

“Good, Acceptable, and Perfect”
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Readings:

Romans 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION

- There are times when we simply don't know what to say.
 - A funeral is one of them.
 - At a funeral, any words seem too small.
 - New Year's too.
 - In the New Year, any phrase seems either too big or too small.
 - We want to wish people all the best, everything that's good, all at once — health, peace, success, vacation, weight loss.
- And then we repeat the classic: "Happy New Year!"
- Or: "Have a blessed year!"
- But let me try something different with you today.
 - When the service is over and you come to greet me, I will say:
 - I hope you have a terrible new year.
 - May your plans fail.
 - May you become frustrated.
 - May you feel weak and lost.
- Now be honest:

- Who's going to want to hug me if it is like this?
- The truth is, nobody wants a bad year. Of course not!
- We all want a good, pleasant, blessed year.
 - And that is exactly what Paul explains in Romans 12:
 - The possibility of experiencing God's good, acceptable and perfect will.
- Paul doesn't talk about luck, nor positive thinking, nor the alignment of energies.
 - He speaks of three profound movements of faith:
 - A rational worship;
 - Not conforming to the world;
 - To have our minds renewed.

1. A RATIONAL WORSHIP: WHEN FAITH LEAVES THE TEMPLE

- Paul begins by saying:
 - "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice."
 - Because that is your reasonable form of worship.
- Notice, then, that reasonable worship
 - Is not a cold or warm worship service.
 - It is not a silent, rigid, or overly intellectual worship.
- Reasonable worship is when what we profess with our mouths is lived out with our bodies.

- It is here in the sanctuary that we learn that God is love.
 - And we leave here in love.
- It is here that we sing about grace.
 - And we practice forgiveness in our daily lives.
- It is here that we hear about humility.
 - And then we practice stopping thinking that we are better than others.
- This is what Paul means when he talks about offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.
 - Paul is not talking about physical martyrdom, nor about punishment of the body.
 - He is talking about a life of dedication, of consistency, of integrity.
- The sacrifice is no longer an animal sacrificed on the altar, but our own lives, continually offered as a living sacrifice to God.
 - It is a worship that takes place in traffic, at work, at home, on social media.
- Reasonable worship is when mind, body, faith, and practice walk together.
 - as a consequence of the salvation given by God.
- By presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, we are offering ourselves enterily in worship to God.
 - more than our Sunday mornings,

- more than our financial resources,
 - but the totality of our lives.
- Do you want to live according to God's will, which is good, acceptable, and perfect, in 2026?
 - Offer your life as a living sacrifice.

2. NOT CONFORMING TO THE WORLD: REGRET AND DEPENDENCE

- Paul continues:
 - Don't conform to this age - or era, or century.
- To conform is to take on the form.
 - It is to adjust.
 - It is to find normal things that, from a Christian perspective, should be abnormal.
- The world says:
 - Be yourself. Be proud of who you are.
 - And we started to believe it.
- But the Gospel says:
 - Repent.
 - The Gospel calls us to repentance and to change.
- Repentance is not self-hatred.
 - It is recognizing that not everything in us reflects the Kingdom of God.
 - It is admitting that we need to change.
 - It is about understanding that there are things about me that hurt others and myself.
- The world celebrates the ego;

- The gospel confronts the ego and places it before grace.
- The world says:
 - "Be independent. Dependence is weakness."
- God says:
 - "Without me, you can do nothing."
- The Christian faith is not a faith of absolute autonomy, but of dependence.
 - Dependence on God and dependence on one another.
 - We are one body. We are a community.
 - We need each other to live, grow, and survive.
 - We cannot accept the truths from this age.
- The world values competition.
 - The church is called to cooperation.
- The world judges by appearance, success, and performance.
 - The church is called to welcome through grace.
- The world loves to receive something in return.
 - The church loves because it was loved first.
- Not conforming to the world doesn't mean creating a list of immoral things we don't commit.
 - It is not religious pride.
- It's about living an alternative model of humanity.
 - shaped by the humanity of Christ.

- To avoid conforming to the world, we need
 - ongoing regret
 - and humility to depend.

3. BE TRANSFORMED: A FAITH THAT CHANGES THE MIND

- Paul concludes by saying:
 - Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- The Greek word here is μεταμορφοῦσθε.
 - which means: Change, transformation. Real. Profound. Continuous.
- The verb tense in which this word appears in the original Greek text indicates a continuous action.
 - It is an ongoing transformation that never ends.
- And change is difficult because you can't change while remaining the same.
 - Change requires letting go of comfortable certainties.
 - Change requires recognizing that not everything we've always done is essential.
 - Change requires learning.
- Transforming the mind means returning to the essence of faith.
- We might tend to think that transforming and renewing means exchanging what we have for something new.

- But most of the time when we talk about faith, renewal will mean
 - to abandon thoughts, actions, and doctrines that we have built up over time,
 - which have come to occupy a central place in our faith,
 - occupying the place that should belong only to Christ.
- We often fight, exclude, and hurt each other over things that are not central.
 - Things that we confuse with the gospel, but that are not the gospel.
 - This happened during the Protestant Reformation, in the 16th century:
 - The church came to believe that purchasing the sacrifice was essential.
 - People were exploited because of this.
 - The renewal, then, did not come about by replacing this doctrine with a new one.
 - but rather by returning to the essence, which is:
 - God's forgiveness is freely available to all.

- What are our doctrines, our social positions, our theologies, our practices that need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds?
 - I'm not going to answer that question.
- But we all need to allow God to continue shaping us.
 - And we will change.

CONCLUSION

- Perhaps a good year is beginning.
 - when our plans fail.
 - When our pride falls.
 - When our self-sufficiency ends.
 - When we abandon some of our convictions.
 - Perhaps until a threat arises.
- God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect.
 - Not because it is easy, but because it makes us more like Christ.
- May this be a year
 - of daily living sacrifice.
 - Out of sincere regret.
 - Of gracious dependence.
 - With a renewed mind.
- And then, yes, it will be a happy and blessed new year.