



## ***The One Urge to Give In To***

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)*

Although these verses are probably among the top five finalists for New Testament Scriptures remembered word-for-word by nearly every Christian in every historical age to the present, it is an interesting testimony to human behavior and its associated attention span that there is a very important, albeit tiny and critical word which is often passed over which places these verses into the proper context. Unlike many other things conveyed by Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament writers, the word which *is not* found here is “command”, but rather “*urge*”. The topic under discussion falls into the category of what is referred to in God’s Word as a “precept”, a responsibility incumbent on someone *after* they have come into a personal relationship with God. Whereas a “commandment” in its strictest definition is a requirement automatically enforceable when a covenant relationship with God is initiated, this belongs to a higher standard for those now properly engaged in a life in Christ. The very nature of a sacrifice means that it cannot be summarily commanded but must be voluntarily offered in accordance with one’s free will. I submit that Romans 12 holds the answer to why there are so many nominal Christians within the walls of the Church proper, and why repeated studies show that 15% of a typical congregation bears upon its shoulders nearly 100% of the ministry work; it is the difference between those who, after coming to Christ, make this kind of commitment and sacrifice versus those who do not.

An old seminary yarn says, “When you see the word ‘therefore’, stop to see what it is ‘there’ ‘for’.” The English words “therefore”, “so”, “since” and the like are most often used in Scripture to indicate that what is now being presented is a summary of the previous discussion, and very often how to practically apply it to the Christian walk. In this case, a reasonable argument can be made that this may be the biggest, most potent and

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important “*therefore*” of all, summarizing not just the paragraph or chapter which came before it, but in fact funneling attention for the entire *eleven* previous chapters.

Romans is a single, contiguous letter which, when originally written, had no verse and chapter markings nor inserted subtitles to break up the text. I would argue that these particular eleven chapters occupy some of the most important doctrinal real estate in the whole of the Bible, the study and understanding of which define the most important, fundamental doctrines of salvation, justification and sanctification in chapters 1-8, combined with an extensive explanation of God’s plan going forward in chapters 9-11. The “*therefore*” at the head of chapter 12, introducing us to an extensive four chapter discourse on how to put those fundamental doctrines into practice is no small thing. When someone truly grasps the riches of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith brought about through the work of our Lord and Savior, they don’t want to simply sit on their hands and live life as usual; there should be a personal motivation to seek the right way to act upon *all* this information. Paul cannot therefore “command” into existence an urge which must be voluntarily engaged.

But also notice that this is Paul’s definition of “*your spiritual service of worship*”, and that our sacrifice must be conducted under the strict qualifications of being “*acceptable to God*”. This means it must meet the minimum requirements according to His Word, which is narrowly defined here as “*holy*”—“*hagios*” in the Greek. This is describing someone who is “set apart” or “consecrated”, the very definition of what it means to be “sanctified”. This conveys the idea of being exclusively separated and devoted to the service of God, sharing in His quality of purity—that is, unpolluted by sin so as to live in the character of the Old Testament sacrifices which had to be presented without blemish. Having come to the cross for the forgiveness and removal of sin by the perfect, unblemished sacrifice of Christ, the chosen response of our will should be to return as a personal sacrifice an unblemished life which going forward lives exclusively according to His Word and ways. True, biblical “worship” is not singing certain songs together on Sunday mornings, but is living a sanctified, dedicated life to Christ each and every day of the week.

*<sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.  
(Romans 12:2)*

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The right urge is to sacrifice self exclusively according to His Word and ways, and then to continually feed the spiritual life cycle by allowing His Word and ways to complete the work of transformation by following it to the degree that it renews our mind—that is, put into practice so that we no longer act in the character of the old life but the new. The word here rendered “transformed” is the same word used to describe Christ as “transfigured” on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2) and by Paul when describing the resurrection of our bodies. (1 Co. 15:51) Paul also uses it to describe the behind-the-scenes process presently taking place within born-again Christians:

*<sup>18</sup>But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

This kind of sacrifice is not only necessary in order to properly serve and worship Christ, but it is the narrow path by which we come to individually know God’s will. And no, this is not answering the kinds of questions our rooted-in-earth human side wants to know such as, “Who will I marry?”, “Where should I go to school?”, “What are this week’s winning lottery numbers?” “God’s will” is being defined here as something which is *biblically “good”* as defined by His Word, *biblically “acceptable”* as defined by His Word, and *biblically “perfect”* as defined by His Word. Those making the proper sacrifice and no longer pursuing conformity to the world find that His will for them is clearly and plainly spelled out in how they should live and behave by the standards of His Word.

I think this is a big reason why so many within the Church proper are “held back”, so to speak, in perpetual immaturity and nominalism because as long as they cling to themselves either through a vestige of something still rooted in the old life, or falling short of putting God’s Word into practice, they are incapable of making the necessary sacrifice urged here. Authentic spiritual change cannot take place in those who ignore this urge and remain on a plateau of spiritually stunted growth, but rooted in carnal and earthly behaviors. The truly changed and authentic Christ-like life is the one who upon receiving and recognizing the depth and working of the sacrifice Christ made for them, in turn sacrifice everything in return.

*<sup>3</sup>For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup>For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup>Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup>or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)*

There have been times when a particular congregation, recognizing there seems to be a lack of all the necessary spiritual gifts for their ministry as being present, will use one of the many well-known “spiritual gifts surveys” to troubleshoot the issue. The truth is, if the sacrifice and commitment of verses 1-2 are not present, nothing which follows in Romans 12 will be found in anything but the most skeletal of conditions. I would suggest that any gaps in the callings and giftings which your church or ministry is experiencing will be filled subsequent to your members authentically making the sacrifice urged in Paul’s opening statement. Short of that, they are perpetually running the circle of their own desires.

*<sup>9</sup>Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup>not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup>rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup>contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)*

Likewise, the absence of all these characteristics of biblically loving and supporting others as our “*spiritual service of worship*” is not achievable without that initial sacrifice. When so offered and pursued, what will become evident is not merely the gifts and callings which are necessary for the right service and worship of Christ, but the appropriate changes in personal behavior. “*Devoted*”, “*fervent*”, “*rejoicing*”, “*persevering*”, “*contributing*” and “*practicing*” are all not only commonly tied to our treatment of each other, but describing the visible kind of Christianity which inevitably comes to the fore of the life giving in to the urge to make this kind of sacrifice. Again, when some have noticed a lack in these kinds of behaviors, the initial reaction is to evaluate the gifts and offices present, but *neither* are resolved until the personal commitment issue is addressed.

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*<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.  
<sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. <sup>17</sup>Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. <sup>19</sup>Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:14-21)*

Paul's progression has been to go from the personal level on to that of the family and Body of Christ to finally dealing with the world. I would argue that without that initial sacrifice, which produces a person behaving in the right biblical character *within* the Church, that it should be no surprise when they fail being able to live up to these standards where the world is concerned. After all, if one is not making such a sacrifice so as to be "*transformed*", they are still being "*conformed to this world*"; they cannot possibly put into practice what Paul is articulating here.

A big reason I am writing this is because of ongoing discussions as to what to do about people who show up to our church or fellowship who these days are identified as a demographic popularly referred to as "transfer growth". In other words, they are Christians who have lived in our community for a long time, but for one reason or another are changing, or "transferring" to a new church within driving distance of the previous one. It is my experience that although there are those who do this for biblically sound reasons should a church or organization abandon the fundamentals of the faith upon which there can be absolutely no compromise, that this is rarely the case. Granted, nearly everyone makes it *sound* like this is the reason they're looking for "a good church" or pastor, but as you get to know them better it becomes readily apparent that this is not really the reason they're "shopping" for a new church home. Far too often the fact is that there is a spiritual issue, which instead of properly facing, they continue to seek an environment where it will either be justified or ignored. (In some extreme cases it is just to stop by long enough to infect another body before moving to the next.) Ultimately, because they choose to not face up to and deal with their spiritual condition, it keeps following them around no matter how many churches they visit and join. In most of these cases, what is needed is Romans 12:1-2; they need to sacrifice self in combination with putting God's Word and ways into consistent, daily practice.

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This is why, in the olden days of my youth, a typical church service was not limited to initiating an altar call only to the unsaved to be invited to make their first ever commitment to Christ, but was almost always accompanied by a similar offer to Christians who needed to make this kind of self-sacrifice, often characterized as *“rededicating your life to Christ”*. Yes, there is evangelism and evangelists dedicated to bringing the Gospel to those who have never heard or accepted it, but the chief role of prophets is a corollary to this for backslidden believers, calling them back to a crucified life by making the kind of sacrifice urged by Paul.

I know that many of these “transfers” will make an initial, compelling case that they have left a place because of some issue which we might identify with Paul’s teaching about interacting with the world in Romans 12:14-21. There are those who may cite reasonable sounding grounds for some transgression of the teaching in Romans 12:9-13 when it comes to personal behavior from fellow Christians, or in Romans 12:3-8 when it comes to the aspects of the gifting or calling of individual Christians or their ministry organizations as a whole. But in the vast majority of cases, the root source of the problem is actually their personal failure when it comes to Romans 12:1-2. Sometimes, as I offer in this case, clarity can come by examining a Scripture in reverse.

- We are confused as to the will of God to begin with because we fail to recognize it is defined by what is *biblically “good”, biblically “acceptable”, and biblically “perfect”*.
- We cannot apply biblical definitions to God’s will because rather than being *“transformed by the renewing of your mind”*, we are still *“conformed to this world”*; in such a case, we are incapable of applying biblical definitions to our own life and behavior.
- We are still *“conformed to this world”* because we are not engaged in *“spiritual service of worship”* that is *“acceptable to God”*.
- We fall short of being *“acceptable to God”* because whatever the sacrifice we are willing to make, it falls short of His standard that it must be *“holy”*—separated exclusively to Him according His Word and ways.

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- A “*holy sacrifice*” is impossible to transact when we ignore the initial urge to do so in the first place and only offer up what is convenient to us.

There is a an entire, plentiful mission field which is coming to us each every Sunday morning, and they need to be called back to Christ in the character of Paul’s urging.

In Him,

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