

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part thirteen - Teaching #2172

Sunday, March 13th, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

PRESENTING YOUR BODY IN WORSHIP - WHAT RENEWED MINDS ARE FOR AND WHY IT MATTERS MORE THAN MOST PEOPLE THINK

Romans 12:1-2 - “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 renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Let's start with a quick review of what we've studied from these two famous verses. **First**, we saw that renewed minds come from **somewhere** not from **nowhere**. The word **“therefore”** links up the **practical** instruction of chapters 12 through 16 with the **doctrinal** teaching of chapters 1 through 11. This is Paul's way (and the Holy Spirit's way) of reminding us that if the church ignores doctrinal instruction and relies on motivational self-help and therapeutic instruction she will miss the roots and source of her future life and strength.

What this means is you can't consistently just **motivate** a deeply godly life. It takes more than a good **sales** pitch and clever marketing to pull yourself or others into the kingdom of God. You have to **learn** and you have to **think**. So says the Word of the Lord.

Second, we saw that the nature of spiritual renewal and transformation can't just be **external** and **mechanical**, but must be **internal** and **organic**. Renewed spiritual life can't be attached from the outside, like the ornaments on a Christmas tree. It must grow from the inside out, like tomatoes on the vine. This is so important. Spiritual life can't just be **copied** from Paul, or Jesus, or anybody else. Pray and earnestly seek God for inward spiritual life and transformation.

Then we talked about the need for a **comprehensive** change by the Holy Spirit on the inside of the heart. We said spiritual transformation must be **comprehensive** rather than **particular**. That means there is no piecemeal approach to spiritual transformation. The Christian life can't be adapted as the answer to some **particular** problem in life. It is like the flu shot. It doesn't just protect your hand or your finger. Once you have it, you have it in every part of your being. You're **all** in or you're not in at all.

And **third**, we saw the renewed spiritual life is fueled by the **mercies of God** - "***I urge you....by the mercies of God to present your bodies....***"(Romans 12:1). Apart from the mercies of God we are driven by nothing more than **duty** and **obligation** in our Christian walk. It's grasping and savoring and contemplating the mercies of God that makes godliness a **delight** rather than a **chore**.

This is why hymns and worship choruses have to do more than just repeat how much we love Jesus. Corporate worship will grow thin quickly on that road. They must also teach and remind us all **why** we love Jesus.

Grasping the mercies of God with enriched minds is the fuel for not being conformed to this present world. Passion alone won't cut it.

Do you remember the account of the wicked woman and the Pharisee with Jesus? Recall how the Pharisee didn't do any of the things for Jesus that the wicked woman did. Then Jesus explains why. This woman had a sense of how vast and blessed was the grace of Jesus. The Pharisee was driven by his religious duties. The wicked woman's devotion flowed out of a burning awareness of divine mercy. ***"I urge you....by the mercies of God to present your bodies...."***

That's where we are in our study of this rich passage. Today we pick up the next idea. Quite surprisingly, Paul says, in view of God's mercies, we are to do something very specific with our **bodies** if we are to be renewed in our **minds**. We are to present our **bodies as living sacrifices (12:1)**.

Why and how are the topics of this teaching:

- 1) **BIBLICAL TRUTH ISN'T UNDERSTOOD AND DEVOTION TO CHRIST ISN'T REAL UNTIL THE ACTIONS OF THE BODY ARE EFFECTED BY THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE MIND**

True enough, the **root** of transformation is a renewed **mind**, and the **motive** of transformation is the **mercies of God**, but the **effect** of all this is fleshed out in the **actions of the physical body** - "**Present your bodies a living sacrifice....**"(12:1). It is in the offering of the physical body to the Lord in sacrifice and service that one moves from **pretend** Christianity to **authentic** Christianity. The mind is renewed. But spiritual life is never **merely** a mental activity. It **starts** with the renewing of the mind. It can't, says Paul, really start anywhere else. But it never **ends** there.

Paul picks an image that, while almost totally removed from our world view, would be very potent and meaningful to these Christians at Rome. The only Bible these Christians knew was the Old Testament. Everyone had read of people coming to the priest to offer their worship to God. They brought animals when they came.

The priest did something that would be against the law in North American society today. The priest would take that perfect, usually young, innocent animal and wring its neck and slit its throat. Blood would flow all over the sacrifice. The priest, on behalf of the one approaching God, would **offer the sacrifice of the body of this animal**. The priest presented the **body** of the animal as a sacrifice.

Of course, those sacrifices pictured something that was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross. All of those animal sacrifices were offered as a covering and atonement for sin and were given their meaning and substance through the Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away the sin of the world.

So when Paul talks about offering our bodies today as living sacrifices he doesn't mean we can, in any way, **earn** the favor of God through anything we do. We don't offer ourselves in **that** sense. But there were **other** kinds of sacrifice offered in the Old Testament as well. There were sacrifices offered in **thanks** for the mercies of God received, sacrifices that celebrated harvest and deliverance and mercy.

These are the sacrifices Paul is thinking of. We offer our bodies as sacrifices ***because of mercies already accomplished and received through Christ Jesus - "I urge you....by the mercies of God that you present your bodies as living sacrifices...."***

We talk so much about being forgiven. We talk so much - and rightly so - about the "amazing grace" of God in Christ toward us. We look back in fondness on that day or moment when we were "**saved,**" or when "**Jesus came into our heart,**" or whatever terminology you were raised with.

And Paul wants to press a little **beyond** that. He writes to these people - these **Christians** - at Rome and says, "Well and good. You're saved. I want to urge you to test those claims. Has this truth cherished in your minds reached your physical bodies? The friendships you make? The grudges you hold? The entertainment your eyes view? (**Psalm 101:2-3** - "...I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; [3] I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.") What about the money you spend? The checks you write? Does the way you live prove you don't think of your body as being **your own**?

See those people coming to the temple to worship? **Do you see the animals going in with them but not coming out?** That's how much your body belongs to the Lord!

True, we're not laying down our lives in the sense of experiencing physical death. Ours are called "**living sacrifices**" after all. But we must, **considering all the mercies of God received in Christ Jesus**, come to an end of **life lived for ourselves, on our own terms. I know you've given your heart to Jesus. Now the rest of your body must come along with it.**

Remember it. What you do with your body counts. If you belong to God at all, your body is His too. You are not your own, says Paul. And he's talking about your physical body. We wrestle with this because there are always theological misfits who think whenever we preach about what we do with our bodies - specifically, sins committed with the body - that we're somehow falling into legalism. But this isn't so.

Just because New Testament sanctification constantly presses into specific details of our behavior doesn't make it legalistic. Remember, Paul calls us to present our bodies in holiness as a response to God's *mercies* - "***I urge you....by the mercies of God that you present your bodies....***" This is holiness as a heart-felt response to *mercy*, not law.

2) **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A PHYSICAL BODY?**

God created many other creatures without them. Angels are real beings - actual entities - but without physical bodies. God Himself is a spiritual being, not possessing a physical body. He could have made you and me in any fashion He chose, but He gave us physical, material bodies. Why?

We - you and I - as physical, personal beings - beings made with physical bodies, yet in the image of God - have the greatest capacity to glorify God for His mercy in Jesus Christ. We can magnify God's mercy in Christ in a way angels can't because they have never experienced redemption. The rest of the physical creation can't because, not sharing God's image, it can't possibly **relate** to God as we persons can.

So we have the most stunning opportunity to glorify God with **physical bodies** for the greatness of His mercy in Christ Jesus. We alone can use our material beings to display how glorious we know the redemptive mercies of God in Christ are.

Do you get it? We are God's **first choice** to advertize how much we relish the greatness of His redemption - not just with our **thoughts**, but with our **physical bodies**. We are God's **first choice** to advertize His boundless grace and mercy. God gave you a body to use as **an instrument** to **visibly - externally** - magnify and demonstrate how great He is and how worthy of devotion and service and sacrifice He is.

We, by faith and consecration, can enter into the song of a renewed, redeemed physical creation in a way the rest of the fallen world can't. Only we, with the outward acts of our bodies, can show how **praiseworthy** and **prizeworthy** our God is for what He has done for us on the cross.

And here's the important point. The visible, devoted dedicating of the physical body to glorify God is what a renewed mind is **for**. God can't be **outwardly** glorified by a merely **inward** salvation. None of this is accomplished merely by agreeing with certain **doctrinal truths**.

You were redeemed, and God desires to transform your life continually, outwardly, and visibly, in order to manifest His greatness through the choices and actions of the body you've placed at His disposal. And not because you **had** to, but because you were **delighted** to in view of His marvelous mercies. Through the actions of your body people can see how complete God's redeeming work in Christ is by how demonstrate you owns your physical body.

Now, take just a minute and turn back the clock before we press forward. Think of how, several weeks ago, I stressed the importance of the single word in our text - "**Therefore....**" I pointed out why, many times, "**practical teaching**" may not solve specific problems - and that before Paul makes his practical appeal to the Roman Christians he takes the time to give 11 chapters of doctrinal teaching.

Now we're in a better position to test Paul's approach. What does all this talk about Old Testament sacrifice and history and why we have physical bodies really have to do with daily life? In other words, what difference does it make if we **forget** why God created us with physical bodies? What difference does it make that God created us with physical bodies in order to manifest His mercy and glory through them?

What happens when people forget who they are as God's creation? I used to go and visit my mom at Shepherd Lodge every week. I would constantly see people who don't know where they are and who they are. Some think they're in a hotel when they're not. Some don't know the names of family members or spouses because they've forgotten the family to which they belong. This is the worst kind of disorientation. There is nothing else about life that can function properly when you actually forget who and why you are.

The Bible talks about fallen people who don't know their Creator. They may have good jobs and drive nice cars and dream their dreams and run incredibly successful businesses, but the Bible says they're horribly fallen and disoriented because they're not remembering who they are as God's creatures. They've forgotten God gave them the bodies they have so they will have instruments with which to glorify and praise and honor Him.

If you stay with this I think you can see the difference it makes - more and more as you watch the news and read the papers. What difference does it make when young men and women come to believe that their bodies exist to ***look good to the opposite sex*** rather than ***display God's redeeming, Christ-exalting mercy and ownership?***

And what happens is you end up with a world crowded with ***eating disorders*** and ***plastic surgeons*** because young women especially have fallen for the lie that they were made with bodies for the covers of magazines and fashion designers rather than being vehicles of God's mercy. You end up with a world full of mixed up, pathetic people who work more on their ***abs*** than their ***souls***.

How we need to pray that God is going to raise up bright young people and young adults who aren't that stupid and who have a strong Biblical sense about why they're here and why God has made them with the bodies He has given them. This is the only road to wholeness and sanity in this mixed up world.

Let every act of your body - your physical body - Monday through Sunday - show that Christ is your **treasure**. Let every act of your body - your physical body - reveal the **death** of all that dishonors Christ. That's what Paul is talking about. And he says we're to be "**living sacrifices**." That means this demonstration isn't something done **once and for all** in the moment of your conversion, but is **continuously** being lived out, every moment of every day.

3) **DEDICATING OUR BODY AS A PART OF OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP PATTERNS**

Perhaps now we've framed an idea with enough theological background to make it crisp and clear. We can start to see why, throughout the Scriptures, as the people of God worship Him, they are called to manifest renewed minds with physical bodies. The bodies are the instruments of their "**spiritual worship**"(12:2). This is how **all** God's people are to come and approach God.

Why? Because worship, at its heart, teaches us about our relationship to God in our physical bodies. It's the focal point of how we **meet** God. And everything in the Bible tells me that my relationship with God doesn't just limit itself to my **mind** or my **heart**. He calls for the offering of my **body**.

But I'm prone to not want to do this. I want to honor God ***inwardly*** with my thoughts ***devotionally*** more than I want to eat and play and date and talk and work in honor of Him. So God has a plan. Every time He calls me specifically to deal with Him He makes it more physical than I'm comfortable with. When I'm baptized I get wet. When I remember Christ's death I actually eat and drink. Sometimes we bow. Sometimes we raise hands. Sometimes we speak out loud verbal praise with our physical mouths.

And people who don't understand just think we're doing some emotional charismatic thing. But it isn't. We're ***reminding ourselves*** in the very way we worship God that He calls us to offer, not just our ***hearts*** and our ***thoughts***, but our ***bodies*** as living sacrifices.

So we're called to worship in ways that ***reinforce*** the offering of our bodies. Of course people can lift their hands in church and not honor God on the way home. And that's a very common criticism against visible forms of worship. But it really misses the point. Rather than be upset about hypocrites who demonstrate a pattern of worship they don't live out, I'll make sure, as much as I possibly can, that I'll present my body in the sanctuary in ***preparation*** for the offering I'll make all week long. God can worry about the hypocrites. I'll offer my whole life - body and all - to His transforming power and grace.