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Romans 12:1 “An Appeal for Total Commitment”

Intro. Have you found living the Christian life to be very difficult? Do you think it is impossible? Are you about ready to give up?

If that is the case, perhaps you are trying to live the Christian life without first laying the proper foundation. You see, before Paul deals with the practical aspects of living in the Christian life in chapters 12-15, he first lays the doctrinal foundation in the first 11 chapters. This is right in line with Paul’s custom. You see, what we believe helps to determine how we behave. Trying to live the Christian life without first laying the doctrinal foundation is like trying to build a roof without first laying the foundation & walls to support the roof. However, with this doctrinal foundation, the life that is demanded from us as believers is indeed possible, for it is simply the logical development of the work of redemption. It is futile to give practical exhortation apart from the basis on which it rests.

Now, let’s see how the doctrinal foundation relates to practical living. Before a person should be taught about how God wants him to live, he must first be saved. Notice that Paul addresses these words to “brethren.” So in chapter 3-5 he talks about how we are saved, and tells us some of the blessings of salvation. Until you are saved, made right with God, & born again, you cannot live the Christian life. Then he explains that the believer has died to sin & been joined to Christ in His resurrection life (chap. 6). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit has been given to him to help regulate and empower his life (chap. 8). Only after a person has been convinced that consistent right living is possible through Christ will he be able to obey the ethical commands of the last 5 chapters. As Jesus taught, change a person on the inside, and change their thinking, and then the outward conduct will change for the better.

After a person has been saved and has learned about his union with Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in his life, where does he begin in living his life for the Lord? Well, before Paul begins teaching us how to live the Christian life, he first gives one more foundation upon which his ethical teachings can be built. You must get verses one and two of chapter 12 settled with God before you will be able to obey the rest of Romans. So let’s study these all important verses together. We will only cover v.1 today, and cover v.2 next Sunday. I am taking so much time because these verses are so important. I believe these 2 verses should be memorized by every believer. Now first of all, notice that:

I. AN APPEAL IS MADE

Paul begins v.1 by saying, “I beseech you therefore, brethren....” Paul uses a word (*parakaleo*) that literally means “to call along side.” It is what you do when you call someone to your side to give them some exhortation. It means to “implore”, to “entreat”, to “exhort”. It expresses strong appeal. These words summon obedience, though they fall just short of a direct command.

Paul does not make appeal for action based on his apostolic authority. Nor is he pleading for a favor. Instead, notice the basis of his appeal:

A. An Appeal to Our Mind –Notice the word “therefore.” Based on what God has done for us, as expressed in chapters 3-8, we should give ourselves to the Lord. Paul had shared about the sacrificial death of Christ for us. He has pointed out that we receive salvation & eternal life as a gift, apart from works. We have received the Holy Spirit as a gift. We have received so much from the Lord. Think about that! What should our response be? But Paul also makes:

B. Appeal to Our Heart - Paul could have appealed to the severity of God’s judgment in his pleas for living the Christian life. But here Paul appeals to us “by the mercies of God.” This (*oiktirmos*) is not the typical word for “mercy” (*eleos*), but is a word that refers more to tender compassions. God was not indifferent to our sufferings caused by sin. Instead, He was moved to action by His mercy & compassion. And notice that “mercies” is used in the plural. This probably denotes the abundance of the mercies of God, as expressed in the forgiveness of sin, the granting of peace & sonship, sanctification, union with Christ, life in the Spirit, and the hope of glorification. But the greatest act of mercy shown by God was the suffering and death of God’s Son on the cross! What mercy & compassion that Christ would suffer so much for hell-bound sinners.

Should we not respond to His compassion and kindness? If we fail to respond to such love and mercy, then our hearts must be ice cold! So Paul’s entreaty teaches us that until we really apprehend how much we owe to the mercy of God, we will never worship Him in the right way, nor be effectually stimulated to obey Him.

Now based on what God has done for you, He has a right to expect you to obey Him. But is your attitude something like: “Tell me what you want me to do, and if you are not asking too much, I will do it.” But is that the right attitude in light of what Christ has done for us? He gave His *all* for us. We should give our all to Him!

So we need to understand that due to the mercies of God, He has the right to lay claims upon us. Therefore, not only is an appeal made, but we also see that:

II. THE APPEAL IS EXPRESSED

What specifically does Paul appeal for us to do? He goes on to say in v.1, “that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Now consider with me:

A. The Nature of this Consecration – There are two things involved here: our innermost self that does the presenting and our bodies that are presented. It should almost go without saying that it is useless to give our bodies if we have not, first of all, given ourselves. Paul spoke well of the Macedonians when he said, “They first gave their own selves unto the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5).

Now the word translated “present” (*paristemi*) means “to dedicate” (Luke 2:22) or “to place at the disposal of.” For example, the word is used of Paul “presenting” his converts to God (Col. 1:28). God wants you to commit yourself to the Lord, to do His

will, to yield yourself to Him completely. The word also is used of a servant who stands by, always ready to carry out the commands of his or her lord (Luke 1:19; John 18:22; Acts 23:2, 4; Rom. 16:2). This meaning is the one Paul has already used in Romans 6:13, 16, 19.

I believe this presentation of ourselves involves a definite act of the will. He doesn't use the verb tense that would refer to an ongoing presentation of ourselves, but rather a tense that is consistent with a once and for all presentation of ourselves to God. It commands a definite commitment of the body to the Lord.

I believe that marriage is a good illustration of what I am talking about. On our wedding day, Cheryl presented herself to me as my beautiful bride. After 30 years I can still well remember her coming through the back doors of the church on the arm of her father, walking toward me to commit herself to me in marriage. There at the marriage altar I also presented myself to her. That was a decisive act of commitment that will last for a lifetime. She presented her body to me, and I presented my body to her. She stands ready to serve me, and I stand ready to serve her.

Even so, when I was 17 years old, I made such a commitment to the Lord, and my life has never been the same. A clear & complete change took place in my life.

Have you reached the point in your spiritual life that you have made a complete commitment of your life to Christ? Does your life & body belong to God for the rest of your life? It seems that too many Christians have not made such a commitment. They hold back ownership of certain parts of their lives. Some seem to lay their lives on the altar in a revival meeting, or in a crisis situation, but they keep getting off the altar! I am not impressed with people who keep making rededications to the Lord over and over again. Brother, if your rededication does not last more than a month, it isn't worth much! Before you rededicate your life to the Lord, you need to make sure you have truly & completely dedicated yourself to the Lord like Paul is talking about here!

When I give the invitation at the end of the service, you will have the opportunity to present yourself to God in total commitment to Him, ready to obey His every command. If you are a Christian, and if you have not been living in obedience & service to God, then you should make such a commitment today.

Now we not only see the nature of this consecration, but also:

B. The Object of This Consecration – What is it that we are to “present” to the Lord? Paul specifically mentions the body. God has your soul if you are a Christian. Now the question is, does He have your body? We should realize that the life that we live must be lived in this world and that it must be lived in the flesh. And the Christian needs to understand that their body really belongs to the Lord. Is that how you view your body? However, yielding one's body to God isn't always easy, because the body is the beachhead of sin in the life of the redeemed. That tends to be the battleground for most people.

This issue is very relevant today. Have you noticed how our culture puts so much emphasis on the body? The body seems to be the #1 aspect of the lives of most people. Some spend over an hour a day working to improve their outward appearance. They may spend another hour or more keeping themselves physically fit. Those are not bad as long as spiritual priorities are not sacrificed. What Paul is especially appealing against is using the body for sinful pleasures, which is so common today. For example, Paul said in 1 Cor.

6:13, “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” You need to overcome committing sin with your body. But the appeal does not just encompass the negative. Our bodies are also to be presented in a positive way. We are to dedicate our bodies to glorify and magnify Christ (Phil. 1:20-21), & to obey & serve Him with our bodies. We sacrifice sinful pleasures, but God gives us heavenly and better joys instead.

C. The Sacrificial Nature of this Consecration – Paul describes this commitment of our bodies to the Lord as a “sacrifice.” Furthermore, according to Josephus (*Antiquities* IV. 6.4) the Greek verb translated “present” was used of offering sacrifice. Based on the immediate context, the term has an obvious sacrificial connotation.

Now there are 4 things in particular that Paul says about this sacrifice that we offer to the Lord.

1. We Are to Offer an Acceptable Sacrifice - Animal sacrifices had to be clean, perfect, no blemish. They were to sacrifice only the best of the flock to the Lord. Even so, we are to give our best to the Lord. You are to give God the first of your income, not what is left over. You should give God the best of your day for prayer & Bible reading. We give the first day of the week in worship.

Furthermore, we need to make sure that what we present to the Lord is acceptable & pleasing in His sight. In fact, this is an important aspect of sacrifice. In the case of Christ, Paul wrote, “...as Christ... has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2). Paul spoke of a sacrificial missionary gift as “...a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). Peter says that we are to offer up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). In Heb. 13:15-16 the author spoke of the sacrifices of praise and doing good works which are “pleasing to God.”

In this verse Paul tells us what is involved in offering ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice unto God.

2. We Are to Offer a Complete Sacrifice - We must come to the place in our lives where we say, “My body is not my own; it is all yours, Lord.” This also means that every part of our body is to be presented to the Lord, dedicated for obedience & service. Paul has already said back in Rom. 6:13 that we must yield the members of the body as “instruments of righteousness.” These hands that used to steal I have committed to the Lord, and they will no longer steal. This mouth & tongue that used to cuss & lie & slander has been committed to the Lord. My mouth will no longer utter a cuss word. My mouth will not be used to lie or gossip or slander people. Instead, my mouth & tongue will be used to sing praises, give thanks, & proclaim the Gospel. Some people have laid everything but their tongues on the altar it seems!

3. We Are to Offer Ourselves As a *Living* Sacrifice – Of course, this is in contrast to animal sacrifices that were so common in Paul’s day. Such sacrifices would end with the death of the animal. But now that Christ has offered Himself as the true sacrifice of our sin, God has done away with animal sacrifices. Instead, He is now looking for living sacrifices. God doesn’t want you dead. He wants you to have life, and serve Him as a living sacrifice. The same word & verb form for “living” is used in Romans 6:11 where Paul says you should “reckon yourselves ... alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The word living, however, may mean perpetual, lasting, such as “living water” (Jn. 4:10-11; 7:38) or “living bread” (Jn. 6:51) that lasts, & keeps satisfying the hunger & thirst of our souls. Peter talks about a “living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3) that never ends in this life. 1 Peter 1:23 says “the word of God ...lives and abides forever.” The sacrifice then which we are to make is not a transient, momentary commitment, like the sacrifice of an animal, but it is a living or perpetual sacrifice.¹ Perhaps we may conclude from this that we are not to seek a martyr’s death. Generally, the Lord wills that we live for Him as a *living* sacrifice.

4. We Are to Offer a Holy Sacrifice – “Holy” means set apart for God’s service. It means separated unto God. Thus the physical body of the believer, put at the disposal of God, presented to Him, is holy both in the sense of being set apart for His use, and holy in the sense of being used for pure and righteous purposes, and thus free from sinful practices. We also should view our bodies as holy temples to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19). He does not dwell in a special way in buildings made with hands, but in His people.

Is your life, your body, your all set apart unto God as holy, separate from sin? Is your sacrifice acceptable & well-pleasing to God?

Now we not only see the nature of this consecration, the object of this consecration, & the sacrificial nature of this consecration, but also:

D. The Reasons for this Consecration – You might ask, “Why should I make such a sacrifice unto God?” Well I have already given one reason. We should present ourselves to God because of what Christ has done for us. As Paul suggests in this verse, it is only reasonable that we respond with complete devotion. But I see another reason. It is our best form of worship. You see, the Greek word translated “service” (*latreia*) specifically refers to religious service, including the service of worship (see 9:4). Notice that our service of worship should be “reasonable” (*logikos*), which means “rational” as distinguished from the material. Thayer says it is “the worship which is rendered by the reason or the soul.” It is rational in contrast with what is mechanical and automatic. This expression is very likely directed against the external ceremonies of the Jewish and heathen cults. If you worship God only by means of externals, like church attendance, or even by singing and shouting, and saying “Amen”, then your worship is *not* acceptable. True worship does not consist of mere outward participation in rituals, such as lighting candles & liturgy. In John 4:24 Jesus says the Father seeks true worshipers. As we see here, one of the best forms of worship is obedience to God in our daily lives! It is dedicating ourselves to the service of God.

By now many of you have at least heard about the story behind the movie, “Saving Private Ryan.” It provides a good illustration of what I am trying to get across. In the story, the private had 3 other brothers who were serving our country during WW2. All three died in combat. In the process of writing condolence letters to the grieving parents, it was discovered that Private Ryan was the only son his parents had left. So the War Department ordered that Private Ryan be brought home. 9 men volunteered for the mission to find him. On the way, 2 of the 9 were killed. When the team arrived, Private

¹ There are two “living sacrifices” in the Bible. The first is Isaac (Gen. 22); the second is our Lord Jesus Christ. Isaac “died” just the same – He died to self and willingly yielded himself to the will of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ actually died as sacrifice, in obedience to His Father’s will. But He arose again. And today He is in Heaven as a “living sacrifice.”

Ryan did not want to leave his comrades. They were assigned to hold a bridge at all cost. So the remaining 7 soldiers of the search team decided to stay & help the company out. Then the Germans came with tanks and many infantry to cross that bridge. A battle ensued, and many Americans lost their lives, including the commander of the search team. But they saved Private Ryan. As the commander was dying, he looked up to Private Ryan and said, “Earn this.” In other words, several men had died to save him, and bring him home to his family. In light of their sacrifice, the commander expected him to live worthy of their sacrifice.

Years later, Private Ryan visited the grave of that commander & reflected back on his statement, “Earn this.” He even asked his wife, “Am I a good man? Have I lived a good life?”

In light of the mercies of God, and in light of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for you, you cannot earn your salvation, but it is very reasonable to respond to such sacrifice & great mercy by presenting yourself wholly and completely to God in obedience & service.

Conclusion: So I appeal to your mind and your heart, that you reach the place in your life that you present your body a living sacrifice, holy & acceptable unto God. That is your most reasonable service of worship in light of what God has done for you.

I wonder who needs to present yourself to God to receive salvation today? I wonder who among you have been saved, but you haven't presented yourself for baptism? That is one of the first steps of obedience we should render to God. Is God calling someone to be a preacher or missionary? Are you willing to present yourself to God in full-time Christian service today? Do you need to present yourself for church membership this morning? If so, you come forward as we sing the invitation hymn.

Sources: Steve Felker (notes from sermon tapes of 8/15/82 & 8/21/94); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, “God’s Covenants” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *A Living Sacrifice: Study Notes on Romans 12:1-8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).