

Romans 12:1-2

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 12 verses 1 through 2 on page 922. Would you please stand for the reading of God's Word? 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. 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. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Amen. Well we are two weeks away from what is the fullness of the summer months ahead and shortly we are going to turn our summer attention to the book of 1st Samuel and the first seven chapters. In other words we are going to be taking a break from the book of Romans and picking it up again in the fall. In fact in the fall we will be preaching through all the passages of chapter 12 through 16 up to Advent.

But we didn't want to leave after chapter 11 without at least two expositions on little moments within the final chapters. The book really divides between chapter 12 through chapter 15 13. And so all that I will share today from these two verses really sets the stage for that part of the letter. And then next week Pastor Jackson will preach the concluding message so that you at least have a sense of seeing your whole way through Romans when we began it last January. Well today in our offertory was a good example of what I want to open with today. Whenever I am asked to identify various hallmarks of our congregation it isn't long before I begin to speak of our creativity and productivity. We are a people and pastor alike who cherish the act of creating or making in this case today wonderful music. Whether it's the conceiving and raising of children and there are many in our midst or the writing of papers and instructional lessons and lectures and articles and books. Whether it's the filling of your summer calendar to pack in all that you can in the city. We are a people that wants to get out and get going and get something done. And all of that may account for some of the restlessness that we have in the midst of Romans chapter 1 through 11. For there in those many chapters we haven't been reading too much about what we're to do. In the opening chapter Paul instead gave us two definitions neither of which related to who we were or what we do. Rather they were definitions concerning the gospel itself. The first one chapter 1 verses 2 through 5 what the gospel is and then that famous statement in verses 16 to 17 what the gospel does. And he's been speaking for 11 chapters on the gospel. What it is and what it does. And now we arrive at the 12th chapter and the inference of the gospel begins to be made known.

There are clear concrete takeaways. And so for a congregation that wants to get about gospel life. Here it is.

What are we to do in light of the gospel? One, present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God. 12.1. One, two, take on the task of transformation via the renewing of your mind. Wonderful concrete things for us to look at in these minutes together.

[4 : 58] In light of the gospel, what do we do? 12.1. 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.

Now let me say a few things about it. Notice the gospel appeal. I appeal to you. It's this exhortation. He's longing for you to get about this even this week even with the rest of the day and the rest of your life.

And notice who he is speaking to. Brothers. He speaks now of our and he has in the past but especially here of our new identity in Christ.

In Christ God has made us one. brothers and sisters. So this gospel appeal is made at the beginning of the verse.

The appeal is grounded in something. Look what it's grounded in. By the mercies of God. What you do this week with these verses is rooted in your understanding of the mercies of God.

[6 : 17] the mercies of God are the motivation for Christian living. Now the word mercies is interesting here. If you just glance back a bit into chapter 11 verses 30 to 32 you will see a word translated mercy.

No fewer than three times. The mercy of God has been appealed to. But it is a different word here a synonym and notice it's in the plural.

He's appealing to you on the mercies of God. Now how would I distinguish between these two terms? We normally think of mercy as getting good when bad was deserved.

Mercy. I got mercy. I got good when bad was warranted. This term has a slight nuance.

It in a sense is the tender care given when life's course was harsh. You feel that?

[7 : 27] That's what he's appealing to you on. God has come into your life in Christ in a multitude of mercies. There are a multitude of ways that he has demonstrated tender care in the harshness of life.

Those two words mercy and mercies appear together in chapter 9 verse 15 where it talks about the mercy God having mercy whoever he would have mercy on and compassion on whomever he would have compassion.

A quote from Exodus 33. And this is what God has done. He has been merciful to you in Christ. Namely given you life redemption in the gospel by faith and that has come with attending mercies. Think of them. The forgiveness real forgiveness of sins. You have that in Christ. What a tender care for you in the harshness of life.

He's given you costly sacrifices. Philippians 2 translates this word sympathy.

[8 : 51] He has been sympathetic to you. And were we to sit today and open the mic for you to speak we could go on for hours in regard to the tender care of God over and in your life that extend far beyond the simple understanding of I got good when bad was warranted.

all that you do in the gospel is rooted or grounded in the mercies of God.

So what are you to do? The appeal has been put forth. I appeal to you brothers. The grounds for the appeal has been laid out by the tender care of God that has been manifested in your life in a multitude of ways.

To do what? To present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship. Now that little phrasing there is loaded with technical terms that would recall in the mind of the first reader the role of the priesthood and the sacrificial system.

That you are presenting something as a sacrifice which is in accordance with your service which was the service of the priesthood.

[10 : 23] So the echo underneath this work for you to do this week is the ambiance of a priesthood who is carrying the sacrifice that would mediate relationship with God.

But think about how it's different than that. Think about what we've learned in Romans. Think about what Christ has done that he has offered the sacrifice once for all.

That that which was perfectly needed was perfectly given. And think about what a priest would do.

They would actually take an unblemished animal and they would kill it and the blood would be spilled upon the altar and the sacrifice that was offered or presented in service to God was dead.

Now he says to the church, if you want to do something in light of the gospel, live! Live as an aroma, as a sacrifice, as an outpouring of praise and gratitude to God for what he has done.

And it is to involve your body. Now, in other words, grace has been extended to you in Christ.

[11 : 42] That grace has been applied to you and apprehended by faith. But now gratitude is the part you play in presenting your entire life.

Not a 45, an hour and 15 minute, hour and 30 minute service. Your entire life is now a living sacrifice to God. You are climbing up on the altar of life and living for him.

And whereas the sacrifice was killed and the aromas went up and the praise went forth, you walk out and you speak and you bear testimony and your hands work and your feet run with his good and gracious news.

This is what you are to do. Isocrates put the differences this way in a very famous quote. In the worship of the gods, follow the example of your ancestors, but consider that the noblest sacrifice and greatest service is to show yourself the best and most righteous person, for such persons have greater hope of enjoying a blessing from the gods than those who slaughter many victims.

What's he saying? the one who goes out and actually lives in righteousness is the one who is praising and blessing God and has more success in the eyes of God than the one who is slaughtering many victims, such as they did in those days of animal sacrifice.

[13 : 20] And so this is what you're to do. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, for this is your spiritual, interesting word there, act of worship.

The word spiritual is *logikos*, which could bear the meaning of reasonable, rational. This is the most reasonable thing for you to do once you've understood the gospel.

It's to present your bodies as a living sacrifice to him. Epictetus said, if I were a nightingale, I would do it what is proper to a nightingale.

And if I were a swan, what is proper to a swan? In fact, I am a *logikos*, so I must praise God. That's what you do.

Pastor, what do I do in the gospel? Praise God. Walk, talk, act in praise and thanksgiving to him.

[14 : 25] It's interesting, I mean, why would Paul, say that we worship God with our bodies? I mean, isn't God merely just interested in our souls?

Evidently not. Why is the body important? Why is how you handle your body critical in the first application of Christian teaching? Because the body, which will be laid in the ground, shall be resurrected on the last day.

He is not done with our bodies. Our bodies will move in a glorified state forever.

It comes with you in that way. It will be new, yes, God's love. But he is concerned that even now you begin to live in accordance with that which would please him.

You are a temple of the Most High God. How? How do you worship God with your body? Well, let me say this.

[15 : 40] This is not so much about making conclusions about your caloric intake as it is about our sexual ethic, about the mystery and meaning of lovemaking.

Take a look at what he will outline later in chapter 13 verses 13 and 14. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

In other words, when he created us, male and female, he built within us an intention for how sexuality would work.

And we are to worship him now that I'm learning what the gospel is, in a sense to reorient my appetite and my ways toward his intention and design.

We worship God with our bodies by refraining from giving our bodies to many or to those of our same gender.

[17 : 04] Secondly, take a look back for a moment just to see that this is not new for Paul. Look back at chapter 6, verses 12 and 13, where he was speaking about the lives we live as a consequence of being baptized into Christ.

And he said in verse 12, let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, there's our word again, to make you obey their passions. Do not present, there's our word again, we are presenting something to God, do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace. So the very first application of the gospel when it goes forth to people is it deals with our sexual appetite and our awareness.

It's fascinating. Why? Because our bodies are important to God. And as we understand what God has done for us, we immediately begin to present ourselves in accordance with what we understand of his design.

Take a look back all the way in Romans to chapter 1 where we saw the wrath of God rolling out and it also spoke there in regard to how we were handling our bodies before we knew the gospel.

[18 : 39] Verse 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies. Whereas now you see we are honoring God in the use of our bodies.

There was a dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions for their women

exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passions for one another. Men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their heir. The book of Romans opened with this orientation of human heart that moved away from God's design and so what he did in his wrath is roll out a heart that moved further and further away. That was the dishonoring of it all. And so when the gospel comes to you the first thing that begins to happen is you begin to realize I am supposed to be presenting my body unto God in accordance with his intention his design.

This is brand new for me. And it was brand new in Rome and Paul begins to call us to it with them. In other words there ought to be a reorientation of your sexual appetites and your ethics and your experiences as a consequence of understanding Paul's gospel.

[20 : 27] Now what will that look like in practice? Well first you have to begin to acquire a new appetite of the heart. Think in the world of food.

There are healthier appetites than others. What the gospel begins to do is it says I've got to eat well. I need to cultivate an appetite that is in accord with what he has created and how he has asked us to live.

And that's what many of you are beginning to do. And so when your mind begins to move and your commitments and experiences in one time of your life were open to almost anything in Christ they begin almost to come into greater focus with what did he want from me to begin with?

And what he wanted was something according to his design and according to nature. And so we are acquiring in our congregation new heart appetites because holy desires will lead to healthier living and stronger marriages.

There are so many here who are young who are yet looking at the prospect of marriage or are recently married or who are in marriages and this is where the rubber hits the road.

[21 : 50] where is the appetite? In other words there ought to be an altering of viewing patterns because everything that we are presented with today moves in conflicting ways with what God has given us.

For those of you who are parents with young children you are to be actively engaging your children as parents in regard to what has God done, how has he created us and how would he have us handle our bodies?

For we want to worship him. It goes even further that those of us who are in marriages need to be awakened to the reality of the mystery of what is happening in mutual marital intercourse.

I mean think of Thomas Cranmer verse 1629 the book of common prayer the wedding vows. Do you remember the old wedding vows? They don't use them anymore because nobody's quite sure how to interpret the meaning.

With this ring I thee wed with my body I thee worship with all my worldly goods I thee endow. What did he mean by that with this body I thee worship?

[23 : 09] Well certainly Cranmer's not advocating idolatry. So what does it mean to present your bodies in accordance with this gospel implication?

I want to suggest two things. It means a singularity of commitment. This goes for those of you who are married and those who are not.

There is a singularity of my commitment to my wife. and my wife alone. With my body I thee worship.

I am singularly committed. Think of it this way. When you worship something what do you do? You are elevating it above all else. All others. You are esteeming it before all others.

And so this week in the gospel as we are learning to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God in ways that will be appealing to him or pleasing to him.

[24 : 17] It is understanding again there is a singularity of commitment and for those of you who are not yet married and might become married one day to realize I must reserve myself for that for that is what God has.

not only is there a singularity of commitment but there is a completeness of the person. All I have I give to you.

When one actually is one flesh with another you have given all. All I have. A completeness.

Now the scriptures say that the woman's body does not belong to her but to the husband and the husband's body does not belong to him but to her but the recognition is that there is a completeness

here that is extended in singularity of commitment.

I will not give my body to another. You shall have me. You shall have all of me. And in doing so we worship God.

[25 : 32] We live in ways that please him. We serve him. What a wonderful text. What a great reorientation to life.

But let's look at the second thing. Be transformed. Not only are you to this week in light of the gospel begin presenting your body to the Lord in worship but you are to be transformed. That's our task. Our life work is the life work of transformation. The word there is interesting. It's where we get the word of something that's a metamorphosis. You think of a caterpillar goes into the chrysalis, comes out a completely changed creature.

It's changed. It's the word that Luke 9 uses to depict what happened to Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration. He was changed. What you are to do in Christ with the gospel is you are to be about transformation.

In other words, the gospel changes things. Is there any hope for you and your life and where you are? Yes, according to the gospel, it actually changes things.

[26 : 47] But notice what it changes. us, the church. The goal of the gospel is a changed constituency here.

It's not speaking of the culture. And it's important for us. I mean, think of our own vision statement as a church. We seek to see the city of Chicago transformed.

There's our word. Transformed by the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But have you ever thought of it this way? what's your vision statement? To see the church in Chicago transformed by the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's in accord with Romans 12 1. To see my congregation, because it's all plural here. I want to see us changed. I want to see us changed in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to come out like a butterfly one day. Isn't that beautiful? the goal of the gospel is the children and family of God.

[27 : 54] Change. Can we change? Yes, we can. How? By the renewing of our mind.

Now, you can give your heart to Christ, but He doesn't have you if He doesn't have your mind. change happens by this renewal of the mind.

What does that mean? You need to realize these two words, mind and testing, which is in our verse here, by this renewal of the mind, we learn to test and discern what the will of God is.

Those two words have traveled together in Romans. They appeared also in the first chapter. Just as our heart's desires led to bodies that were given in ways that didn't worship God, so too our mind, Romans 1, 29 or so, did not want to discern or test how to live life in light of God.

Therefore, He gave our minds over to the inability to do anything well for Him. So that great long laundry list in chapter 1 of Romans, about the wrath of God spilling out because of the giving over of our minds to things that are debased, verse 28, were filled with unrighteousness and what does that list entail?

[29 : 22] Evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slanderers, haters of God, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless, all those things are what?

They're relational. The renewal of your mind is needed if we're to live in community. Well, that's what God is doing.

At one point in our lives, we did not know how to discern God's will for us. But now in Christ, we know how to discern and to test that which is His will so that we will relationally become a family in Chicago and a congregation that is loving, caring, helpful.

Isn't that interesting? That's the way Romans works. So what will it look like? Does this renewal of mind mean that we're all like growing into powerhouse intellects?

No! listen to what the commentator, University of Chicago commentator Jewett writes in his wonderful work on Romans.

[30 : 43] Quote, the transformation Paul has in mind here is shaped by the recovery of a realistic appraisal of ethical choices in light of the converting, consummating experience of being in the new creation brought on by Christ.

The transformation that he has in mind here is the reappraisal of ethical and relational life. How we live together, that's what happens when we begin to live for Christ.

So this is not so much academic or educational knowledge as is relational and ethical knowledge. that we learn how to get along, that we learn how to respect our racial differences, that we learn how to embrace our racial differences, that we learn how to welcome those who are unlike us into our home.

That's what chapter 12 through 15 is going to do, that we learn how to accept the weaker, that we learn how to live humbly as a stronger, that we're connecting in the ways we're supposed to, that the black and white divide will be reversed somehow through these little communities of faith, even ours, because we're being transformed by the renewal of our mind and we've been learning now to think in accordance with God who has brought all things together under Christ.

And if he's brought all things together under Christ and he's bringing all nations together under Christ, then he certainly can bring Dave Helm and Arthur Jackson together under Christ and you and those sitting near you.

[32 : 21] it's a renewal of mind. That's a transformation of life. Harry Blameyers, and I'm closing, wrote a book, I think back in the 50s.

Mulholland, you'd love this book. If you've never read it, you need to get it. It's called The Christian Mind. And when he wrote this classic book, The Christian Mind, it opens with this word. Here's this opening sentence.

Today, there is no Christian mind. I'm interested in the recovery of the mind and where Blameyers would point us.

Where's the first thing he does to point us to the recovery of a Christian mind? It's to the recovery of the supernatural, complete with the view of another world and a heavenly destination.

That's where the recovery of the mind begins for Blameyers. The supernatural and the understanding of another world and another destination. Now, think back to chapter 1 in Romans.

[33 : 22] They did not honor him as God or give thanks to him as God. Therefore, he gave them over in this way. What is needed is an acknowledgement, Christian or otherwise, that there is a God.

There is a, I just finished McCullough's 1776 again, that there is a providential hand behind behind the affairs of men. And that there ought to be a sense of piety toward this God, this creator, who we understand today to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And as we acknowledge his presence and the awareness of the supernatural in the world and an ultimate destination that is beyond, and we begin to live in ways that respect him and respect his design, we change.

And as we change, we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. And we will know what the will of God is. So there we are. We're underway. Romans 1-11.

We've been running hard at a definition of what is the gospel and what does it do. And now you know. So who are you? brother, sister, in Christ.

[34 : 43] And what must you do? This week? Every week? Begin learning what it means for you to present your bodies as living sacrifices and the task of transformation via the renewal of your mind that you might live well with one another.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this word from Romans and pray that you would send us out of these doors committed, fully committed, to do things for you, particularly these two things, in Christ's name.

Amen. Let's stand.