

# A PLEASING RESPONSE TO GOD'S MERCY

Romans 12:1-2

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## **Introduction**

One of the ideals, which perhaps every Christian has, is to live a life pleasing to God. This is reasonably true because in God's plan of full salvation, the believer is becoming aware that pleasing Him is not only an act of receiving Christ, but also living in full submission to Him.

However, having such ideals and awareness does not automatically make the difference in the reality of our Christian experience. Paradoxically, we often find ourselves in opposition and struggling with God. We find ourselves insisting that what we do is the thing that pleases God. Yet, we find out that it is not the best that God expects of us. Rick Warren, in his *Purpose Driven Life*, shares a very important point in this issue of pleasing God. The first chapter opens with a wake-up call:

It's not about you.

The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose. The search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That's because we typically begin at the wrong starting point—ourselves. We ask self-centered questions like What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams for my future? But focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life's purpose. The Bible says, "It is God who

directs the lives of his creatures, everyone's life is in his power"(pp.17-18).

In short, pleasing God does not begin with what we think pleases Him, but what He desires that pleases Him. All our purpose and actions should start with God (Cf. Col. 1:15-19; Rom. 11:36).

The claim of God's primacy in all things is explicitly illustrated in our passage (Rom. 12:1- 2). Its rationality has its stamp of appropriateness in the final clauses of verses 1 and 2: [Adjectival] "...which is your reasonable service" (v.1) and [Purpose] "...so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (v.2).

### **Context**

The passage (Rom. 12:1-2) opens as a summary of the claim of Pauline Christian gospel. This sets forth the mood of Paul's exhortation and the basis of the response he expects from the believers in Rome. Both elements imply to his readers the necessity of pursuing what is pleasing to God, and letting God complete His work in their lives. This indicates a balance in Christian lifestyle and relationship, personal commitment and divine enabling.

Paul builds up the logic of his exhortation by setting everyone in a perspective where each could have a full view of the "all-encompassing power and effect of God's mercy."

Paul's emphasis on divine mercy confirms the connection of his discussion with the preceding chapters: In chapters 1-4, he shows how an awfully wicked man can be justified by faith. In 5-8, the justified by faith can be sanctified in Christ by the communication of the Spirit. It is perhaps the refusal to follow this way of relationship with God that has drawn down on Israel God's displeasure in chapters 9-11; however, it has become the opportunity for God's mercy to be manifested to the Gentiles (11:30-32).

From such point where Israel failed to please God, Paul makes the point of his exhortation in 12:1-2. He reminds the Roman believers that the mercy they received from God is just the beginning of the fuller blessing of salvation. They are urged to continue in such ever-affecting power of divine mercy. In this instance, it is concerned with what they should do in response to God's mercy. Paul mentions two things:

## **I. DEDICATE OUR WHOLE BEING AT GOD'S DISPOSAL – v.1**

Paul begins with the command, “present” *paristimi*, meaning to “place something or oneself at the disposal” of somebody. In our text, the object of presentation presupposes God. He makes the order, arrangement, control and management. The opening expression, “present your bodies a sacrifice” is certainly drawn from the technical language of cultic sacrifice. This allusion to the OT sacrificial system helps us understand the collective idea of body (*somata*) which is the body in its wholeness. The body which stands or the whole person is dedicated to God, and it is understood further in its relationships within the world. Paul makes this explicit in 6:13, 19: “...do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of righteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God...so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

This wholly-dedicated life to God is further described by Paul:

**a) Living:** Paul compares this character-dedicated life to an animal sacrifice, but he corrects an aspect in the comparison by adding, living” to “sacrifice” along with other phrases. This reminds us that Christian life is not cult that offers God dead animals. It is a life consisting in the quality of daily living and constant dedication.

The contrast being made here is between a dead animal and a conscious being. The ancient sacrificial lamb gave up its life to be sacrificed,