

Bible Study Note

Romans 12:1 and Old Testament Roots

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Version 1.1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1, ESV)

Introductory Comments

This short Bible study is to give one example of how the New Testament is almost completely based on the Old. It develops further the doctrines of the Old – it does not replace or negate them.

One work in particular that I recommend is *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, Andrew David Naselli – eds), a key one-volume reference work. It provides a comprehensive examination of the complex subject regarding how the authors of the New Testament utilise, quote, allude to, and echo the Old Testament. With contributions from over 50 evangelical scholars, the dictionary includes hundreds of articles that address a variety of topics, eg. "Typology," "Allusion," "Echo," "Inner-Biblical Exegesis," "Quotation," - specific passages from the Old Testament and their usage in the New Testament.

Use of the Old Testament in Romans 12:1

In regard to Romans 12:1, here is a phrase-by-phrase comparison with Old Testament scriptures, using the ESV translation for the verse:

- “I appeal to you therefore, brothers” – alluding to Deuteronomy 6:4–5; 10:12; Joshua 22:5; Psalm 100:2 (“Serve the LORD with gladness ...”) – calling for the wholehearted obedience to God.
- “by the mercies of God” – alluding to Exodus 34:6–7; Psalm 103:8–14; Isaiah 54:7–8; Hosea 6:6; Micah 7:18–19 – here Paul appeals to God’s compassion very much like the prophets do when calling for repentance.
- “to present your bodies” – Psalm 40:6-8. Note also Daniel 3:28 where the 3 young men offer their bodies rather than worship the image.
- “as a living sacrifice” - Leviticus 1–7 (whole burnt offering, *‘ōlā*); Psalm 50:14–15; 51:16–17; Isaiah 66:20; Hosea 6:6; Malachi 1:11 – while Old Testament animals were killed, the old man dies spiritually and the new man lives, offering ourselves daily as “living sacrifices”.
- “holy” - Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26 (“You shall therefor be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy”) – this is clearly based on the Leviticus Holiness Code. “Speak to all the

congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:2-4)

- “and acceptable to God” - Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17; 22:19–20 (“an aroma pleasing to the LORD”); Psalm 51:19 - the phrase “pleasing aroma” (*rēah nîḥōah*) is used for acceptable offerings. But Paul applies it to the believer’s life.
- “which is your spiritual worship” - Deuteronomy 10:12–13; 1 Samuel 15:22 (“To obey is better than sacrifice”); Psalm 50:23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8 - the Greek *logikēn latreian* is rendered “spiritual worship” in ESV. It appears that Paul is saying that the spiritual priestly service God wants is transformed lives which is similar to that of the prophets’ who cry out that justice, mercy, and obedience are the worship God desires (in addition to obedience to His commandments). See Deuteronomy 6:5.

Paul is therefore presenting the church as the new temple, believers as the new priesthood, and daily obedient life as the new (and true) sacrificial system. Transforming believers as priests under Melchizedek. Sort of a training process for their Millennial role under Christ, but over the Levitical priesthood.

Truly, one could write endlessly on the subject, but that would be mean devotion to a single subject, when there are so many subjects to put effort into.

I trust that this short study opens the eyes of the reality that the New Testament does not cancel any part of the Old Testament. It is a continuation of its doctrines and spiritual requirements.

Recommended Reading

- *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by Gregory K. Beale (et al, eds).
- *Jesus and Scripture: The Use of the Old Testament in the Gospels* by Steve Moyise.
- *Old Testament Laws and Spiritual Requirements Repeated in the New Testament* by Craig M. White.
- *The Gospel Through Old Testament Eyes* by Nicholas P. Lunn.

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