

The Bible Says Romans 12:1 Meaning

In chapters 1-11, Paul is telling his audience of Roman believers how God's righteousness is attained. He explains that it is not through the Law, as some competing Jewish "authorities" were arguing, but that it is through faith. Chapters 1-11 provided an extended explanation of the theme verse in [Romans 1:16-17](#) that asserted that the righteousness of God is experienced through a walk of faith. [Romans 1:16-17](#) quotes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)).

So it could be viewed that [Romans 1-11](#) is a New Testament explanation of an Old Testament principle that righteousness is experienced through faith in God's word and by following His ways rather than through pride and following our own ways. This therefore provides a link to Genesis, to the original sin, from the original choice given to Adam and Eve. The choice was whether to trust that God's ways were for their best, or to seek out their own knowledge and decide that for themselves ([Genesis 2:16-17](#), [3:6](#)).

By "righteousness," Paul means behavior that lines up with God's (good) design. In Greek thought, the word translated "righteousness" or "justice" means "lining up with" or "creating harmony with" what creates human flourishing.

Now, Paul is telling his audience what a life of righteousness through faith looks like; this is noted by Paul's use of *Therefore*, saying that, because of what he had already made clear in chapters 1-11 (that righteousness is attained by a walk of faith) now Paul begins to describe how believers ought to live. He begins with a strong call: *I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God* (v 1) to live righteously.

First, Paul talks about sacrifice. He tells his audience *to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God* (v 1), to live sacrificially, doing what God asks of us, which is a way of giving worship, praise, and honor to God. Paul calls this sacrifice a *spiritual service of worship*.

The word translated *spiritual* is the Greek word "logikos," which can also be translated *logical*. It seems the idea is that—in light of what Paul has demonstrated about a life of righteousness—the only logical conclusion is for us to live life as a *living sacrifice*.

Why does this make sense, to live as a sacrifice? Without the preceding 11 chapters it would be difficult to understand the notion that it is "logical" to empty ourselves for the benefit of others. But reflecting on chapters 1-11, life under the law is a life in slavery to sin. And although believers are justified in the presence of God solely on the basis of faith in Jesus, irrespective of our behavior, if we do not live a sacrificial life that follows Jesus's example, we miss out on the great benefits of righteousness. And inevitably we slide back into sin, which is walking apart from God's (good) design for us.

If we walk in sin, we therefore will suffer adverse consequences. This is sad, because we have been delivered (or saved) from having to experience such adverse consequences by Jesus's

resurrection power. This was discussed in detail in Chapter 6. This is akin to someone being set free from prison but choosing to remain in his cell.

Instead of living in freedom, serving the purpose for which Jesus created us, we instead revert to slavery to sin. Slavery to sin leads to earthly condemnation; we suffer the effects of sin and death (or disconnection) as a consequence of refusing to live a spiritual life of sacrifice to Jesus. That is why living sacrificially is so "logical," because it is living freely in Jesus, and it avoids slavery to sin and its consequence of death.

When we present our bodies as a living and holy (set apart) sacrifice for God to use, we are living a life of service to God, which is what we were created to do. So again, it is logical for creations to do what they were created to do. The word *worship* (Greek, "latreian," "λατρείαν") is found in the original text and is certainly fitting, so long as the reader understands *worship* the way the scripture uses it. The scriptural use differs from the very limited way it tends to be used among church—goers to refer only to scheduled church services. For a Jew, like Paul, worship would include sacrifice.

Here, believers are pictured as being on the altar, sacrificed to God. That means our whole person is devoted to God. This is not just a church—service—attendance level of commitment. In Scripture, the word *worship* is very broad, and applies to any aspect of living where we are acknowledging God. One example is from [Matthew 8:1-2](#):

"When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'" In this verse, the leper worships simply by acknowledging Jesus's power. By living a sacrificial life where Jesus's power flows out of us in service to the commands of Jesus, we are indeed worshipping with our lives each moment of each day.

A sacrifice is that which gives up its life in order to please another. The animals sacrificed in Hebrew worship created an aroma that ascended to heaven and pleased God ([Leviticus 4:30-31](#); [Numbers 28:26-27](#)). Most offerings were then cooked and eaten by those joining in the festival and celebration. Jesus references being a living sacrifice that tastes good when He instructed His disciples on how to be great.

In [Mark 9](#), the disciples had been arguing about who among them was the greatest ([Mark 9:33-34](#)). Jesus gave them an object lesson that ended with this admonition:

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." ([Mark 9:49-50](#))

When Jesus says "Have salt in yourselves" He is likely painting a picture for the disciples of each of them being a sacrifice. A sacrifice that is cooked and salted is one that is pleasant to eat. The picture seems to be for the disciples to yield their lives over to God to do His bidding. In doing so they will have peace with one another rather than arguing about who is the greatest. Their focus will not be on one-upping others, but rather it will be on serving one another. It is in laying down our lives in service that we can achieve true greatness.

The Bible Says Romans 12:2 Meaning

A life of righteousness is a life where we live according to God's (good) design, so it does not look like a life of sin, which is living apart from God's (good) design. That's why Paul tells us to *not be conformed* (resemble, follow) *to this world* (v 2).

The word *conformed* as a picture looks like taking the shape of something else. Water conforms to the shape of the glass it is in. Believers are admonished not to be shaped by the forces in the world, which has its own ideas of what is honorable and what is shameful—forces that are opposed to the righteousness of God.

Rather, believers are admonished to *be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (v 2), to live a life that is transformed from the ways of the world to the ways of God. This is possible when our minds have been changed to think after the ways of God.

The book of Romans is an excellent example of what sort of change of mind is called for. Paul has argued in Romans that sin is self-destructive. The world most certainly does not preach that. The world says sin is fun and desirable. The world says we have the right to do whatever we want to do and deserve to be happy as a result. This is sinful because it is living apart from the reality of the cause-effect world God designed.

Paul has admonished us to realize how counterproductive and undesirable a life of sin is; a life that is self-seeking, self-justifying, and driven by satisfying appetites is a life that leads to death. The world says the more appetites we can satisfy the happier we will be. But even logic tells us this is not reality. If we are always pursuing the satisfaction of a new appetite, we cannot be happy with what we are currently experiencing, so we will spend most of our time unhappy. Paul asserted in Chapter 1 that sin has a progression. It goes from lust to addiction to a loss of mental health ([Romans 1:24](#), [26](#), [28](#)). We can gain the opposite of this self-destruction by following God's ways.

When we have transformed minds, we *prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect* (v 2).

We can see how God wants us to live. And when we see how God wants us to live, and follow that path, we do the will of God, and we follow the design God has for us. We prove the *perfect* will of God.

The word *perfect* is a translation of the Greek word "teleios," which is used in the Bible to refer to a destination, such as the finish line in a race. The word here indicates that by living a transformed life with a renewed mind, we become all God intended us to be. We live according to the way God designed us, therefore we are fulfilled.

Whatever our goals in life, they should include this idea, that we become who God intends us to be by changing our thoughts to God's thoughts and living in a manner in which God directs us to

live. All other paths will lead to futility and loss. All other paths separate us from God's (good) design for us. This separation is death ([Romans 6:23](#)).

In a great irony, by trying to live a life apart from God and God's way, we will lose who we were designed to be, and therefore lose our true selves.

The lifestyle of Christians who are pursuing righteousness through faith will not look like the lifestyles of the rest of the world. This is because the world is not pursuing God's righteousness; the world pursues sinful desires. Sin is living apart from God's ways; apart from His (good) design for us.

If it were inevitable for Christians to pursue the righteousness of faith, it would not make sense for Paul to admonish these Roman believers to pursue a renewed mind. He has already commended them for how their faith is famous throughout the world ([Romans 1:8](#)). Yet here he is still admonishing them to pursue the renewing of their minds. Becoming transformed is a journey, and it requires a lot of effort on our part. That journey has everything to do with whether our lives on earth reflect the reality of our righteousness before God in heaven.

We, as believers, are set apart from the rest of the world in Christ, so it makes sense that Paul would tell us to be transformed and made new by the renewing of our minds. By renewing our minds, we can live the reality of Christ's redemption in our daily lives. We are no longer slaves to sin and death, so we must begin to renew and change our minds in order to live apart from our sinful past through faith. The primary faith we must adopt is to believe that following God's way of setting aside self is actually in our best interest.

The primary faith we need is to believe what God tells us is true and to act on it. We saw this in [Romans 10](#), that the righteousness of faith is accomplished by acknowledging what is true in our hearts, speaking that truth, and then living it ([Romans 10:6-10](#)).

By doing this, we will be accomplishing God's will for us. It is common for believers to think that seeking God's will requires discovering a particular circumstance. But the Bible indicates that what God really cares about is us serving Him obediently, sacrificially, no matter what the circumstances. [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#) states this quite plainly: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

"Sanctification" simply means being "set apart" for special service. By living a life as a living sacrifice to God, we are living in a way that pleases Him, and are clearly set apart for special service. This is God's will for our lives.

In renewing our minds, we can better understand what is good and what God wants us to do. We can shift our mindset from trying to gain the rewards of the world through exploiting or defeating others. Instead we can focus on serving others, and seeking their best. As Jesus showed us, sometimes pursuing the best for others includes telling them things they do not want to hear ([Matthew 23](#)). But in each case, by seeking to please God rather than men we are sowing to the spirit which will reap life and benefit ([Galatians 6:8](#)).

