

As we begin our time today in the book of Romans... I would like for you to think of a fellow believer in your life... who has made a very strong impression on you for Christ. ... Your thoughts of this person... are that they truly live a life that is dedicated to Christ. ... Obviously... they are not perfect... but this would be a person that you could look up to as a model for Christian living. ... [P A U S E] ...

Does such a person come to mind? ... Now I would like for you to consider what stands out (about them)... so that you think of them this way. What Godly characteristics do they have? ... [P A U S E] ...

(What if I were to tell you) – that you may... or may **NOT** be using the right measurement. In fact... the person that you were thinking about may... or may NOT be using the right measurement as they evaluate their own life. ... What is true dedication? Is it possible that we don't really know what true dedication to Christ looks like in someone else – but FAR MORE important – do we know how to evaluate our OWN spiritual selves?

(Let me explain why I pose this question...) ... It is possible for us (as believers) to live lives on one of three levels. ... We can live lives that are: **1) sensual... 2) that are soulish... or 3) that are spiritual.** ... (Sensual... Soulish... or Spiritual...) ... A person... for example... who is ruled by the physical is sensual. ... To be “sensual” does not necessarily mean that we live in the constant indulgence of the worst forms of carnality. ... It simply means that we are most strongly motivated (with life decisions) by the senses.

Think of each of the following expressions: "*I don't like the smell.*" "*It's too hot.*" "*I'm too tired.*" "*Does it taste good?*" "*What does it feel like?*" "*Don't do that, it hurts.*" "*Isn't it ugly?*" "*Let me tell you what Betty said.*" Each one of these statements reflects a physical reaction. ... People who are ruled by such considerations are ruled by the senses — by what they see... feel... hear... taste or smell. ... The motivations of such people may look "spiritual"... but... nevertheless... people motivated by such considerations are "sensual."

And it is possible for a Christian to be "sensual." He will not go to prayer meeting because it is too hot. He will not work in the slums because they are too smelly. He doesn't like John Jones because he uses bad grammar. In other words... he is a sensual Christian ... but he/she is living their life on the lowest possible plane. "Sensual" is not "spiritual."

Now let's look at a different plane. ... It is also possible for believers to be... #2 - soulish in their expression of the faith. (Soulish is not "spiritual.) ... The soulish person bases much of their motivation on their intellect... their emotions... and sometimes on their will.

Lives that are lived on the soulish plane (often) look so much like a life that is spiritual... that it can be very difficult to detect that it is not spiritual. ... For example... a believer may give himself over to *intellectual* pursuits in his/her practice of Christianity. They will study their Bible and become a walking Bible encyclopedia. ... He/she becomes a great theologian... a great defender of the faith. People admire and respect him/her for their great grasp of truth. However... this person is not necessarily

spiritual... Their grasp of truth (all too often) is merely intellectual... and they may only be on the soulish plane... relying mainly on their intellect.

Or the soulish person may be strongly given to *emotion*. At the Lord's Supper (for example) the thought of Calvary brings tears to his/her eyes and they will weep. ... At the prayer meeting they might get so worked up and shout vigorous hallelujahs. ... Perhaps this person is so deeply moved at the thought of the poverty of orphans in Ethiopia... or the masses of India... that he/she will empty their pocketbook into the offering when an appeal is made. ... **BUT**... this person is not necessarily **spiritual**. ... Even an unsaved person might do as much.

And then... a believer might have an iron *will*. ... When he is saved he feels that he should give up smoking... so he immediately throws his cigarettes into the fire and never smokes again. (or maybe it is any number of bad habits... that are done away with - instantly.) ... But this may not be a **spiritual** victory... it may simply be - the assertion of a strong will.

Indeed... the soulish person may demonstrate an impressive combination of two... or even all three factors (intellect... emotions... and will)... so that person appears as an exemplary Christian - without being truly spiritual at all.

Now... of course... (please don't misunderstand me)... the intellect... emotions... and the will... all play an important part in the life of a spiritual Christian! But just to be intellectual... emotional... or very determined... does not constitute the essence of **spirituality**.

So then... what does...? ... I am so glad you asked... because this is what our text today will be answering. ... We will look at it in terms of how we can evaluate ourselves... not in terms of evaluating others.

What is "true dedication?" (How do we know if we have it?) ... We will see Paul describe true Christian dedication as involving three steps.

You give God your body (v. 1).

You give Him your mind (v. 2a).

You give Him your will (v. 2b).

Paul (in Romans 12:1-2) lays down the principle from which all the parts of holiness flow. ... And when people think of holiness... what is the first thing most folks think of...? "Rules of conduct!" Am I right...?

James Montgomery Boice writes:

It is so easy to put down rules of conduct, but Paul is not doing that. He has delivered us from the Mosaic Law, and he did not deliver us in order to put us under another legal system. There are a lot of Christians who call themselves separated Christians because they don't do this, they don't do that, and they don't do about fifteen other things. ... Paul puts down great principles that are to guide the believer. The Holy Spirit is giving the believer a road map of life, showing the curves but not the speed limit.

So let's turn now to our passage. It is only two verses (Romans 12:1-2)... and there is plenty here!

Romans 12:1

"*I appeal to you*" is the language of grace (not law.) ... There is no thunder here from Mount Sinai. Moses commanded - Paul appeals.

"By the mercies of God." ... Notice the plural here ("mer-cies".) ... The plural is a Hebraism,...emphasizing an abundance of mercy. ... God is rich in mercy ... God has plenty of it! ... I know this - because He has had to use a lot of it for me... and if you're honest... you will have to admit that there has been plenty that has gone to you – too. ... And there is plenty more where that came from!

"Mercy" means "compassion"... "pity"... and "the tenderness of God." ... In the Bible... it refers to God NOT giving us what we deserve! Specifically... Paul is talking about the mercies of God - *as spelled out in the eleven preceding chapters here in Romans*. Paul means, "*In view of what I have just been writing, you must not live for yourselves but rather give yourselves wholly to God.*"

This is as bold a call to total commitment... as there is anywhere in all of Scripture! ... And it applies equally to all — to the Bible teacher... to the preacher... to the worship leader... to high schoolers — to everyone! It is for the entire Church.

We must put away the medieval thinking that makes a distinction between clergy and laity (the idea that ministers and missionaries should have 100 percent commitment... but the laity is permitted 75 percent... or 30... or...) The truth is - all believers are called to be totally committed to Christ.

(And here is the really great news that we see here!) We all can be! The greater our comprehension of what God has done for us... the greater our commitment will be. ... Practically applied... when we meditate on what God has done for us... (when we take it to heart)... it is a magnet that

draws us to deepest commitment to Him. ... What motivates us (as believers) to give God our body... our mind... and our will... is an ever-increasing comprehension of His mercy toward us.

God wants us to offer ourselves... as *living* sacrifices — daily laying aside our own desires to follow Him... putting all our energy and resources at His disposal and trusting Him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

Sacrifice is an utterly unpleasant word in our day! ... No one wants to be a sacrifice. ... In fact... people do not want to sacrifice even a single little thing. ... We want to acquire things instead. ... Nevertheless... this is where the Christian life starts. ... It is God's instruction and desire for us.

A sacrifice implies that he who offers it presents it entirely. He releases all claim or right to it... and leaves it to be disposed of for the honor of God.

In the case of an *animal*... it was slain... and the blood offered. In the case of any other offering (such as a grain offering or money)... it was set apart to the service of God... and he who offered it... released all claim on it... and submitted it to God... to be disposed of at His will.

This is the offering which the apostle entreats the Romans to make - to devote themselves to God... as if they had no longer any *claim* on themselves... to be disposed of by Him... to suffer and bear all that He might desire us to go through... and to promote *His* honor in any way which *He* might command.

Before we trusted Christ... we used our body for sinful pleasures and purposes... but now that we belong to Him... we want to use our body for His glory. The Christian's body is God's temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Committing our body to the Lord is **logical**.

Those of you who know me... know that I am not a “King James” person (in terms of my Bible reading preference.) The King James is based ONLY on the manuscripts that they had available to them back in 1611. There have been many archeological discoveries since 1611... which are known to be much closer to the original letters of the New Testament.

HOWEVER (!) when it comes to Romans 12:1... (as a rare case) I must admit that I believe the King James does a much better job in translating the original language of the New Testament... than our newer versions do. The King James Version more accurately represents the last phrase of verse 1, "...*which is your reasonable service*"... rather than the NIV or the ESV that both read "*which is your spiritual worship*."

The original language used the word *logikos* – which is better translated as “reasonable” or even as “logical.” ... (You see...) for Paul... true worship (in offering ourselves to God)... is reasonable or logical... because it is consistent with a proper understanding of the truth of God (as revealed in Jesus Christ.) ... Total commitment is the only rational course to take when you really see who God is. Nothing else makes any sense.

Halfway commitment is ***irrational***. To decide to give part of your life to God and keep other parts for yourself (in other words... to say: "Everything is yours, Lord, except for this relationship... this deal... this pleasure" - is beyond spiritual logic!)

So let me give you a very PRACTICAL way... that you can give God your body... each and every day. We are to make ourselves a living sacrifice – and this means an ONGOING (not just a one-time event) offering. I mentioned this when we were in Romans chapter 6... because Paul told us to present the individual members of our body to the Lord (in Romans 6:13.) ... (You know)... whenever Paul repeats an exhortation... in the same letter... it must be VERY important. So let me teach you (once again) something that I first learned from my friend (Dr. Jim Cecy)... and this week I discovered was also the practice of James Montgomery Boice. It is an application for both Romans 6:13 and Romans 12:1.

Every day... I (and many Christians) pray along the lines of:

Lord... here is my body. I release all claim or right to it... and I submit it to be used for Your honor and glory. . Today... I want to offer you my mind for You to use. Let me think right thoughts. Here are my eyes and my ears. Let me observe life around me the way You do. ... God... here is my mouth which has my tongue. Let it be used to build others up... and not for tearing down...grumbling... unwholesome talk... or gossip. ... Oh! And my heart... God... It has all these passions. Let me passionate only about the things You are passionate about. Let me see where my passions and Yours are not the same. ... Let my hands do Your work... and my feet only take me where You want me to go.

Praying like this can be as long or as short as you want to make it. And if God leads you to pray in such a way... watch and see how throughout the day God will remind you... if you begin to use your mind or emotions

inappropriately... or if you are tempted to gossip or say harsh things to people.

What ***is*** "true dedication?"

- 1. You give God your body (Romans 12:1).***
- 2. You give Him your mind (Romans 12:2a).***

Romans 12:2a

Notice that there are two commands. The first is negative: "*Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world.*" The second is positive: "*...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" These are the two sides of committing your mind to the Lord.

What does this *negative command*, "*Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world,*" mean? "*World*" in the original language of the New Testament is "*aion*" and it is most literally: "this present age" referring to whatever passing age the reader of this verse happens to live in. (You know) every age has its own ideals (and philosophies) that are influenced and dominated by Satan. ... "*Don't be conformed to the schemes of this passing evil age.*" J.B. Phillips has famously paraphrased the verse as saying: ""*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.*"

The painful truth is... such conformity is common to many of us - to a *greater extent* than we like to acknowledge. ... [P A U S E] ...

The world sure does want to change your mind... doesn't it...? I don't mean to turn this into a political discussion... but there sure is a strong push by broadcast news and social media to control all of our thinking (just in the last 4-5 years!) ... There is such blatant censorship of views not held

by the social media controllers. Free speech is disappearing before our very eyes... on Cable News... and platforms like Facebook... Twitter... and YouTube.

It does not take a "Rocket Scientist" to understand what is just around the corner of thought control. Soon it will be labeled "hate speech" to speak against any of our passing age's ideals and philosophies.

But I am going to engage in this type of "hate speech" for a few minutes... so that I might point out what Romans 12:2 is telling us to resist. In our passing age... we see 4 "isms" that depict what the world wants us to be conformed into: Secularism... Humanism... Relativism... and Materialism.

Secularism is a philosophy that does not look beyond this world but instead operates as if this age is all there is. ... If now is the only thing that matters... why should we work hard at anything... or want to do meaningful work... as long as we can have a good time now? ... Most important... why should I worry about God or righteousness or sin or judgment or salvation... if now is all that really matters?

R. C. Sproul writes:

"For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in light of this present time.... What matters is now and only now. All access to the above and the beyond is blocked. There is no exit from the confines of this present world. The secular is all that we have. We must make our decisions, live our lives, make our plans, all within the closed arena of this time—the here and now."

Humanism is another idea of our passing age that wants to conform us. Humanism is a way of looking at people (particularly ourselves) apart from God. The 1993 document called the "*Humanist Manifesto*" declares:

"Traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival."

The 1973 *Humanist Manifesto II* said, "We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural" and "There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."

Relativism is the next one that I want to mention. Relativism believes that there are no absolutes. Truth is relative. What is true for you may not be true for me. Pick your own truth.

And the final "ism" to which Christians are not to be conformed is materialism. Materialism preaches that if there is any value to be found in life... it must be in material terms. Be as healthy as you can. Live as long as you can. Get as rich as you can. He who dies with the most toys – wins.

So here are 4 "isms" that we need to resist being conformed by: (Secularism... Humanism... Relativism... and Materialism.) ... The world wants to control your mind – but God wants to transform your mind! ... If the world controls your thinking... you are a *conformer*. ... If God controls your thinking... you are a *transformer*.

So let's look (now) at the *positive command* in verse 2: "...*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" "Transformed" sounds like "*metamorphosed*" in the original... and is the word from which we get *metamorphosis* (the radical change from one form to another... as in the transformation of the tadpole to the frog... or the caterpillar to the butterfly.)

But the full meaning is even richer... as the other three uses of the word in the New Testament indicate. In Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 it is used to describe the transfiguration of Christ (when the Lord's glorious inner essence was allowed to show through His body so that His face radiated like the sun and His clothing was white with light.) We experience such transfiguration in Christ. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:18 (using the very same word):

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

How does this happen? ... And notice... please that our text says we are to "**be** transformed" (passive imperative). ... Our transformation must be done by someone or something else. Who... or what is that...? It is... of course... the Holy Spirit... as He illumines and applies the Scripture that we study and learn.) ... We behold the glory of the Lord (by seeing it in Scripture)... and the Holy Spirit transforms our minds.

We are to regularly input God's Word into our heart and submit to the Holy Spirit Who brings about "*the renewing of your mind.*" ... Paul writes of it (here) as a **process** (a gradual transformation.) ... *The Christian is to allow himself to be changed continually.*

What is “true Christian dedication?”

1. ***You give God your body (Romans 12:1).***
2. ***You give Him your mind (Romans 12:2a).***
3. ***You give Him your will (Romans 12:2b).***

Romans 12:2b

It is Satan who suggests that God is not to be trusted... that He plans for us some unpleasant experience... that He will let us down and leads us into anguish... pain... and loss. ... Satan always seeks to frighten us into a lack of trust of God. ... But God's will is good.

It is also acceptable. God will not ask us to do that which we cannot accept. He brings us along life's path... maturing us as we go... so that when we come to Canaan and its giants... we are ready for them.

We also read (here) that God's will is perfect. ... No plan of ours can improve on the plan of God. ... We only see bits and pieces - He sees the whole. ... We see only fragments of the past. ... We measure things by the narrow horizon of our present vision. ... He sees past... present... and future... in its total context as related to eternity. ... He sees when... where... and why... we touch the lives of others. ... He weighs all actions. He controls all circumstances. ... His will is perfect.

But how can we know what the will of God is...? ... Here is my best short answer to that: Maintain a disposition to obey whatever He shows you. (That's it!) Simply be willing to conform yourself to whatever He reveals.

John 7:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

Once God shows us His will... then we must surrender our own will to it. We surrender our wills to God through prayer. Pray with the Lord: "*Not my will, but Thy will be done.*" ... Prayer is all about our submission for God to have His way in everything.

This week... if you are not already doing so... I appeal to you to begin each day by surrendering your body to the Lord. ... Then spend time with His Word... and let Him transform your mind and prepare your thinking for that new day. ... Next... yield the plans of the day to Him and let Him work as He sees best. ... Pray about those tasks that upset or most worry you... then watch and see how He will see you through. To have a right relationship with God... to have a proper dedication to Christ... start the day by yielding to Him your body, mind, and will.