

# Introduction of Romans 12 --- Romans 12:1-2

April 19, 2020

*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. 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.*

## Introduction

One of the most effective stories that describes the tendency of the Church to downgrade the Gospel is a story told of a small English village that had a tiny chapel where the stone walls were covered with ivy. Over an arch was carved into the stone the words, "WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED." There had been a generation of godly men and women who did just that. They stood for Christ, the Son of God, crucified to save sinful men.

But times changed. The ivy grew and soon covered the last word, "CRUCIFIED." The words now read, "WE PREACH CHRIST." A new generation came and they did preach Christ: Christ the philanthropist, Christ the great teacher, Christ who will heal you and give you prosperity. They preached a social gospel.

As the years passed, the ivy continued to grow until finally the inscription read: "WE PREACH." The generation that came along no longer preached Christ. They preached that all religions lead to heaven, an ecumenical hodge-podge. They preached positive thinking . . . your best life now.

But the message of the crucified Christ assaults a person's pride and transforms people and brings about change in the deepest part of man's being. The good news of Christ begins with the bad news of man's sin and the eternal judgment of his never dying soul. It is only when you begin to understand the plight of your soul before God that you can understand what Christ has done for you. Before we can appreciate the good news of Christ as Savior, we must understand the depths from which we are dug.

I read an account of how D. James Kennedy, the author of *Evangelism Explosion*, got saved. Kennedy was a dance instructor who lived a reckless lifestyle. One Saturday night he had been out drinking. In the wee hours of Sunday morning, he staggered back to his hotel room, fell in bed, and went to

sleep.

The next morning he was suddenly jolted awake by his clock radio. A man was speaking and he was asking this question, "If in the next few moments some great disaster should happen and you should be killed and if you should find yourself before God and he asks you, 'What right do you have to come into heaven', what would you say?"

Kennedy was amazed and, at the same time, troubled by the question. He had never heard a question like that before. He realized that he did not have an answer. He sat silently on the edge of his bed while Donald Grey Barnhouse, the man on the radio, explained the answer to him.

Kennedy was transformed by the Gospel that morning and went on to become a Presbyterian preacher and author of *Evangelism Explosion* which thousands upon thousands have used in evangelistic efforts. D. James Kennedy was confronted by his sin and the fact that he could not be good enough to get into heaven. He knew that he had no excuse that he could give to God for rejecting God all of his life.

Thus is the power of the Gospel that we have studied through the book of Romans for over three years. Now we come to a watershed section that transitions from doctrine to duty. Romans 12 is the beginning of Paul's description of how eleven chapters of sound theology is applied to life.

In our introduction of Romans 12, we consider the fundamental connection between what a person believes and how he lives his life. Action is based on belief. What you believe and hold to be true determines what you do. Doctrine determines conduct. False doctrine or error will usher in distorted living. Where there is unbiblical theology, usually one of the first things that goes is morality. Conversely, biblical doctrine will put you on the path of right living.

You find this principle fleshed out in numerous places in the Scriptures. In many of the epistles, the writers begin with articulating doctrine. Then they move from doctrine to how to live in light of that doctrine. Doctrine is exceedingly practical. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Christ which involves applying sound theology—applying to life what you know to be true in God's Word. And this is what Paul begins to do in Romans 12.

*Romans 12:1-2 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. 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.*

This morning, I want to simply introduce this transition that we have the great privilege to study. One primary message in these opening verses is the vital need to renew our minds with the Word of God. The Bible views knowledge of doctrinal absolutes as foundational to godly living. Most of Paul's letters begin by laying a doctrinal foundation before giving exhortations for godly living. We have seen that in our studies before. The Bible warns of the danger of the lack of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*

Ephesians 4:13 warns that a lack of knowledge results in being like children; *“ . . . tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming . . . . ”*

When we study God's Word and believe it and submit to it, we grow in knowing God and His will; we learn to understand general principles of godly behavior; we grow in understanding how to apply those principles to our lives. That progression will result in godly character and practice. So the study of God's Word is vital and foundational to godly living. As believers, we must devote ourselves to in-depth study of the Word of God both corporately and individually. There are no substitutes.

We saw in our study of Colossians a few years back that Paul understood this vital need to study and know the Word of God before one can walk the walk of the Christ life. Colossians 1:9-10 states, *“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God . . . . ”*

Feeding on the Word has a specific goal. Just acquiring knowledge is not the end. Just knowing Scripture is not the goal, but it is the *means* by which we obtain spiritual growth. Knowledge by itself puffs up and makes one prideful. Knowledge that is put into service is what edifies self and others.

I have said numerous times before that you can know the Bible yet not grow if your knowledge stops simply as head knowledge. That describes the Pharisees, right? They knew the Old Testament, but they failed to act upon it. Jesus told them in John 5:39-40 *“You search the Scriptures because you think*

*that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”* They failed to act on the Word of God; they knew the Scriptures, however they did not grow.

But the flip side is equally true. You cannot grow without knowing. It is the knowledge of the Scriptures and knowing God in a fertile heart that really makes a believer grow. The new life cannot grow without the nurture of the Word of God. Paul knew this, so his normal pattern in his letters was to present sound doctrine first and then call believers to live accordingly.

For example in the book of Ephesians, the first three doctrinal chapters are followed by three chapters dealing with spiritual gifts, morality, personal relationships, and spiritual warfare. Likewise in Galatians, the doctrinal sections in chapters 3 and 4 are followed in chapters 5 and 6 by material on Christian liberty, spiritual fruit, love, and the obligation to do good to others. Also in Colossians, the doctrinal material is in 1:1-2:5. The application is in 2:5-4:18.

Paul opens many of his letters by continually praying for believers to know God through His Word. Ephesians 1:18-19 says, *“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe . . . .”*

In Phil 1:9-11, Paul writes, *“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; <sup>11</sup>having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*

Paul prayed in Colossians 1:9-12 *“ . . . that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup>strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.”*

So here we see the Scriptures emphasize over and over our need to feed our souls the Word of God and the resulting growth and maturity. We must stop and note that the clear systematic teaching of the Word of God has never been popular to the human mind. The Church has always tended to want to entertain the world with a tendency to sink down to the lowest common denominator.

Spurgeon spoke out against this tendency in the Church of his day. J.C. Ryle spoke out against it. Calvin and Luther had the same problem. We have it in our day. You can go back to the days of the apostle Paul and find that he writes against this tendency.

*2 Timothy 4:1-3 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2preach the word; be ready in season and out of season (meaning "when it is popular and when it is not popular); reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, . . . .*

My sole desire each Sunday is to expose you to the Word of God because God promises that it will perform a work in those who believe.

The Church tends to drift from a biblical, Christ centered, eternal perspective to a worldly and temporal focus. Paul writes in Colossians 3:1 "*Set your mind on things above and not on things of this earth.*" Maintaining an eternal perspective and renewing our minds with the Word of God is critical to our remaining steadfast in the truth.

God instructs us not to be consumed with the nonsense of this earth but rather to purpose to think about heavenly truths. In our text this morning, Paul exhorts us, "*. . . do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" I believe one of the reasons why seminaries, churches and believers drift is because there is a lack of renewing our minds with biblical teaching. We get consumed with the here and now.

There is a battle for the minds of men. Satan from the beginning worked hard at distorting truth in order to confuse Eve's thinking about what God had said, and Satan continues to do so today.

We live in mindless times. This is because of the fast pace of modern life which does not give people sufficient time to think. Our materialism points our thoughts to things rather than freeing our minds for ideas and thoughts. In fact, the mindset today is that there is nothing to be gained by thinking anyway. The permeating influence of the screen (whether the t.v. screen, the computer screen, the smart phone screen, the movie screen, etc.) is destructive to rational thought processes.

But we need to think, and we need to think biblically! This is why the last

section of Paul's letter to the Romans begins with the need for the renewal of the mind. Paul knew that if we are to act as Christians, we must first learn to think as Christians since how we think will determine what we do. In our day, people tend not to think deeply and seldom do they think about the truths of Christianity.

Unbelievers live life in a spiritual daze unaware that their souls are broken and barren. But the sad reality is that believers are often in a daze too. In many cases, there is very little difference in thought and action between believers and their unbelieving counterparts. One observer of contemporary churches says, "God lies weightlessly upon them, and Christian doctrines seem to have no consequences."

So, by God's grace, we have spent years studying the foundational doctrines that Paul has laid out before us in the first eleven chapters of Romans. We now transition into the application of these tremendous doctrines to every day life.

## Review

I want to consider, for a moment, an overview of what we have learned up to this point. We know the overall theme, the overarching subject of Paul's focus found in Romans 1:16-17, *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS BY FAITH SHALL LIVE.'"*

The Gospel message is Paul's focus. He begins with man's plight of his total depravity. We saw that in the first three chapters, Paul reveals sin nature in the Pagan Man, the Moral Man and the Religious Man. His conclusion is found in Romans 3:9-12 *"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.'"*

Furthermore, Paul pointed to the consequences of man's sin—namely the eternal wrath of God. Romans 2:5-6 reads, *"But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS . . . ."*

Paul understood that man's sin and the consequences for sin are the backdrop that must be in place before looking to Christ and His death for sin. Christ on the cross makes no sense apart from understanding that He is there as a substitute, taking upon Himself the justice and judgment due you for your sin.

The turning point concerning the good news comes in Romans 3:19-24. *“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. 21But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; . . . .”*

Chapter 4 centers around Abraham and David as premiere examples of being justified by faith alone. Then in first half of chapter 5, we considered the results of salvation: namely—peace with God, standing in grace and hope of living eternally in the glory of God. In the second half of chapter 5, we considered the amazing spiritual truth that believers are “in Christ” and all the blessings that are associated with that truth.

In chapters 6-8, we studied the great theme of Sanctification and the practical outworking of the Gospel in the Christians life. We considered that we are no longer enslaved to sin instead we are enslaved to God. We learned that the old self has been put to death, and there is now a new self that walks in newness of life in obedience to God. Nonetheless, we still have the residual flesh that is the source of sinful tendencies in the believer. How are we to understand this battle within believers against sin? Thankfully, Paul revealed his own battle against the flesh in chapter 7.

Maybe one of the most important truths that we considered concerning sanctification is in Romans 8:1 *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* That is important to keep in mind as we are in the process of putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. There are times that we fail, and we sin. But we understand there is no condemnation, and we get back up and continue down the path.

We ended our study of that section as we considered that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. We stand in a “no condemnation, no separation” status before God.

Then in chapters 9-11, we saw that Paul gave a tremendous illustration that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The history of the Jewish nation is proof positive that God is faithful to His promises and to His people. We considered the amazing truths of election and how God has purposed to set the nation of Israel aside for a time while He brings to fruition a time that was a mystery in the Old Testament: the Church Age. The Church Age would be predominantly Gentile in nature; yet, God has not rejected the nation of Israel.

Romans 11:25-27 *“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; <sup>26</sup>and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.’ ‘THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’ ”*

So as Paul stepped back and took a panoramic view of all the God has done in demonstrating His grace to ungodly mankind, he breaks out in worship in Romans 11:32-36 *“For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. <sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup>For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup>Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup>For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

A few weeks ago, we saw that there are five truisms about God that Paul declares in these verses. First, God's wisdom, knowledge and judgments are unsearchable and unfathomable. Second, no one knows the mind of God and no one is in a position to give God advice or to counsel Him. Third, God does not owe anything to anyone. He is not obligated to anyone. Fourth, the Lord is the source, the avenue and the recipient of all things. Fifth, the Lord is glorified forever.

We will learn that Paul concludes the two great sections of his letter to the Romans with a doxology of praise to God. Paul writes that the goal of all things must be the glory of Christ. Paul says at the end of chapter eleven in verse 36, *“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”*

At the end of chapter 16 in verse 27 he likewise declares, *“To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”* That is the purpose of all things, and it was Paul's deepest desire that everything he did and every thought he

had might be to the glory of the great, sovereign, wise, holy, and compassionate God who had saved him through the Gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ.

So with all of this in mind, we turn our attention to Romans 12.

## Introduction to Romans 12

Romans 12:1-2 *“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. 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.”*

I want to just touch on the first word of verse 1. The “therefore” here is particularly important. Upon this one word, the whole book of Roman pivots. I am sure you have heard some teacher say at one time or another that when you come to the word “therefore” in the Bible, you should always pay close attention to it, because it is “there for” a purpose. *Therefore* always points back to something else meaning that we cannot understand the importance of what is coming or the connection between what is coming and what has been said until we know exactly what the “therefore” is referring to.

In this case, “therefore” points back to all that Paul has written thus far. As I said, doctrine has a purpose. Those who have received the revelation in the first 11 chapters must also act upon it. That is the very nature of revelation, it demands application. True conversion makes a difference in a person’s life. If there are no differences, there is no genuine conversion. So we must have Romans 1-11 before we can go onto Romans 12-16. “Therefore.”

The only thing that ever really changes people is God Himself through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you have been called to faith in Jesus Christ, you are part of a radically changed community. It is your privilege and obligation to begin to make changes in the world around you. These changes are explained in the remaining chapters of this letter. So I want to conclude by giving you an outline of where we are going.

Based on all the previous doctrine, Paul calls believers to worship God by presenting themselves as a living sacrifice. This would agree with Jesus' call to discipleship in Luke 9:23-26, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. 25For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses*

*or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup>For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”*

Paul sets out the principles that must govern our relationship to God in verses 1 and 2. The great underlying attribute that undergirds all that follows is humility/death to self. We are living sacrifices unto God. We are dead, and Christ is preeminent in our lives. Paul reminds us that we are not our own and that we should therefore present ourselves to God as willing and living sacrifices.

Having established a person's relationship with God in terms of death to self through the Gospel of Christ, Paul then turns to the Christian's horizontal relationships. The emphasis in the rest of this letter is on relationships with those inside of the church and outside of the Church.

Verse 3 shows the right relationship of a Christian to himself (he is not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but rather to be humble). Then in verses 4-21, Paul shows how the believer is to relate to those within the Church and outside of the Church.

In chapter 13, we find that the Christian does not have a relationship only to other individuals. He also has a relationship to institutions that God has established, particularly the government. How does the Christian relate to the government in which he lives? Is he to oppose it as a secular and godless institution? Is he to try to escape from it? Should the Christian submit to it?

If we are to submit, is that submission to be without any qualification, regardless of what the government may do or ask us to do? Or are there limits? If there are limits, what are they? We know from history that these became very important matters for the early Christians, especially in the years when the emperors persecuted them, trying to abolish Christianity. Paul answers many of these questions in the first half of chapter 13, providing a strong case for the legitimate role of secular governments.

Next is the law of love found in 13:8-14. Jesus said that the sum of righteousness is this: #1 that we love God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength; and #2 that we love our neighbor as ourselves

Matthew 22:35-40 . . . a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup>And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” <sup>38</sup>This is the great and

*foremost commandment. 39The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*

Paul expounds on this teaching of Christ in this section. We could refer to the next section as Christian Liberty (14:1-15:13). The longest part of these final chapters concerns Christian liberty. One pastor writes this of this section, "At first glance this seems surprising, given the many great personal, social, and cultural problems that existed in Paul's day as well as our own. Why did Paul not condemn slavery, develop a Christian view of economics, or comment on war? We cannot know with certainty why Paul chose to ignore these matters and address others, but his decision to deal with personal liberty at least indicates how important this matter was for him. He does not allow Christians to disobey God's moral law, and he offers no low standard of ethics. The standard is the highest: the yielding of our entire selves to God as living sacrifices."

Next, in chapter 15, Paul tells of his personal ministry and plans (15:14-33). Paul writes of his future plans. In these verses he picks up on matters he introduced at the start of the letter, explaining that he wants to come to Rome, why he has been hindered in coming earlier, and what he hopes to receive from the Romans when he does get to them.

Paul concludes this letter with his final greetings in chapter 16. The last chapter of the book is often overlooked as little more than a list of names, however it is more important than that. The names in this chapter reveal much about the churches in Rome and Corinth and show how involved Paul was with the individuals who made up these early Christian communities. They show that Paul himself practiced the concern for others that he has been urging all along. All of what Paul has written in this amazing letter can be seen in his life. He practiced what he preached.

What we see in these final chapters is that conversion has a cost. For Paul it was a lifetime of suffering and a martyr's death. Jesus said if any man would be My disciple let him deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Me. He who loses his life for My sake will find it. It is a total sale out. Those who want to just tack Jesus on need not respond. Paul was an apostle of Christ—he lost his life for the sake of Christ.

Furthermore, conversion is transformation. Biblical terms include born again, new creation, new self. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."*

There are great joys in the Christian walk. But they do not have their origin in this world. God brings peace, joy, fellowship, contentment in salvation. He also brings trials, hardships, and tests to grow us up. The life of Paul shows how God can take a Pharisee, hell-bent on destroying the early Church, and use him to become an important preacher of the Church. No matter what depths of depravity, evil or corruption, to which you have descended, if you are convicted of your sin, repent and trust in the Gospel of Christ Jesus, God will use you to further the cause of His kingdom.

Paul was used in a mighty way by God in the Church, writing Scripture, being an example. Paul was a fierce defender of the centrality of the Word of God in the believer's life. He above all men understood that doctrine determined godly living.

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