

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Radically Transformed to Discover God's Purpose

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"I call-y'all-alongside, brothers and sisters, by means of the mercies of God, to stand your bodies alongside one another (as) a living sacrifice, set-apart, well-pleasing to God, the reasonable worship-service of y'all. And do not conform yourselves to this age, rather transform yourselves by the renewing of the mind, toward y'all to test-out-by-trial-to-discover what is the desire of God, that which is beneficial and well-pleasing and mature."

Romans 12:1,2

We mentioned last time how **Paul introduces the practical section by calling the Roman Christians to come alongside to stand their bodies alongside one another as a living sacrifice. He is calling them to come together and stand next to each other to become something larger than themselves.** The word picture is *not* about each person becoming a living sacrifice. Rather, they are to *become a team together*. Together they are to become a "living sacrifice", offering their potential life-together with complete commitment to God. It is important to see that this invitation, or "calling-alongside", is placed at the beginning of the section dealing with spiritual gifts and interactive "body-life". **In order for the vision God has in mind for the Body to come to pass, it is necessary to enlist their whole-hearted participation.** They need to be willing to come together and function as a team in order for God's intended purpose for them-together to come to fruition. Note that they are called-alongside to stand together (or, "stand-at-the-ready-together") to be a "living sacrifice", ...wholly-dedicated, set-apart, consecrated-to-God. This is well-pleasing to Him, the kind of spiritual service He is looking for. **As a "living sacrifice", your "life-together" (as well as your life as individuals) is offered to God with complete abandonment,** ...a "no holds barred" commitment of yourself and your Christian-community as an offering to God. **This means that you are to be willing to give yourself totally,** ...all you have, all you are, all your hopes, dreams, expectations, preconceptions..., *everything* to God to serve Him as He would choose to spend and utilize you. **You give God free reign to determine your role, direct and utilize you and your "team" as He sees as best.**

This next verse describes how we are to prepare ourselves to discover and accomplish God's purpose for us: **"and do not assimilate to this age" – Paul strongly charges us not to simply adjust ourselves to fit in and become like the surrounding culture.** The original language uses the word picture of using a mold to shape something that is malleable into the likeness of the image and shape of that external pattern. Typically the raw material being shaped is lifeless and is acted upon by some outside person or force. Here, the original language clearly indicates that **we are the ones who voluntarily choose to adjust ourselves to fit in to our surrounding culture.** True, the pressures of our society, our families, our friends, our schools, our jobs, propaganda from our political system, advertising from business, suggestions from the spiritual world, and our own selfish desire to be accepted by others are strong and compelling, but, in the end, **we each determine how we will choose to "become what others want and expect" so that we are liked and accepted.** Most of this pressure to conform is not consciously thought of in this way by us. We are more than happy to "git in where we fit in", or "go along to get along". From the time we are young, however, we have often experienced disapproval, rejection and even punishment for behaviors that are *not* acceptable to our social group. We learn to conform to be accepted, but we do not recognize that **we are being programmed, diminished, directed and controlled by these external pressures, at the same time.** We give up something of ourselves, and we learn to *not* think, speak, and behave in ways deemed unacceptable.

"but be transformed" – The word in Greek is *metamorphoō*, from which we derive our English word, "metamorphosis". **It refers to "an inward change of nature that produces a perceptible change in outward form and appearance".** It is a very strong word in Greek. It means a radical change from one form to another. One of the most amazing examples of this in nature is the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. What a powerful, dramatic, and amazing illustration! The beautiful, graceful, colorful butterfly looks nothing like that lowly worm that went inside that chrysalis. It no longer eats the same, travels the same, nor does it do the same things. Its entire manner of life is radically different. In the NT, this same word is also used of Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2). Peter, James and John were with Him on the mountain, and "He was transformed before them." His face shown like the sun, and His garments became as white as light, dazzling and radiant in appearance. Something was happening within Him that caused a perceptible change in His appearance. There is one other example of the use of this word in the NT. It occurs in 2 Corinthians 3:18. There, Paul says that as we are "beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into His image, from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

Again, there is an inner change that happens as we gaze upon God's glory, and this inner change produces an outwardly visible change in our appearance. **We are commanded to be transformed!**

How are we to bring about an inward change of nature that will produce a perceptible change in our outward form or appearance?

Paul tells us. "...by the renewing of your mind..." The inward change here is the renewal, the making new and different, the renovation of the mind. **The word for "mind" here is more than just your intellectual ability** (your "thinker"). **The word refers to your perception of reality or your world view** (your "perceiver"). The root of the word translated "renew" means to make something of an entirely new quality, of an unused, unheard of, unknown character. In other words, **we are to train our faculty of perception to function in an entirely different manner. We are to come to perceive and process reality in a way that we have never experienced before.** As you expand your awareness of reality, correct misunderstandings and misbeliefs, learn more accurate information and develop new skills of thinking, perceiving, evaluation and decision making, your worldview will become more accurate and your perceptions will become more clear and precise. The word for "renewing" is prefixed by a preposition that implies repetitive, continuous, ongoing action. **This renewing process is an ongoing, lifelong process.** It is an attitude of learning and seeking that will promote investigation, and is constantly open to learn. **As our thinking and perception of things change, our reactions to things will also become dramatically different.** Our responses will be wiser, more measured and effective. As we see life differently, we ourselves will begin to respond differently to what we see, and we will be changed from the inside-out. **The word for transformation also means to change to a completely different form.** It is not merely about controlling outer behavior, e.g., restricting sinful desires by force of will. It refers to being made different through and through, e.g. to no longer have those sinful desires, but to truly have godly ones. Thus the transformed person can simply be him/herself, because he/she truly does want what God wants.

"unto y'all to test-out-by-trial/discover-by-experimentation ...the desire of God". The discovery of God's will is an active process, not just "Book learning". It will involve an ongoing process of assessment, sharing ideas, taking risks, and *making mistakes* in order to find out what works, and what it is that God wants us as a Body to be doing. **The word translated as "you might prove" in the NASB does not mean to intellectually prove,** as in building a theological case for something. **It is the Greek word dokimazō, which means to test-out-by-trial, to-discover-by-experimentation.** Also, the "will of God" is not about God's prescriptive moral will, but rather refers to God's situational desire and purpose for us in our specific context. Remember, this passage is written to a group of people in Rome. **The thing they are to be looking for is, "What does God want for us to do?" This is discovered through a trial-and-error process, a process fraught with stumblings, frustrations, mistakes, and dead ends.** It is very much like a child learning to walk. It is impossible to learn this skill without making attempts, and thus discovering what works and what does not. God does not expect that we will get it right on the first try. In fact, the **mistakes and errors are as much a part of the learning process as the successes. Every attempt stands for progress, if we can learn from our mistakes.** Cf. Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10.

What are we trying to learn? – The will of God. What does Paul have to tell us about *that*? He describes it as "good, well-pleasing, and mature." Other definitions would be "beneficial, pleasant, and complete". **The will of God is ultimately to be a "good-news thing" to us, and the manifestation of His purpose often will develop and be established over time.** The rendering of the text in most translations (e.g., "to prove the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" -- NASB) tends to support the impression that we are to intellectually prove out from Scripture what is the moral, prescriptive will of God. This would be defined as the things that are good in God's sight, acceptable to Him, and which meet His standard of perfect righteousness. His moral will is absolute and timeless, since He does not change His standards.

I believe this kind of interpretation is exactly *backwards* of what was really intended by Paul. **I think Paul intended the Roman Christians to discover-by-experimentation the desire of God for them as a group, in their particular time-and-place setting. God's desire will be learned through active experimentation.** The reason for pursuing a knowledge of God's desire for them is not just from a sense of obedience or obligation. It also comes from the fact that **God, as a loving Father, wants "what is best" for them. His desire will be "what is beneficial and well-pleasing" to them. It will also be "mature", because God, as Father, desires them to grow up and develop more skills and perspective over time, and through experience.** The use of this word, "mature", also implies a process of growth, change and development moving toward a culmination, or end point of skill or fruitfulness. **Discovering God's desire is not a duty, but a growth adventure!** This is what we have been learning from our studies in *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby. **God IS at work in our lives, and in our location.** He desires to *show us* how to join Him effectively. **It takes a paradigm shift, a change in perception to begin to expect, see and respond to Him. How do we respond? We must take the risk to join Him. THAT is testing-out-to-discover the will of God!**