

THE SCROLLS

Measures of a Disciple | Romans 12:1-2

Life Lesson

The ultimate paradox of the Christian life is that true freedom and fulfillment are never found in pursuing self-governance, but in total, radical surrender to Jesus Christ. When we stop trying to shape our own future and instead surrender our bodies, minds, and daily plans on the altar of God's mercy, we discover that His will is far greater, wiser, and more satisfying than anything we could have imagined on our own.

Examine Scripture

12 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. 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.

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?
2. How is God calling you to grow or change?
3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?

Shaped in Surrender

The ultimate mark of a Christian life is not passive belief but complete, radical surrender. In the first eleven chapters of the Book of Romans, Paul constructs a towering monument of Christian doctrine: he reveals human sinfulness, exalts justification by faith alone, declares the believer's union with Christ, and shows the sovereign grace of God in salvation and redemption.

Then comes Romans 12. With a single pivot, Paul shifts from the grand summit of doctrine to the practical valley of Christian duty. The Gospel never ends at intellectual agreement; it requires full, unreserved surrender. Surrender is not an elite spiritual level reserved for missionaries or martyrs; it is the ordinary, necessary response of every person who has experienced God's redeeming grace. True biblical surrender is not a surrender of defeat but a surrender of devotion, placing everything we are on the altar of the One who gave everything for us. This is our true and proper worship.

“Therefore . . .”

This marks the transition from doctrine to duty, theology to practice, thought to action. The word “therefore” indicates the connection between what Paul is about to write and what he has already written in the first eleven chapters. In other words, there is no clear break in thought. What Paul is about to say is directly related and should be a direct response to what he has already discussed.

We receive a summary of the first eleven chapters in (Rom. 11:33-36): “Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Paul ends his theological discussion with a hymn of praise.

That's the “therefore!” Since all things come from God, through God, and to God, and no one could ever repay Him for His kindness, grace, and mercy, there is only one response: complete

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surrender. In other words, our response to God's greatness and glory is, and can only be, true worship, which requires us to surrender completely by offering ourselves as living sacrifices.

This is why Paul wrote the incredible theological revelation of God's glory in all things. It was not only to inform our minds but also to inflame our hearts. It was not just to increase our knowledge of God but to motivate us to action.

“In view of the mercies of God . . .”

What should motivate us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices and fully surrender to Christ? Paul reminds us what to focus on: “in view of the mercies of God” (v. 1). The word “mercies” (οἰκτιρμός) is the Greek word “hiktirmōn,” which means compassion, mercy, or pity. In other words, it refers to God's actions and attitude toward sinners. It is out of compassion, pity, and mercy that He extends His grace toward us.

What are “the mercies of God” to which Paul is referring? Again, Paul is connecting what he says in this verse to what he has already said in the first eleven chapters. Based on the doctrine and theology in (Rom. 1-11), we understand that all we are, have, and hope to be is simply by the mercy and grace of God. Here are some of the mercies that Paul describes in (Rom. 1-11): forgiveness of sins, justification by faith, peace with God, union with Christ, freedom from sin and the law, adoption as sons and daughters, possession of the Holy Spirit, no separation from Christ's love, salvation made available to both Jews and Gentiles, etc. In other words, the mercies of God are compiled in the Gospel! So, the basis of our complete surrender, the foundation by which we are able to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, is the Gospel!

True surrender to Christ never results from legalistic pressure or fear of condemnation; it comes from a heart overwhelmed by mercy. By experiencing God's grace and mercy, you grasp the depths of sin from which you were saved and the joy of your salvation. True gospel surrender never arises from legalistic pressure or fear of condemnation; it flows from a heart overwhelmed by mercy. Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs noted: “When the soul considers what God has done in Christ, it cries out, ‘I can withhold nothing from so sweet a Savior.’” Surrender is not how we earn God's favor; it is how we show our awe that His favor was freely given to us when we deserved judgment.

“I urge you . . .”

The word Paul chose to use is very meaningful and should bring great comfort. The Greek word for “urge” (παρακαλέω) is “parakaleō.” It means to invite or call someone to one's side. It shares the same prefix as “parakletos,” used for Comforter in reference to the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul is not pointing and saying, “Go and surrender!” He is

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pleading with us and drawing us toward his side, as if to say, “Let’s do this together.” How encouraging is that? Inspired by the Holy Spirit (the parakletos), Paul is telling us we need to rely on each other to completely surrender to Christ!

“to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.”

Paul is quick to remind us that following Christ requires sacrifice. To be a living sacrifice, you must surrender yourself to Christ. If following Christ costs you nothing, then you are not truly following him. It is costly and demands, as Jesus said, to “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Paul also hints at this in (Rom. 6 and Gal. 2:20); we have died with Christ. In the Old Covenant, an animal was brought to the altar, slain, and burned. In the New Covenant, the altar remains, but the sacrifice changes. We offer our physical bodies (our hands, eyes, feet, desires, and talents) and lay them down, alive to serve God's glory. It is about complete surrender, not just giving up some parts of our lives. Complete sacrifice; not just what feels comfortable.

Paul continues to emphasize that this living sacrifice must be “holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship” (v. 1). The two requirements for presenting ourselves to God are that our sacrifice must be holy and acceptable. This alone demands great effort. We are to be holy and do what pleases God. This means our lives should reflect Christlikeness in a way that honors and glorifies Him.

Paul even goes further by saying it is “your true worship.” The word used for worship is “latreia,” which literally means “service.” Clearly, Paul is referring to the Old Testament sacrificial system—sacrifices offered to God as acts of religious service. The difference is that we do not bring a sacrifice, but we are the sacrifice! So, it is a daily challenge to present ourselves as living sacrifices, work that is incredibly demanding. Placing yourself on the altar every morning is neither easy nor natural. It takes effort.

In other words, true worship is not just about Sunday mornings; it is about every moment from when your eyes open in the morning to when you finally close them to sleep. Worship is the life we live, but only if we live in a way that is holy and acceptable through complete surrender. Total surrender is the only logical response to infinite mercy. If Jesus gave His life for us, it is entirely reasonable for us to give our lives back to Him. Worship is not just what happens inside church walls on Sunday morning; it is the daily, whole-bodied yielding of the self to God.

Charles Spurgeon captured the paradox of the “living sacrifice”: “You are to be a living sacrifice, presenting your body in its actual activity, your life in its vigor and vitality... The difficulty with a living

Personal Reflection

1. Why do I follow Christ? What motivates my complete surrender to Him?
2. Is my true worship based on the "mercies of God" or on my personal preferences? (i.e., "I like this song, so I will sing" or "I feel good today, so I will worship"). How does completely surrendering to Christ affect my worship?
3. In what specific ways is the culture around me attempting to force my values, entertainment choices, or priorities into its mold rather than God's?
4. How much am I actively filling my mind with Scripture and truth compared to the worldly media, news, and opinions I consume daily?
5. Do I truly see God's will for my life as "good, pleasing, and perfect," or do I secretly worry that fully surrendering to Him will cause me to miss out on something better?

Commentaries

*Expositor's Bible Commentary
(Abridged Edition): New Testament*
Edited by Kenneth Barker

New Bible Commentary Edited by D.
A. Carson

NIV Application Commentary:
Romans by Douglas Moo

Romans by John MacArthur

Mt. Zion's Mission

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MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
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sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar." Surrender is an ongoing daily act, not just a one-time event. The Christian returns to the altar each morning, handing the reins of life back to Christ.

"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ."

This is the result of genuine surrender to Christ! When you fully surrender to Christ in true worship, it changes you! If it does not change you, then it is not genuine worship! Throughout Scripture, whenever someone truly encountered God in worship, they were completely transformed; some even experienced a complete change of name.

True worship shapes you by preventing you from being molded into the world's image. You will not look like the world. The world constantly exerts external pressure, pushing believers to conform to its mold of self-centeredness, independence, and materialism. John Piper highlights the risk of worldliness: "Conformity to the world is living for the same practical goals as those who do not know God. Transformation is the radical change of your desires from the inside out." Surrender involves rejecting secular culture's influence over our values, ambitions, and ethics.

Furthermore, true worship renews your mind. Your thoughts are completely transformed, and your focus shifts to Christ. Surrendering your body begins with surrendering your mind. You cannot live a surrendered life if your mind is continually fed by the wisdom, entertainment, and values of the world. The mind must be renewed through God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit's power.

"So that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."

Lastly, genuine worship and total surrender enable you to understand God's will. Many Christians wonder, "What is God's will for my life?" as if it were a hidden puzzle. Paul shows that understanding God's will comes from surrender. Hearts that are not surrendered cannot recognize or take joy in God's will because their own will clouds their vision. Once your mind is renewed, God's will no longer feels like a burdensome set of rules, but as good, pleasing, and perfect. You will never truly understand what God desires for you until He receives worship from you.

Romans 12:1-2 leaves no room for lukewarm Christianity. Considering God's infinite mercy, total surrender is not an extraordinary act of devotion; it is simply our true and proper worship. We are called to break free from the world's mold, lay ourselves on the altar each day, and allow God to renew our minds from within.