

Sermon Topic: A Pleasing Present, by Ps Gan-Tay Li Ping

Sermon Text: Romans 12:1-2

Opening question to ponder:

Do we wonder what we can gift to God, which would really please Him? This is something we may think about at Pre-Pledge Sunday.

How much [tithe, money] would please Him? Or is God pleased with something more than my money?

What is a present that is pleasing to God? → **You are!** 2 key points emerge from Romans 12:1-2:

- 1) Present yourself to God: as you are already pleasing to Him.
- 2) Present yourself to God: so that you will know what is pleasing to Him.

1 Present yourself to God: as you are already pleasing to Him.

Looking at v1 in parts:

- **“Offer”, or “to present”**: from the Old Testament, a system of sacrifice over His relationship with His people Israel. This was for the purpose of addressing sinfulness among His people, so that they could continue to fellowship with Him as a holy God. A system of priesthood, sacrifice, and ritual laws.
 - They center around a series of offerings, expressing: Gratitude – “Thank You, God!” (via Grain and Fellowship offerings), or Confession and Apology – “I’m Sorry, God!” (via Burnt offerings, Purification Offering, Restitution Offering and the Day of Atonement)
 - The latter always involves sacrifice of an animal, whose death covers (‘atones’) for the one offering the sacrifice. – On the Day of Atonement, such sacrifice intimately and actively involves each worshipper. The visceral reminders of the ritual (in presenting the animal, killing it and the associated sights and smells) enabled each worshipper to be keenly aware of the weight of their sins, contrasted against the awesome holiness of God.

- **“Present yourself”**: i.e. sacrifice yourself, not an animal of your flock or presenting an animal sacrifice.
 - ‘Presenting your bodies’: akin to marriage vows to give all of oneself (“all that I am, all tht I have”) to your spouse during your marriage covenant, it is giving all we are and have to God.
 - “The sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices but in giving one’s own” – NT Scholar F.F. Bruce
- A **“pleasing” sacrifice**: cf. elsewhere in the Old Testament referring to the “pleasing aroma” of a sacrifice, meaning that it is acceptable to God.
- **“In view of God’s mercy”**: we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice as a thankful response to God’s mercy. What do we have to be thankful for? This is addressed in the preceding 11 chapters of Romans, on two key things about God’s mercy:
 - **Justification**: having a right relationship with God. [Rom 3:23-26]. God in His mercy freely offers His Son Jesus to atone for our sins as the perfect sacrifice. When we receive Him by faith, we are justified by God’s grace that is freely given. [Justification gives us the right to go to heaven.]
 - **Sanctification**: being made holy [Rom 8:29]. I.e. to become like Jesus Christ. God is not content to leave us just in a right relationship with us, or just leaving us as we are. He wants to transform us to be holy like Jesus Christ, and Himself. [Sanctification fits us for heaven].

We present ourselves to God: as a thankful response, and with the assurance that in Christ we are already pleasing to God.

Yet, we may doubt that God can be pleased with us. Our doubts arise as we consider our sins and willful ways of displeasing God. We think of these and wonder, “How could God possibly be pleased with me, when I fail in so many ways?”

- God is not calling us to be the unblemished Lamb that is the sacrifice: Jesus has fulfilled this role, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.
- There is no condemnation for those who have accepted the Lord. [Rom 8:1]
- When we sin, we do not break the relationship we have with Christ Jesus, as God’s children. We confess our sins so that the fellowship with the Lord remains unbroken. We confess our sins as children to a Loving [Heavenly] Father who will forgive us.

2 Present yourself to God: so that you will know what is pleasing to Him.

Looking at v2: How do we present ourselves to God

- **“Not conforming to the pattern of this world”**: not letting the world ‘squeeze you into its mould’ [paraphrase of 12:1a]. In our everyday lives, we may conform to messages that the world puts out, being squeezed into life’s mould, e.g. “wealth equals worth”, “we are what we earn”, “performance equals personhood”, “might is meant to get what we want rather

than to give”, “contentment is based on circumstances”, “suffering is bad”

- **“Be transformed by the renewing of our mind”**: this helps us discern what moulds we may be conforming to.
 - **“Be transformed”**: this is in passive voice, meaning something is being done to us [the object].
 - Paul is not asking us to transform ourselves, but to allow God to transform us inside out when we receive God. These are marks of change, as people who are being changed by God:
 - We were once dead to sin, but are now alive to God in Jesus Christ. [Rom 6:11]
 - We were once in the realm of flesh, but are now in the realm of the Spirit. [Rom 8:9]
 - We were once slaves, but are now children of God. [Rom 8:14-16]
 - Alike a pastor pronouncing a newlywed couple as ‘man and wife’’: something changes. They are now one flesh, as a married couple. They can choose to continue living their lives in their old identity as single persons, or choose to live intentionally as married people. Doing the former means thinking and doing based on self-interest. It doesn’t change the fact of the marriage, but it will be damaging to their marriage.
 - Living according to their new identity, as people who love, nurture, respect, forgive, and accommodate: as this happens, causes the couple’s outward lives to reflect the inward reality that they are married to each other before God.
 - Similarly, this change happens when we accept Christ before God. We can choose, and have to Choose, to live according to our new identity [rather than our old identity].
 - It’s not about our self-effort, which don’t transform us. Instead, as we live in accordance to God and the Spirit, He works in us to transform us by renewing our minds. → Then we “will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.” [v2b]

Present ourselves to God first, even as there are many things we might seek God about. As we do, God will transform us by the renewing of our minds, and make known His will to us.

Discussion Questions:

Read Romans 12:1-2

- 1 What does 12:1 ask the follower of Christ to offer as a sacrifice? Why this particular term? What might you have expected? What does Paul say that such an act is?

- 2 How have Christians, in general, compartmentalized “worship”? What is it to most Christians? How does this passage alter this misunderstanding?

- 3 Besides the command to give your bodies as a living sacrifice, what else does God command as an act of worship according to verse 2? Why these two particular elements: body and mind?

- 4 How does this understanding readjust the way you worship God on Sunday? On weekdays?