

A Call To Consecration

Romans 12:1-2

Pastor John Miller

"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. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12:1-2

I believe that Romans 12:1-2 should be put to memory by every Christian. Not only put to memory, but it should be put into practice or shoe leather by every Christian. Paul, on his knees, after 11 chapters of doctrine pleads with the believers, "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," or some translations have worship, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Jesus gave His version of this statement, and Paul is giving his inversion of what Jesus said. He said it like this, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." you don't sound too enthusiastic there. You say, "Deny himself (monotone voice)." "...and take up his cross, and follow me." You die to yourself, you take up your cross, and you follow Jesus Christ. The Christian life is a crucified life. You're crucified to the world, its affections, its lusts, and its desires. When we die to ourselves then we have life in Jesus. Here's another way Jesus said it. He said, "If you seek to find your life, you'll lose it; but if you lose your life for My sake and the gospel, you will find it." It's one thing to be born again and be saved, it's another thing to be holy and completely and totally consecrated to living for, serving, loving, and following God. I believe that this passage is the will of God for every Christian. God wants every one of His people to fully and completely, totally surrender to following Jesus Christ.

When we come to Romans 12, we come to what might be said to be the practical section of the book, but I hesitate a bit to say practical section because there is the tendency to think that the first 11 chapters, being doctrine, are not practical. Sometimes people get the idea that theology or doctrine is not practical. Nothing could be further from the truth, and here's how it works. You can't practice what you don't know. God doesn't bless ignorance. The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. You can't neglect your Bible and expect to be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. If you're not reading your Bible, you're not growing as a Christian. I believe that God uses His Spirit through His Word to transform our lives into the image of Jesus Christ. You're probably getting tired of hearing me pray this when I pray, but often I'll say, "God, we ask that the Spirit of God would use the Word of God to transform the child of God into the image of the Son of God." That's how it works. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and transforms the child of God into the image of Jesus Christ the Son of God. It's the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God changing us (we're going to see it in this passage) and making us more like Jesus. Now, that won't happen this side of heaven completely, but when we go to heaven, we're going to see Christ, and we'll be changed

in a moment to be totally like Him.

The 11 chapters of theology closes in Romans 11:33-36 with doxology and moves into chapters 12-16 to duty or practice. They always come in that order; theology turns into doxology or worship and praise, and true genuine worship and praise must result in the surrender and the dedication of one's life to God. I noticed a lot of you tonight lifting your hands when you sang. Some of you were standing when you sang. Some of you were closing your eyes, and singing very fervently. That's all wonderful, but we're going to leave this sanctuary in a few moments and you're going to go home. Do you still raise your hands and sing when you get home and your wife tells you guys to take the trash out? You say, "These hands are for God! Sweetheart, they're sanctified. I'm a man of God; I worship God. I don't touch trash cans." When you go to work tomorrow morning, you're driving in heavy traffic and people cut you off. Are you going to lift your hands to the Lord as opposed to lift your hands to other people? Are you going to sing? Are you going to worship? Is your life an act of worship? We're going to learn tonight that to sing a song on Wednesday night or Sunday but not giving your whole life every day of the week, 24/7, is inconsistent. If you're going to sing, if you're going to worship, if you're going to follow Jesus Christ, He wants all of you. Everything that you are He wants—a living sacrifice.

In this section of Romans, we're going to find four ways of consecrating our lives. Eleven chapters of doctrine now moves into five chapters of practical implication of that doctrine. So, rather than going from theology to practice, we're going from theology to response. This is how we respond to what we've learned these last several weeks. I want to take a moment and just point out that there are two main summaries of this consecration, this relationship to God, as it starts in verses 1-2. In verse 1, we're going to see the consecration of our bodies; and in verse 2, we're going to see the transformation of our minds. We're going to look at the basis of consecration, the nature of our consecration, the demands of our consecration, and fourthly we'll look at the results of our consecration to God.

Let's look first of all at the basis of our consecration. Go back with me to verse 1. Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren," he's talking to believers, "by the mercies of God," this is one of the great "therefores" in the book of Romans, and in the Bible for that matter. There are many "therefores" in Romans, but one of the most important started in Romans 5:1. It says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The second one is in Romans 8:1. It says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Tonight, we come to the third great "therefore" where Paul says, "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." As we've always pointed out, whenever you find a "therefore" you need to ask yourself the question, "What is it there for?" It's basically there for 11 chapters of doctrine, salvation, justification; we see all of this doctrine and how God takes those who are condemned and saves sinners by His grace and mercy. Then, Paul breaks forth in praise at the end of chapter 11 and exhorts us, based on the mercies of God, notice it in verse 1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," two key words, therefore and mercies of God. At the end of chapter 11, he just finished saying (verse 36), "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Jesus is the source, the sustainer, and the goal of all things. So, “therefore, I beg you, present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice.” He appeals to the mercy of God that we would understand how merciful God has been in saving us. He mentions God’s mercy to us in Romans 9:16, 23 and Romans 11:30, 32. Look at it with me. It’s right there in our text. “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” In Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.”

Have you ever stopped to think about how merciful God has been to you? Do you ever stop and think about how merciful God has been to you? Well, what are you doing about it? You say, “Well, I come to church on Wednesday nights. I raise my hands. I give tithes of all that I possess.” What about your thoughts? What about your words? What about everything you do? Your whole life? Your money? Are you responding in worship with all of your life? Is your life surrendered, dedicated, yielded, and devoted to God? One of my goals tonight is, I want you to listen to me very carefully, that you will become very uncomfortable at what we study here. I’m not here tonight to entertain you. I’m not here tonight to wow you. I’m not here tonight to impress you. I’m praying that God will really speak to our hearts. For as many years as I’ve studied this passage, every time I read it it just convicts me again. Is my all on the alter of sacrifice laid? Have I yielded everything to God? Have I surrendered all my life to God? It’s one thing to say, “Well, I’m saved. I’m going to heaven.” Okay, but what about your business? What about your marriage? What about your thought life? What about your sex life? What about the music you play? What about the music you have? What about your kids, your home, and everything? What about your time and your talent? Is everything on the alter tonight? I pray to God that tonight He gets ahold of our hearts and we listen to Him because this is an amazing passage. My life has been transformed when I think about this passage and every time I come to it, I reconsecrate my life again and I rededicate my life. I say, “Lord, take all of me. Have Your way in me. You’ve been so merciful to me.”

I love John Newton, the man who wrote the song “Amazing Grace.” He said, “There are two things I know, I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great Savior.” His life was consecrated, devoted, and dedicated to God. Based on the mercies of God, God saved you by His grace and my His mercy. We were lost, we were condemned, we were on our way to hell, we were without hope, and God saved us by His mercy. There is no greater incentive to holy living than a contemplation of the mercies of God. The greater our comprehension of what God has done for us, the greater our commitment should be. This is why, again, Isaac Watts wrote, “Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.” Charles Erdman said, “We don’t serve God to win His favor but because we have received His favor we serve Him in gratitude and love.” I want us to stop for a moment. I want you to think about how merciful God has been to you. Do you know that we would all be in hell right now if it weren’t for God’s love and grace? Hasn’t God been merciful? Hasn’t God been good? Has God saved you by His grace and mercy? Well, that’s the basis for which we should surrender our lives.

I want you to notice the second point in verse 1, and that is the very nature of our consecration. What is the nature of our consecration to God? Here it is in verse 1, “...that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable....,” or logical or

sensible or sane "...service," or act of worship. So, our consecration has two prominent characteristics. It is total commitment of our total person. I want you to look at verse 1 for just a moment. When he says "present your bodies" the word "present" literally in the Greek means once and for all—total complete consecration of your body. The word "body," it's very important that you catch this, doesn't just mean your physical flesh. It means your mind, your emotion, you will, and your physical body. It means every part of you. The word "body" is used to depict your whole being, your whole personality—your thought life, your words, your attitudes, your actions, and your bodies. Your bodies were used for sinful purposes, now they are to be used to glorify God. Your body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amen? It belongs to God. You're not your own. You're bought with a price, so dedicate and surrender it to God. The word "body" means all of you, your whole being, your mind, your eyes, your ears, your tongue, your feet, your hands—all of this. It was used for sinful purposes; now it is to be used to glorify God.

I love what John R.W. Stott said. He said, "No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical. It must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by your bodies." If you are really worshipping God, you're going to worship God with everything you are and everything you have. You can't compartmentalize your Christian life. "Okay, God, You get Sunday morning, an hour and a half; Friday night's mine. Saturday night's mine. During the week when I go to work, that's my time. This is God's time, that's my time." You don't compartmentalize your life. Every day, all day, everywhere, all the time, your thoughts, your words, your attitudes, your actions, your hands, your feet, everything belongs to God. That's what this verse is telling us. Total consecration. Notice he says that it's reasonable. We get our word "logical" from it. Do you know what the most reasonable, logical, intelligent thing you can do with your life is? Dedicate it to God! Do you know what the stupidest thing you could do? (That's not a theological term, I just thought I'd throw that out) Trying to run your own life. That's just flat out dumb. What is wise is to say, "Lord, I give my life to You. Guide me, direct me, have Your way. Lead me, I belong to You. I want Your will in my life. Lord, I don't want to do my will, I want to do Your will." When Jesus was face down in the dirt of Gethsemane, facing the cross of Calvary, He cried in agony saying, "Father, if it be Thy will let this cup pass from Me, but nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou will."

Have you ever said, "Lord, I'll go wherever You want me to go?" You say, "No. He might send me to Barstow. I don't want to do this." He might send you to San Bernardino. Who knows where He's going to send you, but guess what? Wherever He wants to send you, you should go. Amen? "Lord, I'll do whatever You want to do. Uhhhh, I don't know. He might want me to teach Sunday school." "I'll be whatever You want me to be. Oh, He might want me to be kind to my wife, and I don't like my wife." "He might want me to forgive my neighbor, I don't want to do that." "I don't like this sermon, Pastor John. This is really making me uncomfortable." Is your all on the alter of sacrifice laid? Have you yielded everything to His control? It's reasonable. It's logical. Birds fly, in case you haven't noticed, fish swim, Christians worship God. Christians surrender to God. Christians live for God. Christians follow God's will in obedience unto Him which is your reasonable act of worship or service. If we're worshiping apart from a commitment to God, it's false worship. We're deceiving ourselves if we're doing Christian things but are not consecrated to Jesus Christ. A man by the name of Sam Shoemaker said, "To be a

Christian means to give as much of myself as I can to as much of Jesus Christ as I know." I like that. That's what it means to be a Christian.

Notice, you are a living sacrifice. In the Old Testament they knew only about dead sacrifices, but this is a living sacrifice. You die to live, that's the paradox, which looks contradictory but it's not. For you to live, you have to die. For you to live, you have to die to your goals, your plans, your ambitions, your desires, your wants, your will and you have to completely surrender to God and say, "Have Your way in my life." You don't marry or do anything out of the will of God. It's all a matter of surrendering to God and being dead center in the will of God and being all that God wants you to be.

Thirdly, this leads me to what the demands of our consecration are, verse 2. The demands are twofold and are commands, by the way. They're imperatives. The first is negative, "And be not conformed to this world," and the second one is positive, "but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The command: Don't be conformed to this world. That's a command. It's an imperative, and it's in the present tense. Right now, right here, ongoingly, don't let the world press you into its mold. J.B. Phillips paraphrases this, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold." A lot of Christians are influenced by the world. They think, act, and live like the world. They are worldly-minded rather than spiritually minded, and they're letting the world push them into its mold. It's like pouring Jell-O into a mold, and it comes out the shape of whatever the mold is.

A lot of Christians are being influenced by the pressure of the world. The Bible says in 1 John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world." You have your passions, your possessions, and you have your pride. That's the world, and the world is not of the Father but is going to pass away. We need to be careful that, if we watch too much television, we don't start thinking like the world. We listen to worldly music, and there is such a thing as worldly or ungodly music. It's not sacred. It's music that is not blessed by God or inspired by the Holy Spirit. It has lyrics that are ungodly. I don't think the beat is the issue. Some Christians freak out and think that drums are demon beat, electric guitars are of the devil, and stuff like that. That has nothing to do with it. Its source is not from the Spirit of God or the Word of God or from a child of God. It's worldly or secular, and it's molding and shaping you. You're being pressed from the outside.

Here's what this verse is conveying. This isn't just an illustration, the very words actually convey this idea that what is on the inside of you isn't coming out. It's being suppressed and reshaped by the pressures of an ungodly world around you, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, pride of life—the worldly way of thinking. The job and the things that you are on, the world around you is pressing you into its mold, and that happens so easily. We need to be careful that we don't begin to be like the world. Rather, he says, "...be ye transformed," that's the positive. Again, this is an imperative. This is a command in the Greek. The word "transformed" is where we get our word metamorphosis from. We know that a tadpole becomes

a frog and a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

Have you ever held a big fuzzy caterpillar in your hand? They're kind of cool to play with. Just don't play so much with it that you kill the poor thing, okay? Do you know what's inside of that fuzzy, ugly-looking, weird worm? A butterfly. I remember when we were kids, monarch butterflies were everywhere. There aren't as many monarch butterflies around, but the other day in our front yard I saw this big, beautiful monarch butterfly. I reverted to my childhood and chased it around the yard for a while. I remember we were naughty little boys and we would catch those things. We'd play with and trip out with them, but you know, if you touch their wings you ruin them and you'll kill them—they won't fly. We shouldn't have touched the things. This time I was a good boy, I just watched this beautiful monarch butterfly.

The opposite of being conformed, that is, what is on the inside is not expressing itself on the outside, transformed is what is on the inside then comes out on the outside. So, inside that little worm is a butterfly, and God wants Christ in you to be manifested on the outside. Too many Christians are walking around like little worms, and they need to let the butterfly out. They need to let the Spirit of God transform or metamorphosize them so that what is on the inside begins to express itself on the outside. The same word was used when Jesus was transfigured on the Mount Transfiguration when He pulled back the veil of His humanity and allowed His deity to shine forth in all of its majesty.

Notice the word "transformed." The Greek is in the passive voice. You say, "Well, what does that mean?" It means that you cannot transform yourself. It has to be from something else on the outside acting upon you. For you to try to be a good Christian, "I'm going to be a good Christian. I'm going to be a good Christian. I'm going to pray. I'm going to read. I'm going to be spiritual." You psyche yourself up. You get up and look in the mirror, "I'm going to be a good Christian." You're not going to be a good Christian. You're going to fail. You get up in the morning and look in the mirror, "I'm not going to lose my temper. I'm not going to lose my temper. I'm not going to lose my temper." You get in your car and the first thing you do is lose your temper. Have you ever noticed, the harder you try to be a good Christian, the worse Christian you become? "I'm trying, I'm trying, I'm trying!" This transformation happens when two things happen to you—the Holy Spirit starts to work in your life through the Word of God. You can't make it happen yourself.

I'll never forget being a young Christian and getting on my knees months after I was saved and just crying before God saying, "God, I can't live the Christian life unless You do it. I can't do it. I can't be a Christian. I can't be good. I cannot follow You. I can't worship. I can't obey You. I can't be a Christian, Lord, unless You do it." I died to myself and surrendered to God, and it was a turning point in my life. When you die to yourself, God comes upon you by His Holy Spirit and He begins to change you. Those are the two active agencies that transform our lives—the person of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." In Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." I believe with all of

my heart there is nothing more important in a Christian's life than those two things, the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) and the Word of God. Read your Bible, get on your knees, and ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit to enable you to live the Christian life, to be the husband and the wife and the parent and the worker, the employee, and the employer, the Christian servant, the dad, the mom, whatever it might be that He enables you to be by the power of His Holy Spirit. We are transformed by the Spirit of God and by the Word of God. Jesus said, "Sanctify them through thy truth. Their word is truth."

What happens when we surrender our whole body, soul, spirit, mind, personality—everything consecrated given over to God? Here are the results. Lastly, at the end of verse 2 it says, "that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Notice that God's will is good, acceptable, and it is perfect. Even a Christian can be bummed out on their life. "Well, I'm a Christian, but I'm not happy," or "I'm a Christian and life is miserable," or "I'm a Christian and life's a struggle," or "I'm a Christian, but I'm not having a good time. My marriage is struggling. My life is struggling. Things aren't going right. I don't know God's will for my life." Here are the steps that you need to take to find the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. Lose your life—you'll find your life. Take up your cross and die to yourself. This is what Paul is saying here. The New English Bible renders it, "...then you will be able to discern the will of God and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect."

If you want to know God's will tonight, these are the steps that you need to take. You need to present your body as a living sacrifice. Do you know one of the problems with the living sacrifice is that it tends to want to crawl off the altar. We dedicate our lives to God on Wednesday night until that party we want to go to on Friday night. "Lord, You can have my life, but Saturday night I want it back for a few hours. There's a really good party I want to go to." We are not really fully dedicated to God as a living sacrifice, but to know the good and perfect and acceptable will of God we must surrender and yield our lives completely to Him. These are the steps on how to know God's will. Did you know the two value systems, this world and God's will, are incompatible. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters. He's either going to love one and hate the other, or he'll despise one and cling to the other. You cannot serve God and money." You say, "John, this is pretty heavy stuff here in Romans 12:1-2." Eleven chapters of doctrine lead to duty—doctrine, doxology, and duty. What will be your response tonight? You say, "I wasn't here for Romans 1-11, so I don't have to do this. I plead ignorance." Well, let me tell you then, you are on your way to hell. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will never perish but have everlasting life." If you're a Christian tonight, you believed in Jesus, you trusted in Jesus, and God took away your sins and gave you eternal life. Amen? What have you given to Him? Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and you're not willing to give up what? Your party, your friends, your goals, your ambitions? I love that song, "All my goals, all my plans, all my ambitions at His feet in ashes lay." You say, "Man, this is really depressing." Try to find your life, you lose it—you lose your life, you'll find it.

Do you know that this is the way to have fullness of joy? This is the way to have an abundant life. "Yeah, but I don't want to give up my non-Christian boyfriend." "I don't want to give up my

non-Christian girlfriend.” “I don’t want to give up some of these vices.” If you find your life, you’ll lose it—you lose your life, you’ll find it for Jesus Christ. When a married couple, you married folk that are here tonight, when you say, “Our lives are on the altar. Have Your way in our marriage, in our home, with our finances, with our children—please, have Your way with our children right now in Jesus name!” “Have Your way in every area of our lives.” That’s when you’re going to find fullness of joy. That’s when you’re going to find the peace of God. That’s when you’re going to find the fullness of His Spirit working in your life. And, guess what else you’re going to find? The perfect, good, and acceptable will of God. You know, people who don’t make this commitment and surrender, flounder their whole lives. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do? I don’t know where I’m supposed to go? I don’t know what my purpose is? I don’t know what God’s plan is for me. I don’t know what God is trying to teach me or show me? I beg you, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies tonight as a living sacrifice. Don’t be conformed to this world. Don’t let the world push you into its mold, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Let your minds be renewed by the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Marinate your mind in God’s Word and fully surrender your life to God, and the Holy Spirit will transform you and change you and mold you and shape you and make you into that person God wants you to be.

I’m going to make an appeal tonight, not to unbelievers but to believers. This is between you and God. You don’t have to stand. You don’t have to raise your hand. You don’t have to come forward, but I’m going to ask you to close your eyes and bow your heads. I’m going to ask you to look to God right now as though you were in this sanctuary all by yourself. You’re all by yourself, there is no one else around, it’s just you and God. He sees you. He knows you. He hears you. He knows your downsittings and your uprisings. He understands your thoughts afar off. He brought you here, and He’s calling you tonight through this passage. He’s saying, “I beg you, by the mercies that I have shown you. Present your body to Me tonight, a living sacrifice.” Tell God you’re sorry for your selfishness. Tell Him you’re sorry for pursuing your own goals and ambitions, your own pleasures and say, “God, have Your way in me. Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.” Commit your marriage to Him tonight. Say, “Lord, I put it in Your hands. I surrender it to You.” Commit your health, your wealth, your occupation, your career, all that you have tonight, everything that God brings to your mind, some selfish pursuit that you need to abandon. Don’t let the world press you into its mold. Friends that are ungodly that are influencing you—you’re thinking like the world. The world is pressing you into its mold, and just do some business with God right now as we pray.