

To Tell the Truth

Romans 12:1-2

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May 25, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are going to be looking at two verses in this study in Romans 12:1–2 which says

[1] 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. [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.

May God continue to bless us as we apply this Word together.

When we come to Romans 12 we have a remarkable opportunity to see one of the pivotal verses of passages of the Old Testament and I hope you'll memorize those two verses and place them in your heart. They speak about God's Truth. When we come to truth so often hindsight is 20/20 and I'm sure you've heard that phrase.

Sam Philips knows that for he owned a small recording company in Memphis, Tennessee and back in 1955 he sold it to RCA records for the tiny sum of \$35,000 and the exclusive contract he had held with a young man named Elvis Presley. Thereby he forfeited all the royalties on all of Elvis Presley's music as he produced more than a billion records. Hindsight is 20/20.

In 1889 the editor of the San Francisco Examiner published one article by a young writer by the name of Rudyard Kipling but declined to accept any more of his work because he said "I'm sorry Mr. Kipling you just don't know how to use the English language." Hindsight is 20/20.

Think of the story in 1938 of Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel who sold all the rights to one of their little comic strips they had designed to their publisher for \$130 which gave them \$65 each. They gave away Superman to their publisher and never earned any of the royalties. Hindsight is 20/20.

In 1898 the young Albert Einstein had applied to study at the Munich Technical Institute in Germany but he was turned down as the document said “he showed no promise as a student.” Hindsight is 20/20.

In 1880 a schoolmaster at a school in England wrote of a 6 year old pupil that he is forgetful, careless, unpunctual and irregular in every way. Unless he is able to conquer slowness he will never make a success of public school. This schoolmaster was speaking of Winston Churchill. Hindsight is 20/20.

When you come to this passage and we’re all celebrating in heaven, I hope that is not going to be true of Romans 12:1–2. Hindsight is 20/20 but that we’ll know, understand and have already applied clearly the remarkable truth is. In the first eleven chapters of Romans Paul has been establishing a brilliant exposition of the Gospel and its implication. In Romans 1:16–17 Paul says [16] *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.* [17] *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”* Paul goes on to unfold its implications in terms of the universality of sin and the righteousness of God, in terms of the fruits of justification and the benefits of sanctification. He addresses the struggle believers have in spiritual things in Romans 7 and the work of the Spirit in Romans 8. He deals with the relationship of the Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9, 10 and 11.

Finally we come to Romans 12 in which he starts out “I appeal to you therefore...” Because of this marvelous Gospel of grace of this Lord Jesus Christ I now appeal to you. He begins to deal with the concrete and applications of the Gospel, what union with Christ should produce in you and me. He continues with this in Romans 13, 14 and to the end of the book. He knows that Biblical morality begins with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Biblical morality doesn’t lead to Christ or establishes us as a believer but it is from the Gospel. John Murray, a commentator on Romans, says “Ethics must rest upon the foundation of redemptive accomplishment.” In other words, what Christ has done, serves as the basis of Romans 1 through 11 and now we come to Romans 12.

In a sense, Paul says “Ok, so what” of all that has been written so far and he challenges us in two ways. I love the way Jerry Bridges expresses it. I recommend reading his book *Disciplines of Grace* but he comes to this passage and sees two disciplines of grace. The first discipline of grace is found in Romans 12:1 which is present your bodies as a living sacrifice. He is talking to believers. If you were a good Jew in Rome reading this letter or a Gentile with Jewish friends hearing this letter you would have marveled and been astonished with the implications when it said to present your bodies as a living sacrifice because you would know as a Gentile that you were never invited to the temple of God in Jerusalem. You would barely make the outer most court but suddenly in Christ you have not only been invited into the outer court but you have been invited into the inner court so to speak. Spiritually speaking, you have been given access to

that inner court and as you walk in you pass the great altar, into the holy place and finally the holy of holies. You can come directly into the presence of God. The only person who could ever do that before was the High Priest but spiritually speaking in Christ you have been given the ability to present your bodies a living sacrifice directly to God Himself. That's a novel idea from the Jewish perspective. In Christ we go to where only the High Priest could go and we offer ourselves.

It's interesting that Paul says that we offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Why mention our bodies? Paul knows in his culture, especially among the Greeks, the body was seen as a no- no. The body was bad and something to be separated from. Paul wanted his readers to understand that the body was good. It is a gift from God and to be the container of the Holy Spirit. It is something that we treasure and take care of. The problem with the body is sin. The wages of sin is death and that is what has afflicted the body. That's why it doesn't always function properly and it's in many ways a challenge to live in these bodies of ours but it's not because the body is bad. So he says, very un-Greekish, that we have the opportunity to present our bodies as living sacrifices.

He also knew that the body would be his biggest troublesome element when it comes to temptation and sin. It is the deeds of the flesh, the temptations of the flesh that so often causes us to stumble and preoccupy our minds as we struggle with the weaknesses and infirmities of the flesh. That's what God wants – present your bodies as a living sacrifice to Him. As we read the rest of the Scripture we know it's not limited to our bodies.

Romans 6:13 says [13] *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.* So here in Romans 12 when Paul is speaking of our bodies he is emphasizing the bodily part but he is speaking of ourselves that we should present ourselves as a living sacrifice. A living sacrifice is another odd perspective because if you were accustomed to Judaism in that day you would know that all animals presented to God were killed when sacrificed but Paul is speaking of us as a living sacrifice.

It is true that when we come to Christ that in a sense we do die for Paul says in Romans 6:2, [2] *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* But our death is defining our relationship to sin. He means that we have died to the ultimate power and ultimate tyranny of sin. The power of sin has been broken. I am no longer enslaved by sin in this world. I have been given the ability not to sin. That's a gift of God's grace so that now my works and deeds will never earn salvation but my works and deeds for the first time can bring glory to God and I'm no longer under the tyranny of sin. What a privilege to have forgiveness and freedom from sin! That doesn't mean we're always going to be free in this world for we'll still struggle with sin but it no longer controls us in the way it did. It is no longer our master for that power has been broken. Now we're called as a

member of Christ and containing the Holy Spirit to present ourselves to God in the decisive once and for all gift, like an animal on the altar, with no returns or exchanges we present ourselves completely to Him.

Here my gift to God is seen as my spiritual worship according to the text. The word 'spiritual' which is used here is a term that Paul only uses once and in fact it only appears once in the New Testament. The word spiritual here means reasonable or rational. Your Bible will have the emphasis on the word rational and Paul's point is that true worship is that which enlists our mind, heart and intellect. Our true worship in Scripture isn't just our body going through motions but it engages our heart, mind and the whole interior side. When our heart and mind are a thousand miles away in our time of worship then our worship begins to lose our acceptability before God because our worship is designed by Him to be a reasonable or rational worship. The key problem though, when we now have presented our sacrifice on this altar, it's quite profound because the problem with a living sacrifice is that they can crawl off the altar. That happens so often with us.

We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice but we have a hard time with consistency and persevering and that's why Paul gave us this second discipline of grace. They are two passive verbs that really form one idea – they are two sides of the same coin. The first is that we be not conformed (or the pattern of) to this world or this age. Our natural state apart from Christ is that we tend to follow this temporal age as opposed to the age to come. In Ephesians 2:1–3 says *[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Prior to us coming to Christ, in our B.C. days so to speak, we did follow the patterns and directions of the world. That was our standard. What the world said to do or buy we would do or buy or else we'd reject the world but they would still control us. When we come to Christ we're called no longer to be conformed to the world for we've offered our bodies as a living sacrifice. Murray, a commentator, said "If all our calculations, plans and ambitions are determined by what falls within life here on earth, then we are truly children of the age." We need to be careful to remember for Paul the problem isn't the world around us. It wasn't the age we live in. We are not to conform to it but that's not necessarily the worst problem. It's what's inside that is the problem. It is the sin that is within our heart and it's the sin nature that constantly continues to sin and tempts me to drag myself off the altar. Sin is the transgression of the law of God that I struggle with every day.

Paul David Tripp said "Our deepest problems are not experiential, biological or relational. It is moral and it alters everything. Our biggest problem distorts our

identity. It alters our perspective. It derails our behavior. It kidnaps our hopes.” He is speaking of the sin that affects all of us deep within all of our hearts. The power of that sin has been broken and it still lingers and causes trouble. Sin is damage in the heart. It causes me to turn away from the Creator and serve the creation. It makes me hope not in a Person of Christ but in systems, to hope in ideas, other people and my possessions. Sin from the time we’re conceived, in me it produces rebellion. It makes me a rebel. It promotes autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-focus in me.

C.S. Lewis said “Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement but he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.” Sin produces in me rebellion and foolishness. A foolish person believes there is no perspective, insight, theory or truth more reliable than my own. A foolish person says I know what’s right and it’s my way or the highway. A foolish person says I’m right all the time and if there is a problem in the world then it’s you or it’s my circumstances. The fool says the problem isn’t them and that’s what sin produces. Sin also produces inability so that we’re unable to please God or do what He has ordained for us.

In a twitter post, Paul David Tripp wrote, “The biggest disaster we all face in life is the unmitigated disaster of our own sin and for that sin we have the glorious grace of Jesus Christ.” That is why Paul rushes to this point of saying do not be conformed to the pattern of this world because given our sin nature it’s like taking a lighted match and tossing it into a bucket of gasoline. The lighted match is bad enough for it can burn you but the gasoline can cause an explosion and that’s why he says not to be conformed to this world.

Because of our own sinfulness though Paul needs to add the second passive verb in Romans 12:2 which says to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This transformation begins when we’re converted, when we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. That transformation doesn’t come with school or hard work but it comes because Christ is at work in us. The word for transformation is what we call sanctification. In the shorter catechism sanctification is defined as work of God’s free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. It is that transforming process.

Someone put it this way and I like this. Nature forms us. Sin deforms us. School informs us but only Christ can transform us. That is a great statement for Paul wants us to realize we need to be transformed but you may be thinking that is a passive verb. We can’t transform ourselves but we are told to be transformed. The way this works is that we are called to engage in behavior that God uses to transform us. That is what Romans 12:2 is talking about. Paul says we are to discern, test, God’s will and he is speaking there of God’s revealed will, of His Word. We are called to interact with Scripture constantly as the primary way that

are hearts and lives are transformed. Do we transform ourselves? No, but we embrace and apply Scripture to our lives so that God transforms us.

So how do I test God's revealed will? Let me give you three steps. Number one is that we need to be convinced of the origin of God's Word. It is from God and given through men as His truthful and inerrant Word in those original manuscripts. God's Word came through the Prophets that were writing and they had their own styles and unique perspectives and they did their own research in which Luke tells us this in Acts 1 but God worked through them to put down on paper precisely the words that He wanted to be told. You and I need to be convinced of that.

One of Satan's strategies is to help us forget the words of II Timothy 3:6 when it says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.* Also II Peter 1:21 says *[21] For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* What the Bible says, God says. Satan wants to separate us from our trust in Scripture and one way he does it is to give us permission to decide which verses may be God's Word and which ones aren't. Satan doesn't come out and say that's all wrong but that certainly some of it can't be true so he thinks we have the right to decide which is true and which is not. Satan loves for us to take that assumption because once he knows the camel's nose is out from under the tent it just takes a little bit of time before we are tossing all kinds of verses out that we don't like or that might make demands on me that I don't want to honor.

In 1973 when I was finishing up a summer ministry project it was the first time I'd ever really read a book on the defense of Christianity. It was a book about apologetics by James Warwick Montgomery and the book was called History and Christianity. It absolutely dazzled me because it defended the truthfulness of Scripture. The book didn't change as much as my conversion did but it changed my life. It rocked my little life when you can trust this Word to be true. There are some verses that I don't entirely understand and there are some that frankly I probably wouldn't have put in there.

There are some verses in there that paint a picture of God's interaction with man that I don't entirely grasp but the problem is what is between my ears. It's not God. The problem is I am very little in my thinking and very limited in my understanding. A book from God is bound to be bewildering to us at times but is no less God's Word and we need to embrace that and be convinced of the origin of God's Word.

Secondly, we need to be committed to learning God's Word. I certainly hope this is not the only exposure you have to God's Word this week. We need to be committed daily to God's Word, to reading, to listening, to applying and personally disciplining ourselves to spend a lifetime learning it. I can promise you

that when you come to the end of your life you are going to find that you have only scratched the surface but we will rejoice when we step into heaven and see how true this Scripture was. When the world is telling me that one thing is okay or my friends are trying to persuade me that others are okay and yet God's Word says it's not right then I would be very wise to be committed to God's Word.

Zig Zigler, the Christian motivational speaker who has already gone to be with the Lord, said "How many of you believe everything you read in the newspaper? How many of you believe everything you read in the Bible? How many of you spend more time reading the things that you don't believe than the things that you do believe?" It's a useful application. If you're going to read the newspaper or watch the news then you'd better read the Bible. You better keep constantly filtering all that you hear through the Scripture as your mind is being conformed to Christ, to the renewing of your mind.

Thirdly, we need to be captured by the truth of God's Word. We need to so treasure God's Word that it so captures us and our devotion so that we live in bondage to what it says about our lives. Psalm 119:105–106 says *[105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. [106] I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules.* When I was an elementary school age child I would always go to a family camp near Cleveland, Tennessee. It is a beautiful lake in the mountains and it was always lots of fun. We would spend a week running in the woods, barefooted and having a great time. When it became nighttime it would be very dark for there were no lights and the most popular person at night was the one who held the flashlight. If you had the flashlight people gathered around you as you walked from one area to another at the campsite. Since you were barefooted you could stump your toe or step on all kinds of things so you really looked forward to having that flashlight as the guide – the lamp unto your feet so to speak.

That is the way we ought to run to Scripture with great enthusiasm because we are living in a very dark world and we need that lamp unto our feet that light unto our path. We need to be captured by the truth. So if we're convinced, committed and captured by God's Word then we'll discern among the many truths that I hear in this world that God's Word is truly that which is good, acceptable and perfect. I'm in the process of constantly talking to myself about my circumstances. I need to ask myself, is my mind and heart being transformed by Scripture? We really do talk to ourselves all the time but not in a neurotic or psychotic sort of way but we do chat with ourselves about our circumstances, God and our surroundings. We constantly evaluate what is said about God, creation, morality and myself through the lens of my own perspective and sometimes I'm right and sometimes I'm not.

For instance, when I walk outside and it's pouring down rain and I'm getting ready to go on a picnic then that's a bummer but if you had planted a bunch of sod in your yard then it would be wonderful to see the rain. We constantly tell

ourselves things about our surroundings. The problem is when Bible believing Christians forget what the will of God is revealed in Scripture then it's easy for them to start finding their identity in other things, rather than in Christ. We are not letting God transform our heart. We are finding our identity in the things around us.

Think of being a parent with children. That is a wonderful occupation that many of us have been given but it is an occupation that is temporary. We will raise those children and then at some point we'll push them out of the nest and they'll be gone, not permanently so to speak but we'll no longer have control or daily interaction with them if we're healthy and Biblical in our parenting. How sad it is for the parents who begin to derive their identity from their children. So when the children are successful then they are successful but when they aren't successful then they're not successful. God never intends us to derive our identity from our children but from Him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of the person who enjoys some great time of success or victory in their life and that's fine but God never intends us to derive our identity from that success or victory. Our identity comes from Christ. It's kind of sad to see someone who did enjoy a success or victory back in their teens or early twenties only to find that fifty years later their life is still defined by that victory. God never meant us to do that because our identity is always to come from Christ.

Think about the person who has endured the great tragedy through perhaps a loss of a spouse or child or a marriage or a job. It's very easy for us, if our minds are not being transformed by God's Word, to gain our identity by our losses. So a parent might say they'll just be a bereaved parent for the rest of their life or someone may say they'll just be a loser when it comes to a marriage because of a previous failed marriage. The Scriptures would say no for you are in Christ and your identity comes from Him regardless of those circumstances. Maybe you've wrestled with a chronic disease or addiction of some sort and it's so easy when those kinds of things dominate our lives to begin to think that is your identity. I guess I'm just a depressed person since I'm depressed.

Think about it this way. Rather than making that our identity let's engage in some Biblical application here. Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I have been bought with a price by the Creator of the Universe. I have been adopted by my heavenly Father into His forever family. I have been saved and set apart to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and yes I struggle with addiction or depression. Does that sound different? My identity comes from Christ. My identity doesn't come from those circumstances but it's very easy, even for believers endowed with the Holy Spirit but who are not being transformed by the renewing of their mind, to begin to gain their identity and even their priorities from the world around them. It's a bondage that is very sad and discredits the Kingdom. Our non-Christian friends will look at us and say that there is no difference between him and me.

They are just as sad as I am. Why? It is because we're allowing our circumstances to define who we are.

God intends as we have given our lives to Him as living sacrifices that we are being transformed and despite our circumstances, in the midst of our losses, difficulties and sins, I am a child of the King. Jesus is my Lord and Savior. This verse in II Corinthians ought to be plastered across our foreheads. II Corinthians 5:17 says *[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* I'm the new for the new is here. The new has come.

C.S. Lewis put it this way in his book *Mere Christianity*; "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself because it is not there. There is no such thing." You and I have been given an astounding gift with God's Word. God intends to make us little Christs as we conform to the image of God. When those early believers were observed in Acts at Antioch by the pagan culture around them they called them what they thought was a term of derision – Christians, little Christs – because they stood out so distinctly from the rest of their culture.

This is what I would challenge myself and each one of us. As God is transforming us, are we defined by our circumstances, our failures or our victories rather than Christ? If Christ truly defines us we will have a powerful influence on our neighbors and our friends. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You so much for the privilege of knowing You and of having that transforming power in each one of us. Lord, forgive us when we neglect Your Word and fall short of Your glorious ideal but Father, I pray that even now we would be taking that sacrifice and sliding it back upon the altar and that we would be recommitting ourselves to making that Word part of our lives on a daily basis and that we would rejoice in the freedom You give us, not to define ourselves by the way others see us or by the successes and failures we have experienced or by the responsibilities that have consumed us for many years but we're defined as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, help our identity to come solely from You so that we can represent You before a watching world and then some day step into Your presence with great joy. We thank You and ask this in Jesus' Name and for His Sake, Amen.

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