

A Life Set Apart for God

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[0:00] Go ahead and turn over to Romans 12, and we'll read verses 1 and 2. So how many of you could guess that that's probably where we're going to be at this morning after that opening statement? It's a really popular one, and we're going to get into some of that here, but I've got to get there too.

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. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

These two verses are some of the most repeated in the Bible. I always take that as an indicator of how important they are. These were some of the first verses that the Lord laid on my heart when I began my Christian life.

I believe the reason for this was that I lived surrounded by worldly influences, and until then, I too was verily worldly. God used these verses to remind me of the pull of the world, the influence it has, and that I need to be cautious of letting it change me.

These verses don't just speak to new Christians, though. We ought to keep them running through our minds, throughout our lives, because the ways of this world do not go away while we're here.

[1:12] Turn over to 2 Timothy 3 real quick. We'll read verses 1 through 5 there. This note also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

From such, turn away. These verses speak of the last days. It speaks of people being lovers of themselves, proud, unholy, and the list went on and on.

Lovers of pleasures more than God. These verses in 2 Timothy tell us that the world will not improve. It will continue to move against God, and it will continue to get worse.

To this we receive the warning. From such, turn away. Turn away or take no pardon. Be not yoked with, be not conformed to. Satan does not give up on trying to hinder us.

Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. We read here in 1 Peter 5.8, the devil does not rest in his pursuit against the righteous.

[2:35] We must keep our guard. We must assess what we're influencing and what's influencing us. So let's start at the beginning of the chapter here. Go back over to Romans there. I beseech you, therefore, brethren.

Chapter 12 is not started with a continuation of the previous verses, as most other chapters previous were. Now, the previous chapters were over the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. They conclude, and a new subject is introduced. So how do we know a new thought started? Well, in this instance, it's pretty easy, because if you look up at chapter 11, verse 36 there, it reads, Amen, which signifies to confirm or establish and to mark an end to a declaration.

The previous thought is wrapped up, and we continue now with the next. So I wanted to stop and take a minute here and just talk about some of the Bible punctuation, right?

So the Bible tells us to rightly divide the word, and part of that's understanding our context. So one of the tools that we can use when doing that is punctuation. When you read an article, a story, a book, anything, you're following the punctuation lines, and that usually shows separation from one part to the next.

[3:59] If it was just one big, long stream of words, it'd be pretty monotonous and hard to read, hard to decipher. So one of the tools we can use is the punctuation. Now, our Bible is split up into chapters and verses, and that happened around 1599, as I understand, and that's also where they introduced a pilcrow.

Now, how many know what a pilcrow is? A little backwards-looking pea. Backwards pea. So if you look through your Bible, you'll find a little pilcrow every once in a while, and what that means is that's the start of an indentation of a new section there.

So since we don't have that separation out, you know, with the indentations in the word there, they put pilcrows. But it's also important to understand that just as the chapters and verse were introduced by editorial committee, so were the pilcrows.

There's no, per se, divine influence in the pilcrows themselves. They were just placed there from the editors of the KJV, saying this is where we believe that a new separation should start and begin there.

So it's always important to remember that. But now that we talked about pilcrows a little bit, I can tell you that they're of no use to us here, because the last pilcrow that's used is in Acts 20.36 there.

[5:20] So there's speculation as to why, but my thought is just that from Acts, you move into the epistles. And in the epistles, they're more of a letter, which is less formal generally.

When you write a letter, you're not following strict guidelines. They're letters to the churches there, or they're letters to different people there, right? So we don't have any pilcrows there, but we can still use the reasoning of the context of the words.

And we have different indicators in the word here of where we would end a thought and where we'd begin one. Right here, we have one, to whom be the glory forever, amen.

Right? We stop that there, and then that thought kind of continues on then until if we read, it was the end of verse, or chapter 15.

So we kind of have this section here that covers on this topic. So we have the start of a new section, and immediately we're beseeched. So what does it mean to be beseeched?

[6:25] To entreat, to supplicate, to implore, to ask or pray with urgency. The matter we're called attentiveness to is affectionately pressed upon us. Paul here addresses the brethren.

It shows his affection and relationship to those he addresses. This translated word brethren is used 319 in 319 verses in the New Testament. Acts contains the highest usage, with it being used in 56 verses.

And for comparison, it's used in 31 verses in Matthew and 35 verses in 1 Corinthians, which are the two runners-up. Now, we ought to find that no surprise because we find so great in evangelism outreach in Acts.

So if we go turn over to Acts 15.36, Acts 15.36 tells us, And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they do.

We find here who the brethren are. They are saved individuals that they have preached the word of God to. We see the affection toward them as they seek to take report of them to see how they do. The theme continues.

[7:33] If you turn, let's see, a couple pages over there to Acts 21 in verse 7. That reads, And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemus and saluted the brethren and abode with them one day.

And then a little further in verse 17 there. That reads, And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And one chapter over in 28, verse 13.

Or excuse me, that's a couple chapters over, isn't it? Yeah. So Acts 28.13. And from thence we fetched a compass and came to Regim. And after one day, the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Petoli, where we found brethren and were desired to tarry with themselves, or with them

seven days.

And so we went toward Rome. All right? So back in Romans, we are called upon as brothers and sisters in Christ, as friends and fellow laborers, as family, to stop and attend to this most urgent matter.

As we read further into this, as we remember that we are preyed upon with urgencies as brothers in Christ on the matter, we find another depth of urgency that Paul expands upon. We are not only called on the matter as fellow servants with Paul, but we are called by the mercies of God.

[8:59] Now, God is merciful. We're going to read Psalm 103.8. That is a good one for here. And Psalm 103.8 reads, The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

And also Numbers 14.18. The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children under the third and fourth generation.

So as the crowd of Israelites murmured against God and they were ready to return to the land of the captivity, they were reminded of his long-suffering and mercy toward them. So look at verse 19 here.

Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now.

That sounds familiar. I beseech thee, according unto the greatness of thy mercy. That sounds like the same urgent call to listen up. Here, Moses calls urgently upon the Lord to pardon the people's iniquity to his great mercy, and he responds lovingly and succinctly.

[10:07] As Psalm 103 read, oh, excuse me, I skipped the verse, that's verse 20, and the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word. So as Psalm 103 read, the Lord is merciful and plenteous in mercy.

The Lord is also merciful toward us. But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

By grace are you saved. And that's found in Ephesians 2. We were dead in sin, yet he had mercy on us. Christ died for us. Romans 5, 8 reads, but God commendeth his love toward us and that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us.

He is merciful to us and that he made a way to save us from an eternal destination in hell. I'm sure thankful that he is merciful. Because of this mercy, I can now look forward to an eternity in heaven by our Savior's side.

And I hope that each one of you can look forward to that as well. It's by these great mercies that we are called to heed these words. So what then to these great lengths are we beseeched to? That you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.

[11:16] In the Old Testament, sacrifice was a common theme. The first instance we find this concept is back in Genesis 3, 21. Unto Adam also and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothe them.

The first recording of a beast being slain. The first picture of mortality and of death. Before this point, clothing was unnecessary. It was because sin entered in and man understood nakedness that the slaying of this lamb was necessary.

Another display of God's mercy and a foreshadow of what was to come. He closed Adam and Eve and exposed them to a new world that they lived in, an immortal world, a world he just explained to them back in verse 19.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground. For out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return. We find the idea of sacrifice being continued over in Genesis 4 in verses 1 through 5.

And Adam and Eve knew his wife or and Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bare Cain and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel and Abel was the keeper of the sheep but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

[12:26] And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock of the fat thereof.

And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had no respect. And Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell. We see here that Cain and Abel were

taught to bring sacrifice to the Lord.

Furthermore, this story tells the sacrifice that was acceptable, a blood sacrifice. And we read later on in the Old Testament, we find where God gives specific instruction on sacrifices.

And you can find that over there in Leviticus. But we won't read all those chapters today. But if we, let's see, focus on Leviticus 1 here in verses 2 and 3.

That reads, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, he shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish.

[13:31] He shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. We can see that these sacrifices were to come from a living creature. Also, we should note the instruction in verse 3 that he should offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord.

The sacrifice was to be voluntarily given. There should be no reserve in offering sacrifice. We ought not to reserve our own selves in sacrifice to the Lord. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were given fully.

They were brought living to be given and only a living sacrifice would do. A dead one would not be accepted. This shows a picture of the type of sacrifice that we ought to offer ourselves.

In Romans 12.1, it says a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable. So if we read back in Leviticus, it told us that without blemish, the choice of the flock was to be chosen.

So if we read back to Genesis 4.4, we find that Abel brought the first of his flock, the best of his flock, and his offering was accepted while Cain's offering was brought of his own way, contrary to what the Lord required and was not accepted.

[14:44] So God instructs us to bring ourselves a living sacrifice, meaning we are not to be brought alive to be slaughtered, but that we are to continually present ourselves to the Lord to give our lives over to him.

Without blemish, acceptable to him. As 1 Peter 1.16 reads, because it is written, be holy, for I am holy. He gives us the picture of sacrifice here as an example to know how we ought to bring ourselves to him.

Holy, reserving nothing. Let's turn over to 2 Corinthians 8. We'll read from there. And down to verse 5, it reads, and this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God.

First, they gave in themselves to the Lord. Lastly, in this verse, we find that we must give ourselves reasonably, which is your reasonable service. Isaiah 1.18.

Let's read that one. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

[15:49] God is reasonable. He is a teacher, a helper. He does not ask us to act out of blind devotion. We must serve Him in truth and understanding. The Lord is merciful and does not ask us, ask of us the unreasonable.

He wants us to understand. We cannot offer ourselves in reasonable service without understanding. Psalm 32.8 reads, I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eyes. So He'll instruct us there. And then if we turn back to Psalm 25, just a couple pages away, it says, Good and upright is the Lord.

Therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment and the meek will He teach in His way. And then we have in Jeremiah 33.3, another popular verse there.

I've got to go in the right direction. Jeremiah 33 reads, Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not. So He will show us great and mighty things we know not.

[16:54] 2 Timothy 3.16. It's the last verse we'll read on this topic here. And that reads, All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, and righteousness.

So the whole Bible is also given there for our instructions. So we were just given a call how we ought to live out our lives in complete obedience to the Lord, living each and every day as a sacrifice to His will, completely surrendered.

This is the part where things can get a little tricky because we all have great intentions and we usually like to start off pretty strong. But life happens and it can wear on us. If we're not solidly guarded and grounded, if we read Romans 12, 1 and 2, we can see that although they are separated by verse and numbers, they're really just one statement together.

Because verse 2 begins with a big and right there. And it's a coordinating conjunction that connects this clause to the previous. So we are to offer ourselves a living sacrifice and we are not to be conformed to this world.

So what does it mean to be conformed? Being conformed means to fit into a mold, becoming plastic and being shaped by a rigid structure. As Christians, we ought to be a different shape.

[18:08] We ought not to fit into the mold of this world. So pressure creates cracks. So the popular term here is that pressure creates diamonds. How many of you have ever heard that one?

I hear that all the time. You have to be under this tremendous amount of pressure and out pops a great shiny diamond. You know, that's how it goes, right? But in my experience, when I put pressure on things, they crack and they break.

Right? I don't know about everybody else. So I always think back to when I worked in the truck shop and I don't know if many of you hear from like an industrial background, but in the shop we had a hydraulic press and I don't know how many of you use one of those, but some of them they just use that little hand crank one where you pump it up and you can you know, put pressure on something there.

But we had one of the big fancy ones and it was air operated. So all you had to do is sit back, push a button and it did it all by itself. So it's kind of dangerous because now you're not feeling the pressure, right?

All you have is a little gauge and I don't know how you guys are, but we don't usually pay attention to those. They just kind of go by what's, you know, oh yeah, I kind of heard that second pop.

[19:25] I think that's getting pretty close, you know? So with these hydraulic presses, they have a cover, right? They put a little screen on and we won't get into it but they mostly are just filled with dust because they never get used.

So anyways, I remember putting a tie rod up on this hydraulic press, right? And you sit in there, you put your little block down, you put the press, the ball joint on there, you're going to press that out, right?

Put the adapter, hit the button, starts coming down, right? Okay, you get your pressure, you look, everything's squared up, we're good to go, right? Hit that button a little more, nothing, still nothing, pop, okay, well, we might be getting somewhere, you know?

And the problem is, you don't get much indication but that thing will just keep going. You can hit that button all day long and that press is just going to keep going down and you have all that air pressure behind it to create that force.

So, what happens is I never turned that tie rod into a diamond. I put all that pressure on, it kept going, never turned it into a diamond. If it did, I'd probably just sell the diamond and buy a new tie rod and move on with my day, collect the leftover, you know, from that.

[20:37] So, never did happen. But what it did do is it broke it, right? Because eventually, and generally things go flying. I understood the reason for the gates in front but, you know, you do the side, you know, once you hear about the second or third pop, that's when you start getting a little cautious, step off to the side, you know, wouldn't want anybody to get hurt, right?

So, anyways, pressure creates cracks, pressure breaks, right? So, the longer we're here and the longer that we're exposed to this force and the longer it wears on us, and the moment we start to lose our inhibitions and become relaxed is the moment that the pressure of this world gains an inch. Unfortunately, this is something we see all the time. A Christian once living their life for the Lord, now indistinguishable from the world around them, conformed to the lifestyles and actions of the world they were to be guarded from, not living their lives as a living sacrifice but living in need of

revival.

We see this also in churches. Over time, they can become more flexible. They can focus on the wrong thing. It becomes about more about what they want instead of what the Lord's will is for them.

They begin to think, maybe if we make the word more palatable, we'll get more members. Or maybe they decide it's okay to bend God's word if they think they might get more professions of faith. It's important to remember that we are not here to save anyone.

[22:04] Our job, as Mark 16 and 15 says, is to proclaim the word. He said unto them, go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It is an honor for us to speak of the sacrifice he made for us and it should always be done within the context of his word.

We should never allow our own ambitions to allow us to bend our morals in the name of sharing the gospel. So we'll turn over and read a few verses in 1 Corinthians here that go along with this.

And 1 Corinthians 11 is where we're going to be at in verse 17. We'll start. Okay, in verse 17 it reads, Now in this that I declare unto you, I praise you not that you come together not for the better but for the worse.

For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you and I partly believe it. For there must also, there must be also heresies among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

When you come together therefore in one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating everyone taketh before other his own supper and one is hungry and another is drunken.

[23:12] What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in or despise ye the church of God and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

The church at Corinth struggled with being conformed to this world. These verses opened by stating that it was so bad that they came together for the worse and not the better. We ought to pray like something like that could never be said for us.

They allowed heresy, divisions, and gluttony to enter in amongst them. They allowed the things of this world to infiltrate the church. We need to be rooted and to have a solid foundation.

Jeremiah 17 in verse 7 through 8 reads, Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river and shall not see when heat cometh but her leaf shall be green and shall not be careful in the year of drought.

Neither shall cease from yielding fruit. This goes back to the reason why we see so many fall to the paths of conformity. They weren't rooted in God's word. It's popular today for people to make fun of the King James Bible.

[24:18] I don't know if anybody's been out and about but you talk to other Christians and when it comes up the Bible that you have chosen to use they'll say, why? That's outdated.

That's no good. You are doing something wrong by choosing that because none of us do. It's kind of the part about it. I even had a friend once. He did his homework.

He learned about it and he decided to switch to reading the King James Bible. And when he actually went to the church that he was at they made fun of him and said, just berated him on it we'll say.

So it's really sad. And so we gotta be strong in that. Strong in what you know. We gotta hold to the truth that we know there.

So you know I always wonder about that though. It's like you have so many people out that proclaim what they call God's word and we have so many preachers around I always wonder if you struggle with the basic fundamental then what else do you have wrong in your teaching?

[25:24] It's like that's to get your word from something you have to be sure that it's correct. Right? So just you know something I think about but you know because I remember when I had to study and decide what Bible to use and I'm grateful that he taught so much to me about it.

You know I'm grateful that he guided that the Lord guided me in selecting the correct translation to use. Right? So when I first would say back before even the truck story there I remember I wanted to

read the Bible and I wanted to know God.

I wanted to know what he had to say. Right? So I went down I think it's like a crossway or whatever they had down there in North Carolina and I look at the shelf and if you go into one of those stores and you look at the shelves I mean there's probably five shelves.

There's different Bible translations and I remember there standing at that moment I looked at all these books and I said well which one of those is God's word? There's a whole bunch of them. They're all different. Which one is God's word? And you know I think at the time I chose a different one. My reasoning was I looked at it and I said oh this sounds like like a standard version.

[26:35] That would be the most you know sounds right. Right? Standard. You know I speak English it's standard. And I mean that's just that's Matt reasoning right? So I grabbed that Bible up and I started going and I you know it was a little later but like I said the Lord worked with me he taught me we don't know everything right off the beginning.

You know we continually learn we continually learn. so I learned this as time went on and I and then I finally you know once I knew I made the switch and you know I'm just grateful that I was allowed to do that but we have to be strong in that because if we go around to other people and we're more concerned about what they have to think what we read you know we're gonna we're gonna conform to that.

If we're constantly pressured and we don't have a solid foundation in what we believe you know that's that's not gonna end up well for us. So I encourage you to just do your homework on the Bibles.

You know the evidence presents itself and the Lord will lead you in it so and he'll bless you in that endeavor. So so yeah you must have a solid grounding in God's word to be guarded from conformity and you need the word of God to be accurate.

You can't you can't base all the rest of your foundations on something that's not accurate right? All right so that brings us to the last part of this verse here.

[27:55] And be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. God here gives us an instruction on how we are able to guard from being conformed and how we can be grounded.

First Corinthians 15 18 reads therefore my beloved brethren be steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Steadfast and unmovable or good traits in this context. Once we know the truth we ought to sink our feet into it and anchor to it. The Lord tells us to do this by the renewing of our minds transforming us to be more Christ-like.

So how do we renew our minds? Let's look at a few verses here of what the Bible tells us. So over in Philippians 4 8 it reads finally brethren whatsoever things are true whatsoever things are honest whatsoever things are just whatsoever things are pure whatsoever things are lovely whatsoever things are of good report if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things.

We ought to focus our minds on thinking on the correct things. So over in Colossians 3 16 it reads So that is letting the word of Christ dwell in you and to teach one another.

[29:34] Psalms 19 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight O Lord my strength and my redeemer so gauging our efforts that they are acceptable.

We always ought to look back make sure what we're doing lines up with what God wants us to do. So we have a couple in Psalms here 119 15 in Psalms I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways Psalm 104 34 reads my meditation of him shall be sweet I will be glad in the Lord.

Psalm 1 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night. So those verses in Psalm talked about meditating on God's word continually.

We look over into Isaiah in chapter 26 verse 3 Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee. And 2 Corinthians 4 14 through 18 knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus and shall present us with you for all things are for your sakes that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God for which cause we faint not but though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far

more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal so that tells us we ought to keep our eyes focused not on this world but on the eternal so we must renew our minds continually it should not be an up and down cycle waiting until we've fallen behind before trying to catch back up our efforts need to be constant steadfast and immovable this renewing of our minds will prove the perfect will of God it will allow us to guard from being conformed to this world and allow us to be the acceptable living sacrifice that we are called to be

Hebrews 12 verses 1 and 2 tell us wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God we are to run with patience keeping our eyes on Jesus it's through him that we are able to overcome the world so I want to encourage you this morning we read Romans 12 1 and 2 and those are a declaration it tells us what we ought to be doing but as I kind of alluded to earlier that section really goes down through verse or through chapter 15 so I encourage you to read through that because it really gives you an outline of how you can live your life as a living sacrifice and I think it's something you know we ought to just keep in our minds because as you were saying earlier the world is that pressure on top of us right and it has that force against us and if we try to do things in our own power that force can overcome us it can gain an inch on us but if we keep our minds in the right place and focusing on the right things

[33:15] God will help us and he's the one that's able to overcome the world right let's go ahead and pray and