

## A. THE HEART OF THE MATTER: TOTAL TRANSFORMATION (12:1-2)

*1Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, through the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice — living, holy, and well pleasing to God, your true worship. 2And do not conform to this age, but be transformed through the renewing of your mind, so that you can approve what is the will of God, that is, what is good, well pleasing, and perfect.*

Romans 12:1-2 is one of the best-known passages in the NT. Its fame is justified: here Paul succinctly and with vivid imagery summarizes what the Christian response to God's grace in Christ should be. The verses have a pivotal role in Romans. On the one hand, they look back at the argument of chaps. 1–11. While Paul ultimately has in view all of these chapters, verbal and thematic links point to two texts as particularly significant. The first is Rom. 1, whose downward spiral of false and foolish worship (cf. v. 25) and corrupted minds (cf. v. 28) now finds its reversal in the Christians' "reasonable" worship and renewed mind.<sup>13</sup> The second is Romans 6, whose brief mention of the need for Christians to "present" themselves (vv. 13 and 19) as those "alive from the dead" (v. 13) is here reiterated and expanded.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, 12:1-2 stand as the heading for all that follows in 12:3–15:13.

1 "Therefore"<sup>15</sup> must be given its full weight:<sup>16</sup> Paul wants to show that the exhortations of 12:1–15:13 are built firmly on the theology of chaps. 1–11.<sup>17</sup> The English verb "exhort" captures well the nuance of the Greek *parakaleō* in contexts such as this.<sup>18</sup> Its semantic range lies somewhere between "request" and

13. See esp. C. Evans, "Romans 12.1-2: The True Worship," in Lorenzi, *Dimensions*, pp. 30-31.

14. See, for these relationships generally, M. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13* (JSNTSup 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 79-85; D. Peterson, "Worship and Ethics in Romans 12," *TynBul* 44 (1993), 276-79.

15. Gk. οὖν.

16. E.g., Cranfield; Wilckens; contra those who view οὖν as a simple transitional particle (e.g., Käsemann; C. J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalō: Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalō-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen* [Bibliotheca Theologica Norvegica 1; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967], pp. 161-68; Evans, "Romans 12.1-2," pp. 11-12).

17. Most commentators think that Paul refers back to the argument of the entire epistle (e.g., Godet; S-H; Murray; Cranfield), but some think the reference is immediately to 11:35-36 (Meyer), to chaps. 5–8 (Schlier; Zeller [chaps. 6–8]), or to chaps. 5–11 (Dunn).

18. Paul's 54 uses of παρακαλέω fall into three categories: (1) "comfort" (14 occurrences; cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 1:4); (2) "beseech" (a personal request; nine occurrences; cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 12:8); and (3) "exhort."

“command”: an exhortation comes with authority, but the authority of a preacher who is the mediator of God’s truth rather than the authority of a superior issuing a command.<sup>19</sup> “Through the mercies<sup>20</sup> of God” underscores the connection between what Paul now asks his readers to do and what he has told them earlier in the letter that God has done for them. All that Paul has written in the letter thus far may be summed up under the heading of the mercy of God in action. Paul has just summarized that universal mercy of God (11:30-32) and expressed praise to God for it (11:33-36). Now he calls Christians to respond. The preposition “through” is better translated here “because of” (TEV) or “in view of” (NIV): it indicates not the means by which Paul exhorts but the basis, or even the source, of the exhortation.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately Paul is simply the instrument through whom “the mercy of God” is itself exhorting us. As Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 5:20, he is an “ambassador for Christ,” one through whom God himself exhorts his people.<sup>22</sup> What Paul calls for in v. 1 — and, by extension, in all of 12:2–15:13 — is no more (and no less!) than the appropriate and expected response to God’s mercy as we have experienced it. Yet this response is no simple “tit for tat” bargain, as if we grudgingly “pay God back” for what he has done for us. For God’s mercy is not a matter of past benefits only, but it continues to exercise its power in and through us. That God’s mercy does not automatically produce the obedience God expects

19. “The exhortation is distinguished from a mere verbal appeal by this reference back to the work of salvation as its presupposition and basis” [he is referring to “through the mercy of God”] (O. Schmitz, *TDNT* V, 795). See also H. Schlier, “Vom Wesen der apostolischen Ermahnung nach Römerbrief 12,1-2,” in *Die Zeit der Kirche* (2d ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1958), pp. 75-78, and his commentary, 351-53; Cranfield 2.597. Bjerkelund has compared Paul’s use of *παρακαλέω* to its use in Hellenistic literature (*Parakalô*), suggesting that Paul often uses it to introduce key points in his argument. See also the survey of A. Grabner-Haider, *Paraklese und Eschatologie bei Paulus: Mensch und Welt im Anspruch der Zukunft Gottes* (NTAbh n.s. 4; Münster: Aschendorff, 1968).

20. I reflect in my (literal) translation the fact that the Greek word Paul uses here, *οἰκτιρμῶν*, is plural (cf. also KJV; NASB; RSV; NRSV). But Paul picks up the plural form from the LXX, which uses it to translate a Hebrew word (מְחַמֵּדִים) that has a singular meaning. With, then, NIV; TEV; REB, and most commentators (e.g., Käsemann; Cranfield), it is probably best translated in English with a singular.

21. See the other occurrences of *διὰ* following *παρακαλέω* in Paul: Rom. 15:30 (“I exhort you *through* our Lord Jesus Christ and *through* the love of the Spirit”); 1 Cor. 1:10 (“I exhort you, brothers, *through* the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”); and 2 Cor. 10:1 (“I myself, Paul, exhort you *through* the meekness and gentleness of Christ”; the use of *διὰ* in 2 Cor. 5:20 is different). In each case, the object of *διὰ* is that which is ultimately making the appeal that is expressed. See, e.g., Schlier, “Ermahnung,” pp. 78-80; Bjerkelund, *Parakalô*, pp. 162-67; Grabner-Haider, *Paraklese und Eschatologie*, pp. 48-49, 117; Käsemann; Wilckens. Some think that Paul’s construction might reflect the Lat. *per* (e.g., BDF 223[4]; Turner, 267; Zahn; Michel; Cranfield), but this is not clear (Schlier).

22. See Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, pp. 99-102.

is clear from the imperatives in this passage. But God's mercy manifested in his Spirit's work of inward renewal (see v. 2) does impel us toward the obedience that the gospel demands.<sup>23</sup>

We experience God's mercy as a power that exerts a total and all-encompassing claim upon us: grace now "reigns" over us (5:21). It is therefore entirely fitting that our response is to be one that is equally total and all-encompassing: the presentation of our entire persons as a sacrifice to God.<sup>24</sup> Some scholars think that Paul's use of the aorist tense to state this demand indicates that he thinks of this presentation as a "once-for-all" act.<sup>25</sup> But the aorist tense itself does not indicate this; and there is no reason in the context to think that Paul would view this presentation as an offering that we make only once. Paul simply commands us to make this offering, saying nothing about how often it needs to be done.

Paul's use of sacrificial imagery here fits a pattern found throughout the NT. Christians no longer offer literal sacrifices; for Christ has fulfilled and thus brought to an end the OT sacrificial system. But the centrality of sacrifice in ancient religion made it a natural and inevitable vehicle for the early Christians to express their own religious convictions. At the same time, the NT use of cultic language has an important salvation-historical and polemical function, claiming for Christianity the fulfillment of those institutions so central to the OT and to Judaism.<sup>26</sup> Christians offer no bloody sacrifice on an altar; but they offer "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5), such as the "sacrifice of praise to God, which is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15). In Rom. 15:16, Paul describes his own missionary work in cultic terms (see also Phil. 2:17; and note Phil. 3:3 and 4:18). In Rom. 12:1, however, the sacrifice we offer is not some specific form of praise or service, but our "bodies" themselves. It is not only what we can give that God demands; he demands the giver.<sup>27</sup> "Body" can, of course, refer to the physical body as such,<sup>28</sup> and the metaphorical associations

23. See, e.g., G. Dehn, *Vom christlichen Leben. Auslegung des 12. und 13. Kapitels des Briefes an die Römer* (Neukirchen/Vluyn, Neukirchener, 1954), pp. 12-14.

24. The shift from the plural σώματα ("bodies") to the singular θυσίαν ("sacrifice") could indicate that Paul thinks of this presentation as having a corporate dimension, involving the service of the entire Christian community together (e.g., G. Smiga, "Romans 12:1-2 and 15:30-32 and the Occasion of the Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 53 [1991], 268-70). But θυσίαν is probably a distributive singular.

25. E.g., Godet, who contrasts the "once-for-all" requirement of v. 1 with the "continuous incessant" acts demanded in v. 2 (where present tenses are used).

26. The OT and other Jewish authors also used sacrificial language metaphorically (cf., e.g., Ps. 50:14, 23; 51:16-17; 141:2; Sir. 35:1; Tob. 4:10-11; 12:12; 2 Macc. 12:43-44; Jud. 16:16; 4 Macc. 6:29; 1QS 9:3-5; cf. J. Behm, *TDNT* III, 186-87), but, as Dunn points out, these texts do not, as do the NT texts, assume the abolition of the literal cult.

27. Wilckens.

28. It is given a prominently physical sense by, e.g., Godet; S-H; Murray; Gundry, 34-36.

with sacrifice make it an appropriate choice here. But Paul probably intends to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person's interaction with the world.<sup>29</sup> Paul is making a special point to emphasize that the sacrifice we are called on to make requires a dedication to the service of God in the harsh and often ambiguous life of this world. The sacrificial context makes it likely that the verb "present," unlike its somewhat parallel occurrences in 6:13 and 19, means "offer as a sacrifice."<sup>30</sup>

Paul qualifies the sacrifice that we offer with our bodies with three adjectives.<sup>31</sup> Each of the three continues the sacrificial metaphor. Many commentators, noting the many points of comparison with Rom. 6, give "living" a theological sense, "as those who have been brought to new spiritual life" (cf. 6:11, 13).<sup>32</sup> This would make good sense if the adjective modified "our bodies." But it does not; it modifies "sacrifice." This being the case, it is more likely to refer to the nature of the sacrifice itself: one that does not die as it is offered but goes on living and therefore continues in its efficacy until the person who is offered dies.<sup>33</sup> "Holy" is a regular description of sacrifices; it implies here that the offering of ourselves to God involves a being "set apart" from the profane and a dedication to the service of the Lord.<sup>34</sup> Such a sacrifice is "well pleasing to God."<sup>35</sup>

At the end of v. 1, Paul adds an appositional phrase that qualifies the whole exhortation that Paul has just given: offering ourselves as a sacrifice is our "*logikēn* worship."<sup>36</sup> The meaning of the word *logikēn* is notoriously

29. On this "theological" meaning of *σῶμα*, particularly in Paul, see the notes on 6:6. See here Calvin; Barrett; Käsemann; Cranfield; Dunn; Fitzmyer; Ortkemper, 23-24.

30. The verb *παρίστημι* does not have this sense in biblical Greek but does in extrabiblical Greek (BAGD).

31. All three follow the noun they modify, *θυσία*, as I have brought out, somewhat awkwardly, in my translation. But by putting the first adjective, *ζῶσαν* ("living"), before the noun, many English translations (e.g., KJV; NIV; NASB; NRSV) give it a prominence that Paul does not.

32. Calvin; S-H; Cranfield; Murray; Schlier; Wilckens; Thüsing, *Per Christum in Deum*, pp. 94-95.

33. Parallel uses of the adjective "living" are John 6:51: "I am the *living* bread that has come down from heaven . . ."; and 1 Pet. 1:3, "*living* hope." See Hodge; Dunn.

34. The metaphorical context makes clear that "holy" has primarily cultic associations (Käsemann; Dunn); but for Paul the ultimate significance of this being "set apart" has, of course, moral implications (see Cranfield).

35. εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ; Paul uses the same phrase to refer to a metaphorical sacrifice in Phil. 4:18.

36. A few commentators think that τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν ("your *logikēn* worship") is in apposition to *θυσία* ("sacrifice") only (e.g., Hodge; Barrett). But it makes better sense to see the phrase in apposition to the entire exhortation, beginning with *παραστῆσαι* (cf., e.g., S-H; Denney; Ortkemper, 26).

difficult to pin down. The word *logikos* (the lexical form of the adjective *logikēn*) does not occur in the LXX and only once elsewhere in the NT, where its meaning is also debated: 1 Pet. 2:2, where Peter exhorts his readers to “long for the pure *logikon* milk.” The word does, however, have a rich background in Greek and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy and religion. Arguing that God and human beings had *logos* (reason) in common, some of the Greek philosophers of the Stoic school emphasized that only *logikos* worship could be truly appropriate worship. They contrasted this “rational” worship with what they considered to be the superstitions that were so typical of Greek religion.<sup>37</sup> Hellenistic Jews took over this use of the term, applying it sometimes to the mental and spiritual attitude that was necessary for a sacrifice to have any merit before God.<sup>38</sup> Still later, the word was applied directly to sacrifice in the gnostic Hermetic writings.<sup>39</sup>

Considering this background and the context, we arrive at four main possibilities for the connotation of *logikos* here: (1) “spiritual,” in the sense of “inner”: a worship that involves the mind and the heart as opposed to a worship that simply “goes through the motions”<sup>40</sup>; (2) “spiritual” or “rational,” in the sense of “appropriate for human beings as rational and spiritual creatures of God”: a worship that honors God by giving him what he truly wants as opposed to the depraved worship offered by human beings under the power of sin (see Rom. 1:23-25);<sup>41</sup> (3) “rational,” in the sense of

37. See the evidence listed in G. Kittel, *TDNT* IV, 142 and Ortkemper, 28-33. The sense of λογικός as it is used in these texts is especially clear in this statement of Epictetus: “If I were a nightingale, I should be singing as a nightingale; if a swan, as a swan. But as it is, I am a rational being [λογικός], therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God” (1.16.20-21).

38. The clearest example is Philo, *Special Laws* 1.277: “. . . that which is precious in the sight of God is not the number of victims immolated but the true purity of a rational spirit [πνεῦμα λογικόν] in him who makes the sacrifice”; cf. 1.272: “And indeed though the worshippers bring nothing else, in bringing themselves they offer the best of sacrifices, the full and truly perfect oblation of noble living, as they honour with hymns and thanksgivings their Benefactor and Saviour, God. . . .” See also *T. Levi* 3:6, which refers to angels who “present to the Lord a pleasing odor, a rational [λογικός] and bloodless oblation.”

39. Several passages speak of a λογική θυσία; for the texts, see Cranfield.

40. Note the contrast in Rom. 2:28-29 between the Jew “in appearance only” and the Jew “in the hiddenness [of the heart].” See, for this general approach, Zahn; Barrett; Black; Bruce; Ziesler; Ortkemper, 27; J. M. Nielsen, “Die paulinische Auffassung der λογική λατρεία (rationabile obsequium; Röm. 12,1) in ihrer Beziehung zum kultischen Gottesdienst,” *TGl* 18 (1926), pp. 696-97.

41. Although they differ in detail, see Lietzmann; Dunn; Evans, “Romans 12.1-2,” pp. 17-21; H. D. Betz, “The Foundations of Christian Ethics According to Romans 12:1-2,” in *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden* (ed. P. E. Devenish and G. L. Goodwin; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), pp. 63, 69; idem, “Christianity

“acceptable to human reason”: a worship that “makes sense,” as opposed to the “irrational” worship of God through the offering of animals;<sup>42</sup> (4) “reasonable,” or “logical,” in the sense of “fitting the circumstances”: a worship that is appropriate to those who have truly understood the truth revealed in Christ.<sup>43</sup>

This last connotation, while probably implied, does not go far enough, ignoring too much of the rich background of the term that we have sketched. The third is also a questionable explanation, assuming as it does that the OT sacrificial system, for instance, was, or would have been, viewed by Paul as an irrational form of worship.<sup>44</sup> Choosing between the first two alternatives is difficult and perhaps not necessary. Certainly Paul does not suggest, as the reference to “bodies” makes clear, that true Christian worship is a matter only of inner attitude.<sup>45</sup> But the inner attitude is basic to acceptable worship, as Paul makes clear in v. 2 by stressing the “renewing of your mind.” And it is just this involvement of the mind, renewed so that it can again understand God aright, that makes this worship the only finally appropriate and true worship. In light of this, and recognizing that each of the usual translations “spiritual” (NIV; NASB; NRSV) and “reasonable” (KJV) misses an important part of the meaning, it would be best to follow TEV and translate “true worship.”<sup>46</sup>

The word “worship” (*latreia*) continues the cultic imagery of the verse.<sup>47</sup> Paul probably chooses the term deliberately to create a contrast between the Jewish and Christian form of worship. For Christians, there is

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as Religion: Paul’s Attempt at Definition in Romans,” *JR* 91 (1991), pp. 337-39; P. Seidensticker, *Lebendiges Opfer (Röm 12,1): Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus* (NTAbh 20; Münster: Aschendorff, 1954), pp. 260-63.

42. Chrysostom; S-H; Lagrange; Haldane; Gifford; Fitzmyer.

43. Godet; Cranfield; Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” pp. 273-75; Newton, *Concept of Purity*, p. 71.

44. See the appropriate objection of Roetzel along these lines (“Sacrifice,” pp. 414-15).

45. Cranfield.

46. See Wilckens. Paul’s use of the term may have a polemical edge: in contrast to the superstitious practices of the pagans, the mystical integration with the *logos* in Hermetic worship, and the continuation of the “shadow” of the cult in Judaism, Christians in offering themselves to the God who redeemed them offer the only “true” worship (see Schlier, who stresses the contrast with the Hermetic conception).

47. Its one other occurrence in Paul is a reference to the Jewish cult (9:4), the only other NT occurrences (John 16:2; Heb. 9:1, 6) have a cultic connotation, and it has this reference in all but one of its nine LXX occurrences (Exod. 12:25, 26; 13:5; Josh. 22:27; 1 Chron. 28:13; 1 Macc. 1:43; 2:19, 22. 3 Macc. 4:14 is the exception). The cognate verb λατρεύω is also a religious term, referring to “serving” (1:9; 2 Tim. 1:3) or “worshipping” (Rom. 1:25; Phil. 3:3) God.

no more “cult” or “sacrifice” in any literal sense.<sup>48</sup> While the Jew looked to the Jerusalem temple and its cult as the center of worship, the Christian looks back to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Christians are all priests (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), forming together the temple where God now reveals himself in a special way.<sup>49</sup> But Paul does not “spiritualize” the cult; rather, he extends the sphere of the cultic into every dimension of life.<sup>50</sup> Thus the Christian is called to a worship that is not confined to one place or to one time, but which involves all places and all times: “Christian worship does not consist of what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times, and with sacred acts. . . . It is the offering of bodily existence in the otherwise profane sphere.”<sup>51</sup> Chrysostom comments: “And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let thy tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become an offering; let thine hand do no lawless deed, and it hath become a whole burnt offering.” Regular meetings together of Christians for praise and mutual edification are appropriate and, indeed, commanded in Scripture. And what happens at these meetings is certainly “worship.” But such special times of corporate worship are only one aspect of the continual worship that each of us is to offer the Lord in the sacrifice of our bodies day by day.<sup>52</sup>

2 By using the vague conjunction *kai* (usually translated “and”; cf. KJV and NASB), Paul leaves open the exact relationship between vv. 1 and 2. The two verses could be coordinate, issuing two parallel but separate exhortations.<sup>53</sup> But v. 2 is probably subordinate to v. 1, giving the means by which we can carry out the sweeping exhortation of v. 1.<sup>54</sup> We can present our bodies to the Lord as genuinely holy and acceptable sacrifices only if we “do not conform to this world” but “are transformed by the renewing of the

48. Hence Dunn is right to label the later tendency to describe the Lord’s Supper as a sacrifice as a departure from the Pauline (and NT) perspective.

49. 1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5.

50. Cf. Roetzel, “Sacrifice,” pp. 415-16. He intriguingly compares Paul’s concept to that of the Pharisees, who, it has been alleged by several prominent scholars, had as their program the extension of the purity of the cult into everyday Jewish life.

51. Käsemann.

52. We may again quote Käsemann: “[Worship services and the sacraments] are no longer, as in cultic thinking, fundamentally separated from everyday Christian life in such a way as to mean something other than the promise for this and the summons to it. . . . Either the whole of Christian life is worship and the gatherings and sacramental acts of the community provide equipment and instruction for this, or these gatherings and acts lead in fact to absurdity” (p. 327). See also Peterson, “Worship and Ethics.”

53. Zahn, e.g., thinks that v. 1 is directed mainly to Jewish Christians and v. 2 to Gentile Christians. Fitzmyer is representative of others who argue that v. 1 focuses on external (“bodily”) service and v. 2 on internal (“noetic”) commitment.

54. Evans, “Romans 12.1-2,” p. 25.

mind.”<sup>55</sup> The salvation-historical framework that is so basic to the development and expression of Paul’s understanding of the Christian life (see particularly Rom. 5–8) comes to the surface very plainly here.<sup>56</sup> “This world,” literally “this age,”<sup>57</sup> is the sin-dominated, death-producing realm in which all people, included in Adam’s fall, naturally belong. But it is “to deliver us from the present evil age” that Christ gave himself (Gal. 1:4); and those who belong to Christ have been transferred from the old realm of sin and death into the new realm of righteousness and life.<sup>58</sup> But this transfer, while decisive and final, does not isolate us from the influence of the old realm. For while belonging to the new realm, we continue to live, as people still in the “body,”<sup>59</sup> in the old realm. Paul’s command that we “not conform to this world,” then, builds on the theology of Rom. 5–8 (and of Rom. 6 especially) and calls on us to resist the pressure to “be squeezed into the mold” of this world and the “pattern” of behavior that typifies it (see 1 Cor. 7:31).

Because the verb “conform” is in the present tense, many scholars think that Paul wants his readers to “*stop conforming*” to this world.<sup>60</sup> But Paul’s generally positive attitude toward the Romans’ spirituality (cf. 15:14) makes this doubtful.<sup>61</sup> Also uncertain is the voice of the verb and its significance. It could be passive — “do not be conformed” (KJV; NASB; NRSV)<sup>62</sup> — or middle, with a reflexive idea — “do not conform yourselves” (TEV) — but, perhaps most likely, whether middle or passive in form, it has a simple (“intransitive”) active significance — “do not conform” (NIV; REB; NJB).<sup>63</sup>

The second, positive, imperative in the verse, however, has a clearly passive meaning: “be transformed.” The neat verbal paronomasia found in most English translations (*conformed/transformed*) is not present in Greek,

55. The shift from παρακαλέω plus infinitive (v. 1) to imperatives (v. 2) is found elsewhere in Paul; see Rom. 16:17.

56. See esp. Nygren for this emphasis.

57. Gk. αἰών. The word can refer to the “world” in a spatial sense (cf. BAGD), but typically in Paul it has a temporal nuance, referring to “this age” as the period of time in world history characterized by the domination of sin and Satan (1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12).

58. Rom. 5:17, 21; 6:2-6, 14, 17-18, 22; 7:2-6; 8:2, 9.

59. Cf. the reference to σῶμα in v. 1.

60. E.g., Wilckens; Cranfield. The supposition that the present imperative when negated denotes the need to stop an action one is engaging in (durative *Aktionsart*) is widespread even in the grammars; cf., e.g., Turner, 74-75.

61. Porter thinks that Paul uses the present tense rather to draw attention to the importance of the prohibition (*Verbal Aspect*, pp. 351-60); but this is also unlikely. See, for further remarks on tense in Greek commands, the notes on 6:12 and 13.

62. Dunn.

63. See Turner, 57, who notes that Hellenistic Greek manifested a tendency to use the middle and the passive voice with an active meaning.

where verbs from two separate roots are used. Most older commentators and many recent ones are sure that this change in root signifies a change in meaning also. They argue that the verb translated “conform”<sup>64</sup> connotes a superficial resemblance, whereas the verb translated “be transformed”<sup>65</sup> refers to an inward and genuine resemblance. As Morris puts it, then, “Paul is looking for a transformation at the deepest level that is infinitely more significant than the conformity to the world’s pattern that is distinctive of so many lives.”<sup>66</sup> However, as Barrett notes, “conformity to this age is no superficial matter.” More important, the lexical basis for the distinction is not solid.<sup>67</sup> Therefore the shift in root probably reflects no difference in meaning; and, somewhat ironically, the use of the same root to translate both verbs in English reflects closely enough the meaning of the Greek terms. The tense of the verb is again present; and in this case the fact that the renewing of the mind is a continuing process justifies us in thinking that Paul uses this tense to stress the need for us to work constantly at our transformation.

“The renewing of your mind” is the means by which this transformation takes place. “Mind” translates a word that Paul uses especially to connote a person’s “practical reason,” or “moral consciousness.”<sup>68</sup> Christians are to adjust their way of thinking about everything in accordance with the “newness” of their life in the Spirit (cf. 7:6).<sup>69</sup> This “re-programming” of the mind

64. Gk. συσχηματίζομαι, which uses the σχημ- root.

65. Gk. μεταμορφώω, which uses the μορφ- root.

66. Others (e.g., Chrysostom; Leenhardt) think that συσχηματίζομαι implies the transitory nature of this world. Among those who find a distinction of some kind are Godet; S-H; Michel; Murray; Dunn; R. A. Culpepper, “God’s Righteousness in the Life of His People. Romans 12–15,” *RevExp* 73 (1976), 452. J. B. Lightfoot, in an extended note in his *Philippians* commentary, presented the classic case for a consistent NT distinction between words built on the σχημ- root and those built on the μορφ- root (*Philippians*, pp. 127-33).

67. Paul can certainly use verbs from the σχημ- root to indicate a superficial and outward transformation; cf. his references in 2 Cor. 11:13 and 15 to false apostles, who “masquerade” as apostles of Christ and servants of righteousness, and in 2 Cor. 11:14 to Satan, who “disguises” himself as an “angel of light.” But a similar superficial or outward conformity is difficult to suppose in Phil. 3:21, where Paul says that God will “transform” (μετασχηματίζομαι) our “body of humility” into a “body of his glory”; and note that Paul uses a word from the μορφ- root in the same verse to refer to the same concept. Similarly, a difference between μορφή and σχήμα is difficult to sustain in Phil. 2:6-7. Among those who do not think the two verbs are different in meaning in Rom. 12:2 are Barrett; Wilckens; Cranfield; Evans, “Romans 12.1-2,” pp. 25-26.

68. Denney. The Greek is νοῦς. See the note on 1:28.

69. The Greek word in Rom. 12:2 is ἀνακαινώσει (a dative of instrument; cf. Turner, 240); Paul uses the word in a similar way in Tit. 3:5 and the cognate verb in 2 Cor. 4:16 (our inner person being renewed day by day) and Col. 3:10 (the new [person] being

does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think. In Rom. 1:28 Paul has pointed out that people's rejection of God has resulted in God's giving them over to a "worthless" mind: one that is "unqualified" (*adokimos*) in assessing the truth about God and the world he has made. Now, Paul asserts, the purpose<sup>70</sup> of our being transformed by the renewing of the mind is that this state might be reversed; that we might be able to "approve" (*dokimazō*) the will of God. "Approving" the will of God means to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view to putting it into practice.<sup>71</sup> That Paul means here by "the will of God" his moral direction is clear from the way Paul describes it: this will is that which is "good," "acceptable [to God]," and "perfect."<sup>72</sup>

Paul's teaching about the Christian's source for finding the moral will of God in this verse deserves attention. Paul has made clear earlier in the letter that the Christian no longer is to look to the OT law as a complete and authoritative guide for conduct (see Rom. 5:20; 6:14, 15; 7:4). What, Paul's first readers and we ourselves today might ask, is to be put in its place? Paul answers: the renewed mind of the believer. Paul's confidence in the mind of the Christian is the result of his understanding of the work of the Spirit, who is actively working to effect the renewal in thinking that Paul here assumes (cf. Rom. 8:4-9).<sup>73</sup> And it is important to note that Paul's confidence in our ability to determine right and wrong is not unbounded. He knows that the renewal of the mind is a process and that as long as we are in these

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renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it). Particularly significant for the argument of the letter is the way this phrase picks up *καινότητι πνεύματος* ("newness of Spirit") from 7:6 and *καινότητι ζωής* ("newness of life") from 6:4. See also Eph. 4:23: "be renewed [*ἀνανεοῦσθαι*] in [or by] the spirit of your mind [*νοός*]" (the use of the verb *ἀνανέομαι* in this verse demonstrates that a hard-and-fast distinction between the roots *νε-* and *καιν-* is as difficult to sustain as one between *μορφ-* and *σχημ-*).

70. The Greek construction *εἰς τό* with the infinitive probably denotes purpose here (Michel) rather than result (as Lenski thinks).

71. Ziesler paraphrases "discover in order to carry out." On the Greek verb *δοκιμάζω*, see the note on 1:28.

72. The three adjectives are probably in apposition to *τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ*, as the translation above and most English translations suggest (Murray; Käsemann; Cranfield; Schlier), rather than direct descriptions of it, as KJV translates: ". . . what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (this view is defended by, e.g., Godet).

73. See Westerholm, 243; and on this general subject, D. J. Moo, "Putting the Renewed Mind to Work," in *Renewing Your Mind in a Secular World* (ed. J. D. Woodbridge; Chicago: Moody, 1985), pp. 145-60; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, pp. 596-97.

bodies we need some revealed, objective standards against which to measure our behavior.<sup>74</sup> Hence Paul makes clear that Christians are not without “law,” but are under “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:19). This “law” has its heart in Jesus’ own teaching about the will of God, expanded and explicated by his appointed representatives, the apostles. But Paul’s vision, to which he calls us, is of Christians whose minds are so thoroughly renewed that we know from within, almost instinctively, what we are to do to please God in any given situation. We need “law”; but it would be to betray Paul’s call to us in these verses to substitute external commands for the continuing work of mind-renewal that is at the heart of God’s New Covenant work.<sup>75</sup>