

Romans 12:1–2 “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

Introduction: My wife is the greatest gift, outside of salvation grace, that God has ever given me. God has used my relationship with her to grow me, strengthen my weaknesses, and flourish as a Christian. *Therefore*, I will love her the way Christ loved the Church. It’s a love that is willing, eager, and sacrificial.

My children are a blessing from the Lord—4 little image-bearers who grew up to have their own minds and live their own lives. And it turns out that when kids grow up—as a parent, I cease to be the center of their solar system (imagine that!).

Therefore, I will pray **daily that God will turn the heart of this father to his children**...that as far as it is up to me I will live out Paul’s instruction in Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, do not stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD.”

This church—is such a gift to me. There is not a day that goes by when I do not reflect on what a gem amidst the greater Church in the US that CCC is. Folks, we found each other just at the right time—God so obviously led us to partner together in ministry. *Therefore*, I resign myself to serving this body of believers and our elders diligently, eagerly, and enthusiastically.

You see, the nature of the gift is such that it inspires, no, they demand a response. Paul is going to tell us that in light of these mercies—just as sin reigned in death from Adam to Jesus, so now grace reigns through the righteous act of sacrificial love... resulting in our eternal life (5:21) and for the elect on whom God has shown mercy, sin will no longer rule over us—because we come into the dominion, the realm of sovereign grace.

Transition: As intensely doctrinal as the last three chapters have been, Paul turns sharply and becomes equally as practical in how the grace of Christ applies in Christian community. Chapter 12:1–2 introduces the theme of the next 5 chapters—as a transformed community of Christ, we are able to discern God’s will and are empowered to do his work, which is to build up the church.

He tells us firstly that...

1. Grace inspires an urgent response (12:1a). “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you...

Our urgent response to the message of grace freely offered takes three forms:

- **Immediacy. Illus. Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God came with a sense of immediacy—the Kingdom was not far off—it was at hand. New creation life was not far off somewhere in the sky—it had suddenly broken into the world** in power, in compassion, and in truth. When they came to him and said, “Lord I want to follow you but let me go take care of my affairs first. Let me tend to my aged parent and Jesus’ message was maybe even seemingly harsh “let the dead bury the dead. You come and follow me.” Jesus was not saying “don’t go to your dad’s funeral.” He was saying, “by the time you go back home, wait for your father to pass, and then go through all the burial rites to prepare his bones for the stone ossuary box to put in your family tomb in preparation for the resurrection, you’ll have missed the chance to follow me.” **(Luke 16:16)** “the Law and the Prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed and everyone is urgently invited to enter it.” This good news of the Kingdom of God is just too good to put off. It’s just too good to disregard in favor of the temporary, ultimately unsatisfying preoccupations of life. But that’s not the only reason for an immediate response...

(Acts 2:40) With many other words he (Peter) testified and strongly urged them, saying, ‘Be saved from this corrupt generation!’ We respond immediately not only because the gift that is offered is so good. But because the alternative is death in this corrupt age—which is headed for judgment and wrath. **This is a call to respond with no delay.**

The second form that urgency takes is...

- **Earnestness. Illus. Years ago, someone wrote me an anonymous check to help pay my way through college.** I have never been able to repay that person, and they never identified themselves and asked for repayment. But my response has been to make good on the gift in an earnest, and to have a singular pursuit of my education for the ministry. Listen, my response to the lavish and extravagant grace of God can never be commensurate or directly proportional to the gift that is offered. Who could repay the Lord for all that he has done? However, my immediate and earnest response to his mercy is fitting praise and acknowledgement.

Another sense in which we are exhorted to respond...

- **Value. We value whatever is precious to us.** And our response can be a direct indication of whether we really value something and see it as worthwhile. In Romans 1 Paul teaches that godless and unrighteous people are storing up wrath for themselves through idolatry, sinful rebellion against God’s decree—he summarizes our spiral toward oblivion in one sentence, “And because they did not think it **worthwhile** to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right” (Romans 1:28). If you’re a non-Christian and an unbeliever today, understand that to

deny so great a salvation and the offer of mercy and pardon for our sins is to devalue that which has the greatest value of all. And to think it not worthwhile to receive God's grace results in a corrupted mind and life. When we respond with a sense of urgency to this exhortation, acknowledging the infinite value of our salvation, we are delivered from a corrupt mind.

But what is the urgent response God expects from us?

2. Our response is total devotion (12:1b). He starts with the body. "I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.² Do not be conformed to this age," this is what we call "consecration."

Consecration in the OT was the act of setting something apart for a sacred purpose. The response that Paul exhorts and urges us to have is a drastic separation and severing from the godlessness of this age. To separate ourselves from its practices and way of thinking.

And the comparison here between the Old sacrifices and the New sacrifices in the Christian life is clear. In the old system anything brought to the temple as an offering (money, supplies, resources, or burnt offerings) had to be top shelf materials. Your lambs and bulls had to be the best from your flock, not diseased livestock. Your sacrifice had to be your best, pure and without defect— *holy and acceptable*.

Likewise, Peter states, (1 Peter 2:4–5) "As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer ***spiritual sacrifices acceptable*** to God ***through Jesus Christ.***" As God's people, saved by grace in Christ, we are a holy, royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God—*through the Lord Jesus Christ who is the **holy lamb** of God who proclaimed the year of the Lord's **acceptable favor**, who was dead and is **alive** again.* What sanctifies our sacrifices is that we are in Christ, and they are offered *through* Christ.

And now in the NT, the offering of our bodies is to be:

- **Living**—Paul said the believer has moved from death to life—we are to count ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ. The sacrifices we give are alive...like a severed electrical wire dancing and crackling with electricity on the pavement—the believer has been severed from the old and now moves—serving, giving, loving, correcting, rebuking, instructing with resurrection power.
- **Holy**—In the Bible holiness is expressed in two ways: as that which is ***morally pure*** (corresponding to the way God is); and as that which is done in ***obedience to God*** (in compliance to what God's commands). What makes my service holy is the fact that it reflects his inviolable, holy nature and conforms to the sanctity of his commands.

- **Pleasing**—when a person who has partaken of resurrection life of the Spirit offers holy acts of sacrificial love and service to God, that person is pleasing to God. Those sacrifices offered, as Peter wrote, to God through Christ are acceptable.

This is what it means to not conform to the pattern of this world. Let me ask you... When we were our own gods what did we ever do for ourselves that was of any value? What did serving your own self-god ever get you? All we had was death, and emptiness, and hopelessness, and absolutely no answers. Blind men leading the blind. Dead men leading the dead. Empty men leading other lost and depressed souls. Before we knew Jesus what on earth did we have to offer to God that would please Him? Nothing!

By the mercies just enumerated, according to the abundance of grace that has been lavished on us...let us leave the old and offer the new. Let us not become conformed to a rotted, dying, lost culture. ***I URGE YOU—Devote yourselves—the entirety of your life to God—holding nothing back.***

3. Total devotion begins in the mind (Rom 12:2a). “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

The offering of our bodies as spiritual sacrifices to God through His holy, acceptable, and living servant Christ is not a punch list of stuff to do—a checklist of religious activity that, only after completion, confers upon us the status of being “acceptable” or “pleasing” to God. In other words, it’s not a religious “To-Do” list. That’s just Pharisaism which Jesus cursed and damned in Matt 23.

Body life and mind life are *inter*—dependent or mutually reliant. Your body isn’t going to do anything that your mind doesn’t decide to do, and your mind isn’t going to do anything without the body doing it.

Illus. Like going to the Gym. I love it and I don’t love it. In my mind I only need to make one decision “Drive to the gym.” Once I get there, I need to put my body on those machines. As I begin to work up a sweat, suddenly I find my mind thinking, “I’m so glad I came to the gym today. This is so fun I think I’ll stay 30 more minutes. And then I do stay about 5-10 more minutes.” Now my body has followed my mind, and my mind is edified by the body.

That’s the principal here in the spiritual life of the body and the mind. The transformation of the believer (not their forensic justification but their ongoing sanctification) happens as we renew our minds in God’s Holy Word. This is why Satan will stop at nothing to *discredit* the Bible, to *distract* us from it (he would rather for us to do anything else than read the Word), and to *disillusion* us (“remember that one time when we tried and it didn’t work, like, immediately?”).

Now, in order for the Word of God to have a restorative, renovating effect on the mind we must have four things:

- Content—the Bible. Books about the Bible are great. Background studies, or inspirational stuff...all of that has its place as exhortation, encouragement and instruction—as supplemental. But none of that should substitute the Bible. Because “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” The Bible is inspired, so it has the power to change us. But it’s also useful and notice the relationship between those two—**the usefulness of God’s Word equips us for God’s work.** If we’re going to experience the renovation of the heart and mind we must start with the right content. Because without the right source-material, we won’t be any use for the Kingdom work.
- Frequency of exposure—time and intensity. If you have frequent and intense exposure to certain chemicals or asbestos, you likely will get cancer, or mesothelioma. If you were a soldier and you had frequent and intense exposure to gunfire, explosions, and the blood and guts of war, you likely will develop some kind of PTSD. If you have frequent and intense

exposure to optimistic parenting (like my mom, Sharon) you likely will think that the world is your oyster and life will just be an unbroken chain of successes. Now, life itself will swiftly deprive you of that belief. Conversely if you were raised in a negative environment where you never heard a kind word and were always told what a worthless loser you are—you'll struggle to fight those thoughts the rest of your life. It's just axiomatic to say that frequent and intense exposure over time to it will change the wiring in your brain. You will think differently. Listen, if you think you're mind is going to be renewed because you listen to one 40 minute sermon a week—the culture is going to disabuse you of that notion. And they will disciple you in the worthless and empty pattern of their thinking.

- Community—like-minded believers. Now by community I don't mean an interfaith book club. Look, I know some of you are very diligent to do discovery Bible studies and lead groups on your job—which is fantastic. As well you should. But there's got to be some space in your life for study of the word with other Christians where who can challenge you to grow and stay on track. And a major key here is frequent and deep interaction with the Word in community with like-minded Christians who can encourage, exhort, and challenge us to think better.
- Strategic solitude—intentional and temporary. We need time away with God, searching his Word breathing in its inspired life. Mark 1:35 says that “Jesus got up earlier in the morning to find a place to pray.” No question that we need to get alone with God. But listen, that is not the same as perpetual isolation. What does isolation produce? I can tell you exactly what it produces—a kooky, complicated end-times manifesto that usually ends up on my desk. Some weird perspective on the Bible where people think they have found a “new truth” or rediscovered a “lost truth” due to frequent and intense exposure to the Bible *all alone all the time!* Not done in community. Not the product of sound, contextual study in the fellowship of the saints where we can be held accountable for our ideas, where we can test those insights on other mature, biblically-informed and caring believers.

What does a mind that is renewed in the Word produce?

What does a mind that is renewed in the Word produce?

4. A renewed mind can discern the will of God (12:2b). “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

God’s will is already revealed in the Bible. And any direction from the Spirit, or “word” we might receive must be tested against the value system and the truths of the Bible. Otherwise, it is not good, pleasing and perfect—and it certainly isn’t the will of God and it certainly isn’t the mind of Christ. Don’t mistake every thought that pops into your mind as “the mind of Christ” for you. Our thoughts have to be tested against Scripture, they have to be held up to the light of the Word.

Illus. I just want to end this by addressing something that’s been very difficult for me to process this last week. A friend of mine who has served as a mentor and a leader, and a friend decided to leave his wife and family and run off with another person. The bizarre thing about it was that he justified his sin against his wife and church by appealing to God’s will to make him “happy.” Because after all, that’s what God wants—for all of us, no matter what the cost, no matter who has to pay—for all of us to just realize ourselves, to actualize our dreams. This is the heresy of our day.

His letter cited all the circumstances that led him to that decision. But I want to a couple things about that:

Firstly, *whenever there is a public failure—a bad decision on public display—that one decision is the result of 1,000 bad decisions that no one ever saw.*

Secondly, that sinful decision playing out in public is not due to environment or circumstances. Because no temptation has come upon us that isn’t common to us all. The breakdown is not due to circumstances, but in the mind. Somewhere along the way this person who left his wife and family decided that this was a justifiable fantasy—which has now become, in their minds, a justifiable reality.

Listen, we don’t sit arrogantly in judgment of anyone today. We know that we are only morally sane and spiritually sensitive because of the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus who saved us and gave himself for us.

But we also have been given, right here, a sure path to being able to discernment of the truth.

May I suggest some applications for us today?

1. May our lives be characterized by an urgent response today: immediate—no delay! It’s earnest and serious, recognizing the value of the mercies we’ve received.

2. And in view of those mercies, our response is total—alive from the dead, as the holy saints of God, offering pleasing, acceptable sacrifices of praise to a holy and righteous God. We choose to hold nothing back.

3. And this total devotion begins in the renovation of the mind and heart—As we commit to studying God’s Word with intensity, in community, and privately—avoiding the dangers of isolation which leads to justifying sin.

4. And this renewed mind and consecrated body produces in us spiritual discernment—being able to discern righteousness from unrighteousness, the good from the bad, the pleasing from the odious, and the perfect from the imperfect, the holy from the defiled.