

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Harvest Christian Fellowship (<https://hcfellowship.com/>)
Sunday, September 18, 2022

Romans 12:1 “An Appeal for Total Commitment”

Intro. Have you found living the Christian life to be very difficult or even impossible? Are you about ready to give up?

If that is the case, perhaps you are trying to live the Christian life without first laying the proper foundation. The way Paul has written the book of Romans illustrates the point I am making. You see, before he deals with the practical aspects of living the Christian life in chapters 12-15, he first lays the doctrinal foundation in chapters 1-8, and then chapters 9-11 present solid doctrine as well. This is right in line with Paul’s custom. You see, what we believe helps to determine how we behave. The truth of the gospel should transform us, as stated in v.2, and lead to holy living (cf. Jn. 8:32, 34). So trying to live the Christian life without first laying the doctrinal foundation is like trying to build a roof without first laying the foundation and building walls to support the roof! However, with this doctrinal foundation, the life that is demanded from us as believers is indeed possible, for it is simply the logical development of the work of redemption.

Now, let’s see how the doctrinal foundation relates to practical living. Before a person should be taught about how God wants him to live, he must first be saved or “born again.” Notice that Paul addresses these words to his “brothers.” So in chapter 3-5 he talks about how we are made right with God, and tells us some of the blessings of salvation. Until you are made right with God, and born again, you *cannot* live the Christian life. Then he explains that the believer has died to sin and been joined to Christ in His resurrection life (chap. 6). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been given to him to help regulate and empower his life (chap. 8). Only after a person has been convinced that consistent right living is possible through Christ will he be able to obey the ethical commands of the last 5 chapters. As Jesus taught, change a person on the inside, and change their thinking, and then the outward conduct will change for the better (cf. v.2).

After a person has been saved and has learned about his union with Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit, where does he begin in living his life for the Lord? Well, before Paul begins teaching us how to live the Christian life, he first gives one more foundation upon which his ethical teachings can be built. You must get verses one and two of chapter 12 settled with God before you will be able to obey the rest of Romans. We will only cover v.1 today, and cover v.2 next Sunday. I am taking so much time because these verses are so important. I believe these 2 verses should be memorized by every believer. So let’s study these verses together. Now first of all, notice that:

I. AN APPEAL IS MADE

Paul begins v.1 by saying, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers....” Paul uses a word (*parakaleo*) that literally means “to call along side.” It is what you do when you call someone to your side to give them some exhortation, comfort, or encouragement. It means to “implore”, to “entreat”, to “exhort”. It expresses a strong appeal but falls just short of a direct command.

What does He base his appeal on? Paul does not make appeal for action based on his apostolic authority. Nor is he pleading for a personal favor. Instead, notice the basis of his appeal. He gives:

A. An Appeal to Our Mind – Notice the word “therefore.” I believe that word points back not only to chapter 11 but to the entire doctrinal presentation of Romans. In chapters 1-3 Paul has proven that sin is a universal problem that results in the divine wrath. Yet we see in chapters 3-4 that God in His love, mercy and grace has made salvation from sin possible through the sacrificial death of Christ for us. He has pointed out that we receive salvation and eternal life as a gift, apart from works. Beginning in chapter 6 we see that we have also received the Holy Spirit as a gift, to enable us to overcome the destructive power of sin in our lives. We have been graciously predestined to be conformed to Christ and share in His eternal glory. Such a destiny is secure because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We have received so much from the Lord. Think about that! What should our response be? Paul tells us in v.1, “Therefore, present your bodies a living sacrifice....” But Paul also makes:

B. An Appeal to Our Heart - Paul could have appealed to the severity of God’s judgment in his pleas for living the Christian life. But here Paul appeals to us “by the mercies of God.” This (*oiktirmos*) is not the typical word for “mercy” (*eleos*), but is a word that refers more to tender compassions.¹ God was not indifferent to our sufferings caused by sin. Instead, because of His compassion, He was moved to action to show mercy. And notice that “mercies” is used in the plural. This probably denotes the many displays of God’s compassionate mercy he has touched on in chapters 1-11. Though deserving of divine wrath, he has granted through Christ the forgiveness of sin, peace and sonship, sanctification, union with Christ, life in the Spirit, and the hope of glorification. But the greatest act of mercy shown by God was the suffering and death of His Son on the cross! What mercy and compassion that Christ would suffer so much for hell-bound sinners.

Should we not respond to such compassion and kindness? If we fail to respond to such love and mercy, then our hearts must be ice cold! So Paul’s entreaty teaches us that until we really apprehend how much we owe to the mercy of God, we will never serve Him and worship Him in the right way, nor be effectually stimulated to obey Him.

Now based on what God has done for you, He has a right to expect you to obey Him and serve Him. He gave His *all* for us. We should give our all to Him!

So we need to understand that due to the clear evidence of the compassionate mercy of God, He has the right to lay claims upon us. Therefore, not only is an appeal made, but we also see that:

¹ In the LXX it translates the Hebrew *rachuw*, based on *racham*, “to love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate, have tender affection.” Ex. 34:6 says, “The LORD, the LORD, a God [who is] merciful...” Deut. 4:31 says, “For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you...” In 2 Sam. 24:14 David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great...” Neh. 9:19 says, “you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.” Psa. 51:1, “... according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.” Ps. 77:9, “Has he in anger shut up his compassion?”

II. THE APPEAL IS EXPRESSED

What specifically does Paul appeal for us to do? He goes on to say in v.1, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Sacrifice was the focal point and supreme obligation of ancient religion. Paul focuses now on the kind of sacrifice *we* should offer to God as Christians. In fact, the metaphor of sacrifice runs throughout this verse. In light of the sacrifice of Christ for us we, certainly should be willing to present our bodies to him as a living sacrifice. Now consider with me Paul’s appeal:

A. Let Us “Present” Our Bodies to God – There are two things involved here: our innermost self that does the presenting and our bodies that are presented. It should almost go without saying that it is useless to give our bodies if we have not, first of all, given ourselves. Paul spoke well of the Macedonians when he said, “They first gave their own selves unto the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5; NKJV).

Now the word translated “present” (*paristemi*) means “to dedicate” (Luke 2:22) or “to place at the disposal of.” God wants you to commit yourself to the Lord, to do His will, to surrender yourself to Him completely. The word also is used of a servant who stands by, always ready to carry out the commands of his or her lord (Luke 1:19; John 18:22; Acts 23:2, 4; Rom. 16:2). This meaning is the one Paul has already used in Romans 6:13, “present yourselves to God ... and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (see also 6:16, 19).

I believe this presentation of ourselves involves a definite act of the will. He doesn’t use the verb tense that would refer to an ongoing presentation of ourselves, but rather a tense that is consistent with a once and for all presentation of ourselves to God. It commands a definite commitment of the body to the Lord.

I believe that marriage is a good illustration of what I am talking about. On our wedding day, Cheryl presented herself to me as my beautiful bride.² After 44 years I can still well remember her coming through the back doors of the church on the arm of her father, walking toward me to commit herself to me in marriage. I’m glad she didn’t turn around and walk out! Then, when she arrived at the marriage altar, I also presented myself to her. We made a decisive act of commitment that will last for a lifetime. She presented her body to me, and I presented my body to her. She stands ready to serve me, and I stand ready to serve her.

Even so, when I was 17 years old, I made such a commitment to the Lord, and my life has never been the same. Everyone could see that a clear and complete change took place in my life.

Have you made such a complete commitment of your life to Christ? Does your life and body belong to God for the rest of your life? It seems that too many professing Christians have not made such a commitment. They hold back ownership of certain parts of their lives. Some seem to lay their lives on the altar on Sundays, or in a crisis situation, but they keep getting off the altar! I am not impressed with people who keep making rededications to the Lord over and over again. Brother, if your rededication does not last more than a month, it isn’t worth much! Before you *rededicate* your life to the Lord, you need to make sure you have truly and completely *dedicated* yourself to the Lord like Paul is talking about here!

When I give you an invitation to respond to this message at the end of the service, will you in your heart present yourself to God in total commitment to Him, ready to obey His every

² In fact, Eph. 5:27 says of Christ, “so that he might present the church to himself” in the context of a marriage illustration.

command? If you are a Christian, and if you have not been living in obedience and service to God, then you *should* make such a commitment today.

Now what specifically are we to present and dedicate to the Lord?

B. Our Presentation to God Includes “Our Bodies”– Did Paul simply say “present yourself” to the Lord? No, Paul specifically mentions presenting your body. Paul could well have been addressing the Greek viewpoint of a strong dichotomy between the body and spirit of the person. The body was viewed as the prison of the spirit, and it mattered little morally and spiritually what you did with your body. Even some Christians seem to believe that as long as you worship God in your spirit, it doesn’t matter nearly as much what you do with your body. Yet the Christian needs to understand that their body really belongs to the Lord. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We also recognize that we are physical beings, interacting with the material world. The Holy Spirit must be able to work through our bodies as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13). However, yielding one’s body to God isn’t always easy, because the body tends to be the battleground of temptation for most people. In 1 Peter 2:11 Peter talks about “the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”

This issue is very relevant today. Paul is appealing against using the body for sinful pleasures, which is so common today. For example, Paul said in 1 Cor. 6:13, “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (NKJV). You need to overcome committing sin with your body. We sacrifice sinful pleasures, but God gives us better joys instead.

But the appeal does not just encompass the negative. Our bodies are also to be presented in a positive way. We are to dedicate our bodies to glorify and magnify Christ (Phil. 1:20-21), and to obey and serve Him with our bodies.

C. Our Presentation to God Is a “Sacrifice” – Paul describes this commitment of our bodies to the Lord as a “sacrifice.” Furthermore, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* IV. 6.4) the Greek verb translated “present” was used of offering sacrifice.³ Based on the immediate context, the term has an obvious sacrificial connotation. So we are to heed the call of Christ to deny self and take up our cross and offer our bodies as a sacrifice to God.

Now there are 4 things in particular that Paul says about this sacrifice that we offer to the Lord.

1. We Are to Offer an “Acceptable” Sacrifice - This is an important aspect of sacrifice. In the case of Christ, Paul wrote that “Christ... has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2; NKJV). Paul spoke of a sacrificial missionary gift as “...a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18; NKJV). Peter says that we are to offer up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5; NKJV). In Heb. 13:15-16 the author spoke of the sacrifices of praise and doing good works which are “pleasing to God” (NKJV).

Now, in order to be acceptable and well pleasing to God, animal sacrifices had to be clean, perfect, with no blemish. They had to be the best of the flock to the Lord. Even so, we are to give our best to the Lord. You should give God the best of your day for prayer and Bible reading. We give the first day of the week in worship. You are to give God the first of your income, not what is left over.

³ However, this appears to be the only verse in the New Testament where the word is clearly associated with sacrifice.

In this verse Paul tells us what is involved in offering ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice that is well-pleasing to God.

2. We Are to Offer a Complete Sacrifice - When someone offered in animal sacrifice to the Lord, they did not just offer part of the animal, such as a leg. The burnt offering was wholly given to the Lord. Even so, we must come to the place in our lives where we say, “My body is not my own; it is *all* yours, Lord.” This also means that every part of our body is to be presented and surrendered to the Lord, dedicated for obedience and service. These hands will no longer be used for sin but used in service and worship of God. My eyes are not to engage in sinful lust but be used to behold the glory of creation, to read and study His Word, and to see the needs of souls all around. This mouth and tongue that used to cuss and lie and gossip and slander has been committed to the Lord to sing praises, give thanks, and proclaim the Gospel. Some people have laid everything but their tongues on the altar it seems!

3. We Are to Offer a “Living” Sacrifice – Of course, this is in contrast to animal sacrifices that were so common in Paul’s day. Such sacrifices would end with the death of the animal. But now that Christ has offered Himself as the true sacrifice of our sin, God has done away with animal sacrifices. Instead, He is now looking for living sacrifices. He wants you to have the life that only He can bestow and serve Him as a living sacrifice. The same word and verb form for “living” is used in Romans 6:11 where Paul says you should “reckon yourselves ... alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NKJV), always ready to serve Him with obedience and worship.

The word living, however, may mean perpetual, lasting, such as “living water” (Jn. 4:10-11; 7:38) or “living bread” (Jn. 6:51) that lasts, and keeps satisfying the hunger and thirst of our souls. Peter talks about a “living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3) that never ends in this life. 1 Peter 1:23 says “the word of God ... lives and abides forever” (NKJV). The sacrifice then which we are to make is not a transient, momentary commitment, like the sacrifice of an animal, but it is a living and ongoing sacrifice.⁴

4. We Are to Offer a “Holy” Sacrifice – “Holy” means set apart and dedicated to God for His use. It means separated unto God. Thus, the physical body of the believer is to be put at the disposal of God, presented to Him as holy, both in the sense of being set apart for His service, and holy in the sense of being used for pure and righteous purposes, and thus free from sinful practices. We also should view our bodies as holy temples to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19).

Is your life, your body, your all set apart unto God as holy, separate from sin? Is your sacrifice thus acceptable and well-pleasing to God?

Finally, we also see from our text:

D. The Reasons for this Consecration – You might ask, “Why should I make such a sacrifice unto God? How can God expect so much from me?” Well, I have already given two reasons. We should present ourselves to God because of His great mercies and because of what Christ has done for us.

I see another reason stated at the end of the verse. We should offer such a sacrifice in such a way because it is our highest form of worship. Yet the Greek word translated “worship” has a particular meaning. It (*latreia*) first referred to a service to which a person devotes their life.

⁴ There are two “living sacrifices” in the Bible. The first is Isaac (Gen. 22); the second is our Lord Jesus Christ. Isaac “died” just the same – He died to self and willingly yielded himself to the will of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ actually died as sacrifice, in obedience to His Father’s will. But He arose again. And today He is in Heaven as a “living sacrifice.”

In the New Testament that word refers exclusively to religious service, including the service of worship (see 9:4).⁵ The Priests and the Levites would devote themselves to such service of worship. The fact that it is associated with presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice tells me that real worship is the offering of everyday life to God. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” He says in 1 Th. 5:17, “pray without ceasing.” Worship is not just something you do with the gathered congregation on Sunday, but we worship, serve and obey God every day.

Notice also that our service of worship should be “spiritual” (*logikos*). That translation contrasts sacrifice and worship that is just going through the motions of the physical expressions of worship, like so many of the external ceremonies of the Jewish and heathen cults. We can make the same mistake in our worship. As long as we are physically present in worship, singing songs, praying prayers, saying liturgies, giving offerings or even lighting candles. Such worship is *not* acceptable.

Yet the Greek word has a deeper nuance. Since the word is based on *logos*, the word, it can carry the idea of reason, or since an adjective, what is reasonable. *It* can mean that offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God is only reasonable as an act of the service of worship. Or it can refer to the service of worship that is characterized by reasoned communication. The same word is only found one other place in the New Testament, when Peter says in 1 Pet. 2:2 that we are to “long for the pure spiritual milk,” clearly referring to the Word of God. In John 4:23-24 Jesus says the Father seeks true worshipers, who worship Him in spirit and in truth. When we gather for worship, we are to engage our minds in all aspects of the worship service. God cares more about *what* we sing than *how* we sing in worship. Our songs must accurately reflect the truth of the character of God and His gospel work in our lives. Our service of worship should be reasoned and informed with the proper understanding of the grace of God in our lives. We offer ourselves not ignorantly, like animals brought to the slaughter, but intelligently and willingly. This is the worship that pleases God. So let us dedicate ourselves fully as a living sacrifice to the service of God.

I’m sure most of you have heard about the story behind the WWII movie, “Saving Private Ryan.” It provides a good illustration of what I am trying to get across. In the story, the private had 3 other brothers who were serving our country during WW2. All three died in combat. In the process of writing condolence letters to the grieving parents, it was discovered that Private Ryan was the only son his parents had left. So the War Department ordered that Private Ryan be brought home. 9 men volunteered for the mission to find him. On the way, 2 of the 9 were killed. When the team arrived, Private Ryan did not want to leave his comrades. They were given orders to hold a bridge at all cost. So the remaining 7 soldiers of the search team decided to stay and help the company out. Then the Germans came with tanks and many infantry to cross that bridge. A battle ensued, and many Americans lost their lives, including the commander of the search team. But they saved Private Ryan. As the commander was dying, he looked up to Private Ryan and said, “Earn this.” In other words, several men had died to save him, and bring him home to

⁵ Heb. 9:6 says, “...the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties (*latreia*)....” The verb form of the word is used in Mt. 4:10, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” In Luke 2:37 it says that Anna “did not depart from the temple, worshipping (*latreuo*) with fasting and prayer night and day.” In Rom. 1:9 Paul said, “For God is my witness, whom I serve (*latreuo*) with my spirit in the gospel of his Son....” Rev. 7:15 says, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve (*latreuo*) him day and night in his temple....”

his grieving parents. In light of their sacrifice, the commander expected him to live worthy of their sacrifice.

Years later, Private Ryan visited the grave of that commander and reflected back on his statement, “Earn this.” He even asked his wife, “Am I a good man? Have I lived a good life?”

In light of the mercies of God, and in light of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you, you cannot earn your salvation, but it is very reasonable to respond to such sacrifice and great mercy by presenting yourself wholly and completely to God in obedience and service. This is what has motivated many missionaries to serve in foreign lands. This is what has motivated me to give my entire life in service to Christ until He calls me home to heaven.

Conclusion: So I appeal to your mind and your heart, that you reach the place in your life that you present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. That is your most reasonable service of worship in light of what God has done for you.

I wonder who needs to present yourself to God to receive salvation today? I wonder who among you have been saved, but you haven't presented yourself for baptism? That is one of the first steps of obedience we should render to God. Is God calling someone to be a preacher or missionary? Are you willing to present yourself to God in full-time Christian service today? Do you need to present yourself for church membership this morning? If so, speak to one of our elders after the service this morning.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, “God’s Discipline” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); John MacArthur, Jr., *A Living Sacrifice: Study Notes on Romans 12:1-8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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