

The Harvester



*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*



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APPROPRIATELY RESPONDING TO GOD

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The appropriate response to God for those outside of Christ is, obviously, to obey the Gospel. On the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, some asked Peter about their response, to which he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Then, Luke acknowledged, "those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). The question of how to respond to God after a person becomes a Christian may not be so obvious. There are many passages to which we could turn that would detail the answer. For this study, though, the focus will be on Paul's words to the Romans:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

From these verses, note two basic responses Christians should have and maintain toward God.

BE SET APART FOR GOD

In response to what God has done, Christians must first present themselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). Paul's appeal to the "mercies of God" serves as the foundation for his instruction on ethical conduct (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 2:1; Col. 3:12-14). Our "bodies" being presented as a living sacrifice is

significant, for it refers to our living, physical body (Rom. 1:24; 4:19; 8:10-11). Yet, it is with these bodies that humans serve sin! It was because the Gentiles dishonored their bodies through sin that "God ... gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts" (Rom. 1:24). It is with these bodies (i.e., "flesh") that non-Christians serve "the law of sin" (Rom. 7:24). In fact, Paul said that "if you live according to the flesh [i.e., the body's appetites] you will die" (Rom. 8:13). However, contrary to Calvinism, our bodies are not the final say to our spirituality. People can choose to believe that Jesus is the Christ (Jn. 8:24), repent from sins (Acts 17:30-31), confess their faith in Him (Mt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:10), be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and thus be added by the Lord to the church Jesus built (Acts 2:41, 47).

Whenever we obeyed the Gospel, "our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:6). Therefore, it is the obedient believer's choice to "not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom. 6:12). Our whole being (body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thes. 5:23) can and must act as a unit in rendering service to God, as Paul commended the Romans, "you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). If the fleshly self is wholly given to God, then the entire person is given to God (cf. Rom. 6:11-13). Perhaps this was part of the reasoning why God choose circumcision as a sign of the covenant under Moses' Law. If that part of a man's body was consecrated to God, then his whole body was!

The idea of a “living sacrifice” is also significant. As in a literal animal sacrifice, a living sacrifice for Christ, involves a death. That is, a death has occurred to sin through baptism (Rom. 6:1-7). However, unlike a literal animal sacrifice, a new, spiritual life is gained that is lived in dedication to God (cf. Rom. 6:13; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Gal. 2:20). The word translated “holy” (from *hagios*, ἅγιος) means to set apart to or by God, consecrated; holy (Rom. 7:12; 11:16; 16:16). The plural form of this word is usually translated “saints,” which literally means “holy ones” (Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25-26, 31; 16:2, 15). “Holy” refers to something without blemish or defect, and without defilement from sin. Anything taken out of common use and devoted to God is holy, which is especially applicable to the bodies of those who submit and obey the Gospel! This kind of sacrifice is acceptable to God (Rom. 14:18; Heb. 13:21).

Consider major Old Testament sacrifices and how they relate to this “living sacrifice” of Christians. Sin and trespass offerings were offered *before* propitiation in order to obtain forgiveness (Lev. 4-5). Christ fulfilled these under the New Covenant (cf. Rom. 3:24-25). Christians are pardoned, justified, and saved, not by their own merit (no matter what their “sacrifice”), but by the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The burnt and peace offerings were offered *after* propitiation and involved consecration and fellowship, respectfully. Burnt offerings required that the entire body of the victim be consumed (Lev. 1:1-17; 6:8-13; Num. 28:3-8). It sym-

bolized the entire consecration of the offerer to the service of God. The life of the dead sacrifice stood for the life of the offerer. This sacrifice ended when the animal’s body was fully consumed. Nationally, there was to be a continual burnt offering for Israel (Ex. 29:38, 42). Peace offerings symbolized restored fellowship and thus communion with God (Lev. 3:1-17; 7:11-38; 9:18-21; 10:12-15). Because of what Christ did on the cross, the Christian has all these blessings, yet the Christian lives before God and the world as testimony that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15)!

The term “reasonable service” (*logiken latreian*, λογικὴν λατρείαν) has been the subject of controversy. Some, for example, will take the term to mean that all of life is worship. A survey of the translations reveal some differences: “spiritual service” (ASV); “spiritual service of worship” (NAS); “spiritual worship” (ESV); “spiritual act of worship” (NIV). The word translated “reasonable [spiritual, ASV]” (from *logikos*, λογικός) is the same word from which the English language gets “logic,” or “logical.” The Greek term means rational, spiritual; “belonging to reason” (ASV margin). This Greek word occurs only one other time in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:2, where it is translated “pure [sincere, KJV; spiritual, ESV]”). Christian service is a reasonable and logical!

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The word translated “service [worship, NAS]” (Rom. 12:1) is from a word (*latreia*, λατρεία) that can mean service or worship, depending on the context. The verb form of this Greek noun is the third most common verb translated by a form of “worship” in the New Testament (*latreuo*, λατρεύω). This word occurs more in the Greek text than *sebomai* (σέβομαι, the second most common verb translated “worship”), but is usually translated by a form “serve” (Mt. 4:10; Lk. 1:74; Acts 7:7). It is derived from a word that literally meant “wages,” and then came to mean “work for wages” (Hess 549). By New Testament times, the word was used to denote service in general, including that done in the name of religion. Therefore, in the New Testament, the word meant to “serve” and was used “only of the carrying out of religious duties, esp. of a cultic [religious] nature, by human beings” (Bauer 467). This “religious” service may include that rendered to false gods (Acts 7:42 ASV; Rom. 1:25) or that rendered to the true and living God (Mt. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:3; Rev. 22:3, et al.).

Because worship is a part of religious service, this word also carried the idea of “worship” in some contexts (Acts 7:42; 24:14; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 10:2) (Bauer 467). However, because in some contexts the word may be translated “worship” does not mean that all of life is worship. Some argue: since the Christian’s life is to be a life of service to God; and since (by a faulty view of “reasonable service”) all the Christian’s service is worship; therefore, everything the Christian does in life is worship. Such reasoning is false on several counts. The most obvious of these is when the Christian sins. If the Christian sins while living daily life (1 Jn. 1:8, 10), and all life is worship, then his sinning would be worship! Such is complete foolishness! Yes, all worship is service, but not all service is worship. Worship has always had a “starting place and a stopping place” (cf. Gen. 22:5; Judg. 7:15; 1 Sam. 1:19; 2 Sam. 12:20; Isa. 66:23; Zech. 14:16; Mt. 2:2; 15:25; Acts 8:27; 24:11; Rev. 3:9; 15:4) (Workman 8). Thus, there are times in the faithful Christian’s life when he is not worshiping! The truth of the matter is that God authorizes five avenues of worship (singing, Eph. 5:19; teaching/preaching cf. Mt. 15:8-9; praying, Acts 2:42; and on Sundays, the Lord’s Supper, Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-29, and free-will financial contributions, 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Good works of service are just that: good works of service!

A word of caution must here be given. While we must avoid the extreme that says worship includes

everything a Christian does, we must also avoid the other extreme that says worship is only that which takes place in the church building. “Every act of Christian service is not necessarily an act of worship, and those things which occur during a period of formal worship are not entirely inclusive of one’s religious service and worship” (Chadwell 21).

BE SET APART FROM THIS WORLD

Not only must Christians be set apart *for* God as a living sacrifice, they must also be distinct *from* the worldliness around them! Paul wrote, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Christians must not let the world shape their minds. The word translated “be ... conformed [fashioned, ASV]” means to be conformed to, be shaped by, live after the pattern of. The only other occurrence of this word is where Peter described his readers “as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts” (1 Pet. 1:14). “World” is not from the usual word that describes the planet, but from a word (*aion*, αἰών) that refers to age; world order; existence, the present life (Mt. 13:22; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6-8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21). Christians must not allow this present age to shape their thinking (1 Pet. 4:1-4). Rather, they must leave those ways in the grave, having been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20; 5:24).

Instead of allowing this world to shape their thinking, Christians must let God’s will shape their minds (Rom. 12:2b). The word rendered “be ... transformed” (from *metamorphoomai*, μεταμορφόομαι) means to be changed in form. It is used of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2) and of the ultimate transformation that takes place through knowledge (and obedience) to the Gospel (2 Cor. 3:18). This transformation can only take place from the inside out. It starts by the “renewing of your mind.” The word translated “renewing [renewal, ESV]” in this context means to have a whole new mind, which is formed by “the will of God”!

CONCLUSION

God has done so much for everyone (cf. Mt. 5:45). He especially gives great blessings to those who have obeyed His word (cf. Eph. 1:3; 2 Cor. 9:15).

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Christians have a fitting response to Him as we live in this world below. Let us keep ourselves set apart for Him and to keep ourselves from having the mindset of this age!

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