

Consecration And Transformation

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[0 : 00] Let's turn briefly to Romans chapter 12 this evening. I'd like to look at the first couple of verses. So we'll just read through these two verses again. Romans 12, beginning at verse 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. 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 perfect, acceptable and perfect.

Well, it's obvious as you come to chapter 12 of Romans that you're moving into the area of application, the application of the teaching that we've had in the previous 11 chapters. So this is really Paul beginning to apply the doctrine that you find in these earlier chapters, especially chapters 1 to 8, but nevertheless chapters 9 to 11, which deal largely with the relation of Jew and Gentile, and how that has its own place in God's scheme of salvation.

You then come to 12, where he begins to apply all that great teaching that's gone before now. In other words, you could say that chapters 1 to 11 are really establishing the doctrine that we are justified or righteous by faith, that we have righteousness in Christ, and it comes out to be ours by faith in Christ, and our part, of course, being the gift of God.

But being righteous by faith is really what's being established in these earlier chapters. And then when you come to 12, you could say that that's now concerned with how the righteous are to live.

[1 : 42] We are righteous in Christ, but this is the righteous life that follows on from being righteous in Christ. How shall we live? The righteous shall live by faith, is the verse from the Old Testament that's quoted and taken on by Paul into this area.

So the application of it really is in terms of our personal lives, but also in terms of our relationships, both in the church and in marriage and out with the home, in our relationships to the world around us.

So tonight, in these verses of the chapter, we're looking at two things, really. Consecration, in the first verse, being consecrated to God. We'll see how that's emphasizing the presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice.

And secondly, you have transformation mentioned in verse 2. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal, or actually renewing of your mind, so that you may know what is the will of God.

So the two things, the consecration of our bodies and the transformation of our minds. And of course, you have to maintain very closely the connection between body and mind in the teaching of the apostle here as much as anywhere else.

[3 : 00] Now he begins with an appeal. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. In other words, Paul is urging the Romans, having set out all that great doctrine, he now comes to apply it, but he does it first and foremost by beginning that application, by an urging, by an appeal, by saying, I appeal to you, therefore.

Having said what I've said, this is the conclusion now that I'm coming to. He's saying, I appeal to you. And it's a very strong word, and it reminds us that our holiness, our righteous living is not simply automatic.

It's not something that just flows without any thought on our part, that flows from our righteousness in Christ. We have to think about it. We have to think about it daily. We have to pray over it.

We have to seek the Spirit of God to live within us and to guide us from within. All of that comes into it. And he's appealing to them as brothers. And that's important, too, because he wants them to realize that this is really the case with him as well.

Although he's an apostle, he's not outside the scope of what he's appealing to these Romans for. He has to follow the same pattern of life as he's calling upon them to live by as well.

[4 : 17] And we need these exhortations from God. I was quite far on in my Christian life before I came across the teaching that said, every facet of God's word relates in some way or other to how you use your faith.

In other words, where you have these different elements in the word of God, such as promise or law or warning, all of these relate in some way to your faith, to your believing.

But your faith acts very precisely in relation to these. And then you go to the confession of faith, and you'll find that there's a paragraph there that specifies that, that by faith, we, in our faith, we, as it says, tremble at the threatenings and rejoice in the promises.

So when you rejoice at the promises of God, that is your faith in action. When you tremble at the threatenings, when you actually are filled with awe at these commands, at these instructions that God gives, or the warnings that God gives, which are also for his people, you have an element of trembling, of awe as you read that and as you assimilate that into your own life.

So these are all aspects of faith in its exercise. But he's especially referring here to by the mercies of God. He's saying, I appeal to you to do this.

[5 : 39] And before he actually comes to tell them what he is appealing for them to do, he says, by the mercies of God that you do this. And when you go back over the previous part of the epistle, all the way through the epistle, Paul has been dealing, you could say, largely with the mercies of God, the mercy of God.

And he uses the plural here because the mercy of God, as it's seen in different ways, can be said really to be mercies. Right from the very beginning of Romans, he's talking about the mercy of God in the gospel, set out in the gospel of his Son.

You find the mercy of God in relation to the wrath of God. How God does not exercise his wrath as thoroughly as we deserve. You find him mentioning the mercy of God in the application of redemption to us.

First of all, its establishment in Christ. And how he then goes on to speak about our union with Christ. And how God detaches us from the power of sin. And establish us in the way of being led by the Spirit as the children of God.

The mercy of God in our adoption. The mercy of God all the way through there. You can go through it yourself. Pick out the number of times in Romans up to now that Paul has used the word mercy.

[6 : 55] And you can see that that's why he's now saying, By the mercies of God, now live your lives to, first of all, present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

And of course that reminds us too that it's an appreciation of the grace of God that constrains us to live a life of gratitude, of thankfulness, of holiness.

The more you appreciate the workings of grace against the dark background of sin to which the wrath of God is directed and our rescue from that, the more you're filled with thanksgiving.

And the more we appreciate that great doctrine of salvation and all the doctrines within it, the more you are then constrained to live out that grace, that salvation in your daily life.

But notice he's saying, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Now, in many ways that's remarkable because it's the language of the Old Testament in relation to sacrifices.

[8 : 03] He's really talking here about offerings, that you offer your bodies, that you present just like you'd find the priesthood in the Old Testament coming with the offerings of sacrifices that God had required.

That's the same kind of language that's actually used here in respect to our dedication or consecration of ourselves to God. But he is focusing, especially here, on presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice.

That's interesting in itself. We can't translate this, or sometimes you find it translated by those who think maybe it shouldn't really specify bodies, although it obviously does, because the following balance is given by transforming your mind.

So you've got the body as well as the mind in these two verses. And he's saying here, present your bodies, offer your bodies, give your bodies to God, just as the sacrifices in the Old Testament were dedicated to God, consecrated to God, given up to God.

That, he says, what the Christian is obliged to do by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice. These animals in the Old Testament were dead, but you're not dead.

[9 : 23] And therefore, he's saying, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, a living offering to God. So it's not the whole person, as some people might translate it, present yourselves to God.

That's a fact that we need to present ourselves. We'll see that because the mind is included as well. But here, it is really specifying the body. Now, in Greek thought, which followed on into Roman thought, for a long time, the body was regarded as something dishonorable, something that really prevented the spirit from functioning properly, something that trapped your spirit until the moment that your spirit was released.

And you find that within other religious customs as well. Think, for example, of the Hindu practice of funeral pyres, which is a horrible thing to see.

But not so long ago, there was, I can't remember just who it was, some prominent Hindu that was given prominence on the news. And you could see the funeral pyre being lit.

And then there's a specific moment during that ritual when somebody comes and breaks the skull of that dead body so that the spirit in their thinking, of course, is then released.

[10 : 45] And that's the idea that the body contains or entraps or imprisons the spirit and needs to be released. Whether it's in that way or some other way, it doesn't really matter.

But that's the idea. Now, Christianity has actually overturned that. And Christianity, the religion that we have, the salvation that God is talking about, that Paul is talking about, God's way of salvation treats the body with respect.

It gives the body an equal place in God's redemption. In fact, you'll find a way back in chapter 8 there that we are waiting for something, he says, to happen while we're in this world so that as we come to look forward in hope and in faith to the world to come, we talk about the creation groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, verse 22.

Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Now, isn't that interesting? You might think that we already have been adopted, and we have been. We are adopted in Christ when we come to know Christ, when we come to be joined to Christ by the grace of God.

[12 : 07] One of the benefits of that is that we are adopted. We receive the blessing of adoption. We are taken into the family of God. But here he's using the adoption very specifically, the word looking forward to the resurrection, the resurrection of our bodies.

So, in a sense, he is saying, well, our adoption is certainly real right now. We are adopted as we are as children of God. But there's a sense in which our adoption waits the perfection of our body, our body being perfect and raised from the ground in our resurrection.

That, he says, is the final completion of our person in the holiness and the redemption that we have in Christ. And we're waiting for that. We're eagerly longing for that, he says.

For Paul, that's really such an important thing, that the resurrection really is the thing that he aims for and is looking towards. Not just death to be with Christ. Yes, it's far better.

But there's something missing. I know it's difficult to say that because heaven is perfect. We know that, even in terms of our souls being there. But Paul's redemption is complete redemption.

[13 : 21] God's redemption, Paul's view of it, is complete. The whole person is in Christ. That means the body as well. So that in this life, here and now, we're to present our bodies to God.

It's part of our consecration to God that our bodies come into what we offer to God. Now, you have to remember that all the way through the Bible, really, but very often in the apostles' own writings as well, you have the different parts of the body that are very much the instruments for sin and for sinful behavior to be taken up and carried on.

For example, your eyes, your ears, your mouth. All of these parts of our body are so easily and so readily, unless very carefully watched, they become vehicles for sin.

They can become channels for further embroilment in sin. What you see and what you hear and how you say things and the words you use.

And now Paul is saying, you present your bodies, you present all of these to God. You say, Lord, I consecrate. I want my tongue to be consecrated. I don't want to speak a bad word today.

[14 : 36] And if I do, please forgive me. I want my eyes to be consecrated. My ears to be consecrated. My listening to be consecrated. My hands to be consecrated. All of the things that belong to our bodily functions.

And how different that is to the world you're living in. How different that is to the prominence that's given to the body and to physical elements of the body in the world's thinking.

See that that's important. In verse 2, you're not to be conformed to this world. And that applies to your body as well. Because your body belongs to Christ. That's why we find so much in the world of our day that's just emphasizing freedom to do as you wish with your body.

Look at the... Look at the... We're told the huge industry that the pornographic industry is. Not just in viewing pornography, but actually in carrying out the same types of stuff that you see in pornography.

That's why people's lives are caught up with such a mess of sexual impropriety and adultery and relationships and all kinds of things that just make such a mess of human lives and human relations.

[15 : 56] What's it about? It's about giving your body to sin. It's about the very opposite thing to what a Christian life is about. What a Christian mindset is.

What a Christian view of the body is. That's what he's really saying. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice. This is really the very reverse of what the world is thinking.

The very reverse of the world's practice. The very reverse of the things that are taught very often in the world. Even to our young people. That's why it's so important, as we've prayed for tonight, to keep on praying for our young people, our children, our schools.

Because this is the kind of stuff that they're taught. Your body is your own possession. It's in your own hand what you do with it. And whatever people think, whatever Christians think, whatever those Bible preachers think, you just do your own thing.

If it feels good, then follow it. And you can see how totally, totally different the Christian lifestyle is.

[17 : 05] Present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Which he says is your reasonable or spiritual worship.

That's not such a good translation there. The words really mean your rational service. Your serving of God. Remember that the priests in the Old Testament bringing the sacrifices, they were serving the Lord.

They were there to serve him in the temple or previously in the tabernacle. And that idea of serving is built into this as well. It's not just worship in the sense we normally think of worship.

It's just really following on from presenting your body as a living sacrifice. That, he says, is your reasonable or rational service. You're doing it rationally.

You're not doing it just as a matter of form. You're not just doing it as a ritual. It's something that you do in terms of it being spiritual or rational.

[18 : 09] In other words, the offering of your body is done consciously. You're conscious of giving your body to Christ, to God. It's not something that you do imperceptibly.

It's not something that you do without really thinking about it. And it's that thinking, it's that mind, which Paul is going to speak about in a minute. It's that mind that really lies behind this non-conformity.

And it's also behind presenting positively our bodies as a living sacrifice. When you pray to God, Lord, please keep my eyes, keep my tongue today from sinning against you, from doing hurt to other people.

You're using your rational mind, your God-given reasoning, your enlightened mind to do that. And that's what he's saying. Present, offer your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your rational service.

Which is why he goes on to speak, secondly, about the transformation of our minds. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

[19 : 26] That really follows on so naturally, doesn't it? From verse 1, that we've seen this rational service, this use of the mind, that is to be very much at the center of our, presenting of our bodies as a sacrifice to God, dedication to God.

Now he's saying, do not be conformed to this world. Well, to conform, as you know, is to be or to become like something or someone. When you conform to something, whether it's a standard or a person, you're wanting to be like that.

You're wanting to be assimilated with that in the sense of being like it. And it says, don't be conformed to this world. What does he mean by this world?

Well, he means by this world, essentially, the culture and the values and the ways of this world. Paul is always contrasting this world in the way that it sees what's important, what's to be a priority for human beings and contrasting that with what God would have us to think and God would have us to do.

The ways of this world are time-bound. Worldliness does not look past the immediate or certainly this life itself. Nothing else beyond that.

[20 : 41] Worldliness is just being confined to the elements, to the very patterns of the world, as if there was no eternity, as if there's nothing better than the world itself that you see in its behavior and its values.

And he's saying that, that's, he says, don't be conformed. Do not be conformed to that. So the patterns of this world is really this age, which again, when you think about it, as he's using the word age, it's really this age up to the return of Christ.

In other words, this age does not allow for resurrection. This age, as it's seen by the world, does not actually admit of anything beyond death. But he's saying, don't be conformed to this world, to the values of this world, to what the world says, to what the anti-God people say about themselves, about the world, about God, about the gospel, about the Bible, about the church, about what humanity is, what makes a human being, relationship, whatever.

Don't be conformed to the pattern of the world. A chameleon and some squids, I think as well, take their coloring from their surroundings.

It's fascinating when you see a film of a chameleon or a squid coming along to the different colors of rocks, let's say, under the sea, and as they move along and come to a completely different color of rock or pattern, it changes.

[22 : 17] It can actually change its whole body so that it blends in with that for its own advantage. The same with the chameleon. Well, Paul is saying, Christian is not a chameleon.

You don't take your color, the color of your life, from your surroundings. You take it from the will of God, as we'll see in a minute. You take it from that which sets the pattern for you. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may know that will of God and go on knowing it and know it increasingly.

That's what he means, as we'll see. But it's, of course, the will of God that really sets the pattern for us as Christians. In other words, when you think about the distinction that that places between or makes between a Christian and the world around, the world in its pattern of life, in its values, in its culture, you go to some words in the Old Testament, first of all.

We can pick up a verse there in Leviticus, and there are other ones very like that. When you go to Leviticus, for example, where God is through Moses instructing the people, Leviticus 18, and we can just read the first five verses there.

these first verses of Leviticus 18. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God.

[23 : 45] You see, that's the first emphasis. I am the Lord your God. I am speaking to you. I am your Redeemer. I am your God. This is coming from me. And he's saying, You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you.

In other words, he's saying to them, The land of Egypt that you lived in, that's not the lifestyle for you. You've left that. The land of Canaan that you're going to, neither is that going to be the pattern for your lifestyle.

You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules.

If a person does them, he shall live by them. I am the Lord. You see how repeatedly he's saying that I am the Lord. This is my standard. This is my rule.

This is my injunction. This is how life will be for you. Don't be tempted to go back to copy the lifestyle of the Egyptians. Don't be tempted to copy the lifestyle of the Canaanites, the sexual debauchery and the religion that you find there.

[25 : 00] That's not for you. This is my standard. He's saying you're different to that. And Paul is now saying don't be conformed to this world. Don't live by that culture around you.

Just the same example if you find some people saying sometimes that this fellow Paul really spoiled the religion of Jesus. Jesus. And actually if we as Christians if we could just confine ourselves in what we commend to the world if we confine ourselves to the Sermon on the Mount verses chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's Gospel that would really be far more suitable and far more acceptable.

And you know I sometimes feel the people who would say that know nothing or little about about the Sermon on the Mount chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew. There isn't any part of Scripture more difficult to live by than the Sermon on the Mount.

It's the most challenging manifesto in all of Scripture. It's the standard of God. And it's ludicrous to think that if that really were the Gospel things would be a lot easier.

If you read through it you can see how it is hugely challenging. How it's impossible without the grace of God and how even by the grace of God it's exceedingly difficult.

[26 : 33] And yet you have elements of that Sermon on the Mount here in Romans 12. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. If your enemy is hungry feed him.

If he is thirsty give him something to drink. That's the Sermon on the Mount. That's the standard of God. Don't be conformed to this world to the pattern of this world. God has given us a standard exceedingly difficult as it is.

And that's why we keep insisting against the teaching that you come across in the world of today against everything that's thrown at us and thrown at our children we need to maintain this absolute.

The moment you go into relativism in other words the moment you start moving away from God's own standard as your absolute and absolute is something that does not change.

It's not subject to the influence of time or of circumstances as they change from year to year or generation to generation. God's absolute God's truth that is the absolute and human life needs security to know the difference between what is and isn't right and wrong and sinful and acceptable.

[27 : 52] It's God's absolute that sets that for us. That's why we need to keep insisting that against all the relativism that you see in the world where the human mind and human ideas and human ideologies and human philosophies and human inventions in terms of what's right morally and in a human life.

Where are you going to go with that? That's all just competing values competing ideas. You're never going to come to a consensus as to which one is going to prevail and to be left as the basis for any society but when you come to this absolute to the standard of God you're on sure ground.

Not going to give way beneath you when the next generation turns to actually be different to this one. So he's saying this non-conforming don't be conformed to this world but be transformed word that's used exactly the same word used in Christ transfiguration on the mount and also in 2 Corinthians 3.18 where you find that we're being transformed into the same image as by the spirit of the Lord in terms of holiness or sanctification of life.

Well he's saying it's be transformed which is the opposite obvious of being conformed instead of being conformed to the world be transformed and the word he's using means go on being transformed something that begins and then continues as God works in your life but we have to actually see that we're attending to this so often the Bible gives us that responsibility to attend to the things even if we know that only by God's help can we do them but he says go on being transformed by the renewal of your mind that fits as we said with word reasonable or spiritual or rational in the first verse by the renewal of your mind now there's so much in that and the time's really gone but the mind and the teaching of the apostle especially is very much the control room if you like of the human life what the mind actually concludes what the mind thinks what the mind actually comes to decide upon everything in terms of the mind is what then makes everything else if you like follow on from that in terms of our other functions give your mind to these things as he said remember he said to the Colossians if you or since you have been risen with Christ set your mind on the things which are above let your mind be upon these things of Christ and the things of heaven and of salvation and how are we transformed how is that transformation how does it take place well it's by two things it's by two combined things in our experience that's the spirit of God and the word of God the spirit of God in the Bible are God given means by which we come to go on being transformed when God transforms you in the first instance by taking you and joining you to Christ and converting you and bringing you out of the way of life you once had and putting you on a new journey and a new life altogether the transforming of your mind begins at that stage and it goes on being transformed by that spirit of

God as 2 Corinthians 3 18 puts it you go on being transformed and you attend to that transformation so that he says by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect now again that's not a very good translation I think there are different ways of translating it you'll find that in all the different versions that you you can consult it means something like this that you may approve what is the good and perfect and acceptable in other words he's looking at the good the perfect the acceptable as an entity there for you to discover for you to discover more and more of what is the good what is the acceptable what is the perfect and he's saying in order to discover more and more of that you do so by going on being renewed in your mind by growing in your

[32 : 34] Christian stature and as you do so you come to realize and know that the good the acceptable and the perfect is in fact the will of God that's I think how it should be taken what God is saying in the Bible his revealed will as the standard the pattern for our lives and contrary to that of the world that's the good that's the perfect that's the acceptable that's what's really essential for us to measure our lives by to live our lives by to consult to grow in appreciation of to commend to others so these are the two great things the consecration of our bodies in contrast to the standards the spirit the pattern of the world and the transformation of our mind instead of being conformed to this age to the values of this world we are instead to be transformed by the ongoing renewal or renewing of our minds may God bless these thoughts to us let's pray

Lord our God and our heavenly father we do give thanks that you have not only provided for us that great standard of your truth revealed in the scriptures and revealed dispersion in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord but we give thanks too for the mind that you give to your people to accept it and to regard it as such help us Lord to be true to that standard in our own lives both when we are on our own and when we are in public in all our relationships and everything that we seek to do bodily as well as by our spirits Lord we pray that you would help us never to be conformed to this world and help us more and more to be by your spirit molded into the image of our saviour so receive our thanks hear the prayers of your people hear silently as well as spoken for Jesus sake Amen