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September 29, 2013

**Our Relationship to God:
Total Commitment to Christ
Romans 12:1-2**

Introduction:

In his book *The Legend of Eagles*, **George Esparte** recounts a story that happened to the **French Army** during the war with the **Kosaks**. It was in the middle of **winter** and the **French** had come to a river that they couldn't cross. **Napoleon** was at his wits end because there was **nothing** that he could think of to get across. Knowing that the army had to **cross** the river or else they would all **freeze to death**, **some of Napoleon's men** took it upon themselves to go out into the **icy waters** and **build a bridge**.

A **number** of them were **swept away** by the strong current and **drown** but eventually they **succeeded**. **History** records that **after** the entire army had **crossed** over the river on their **makeshift bridge**, **Napoleon** called to the men who were **still** in the water to **come out**, but **none** of them **moved**. They **clung motionless** to the **pillars** of the bridge because they had all **frozen to death**. **Napoleon** just stood there and **wept** because these men were willing to make the **ultimate sacrifice** out of love for their fellow soldiers and their country.

This **powerful story** brings into focus the **personal sacrifice** and **total commitment** that some people are willing to make for what they **believe** in. And it is such **dedication** and **devotion** to Jesus Christ that Christians are called to in the passage we will be looking at this morning.

We now come to the **second major section** of the book of Romans in **chapters 12-16**. This morning we are only going to look at **12:1-2**, which is one of the **best-known** passages in the New Testament. These **two introductory verses** are of **utmost importance** because they set forth the **fundamental obligation** of believers' relationship to **God Himself** that unless **obeyed** will hinder us in pleasing Him in all of the **other relationships** spelled out in **12:3-15:13**. Turn with me in your Bible to **Romans 12**.

In Romans 12:1-2 we see ***four aspects*** of the total commitment to Christ that God demands of every believer.

The ***first aspect*** is this:

I. The Reason for our Total Commitment

- A. Look at the **first part** of v. 1: **Therefore** I urge you, **brethren**, by the **mercies of God**... (Stop there)
 1. The word "**Therefore**" (oun) here signals that **all** of the **practical exhortations** of **12:1-15:13** are built firmly on the **theology** of **chapters 1-11**. Whereas **doctrine matters** because you cannot **live out** what you **don't know**, **doctrine** must be translated into **practice**.
 2. Jesus said in **John 13:17**, "If you **know** these things, you are **blessed** if you **do** them."
 3. This is why Paul's **pattern** was often to **follow** a more strictly **theological** portion of Scripture with a more strictly **application** portion (Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:1). In other words, he **connects what** God has done to **how** we should live, thus joining **doctrine** to **duty**, **belief** to **behavior**, **exposition** to **exhortation**, **creed** to **conduct**, and **precept** to **practice**.

4. Now Paul **begins** in **v. 1** by saying, “I **urge** you, **brethren.**” The meaning of the word “**urge**” (parakalo) lies somewhere between “**request**” and “**command**” and is best captured in the word “**exhort.**”
5. Therefore, Paul is **exhorting** his brothers and sisters in Christ at **Rome**, affectionately calling them “**brethren.**” Although as an **apostle** he has the **authority** of Christ to **command**, and will do so later, here Paul simply **appeals** to them as he also did to **Philemon** in **Philemon 8-9** where he said, “...though I have enough **confidence** in Christ to **order** you to do what is **proper**, yet for **love’s sake** I rather **appeal** to you...”
6. However, even Paul’s **exhortations** are **authoritative**. **C.E.B. Cranfield** is correct when he says, “It denotes the **authoritative summons to obedience** issued in the name of the gospel.” (pg. 597)
7. Paul then states the **reason** for believers’ **total commitment** to Christ when he says, “...**by the mercies of God.**” The “**mercies**” (oiktirmon) or **compassions** of God encompass **everything** that Paul has taught in **chapters 1-11**.
8. Although the explicit terms for **mercy** do not occur before **chapters 9-11**, the **concept** the God’s **inexplicable mercy** and **unfathomable grace** surely does. **For example**, God’s “**mercies**” include such blessings as: **justification** by faith in Christ, **union** with Christ in His death and resurrection, **deliverance** from the penalty and power of sin, being under **grace** not Law, our **security** in Christ, **sanctification** by the indwelling of and power of the Holy Spirit, the promise of

glorification as heirs of God, sovereign **election** by grace, and God's **faithfulness** confirmed by His revealed plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

9. All of these **mercies and more** God did for us in Christ, though as **sinners** we **deserved** eternal punishment instead.

Therefore, the most **compelling reason** and **motivation** for **doing** what Paul is going to tell us to do should be **loving gratitude** to God for all of His **marvelous mercies** bestowed on us in Jesus Christ.

10. And we see the **proper way** God **demands** that we **respond** in the **second aspect** of our total commitment to Christ, which is this:

II. The Responsibility to Give Total Commitment

- A. Look again at v. 1: 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**.

1. The word "**present**" (parastesai) here is a **technical term** for the **offering** of a **sacrifice**. It is in the **language** and **imagery** of **sacrifice** that we see the **response** God **demands** of believers to all of His **mercies** on our behalf is one of **total commitment**.
2. The missionary **C.T. Studd** understood this well when he stated, "If Jesus Christ is God and died for me, then **no sacrifice** is **too great** for me to make for Him."
3. Here Paul tells us that it is our **responsibility** "to **present** your **bodies**." Now although **presenting** this **sacrifice** of **total commitment** to Christ has to be a **deliberate** and **decisive**

action on our part, Paul is not talking about a **once-for-all act**, but simply telling us to make the decision. And this decision has to be **affirmed** and **reaffirmed** over and over again throughout our lives.

4. Now since Jesus Christ's **once-for-all** sacrifice for sin has **fulfilled** and brought an **end** to the Old Testament sacrificial system, no longer does God **accept** animal sacrifices. The **sacrifice** that He wants from His children is their "**bodies.**"
5. The word "**bodies**" (somata) here refers to our **physical bodies**. Although the **Greeks** saw the **soul** as inherently **good** and the **body** as inherently **evil**, and thus, being the **prison-house** of the soul, this is not what God says.
6. Now obviously, God demands our **whole person** to be **totally committed, wholly surrendered, fully devoted, and completely dedicated** to Him. But it is specifically our **physical bodies** that Paul is focusing on here.
7. Since the **physical body** is not **sinful** in itself, but is merely a **neutral instrument** that can be used for **good** or **bad**, for either **sin** or **righteousness** (6:13, 19), God demands that we **totally commit** it to Him. God cannot **work** through us without in some way **working** through our **bodies**.
8. In **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** we read, "...do you not know that your **body** is a **temple** of the **Holy Spirit** who is **in you**, whom you have from God, and that you are **not your own**? For you have been **bought** with a **price**; therefore **glorify** God in your body."

9. **Total commitment** to Christ of our bodies, which belong to God, is what brings **glory** to Him. It is using the various **members** of our bodies—our **tongues, eyes, ears, hands, feet**, etc. for **God** and His **righteousness** not for **self** and **sin**.
10. It is this **total commitment** to Christ that **Isaac Watts** is talking about in his hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* when he wrote:

Love so amazing, so **divine**
demands my **soul**, my **life**, my **all**.

B. Notice how Paul goes on to **characterize** our **bodily sacrifice** to God in **three ways**:

1. **First**, it is a “**living**”(zosan) **sacrifice**.
 - This is in **contrast** to the Old Testament sacrifices of **animals** that were **put to death** on the altar. Since we as believers are now “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11, 13; 8:13), we are to continue to **offer** our bodies as **living sacrifices** to God in our daily lives.
2. **Second**, it is a “**holy**” (hagian) **sacrifice**.
 - The word “**holy**” means **set apart** for a special purpose. It speaks of a sacrifice that **belongs** to and is **fully dedicated** to God.
 - Now since the animal sacrifices had to be “**without defect**,” this can also symbolize the **moral purity** that God requires of us as His children, which is only possible as we **depend** on the Holy Spirit and allow Him to **control** our lives (Gal. 5:16).
 - **First Peter 1:15-16** tells us: But like the **Holy One** who **called** you, be **holy** yourselves also in **all** your behavior;

because it is written, “**YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**” (1 Thess. 4:3)

3. **Third**, it is this **kind** of “**living** and **holy** sacrifice” that is “**acceptable** to God.”

- Our **total commitment** to Christ is “**acceptable**” (euareston) to God, in that, it is **well-pleasing** and a **soothing** or **fragrant aroma** to Him.
- Like Paul, this should be our primary ambition in life for he said in **2 Corinthians 5:9**, “Therefore we also have as our **ambition**, whether at home or absent, to be **pleasing** to Him.”

C. Paul then says in **v. 1** that our bodily sacrifice to God, “...is your **spiritual service of worship.**”

1. The word “**spiritual**” (logiken) here in the **NASB** is a term used nowhere else by Paul and only once again in 1 Peter 2:2 (e.g. “pure”). But it can also be translated as “**reasonable**” (rational) as in the **KJV**.
2. Whereas there is **much debate** as to which view is **correct**, I agree with those who say it’s **both**. It is **spiritual**, in that, our sacrifice is **willing** and **wholehearted**, for without a **right heart attitude** we are just **externally** going through the motions.
3. And it is **reasonable**, in that, our sacrifice is the only **sensible**, **logical** and **appropriate response** to God in view of all of the mercies He has bestowed on us in Christ. And **failure** to **totally commit** our bodies to Him is the height of **folly** and **irrationality**.

4. And all of this is our “**service of worship**” to God, which is **one word** (latreian) in the Greek. We are saved to **glorify God** by **loving** and **worshiping** Him **first** and **foremost** in our lives (Matt. 22:37-38).
5. Jesus said in **John 4:23-24**, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the **true worshipers** will **worship** the **Father** in **spirit** and **truth**; for **such people** the **Father seeks** to be **His worshipers**. God is **spirit**, and those who **worship** Him must **worship** in **spirit** and in **truth**.”
6. Notice how **Christians** are **defined** in **Philippians 3:3** as “...the **true circumcision**, who **worship** in the Spirit of God and **glory** in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”
7. **True worship** of God includes **corporate worship**, but it is far more and involves our **entire lifestyle** of **continual service** and **worship** in the sacrifice of our **bodies** day by day. It is seeing every **common deed** an act of worship.
8. Now for Paul to say “**present** your **bodies** a **living** and **holy sacrifice**, **acceptable** to God, which is your **spiritual service of worship**” is as **bold a call** to **total commitment** to Christ as there is anywhere in the Bible. But this doesn’t come **automatically**, as we see in the **third aspect** of our total commitment to Christ, which is this:

III. The Requirements that Maintain Total Commitment

- A. Look at the **first part** of v. 2: And do not be **conformed** to this **world**, but be **transformed** by the **renewing** of your **mind**...
(Stop there)

1. If we are going to become and remain **totally committed** to Christ then we must **obey** the **two commands** that Paul gives here. The **first command** is **negative** and the **second command** is **positive**.
2. Look again at Paul's **first command** where he **negatively** states, "And do not be **conformed** to this **world**..." The word "**conformed**" (suschematizesthe) simply means to form or mold after something.
3. I like how **J.B. Phillips** translates this phrase, "Don't let the **world** around you **squeeze** you into its **mold**."
4. Now there are many **commentators** who make a **sharp distinction** between the words "**conformed**" and "**transformed**." They say that to "be **conformed** to this world" refers to **external conformity** and to "be **transformed**" in our minds refers to **internal conformity**.
5. However, these words are essentially **synonymous** and refer to a **pattern** of ethical behavior that involves both **internal** and **external**. For **C.K. Barrett** rightly states, "Conformity to this age is no **superficial** matter." (Cranfield pg. 606)
6. Now we as believers are not to **continually pattern ourselves** or allow ourselves to be **patterned** after "this **world**" (aioni), which refers to this **present evil age** that is passing away (1 Cor. 2:6, 8; 7:31; Gal. 1:4; 1 Jn. 2:17) and is dominated by **sin** and **Satan** (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:19).
7. This has to do with the **evil world system** with its **godless** and **self-centered** attitudes, standards and values. The apostle John **sums up** this entire world system when he says in **1 John**

2:16, For all that is in the world, the **lust** of the **flesh** and the **lust** of the **eyes** and the **boastful pride** of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

8. Because of this we must **consciously** and **deliberately** in **full dependence** on the Spirit of God **resist** the **pressure** to be squeezed into the mold of the world, from which we have been saved. We must **resist** its **ungodly lies** and **self-centered values** and **standards**.
 9. **Leon Morris**, “Christians have been **introduced** into the life of the world to come; what a **tragedy**, then, if they **conform** to the **perishing world** they have **left**.” (pg. 435)
- B. The only way not to be **squeezed** into the world’s mold is to **obey** Paul’s **second command** where he **positively** states, “...but be **transformed** by the **renewing** of your **mind**...”
1. The word “**transformed**” (metamorphoo) is the word from which we get our English word “**metamorphosis**,” which speaks of the change from one form to another—as in the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly.
 2. This is the same term is used for the external change of Jesus’ “**transfiguration**” (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2; Lk. 9:29). The word “**be transformed**” is in the **passive voice** in the Greek, indicating that **transformation** is the **active work** of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.
 3. However, the fact that it is also an **imperative** or **command** also shows that we as believers are **responsible** to yield to the Spirit and allow Him to work in us. **Biblical sanctification** is

both us being **responsible** to **obey** and **depending** on **God** who alone can bring about **true change!** (Phil. 2:12-13).

4. Now notice **how** God brings about this transformation. Paul says that this takes place, “...**by the renewing** of your **mind.**”
5. The word “**renewing**” (anakainosei) means to make new. **W.E. Vine** describes it as, “The **adjustment** of the **moral** and **spiritual vision** and **thinking** to the **mind of God**, which is designed to have a **transforming** effect upon the life.” (pg. 951)
6. Since the “**mind**” (noos) is the **mission control center** of our attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions, no transformation into increased Christlikeness in our lives ever takes place without the **renewing** of your mind.
7. The **key** to **change** is the **mind**. We see this in **Proverbs 23:7** which says, “For as he **thinks** in his **heart**, so is he.” (NKJV)
8. Before we were saved, our **natural** (unregenerate) **mind** was morally darkened, blind and resistant toward God (Eph. 4:17; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3). But at the moment of our salvation, the Holy Spirit brought supernatural regeneration and renewal through initial repentance, which is a change of mind whereby we turned from our sin to God (2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:5).
9. At the moment of salvation God makes us spiritually alive, opens our darkened and blinded eyes, and gives us the light of a God-centered world and life view. This **initial** repentance **begins** a **continuing** change of mind in believers’ lives, so that we can increasingly grow in Christlike righteous and love.
10. **Douglas Moo** says, “This ‘**re-programming**’ of the mind does not take place **overnight** but is a **lifelong process** by which

our **way of thinking** is to resemble more and more the **way** God wants us to think.” (pp. 756-757)

11. In other words, we think “**biblically.**” In **2 Corinthians 10:5** we read, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking **every thought** captive to the obedience of Christ.”
12. The **battle** is for the **mind!** Our **sanctification** is on-going moral renewal of our minds.
13. Since the **value systems** of the **world** and **God** are **totally incompatible** in every facet of life, wrong, self-centered and worldly ways of thinking must be replaced by right, Christ-centered and biblical ways of thinking.
14. And it is the **Spirit of God** who uses the **Word of God** in and through us as the **People of God** to bring about greater and greater transformation into our lives from one level of spiritual growth to another. This **renewing process** of transformation is described in **2 Corinthians 3:18**, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the **Spirit.**” (2 Cor. 4:16)
15. Therefore, the **requirements of not being conformed** to this world but **being transformed** by the **renewing** of our minds must be met to **maintain** our **total commitment** to Christ.
16. The **fourth aspect** of our total commitment to Christ is this:

IV. The Result of Our Total Commitment

- A. Look again **v. 2**: 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**.

1. Here we see the **result** or possibly the **purpose** of our **total commitment** by the **renewing** of our mind is that we might be able to **prove** what the **will** of God is. The word “**prove**” (dokimazein) means to **approve** as genuine by testing, to **discern** by experience.
2. In other words, **result** of our total commitment to Christ is to **understand** and **agree** by **personal experience** what God wants us to do in His **will** and put it into practice.
3. Paul then describes what **God’s will** is “...that which is **good**, **acceptable** and **perfect**.” **Beloved**, God has a **will** for our lives, which He is very **willing** and **desirous** that we know; and His **will** is found in His **Word**, which is the **moral will** of God.
4. Paul describes God’s will in three ways: **First**, God’s will for us is “**good**” (agathon). Although the will of God at times can be very **difficult** and **confusing**, it is **always good** because God is **always good** no matter what.
5. By faith we must **believe** that the Lord **never** makes a **mistake**. Therefore, we must **trust Him**; especially at those time when what He has allowed into our lives doesn’t “**seem**” to be **good**.
6. **Second**, God’s will is “**acceptable**” (euareston). Since God’s will is **acceptable** and **well-pleasing** to Him because He knows it is good, it should also be to us.
7. **Third**, God’s will is “**perfect**” or **complete** (teleion). It will always achieve the **desired end** that God has in mind. And His

ultimate end for His people is our complete conformity to Christlikeness (8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2).

8. And having discerned it, we can now **carry out** in our daily lives what we **know** to be the will of God. And God's will always is concerned about loving relationships.
9. **First and foremost** with God Himself, as we have seen in these two verses. And **secondly** with **others**, as we will see in **12:3-15:13**.

Conclusion:

In closing, **David Livingston**, the great missionary to **Africa** said about his **total commitment** to Christ:

“People talk of the **sacrifice** I have made of spending so much of my life in **Africa**. Can that be called a **sacrifice**, which is simply **paid back** as a **small part** of the **great debt** owing to our God, which we can **never repay**? Is that a **sacrifice**, which brings its **own reward** of healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? **Away** with such a word! It is emphatically **no sacrifice...it is privilege!**

Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger now and then, with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us **pause** and cause the spirit to **waver** and **sink**, but let this only be for a **moment**. All these are **nothing compared** with the **glory** which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I **never** made a **sacrifice**. Of this we ought not to talk, when we **remember** the **great sacrifices** which He made who left His Father's throne on high to **give Himself** for us.”

We all need to ask: “Does this describe my **commitment** to Jesus Christ? If not, then **someone** or **something** is before Him. May we all fully surrender to Christ’s Lordship in our lives and totally commit to Him!