

## **A Dedicated and Transformed Life** *Romans 12:1–2*

In late December of 1984, as a junior in college, I was sitting in large hotel ballroom in Dallas. Surrounding me were roughly 1800 college students most of whom were standing. We were at a Campus Crusade conference and we had just heard Bill Bright, the founder and then president of Cru give a talk on the lordship of Jesus Christ. At the end of that talk he invited all who were willing to yield to the lordship of Jesus Christ to stand up and so all around me people were standing. But I stayed seated. I might have looked calm on the outside, but inside me there was this inner turmoil. I was resisting the challenge that Bill Bright had given. I wasn't sure I liked the idea of yielding my life to Jesus. And so I sat.

I don't remember what Scripture Dr. Bright spoke from that night, but my guess is that he was speaking from the passage that we are looking at this morning – Romans 12:1-2. These are verses that call for a response to all that God has done for us in the Gospel. I will share more about my story later.

Over the past year and a half we have made our way through Romans 1-11. In these chapters Paul has articulated the Gospel. All of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, is shut up in sin and deserving of God's wrath. But through Jesus Christ, God has made it possible that we can have a right standing before Him. By faith we can be justified; we can be forgiven. We can have peace with God. But the Gospel is not just a marvelous truth that brings salvation to us; it makes demands on how we live. And so in the rest of Romans, Paul is going to talk about how this salvation should work out in the believer's life. Romans 12:1-2 is a sort of heading for all that follows. In these two verses Paul says that the Gospel calls for a dedicated and a transformed life. Let's look first at the call for a dedicated life.

### **I. The Gospel Calls for a Dedicated Life (12:1)**

Look at verse one. Paul writes:

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

In light of all that Paul has explained about the Gospel, he now exhorts believers to respond. He calls us to respond by dedicating our lives to God. He says *by the mercies of God* offer yourselves as a sacrifice to God.

All that Paul has explained in the book of Romans about what God has done for us through Christ is an expression of God's mercies. Through Christ our sins are forgiven. Through Christ we have been justified and so we have peace with God; God's holy wrath has been turned aside. Through Christ, we have been set free from the law of sin and death. We are set free from condemnation. Through Christ the Spirit of life dwells

in us. Through Christ we are sons and daughters of God. And so in light of God's mercies that He has expressed to us, *present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice to God*

When Paul says that we are to present our *bodies*, he means the whole of who we are. He could have said, "Present your very selves." He is talking about a decisive kind of commitment to God where we yield our full selves to God. It was the kind of commitment that Dr. Bright was calling for that night in 1984.

Paul uses two terms to describe this sacrifice – it is a *living and holy sacrifice*. The sacrifice is in living a certain kind of life before God – a life of constant dedication to Him. In Christ, what God looks for is no longer animal sacrifices in the temple, but the daily commitment of one's very life to Him. Paul also says it is a *holy* sacrifice. Something that is *holy* is set apart to God. We are to offer our bodies as something set apart to God to be used as a tool for righteousness.

God cares about the kind of offerings worshippers bring to Him. In Malachi when the people were bringing animals that were blind or sick or lame, God calls such offering evil (1:8). And God said this in Malachi 1:10:

*"Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you.*

Do you want to know what pleases God? Do you want to know what is acceptable to God? It is when we offer our very lives to Him as a living and holy sacrifice. That's what is acceptable to Him! He doesn't just want part of you; He wants all of you.

Now, this last phrase – *which is your spiritual service of worship* – is describing this presenting of one's body as a living and holy sacrifice. The word that is translated, *spiritual*, can also be translated "rational" or "reasonable." And so it seems that the general idea is that this offering of oneself to God is the proper kind of worship. It is reasonable; it makes sense in light of what Jesus has done for us. **The Gospel calls for a dedicated life.**

If you are a believer in Jesus, God wants all of you. And so the question that this verse begs to be asked is this, have you presented your life to God? Have you made this decisive commitment to offer your very self to God? Are you "standing" or are you "sitting"?

If you have not come to this place of yielding your life to God, why not? It may be that you've never heard this before. But others of you have heard this before and you still haven't responded to the Gospel in this way. Why not? What is holding you back?

I know that what was holding me back when I was confronted with this call was that I wasn't sure I could trust God. I had fears about what God would do with my life if I offered myself fully to Him. But I was also learning a lot about the mercies of God at that

time in my life. I was learning about His great love for me. It was getting clearer and clearer to me how profound my salvation was. And so I was sort of like the young kid on the high dive the first time. He so wants to dive, but he is also not sure. That was me. I wanted to respond to the mercies of God and say, “I’m fully yours, Lord,” but I wasn’t quite sure I could trust God.

If you are struggling with this kind of yieldedness to God, I would encourage you to get clear about the mercies of God! Understand the depths of what God has done for you through Christ, because when we do, this kind of commitment becomes a reasonable act of worship. It will make sense in light of God’s great love for you. **This is what the Gospel calls for – a life that is fully dedicated to God.**

As Paul goes on, he also says that the Gospel calls for a transformed life. Look at verse 2.

## II. The Gospel Calls for a Transformed Life (12:2)

*<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

And so we are to make this decisive commitment to present ourselves fully to God. But this commitment then should be worked out into a transformed life.

Paul says that the *world* seeks to shape us. By, *world*, Paul is referring to a world system that is fallen and opposed to God. *World* could also be translated, “age,” and Scripture speaks of two ages – this present evil age and the age to come. As believers in Jesus Christ, we belong to the age to come, but right now we live in this present evil age, which seeks to conform us to its values.

And so Paul says, *do not be conformed to this world*. The sense of what he is commanding here is, “Stop allowing yourself to be conformed to this world.” *Conformed* is a passive verb, which means that we allow something to act upon us. The world is always acting upon us – it’s values, it’s patterns, it’s standards. And so we have responsibility to not let ourselves be conformed to this world.

Instead of being conformed, Paul says that we are to *be transformed*. We are to be changed. He doesn’t actually say into what we are to be transformed, but certainly we are to be transformed into Christ-likeness. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says this:

*<sup>18</sup> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

We are to be transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.

*Transformed* is also a passive verb and so that means that we allow ourselves to be transformed. Something acts upon us. We certainly have a part to play because this is a command that Paul gives, but we need to understand that the source of our transformation is God Himself. It is the Spirit of Christ within us that brings about this transformation. We cannot transform ourselves.

The way we are transformed is *by the renewing of our minds*. The *mind* is our inner orientation. It is our moral attitudes. Our minds can be inclined towards God or to the ways of the world. And because of this our minds need to be constantly renewed. We can allow our minds to be conformed to the world's system that is opposed to God or we can allow our minds to be shaped by God's revealed truth. We need to pursue things that help us take up the mind of Christ.

Now, Paul says that if you are not conformed to this world, but instead are transformed, you are going to be able to discern the true nature of God's will. He says you will *prove what the will of God is* – that it is *good and acceptable and perfect*. God's will is morally good in every way. It is *acceptable*. It will not be distasteful; it will be well-pleasing. And God's will is *perfect*. You cannot improve upon it.

Let me give you an example of how this conforming or transforming might work out in your life. Suppose you have a problem with lack of contentment. God has provided well for you, but you still find this internal dissatisfaction. You'd just like some better stuff – maybe a nicer car or a bigger house or you'd like to be able to take the trips that some of your friends do. All this adds up to not being content with what you have. And you find yourself at times even feeling envious at people who seem to have it better than you do. This is your struggle. It could be a hundred other things like lust or anger or pride or gossip, but this lack of contentment and envy is your struggle. You don't like it. You want to be different. What do you do?

You need to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You need to gain the mind of Christ about this situation. And so you go to the Scriptures and you find two passages that speak to the issues. 1 Timothy 6:8-9 says this:

*<sup>8</sup> If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

And Hebrews 13:5 says:

*<sup>5</sup> Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*

You memorize these passages. You think about them. You pray that God would help you be content with what you have – that your character would be free from the love of money.

You also are in a Life Group and so one night you decide to confess to your group your struggle in this area. You ask them to pray for you. One of your friends in the group says that she would love to meet with you to encourage you and so you start meeting. One morning over coffee your friend asks you if there is anything in your life that might be stirring up discontentment. And so over the next weeks as you process that question you realize that in your spare time you often put yourself in front of media that is always pushing advertisements for these things you want – homes, cars, trips . . . stuff. You watch old re-runs of *Life Styles of the Rich and Famous*. Some of the friends you hang out with are not just thinking about these things, they are going for it. You know they are maxing out their credit lines, but they sure seem to be having fun. All this stuff is just fueling your lack of contentment. You realize that you are being conformed to the world's ways of thinking because of these things. And so you decide to stop all of this.

Earlier Logan explained Lent and encouraged us to consider seeking God this Lenten season by giving up something down and taking up something. And so you decide that might be helpful in this area. And so you decide that what you are going to give up is going to the mall for these 40 days because that is one more thing that fosters some discontentment. And what you decide to take up is a 30-minute walk every night after work during which you are going pray and spend time giving thanks for how God has provided for you.

Over time you as you do these kinds of things your mind is renewed and the Spirit of God is at work transforming you. Slowly you begin to notice a sense of contentment and satisfaction growing in your life. You notice that the envy you used to feel towards others and what they have has been increasingly replaced with the ability to think it is cool that they get to enjoy the stuff that they have. You find that you are experiencing a kind of satisfaction and joy with your life that you weren't experiencing before.

Before you started this journey of transformation, you knew that it was God's will for you to be content with what you have, but now that you are no longer being conformed to the world, but are being transformed, you've experienced the truth that God's will in this area really is good, and acceptable and perfect. Your situation hasn't changed, but your mind has. You've experienced what the Gospel calls us to – a transformed life.

The Gospel calls for a dedicated life. The Gospel calls for a transformed life. The first is a decisive yielding of ourselves to God; the second is an ongoing working out of that commitment as we are continually transformed through the renewing of our minds. Your transformation into Christ-likeness will be hindered if you are not fully yielded to God. But as well, if you are not continually being transformed your yieldedness will waiver. They really work together – a dedicated life; a transformed life.

After that conference, I returned home and continued to wrestle with this call to yield my life fully to Christ. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that if God's will really is good and acceptable and perfect, then the only reasonable thing was to yield my life to Him. And so on Jan. 7, 1985 I yielded. I know that is the date because on that date I wrote

this in my Ryrie Study Bible:

Lord, today I make you Lord of everything. Take my life and use me. I will go anywhere and do anything you want me to do. I am not my own . . . I am your bondsman for your service. I choose this as a response to your love and grace towards me – which brought me to . . . salvation in Christ.

It has been thirty-one years and one month to the day since I presented all that I am to Jesus. It is a commitment that has been tested and that I've had to renew. At times God puts His finger on new areas of my life that need to be surrendered and there may be a fresh struggle. But ultimately I haven't turned back from the decision I made thirty-one years ago. And I can tell you that there has not been one day where I've regretted presenting my life fully to God. I've experienced the truth that God's will is good, acceptable and perfect.

**Communion:** Today, we are celebrating communion. If you have already yielded your life to God, use this time to be reminded of the mercies of God. He has forgiven you. He has justified you in Christ. Give thanks and allow those truths to strengthen your yieldedness.

But if you have not dedicated your life fully to God, let me encourage you to wrestle with that during these moments. Will you present your life to God? As you take the bread and the juice, think about God's great love for you expressed through the cross. Jesus' body was broken for you. Jesus blood was shed that you might be saved. You have a good and loving heavenly Father that is calling you to this commitment. Yielding fully to God is the only thing that is reasonable in light of who God is and what He has done for you.