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## ROMANS 12:1-2

Romans Series: How God Changes People

I want to pray for us, but before I pray for us I want to read the scripture.

Now if I had my first choice, every Sunday before I teach I would have you stand and we would read the Bible passage for that day. The reason I would do that is because there's some reverence to God's word that is expressed in those moments when we read the scriptures. It's not very convenient for me to do that because the way I teach I read a phrase, I talk about the phrase, read a phrase. You'd be up and down the whole service. It might keep you engaged, but it would be distracting at least.

But today I do want to read a passage and I'm going to read this passage, we're all going to read it together. In honor of the Lord and His word we're also going to stand to read it and then I'm going to pray for us.

Stand with me and let's read this passage of scripture together.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2.*

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come now before you and thank you for your word. It is significant. We are students of your word because we know that within them we experience life. We understand who you are, we understand who we are, and we understand what your plan is for us. So Lord, now as we open your word we ask that you would open our hearts, that the message that we receive today might be something that will impact our hearts ongoing. In Jesus' name, amen.

You may be seated.

I'd like to take these verses apart and look at them. I first had to memorize these verses when I was a kid. Maybe some of you did too. I memorized them in the King James Version. So if you hear some of that terminology coming out while I talk today, you'll know why. I memorized them in the King James Version and they were embedded in my mind and became part of my heart and what God wanted to do in my life. I love these verses of scripture.

I want you to understand them in their context, so I want to start with the ones in the middle where it says *in view of God's mercy*. In other words, I want you to be thinking about what we talked about last week.

If you open your Bibles to Romans 11, you'll see that in Romans 11 starting in verses 30-32 it uses the word *mercy* four times. What Paul is saying in Romans 11 provides the precursor to what we're going to understand in Romans 12:1.

Let me remind you what he's saying in Romans 11:30-32. He's saying that we were disobedient, the Jews were disobedient, and because of that disobedience it opened up the way for God's mercies to be shown. Because mercy is not getting something you deserve. If we were to get what we deserve from disobedience, we'd get punishment. But instead of receiving punishment, we receive mercy. So Paul makes that statement in those verses in Romans 11:30-32.

But then notice what happens right after that in the passage. The whole chapter ends and this is where we spent our time last week. It ends with this praising God.

Here's what happened, I think, in Paul's mind. He's writing these words about God's mercy and how amazing they are, so he launches into this praise time. It's almost like he's taken away and lifted up in his heart that who can understand the mind of God? Who is this counselor? Who can understand His paths? This is so amazing. And he's just praising the Lord at the end of the passage. He's talking about God's greatness and His paths.

Now we are going to see at the end of Romans 12:2 today we're going to talk about testing and approving what God's will is. That also comes from the end of the previous chapter where he's so grateful, God's riches are so great, His plans, who can understand them, they're just so amazing.

This glory that he's seeing in that leads him to chapter 12:1 – *in view of God's mercy*. If you get God's mercy, if you catch this, you're just so blown away. I can't believe He would do this for me. How many kings would send someone, how many fathers would send their son? This is just so amazing that God would do something like this. His mercy is just so big.

*In view of those mercies*, he says, and then he uses the word *therefore* because he wants to tie us back to where we just came from. So that's why the *therefore* is there – to tie us in from the previous passage now.

He says, *Therefore, I urge you, I beseech you*. He doesn't say I command you. I find that fascinating because he's going to have some commands later on in this chapter. But here he doesn't command us. He pleads with us, He urges us, He beseeches us (that's the King James Version that's in my mind). *I beseech you, brethren. I urge you*.

Why? Because when you get hold of God's mercy and His character, you want to do something about it. When someone gives you a gift, as you might receive this week, you might say, "Oh I'm so grateful. I want to do something about it." So when you experience the mercies of God, he's saying *I urge you*, because you've experienced those mercies, to do something.

But before I tell you what the something is, I want you to see who this is directed to. Notice it is directed to the *brothers and sisters*. This is a passage for Christians. This is a passage for people who have already accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

So if you're here today and you've not made that commitment to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, let me just tell you, this isn't a passage that's for you yet. It will be after you choose Jesus and accept Him into your life.

You don't become a Christian by growing up in a family that had Christians. You aren't a Christian because you attended church in your life or because you have a religious heritage. You're not a Christian because you're a member of some church somewhere. You're not a Christian because you do good things or you live in a Christian heritage or even a Christian nation. That isn't what makes you a Christian.

What makes you a Christian is that you personally accept Jesus Christ as the Savior for your sin. "I need a Savior." You say, "I want Jesus to be my Savior from my sin," and He comes to live inside of your heart, and then you are a Christian.

And then there's lots of instructions and guidance in the Bible for us who are Christians already. So if you're not a Christian, you want to look at those passages that are saying, "Hey, this is your first step." and you also want to be looking at passages like this so you see what you're in for.

The rest of us who are Christians need to take this into account what we're about to read because this becomes like a life verse for us. A motto, as it were, for how we are to live. So the direction that Paul is writing here is to the believers.

He gives them this command. He says, *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God*. Now the word *offer* is to present or to give control of yourself over to someone else. We use the term lordship to describe that. I want to present my bodies or my whole person. I want to give my whole person to the Lord. That's what it's saying. Present it to Him.

That's big. That's not just a piece of my life. That's not "I'm going to give God Sunday mornings." It's not just "I'm going to give God my offering of my money." It's "I'm going to give Him everything of who I am. I'm dedicating my whole self." It's a dedication is what it is. Everything that I am I am giving to the Lord, I am presenting to Him.

And then he uses this strange terminology. He says *as a living sacrifice*. Now you wouldn't normally think of sacrifices as living. You think of sacrifices as dead. Because when the Israelites brought sacrifices to God, to the temple, they brought dead ones, a pigeon that was killed there, or a lamb, or a ram, or a bull was offered as sacrifices.

But this is talking about a living sacrifice because God wants us to dedicate our lives as an ongoing living sacrifice. Otherwise when you become a Christian, he'll just take you up to heaven. We wouldn't need to be here. But he wants us to live our lives as a sacrifice. He wants

our daily lives to be ones that are following Him and being part of this sacrifice or whatever it is that he's talking about.

*Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.* So he's taking the analogy of the Old Testament sacrifices and bringing them into this passage for us to understand what this means.

In the Old Testament when someone would offer a sacrifice, say a bull or a ram, they would come and they would put their hands on the sacrifice as it was being killed to demonstrate their participation in it. Just as we lay hands on people that are going off on a mission trip, we are participating in that process of sending them out. So when a person would come and offer that sacrifice, they would be participating in it. And now we are. It says we are to *offer our bodies as living sacrifices*. And so that idea of sacrifices then is brought into the New Testament here.

There are some people who would say the sacrificial system that was designed in the Old Testament for the Israelite people is done. Now we don't have sacrifices in the New Testament because Jesus Christ died on the cross and offered *the* blood sacrifice for us so we don't have to offer those sacrifices again. And that's partially true. We don't offer sacrifices to a priest or in a temple anymore like that. However, that doesn't mean sacrifices are over. In fact in the New Testament we see the word sacrifice used for us. That we are to offer sacrifices to God.

In the Old Testament we had sacrifices like the dedication sacrifice. We had sacrifices like the firstfruit sacrifice, just freely giving. We had sacrifices that were just praise to God that would be a sweet smelling aroma up to God. Just take those three for example.

We look into the New Testament and we see first of all in 1 Peter 2:5 that we are priests. Instead of having to go to a priest now to offer our sins and talk as a mediator between God and man, we don't need a mediator anymore. We have Jesus Christ as our mediator. We can go directly into the presence of God and we are priests who enjoy that. And we offer sacrifices.

In Hebrews 13:15 it says *offer a sacrifice of praise*. That sacrifice of praise is certainly when we worship together. It's so fun for me to worship with other people because there's this group sacrifice of praise that's being offered that I just really enjoy. It's a treasure for me to come together.

That's one of the things I think people miss when they have church at home. Some people say, "I can listen to x number of preachers at home on my TV." I think that's fine, but there's something about being together and worshipping the Lord that is really special. That's a praise.

Or maybe the praise that you offer in the course of your day that just said, "Praise the Lord for that sunset." I don't know if you saw the sunset. My wife and I were driving last night, but it was a beautiful sunset last night. Just beautiful. Praise the Lord. That's praise, an offering of praise.

Another one that's mentioned in Hebrews 13 is a sharing and doing good. He says this is your sacrifice. When we're sharing and doing good, that's a way for us to be offering a sacrifice.

And then in this passage we're looking at now in Romans 12:1 we're offering the whole person as a sacrifice. Notice a sacrifice of praise, just like in the Old Testament. A burnt offering, a sacrifice of praise. Sharing and doing good will, like the free will offerings. And offering your whole person, just like a dedication offering that was available to them in the Old Testament.

The sacrificial system hasn't ended, it's just changed. Jesus Christ, because of His sacrificial death for us, has satisfied the requirements of the law and the atonement for us. But we still offer sacrifice. And so when we come to that passage and we see that we are offering that sacrifice to the Lord, we're talking about something that's very special in our lives. That we're dedicating ourselves to the Lord. We're offering our bodies as living sacrifices.

They say it's been said that the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. I would suggest that's the case with many of us. We need to be a living sacrifice, but we keep, "Oh no, God. I want to do this myself." We need to be a living sacrifice daily, giving ourselves to the Lord and dedicating ourselves to the Lord.

That's why at the end of our worship services most every week when I close us in prayer, I say, "Lord, we dedicate ourselves to you again this week." It comes from this passage. "Lord, every time we get together we dedicate ourselves to you. We want to be energized, encouraged to move forward."

Let's go back to the passage. *This is your true and proper worship*. This is interesting because the word in the King James Version it says *this is your reasonable service*. The word *service* I just want to take off on for just a moment because the word *service* or the word *servant*, there are several Greek words that can be translated *service* or *servant* in the New Testament.

The first one is *doulos*. It's not the one used here. But Paul calls himself a *doulos* or a slave or a bondservant, emphasizing the lordship relationship that he has to God. I am owned by God. That's *doulos*, servant. That's not the word used here.

Another word for *servant* in the New Testament, a Greek word, is the word *diakonos*. That's the person who's a minister. We often have deacons in a church. That's the person who's a minister in the church. That idea of ministering, whether in the Bible it can be a minister in a church or in a home or in a government. That kind of a minister. Someone who's ministering on behalf of others. That's another word for minister. But that's not the word *diakonos* used here.

The word used here is the word *latreuo*. It's where we get our term liturgy. The Greek word is *latreuo*. We get our word liturgy and it has to do with your service of worship. So it's talked about here in *your true and proper worship*. But the word really is service. It's this idea of serving the Lord in a way of worshiping.

So as we come together here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope, a number of us are involved in the *latreuo*. Those are the people who empty the trailer or fill it up. Those are people who are involved in service of worship. Those who run the PA system or those who are greeting or ushering, all of those people are involved in the spiritual worship of God's church. That's *latreuo*, ministry.

Now if we understand that that's what *latreuo* means, we put it back in the passage here, he's saying that when you offer your heart, yourself to God as this living sacrifice, you are worshipping the Lord in this sense of service.

So I want to expand your idea of the word *worship* because I think sometimes people think of worship as singing songs or giving money (which are forms of worship), but this is a bigger picture of worship. So that when we come and we sing songs together or help you get into it... Now when I say get into it, people get into it in different ways. Some people like to clap. I'm a clapper. I like to clap. Some people like to lift their hands. I like to do that too. Some people like to close their eyes. I don't know how you get into worship, but however you get into worship I hope you get into it. Because when you get into it you're saying, "This is my message for you, God, and I'm worshipping you." Because it's not the song we sing, it's the heart of worship that we offer to God during our singing. That's worship. Not just songs, but comes from our heart.

Let's talk about giving. As a pastor I struggle with this, this idea of passing a plate. A number of you give money online or through Bill Pay or whatever so it comes electronically into the church's account, which is great. So I ask myself maybe we shouldn't pass a plate anymore. I wrestle with this idea. Or maybe in some churches what they do is they put a box at the back and the spiritual people always find it. That's the reality of life.

But here's why I continue to pass a plate at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. I like the passing (we have chicken buckets and not plates), but I like them for this reason. I like passing the chicken bucket because when it goes by, and I hope this is what you consider every time you see it now, not in a position that you somehow need to give money, but that you'll see it as a place where you put your whole body in it. I don't want anybody stepping into the chicken bucket now. But the idea is when it goes by you, you should say to yourself, "God, I'm putting my whole body in there." Because what it's saying here is when we give ourselves as a living sacrifice, that is our spiritual service of worship. We're dedicating ourselves to the Lord. It's a sacrifice, a living sacrifice.

It's just a beautiful verse. I just love the verse. But you can't just stop here with verse 1. He goes on and verse 2 explains how do you do that. How do you make yourself a living sacrifice?

So it says in Romans 12:2, *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

In our study here in the book of Romans, I'm trying to approach the whole theology of Romans from the perspective of how God changes people. God wants to change people. Now in our verse there are two words that describe the change process. You have to choose which one you're going to use. One is the word *conform*, that's change, and the other is *transform*, that's change. So the passage we're looking at today is talking about how to be changed in your person to be the person that God wants you to be.



So let's go back. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world.* That's the first word. And the word *conform* in the Greek is *suschematizo* where we get our word schematic from.

The idea is you take a schematic and you put it over the project you're working on so that you can fit everything into the proper place. Like a big puzzle this is the master you put over it and everything fits in the proper place.

The idea is we live in a world where there's a schema, there's a schematic placed over us that tells us how we are to shop, how we are to handle our money, how we are to handle our emotions, how we are to handle the busyness of our lives or our calendar, how we are to handle our entertainment. There's a schema or schematic placed over our lives from the world system that says, "This is how you should live."

God is saying not to be conformed by that schematic but to question things. Is it good for us to do, is it good for us to think, is it good for us to feel. We need to question the conformity of the world because what the passage is saying is we are not conformed. We should not be conformed to this world. We should not fit into this schematic of this world because we are different. We think differently. The whole world's going in one direction and we need to realize that God has called us to be different, to go in a different direction.

I would suggest that if you find yourself fitting in you might have a problem. Our goal is not to fit in. Our goal is to represent Jesus Christ. That doesn't give you an excuse to be weird. There are some weird Christians who think they are being a yellow fish, and I think that's not a good idea. I'm not saying we should be weird. But I also don't think we should take what everybody says and run with it.

Paul is saying don't be conformed to this world. You're different. It means you don't compare yourself to your neighbors. You don't compare yourself to your family. You don't ask the question what's normal?

People ask me this question all the time. I work with parenting ministry. "I'm having a problem with my child. Is this normal?" I have to stop for a minute and say, "Wait a minute. First of all, you've got to understand something. We're not even trying to be normal. So yeah, it might be normal that lots of teenagers do that kind of thing, but that doesn't make it good!" We're going to do something different because we're Christians. God has called us not to be normal. Not weird. Don't get confused here. But not normal.

We are not conformed to this world. We don't have the schematic over the top of us that's guiding us. We are making choices about what we're going to do and how we're going to live. Stop letting the influences around you determine who you are. Oh I like that. They will wear you out. If you're always trying to measure up to someone else, you're trying to be like someone else, then Paul is saying don't do that. Don't be conformed to that.

But he has an alternative and that alternative starts with that word *but*. It's not highlighted there, but the word *but* is really important because it's a contrast word and he's telling us *but* do something different and that is *be transformed*. Transformed. Conformed or transformed.

When my kids were younger they wanted to be Transformers and have Transformers. That's good, but that's an active sense, okay, to be a Transformer. That's not what this verse says, to be a transformer. It says *be transformed*. It's passive. That means it's going to happen to you. Be conformed is also passive. Either the world is going to change you or this renewal is going to change you, this transformation is going to happen to you. You have to choose which one you're going to submit yourself to.

That's why you need to present yourself as a living sacrifice. Because when you offer yourself as a living sacrifice you're offering yourself to be transformed. God does the work. We offer ourselves to Him. Transformed.

Now the word transformed is the word *metamorphoo* where we get our word metamorphosis from.

It's very amazing what happens when this transformation or this metamorphosis takes place with a butterfly. A monarch butterfly, for example, starts as a caterpillar, turns into a chrysalis, and then turns into a butterfly. How this can come from a worm or a caterpillar I have no idea. But then I look at some of you and I see transformation and I say, "This is a miracle what God has done." He takes caterpillars and He turns them into beautiful butterflies. That's a transformation. That's the word.

I show you the picture because that's the word *metamorphoo* that's being used there that we are to be transformed. He tells us what that transformation looks like.

In 2 Corinthians there's this beautiful word that uses the same word *metamorphoo* and, describing the same thing, that Paul is writing here in 2 Corinthians, he says, *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory*. In the same way in view of the mercies of God that we've already talked about, these great mercies of God, he's saying in Corinthians we *contemplate the Lord's glory* and we *are being transformed*. Still passive here. We are not transforming ourselves. But being transformed by God, *metamorphoo, into his image with ever-increasing glory* (God's doing this butterfly thing inside of us), *which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*. 2 Corinthians 3:18-19.

God wants to do some amazing things inside of us. He wants to transform us into something else. So we've got being conformed or being transformed. God wants to make us into something special.

And how does that happen? It happens through our thinking *by the renewing of your mind*. Because the way you think is very important. The thinking patterns that you have are going to guide you to either conform to the world or be transformed by the Lord.

How do you renew your mind? Well you're going to renew your mind, of course, by reading God's word, getting involved in a small group. At Calvary Chapel Living Hope they're all centered around God's word in one way or another. Because we believe that the transformation takes place in God's word and transforms us. But also as you pray or as you get together with



other believers or you listen to Christian music or whatever it is, those things have this transforming affect on us to be help us to be the people that God wants us to be. We're going to change the way we think.

When I think about this idea of conforming and transforming and renewing mind, I think of the story that I like to tell kids about the eagle's egg that slid out of the eagle's nest and rolled down into a bunch of turkeys. So the turkeys hatched the eagle's egg. When it hatched, the eagle came out among the turkey. But the eagle didn't know he was an eagle, he just thought he was a turkey. All the turkeys are groveling for insects and flopping around and walking around and gobbling here and there. The eagle doesn't realize that he has much more potential than that, much more capability than that because God made him an eagle but not a turkey.

But at one point he sees some eagles flying and calling and calling out to him in his language that he understands. He realizes that he has much more to offer, much more that he can do. So he takes off and flies, and sure enough he can fly.

I like that story. I know it's a kid's story, but I like it personally for me because sometimes I feel like I'm an eagle around a bunch of turkeys. Now I'm not saying you guys are a bunch of turkeys. What I'm saying is all of us are eagles and we live in a world of turkeys. We don't want to be caught up in that. We don't want to be conformed to this world. We want to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Wow. I just think this is motivation for us to continue on and to do the work that God wants you to do. One of the rewards about following the Lord and dedicating ourselves to Him and being part of this living sacrifice idea is that we get to understand God's will. Then you will be able to test and prove what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Understanding God's will is not an easy thing. It's a challenge sometimes. But I think what he's saying here is it's not so much an emphasis on discovering it as if it was lost and we've got to figure it out. Although I think that discovering God's will is a good thing and trying to understand it is helpful.

Augustine, one of the great church fathers, wrote, "Love the Lord with all your heart and then you can do whatever you want." The implication is if you love the Lord with all your heart then everything you want is going to be okay because it's going to fit in with loving the Lord with all your heart. I kind of like that. It's kind of good. Partially true, at least.

But I think there are some times we're trying to figure out God's will. We're trying to figure out, "Lord, what job do you want me to take?" "Lord, do you want me to get married to this person?" "Lord, should I buy this car?" Or "Lord, do you want me to wear the red shirt or the green shirt today?" I don't know. We're always trying to figure out what does God want us to do, and some of those things are bigger than others. I think it's good.

If you want to know some more ideas about determining God's will, I've written a Bible study on steps to determine God's will. You can ask at the information table. They'll make sure you get it. We'll email it to you so that you have that Bible study.

I think it's great, but that's not the kind of finding God's will out that's talked about here. I want you to see that there's something that happens in your life that's connected to moving forward with God and His will. In this case you offer your body as a living sacrifice, not being conformed to this world, but being *transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is.*

Okay, do you see the first one is there is a part that we do and as result we get to see what God is doing? I'm going to show you some more verses that illustrate the same thing.

Psalm 37:4 has the same thing. On the one hand *take delight in the Lord* (or in the King James Version it says *delight yourself in the Lord*), *and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

I think if you delight in the Lord then you're not going to say, "Lord, I desire you to get revenge on this person." It's not those kinds of desires that He gives us. See, our delight is in the Lord and what our delight is there then our desires of our heart fit in the right direction. So I think he's saying the same thing in Psalm 37:4, that we of our part delight in the Lord and He's going to give us the desires that need to be in our hearts or move us in that direction.

Let me show you another one, another favorite verse that many of us have as a life verse is Proverbs 3:5-6. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.* It's the same thing like *do not conform to this world, but be transformed* into something you don't do, something you do do. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him (or be a living sacrifice), and he will make your paths straight.*

Do you see the connection between going after the Lord 100% and then understanding His will that follows that? That's the idea that's being taught in these verses and a very powerful message, I think, for us. We all want to know God's will and that's valuable.

Let's try to figure out what God's will is for our lives. It's good, but remember the very first step of this is to trust the Lord with all our heart, delight in Him, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. I think a very important message for us as we try to understand what God has for us.

This is a message for Christians and it ties back in to the worship experience of chapter 11:33-36. In that passage it's saying God is so amazing with His paths. Who can be a counselor of the Lord? We don't know what God's will is to a great extent, but I'll tell you how you can find it, Paul is saying.

So let me urge you to do this. It's the same urging that He gives to us. That we dedicate ourselves to Him 100% and I want to invite you to do that today. This is message for Christians. You say, "Lord I want to dedicate myself again today and tomorrow I'm going to do it again. I want to dedicate myself to you tomorrow."

In the New Testament we have a term called being *filled with the Holy Spirit*. It's the idea of being continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Do you know why we have to be continually filled

with the Holy Spirit? Because we leak. That's why. And as we leak we need more filling. So that's the same idea of being dedicated totally to the Lord.

So I invite you today to pray with me and to sing with me about the dedication of our own hearts to the Lord. That you would go away from this place today saying, "Yes. I'm right where I need to be with the Lord. I'm dedicating every part of my life to Him again today."

Let's stand together. Let me pray for us and then we'll sing.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and thank you for the way you've designed our hearts. We can't run on our own, we can't run our own directions. We need to fit into your paths, your will. Lord, we're grateful for the opportunity we have to come before you, a great God, who's so merciful, and entrust ourselves to present ourselves to you. Teach us what it means to question the world's schema or schematic. Help us to be transformed in our own minds. Lead us forward, Father. We dedicate ourselves. Take our lives, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.