

William Barclay Commentaries on the New Testament

THE TRUE WORSHIP AND THE ESSENTIAL CHANGE

Rom. 12:1-2

Brothers, I call upon you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies to him, a living, consecrated sacrifice, well-pleasing to God--for that is the only kind of worship which is truly spiritual. And do not shape your lives to meet the fleeting fashions of this world; but be transformed from it, by the renewal of your mind, until the very essence of your being is altered, so that, in your own life, you may prove that the will of God is good and well pleasing and perfect.

Here we have Paul following the pattern he always followed when he wrote to his friends. He always ends his letters with practical advice. The sweep of his mind may search through the infinities, but he never gets lost in them; he always finishes with his feet firmly planted upon the earth. He can, and does, wrestle with the deepest problems which theology has to offer, but he always ends with the ethical demands which govern every man.

"Present your bodies to God," he says. There is no more characteristically Christian demand. We have already seen that that is what a Greek would never say. To the Greek, what mattered was the spirit; the body was only a prison-house, something to be despised and even to be ashamed of. No real Christian ever believed that. The Christian believes that his body belongs to God just as much as his soul does, and that he can serve him just as well with his body as with his mind or his spirit.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the instrument through which the Holy Spirit works. After all, the great fact of the incarnation basically means that God did not grudge to take a human body upon himself, to live in it and to work through it. Take the case of a church or a cathedral. It is built for the offering of worship to God. But it has to be designed by the mind of some architect; it has to be built by the hands of craftsmen and of labouring men; only then does it become a shrine where men meet to worship. It is a product of the mind and the body and the spirit of man.

"So," Paul says, "take your body; take all the tasks that you have to do every day; take the ordinary work of the shop, the factory, the shipyard, the mine; and offer all that as an act of worship to God." The word in Rom. 12:1 which we along with the Revised Standard Version have translated worship, has an interesting history. It is *latreia*, the noun of the verb *latreuein*. Originally *latreuein* meant to work for hire or pay. It was the word used of the labouring man who gave his strength to an employer in return for the pay the employer would give him. It denotes, not slavery, but the voluntary undertaking of work. It then came to mean quite generally to serve; but it also came to mean that to which a man gives his whole life. For instance, a man could be said *latreuein kallei*, which means to give his life to the service of beauty. In that sense, it came very near meaning to dedicate one's life to. Finally, it came to be the word distinctively used of the service of the gods. In the Bible it never means human service; it is always used of service to and worship of God.

Here we have a most significant thing. True worship is the offering to God of one's body, and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however noble, and a ritual, however magnificent. Real worship is the offering of everyday life to him, not something transacted in a church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God. As Whittier wrote:

"For he whom Jesus loved hath truly spoken: The holier worship which he deigns to bless,
Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken, And feeds the widow and the fatherless."

A man may say, "I am going to church to worship God," but he should also be able to say, "I am going to the factory, the shop, the office, the school, the garage, the locomotive shed, the mine, the shipyard, the field, the byre, the garden, to worship God."

This, Paul goes on, demands a radical change. We must not be conformed to the world, but transformed from it. To express this idea he uses two almost untranslatable Greek words--words which we have taken almost sentences to express. The word he uses to be conformed to the world is *suschematizesthai*; its root is *schema*, which means the outward form that varies from year to year and from day to day. A man's *schema* is not the same when he is seventeen as it is when he is seventy; it is not the same when he goes out to work as when he is dressed for dinner. It is continuously altering. So Paul says, "Don't try to match your life to all the fashions of this world; don't be like a chameleon which takes its colour from its surroundings."

The word he uses for being transformed from the world is *metamorphousthai*. Its root is *morphe*, which means the essential unchanging shape or element of anything. A man has not the same *schema* at seventeen and seventy, but he has the same *morphe*; a man in dungarees has not the same *schema* as a man in evening dress, but he has the same *morphe*; his outward form changes, but inwardly he is the same person. So, Paul says, to worship and serve God, we must undergo a change, not of our outward form, but of our inward personality. What is that change? Paul would say that left to ourselves we live a life *kata sarka*, dominated by human nature at its lowest; in Christ we live a life *kata Christon* or *kata pneuma*, dominated by Christ or by the Spirit. The essential man has been changed; now he lives, not a self-centred, but a Christ-centred life.

This must happen, Paul says, by the renewal of your mind. The word he uses for renewal is *anakainosis* (GSN0342). In Greek there are two words for new--*neos* and *kainos*. *Neos* means new in point of time; *kainos* means new in point of character and nature. A newly manufactured pencil is *neos*; but a man who was once a sinner and is now on the way to being a saint is *kainos*. When Christ comes into a man's life he is a new man; his mind is different, for the mind of Christ is in him.

When Christ becomes the centre of life then we can present real worship, which is the offering of every moment and every action to God.