

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **A Call to Give Yourself to God**

*Romans 12:1-2*

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# A Call to Give Yourself to God

## Scripture

Let's continue our study in Paul's letter to the Romans. We are in Romans 12. Paul is now going to make a grand declaration about the first principles of Christians living. He's going to issue a Christian manifesto on living the Christian life.

You can't get more practical—or theological—than Paul is here. For Paul, Christian living is a theological matter. If you don't understand the *truth* of grace, then you're not able to live the *life* of grace, because the *life* of grace is grounded in the *truth* of grace.

So, Paul, having told us so much about the truth of God's grace, the sovereignty of his grace, the mercy of God, and so many other of these grand truths in Romans 1-11, now comes to Romans 12 and begins to flesh out for us grace in the Christian life.

For much of the rest of the letter, he's going to be showing us what grace produces in the Christian life. Let's turn our attention then to God's word in Romans 12:1-2.

Let's read Romans 12:1-2:

**<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. (Romans 12:1-2)**

## Introduction

Romans 12:1-2 are two small but hugely important verses in which Paul lays down the first principles of Christian living.

He states in these two little verses at least six truths that are vital for the living of the Christian life. Let's study these six truths.

## I. The Foundation of Christian Living is God's Mercy (12:1a)

First, the foundation of Christian living is God's mercy. We see that in verse 1a, **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God. . . ."**

The starting point of the Christian's life is God's mercy. The basis of the Christian holiness that God is calling us to, in the last part of this book, is God's mercy.

Paul is calling us to live for God, to love God, to obey God, to delight in God's word, to delight in God's will, to delight in God's law, to live it out because of **the mercies of God** toward us.

Christian living, Paul says, is grounded on our having received mercy and on our understanding of God's mercy in our lives. Paul is exhorting us to obedience to God because of what God has done for us. He says, in light of God's mercy, you do this: you be a living sacrifice, you give yourself as a sacrifice for God in view of the mercy of God.

This is vital for us to understand at the outset. The Christian life is not God saying to us, "Do this and live." It is rather, "I have given you life. Now, do this!"

So, doing is transformed. Doing is not something whereby we purchase acceptability with God. Doing is that whereby we express our gratitude for the mercy of God, as well as manifest what God's mercy is designed to accomplish in us.

God's mercy not only has the goal of seeing us justified before him and accepted and accounted as righteous, it has the goal of making us to be righteous.

Calvin, you may remember, if you have read his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, calls this double grace. God wants us to be acquitted and declared righteous. But he also has the goal of one day having us standing perfect before him. He begins that labor now. It never ends in this life. We may wish that it did. It's an ongoing project, it is never complete in this life, but its goal is that we would, not only on that last day be declared righteous, but that we

would actually be righteous as we stand before him through the work of his mercy.

Paul wants you to understand that all his calls to obedience must be set against that backdrop of what God has already done, or you'll be entirely confused, and you'll be tremendously discouraged. And some of you will become resentful.

If you think that Paul is saying, "If you'll just obey, and if you'll just obey well enough, God will love you," you'll probably either end up rejecting Christianity, or you'll end up clinging on to some kind of Christianity, but you'll be angry with God all the time.

But that's not what Paul is asking you. He's not saying, "Just obey well enough and God will show you his mercy." He is saying, "God has already shown you his mercy in Jesus Christ. In light of that, give yourself as a living sacrifice. Love God and obey God and love his law and live the Christian life because of his mercy to you."

That's the first thing that Paul is saying in this verse. And it's not just something that Paul is saying in passing. Everything else will be warped if you don't understand what he's saying there. "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God**" are the first words out of Paul's mouth in the first part of this verse, and there is a reason. The reason is that our living for God is because of his prior mercy to us.

## II. God Calls Christians to Whole-life Sacrifice (12:1b)

Second, God calls Christians to whole-life sacrifice. Paul says in verse 1b: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.**"

Paul urges us **to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.** He's telling us that this call to holiness that he's issuing here means a whole-life sacrifice. Christian living, in other words, means dying for Christ.

Now, we don't live in a culture where people offer animal sacrifices or other types of ritual sacrifices. That doesn't go on in our culture. We're not familiar with it. But, the people that Paul was writing to knew very well the typical practices of sacrifice, so something of the shock of what Paul is saying would have hit home to them. They would have been used to putting something else upon an altar to sacrifice it as an offering to God. Now, suddenly Paul says, "Climb up there yourself and give yourself as a sacrifice to God."

It would be like Paul is saying, "Here is my evangelistic campaign theme: *Die for Jesus!*" Now, you're expecting something more uplifting. Something more positive, like: *Here's Life!* Or, *I found it!* Or, *Change Your World!* Or, something like that. That is something that would draw somebody to an evangelistic campaign. That would be a positive, uplifting, *what's-in-it-for-me?* kind of theme.

But here is Paul's theme: *Die for Jesus!* Now you're seeing why he had to start off by saying, "**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy. . . .**" Paul is calling for us to give everything for Jesus Christ. To put ourselves on the altar and to give up everything for him.

Salvation is the free gift that costs you everything. Paul is looking for whole-life sacrifice from Christians and he stresses that in the very words he uses. He says, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.**"

Paul is not saying, "All I want is your external you. You know, you can keep the internal stuff. I want the external you. I want the body and the actions that the body can do."

No, Paul wants the whole of your self given to God, so he uses this language of giving your bodies as a living sacrifice.

If I could be crass for just a moment with a familiar phrase. It's almost like Paul is saying, "Don't just give Jesus your heart. He wants more than that. He wants all of you."

That's a major issue for evangelicals today, because there are

a lot of people want to give Jesus their hearts but they don't give Jesus anything else. They want to live their own way, they want to act their own way, they want to have their own priorities, they want to give Jesus their hearts an hour or two, at most, a week. The rest of themselves and the rest of their lives they want to keep under somebody else's rule—their own.

But Paul is saying, “Don't just give Jesus your heart, He wants more than that. He wants all of you. Give Jesus all of you. Die for Jesus. **Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.**”

John Calvin understood that. He understood that in a very intense and personal way. He once wrote, “We are not our own, therefore let not our reason, nor our will sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own, let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own. Insofar as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we belong to God. Let us therefore, live for him and die for him, we belong to God. Let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We belong to God. Let all the parts of our lives accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.”

Those are beautiful words, powerful words, but you may think, “Well, that's really nice, but he never had to do the things that I have to do.”

I want to say this about John Calvin's Christian testimony: he lived that particular truth. He pastored the congregation of Geneva for just over 2½ years. They got tired of him and they ran him off. He went to Strasbourg and he took up a charge with a French-speaking congregation. And those people loved it. They loved him and his ministry. He was growing and fellowshiping with friends in the faith. They were having a major continental impact for the Reformation.

Then he received a letter from the Geneva congregation saying, “John Calvin, you are needed back here in Geneva.”

He wrote to his friend, and said, “When I received that letter,

I would have rather died than go back to Geneva, but I am not my own. I belong to God and therefore that is where I am going.”

The apostle here is calling on us to realize that salvation is the free gift that costs us everything. Christian discipleship means giving the totality of ourselves to God.

### **III. God Calls Christians to Whole-life Worship (12:1c)**

Third, God calls Christians to whole-life worship. Paul says in verse 1c: “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.**”

What’s his point? Christian living, Christian service, Christian worship is not a one- or a two-hour-a-week activity. It’s a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week activity; it’s a whole-life activity. In other words, the kind of worship God wants from us is whole-life worship. It’s all-of-life worship.

Worship is not an activity confined to Sunday morning or evening. I don’t mean by saying this to downplay the importance of corporate worship at all. It’s just that God wants his worship in all of our lives, in the priorities that we choose, he wants us to be worshipping him. In the restraint of our own sinful habits, he wants us to be worshipping him.

I read the story of a minister who was preaching in Latvia. As he went into his house, a man burst through his door, held a knife to his head, blindfolded him, stuffed a rag into his mouth, and put him on the floor. The man thought he was going to die right there. As he was on the floor, he thought, “You know, I had this knife poking me in my spine and I thought I could die at any moment. It’s always been my practice that when I experience pain in life, to think of the pain that Christ experienced for me. So, I began meditating.”

He was on the floor for forty-five minutes experiencing this attack. And he meditated on the pain of Christ, the suffering of Christ on his behalf, the sovereignty of God, the mercies of God to

him, while he was being robbed. What was he doing? He was worshipping God. There was no corporate worship service call for that hour, but he was worshipping God with his mind, with his heart, while he was being robbed.

But it is not only in those extraordinary events of life that we are to be engaged in whole-life worship. We are to worship God in every activity. We are to worship God when we eat. We are to worship God when we work. We are to worship God when we study. We are to worship God when we play. We are to worship God when we sleep. We worship God when we are conscious that we are doing every activity for the smile and approval of God.

Paul is saying, “That’s what I want from you, Christian. I want a Christian who is a 24/7 worshiper. I want you to think of worshipping and adoring God in every activity of your life.”

#### **IV. God Calls Christians to Godly Nonconformity (12:2a)**

Fourth, God calls Christians to godly nonconformity. Paul says in verse 2a: **“Do not be conformed to this world.”**

Paul is willing to give some “do nots.” You might think, “That’s not good for Paul to be negative. There are so many negatives out there.” But it’s realistic. You have to have some “do nots” in a fallen world, and here is Paul’s first “do not.”

**“Do not be conformed to this world.”** In other words, Paul is calling us to a godly nonconformity.

Now, this isn’t some sort of a sixties radical subversive thing going on. This isn’t just nonconformity for the sake of nonconformity. This isn’t deciding, “Okay, everybody else in my culture has really nice china, so I’m not going to have really nice china.” That’s not what Paul is after here.

Paul is talking about a godly nonconformity. He’s talking about your life being based on divine norms not ruled by the culture around you. You’re not dominated by the *mores* of the society around you. You, in your living, have God’s will uppermost in your heart and mind and behavior. Not the prevailing social norms,



but God's will. Conformity to this world and to its way of thinking and behaving is the great problem of nominal Christianity.

Nominal Christianity is big, and so you run into disconnects all the time in talking to professing Christians. Like a father who was in my study one time and wanted me to perform the marriage ceremony for his daughter. She was a professing Christian but she was also living with her fiancé. The man was in tears wanting me to perform the ceremony, but he did not see that his daughter's life was inconsistent with her profession of faith.

**“Do not be conformed to this world.”** That is what Paul is saying. Paul is looking for Christians whose mind is not double. It's not dominated by the prevailing thoughts about what's acceptable around them. It's dominated by what God says in his word.

## **V. God Calls Christians to Inside-Out Transformation (12:2b)**

Fifth, God calls Christians to inside-out transformation. Paul says in verse 2b: **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”**

The Christian life flows from a renewed inner man. It's brought about by a recreated mind and heart under the control and influence of the word of God. **Be transformed.** Paul is interested in the inner life.

When I used the crass statement earlier, “Jesus doesn't want your heart. Don't give Jesus your heart. He wants more than that,” I didn't mean to denigrate the importance of the inner life, because Paul goes right to that in verse 2.

Paul is always talking about the inner man. He's always talking about the mind or the heart. He knows that true religion flows from a renewed inner life. When he speaks of the mind, he's talking about our believing faculty, our thinking faculty, our willing faculty, and our desiring faculty, especially those things. Feelings are probably thrown in there somewhere, but they are not as important as the faculty in which we believe and think and will and de-

sire.

He says that has to be transformed in order to live the Christian life. Well how is it transformed? Through its renewal.

And how is it renewed? Through being brought captive to the word of God.

Do you remember the story of Martin Luther standing before the leaders at the Diet of Worms? He said, in part, “My conscience is captive to the word of God.” That’s what the apostle wants for every Christian. He wants Christians whose consciences, minds, and inner man is captive to the word of God because the Christian life flows from a renewed inner man.

We live in a world where it is increasingly common for Christians to think that their opinions about a particular matter are just as valid as God’s, or that their opinions about a particular matter including theology are just as valid as the Bible.

Mark Dever, pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, was teaching a theological seminar at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the days before it was solidly evangelical. Dr. Dever was teaching a theological seminar one day and he made an assertion from Scripture about God.

A student in the class interrupted him and said, “Excuse me, Sir, but I like to think of God as wise, but not meddling; compassionate but not overpowering; resourceful but not interrupting. That’s how I like to think about God.”

Dr. Dever responded, “Thank you Bill for telling us so much about yourself, but we’re here to learn about God from the Bible.”

Now it is sad but you run into Christians like that all the time. They don’t like what the Bible says about God, so they come up with an “improved” version. That will not renew a mind. It will not produce the transformation that grounds the Christians life. The Bible must be the force that works in the transforming and the renewal of our deepest inner self. That inner mind must be subdued and recreated by the word of God.

That brings us to the sixth truth that is vital for the Christian life.

## VI. God Calls Christians to Do the Will of God (12:2c)

Sixth, God calls Christians to do the will of God. Paul says in verse 2c: **“That by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

Paul knows that minds which have been transformed by the renewing work of God’s Holy Spirit in accordance with the Word of God will be able to discern what they ought to do. You can’t *do* the will of God if you don’t *know* the will of God. And you can’t make a discerning choice if you don’t know the truth of God. And so the renewed mind, according to God’s word, is a mind that is able to be discerning in a world that needs discernment.

Sin never makes things easier. It always complicates things. We live in a fallen world. That means to live as Christians in a fallen world can be a complicated thing and you need discernment, and Paul says that a transformed mind that is captive to the word of God becomes a discerning mind.

### Conclusion

May God help each one of us to take to heart the message that the Apostle Paul gives us here in Romans 12:1-2. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
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**PRAAYER:**

Taken from Ray Ortland's *A Passion for God*:

O Lord, you have shown us your glory, bright with your sovereignty, your mercy, your justice, with your overruling of our sin by an invincible salvation, with your assurances of a love that will never cast us off, with your promises of eternal joys yet to come. And now you confront us. We have no right to be indifferent to your mercies. The only way forward into a new life with you is through the complete surrender that true faith always entails. That is right. A nominal faith is unworthy of you. It insults. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. And so we are telling you right now, dear Lord, that you have us. All of us. We hereby consecrate ourselves to a life of unworldly love, with you at the center. Remake us, according to your will.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.