

Applying Romans 12

Discipleship

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Bible Text: Romans 12, Romans 12:1
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Let's open up our Bibles to Romans 12. In verse 1 Paul writes,

1 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. 2 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.

Now I want you to look at something here. Satan is a liar but there is one thing that he says in the book of Job that is rather true, rings true. You can take away a lot from a man, you can take away his house, you can take away his car, all his bank account, his goods and everything else, and it will do him damage but not as much damage as touching his body. When you ask a man to give up his very life, you are asking that person to give the most precious thing they possess, something that cannot be replaced once it is spent, and that's exactly what the Apostle Paul is calling us to do here in this text. Look what he says, "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." He's asking us to give ourselves entirely to Christ, to God, to God's kingdom.

Now he goes on and he says at the very first part of this verse, he says, "I urge you, brethren." This is something very very important. Look, when you hear a preacher or if you are a preacher and you see something of an extraordinary passion in them, that's the way it ought to be. Why should it be this way? Because when we stand up before people, we are not talking about minor topics, we're not talking about minor things or trivial things, we're talking about the things of life and death and heaven and hell, and when we admonish you to do something, if we are admonishing you according to the word of God, we are admonishing you to do something that will not only impact your life but impact all of eternity. When the preacher calls out for you to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, to obey that is to gain life eternal, to deny that is to go to hell and spend all of eternity under the wrath of Almighty God. You see, so Paul when he tells you, "Look, give your life to Him," he's not making a suggestion, he's not simply putting forth an idea, he doesn't have the attitude of take it or leave it, he is saying, "This is our new reality. This is what life is all about." If you are a Christian, it is nonsensical to hold back.

It is irrational to keep your life for you. You are to give it to him. The most precious thing that you have, you give it to him, you present it to him.

Now Paul's urged us to do this, Paul's admonished us to do this, but from where do we gain the motivation? When you hear me say and repeat what Paul is saying that we should give our lives as a living sacrifice to God, most of you are in hearty agreement; you agree that's the thing that ought to be done. So that's not the problem, the problem is but where do I find the motivation? Where do I find the impulse? Where do I find the strength? Where do I find a passion that endures, that continues, so that daily I'm laying down my life, so that daily I'm following him, so that daily I'm pressing on to know the Lord and to be more useful in his service? Brother Paul, I agree that that's what we ought to do but I find that I lack the strength and the motivation, the force of will to do it.

Now let me simplify what I'm saying. You should love God more, is that not true? You should love God more. I should love God more than I do. I should. We all recognize that. You know a horrible thing a preacher can do is tell you, "You need to love God more," but then not tell you how to find a greater love for God. It's like telling someone something they ought to do and then not telling them how to do it and leaving them there stuck between two opinions, helpless. Well, I'm going to tell you that you need to love God more, that you need to be more passionate about God, you need to be more devoted to God, you need to be more given over to God, but I'm not going to leave you there, I'm now going to tell you how that can be accomplished and it's not a quick fix, it's something that requires endurance, but it is something that can transform your life over time and it's found in this text.

Look what he says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." What are we to do? Present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. From where does the motivation come? By the mercies of God. Now what does he mean? The more you understand and comprehend, the more you sound the depths of the mercies of God toward you, the more you will be motivated and strengthened to present your life to him as a living sacrifice. Or in other words, let me put it this way, the more you understand the mercies of God toward you as they are revealed in the cross, in the Gospel work of Jesus Christ, the more empowered you will be to actually grow in devotion and grow in laying down your life for him. That's what he's saying, by the mercies of God, by your comprehension of these things, by these things becoming greater and greater realities in your life, you will begin to be like the Apostle Paul, constrained to present yourself to Christ, constrained to follow him.

Now I want you to see something that's very important here. If you have the New American Standard or even other translations, it begins here in my English text, "Therefore. Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." What must we do? Present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. Where do we find the motivation for doing that? By sounding the depths, growing in our understanding of the mercies of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Now the word "therefore," that little preposition, is absolutely essential because here's what Paul is doing, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of

God," the mercies of God here have just been defined for you in the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans, and what Paul is doing is basically this, "For 11 chapters I have shared with you the mercies of God as they are revealed in the person and work of Christ, now based upon what God has done for you in Christ, the greatness of this work, I want you now to present your life as a living and holy sacrifice."

Do you see that? This is very common for Paul. In the book of Ephesians, we find the very same thing in chapter 4. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, we have the deepest theology in all the Bible. You want to know where the deep stuff is, go to Ephesians 1, 2 and 3. It's absolutely astounding. And how does he begin in Ephesians 1? In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. In Christ. Everything that God has done for us in Christ and basically those three chapters are revealing to us everything God's done for us in the person of his Son. I like to say it this way, outside of the Son you have nothing, in the Son you have all things. You have no part with God apart from the Son, but in the Son God is yours and you are God's, and all the mercies that you will not even be able to discover over in a life of eternity, all the mercies of God are yours in Jesus Christ, he says in Ephesians 1-3, and then he gets to 4 and he says, "Now therefore live this way."

And what does that tell me? The more – and I know I sound like a broken record but there's a purpose – the more I begin to comprehend the mercy and the grace of God in Jesus Christ, not just past mercies, not just present mercies, but even future grace, future mercies that are going to be granted to me throughout all of eternity, the more I understand all of this and how it comes to me only in the death of Christ, the more I am now empowered to live my life. You see, that's why Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5, that he was constrained, that the love of Christ constrained him, it defined him, it pushed him forward, everything that he was, it was motivated by his understanding of what God had done for him in Christ.

Now let's look at it another way. I've told you that you should love God more. How do you do that? How do you make yourself love God more? You know, there's a thing from physics, you know, if I lay on the ground and I'm laying on the ground, of course with my clothes on and a belt around my waist and I'm laying on the ground and I've got both hands on my belt as I lay on the ground and I'm pulling up like this with all my might and straining with all my strength and you say, "What are you trying to do?" I say, "Well, I'm trying to lift myself off the ground." You say, "It's not gonna work. That's not the way physics works. You can't apply the force in that way and expect it to pull you off the ground." But that's the way a lot of people are with regard to the love of God, "I need to love God more. Yes, but how do you do it?" Well, I'm going to tell you how.

I have been married for 23 years to my beautiful wife from Peru. [Spanish]. We're older than we were. She's not, you're not, honey, if you're listening. You're not older, I'm older. But we're older. I love her now far more than when I first laid eyes on her and the first time I laid eyes on her, I mean, she rocked my world. I mean, I almost fell over. I almost passed out. But I love her more now than I did then. Why? Now first of all, she's a virtuous woman but she's an imperfect woman. Why do I love her more now? Because I see more of her virtue now than I saw when I first met her. And what does that virtue in

her do? It draws out my affections so the more I see of her virtue, the more that draws out my affections. I don't, you know, sit in a corner like doing exercises, groaning and moaning and she looks at me and says, "What're you doing?" I say, "Well, I'm trying to love you more." It doesn't work. I mean, that's not how you love somebody more. As a matter of fact, you don't really do anything. You're not the one making yourself love someone more but rather it's the virtue in that person that's drawing love out of you, it's drawing affection out of you. So the more I know of her virtue, the more my affections are drawn out toward her and I appreciate her, I value her, I esteem her. Do you see that?

It's the same way in Christianity, truly. I know it seems too simple. The more that you see of the virtues of God, if you're regenerate, if you're truly Christian, because if you're not a Christian the more you see of the virtues of God, the more you'll hate him, but if you're a Christian and your heart has been renewed, recreated in the image of God and has righteous affections, then the more you see of the attributes, the works, the beauties, the excellencies of God, the more that will draw out your affections and the more motivated you will be to follow him. Do you see that? I hope you can see that.

Alright, now sometimes I play a rather cruel game but it's for a purpose. Someone who is really excited about all their academics and their titles and everything else, especially a young man, I'll ask him this question: before you went to Bible college, how many years did you dedicate to studying the attributes of God? I always put it that way. How many years? And he goes, "Well, I didn't. I mean, I read my Bible." Well, when you were in college, Bible college and you got that extraordinary degree of yours, how many semesters did you dedicate to studying the attributes of God? And he goes, "Well, you know, we had one semester in systematic, well, two semesters in systematic and in that we studied the attributes of God." Okay, well, when you went on to get your Masters, how many years in that Masters program did you study the attributes of God? "Well, that wasn't what I got my Masters in and so I didn't really..." But when you went on to get your Ph.D., how much time there did you spend studying the attributes of God? "Well, I mean, again, I got my Ph.D. In something else." Okay, well now that you've been in the pastorate for 10 years, how many of those years have you dedicated to studying who God is? Do you know what I find out? You can have men who are experts in Greek and Hebrew, studied systematic and everything else, but when you talk about their study of who God is, it's almost zero. Is anybody beginning to see a problem here? I mean, we're Christians. This whole thing is about God and yet very rarely are the attributes of God taught. Very few people in a church could actually sit down and write out a one line definition of the attributes of the different attributes of God, or even mention the different attributes, let alone sound the depths of them and begin to understand the excellencies and the beauties of every one of those attributes, the magnificence of God.

So do you see the problem? This is one of the reasons why our love for God is so little in the church. Again, let me say this, there's this new idea out there that all we need is the Gospel and basically live in Antinomianism. I don't agree with that at all, but here's what I want you to know: what does it matter if you learn all the rules and there's no power to obey them, there's no passion, there's no love? What if you learn of all the duties of a Christian and all the things of the Great Commission and everything? We all know a lot

of those things but where is the power? Where is the strength? Where is the zeal? From where do these things come? They come from knowing God. Rich men should not boast in their wealth, wise men should not boast in their wisdom, strong men should not boast in their strength, the one who boasts should boast in this, that he knows God. That he knows God. And what is primarily the job of the preacher? The preacher does not come and give you moralisms or quaint stories. It is his job to exegete God. He goes into study, he lives there. He's on his knees. He's in the word. He's exegeting. He's reading. He's studying. But it's not just to exegete a text, it's to exegete God, it's to reveal God, it's to explain God, it's to let people know the beauty and glory and power and excellency of God so they walk out excited not about just what they're supposed to do but who he is. Who he is.

That's our job as preachers and even though as preachers we should love people, and in one sense be people people, people persons, we belong to God and we spend more time with him than we do anybody else. When I was first called into the ministry and I went in to talk with my pastor who was one of the most phenomenal men of God I've ever known, even after all these years I've hardly met a person like him, I walked into his office and I said, "Pastor Weaver, I've been called to preach." He turned around, man, he was intimidating, about 6'6", silver hair all back. Man, he looked at me and he said, "Boy, can you be alone?" I thought he meant that if I preached the truth, you know, people wouldn't like me. That's not what he meant. What he meant was this: while all the other boys are going on Christian ski trips together and running around in bachelor packs and doing other little Christian stuff together and everything else, can you just be alone with God? When you grow older, does your wife know that although she has your heart, she doesn't have your heart of hearts and there are times you get that look in your eye and she just has to step away because you're going to be alone because you belong to someone else and you spend your time with him?

In churches, those of you who aren't pastors know this, yes, pastors ought to visit the sick and many other things, but some of your pastors will never be able to be what they should be because of you. You should encourage your pastor to be in his study, to be on his knees, to be praying, to be seeking out the glories and the beauties of Christ so that on Sunday and Wednesday or whenever he gets in the pulpit, he can tell you something that will warm your heart like the road to Emmaus, something about God.

Now think about this. Some of you have been Christians for 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, 30 years, but how much time have you actually studied who God is? How much time have you really considered what the Gospel is? You see, you start learning things like the beauty of God is so great that if you were to catch one glimpse of his beauty without being supernaturally strengthened, it would melt your mind down to nothing and you would turn into an imbecile. That the beauty of God is so great that if he did not strengthen you, it would kill you to see the smallest fraction of it. The delight would overwhelm your heart and burst it. Those are the types of things that will drive a man and a woman out into the mission field. Those are the types of things that make martyrs sing because they know their God. The men and women down through church history that did

amazing things, it was not because they were amazing people, it's because they saw something that most of us don't see, more of God, more of his beauty, more of his grace.

How can you have the motivation to do what he says here, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice? It is by knowing more of who God is in Christ and what God has done for us in Christ, and the more you know that, the more you see it, the more you're moved. No one has to light a fire under you. You don't have to go to some conference somewhere to get all fired up. He is your fire. The knowledge of his beauty, his glory, that's what moves you.

We live in such a superficial age and I detest it when ministers, I detest it when ministers and ministries try to reduce time with God down to some little thing of daily bread or a five minute prayer, or this or that. Those are not substitutes for truly walking with God. There is no substitute for time. And I'm not just talking to ministers. If you are to truly know the Gospel, if you are to truly know God, you have got to realize, you have a priority. Your priority is at it says in Hosea, to press on to know the Lord. That's your priority. And in doing that, everything else will find its corrective measure. You say, "Well, I need to be a better husband so I'm gonna study more about how to be a better husband." You already know more than you can obey.

I was preaching for one of the Master Academy International schools in Samara, Russia, and I had to preach, I think it was like 26 sermons on marriage. We were on sermon 18 and I still had not mentioned marriage and they said, "What are you doing?" I said, "All of you know about marriage, you just don't have any power to carry out what you know, so why should I just give you more principles to burden you with them? But show you were, from where the power comes is knowing Him. Knowing Him."

"I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." Isn't it amazing, he says present. The aorist tense here, the tense indicates not everyday doing it over, over, rededicating your life, but this is kind of a prophetic call, you know, there with the prophet where he says, "How long will you limp between two opinions? If Baal is God, then worship him. But if God is God, then give yourself to Him." That's kind of what's going on here. Once in your life make a decision where you're going to stand on this. Are you going to live in mediocrity? It is a horrible thing, mediocrity, but how much more horrible is it when it is lived out in light of what God has done for us in Christ? Are you going to continue in mediocrity? Are you going to start digging down to know God and to know Christ and to know the Gospel so that the mediocrity is swept away and you become zealous for the things that are truly worthy? Once and for all making a decision and standing up on it to present yourself to God, that you belong to him. You belong to him.

And look what it says here, "present your bodies." I've always wondered why, why is this language used here? Well, if you go to Romans 6, we still have the same kind of language. Romans 7, there's this idea of body, body, body. I almost think it sometime that the Holy Spirit wrote this through the Apostle Paul because he knew about us. I'm sure every generation has this problem but we seem to excel in this problem. And what is the

problem? You see somebody in the church living in sin, living in rebellion against God, and you tell them, "Look, you need to get right with God." And what do they tell you? "You don't know my heart. Don't you judge me. You don't know my heart. You don't know what's in my heart. No, you don't know my heart so you just back off, buddy." Well look, buddy, I don't need to know your heart, I just have to watch your body. Do you know what your heart is? Your heart is the control center of everything you are in Scripture. It is the control center of your will, the control center of your emotions, the control center of everything, and so you can't say Jesus has my heart without him having the rest of you. That's why Isaiah says, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." He's not so much concerned about lips. But Jesus told us what is true, out of the mouth the heart is revealed.

You see, here's the point and I hate to break your little heart, but nobody cares about your heart, okay? The issue is not your little heart. The issue is not about what you feel inside. It's not. It's about what you do because that is what truly manifests the content of your heart, what you do, and if he has your heart, he'll have your ears and your eyes and your tongue and your hands and your feet. Do you see that? Paul will not let us get away with anything here, no super-spirituality here, no mystic, no Gnosticism here. No, no, no, Paul's not gonna allow it. He's talking about the Hebrew idea, the biblical idea of man as a totality. If you truly love God, it is going to be expressed in your heart, soul, mind and strength, to live in a certain way.

Offer your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. Now what does this mean, a living sacrifice? There are two ideas here and one of them may be true, both of them may be in this idea. One is this idea of zeal, of being passionate, of being zealous. We can become zealous about so many things but we are called upon to give a zealous life unto God and how do we do that? We do that, again, by knowing more about God and his Gospel, but also let's not be super-spiritual, we do that also by relying on one another. I am a very weak man but I am a very blessed man because I am always surrounded by men who love God, by people who love God, so that in their light I sometimes see my lack of zeal and am able to repent. That's what the purpose of the church is about, we are to be a people zealous for God so that one of us grows cold, he's brought into the community, he sees the zeal of others, he repents and turns. We are to be a zealous people, not a foolish people, not a people filled with just pure emotionalism or enthusiasm, but a people with real zeal, real fire because of the work of the Spirit of God among them and the knowledge of God among them.

The idea here also is one of life and here's something that will be really helpful if you can grasp this. So much today of energy and zeal in the church I would describe it as mechanical, as springing forth from some program or some exuberant leader or some new methodology of ministry. It's mechanical. True life is not mechanical. True life does not come from a program instituted in a Sunday school class. True life comes from God, from the Spirit of God, from the word of God. One of the worst things you can do is go into a church that isn't very active and make it active just by your own personality, or just by some new program that some church used in the States and it caused them to grow by

150% so now you're going to do it here. No! True life is spiritual and it comes from the Spirit and it's founded upon the word.

Brothers, listen to me: how much do you pray? How much do you pray as a congregation? Talk to me about your congregational praying in your church. Now I'm not talking about all of you gathered around for an hour, the first 45 minutes is people getting up like a town hall meeting and sharing about everybody else's sicknesses and problems and then it's closed with about 10 minutes of prayer. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about congregational praying where you're just seeking the Lord. "My house will be a house of prayer," he said.

You talk about spiritual life, exposition of the Scriptures is absolutely necessary for spiritual life but if you think it's just all exposition of Scripture, you're wrong because you're only doing half of the apostolic duty. They said, "We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." Not just the ministry of the word and not just the praying of leaders but the praying of the congregation, and not just as individuals but as a congregation.

I can say this because I'm not an elder in my church so I won't be boasting, as a matter of fact, my job in the church on Sundays when I'm there is to help with my wife set up the tables for lunch, but our elder when he first came on, he said, "We will pray." So we have a Sunday morning service, a Sunday morning service. We don't have Sunday school. We're not against Sunday school but we just don't have Sunday school. Sunday morning service, the main service starts at 10 o'clock. That main service starts with one hour of corporate prayer. That's not the prayer meeting before the service, that's the service. One hour of corporate prayer. It took our pastor and now our two elders, it took them about a year and a half to teach us how to pray corporately because that corporate praying is simply this, "We are gathered here this day, O God, because we are all empty and You are the God of all fullness. We need You. We need You to speak through the worship. We need You to enliven us in the worship. We need You to speak to us through the word. We need You to speak to us in our fellowship meal afterwards. We need You with us empowering us. You must move or we have nothing this Sunday." That is what goes on and then there's the worship and about an hour exposition of the word.

Prayer. Prayer. Your life can come from some silly little gimmick or it can come from the Spirit of God but don't tell me it's come from the Spirit of God where there's no prayer because I won't buy it. Bethany Jones, the wife of Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, "No one will understand the expository ministry of my husband unless they first of all understand that above all things my husband was a man of prayer."

Prayer, true spiritual life. True spiritual life. Remember, John 15 is not just about the word of God abiding in you but you will ask. Because the word of God abides in you, because you are cultivating the mind of Christ, because you are understanding the will of God, you will ask and the Father will do it and you will be fruitful. Prayer. Prayer. Prayer.

I'm really scared about all this movement of wanting to return to the Puritans. I love the Puritans but I'll tell you this, it's really easy to adopt their theology, what's different, what's difficult is to adopt their devotional life. You want to see a work of God? Then go out and pray like David Brainard prayed.

Now he says a living sacrifice and a holy sacrifice. Holiness. Do you know what holiness is? Do you know what the Bible is saying when the Bible says God is holy because I want to be honest with you, most people don't have a clue what that means. They really don't. If when you hear the word "holy" or "holiness," the first thing you think of is sinlessness or moral purity, you don't understand holiness. You don't and that kind of definition will lead you to legalism every time. What does it mean that God is holy, because in defining that then we can understand what it means to be a holy person.

Well, this is what it means. The word in Hebrew, the word "holy," the root is "to cut," the idea of "cut, separate, something distinct, cut away, removed, separate from everything else." What does it mean that God is holy? It means that he is in a category all to himself. That's what it means. He is unique. There is no one like God. No one. That's why it is very wrong to put God in a conjunctive relationship like God and king or God and country. Don't do that. He's not in any category with anyone else. R. C. Sproul puts it in a wonderful way, he says let me ask you a question: what's more like God, the seraphim standing in heaven, the great angelic host there in heaven, the cherubim and the seraphim, or a worm crawling on the ground? Which one's more like God? The answer is neither of them. There's no one like God.

How foolish do you think I would be if I stood up here right now and I boasted and bragged about being closer to the sun, s-u-n, than the rest of you because I'm on this platform? It would be ridiculous. Well, there's far greater difference between the seraphim and God. God is not like us or like the angels, just bigger and better. He's not like us or like them at all. He's in a completely distinct category and it is the category of highest worth, the category of greatest value. Infinite value, infinitely above all other value combined.

He's separate, distinct and of greatest value and when you start seeing God that way, it begins to change everything. For example, a lot of evangelicals have no problem when the preacher says everything God does, he does for you because he loves you. All evangelicals go, "Woo, that's wonderful! He does it for me. That's right." But if a preacher like me stands up and says everything God does, he does for himself, primarily for himself and for his own glory, then everybody gets mad. Now think about that. Just think about that for a moment. If I tell you God does everything he does for you, you're like, "Yeah," but if I say although God is benevolent to his creatures, primarily everything God does he does for himself, then you're bothered by it. Well, he's an egomaniac, and you're not? You little worm.

Let me give you an example. Let's go to philosophy for a moment, maybe a little bit of Jonathan Edwards made a little more modern. If you see a guy standing on a sidewalk in the rain in his underwear outside his house and you say, "Why are you doing this?" and

he says, "I don't know." Then you draw the assumption that he's irrational. He's irrational but if that same man in his underwear in the rain outside of his house is standing there and you say, "Why are you out here?" and he says, "Because the house is on fire," he's rational. He's rational. Why is he rational? He has a reason for what he is doing.

Now the most rational creature will choose the most rational or highest reason for what he does. Do you see that? It's not just you choose a reason for what you do, you choose the highest reason. What could be the highest reason God would choose for doing anything? Would it be you? Are you the highest reason? Are you the greatest good? Are you the one most worthy for things to be done for? Absolutely not. If God chooses the highest reason to do what he does, it is himself. He does it for his own glory. Who is more worthy of love than God? Who is more worthy of God's love than God himself? God loves himself. His affections are poured out upon himself, primarily above all other things because he is the one most worthy of love, and it is because he is that way that he is able to pour out affection upon you, because if he gave you affection only based upon what you deserve and what you're worth, he could do nothing but condemn you. But because he does it for his own glory and his own worth, then he is able to extend great value to you and save you and exalt you.

So what does it mean that God is holy? He is in a category all to himself, the category of most worth. The most worthy of love, the most worthy of praise, the most worthy of doing all things for his own glory. And what does it mean for you to be holy? When you recognize God's value as God recognizes his value and you begin to live your life and do everything you do for him, when he becomes your highest reason for what you do. If holiness is nothing more than God is sinless, then you're gonna walk around and just think about rule-keeping and avoiding sin, and you can become a Pharisee and a legalist, but if you truly have seen so much of the glory and beauty of God that it's captivated your heart and you see him as the one who is most worthy of every breath, then you do things for him and now it's not legalism, it's relational, it's worship.

Why do I say no to the world, the Christian says? It's not just because God tells me the world is bad but it is because I see that he is infinitely more beautiful than anything the world can give me.

Just hold your place for a second in Romans and go to 1 Thessalonians. Let's see if I remember where this is. It's been a long time since I preached there. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:9, "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead." Now I want you to look at the order: you turned to God from idols. Maybe you're not catching the order here. It should be written: you turned from idols to God because you turn from those things to something else, but he says, "No, you turned to God from idols," and the Greek scholar, Hebert, who if you can get all his commentaries, get them, he points this out very clearly. He goes it's not that these people were just growing tired of all their idols, you know, they were just, "Ah, I don't want these idols anymore. There's nothing." And they begin to look for something else and Paul just happened to wander by. No, what's going on is this,

they're sitting there worshiping their idols, they're all about their idols. I mean, they love their idols. They were happy, satisfied, content with their idols and then all of a sudden Paul comes and he proclaims to them a God who so excels their idols, they see such a beauty in this God, such a greatness, such a glory that they're captivated and torn away from the idols because of what they've seen. And that is to continue on throughout our entire Christian life. That is why we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The more I know.

I sat there for about six months or eight months in the garden of Gethsemane last year, just hours a day in the garden of Gethsemane, the garden of Gethsemane pouring through everything from the ancient church fathers, the Greeks, the Puritans, the Reformers, looking at the text myself, going back and forth, and at the end of it I thought, "I never want to sin again. I never want to sin again. I never want to be about me again." What he did there in Gethsemane goes beyond what the modern preacher even has a clue about what happened to him there. And you walk away, you don't need, you don't need, you know, someone scaring you with hell. You don't need to be scared with the judgment throne of Christ. You're just sitting there looking at the beauty and the power and the glory of this Savior in Gethsemane as he wrestles with evil itself and suffers immeasurably and you go, "I never want to sin again. Lord, let never, never as that songwriter said, never never let me outlive my love for thee. Kill me, Lord, if you know that I'm going to grow cold. Just kill me."

Just by seeing him. That's what Paul saw in Damascus. Saw it. Do you know what repentance is? Metanoia, changing of the mind, although some Greek scholars now argue against that idea but I think it holds? You say, "How can repentance, just change your mind?" Well, my dear friend, you're sitting here calmly right now because in your mind you do not believe this building's on fire and it's not, but if in your mind you believe this building was on fire, everything else about you would change. You see that. Paul the apostle, I mean, if you just meditate for a while on what happened to him in Damascus, it's absolutely, it's like, it's like reality itself totally flipped for the Apostle Paul. It was totally transformed like a man who would walk outside after doing so 40 years of his life, walking out to get the paper every day, and then he walks out one day and the sidewalk is like the ocean and the sky is green and birds are flying backwards and dogs are meowing and cats are barking, and everything he knows about reality has totally changed. Paul was dumbfounded. It was like he was hit in the chest with a truck. He didn't know what to do. He was terrified. Why? Because he left Jerusalem on the way to Damascus, how? He thought in his mind that Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest false prophet and blasphemer that had ever walked the planet. That's what he thought. He left Jerusalem for Damascus thinking that the Christians were the enemies of God and must be exterminated like vermin. That's what he thought and on the road to Damascus he meets Christ and in one moment he realizes everything about reality, his entire reality was wrong. He was wrong about everything that mattered. Everything. Do you see that? He was wrong about everything. The one he thought was the greatest blasphemer and false prophet turns out to be the Son of the living God and the Son of Man of Daniel 7. The ones that he was exterminating like rats were the children of God. And therefore he sat there three days without eating or drinking and everything changed.

And it's the same with you and me. How? You have a 15 year old girl, quite attractive, and she's just all about herself. She loves looking in the mirror. She loves the clothes. She loves the modeling books and all the things and going to the stores and the malls, and she just cares about the way she looks and how she's presented to the boys and everything about her, and then one day she hears the Gospel preached and she realizes that everything, everything she thought was wrong, twisted, black, stupid and wrong, that everything about her life was antichrist and filthy and she changes.

A businessman, he goes to church, he's moral, extremely wealthy, loves to flaunt his wealth, wants more wealth, thinks he's the most respected person in town, everybody looks up to him, some fear him, thinks, man, he's of all the people, he's arrived. He has arrived and then one day he hears a street preacher and the Spirit of God moves in his heart and he sits there and he puts, sits there on a curb with his head between his knees and he realizes he's been wrong about everything.

You see, these are the types of things that we're talking about here. It's why Paul is saying, "I urge you, brethren." This is not about getting your best life now. This is the difference between heaven and hell, of life having meaning or life ending in futility, and it all comes down to either, first of all, initially meeting Jesus but then after meeting Jesus, growing in our knowledge of Jesus.

Then he says a "holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." The word "spiritual" here can also be translated "rational." It is not rational to give your life for a man. As a matter of fact, that's a cult. To give your life for a spiritual leader, that's a cult. But to give your life to the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you, that's rational. That is rational. We do not live in a rational society, do you realize that? We're post-modern. I mean, all the rules of classical logic that built Western civilization, everything has been thrown out the window. We're not rational. I just listen to people every day and everything I learned about logical fallacies, I mean, they're just casebook studies every time someone opens their mouth. We're not rational.

The most rational thing you can do is surrender your life to Jesus Christ and, brothers and sisters, listen to me, this is why the local church is so important. I can use my own life as a testimony. I can't do this by myself. It's not just private study. It's not just private prayer. But it's also being around brothers and sisters in Christ who also are walking in that path, holding one another accountable. Not legalistically, not Pharisaically. But sometimes I'll walk in church and I'll see a deacon or something that is just so fired up for the Lord and it just breaks my heart when I look in the mirror at myself. That's why we need to be in churches where the word of God is being preached and where people are really encouraging and admonishing and stimulating one another to press on to know the Lord.

He goes on and he says, "And do not be conformed to this world." The idea here is a mold. Do not be pressed into the world's mold. Brothers and sisters in Christ, listen, let's say that someone has a bloody forehead. It is a longstanding wound that they have and

they've gone to every doctor in Sydney and they can't find a cure, and I show up and you say, "Brother Paul, you know, we've gone to every doctor in the world and we can't find a cure. I mean, the man's forehead is bloody all the time, bruised and bloody. Could you just pray maybe God would show you something?" I say, "Well, okay, I'll pray but let me just observe him." And I'm sitting there watching him and it's one o'clock in the morning. I'm just sitting there by his bedside and at one o'clock the clock goes ding and he stands up out of bed, goes over to a brick wall and goes bam, and goes back to bed. Taking notes. Clock strikes two, ding, ding. He gets up out of bed, walks over to the same wall, bam, bam. I think I'm seeing a pattern and I go around the clock 24 hours and by the time we get to 12 o'clock, this guy's beating his head against the wall 12 times. The next day you all come in for a consultation and I say, "Look, I'm no doctor but I think I may have found something that we ought to look into." What is it? "Well, he's beating his head against a brick wall."

And people would tell me, they say, "Oh, the Christian life is like some great mystery. How do you grow? You can't grow, it's just, you know, and then there's all these books with all these secret ideas and different plans to make you grow and everything else." Brothers and sisters, it's found here, "Do not be conformed to this world." That's the plan.

I really like power lifting. I'm old now but I really like power lifting. Let me teach you about power lifting, okay? If you have a professional power lifter, he works out every day, well, probably five, six times a week, okay? His workout is very important. He also eats six times a day. Six times a day. Yes, and it's not any fun food, it's usually just tuna and quinoa, alright, and broccoli. He eats six times a day. If you tell that power lifter, "Look, you gotta make a choice, you either miss your workout or miss one meal." He'll miss his workout because they've come to discover that the biggest part of all this is what you eat. It really is. It really is. Most of the physical ailments, not all of them but a lot of them could be totally put away from our modern society because we basically, most people are suffering from malnutrition. They're overweight but they're suffering from malnutrition because what they eat is garbage.

Now that tells us something spiritually, doesn't it? You're in this world awake usually most of us about 16 hours a day. Sixteen hours a day you are being bombarded with the filth of this world. Sixteen hours a day you are being bombarded and some of it's not even necessary. You watch things you shouldn't watch. You read things you shouldn't read. You allow yourself to be captivated by things that should not captivate you and then you have a 15 minute, "I'm going to read through the book of Psalms." Brothers, you are what you eat. Sisters, you are what you eat. It says, "do not be conformed to this world." Get these influences of the world, the ones that you can cut away from you, cut them away. Cut them away.

Paul goes in at length here to talk about the Olympian, to talk about the athlete. Do you realize that when some person, they're six years old and they've discovered that they have an amazing ability in gymnastics, do you realize that from that moment on, they become a slave to gymnastics? Gymnastics becomes their master. In power lifting, in anything like that, it becomes your master. Why? You no longer eat like all the other kids. You no

longer spend your time like all the other kids. You no longer sleep like all the other kids. Everything is geared around one thing, winning a gold medal that's not even gold.

Brothers, but we have a reward that doesn't perish, do we not? What is your discipline? How do you discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness? Think about it. No plan. No regiment. And yet we wonder why we don't grow. So 16 hours a day we're bombarded with the filth of this world yet we have no plan of reading Scripture, of prayer, of fellowship with the saints. Look, you making it out of here, out of this world without shaming Christ is your goal. You making it out of this world having served your generation like it was said of David, that is your goal. You don't have any other goal. And the older I get as a preacher and the more I see preachers fall, I can tell you this, my great goal is to make it out of here without a scandal, without shaming my Lord.

Discipline. Discipline. Discipline. I would encourage you to cut things out of your life that are influencing you. Cut them out and start adding things to your life that influence you toward godliness: the word of God, reading it, studying it, memorizing it, meditating upon it, obeying it, sharing it. You see, holding one another accountable.

I love to tell this story about this famous violinist. I don't even know if he actually exists but it makes for a good story. He's at the end of his life and he plays his last concert. He's an old man. He plays beautifully. He's a master. And when he finishes, a young boy, a young violinist comes up to him and says, "Sir, I would give my life to play like you." And the old man looked at him and said, "Son, I did give my life to play like me." How many people, "I'd give my life to preach like that. I'd give my life to know the Bible like that." Well, some people have given their life and that's what you've gotta do.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed," metamorphosized. It's the same word used. It's from where we get that word. It's the word used of Christ in the transfiguration. Be transformed. It's something supernatural. It's not just discipline or strength of will, it's this, the word of God is powerful and the Spirit of God works through the word of God and if you want to be transformed, then stay in the word looking for greater and greater visions of God in Christ, greater revelations of who God is, of what he's done for you, of his will for your life.

Cultivate. That is a word that you need to write down and write down. Cultivate. Cultivate. Cultivate. Cultivate what? Cultivate the mind of Christ. And how do you cultivate the mind of Christ? By being in Christ's word.

There was a time when I was younger that I read so much of Alexander Maclaren, he's an old preacher, a man in Victorian, Alexander Maclaren. I just loved Alexander, then I realized that I was starting to, without even knowing it, my way of thinking was being shaped by him. Without even trying, the way I logically pursued a text was being shaped by him. One time years after my father died, I came home to visit my mother and I stood on the back porch where my dad used to stand and look out over the ranch, and my mom walked out and she went, "Paul! Look at you!" I said, "What?" She goes, "Look at you." My dad would stand there with his knees locked back like this, with both hands like this,

and with head tilted to the side, and would sit there and look at the ranch kinda like this. She said, "Look at you. You're standing just like him." I mean, it's identical. I never tried to imitate him. I never even really noticed that he locked his knees, it was just that always being with him, always being with him.

It's the same way in the word. It's not a mystery. I had someone get so mad at me on the internet because I said, "Look, it's really not a mystery. Those who say they just can't grow in Christ, I only have one question for you, how much time are you spending in the word of God and prayer?" And this guy wrote back, "You're such a simpleton and give simplistic answers to people." My wife was in Romania years ago and she was teaching these ladies and one lady came to her after about two days and she said, "You know," she said, "You just always give everybody the same answer." She goes, "What do you mean?" "You're telling us we need to spend more time in the word of God and prayer. Why is that?" And she said, "Well, because you need to spend more time in the word of God and prayer."

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." How do you renew your mind? He doesn't specifically tell us here. Renewal is usually associated with the Holy Spirit, in the Old Testament it's also associated with the word of God. But let me start with what I think is priority. I believe that the Holy Spirit most works in my life through the written word of God and so that's my priority for renewing the mind. But before I get to that priority, I've gotta realize something else: it doesn't matter how clean I wash my clothes if right after I wash them I throw them back in the dirt. In order to advance in the positive, you must first deal with the negative. There are some things you've gotta stop, you've gotta start saying no to. You've just gotta stop. You've just gotta stop. One of the things you do in Scripture is you discover the will of God, you discover what God hates and you cut it off of you, you cut it away from you, and you discover what God loves and you wrap your arms around it.

So don't think that just because you're reading the word and then you go watch filthy movies all the time, that's not going to do anybody any good. You listen to stuff, watch stuff, all this, I am blown away by the young Reformed guys I'm seeing. I mean, they just blow me away and I'll tell you why. I hear them talking about Calvin, talking about the Puritans, everything else, and then they'll say, "Hey, afterwards do you want to go see this movie?" And I know from reading Christian reviews the movie is trash. It's like there's this cut off now where people think they can love Jesus and love the Gospel and read the old guys and they're Antinomian and they just go live in filth and think it's okay, they're somehow above it. You're not. Cut the stuff out of your life that God hates. Cut it out. Just stop it or you're not going to advance. I don't know how to say it any clearer. There are some things you just have to stop.

And then you go on and it's the word of God, that's the primary means of renewing the mind, the Spirit of God using the word of God, but then there's also good books and there's also fellowship, true biblical fellowship. When was the last time – now Christ, listen to me – when was the last time you called up a fellow brother in Christ or sister in Christ and you went out to maybe get a bite to eat, get a cup of coffee or something and

you actually talked about Jesus? After church and the sermons are over, how much time have you actually sat around the church and talked about what you heard? Talked about Jesus? There's not hardly any Christian fellowship going on in most places in the evangelical community unless it's around football or rugby or essential oils and homeschooling, just get everybody in there. Fellowship is to be around Jesus, around Jesus.

"Transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is." Listen, and I take this in part from Dr. MacArthur, something that I read years ago, if a person has made the commitment by the grace of God to seek first the kingdom, and they can honestly say, "In all my weakness, by God's grace that's my commitment," seeking first the kingdom, renewing their mind in the word of God, cultivating the mind of Christ, then much of what is called discerning the will of God in specific situations can be determined by what are the desires of your heart. I went to Peru to be a missionary because I wanted to go to Peru and be a missionary. I left Peru because I wanted to go back and start a mission organization. It's amazing the amount of freedom there is when someone has made the commitment to seek first the kingdom and they're actually as a life practice renewing their mind in the will of God. As you cultivate the mind of Christ, as you submit your thinking to Scripture, as you learn to think like God thinks, then you will understand the will of God. You will know the will of God. In most situations there will be no need for some exceptional revelation because you simply know the Scriptures and your heart and mind are being bent towards the will of God.

And how is the will of God described here? Good. If it's not good, it's not God's will. If it doesn't lead to your spiritual health, your growth in Christ, honoring God, advancing the kingdom, it's not good.

Then what else? Acceptable. Not acceptable to your culture. You know, you need to really understand the difference between morals and ethics because there's a big distinction. You know what morals are, morals are not what people think, morals is society's norm with regard to what is right. What does society say is right? That's dangerous because what society said was right 25 years ago is obliterated now. It's not just acceptable to your society or acceptable to your Christian friends, is it acceptable to God? Can God's word verify it? And if God's word can't verify it, it's not acceptable.

Then, pleasing and that's what it really comes down to, isn't it? Pleasing to God. That we give our life as a pleasing sacrifice.

Now in the next sermon, I'm gonna pick up and then we're gonna hit the Gospel full on, but I did all this today to get you to see that I don't want you walking out here just with a clearer understanding of propitiation and then go around and use that word to show all your friends how much they don't know. I want to study the Gospel in light of change. Change. I've gotten more practical in my old age. Sometimes I walk by some students and they're all talking about eschatology and [unintelligible]. Some, you know, infralapsarianism versus superlapsarianism or something like that and they'll say, "Brother Paul, what do you think?" And I go, "I don't know, brothers, I'm just trying to

love my wife." I want the Gospel that is preached to change the way you act as a man, change the way you act as a woman, change the way you act as a child and a teenager, change the way you act as a father, change the way you act as a mother, a son, a daughter, a minister, a congregant, as Christians. As Christians.

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Your word and it is true. I pray that you would work in the heart of Your people for their good and for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.