

Wholehearted Surrender to Christ

Romans 12:1-2

Sunday, August 21st, 2022

By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

Romans 12:1–2

[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Pray

Introduction:

How many of you have ever heard the name Jimmy Valvano (Vahl-AH-no)?

If you haven't, let me tell you a little about him.

Jimmy was the middle child of Rocco and Angelina Valvano. He was born in Corona, Queens, New York and was a three-sport athlete at Seaford High School on Long Island until he graduated in 1963. Jimmy went on to play point guard at Rutgers university from 1964-67. And when he graduated, began a long and decorated coaching career that spanned nearly 19 years, culminated in multiple ACC basketball championships, multiple deep runs into the NCAA tournament, and one unlikely, yet historic NCAA championship in 1983. He even went on for a couple of years to be a very successful ESPN newscaster.

*But these accomplishments aren't what people necessarily remember most about Jimmy Valvano. What most people remember is what happened to him in 1992 and 1993. In 1992 Jimmy Valvano was diagnosed with a terminal form of metastatic cancer. And in that moment the trajectory of his life was changed forever. **No longer was his life about sports, but in an instant, it became about beating cancer and advocating for cancer research with every breath and dollar he had.***

Sadly, Jimmy Valvano (AKA Jimmy V.) lost his battle with cancer on April 23rd, 1993, but in the midst of his fight he established something called the Jimmy V or V Foundation which, to date, has raised over 290 million dollars for cancer research since its inception.

Now I'm not telling you this story, so you gain a great admiration for Jimmy V. **Instead, I am telling you this to connect it to the main overarching truth of the book of Romans.**

That if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ then we too have had the trajectory of our lives radically changed forever. But instead of being changed by cancer (**though that does change lives**), we have been forever changed by the power of God through the gospel of his Son.

This change is so clear when we look at what Paul has already said in the 1st part of Romans. He tells us in Romans 2 that God is a righteous judge who will rightly judge sin and evil. And In Romans 3:10 and 23 that no one is good or righteous and that everyone of us have fallen short of God's standard of perfection.

As a result, in Romans 6:23 we learned that what we deserve for our sin or falling short of that perfect standard is God's judgement and death (**forever separating from God in hell**).

Yet, there is good news for us. In the last part of Romans 6:23 Paul tells us that Jesus gave us a free gift. That free gift is an eternal and forever life with God. This life was bought for us when, according to Romans 5:8-9, Jesus died so that we could be made right with God through his shed blood.

And in Romans 10:9, if we put our full trust and hope in Christ, we not only will attain this eternal life, but Romans 6:22 says that we will be set free from the enslaving power of evil, sin, and death.

But Paul's goal isn't merely to tell us what Christ has done. He hasn't meticulously laid out the gospel for 11 chapters just to say, "God's great isn't he? Look what he's done for you and be amazed" (**Though we should be amazed**).

No, he has laid it out because he wants us to be so overwhelmed by the greatness, goodness, and mercy of God, **as it has been revealed in and through Christ**, that we will see Paul's words to us this morning, and in the rest of Romans, as the only reasonable way to respond to such a great gift.

So, let's begin this morning by looking at Romans 12:1-2 were, in verse 1, Paul is going to call us to a wholehearted and all-consuming response to God's mercy given to us in Christ. And then in verse 2 we will begin to see the road map for how we are supposed to live that out.

1. Our response to Christ and his work should be a wholehearted surrender (Rom. 12:1).

[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Paul is now making an appeal to the Roman church, and in this context that word "appeal" is basically a strong call to action. But the neat thing about his call is that he doesn't call them to action by telling them that it is their duty to obey God, or by being a heavy-handed Apostle who calls them to obedience through the fear of judgement.

Instead, he calls them to action by saying "**...therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.**"

And in those 7 words he is once again communicating the glorious reality of what God has done for them, and he is reminding them of who they are.

The words **therefore...by the mercies of God** is Paul's way to sum up Christ's work on their behalf, and it is a reminder to them that they are recipients of God's perfect and unending mercy.

He then calls them "**brothers,**" which reminds them of what God's mercy has done for them. It has made them apart of the family of God which is why Paul can call them brothers.

And if we put all of that together the first part of verse 1 could have been written this way:

"Because of God's unending mercy, which I told you all about and now belongs to you as his children, I am calling you to action."

Now this might seem like a small thing, but it isn't.

You see, in the Christian life it is very easy for us to get in a mode of living where we do everything out of a sense of duty or fear. We go to church because it is our duty as good Christians. We read our Bible's because we are afraid that God will be mad at us if we don't. We go to various church events because we don't want people to think poorly of us.

And when we live this way, we are not living in light of or responding to Christ and his great work for us. Instead, we are living a lifeless and lesser version of Christianity that is trying to do just enough to get by.

But that's not the kind of life that God has called us to live.

Rather, the life that God has and is calling us to live is summed up in the action or response that Paul wants for us when he tells us in the 2nd half of Romans 12:1:

to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The life that we are called to live where we rightly respond to the mercies of God that have been given to us in and through Christ, is a life where every part of our being is wholeheartedly surrendered to God and given over to him for his purposes. **This is what it means "to present our bodies as living sacrifices."**

And this isn't just something Paul calls us to, but it is the way that the whole cannon of scripture calls us to respond to God and his great work in our lives.

Deuteronomy 10:12

[12] And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with **all your heart and with all your soul,**

1 Samuel 12:20

[20] And Samuel said to the people, “Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with **all your heart**.”

Jeremiah 24:7

[7] *I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me **with their whole heart**.*

Mark 12:30

[30] *And you shall love the Lord your God with **all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength**.*

Everything in our life should be wholly devoted and surrendered to God and his purposes. Our homes, marriages, children, jobs, money, time, energy, and talents should be oriented around honoring, serving, and making much of our great God because of the amazing and undeserved work of mercy that he has done for us in and through Christ.

And what is so convicting to me about these verses this morning is that Paul doesn't say that this is a super special calling for an elite group of Christians. But instead he says to the entire Roman church and to us, “**This is your spiritual (reasonable) worship.**”

Which means that nothing short of a wholehearted surrender to Christ makes sense in light of what he has done for us. **It is the only way we can and should respond as Christians.**

Now I realize that seems big and it is. But God hasn't left us without some instructions on how to live this out.

And I will begin to unpack this for you a little bit in verse two, **but ultimately this is what we will be learning throughout the rest of the book of Romans.**

So how do we begin to live a life that is fully and wholeheartedly given over to and surrendered to Christ?

2. A wholehearted surrender to Christ requires us to reject the patterns of this world (Rom. 12:2a).

Now for those of us who are parents or have been around kids for any length of time we understand that kids begin to imitate us as a very early age.

Babies as they grow begin to imitate simple gestures. Toddlers then will imitate more complex movements. **A good example is our son Joshua. When he would come to worship practice as a young child, he would imitate my conducting.** And finally, our children will grow to a place where they are able to fully imitate the things we say and do. Most of us understand this, and many of you who have little ones are experiencing this right now.

But it unfortunately doesn't stop with mere actions.

As our kids grow we also notice, for better or worse, that they begin to imitate our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. According to an article on *TheSuccessfulParent.com* this is what is known as the **Mirror Problem**. Here's what it says:

“One of the great challenges of parenting is that kids soak up who and what you are and mirror it back to you in their attitudes and behavior. A parent can hardly have a feeling or emotional reaction to something that a child doesn't observe or feel and react to themselves. Kids are mirrors and imitators. They reflect back to you how you behave and what you feel by imitating it.”

Now for some of you that might make you feel really good. You think, I lived a pretty good life and my kids are living that out. **I can check the great parent box. Congratulations to the two of you who feel that way.**

However, for the rest of us, this brings about mixed feelings. Yes, we know that we have hopefully lived out and embodied some good traits that our kids have picked up. **But we also realize that we have lived and reacted in negative ways that our kids are now reflecting in their own attitudes and behaviors.**

For me this can sometimes manifest itself in a negative attitude. I have been prone to negativity throughout my life, my marriage, and in my parenting, and there are times that this same type of negative heart attitude is evident in my kids.

And it is this kind of heart imitation that Paul is calling us away from when he says in Romans 12:1a:

***“[2a] Do not be conformed to this world,...*”**

He understands that we live in a fallen world that embodies heart attitudes, thoughts, language, and actions that are so opposed to the things of God. In fact, these things are all around us in a way that we are almost submerged in them like a bag of tea in hot water.

Not only that, but we also live in earthly bodies that Paul himself says are unable to please God. As he says in Romans 8:5a, 8:

[5a] For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,... [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

So he understands that we are prone to imitate and live like the world. We are prone to seek after wealth, health, and security. We often are selfish, proud, jealous, and arrogant. And we too easily seek after the ease and pleasures of this life as if they somehow can satisfy us.

But Paul also tells us that we have been set free from these things. As he writes in Romans 8:9:

[9] You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

We are not longer controlled by this world or our flesh. We have instead have been crucified with Christ and are now controlled by his Spirit who dwells within us.

And because we are set free from the things of this world and the flesh, Paul wants us to understand that fully surrendering to Christ means **we must not “conform,”(fashion or mold)**, our minds, hearts, practices, attitudes, views, and words to the culture around us.

Instead, we need to work to put them off, reject them, and we need to leave them behind.

We need to stop seeking after wealth and health as if they can save us. We need to lay aside our selfish desires realizing that we have been fully redeemed and made alive by a selfless and sacrificial God. And we need to reject the lie that the pleasures of this world, can satisfy us. Because they can't.

But how do we do that? How do we turn away from these long-standing patterns of sin and worldly thinking? Yes, we are set free by Christ, and his Spirit lives within us, but we are still living in the flesh and this world, and those old ways of living and thinking are always around us. So what are we supposed to do?

3. A wholehearted surrender to Christ requires the transformation of our mind and heart (12:2b).

...but be transformed by the renewal (renovation) of your mind (thoughts, feelings, and will)

Now that word “**transformed**” is close in definition to the word “**metamorphose**” which means to change in form and nature. Now we might want to assume that the transformation that Paul has in mind here is the transformation from death to new life that happens when we first believe in and put our trust in Christ.

But he has already identified them as brother's in Romans 12:1 which means that he are already believers in Christ. Also, he is calling them and us to an action, to do something, and we know that salvation or new life according to Ephesians 2:8-9 is a gift of God and not a result of works or actions. So that can't be what Paul is getting at here.

Instead, the kind of transformation (change of form and nature) that Paul has in view is something that is continuous, moment by moment and day by day. And we know it is an ongoing transformation because it is something he calls us to participate in when he says, ***“be transformed by the renewal (renovation) of your mind (thoughts, feelings, wills),.”***

Which means that we are to daily renovate and change our thoughts, feelings, and desires in such a way that we no longer desire the things of the world, but instead we desire to be fully surrendered to God.

But how do we do that? How do we daily renew and change our thoughts, our feelings, our desires, and our wills? How does that happen?

Is it trying hard to think new thoughts? Is it somehow just trying to do different actions than we did the day before? What is it? What does it mean to renew our minds?

The answer to this question is found in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:18 when he writes:

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

The answer to how we daily renew our heart and mind so that we are transformed into the image of Christ **is to continually look to and immerse ourselves in who God is.**

Now this doesn't mean that we merely read the Bible though we need to do that, and it doesn't mean that we just think thoughts about God which we should do.

But it means that we need to be people that continually fill our minds, hearts, and souls with the very truths of who God is. We need to submerge ourselves in his word as we meditate on the wonder and magnificence of who Christ is and what he has done for us. And we need to ask God to take those truths and press them deep down into every area of our lives so that they actually change who we are at the deepest levels of our affections and desires.

And finally, we need to be people who slow down enough and remove distractions from our lives in a way where we are able to let God and his word do this kind of renewal within us.

Now, I realize that this isn't easy. As Americans we don't like slowing down, we are easily distracted, and because of our modern conveniences and technologies it is super hard for us to be in a place where we are able to experience God this way.

In fact, in preparing this message, I saw these short comings in myself, and I felt in such a deep way how much I fall short of filling my mind, heart and, soul with the magnificence of who Christ is.

And if you are feeling the same way this morning, I want to encourage you with something. That God hasn't left us to do this work on our own. In fact, he knows we can't and he doesn't expect us to.

This is why when Paul tells us, in Romans 12:1, to wholeheartedly surrender ourselves as living sacrifices, he includes the words, **“holy and acceptable to God.”**

Think about it. Can we make ourselves holy and acceptable to God through our own actions? No. We are only made holy and acceptable in God’s sight through the shed blood of Christ and by his Spirit that now lives within us.

Which means that it is only through his Spirit living within us, that we will be able behold and immerse ourselves in the truths of who God is in such a way that they actually begin to renew and renovate our hearts and minds, day by day, so that our desire becomes to fully and wholeheartedly give ourselves over to God and his purposes for our lives.

Paul also highlights that this is a God given and Spirit driven work when he says at the end of 2 Corinthians 3:18, *“For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

And the good news is that when this Spirit driven change happens in us, Paul tells us that the fruit that will be produced in our lives is a life that is surrendered to the good and perfect will of God. As Paul says in Romans 12:2C

that by testing (Putting into practice) you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Conclusion:

And now, I want to end this message recognizing that I haven’t given you a lot this morning that feels super practical. You aren’t walking away with a perfect 3-step program for becoming like Jesus. **But hopefully I have laid the groundwork for everything that Paul is going to say to us in the coming verses and chapters, and that I have given you a Christ exalting Spirit empowered vision and trajectory for your life.**

Because every good thing that God wants for us, in Romans, and really in the Christian life, will come back to these simple yet profound truths and practices.

That we have been bought and redeemed by the mercies of God through the shed blood of Christ. And we have been set free from sin, darkness, and death, and have been given the hope of new life.

Therefore, in light of this great reality, our only response must be to wholeheartedly surrender our lives to Christ as we reject the patterns of this world, and instead immerse ourselves in the magnificent and wondrous truth of who God is, **by his Spirit**, so that we will be daily transformed more into the image of Christ and can walk in his good and perfect ways until he returns.

Let’s pray.