



Dear listener,

I grew up hearing and reading and memorizing the Bible in the translation known as the King James Version. By the time I was in junior high school, the church my family attended was using the Revised Standard Version, and I remember being struck by some of the differences between the two and wondering what the differences might signify.

For example, I had at an early age memorized the first two verses of Romans 12; in the KJV, the first verse reads: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The RSV is almost the same (the apostle "appeals" instead of "beseeches") with one notable exception. Instead of "reasonable service," we are informed that the sacrifice of our bodies is "spiritual worship."

So, are Christians supposed to be spiritual or reasonable? Before getting at the question of why these two translations differ so much, let me note that many Christians seem to assume that they have to choose between the spiritual and the reasonable, that spirituality requires an indifference to the world of thought and of things that others (worldly people) think about. Other Christians believe that there is ultimately no conflict between the spiritual and the reasonable because they designate two radically different spheres of experience. To say that reason and the spirit are in opposition would be like positing a rivalry between the New York Yankees and Manchester United. So we can be spiritual about some things and reasonable about other things.

Still others believe that we ought to be reasonable about our spirituality, but they go on to assume that modern (i.e., Enlightenment derived) standards of reasonableness should guide all our thinking about *spiritual* things. Many Christians in this group find it difficult to think that science or economics or history might be best understood and pursued in ways that require a recognition of spiritual or supernatural realities. So, according to this view, our discussion of the Trinity should accommodate the expectations of scientific rationality, but our thinking about science needn't be Trinitarian.

Back to our translations: the Greek word rendered "spiritual" in one instance and "reasonable" in the other is *logikos*. This verse contains Paul's only use of the word, and the explanation for its possible rendering as either "reasonable" or "spiritual" is tied up with the classical notions of human nature. Human beings were, unlike beasts, endowed with reason, a capacity which ensured that human nature transcended mere material and instinctual behavior. Reason was understood as more than a merely analytic process; it included an ability for moral discernment as well. Today, we think of "reason" as something that makes us resemble computers (thinking machines); in Paul's day (and in the seventeenth century, when the KJV was translated), reason was assumed to move us away from sheer animality and toward the divine. So to be reasonable was to be, in some sense, spiritual.

The New English Bible, by the way, translates this phrase "worship offered by mind and heart." New Testament scholar John Murray believed that Paul used this word to emphasize that our devoted service to God must be conscious and intelligent, not mechanical and automatic. In other words, our lives are to be lived *deliberately*. In the next verse, Paul makes it clear why that is necessary: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (RSV). We need to live deliberately because it is pleasing to God, because it is fitting for our nature as God's image bearers, and because the world—that sector of humanity in rebellion against God and his ways—promotes disordered living.

In every period of the Church's life, wisdom and faithfulness require that believers pay attention to how the surrounding culture seduces them to redefine the meaning of their faith and their assumptions of what makes for a well-lived human life. This was clearly true for the Early Church, as the arguments in much of the New Testament demonstrate. The Early Church—surrounded by advocates of Greek philosophies and Roman deities—had to be reminded what it meant to affirm that Christ is Lord. They had to *learn* not to be conformed to the world; they needed to be *transformed*, not just by receiving a divinely enabled attitude adjustment, but by having their *minds* renewed, their consciousness re-tuned, by coming to understand *all* of reality in a way that conformed to the order established in the nature of things by the Maker of all things.

This is a lesson that every generation of Christians has to re-learn, because false assumptions about God and creation and sin and the ways to live a good life change as cultures evolve. Every period in the Church's life requires discernment and deliberateness in identifying disordered preoccupations and distorted claims about the way life is to be lived. Our *logikos* service to God requires that every thought—about everything—be captive to Christ. The habit of severing the “spiritual” from the “reasonable” is actually a common way of being worldly; it's an effective tactic employed to marginalize religious belief.

The work of **MARS HILL AUDIO** is dedicated to encouraging the sort of deliberateness necessary for the renewing of our minds. Believing that *cultural engagement without cultural discernment leads to cultural captivity*, we eagerly scout for incisive and wise thinkers whose writing and conversation can assist thoughtful Christians eager to elude fashionable assumptions about how we ought to live. We see our work as a project of encouraging Christian *discipleship*, since we believe that discipleship is about all of life—about pursuing what is good and acceptable and perfect in every sphere of experience. Avoiding conformity to the world doesn't mean that our lives are less human or less culturally rich. On the contrary, the transformation of our understanding of God and of his creation enables us to live a more fully human life.

For sixteen years, we've pursued this project, observing the advent of podcasts, streaming audio, and YouTube; the rise and fall of countless magazines, websites, journals, blogs, and newsletters; and the radical rearrangement of the media world. We've made a few changes in how we do what we do, but our core editorial commitment is stronger than ever: we're eager to provide resources for the kind of transformed minds Paul enjoins. A lot of other Christian communicators have fallen prey to the alluring temptation to dumb down their work, so as not to get too out of synch with the dumbed-down media in the broader culture. We believe that such a strategy is precisely wrong, as it invites the abandonment of discernment in a time of cultural change when discernment is most needed.

We know we'll never be very popular, but we still think there are a lot of people who could benefit from our work who either don't know about us, or who haven't taken the step to become listeners. We hope that you share our desire to expand the audience for the kind of thinking we're promoting. Christmas is a perfect time to introduce friends and family to our work, and thereby open doors to a way of understanding cultural experience that resists the deadening conformity Paul warns us against.

To make gift subscriptions to our *Journal* more giveable, we've lowered prices pretty drastically. And if every current subscriber gave just one gift subscription, think how many new conversations about God's ways and God's world could be stimulated and nurtured (not to mention how much more sustainable the work of **MARS HILL AUDIO** would be).

In Christ's (reasonable) service,



Ken Myers  
Host and Producer