

THE TRANSFORMED LIFE
Romans 12:1-2

Human history is divided into two eras: B.C. and A.D. B.C. stands for “Before Christ.” A.D. is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase, “*anno Domini*.” It means “in the year of our Lord” and is used for dates after the birth of Jesus. Non-Christian historians and archeologists have started using B.C.E (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era). But these terms do not change the fact that history is classified by what happened before Christ came into the world and what happened after.

So is the story of every Christian. There is what you were before you met Christ. And there is what you have become since you met Christ. If you are what you have always been, you are not a Christian. Your A.D. should not be the same as your B.C. The two parts of your story may closely resemble when you are first converted to Christ. But the longer you are a Christian, the more evidence there should be of a transformed life. Born again people grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. If you are on your way to heaven it will show in how you live on earth. This is the message of Romans 12:1-2.

There is a pattern in the letters of Paul in the New Testament. Paul teaches doctrine. Then he exhorts duty. Romans 12:1 marks this transition in Paul’s letter to the church at Rome: “*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.*” The word “*therefore*” tells us that what is about to be said is based on what has been said. This “*therefore*” connects to all Paul has said in Romans 1-11. Paul confirmed that all people are guilty sinners on a collision course with the wrath of God. But sinners are declared righteous before God through faith in the blood and righteousness of Christ. After explaining and defending this glorious doctrine of justification by faith alone, Paul says, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*”

The connection can also be read more narrowly. Paul climaxes the doctrinal section with a shout of praise to God in Romans 11:33-36. Chapter 11 ends with the words of verse 36: “*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*” Then chapter 12 begins with the words of verse 1: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*” Whether you read the connection to what precedes broadly or narrowly, the message of our text remains the same: The goal of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a transformed life. Romans 12:1-2 teaches that to experience the transformed life you must live and think like a Christian.

I. LIVE LIKE A CHRISTIAN.

Romans 12:1 says: “*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.*” This is one of the golden verses of the Bible. It is an ocean of truth

in a teaspoon of words. The apostle here gives a clear, moving, and powerful summary of what Christian living is all about.

A. A LIFE OF GRATITUDE

Romans 12:1 issues a radical call to live in total devotion to God. But the verse begins by showing us that this radical call is not as radical as it may seem. Paul says: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God."* This is the proper motivation for Christian devotion. The Christian does not live for God in the hope of receiving something from God. The Christian lives for God in gratitude for what God has already done. JOHN MURRAY is right: "Christian ethics must rest on the foundation of redemptive accomplishment." We see this in the altar call God extends in verse 1.

THE MANNER OF THE ALTAR CALL. Paul says, *"I appeal to you."* The word *"appeal"* means, "to come alongside." It is to plead or exhort or beseech. Paul had the apostolic authority to give binding commands. Yet he appealed to the saints. His choice of words does not weaken the gravity of the altar call. It reveals the nature of it. A simple appeal to live for God is sufficient for those who have been justified by faith alone. ALEXANDER MACLAREN said: "Law commands, the gospel entreats."

THE SUBJECTS OF THE ALTAR CALL. Paul says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers."* This gender specific term encompasses the entire family of God in Christ. It addresses all Christian brothers and sisters. But it only addresses Christian brothers and sisters. Unredeemed sinners cannot be living sacrifices. Romans 8:8 says: *"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* The presentation of your body as a living sacrifice is only holy and acceptable to God if you are a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Is that you? Have you acknowledged your sinfulness and inability to save yourself? Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and rose from the dead for your salvation? If not, do it today. You must receive God's mercy before you can present your body. A stern judge wants a huge bail payment. A loving father simply wants you.

THE BASIS OF THE ALTAR CALL. Paul says, *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God."* Mercy is a one-word summary of Romans 1-11. Sinners are declared righteous before God by divine mercy, not human merit. Mercy is often defined by comparing it to grace. But it may be better to define mercy in contrast to wrath. Romans 1:18 says: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."* Unrighteous people deserve divine wrath. But those who repent of their sins and run to the cross receive divine mercy. Saving mercy is so great, verse 1 speaks of it in plural form: *"mercies."* This is the basis of God's altar call. Other religions make sacrifice the root of mercy. Christianity makes it the flower. We live for God as Christians in gratitude for sparing mercy.

WHERE THE WHOLE REAM OF NATURE MINE,
THAT WERE A PRESENT FAR TOO SMALL;
LOVE SO AMAZING, SO DIVINE,
DEMANDS MY SOUL, MY LIFE, MY ALL.

B. A LIFE OF DEVOTION

Verse 1 says: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."* The key word is the term *"present."* It is a technical temple term for offering a sacrifice to God. The grammar indicates a decisive, once-for-all act. It is a crisis of commitment. This term affirms the Priesthood of All Believers. Every Christian is a priest before God. But what are we to offer God? Paul says, *"Present your bodies as a living sacrifice."* We are to be both priest and sacrifice. And we are to offer God our *bodies*. Romans 1:24 says: *"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."* Sinners under the wrath of God dishonor their bodies. But sinners who have received the mercy of God present their bodies as a living sacrifice. This is about more than skin and bones. It is one's whole being. We are to offer all that we are to God. And our bodies are the instruments of that presentation. Romans 6:13 say: *"Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."*

The picture here is from the Old Testament sacrificial system. There were two kinds of sacrifices: one for atonement and one for thanksgiving. We do not need to make any sacrifices for atonement, because Jesus paid it all with the blood of his cross. But God still wants offerings of thanksgiving. In praise to God, we are to present our bodies as a sacrifice to God. This is the difference Jesus makes. In the Old Testament, the worshiper brought a sacrifice. In the New Testament, the worshiper becomes a sacrifice. God does not want something from you. God wants you. *What does it mean to be a sacrifice?*

First, IT IS A LIVING SACRIFICE. This is an oxymoron. The offering of an animal was not a sacrifice until it was slain. But God does not want a dead carcass from us. He wants a living sacrifice. The problem with a living sacrifice is that it is prone to crawl off the altar. But in light of the mercy of God, you should climb on the altar and stay there. This is what Isaac did in Genesis 22. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Isaac was a young man, not a little boy. Yet he set up the altar, climbed on it, and let his father tie him down. But God provides a ram in the bush. And Isaac got off the altar as a living sacrifice. Moreover, this is what Jesus did. He could have asked his father to send legions of angels to protect him. But he chose the nails. He died on the cross for our sins. But he rose from the dead as our living sacrifice. This is the life of devotion God calls us to. We are to climb on the altar and live for God.

Second, it is a holy sacrifice. The word *"holy"* means to be separate. It is to be set apart for a special purpose. To be a living sacrifice is to be holy. It is a life of consecration. This holy sacrifice is initially cleansed by the blood of Christ. And it is continually cleansed by power of the word of God. Psalm 119:9 says: *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."* Thirdly, it is an acceptable sacrifice. Genesis 4 records the first act of worship. Cain and Abel gave offerings to God. Cain offered from the fruit of the group. Abel offered from his flock

of sheep. Abel's offering was accepted. Cain's was not. This is the first lesson of worship. It must be acceptable to God. No defiled offering was acceptable to God. It had to be holy so that it would be acceptable to God. This is the life of devotion Christians must live before God.

C. A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Verse 1 says: *"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."* This phrase *"spiritual worship"* is notoriously difficult to translate. The word *"spiritual"* can also be translated *"reasonable"* or *"logical."* And it is hard to get which sense is intended here. But all three are true. The life of devotion must be reasonable. It is the right thing to do. The life of devotion is logical. THE LIVING BIBLE paraphrases it this way: *"When you think of what he's done for you, is this too much to ask?"* Ultimate, the life of devotion is spiritual. Religious rituals do not impress God. God wants a personal and complete devotion. This is true worship. The Bible commands us to gather for public and corporate worship. But we grossly misunderstand worship, if we think it is an activity limited to Sunday morning. You don't mean it on Sunday if you don't live it Monday through Saturday. True worship is not an event. It is a lifestyle. Hebrews 13:15-16 says: *"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."* The Christian life is a life of worship with lips that praise and hands that serve.

IS YOUR ALL ON THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE LAID?
YOUR HEART DOES THE SPIRIT CONTROL?
YOU CAN ONLY BE BLEST AND HAVE PEACE AND SWEET REST
AS YOU YIELD HIM YOUR BODY AND SOUL?

II. THINK LIKE A CHRISTIAN.

It is impossible for unsaved or unbelieving people to properly respond to God's altar call in Romans 12:1. Only Christians can live like Christians. Yet many Christians also find Romans 12:1 impossible. Why? Because we stop reading too soon. You cannot do verse 1 without doing verse 2: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* To live like a Christian you must think like a Christian. Verse 2 teaches what it means to develop a Christian worldview.

A. RENEWING YOUR MIND

Verse 2 says: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* This verse firmly refutes any view of Christianity that rejects, neglects, or bypasses the mind. Being a living sacrifice for God does not require that you stop thinking. It requires you to change the way you think. Your mind must be renewed. This process of renewing your mind is twofold.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD. Verse 1 says: *“Do not be conformed to this world.”* Christianity is a battleground, not a playground. The Christian has three enemies of the soul: the flesh, the devil, and the world. Paul presents the world here as a key threat to our attempts to live as a Christian. The *“world”* is the present age in contrast to the age to come. It is the false value system of this God-ignoring, God-despising culture. It is satanic 2 Corinthians 4:4 calls Satan *“the god of this world.”* The devil is at work in and through the world system to get you to conform. Parents warn their children about the dangers of peer pressure. But adults face just as much peer pressure as children.

The world exerts pressure on the Christian to conform. Some Christians run away from the world into monastic life. Many others fit in with the world, like chameleons changing their colors with the environment. But God says, *“Do not be conformed to this world.”* J.B. PHILLIPS paraphrased it this way: *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.”* This prohibition is in a grammatical emphasis that forbids an action that is already in progress. The NIV reads: *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.”* The problem of conformity is not hypothetical or theoretical. It is a present reality. And Paul says, *“Stop being conformed to this world.”*

BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND. The word *“transformed”* translates the Greek word from which we get the term *“metamorphosis.”* It is the process of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. It is a change from the inside out. The word is used in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 for the Transfiguration of Jesus, when his divine glory shined through his human flesh. This is what God wants to happen in your life. He does not want you to be pressured into fitting in with the world. He wants the indwelling presence of the Life-Giver King to change you from the inside out. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”*

But how does this spiritual transformation take place? Paul says: *“be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* You are transformed into the image of Christ as your mind is renewed. You cannot live like a Christian if you do not think like a Christian. You must change the way you think. Philippians 4:8 says: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* This should be the spiritual rating system for the music you listen to, the books and magazines you read, the TV and movies you watch, and the pleasures you enjoy, and the places you attend. Am I saying you cannot have any fun? No. I am saying the world is not playing with you. John Newton asked: *“Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me on toward God?”* The answer is absolutely not. Everything is theology. The world is not a friend trying

to help you have a good time. It is an enemy trying to get you to conform. You must be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

B. DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

How can I find God's will for my life? This is a big question many people ask. Romans 12:2 is arguably the most important answer to this question in the Bible: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* This verse begins by explaining how to think like a Christian. It ends by explaining why you should think like a Christian: *"that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

The goal of renewing your mind is discerning the will of God. How can you discern the will of God? By "testing" it. The word translated "testing" was used for assaying metals. It means to test to prove the genuineness of a thing. It is not a test to expose a counterfeit. It is a test to confirm authenticity. This is how you discern the will of God. But you cannot test and approve the will of God until you are transformed by the renewal of your mind. Years ago, I bought a book by ED DOBSON entitled, *"When God Doesn't Make Sense."* I only read to chapter 3. Chapter 3 is titled, *"God Makes Sense Even When He Doesn't Make Sense."* But your mind must be renewed before you can test and approve the will of God when it does make sense.

Some of us are trying to discern God's will. But you cannot make up your mind until you change your mind. And when you change the way you think by the Spirit of God and the word of God, you will test and approve that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect. These terms do not teach that God has three different wills: one good, one acceptable, and one perfect. God has one will. And it is good, acceptable, and perfect. These terms speak from a divine perspective, not a human one. Your mind must be renewed because you can affirm that the will of God is good, acceptable, and perfect. God's will is good. It is good by nature. It is good in its ways. And it is good in its results. If you do God's will, it is good even when it looks bad. God's will is acceptable. That is, it is acceptable to God, not to you. Your mind has to be renewed to get to a point that says, "Lord, I don't like this. But if it pleases you, I will do it." God's will is perfect. There is nothing better than knowing and doing the will of God.

I read that there is one species of birds of which the mother bird does everything she can to get her growing babies out of the nest. When she is ready for them to go and that they can fly, she begins to push them out of the nest. On occasion, there is one reluctant bird that refuses to leave the nest. So the mother does what a lot of human mothers ought to do when their children refuse to grow up. She actually begins to take the nest away. Piece by piece she picks the nest until it is completely dismantled. I can imagine a conversation going on between the child and the mother. "Mother!" the small bird shouts. "What are you doing?" "I am taking your nest away," she replies. "Why are you doing that?" "I put it up. I can take it down." "But don't you love me?" "Of course, I love you. But my love requires that you fly, and you can't fly sitting around in that nest all the time. So I am taking it away." The small bird

suddenly finds itself sitting on thin air and begins to flap its wings. As it flies upward, surprised at its ability, it calls back over its shoulder, "Hey, Mom. Look at me. I'm flying. I'm flying!" "Of course, you're flying," the mother says. "That's what the disappearing nest is all about."