

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015 – Part I **Pastor Ty Blackburn** **Romans 12:1-2** **January 4, 2015**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 12. I wanted to preach for a couple of weeks on kind of a New Year's theme, and then planning to go back to John 15 and resume our exposition of John in a couple of weeks, Lord-willing. If you were here last week, you know what I'm talking about. If not, you need to listen to the message that Steven preached last week from James 4. But I want to talk about a theme that I think relates to the New Year. You know, New Year's is a time of reflection, thinking over the last year, thinking about the year to come. It is a milestone where you stop and pause in your life, and ask the questions, *Where am I? Where am I going? How have I done?*

I was talking to someone recently who said they have a friend who is in the personal training business. Not really related to that, it is not exactly personal training, but weight loss, this kind of thing. They do 80 percent of their business during the first three months of the year. That makes sense, doesn't it? Isn't it interesting? It is kind of a conspiracy. It's not a conspiracy, but you know what I'm saying, Thanksgiving to Christmas, the eating that we do. You know, wow, you start on a downhill spiral, or actually an uphill spiral really, as the case may be. So we come to the New Year, and it's time to put away the wonderful sweets that we've enjoyed, the blessings of God that He's given us, and certainly we've rejoiced and been able to taste and see that the Lord is good. All the things that He gives us should be received with thanksgiving, and we are thankful for them, but it is a time to stop and evaluate, and to make some adjustments.

I want to do that spiritually today, to help us to reflect, and look at our lives, and see, where are we today? What do we need to adjust in our lives so that we can be moving in the right direction? So I've titled the message 'Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015', and the text is Romans 12:1-2 which is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. It is such an important, powerful text and it has been a blessing to me through the years. But 'Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015', I think we're going to see that this passage really helps us to set our sights to readjust our course as we move into a new year. Look with me at Romans 12, the first two verses.

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Romans 12:1-2 ~ 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.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we bow before Your word, we acknowledge our need of grace. We need Your Spirit to work in our minds, and our hearts. We pray that You would open the eyes of our understanding, and give us grace to humble ourselves, and to respond in repentance and faith where we need to repent, and where we need to believe, and may Jesus Christ be preeminent. We pray in His name, Amen.

Now I want us to consider this text in light of that theme 'Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015'. There are four points that I think that we want to look at. We are going to see that the real emphasis is on the third point. So what I hope to do today is get through two and a half points, the first two points and into the third point, which I think the meat is in the third point. And then next time, finish up the third point, and then, one and a half points next week, two and a half points this week. It is kind of a four-step process, you know, to pursue spiritual fitness this year, today. I'm going to go ahead and give you the four points so you'll know where we're going, okay? The first is, in pursuing spiritual fitness you need to set your goal. Secondly, cultivate your motivation. Thirdly, work your plan. And fourthly, measure your progress. So set your goal, cultivate your motivation, work your plan, measure your progress. We'll see that that is, though I certainly am hitting with the fitness theme there, I think that is an accurate reflection of what the text is saying. To understand the passage though, we should always consider it in context, and it is important for us to see that always, and today as well.

Romans 12:1-2, these two verses are really the hinge of the book of Romans. The first 11 chapters are doctrinal. The last five chapters, beginning in Chapter 12, Chapters 12-16 are practical, how to put into practice the doctrine that Paul has been talking about in the first 11 chapters. You could say the first 11 chapters are theology, the last five chapters of Romans, beginning here in Chapter 12, are ethics. The first 11 chapters deal with our thinking, the last five chapters with our doing. Now when I say that, please understand that strictly speaking, you will find a lot of ethical exhortations in the first 11 chapters too, but it is a matter of the weight of that. The last five chapters have theology as well, but as a whole, the first

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11 chapters are weighted heavily on the doctrine and theology side, and the last five chapters are weighted heavily on the practice, and the ethical side.

Now one of the things that we see in that is that our practice, our lives, matter to God. He doesn't just care what we think, or believe, He cares what we do. And it also tells us something that should be an encouragement to us. You know, we believe that the Bible teaches that salvation is a radical act of God. We talk about that often as we read the Scriptures, and we see that to be saved is not merely to accept a new philosophy of living. That to be saved according to Scripture is to be born again. It is to have the eternal God speak into the darkness of your heart with His creative power, and give you new life. That is radical! Salvation is a radical difference. It is not a small step, it is a giant leap, and we emphasize that, and many passages emphasize that. So that the idea then, that the person who is truly born again has new life in him, you will see evidence of it. There are many passages that focus on that. That the Christian can know he's a Christian by believing, and repenting, and having an attitude of repentance and belief, but also by seeing evidence in his life of a changed life. 2 Corinthians 13:5, examine yourselves and see if you are in the household of faith. There are a number of other passages we could talk about as well.

But today, the emphasis is not so much on the reality of new life, and how different it is, he is talking today about the urgent responsibility that the Christian has, even though he's been transformed in his inner being, we have a responsibility to live it out. I like what John Stott says about this passage. This is a balancing truth, and Scripture is full of balancing truths. The Christian should be different, but he's not always different. In fact, we know that because the Scripture gives us ethical exhortations, five chapters of it in Romans, to say, "Do this. Do this. Do this." The implication is, if he didn't say, "Do this," we wouldn't. We need the ethical exhortations. Stott writes this in his commentary on Romans:

Holiness is neither automatic, nor inevitable. On the contrary, pleas for good conduct need to be issued, and reasons need to be given.

That's why you have five chapters of ethical instruction. God has to give us commands so that we then become holy though our heart is changed. So when we look at where we are today, we evaluate our level of spiritual fitness. It is important to understand that, that we have a part in the process of sanctification. That if we are not actively pursuing holiness, we will not become holy.

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Now, there is the balancing truth that if you are not pursuing holiness, and you really belong to God, He won't let you stay in that state indefinitely. He will discipline you. Hebrews 12:5-11, there the author of Hebrews says if you don't have discipline, you are not a legitimate child. That is, if you are not growing as God wants you to, He will discipline you, He will spank you, He will work in your life to bring circumstances to cause you to have to grow. That is obviously a balancing truth, but here we want to look at, as a Christian, when you look at your life today, and sort of take the health assessment spiritually, where are you? Where are you compared to last year? Think back over the year, where were you? What were you struggling with a year ago? How much progress have you made? If you are a person who struggles with anger? Are the outbursts just as regular, or are they diminishing? And are there not so much outbursts? Are they just little, minor, are they becoming less in intensity? Less in frequency? If you are a worrier, anxiety is a particular sin you struggle with, do you find yourself wracked with anxiety the same way you did a year ago, or has there been progress? Is the peace of God becoming something that is more evident in your life? Trusting God? If you deal with issues of purity, sexual purity, where are you compared to where you were a year ago? Are you making progress? Or have you stalled out? Are you sliding back? We can evaluate ourselves, and it is good and appropriate to stop from time to time with regularity, and ask the Lord to search us, as the psalmist said, "Search me, know my heart. Try me, know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Lord, where am I? Am I making progress?"

Well, if we can look at our lives and we say, "I don't look much different than I did a year ago spiritually," well that means one of two things. Either one, it could mean that you are not a believer, but it could also mean that you are a believer that you've not been applying yourself as you ought. We said the Scripture gives a number of exhortations, one of the other ones that often comes to mind myself is 1 Timothy 4:7 where the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." He uses a word there that is translated '*discipline*', that in the Greek is actually the word '*gumnazo*'. If you were transliterating it, you would write g-y-m-n-a-z-o, and if you look at that it looks like '*gymnasium*'. That is because it is a word from which we get the English word '*gymnasium*', it comes from the word '*gumnazo*'. It is a place of training, the gymnasium, it is a place where you strain and labor to train your body. Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness," that is, "If you don't discipline yourself, you won't be godly." So you have to train spiritually and that is what this passage is calling us to, Romans 12:1-2. He is calling us to take what we believe

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and put it into our lives, to let the Gospel that we have embraced change us. So as we think about where we are, and we think about where we want to be, let's now look at pursuing a spiritual fitness plan in 2015, pursuing spiritual fitness. Four steps in the process.

1) Set Our Goal:

What is the goal that we should have as a Christian? I think the passage tells us this. It actually tells us in Verse 2 when it says:

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...

The goal that we should have as Christians, day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year, is that we would be being transformed, that we would have a transformed life. Not merely that we would just make changes, or adjustments, the world can do that, that is what AA is about, you know, making radical changes but they are not changes from the heart. This is talking about the supernatural life of God becoming evident in your life. A transformed life, the manifestation of the supernatural life of God. We are not to be conformed to the world, but we are to be transformed. The idea there even is if you are not working at transformation, what is going to happen to you? You will be being conformed.

It is kind of like you can't coast in the Christian life. Don't we like to coast? I mean, don't you find yourself, I think it is part of the way we are wired in that when we work hard, isn't it wonderful to then get to the point where you can rest, and sit down, and enjoy what you've done? That's biblical, that is what God did on the seventh day. He wasn't tired, but He shows us that stopping, and reflecting, and celebrating what has been accomplished is good. That is what the Sabbath day was about, and is about, and it is wonderful to have those moments. You know I find myself thinking, "If I get this done, and I get this done, and I get this done, okay, 'then' can wait," right? And we wish those times could last longer.

It's like if you are riding a bike, and you are riding uphill, and you know that when you get to the hill, what am I going to do? I am going to be able to coast. The Christian life really is an uphill ride. It is uphill all the way. There really are no long, descending hills that we can go down. So that means that if you stop pedaling what happens to you? You go backwards, and so we must be pedaling. But the goal here, he says, "Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed." The goal

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should not be merely cosmetic changes, but radical transformation. We are not to be like the world, we are to be radically different. So the question is: *How different are you than the people around you? How different are you than the unbelievers around you at work or at school? Or your neighbors?*

The word for ‘transformed’ is the Greek verb ‘*metamorphoó*’. We transliterate that word into English, a letter-for-letter rendering into English, transliteration is ‘*metamorphoses*’. He says, “Don’t be conformed, but have a metamorphoses, and be continuing to have a metamorphoses.” It is a present tense, an ongoing, continuing action. “Be continually being transformed.” This word is a powerful word. It is a word that is only used four times in the New Testament, and two of the times it is used are in Matthew 17:2, and Mark 9:2 where it says this, when Peter, and James, and John went up with Jesus on the mountain, and He was transfigured before them. The word ‘*transfigure*’ in English transliterates the same Greek verb ‘*metamorphoó*’. Metamorphoses means ‘*to change form*’ and so ‘*transfigured*’, His figure, His appearance, His form was changed. Think about the metamorphoses that they witnessed as they looked at the man Christ Jesus, the man that they had known, and been walking with for years at this point. They were kind of asleep on the ground, they looked up, and they see Him talking to Elijah and Moses, and they see His form transfigured. It says in Matthew 17:2 that His face shone like the sun, His clothes, His garments became as white as the light. Mark says, “So white as no launderer could launder them.” His face shone like the sun, there is light emanating out of His face, the glorious power of the sun is the closest thing he can approximate to what he saw coming out of Jesus’ face, and that light makes His garments, whatever color they were naturally, appear as white brightness.

What were they seeing? They were seeing the reality of the divinity, the deity of Christ becoming manifest. It had been veiled in His flesh, they were seeing the glorious power of God visibly manifest. Paul is saying that you and I, in our Christian lives, are to be so changed that people are to see something divine coming out of us. Not that we are God, no, but that God’s handiwork is in us, that He’s changing us. Supernatural change, that is what our goal should be. Supernatural change for the glory of God. I want to be different tomorrow than I am today, and for that difference to be evidence of the handiwork of God, so that when people look at you six months from now they say, “You’re different than you were.” That’s what we should be striving for. That is our goal, the biblical goal, a transformed life. Set your goal for 2015—a transformed life. This means as you look at the areas that we were talking about earlier that need to change—anxiety,

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or fear, or anger, lust, greed, envy, whatever the sins are that you struggle with, you want to be different. You want God's grace to work mightily in your life so that people can look and say, not so that you get the approval of men, but so that it is evident for the glory of God that He's changing you. That is our goal—a transformed life.

2) Cultivate Your Motivation:

Now secondly, cultivate your motivation. How do you achieve your goal? He says, "Don't forget, don't just jump into the plan, first cultivate your motivation." When he says, in Verse 1:

Romans 12:1 ~ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,...

Now, I want you to think about this. He could have said, "I urge you, brothers, to present your body as a living and holy sacrifice, and to not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind." He could have jumped right into that. Do you see what I left out? "I urge you, brothers, to present your bodies..." but he says, "I urge you, brothers, therefore, in view of the mercies of God," or, "by the mercies of God..." He doesn't leave off the issue of motivation because the issue of motivation is fundamental. To really change you have to want to change. So the question is: *How motivated are you to change?* Are you motivated to want to work on problems because you have a sense of inadequacy, or you have a desire for acceptance, or approval of others, or even acceptance or approval of God? Paul asks us to consider what really ought to be our motivation. He says, "Listen, if you are going to apply the Gospel to your life, and you're going to make progress in growing in grace, you have to have the right motivation." And the motivation is not to be accepted by God, or to be approved by God, or to get rid of things that you don't like. The motivation that will really change your life is not any of those things, the motivation that will change your life is gratitude. Gratitude for the Gospel, gratitude for what God has done. He says, "By the mercies of God, I urge you, I implore, or I beseech you by the mercies of God." He said, "Listen, what is going to make you want to change is when you reflect on the mercies of God."

Now I think in that he is talking about the first 11 chapters of this book, he says, "Therefore," that is an inferential conjunction, right? "Based on what I've been telling you, therefore, now this is what you do with it." That '*therefore*' reaches all

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the way back to the beginning of the book, eleven chapters he has been talking about doctrine and theology, and what he has been telling them is about the mercy of God. He's been telling them that God is a God who looks on us in our misery and is not distant, or unaffected, but that He feels for us, and He has acted decisively to meet our need. In fact, this word '*mercies*' is a very rich word. It is a word which means '*compassion, pity*', but this particular word that is used, the emphasis falls on God's feeling for us. Not so much His action as His feeling. It is clear He has acted, and His feeling leads to action. That is what the Gospel is. Look at what God has done for us because of His mercy. But I love this, that he is telling us in this word that the reality is when God looks at us in the mess that we make in our lives, that the God of holiness, and righteousness, the God who ought to be worshiped with everything that we are, the God who ought to be obeyed continually, yet when He looks at us in our self-inflicted misery, His heart is moved with compassion. He is not distant or unaffected. He is not a God who is sitting there holding a bar up and saying, "You don't measure up." I mean, we deserve that, there is an aspect of it, if you don't repent you will experience the wrath of God. Clearly that is true, but the reality of who God is is He is moved with compassion for all men. He feels for us in our misery, in our anguish. Compassion means He feels *with* us. That is astounding. That is encouraging. And Paul is saying, "Listen, to really be about changing your life, you've got to understand you've got to be motivated out of a gratitude," you and I have to be motivated out of a gratitude for who God is, and what He has done. The mercies of God must be our motivation. This is one of the reasons that we should constantly be preaching the Gospel to ourselves.

I don't know who originally coined that in recent years, that phrase, but it is a very biblical phrase, but it is something in that, to me, Jerry Bridges has really been a blessing in my life. There are two books I'd recommend, even on dealing with this issue of cultivating your motivation. Bridges wrote a book called The Discipline of Grace, I think it is in our bookstore, in our resource center, it is excellent. There is also one, The Transforming Power of the Gospel. Those are two books he has written where he is really trying to help us deal with this issue, that grace is what disciplines us, is what The Discipline of Grace is about. The way that you discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness is you reflect on the wonder of His grace, and His love, and that motivates you to want to be holy so that you strive for holiness not to be accepted, you strive for holiness because you are already accepted. That's very important.

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There's no sense in which the Christian should be reforming his life to be more acceptable to God in a sense of God loving you more. There's nothing that you can do to make God love you more. All that God has done in Christ is more than enough for God to love you and to cover over every bit of wickedness that we are, and to make us righteous, so that when He looks at us, He feels the same love for you, if you're in Christ, that He felt for His Son when He looked at Him.

Think about Jesus, His perfect obedience. He said, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of My Father, the will of Him who sent Me. Just what gives me joy like the joy of eating is to do His will." Every moment of every day, that's what Jesus did, the perfect will of the Father. He continually submitted. He offered a life of perfect righteousness. His whole life was lived in the presence of God. He lived continually obeying the Father, loving the Father, and the Father when He looks down upon the Son at His baptism, what's Jesus doing there? He's submitting to the will of the Father. Remember when He goes to the baptism, and John the Baptist, his cousin, whom apparently He's never seen—remember John the Baptist and Jesus first met when they were both in the womb. John the Baptist was conceived six months before Jesus. Jesus is newly conceived in the womb of Mary, Mary walks in, she greets her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth hears her greeting, and the baby leaps in her womb. John the Baptist recognizes that's the Messiah. She begins to praise God.

Well, apparently they didn't have family reunions back then. At least it was harder to get there. I guess they didn't do it as often, and so John the Baptist had never seen Jesus in person until the day He comes down into the water to be baptized. There he is baptizing, remember, preparing for the Messiah, and saying, "There's one who's coming after me, the thong of whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie. He's coming. Prepare. The Kingdom of God is at hand." He's baptizing and Jesus comes into the water to be baptized, and John is indignant. "I can't baptize You. I need You to baptize me." Jesus says, "It is necessary to fulfill all righteousness," and so John the Baptist baptizes Him. When he baptizes Him, a voice out of Heaven is heard, a loud voice out of Heaven, saying, "This is My Son whom I love, with whom I'm well pleased." The Father looks at His Son. What Jesus is doing when He's baptized is He's identifying with sinful humanity. He's perfectly righteous. He doesn't need to be cleansed, but He has come to identify and be the sin-bearer for all of us who desperately need to be cleansed.

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So when He identifies with it, when He walks that path, when He takes that step, the baptism is Him basically taking the yoke of the sin-bearer upon Himself. The Father looks at that act of obedience, that act of perfect love and obedience, and said, “This is My Son with whom I’m well pleased, whom I love.” It’s as if He couldn’t contain Himself, like a dad watching his son, “That’s my boy.” When the Father looks at Jesus that’s what wells up in the heart of the Father toward His Son, and the reality is that if you have repented and placed your faith in Christ, that every time God looks at you, He looks at you exactly the same way, and nothing you do will change that.

It’s the wonder of that reality, that unchanging reality, that you stand in grace, that you are at peace with God, that you are His beloved child, accepted in the beloved. It’s the wonder of that that motivates holiness. That’s how we live, and that’s what Paul is saying. “By the mercies of God, in view of the mercies of God, now live this way. Live a life that’s holy, out of gratitude.” It’s amazing how powerful gratitude is to produce holiness. There’s no other way. I mean, self-righteousness, human effort, can reform the life, can make changes, but it will not truly result in righteousness.

That’s what the Pharisees were. They were outwardly righteous, but Jesus said they were like whitewashed tombs, whitewashed sepulchers. They painted the gravestones to look pretty, when in reality if you opened up that gravestone and went into that cave, there were dead man’s bones.

So the motivation, cultivate your motivation, how do you do that? You keep reflecting on the Gospel. You keep preaching the Gospel to yourself. That’s interesting. Paul writes the book of Romans to a group of Christians. These aren’t unbelieving Roman people that he writes to. He writes to the church at Rome. He says in Romans 1:15, “I am eager to come and preach the Gospel to you who are also at Rome.” So the Gospel isn’t just for unbelievers. The Gospel is for Christians. It’s to be a part of our life every day.

Now, set your goal. The goal is a transformed life. Cultivate your motivation. Your motivation should be gratitude out of abiding in the Gospel and the wonder of what God has done for you in Christ. Now, the third point is:

3) Work Your Plan:

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There are two parts to the plan here in this passage. We're going to look at the first part today. The two parts of the plan under *Work Your Plan* are *Offer Your Bodies* and *Renew Your Minds*. We're going to look at *Offer Your Bodies*. So you set your goal. I want a transformed life. I know that my life will be changed dramatically by the power of God as I have a right motivation, which is the Gospel, and gratitude for what He's done. Now, how do I live it out? What do I do now? Now that I have the right motivation, what are my exercises? What is the workout plan?

A) Offer Your Bodies:

First, offer your bodies, Verse 1.

Romans 12:1 ~ 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.

He's essentially calling us in this verse. He's saying to you and me that the way that we're to live is we're to see ourselves as priests. In fact, the language is unmistakable. He uses five terms that are more or less technical terms here in this verse, for the priesthood. The word '*present*'. Some translations say '*offer*'. Present your bodies. Offer your bodies. It's a technical term for presenting an offering. Holy, sacrifice, both of those words are from the realm of the temple. That which is holy is that which is set apart unto God, the sacrifice, the offering of something to God, acceptable to God. That word that is translated there as 'acceptable' means well-pleasing. It's a word which is rife with spiritual overtones of the temple, the well-pleasing aroma of the burnt offering that comes up to God, the well-pleasing aroma of the incense. It's the idea that these things please God when we make offerings. Service of worship is the fifth term, a term which well-translated means to serve God or to worship God in the temple.

So Paul says, "Listen, what you need to do, the first plan is offer your bodies. See yourself as a priest, and the offering you make is your body. You're to live your lives as a priest." A priest in the Old Testament, when they were on duty, everything was about their duty. I mean, when they were serving the Lord in the temple, everything was about being prepared to go into the temple, having the right garments, having prepared themselves, the right washings, and everything was about presenting the offerings. They would present the offerings in the morning, and in the evening, and all day long the priests served in the temple. So their life was continually orbiting around the temple. Everything was about the sacrifice and

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the worship of God. He's saying that you and I as Christians, this is how we're to live. We're to see all of life as worship, and that we are priests today. The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is that if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are a priest. And what are we to offer up? We're to offer up our bodies.

Now, I think here he does mean the entirety of our lives, our whole selves, but it's interesting that he says bodies, not selves. He doesn't say, "Offer yourselves," or, "Offer your hearts." He says, "Offer your bodies." I think that's really instructive, especially for American evangelicalism. We talk a lot about offering our heart, you know, give your heart to Christ. Well, there's truth in that, but the language here is you don't need just to offer up your heart. You offer up your bodies. In the 1st Century, this was actually for many of Paul's readers, something that was a little unsettling to them, because they grew up in Greek culture where the body was seen as evil, and the soul, the spiritual, that's good, but the body was seen as evil. This is Greek thought. That's not biblical at all. The Bible never teaches the body is evil in itself. Sin in the body is evil, but the body itself is good. It's made by God. But when he says bodies, why does he say that? I think it's because he's trying to emphasize to us that Christian living, that Christian worship, is to affect the most mundane, basic areas of life, that we're not just to see our lives as worship as we're trying just to think about God. We should. We should be trying to think about God. Pray unceasingly, yes. Reflect on Him. Think about Him. Continually set His word before us, yes, but he's saying as you go about your life, every day, everything that you do is done with your body. As you go about life, as you're brushing your teeth, as you're making your bed, washing clothes, cleaning out the car, rubbing your wife's feet, do it as worship. Offer it to God as worship.

A changed life, the goal of the transformed life, a transformed life will be evident in the things that you do with your body, everything that you do. It's not what we say. It's what we do. It's what we say, yes, but it's more than that. It's what we do.

Now, in presenting our bodies, I think there are a couple things that we can say under this point that I want us to consider. To offer your bodies to God as worship, to see all of life as worship, let's think about it first negatively and then positively.

That you can offer your life to God negatively, what do I mean by that? You offer your body to God when you say no to sin, and that this itself is worship. This is you being a priest. You're offering your body to God when you say no to ungodly desires. When you say no to fleshly impulses, you are offering your body to God. You're dying to self. You're dying to sin.

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Turn back over to Romans 6:12-13. Here the apostle Paul says in Verse 12, he's basically said in this chapter that we died to sin. We died to the reign and rule of sin. Sin no longer is master over you if you are a Christian. Now, you still may feel like it is, but it's not reality, and you have to believe what the Scripture teaches more than what you feel, because what the Bible says is reality, and what you feel is not. He says in Verse 12:

Romans 6:12 ~ Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

I think when we put this together with what Paul is saying in Romans 12:1, he's saying that when we are tempted, every time that you're tempted, it is an opportunity to worship, every temptation, and this really changes. Our obedience must be Godward. Isn't it amazing how we can bring it down to make it just about us? "I don't want to give into this sin, because it makes me feel bad about myself." Doesn't sin make you feel bad about yourself, I mean, after you blow up in anger and then you feel, "I can't believe I did that"? We really shouldn't even say that. "I can't believe I did that. I'm surprised that I would do that." We ought to be surprised that we don't do that all the time, if we're thinking biblically, right? That's because we still have a sin nature. We have a new heart, but we have a body that is still under the dominion, and not under the dominion in the sense that we must obey, but it still has sin living in it, the power of sin.

We can think, "I want to not sin so that I feel better about myself," but we need to not sin so that we can worship God, and that to say no to sin is an opportunity to say yes to Jesus. "Lord, I want to say something in this moment. I want to strike back against this person in anger. I want to get mad at the driver that just pulled out in front of me. But wait a minute. This is an opportunity to worship You, and by saying no to the impulse of my flesh and not letting sin reign in my mortal body, I'm not going to present my members, I'm not going to let my tongue say what it would like about that driver even though he can't hear it. I'm not going to say it, because I'm worshiping You, Lord." It's amazing the power of that when we bring God into the situation.

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It's amazing how foolish we are. From my experience, it's so much easier, so natural to just go ahead and try to do it on my own. "I know I'm not supposed to do this, so I can't do this. I don't want my family to hear me talk about that driver." Well, I shouldn't want my family to hear me talk about that, but that's not the main thing. How do we do it? How do we worship God in the moment? Well, it comes from putting all these things together. Wait a minute. What I want to do is to have a transformed life. I need to cultivate my motivation and offer my body. When I feel the impulse to anger, what am I supposed to do? The first thing you need to do is look at Christ, and to me, one of the most helpful things to do is to go to Him and say, "Lord, here I am. Look at what is on the tip of my tongue about to come out. I don't hide it. I just acknowledge it. Look at it, Lord. Look at me. How long have I been a Christian, and look what was about to come out of my mouth, and it feels like I can't even stop it. It feels like it's coming, Lord. But I come to You because You're a God who looks at me in my misery, and You have compassion."

See, Satan wants to tell us to turn away and try to fix it on our own, and then he mocks us because we can't, but he's a deceiver and a liar. Don't listen to him. Go to Jesus. You go to Jesus and say, "Look at this, Lord. Look at this impulse that I'm even having right now. I know better. I ought to know better. Woe is me! I need You." But as you go to Him and you remind yourself of the Gospel, "You're a God of compassion and mercy. You're a God who doesn't turn me away in this moment. You see me in this moment as if I was living Jesus' perfect life. You see me right now as if I was perfectly obedient, and not only that, but You will give me the power even now to not present my members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but I can present myself to You. I give myself to You, Lord. Help me. I give myself to You now. Help me do righteousness." And in that transaction, what happens is the Lord then gives us the ability to bless those that we were about to curse. "Lord, I pray for that person." It's amazing how you stop and you do that.

I always talk about that. You can pray for me as I'm driving, obviously. I bring that up a lot, don't I? And it's something that I look at and think, "Wow, where am I versus 2015? The car's got a lot more miles on it, but where am I spiritually? But as we think about that, it's amazing how the power of going to God in the moment changes everything. And when you don't yield yourself to sin, your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but you yield yourself to God, and your members, "Lord, I belong to You, help me," then suddenly you begin to think differently. "You know, I pull out in front of people all the time. That guy must be in a hurry. Lord, bless him. Help him not to be dangerous though. Help him know You." Mercy is flowing, and that's transformation.

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So you say no to sin. We present our bodies negatively. We say no to sin and we say yes to righteousness in its place by going to the cross. But then we also can present our bodies positively. What do I mean by that? Not necessarily just in moments of temptation do we have an opportunity to worship. We have opportunities to worship every time we're tempted, yes, but we also have opportunities to worship every time we have an impulse to do something good. So by saying yes to acts of service, we can worship. And this can be the big things like really ministering to somebody when they're hurting, going somewhere to see someone when you don't feel like you have anything to say to them, you're scared, or you have an opportunity to witness to someone and you're afraid of what they're going to do in rejecting you.

“Wait a minute, Lord. This is an opportunity to worship You. It's not just about me and this person, me trying to bring them to Christ and know what to say. It's an opportunity for me to worship You. I want You to know how much I love You, and so I'm going to talk to this person about You, and I'm thinking about the fact that You are here watching me, and I'm not doing it to impress You. I'm doing it because You love me, and you've given me the opportunity to bring this up, and no matter what happens, it's an act of worship to You. You are worthy of being talked about right now with this person.”

It can be big things like that, or it can be small things like I mentioned earlier. It can be washing the dishes or doing mundane tasks. Whatever it is, we can capture it up into worship, and it transforms everything. That's why Paul says:

1 Corinthians 10:31 ~ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Offer your bodies means that when you're tempted to sin, worship. It means when you have opportunities to do good things, worship. I mentioned earlier we like to coast and we like to think, “If I get done with this, and I get done with this, and I get done with that, then I'll have an opportunity to rest.” What we need to be doing as we're doing step A and step B and step C is see it as worship. “Lord, I've got fifteen things on my to-do list. I know I can't get done but maybe seven or eight. If I'm lucky, maybe only four, but while I'm doing number one, I want to worship You. While I'm doing number two, this is for You. I'm doing this Lord, and I'm tempted to think, ‘Why isn't someone else doing it?’ Wait a minute. It's an opportunity for me to worship You.”

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John Stott, in his commentary, he talks about this idea of how God calls us to offer our bodies to Jesus in worship, and he notes that when you look at Romans 3, part of the preaching of the Gospel, you see what we were before we were saved. We were hopeless and helpless. That's what the first three chapters of Romans is about. And then the way of salvation is made clear at the end of Romans 3 and Romans 4, and the way of salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It's by realizing what Jesus Christ did on the cross for me, dying in my place, taking the wrath I deserve, and giving me His righteousness. And then after showing the way of salvation, he talks about the blessings upon the justified. Well, he talks about in that first section—he shows us that sin manifests itself in our bodies. In fact, if you look at Romans 3:10-18, that's where he talks about how bad we are before we're saved. There's no one who does good, not even one. No one seeks for God. All together have turned aside and become corrupt. He says, "Their throat is an open grave. The poison of asps is under their tongues. In their lips are bitterness and cursing. Their feet run to do evil."

So Stott says if that's true in sin, how much more true is it in righteousness? He's saying that righteousness isn't just a matter of the heart. It is that, but it is so much more. It's heart manifest in active works of obedience in our bodies. Look what he says:

If this is true, then our feet will walk in His paths. Our lips will speak the truth and spread the Gospel. Our tongues will bring healing. Our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well, like cooking, and cleaning, typing, and mending. Our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved. Our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.

The Lord wants us to offer our bodies, all of ourselves, to Him, to worship Him in the big and the small. Now, life change is our goal. Set your goal, a transformed life. The motivation must be the cross, and offering your body is the first part of the plan. It's so important to keep that motivation right. I love the words of Isaac Watts, the hymn writer, when he tries to capture this—what's the motivation for the Christian life?

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,*

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and pour contempt on all my pride.

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my life, my soul, my all.*

That's the way the Christian life is to be lived, out of gratitude for what God has done, but all of our lives lived in worship.

Let's pray together...

Our Father, how grateful we are that You are a God of compassion and mercy who feels for us in our misery. Father, we thank You that Your loving-kindness will endure forever, and that one of the marks of the believer is he hopes in Your loving-kindness. When we look at our lives and we see areas where we are so far short of where we ought to be, we rejoice in Your kindness and Your mercy, and yet at the same time, Father, we mourn over our sin. May You help us to be holy. May You change us by Your power. We ask this for Your glory.

Father, we pray for those that are here that have not truly repented and believed the Gospel, that are still living in their sins. Help them today to look to Christ, to turn from their sins, and from living for themselves, and to realize that He is so wonderful, so gracious, that everything else compared to Him is as nothing, that to have Christ is to have all. We pray that You would do this for the glory of Your Name, Amen.

"Pursuing Spiritual Fitness in 2015 – Part I"

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