading and will of God as you obey the general will of God. Does that make

sense? So somebody comes and says, for an example, 'I want to know what God's plan for my life is, but in the meantime, I'm sleeping with my girlfriend.' I tell you that happens and I've lost count of that kind of situation. I've been involved in talking with folks about that. Because, well, that was then. The culture's changed, life has changed. It's safe. Everything's okay.

You'll not know the personal will of God until you know the general will of God. Let me rephrase that, until we are living in obedience to the general will of God. And you won't know everything, of course. As we grow, we learn, we obey what we learn. As we live in obedience to the general will of God, then we experience the personal will that God works out in our lives. You see, it's a bit like learning to ride a bike or learning to ski. You can't learn to ride a bike or learn to ski by going to a lecture on how to ride a bike with visuals and pictures and illustrations, or even somebody else showing you, themselves, how to ride a bike. You can't learn to ski just by watching a video on skiing.

The only way you learn to ride a bike is get on the bike with all the risk you know is there you're going to fall off, and you begin to ride. And as you begin to ride, you begin to learn, you begin to balance. You ski by getting on a pair of skis and standing at the top of the bunny hill, which looks tiny from below. Looks huge from above when you're on it. A friend of mine who was here a few weeks ago, Hans Peter Royer from Austria, amongst other things, he's a ski instructor. I remember him telling me once that when he teaches somebody to ski for the first time, he gets nowhere until they fall. He said, "I wait for

them to fall. When they fall I say, good. Now we can start to learn properly." Because as long as they're timid and scared of leaning, because they're scared of falling, let them fall. Then he said, "You can begin to teach them."

And it's very much like that with the will of God. Don't be scared of making mistakes. You may do, but don't worry about that. It tells us in Isaiah, "If you step to the right or to the left, you hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it." If you go off track, don't worry. The Spirit of God will say, hey, come back. Come back. And we learn. But the point is this, "you present your body as a living sacrifice... Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is." And the marvelous thing is he goes on to say, "It's his good, it's his pleasing, it's his perfect will."

Now the word 'good' does not mean easy. The word 'pleasing' does not mean comfortable. The word 'perfect' does not mean it's what you would've planned anyway. But it means this. When with hindsight, we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. And until then we don't know the full story. But when we do, if we were then to ask him questions and we probably won't, but if we were to and say, 'Lord, why did this happen in my life? Why did this happen to my family? Why was this allowed to come into my experience?' And if he is gracious enough to explain to us and tell us why these things have happened in our lives, our response will be, 'Wow. That was good. Not only was it good, it was perfect. I can't think of an improvement on that. And not only is it good and perfect, but it's pleasing. I'm excited by it.' Isn't that wonderful?

So Paul says, I'm going to talk to you about the practical, ethical outworkings of the gospel, of the presence of Christ in your heart and life, but it begins with a surrender, not conforming to the world. It's a reasonable thing to surrender your life like this. It is an expression of worship to surrender your life like this, but here's going to be the result. Then you'll live in the center of the will of God, and you'll prove it to be so, and you'll prove it to be good and pleasing and perfect.

And one quick last thing which will pick up next time, there's a corporate dimension to this as well. Because he goes on to say in the rest of Romans 12-13, that as we allow him to transform us, transform our mind, and as we begin to prove the will of God, there is a corporate will of God. And we discover the will of God in the church. That's the next few verses of Romans 12. We discover the will of God in society. How do we live out in the big, bad world? He talks about that. We discover the will of God in government. He talks about it. Gives almost a chapter to it. How do we relate to government and to authority? There's a will of God about that.

And the person who presents themselves as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, does not conform to this world. They see it as their reasonable service in their spiritual worship. They'll discover the will of God will flow into every part of their lives. Every relationship and every demand that's made on them will be met by the will of God as it works out in them.