

(Romans 12:1-2)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Romans 12:1 forms an obvious major turning point in the book of Romans. The first eleven chapters contain an overload of great *doctrinal* truth, the greatest compendium of such truth ever written. But here, Paul turns from *doctrine* and its *appreciation* to *duty* and its *application*. There are actually three great turning points in the book of Romans, each centering around the word “therefore.”

The first might be called the great “therefore” of *justification*. Romans 5:1 says, “*Therefore* being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The doctrine of justification means, positively, that God pronounces a believing sinner (at the moment of his faith) as being as righteous as Christ Himself, as accepted by God as Christ Himself, and He treats him in His Family with the same privileges as if he were Christ Himself. The doctrine of justification means, negatively, that the believer is not liable to punishment any longer for a single sin of his past, present, or future (!). He is regarded by God as if he had always kept all of God’s laws and is entitled to all the privileges due to those who have always kept those laws. This is a breath-taking doctrine, but nothing less than these facts do honor to the full Biblical doctrine of justification. Now, any sin the believer commits inside the Family must be taken up in private with the Father Himself. If the believer will not voluntarily appear in the “*washroom*” to be *cleansed* of any sin that occurs in his life, the Father will take him to the “*woodshed*” to be *clouted* — but it is now a Family Matter between a child and its Father! Every believer should spend his entire Life on earth studying the infinite implications of his justification.

The second great turning point of the book of Romans could be called the great “therefore” of *identification*. Romans 8:1 say, “There is *therefore* now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” The phrase “in Christ Jesus,” used by Paul in his letters some 165 times, is the great phrase for the believer’s identification with Christ. The doctrine of identification simply means that every believer is incorporated into the personal history of Jesus Himself. This identification begins for the believer at the moment of his salvation. Thereafter, the believer is viewed as having died with Christ, been buried with Christ, risen with Christ, ascended with Christ, and enthroned with Christ. These are not high experiences to be sought after by a believer; these are present-tense realities all the time! Because of his position “in Christ,” the believer is *as Christ*.

The third great turning point of Romans might be described as the great “therefore” of *dedication*. This is the “therefore” of our text. Note carefully and thoughtfully the *order* of the occurrences of these “therefores.” This is the necessary order of experience in the life of a Christian. First is *justification*, the first and greatest word in understanding the matter of *salvation*. Just as there is no beginning to human life without a human birth, there is no beginning to a Christian life without salvation. Then comes the understanding of *identification with Christ*. This identification is perfect from the moment of salvation, but it usually takes a lifetime for the believer to understand it and live by

it. This identification with Christ is the foundation of the believer's progressive *sanctification*. During all stages of the process of sanctification, the believer is to engage in *service* to Christ, and the dedication to this service is the great "therefore" of Roman 12:1-2.

As previously suggested, this is the most abrupt and decisive turning point of the book. Here, the book changes directions. *Up to* this point, everything has been moving in the direction of *heaven to earth* and the keynote is *grace*. *Here*, the direction reverses, and everything moves in the direction of *earth to heaven*, and the keynote is *Spirit-produced, Spirit-filled gratitude*. The suggestion is that Christianity is like breathing. There is an inhaling of the grace of God in Christ. This was symbolized in John 20 when Jesus "breathed on them." The inference seems to be that they were to "inhale" His fullness by faith. The Spirit-filled life is as simple as breathing — and just as crucial! Then, they were to "exhale" both the *waste* (their sins) and the *worship* (the inevitable result of the Christ-life) toward God. The service of a Christian is simply the Christ-life expressed toward God and toward others. The word "therefore" in Romans 12:1 is a coupling-link between the two parts of the total Christian experience, *doctrine* and *duty, learning* and *living*. I have labeled it "God's Call to Dedicated Christian Living." Let's study it.

I. THE STATED CAUSE

First, we see the stated cause of dedicated Christian living. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...." Three vital things demand our attention in this opening statement of Romans 12:1.

Note first that the call is addressed to "*brethren*." So the first foundational premise of this kind of living is that the participant must be *saved*. He must be born again; he must be a Christian. You see, God makes plans *only* for *His children*. Though God sovereignly determines the place and the destiny of lost people as well as saved, God leaves the devil's children thereafter to their father.

If you are a parent, you know how it is in your own life. You carefully and lovingly plan for your children's future; and while you may be mildly interested in your neighbor's children, you would never think of planning their lives. The person who is outside of Christ has scorned or ignored the thing which God holds dearest, which is the death of His well-beloved Son. So, before such an unbeliever can come into the plan of God and live a useful Christian life, he must face the sin-question and the Son-question. One day some people asked Jesus directly, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered with equal directness, "This is the work (or will) of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent" (John 6:29). You must first come in faith to Christ as Savior and Lord. Then you are God's child and can fulfill His will for a dedicated life.

Jesus said in John 10:3, "He (the Good Shepherd) calls *His own sheep* by name and *leads them out*." The day you are saved, you begin to *know* the will of God and *fulfill* the will of God at the same time. God has exclusive and wonderful plans for His children (Jeremiah 29:11), and they are always "good" from God's point of view (Romans 8:28). This call is addressed only to Christians.

Then note that this call is a "*beseeking*." This word pictures a reasonable, moral, tender appeal. The Phillips paraphrase says, "I beg you." This does not reduce God's Apostle to a beggar; it simply acknowledges the tenderness and reasonableness of the call. Note the grace and compassion of this call. Here is the great Apostle Paul, God's Ambassador, on his knees before the Christians of Rome, begging them to do something that they should do without the begging! Indeed, if they knew the full dimensions

of the matter, *they would be begging God* to let them serve Him! Instead, the call is a tender, compassionate entreaty from the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul.

The call has a specified *basis*. “I beseech you...*by the mercies of God.*” The Phillips paraphrase captures the thought beautifully, “I beg you, my brothers, *with eyes wide open to the mercies of God*, that you present...” The exhortation to “present your bodies a living sacrifice” is to be obeyed *with both eyes steadfastly focused on the mercies of God!* This entails not a mere awareness of these mercies, not a mere acknowledgment of these mercies, but a full *apprehension* and *appreciation* of these mercies.

Note the argument Paul did not use. He did not say, “I *command* you on the basis of the *law* of God” or “I *threaten* you on the basis of the *wrath* of God” or “I *warn* you on the basis of the *judgment* of God” or even “I *advise* you on the basis of the *wisdom* of God,” but rather “I *beg* you on the basis of the *mercies* of God.” Note then the argument he *did* use. “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God.” Generally, this phrase, “the mercies of God,” refers to God’s compassionate considerations which He displays to us all the time. How merciful, gracious, loving and good God has been! Psalm 68:19 says that “He daily loads us with benefits.” We are like pack animals, laden with a heavy cargo of “benefits.” He has covered us up with an avalanche of Divine blessings. Specifically, this phrase refers to the justification, sanctification, and glorification which form the subjects of Romans chapters one through eight. All of these infinite and countless mercies form the basis of the Spirit’s appeal to us to surrender ourselves happily to God’s purpose. If a Christian won’t respond to an appeal made on the basis of the innumerable mercies of God, there is little hope for his usefulness. So the call is addressed to brethren, is stated in the form of a tender entreaty, and is based on the great mercies of God.

II. THE STRONG CALL

Next, we note the Holy Spirit’s strong call to dedicated Christian living. “I beseech you ... to present your bodies a living sacrifice...” The key word at this point is the strong aorist tense, active voice verb, “present.” Perhaps it can best be understood by looking back to its Old Testament counterpart, the bringing of a sacrifice to God through the Jewish sacrificial system. The Jewish system of sacrifice knew five kinds of sacrifices, but they could be divided into two basic categories. The first category concerned the sacrifices that were offered to God *to obtain reconciliation*. This category included the sin offering and the trespass offering. These sacrifices were *compulsory* because of the urgent need of the sinner. The other category included the sacrifices offered to God *after reconciliation* for the purpose of *celebrating the reconciliation that had been received*. These were called “sweet savor” offerings, and they were *voluntary*.

The one offering which meets the requirements of Romans 12:1-2 is the “burnt offering,” the first of the “sweet savor” offerings. It was called a “*whole* burnt offering,” and the word “*whole*” points out the distinctive feature of this particular offering. This offering was totally consumed by fire, so it was called a “holocaust offering.” You see, the demand made in these verses is quite radical! No part of this offering was withheld from total devotedness to God. When a worshiper brought this offering, he released it into the hands of the priest as if he were giving it directly into the hands of God. Highlight the word, “*release*.” Release, not *retain*. *Present*, not *preserve*, the sacrifice. Indeed, the word “sacrifice” here is synonymous with the word “victim.” In order to see the real nature of this dedication, join in your mind the words “holocaust” and “victim.” *You are invited, dear Christian, to be a willing holocaust victim!* In a particular instant of time, the worshiper *took his hands off of the sacrifice forever* by placing it into the hands of the priest. Even so, we are to “take our hands off” of our lives by a once-for-all surrender, or *release*, of ourselves to Him — as a living sacrifice. The aorist tense of the word

“present” calls for a commitment made at a crisis point of time. This is the crisis that initiates the stewardship of the total life and personality.

Once this crisis commitment has been made, it need not be repeated; however, it may (and *must*) be *re-affirmed* whenever necessary. Coldness of heart and recurrence of sin make this re-affirmation often necessary. Suppose a married couple breaks into a serious quarrel. Is it necessary for them to be married again in order to be restored? Certainly not, but an adjustment is necessary! If they are wise, they will make mutual confessions and reaffirm their love for each other. The same is true of a Christian who has become cold of heart or corrupt in practice. Confession and cleansing will re-affirm his original release of himself to God.

Remember that this surrender is to a *Person*, and to a *Plan*. It is to be “acceptable unto God,” and it will involve you henceforth in the “good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.” So surrender to Jesus Christ is not *resigning* yourself to the *worst* (as carnally-minded people will invariably think it is), but *releasing* yourself joyfully to the *Best* (as every spiritual person regularly proves). God is often accused of brutalizing anyone He can get His hands on, but the Bible says that this is the work of the Devil, not God. Jesus said, “The thief (Satan) comes not except to steal (*dispossession* is his first work) and to kill (*death* is a feature work of Satan) and to destroy (his agenda never varies from that of *destruction*)” (John 10:10). However, when a Christian obeys this command to release Himself to God, He is placing himself in the omni-caring and omni-competent hands of the “Lover of his soul.”

III. THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Next, we will examine the spiritual characteristics of Christian dedication. Our text presents a veritable flood of ideas which describe the nature of such dedication. These verses are like a diamond which might be turned again and again in the sunlight, with each new turn disclosing new facets of the gem. Look at several of these facets.

First, Christian dedication is *volitional*. It is voluntary. Don’t misunderstand this. This surrender is morally mandatory, though not legally compulsory. Remember that it is based on “the mercies of God,” not the law of God. The word “present” is the same word that is used five times in Romans six and translated “yield.” This word does not express the demand of a tyrant who crushes you, but the gentle entreaty of a Master who loves you.

Second, Christian dedication is *total* in nature. “Present your *bodies* a living sacrifice.” Why the “body?” The body of a sacrificial animal denoted the entire animal. In the case of a man, it denotes the whole man (remember the “*whole* burnt offering”). The Holy Spirit does not say, “Present your spirits, your souls, your emotions, your feelings, your sentiments, or your good intentions.” Your body is what you occupy as you read these words. It’s what you will take to lunch tomorrow. It sat at your breakfast table this morning. You will have it with you seven days a week for the rest of your life. The body you now live in is, in fact, the only body you will ever have. Even in eternity, you will have the same body, though glorified. Wherever your body goes, you are there. Wherever you are, your body is there. Take a tour through the Scriptures, and look at how many times God talks about the human body. He is apparently very concerned about your body. The reason is simple: If God gets your body, He gets *you!* The body is the organ of all of life. It is the vehicle of life-expression. You cannot *look, speak, touch, hear, smell* (in both senses!), write, travel, etc., without using your body. This is a call simply to devote to God all the active powers of your personality. But take nothing for granted here. Many people have yielded themselves to God only in part. The curse of the times among Christians is the curse of partial

surrender. Someone said, “Most of our difficulties in living the Christian life arise from our vain attempts to only *half* live it.” Florence Nightingale, when asked the secret of her useful life, answered, “I have always worked hard, and *I have never refused Jesus Christ anything.*” This dedication includes the totality of life as we know it.

Third, Christian dedication is *sacrificial* and *radical* in nature. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” Take a long look at the word “sacrifice.” “Fic” is a Latin term which means “to make.” “Sac” is the root form of our word “sacred.” The word “sacrifice” means to “make sacred.” The object is your body, which has always been used for “profane” purposes. “Pro” means “before” or “in front of.” “Fane” means a “holy place,” such as a temple. So “profane” means “outside the temple.” This word described anything that is used for ordinary, natural, fleshly purposes. Before conversion, a person’s body is “profane.” After conversion, it is to be used for “sacred” purposes. It is to become a “sacrifice” unto God. Note this rule: there is no such thing as *man* making a sacrifice to *God* without that sacrifice *costing man something*, and there is no such thing as *God* making a sacrifice for *man* ***without it costing Him something.*** Read again the story of the awful Cross to see what His coming to you cost Him!

The first impulse of an intelligent Christian may be to ask, What is the word “sacrifice” doing in the New Testament Gospel? Hebrews 10:12 says that Christ’s “one sacrifice for sins forever” rendered unnecessary the system of blood sacrifice. Jesus sat down at the right hand of God — the symbol of a finished, accepted atonement. Dr. K. Owen White said that if an artist should set out some day to paint the book of Romans, using one symbol for each chapter, he might have some difficulty deciding on a symbol for some of the chapters, but not in chapter twelve — the symbol would have to be an *altar*. The first eleven chapters of Romans are about the great sacrifice which Christ made to reconcile us to God; now, we turn from His infinite sacrifice to our finite sacrifices. Paul is inviting us to build an altar, climb atop it, and sacrifice ourselves to God!

So here is a call for sacrifice in a system that has no present sacrifices in it. How do we resolve this paradox? There are several keys. One key is that Christian dedication involves a “*living sacrifice.*” The sacrifices of the Old Testament were effective *only* as they were *slain*, but the sacrifices of the New Testament would be ineffective *if* they were slain. The Old Testament sacrifices were alive when presented, then put to death. But the Christian is *still alive* after he becomes the sacrifice. Our bodies are to be presented like those of the Jewish sacrifices, but not like them to be slain; yet like them so completely to be made God’s that during their whole life they are as good as slain. The word “living” implies a vast superiority over slain sacrifices.

A second key is found in the distinction between *bringing* a sacrifice which is outside the worshiper, and the worshiper actually *becoming* a sacrifice. *Becoming* a sacrifice instead of *bringing* one! That’s a great difference. God does not ask the Christian to *bring* a sacrifice. Much of our stewardship, unhappily, is based on this appeal. Rather, God invites each of His children to *become* a sacrifice.

The third key is seen in the intelligence of the sacrifices. In the old system, the poor dazed animals gave up their lives without understanding, in dumb passivity. But the Christian sacrifice is nothing if it is not *conscious, willing, eager, and free.* You, dear Christian, are asked to *climb up on the altar* and become a sacrifice as surely as if you were killed and consumed in flames.

Bishop Taylor-Smith was once asked what was the secret of his consistent spiritual life. He answered, “Every day when I awake, I do something before I get out of bed. I lift up my heart to my Lord, and I say, ‘Blessed Lord, this bed is the altar, and my body is the sacrifice. I gladly offer myself

up to you, so that for these next twenty-four hours I may be Thine alone, for Thy pleasure and for Thy service.” This is the idea of the “living sacrifice.”

Fourth, Christian dedication is *spiritual* and *moral* in nature. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy*...” The Greek word is “hagios,” which means “set apart” or “devoted.” The primary idea is not that of moral purity or freedom from evil. A pagan worshiper, or a pagan temple, or a pagan act, was called holy simply because it was set apart or devoted to a certain purpose. In the Old Testament, places and objects were often called “holy,” not because they were pure or sinless, but because they were devoted to a specific purpose (usually the worship of God). So the *presentation* of verse one makes the thing presented “holy,” and this word is totally independent of the moral nature of the thing presented when the presentation is made. *However!* It is this very association that produces the “saint,” who should become increasingly pure simply by his association with the holy God. So Christian dedication is first a spiritual act of release and surrender, and this allows God to make the dedicated person increasingly pure and less and less controlled by sin. So the physical body of the believer, presented to God and thus made disposable to Him, is *instantly* holy by *presentation* and will become *increasingly* holy by *association*.

Fifth, Christian dedication is *reasonable* in nature. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The word translated “reasonable” is the Greek word “logikos,” the word from which we derive our English word, “logical.” The word means “rational, agreeable to reason.” The word has two ideas in it. One is that this dedication is not merely external or material. Perhaps, again, Paul follows his analogy. The Christian surrender is in direct contrast to the dumb, thoughtless sacrifices of the Old Testament. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were made with no intelligence or decision from the animals concerning the sacrifice. But the Christian’s commitment is to be made in full awareness, full intelligence, of all the issues that are involved.

The other idea is that of reasonable succession. If “A” is true, then “B” should follow. If God has done all these things for us, it is unreasonable for us to be indifferent or half-hearted, and it is perfectly reasonable for us to be totally dedicated to Him. The logical result of our reception of all the blessings that come from our union with Christ is to present ourselves unconditionally and totally to God. Another thing requires to be said at this point. There are charges sounding out from every direction in our lethargic, affluent, self-indulgent, self-dominated world that this kind of demand is ridiculous and that this kind of life is “fanatical” and unreasonable. *Quite to the contrary*, Paul says, *this kind of response to the “mercies of God” is the only one that makes any sense at all!!* This surrender that is total and irrevocable is the *only* response which is truly *rational*. C. T. Studd, the English cricketer who became one of the greatest missionaries of Christian history, recognized this when he said, “If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice would be too great for me to make for Him.” Technically, when Calvary’s “Love Offering” is compared to our puny surrenders, our responses should never be called “sacrifices.”

“When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

That is the best logic, the greatest intelligence, and the highest thoughtfulness in the universe!

Sixth, Christian dedication is *vocational* in nature. The vocation of the Christian life is both negative and positive in its requirements.

Think of the negative demand first. “And be not conformed to this world.” The word “conformed” is based on the word, “schematizo,” which refers to a person assuming an outward expression that does not come from within him. So his outward *habits* do not match his inner *heart*. The full word is “sunschematizo.” The prefix “sun” is a preposition which means “together with.” The entire long word contains the idea of adopting an outward habit, a “scheme,” which is patterned after some definite outward model. The outward model (Phillips calls it a “mold”) is “this world,” or this age. Someone translated it, “Christian, stop masquerading in the mannerisms, speech expressions, styles and habits of this world.” Sadly, Christians may dress themselves in this unbecoming masquerade costume, but it always hides the Lord Jesus Christ in the heart of the Christian. The costume, then, becomes an opaque covering through which the Holy Spirit cannot radiate the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We hear much today about “adjustment,” but here is God’s call to *maladjustment!* We hear a lot about “integration,” but here is God’s call for dis-integration, or *spiritual segregation*. We are often urged into social conformity, but here we are urged to become non-conformists. The word “world” here refers to this age and the spirit that governs it (Satan). The verse says, “Be not fashioned together with the spirit of this age.” Anything that puts you in identification with this world system places you in a position that is anti-God. The world-system is a whole way of life, under the supervision of Satan, the “god of this world.” This world-system is carefully organized to express the philosophy, the “mind” of the Wicked One. Christians are not to permit themselves to be governed by this Master, by this mind, or by this manner of life.

Archimedes said, “If a man could find *a fulcrum strong enough, and a lever long enough, and could occupy a position apart from that which he is trying to move, he could move the world!*” The dedicated Christian has all three of these necessary ingredients. The *purpose of God* is the fulcrum, the *strategy of Jesus* is the lever, and our text urges us to *occupy a position apart* from that which we are trying to move. When Christians have used these ingredients, the world has always been moved.

The J. B. Phillips paraphrase of the New Testament says, “**Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.**” The world has a mold much like a gelatin mold, or a cookie mold. You dissolve gelatin in hot water, pour it into a mold, then place it in the refrigerator until it gels. When it congeals, it takes the shape of the mold into which it was poured. In something of the same manner, the world has a mold — a “shape” for our thinking, our values, our pleasures, our dress, our talk, etc. The world is constantly trying to press us into its mold so that Christians will be indistinguishable from non-Christians.

Christians are either like thermometers or thermostats. Thermometers only register the temperature that is around them. They simply reflect their environment. Thermostats, however, regulate the temperature in their surroundings. Though a thermostat is very small in comparison to the size of the house or the appliance it is in, it bears an influence over those things all out of proportion to its size. It actually controls the temperature of the whole house or the appliance. Some Christians only *register* or *reflect* the moral and spiritual temperature of their environment. They conform to the prevailing mores of their society. But other Christians *regulate* the moral and spiritual temperature of their environment. In order for the Christian to regulate his environment (as “salt” and “light,” Matthew 5:13-16), he must not be conformed to the prevailing spirit of that environment.

Perhaps Paul is following his symbol of the Old Testament sacrificial system here. In that system, when an animal was yielded to God as a sacrificial victim, it thereby lost its place in the stall and in the market and no longer could be bought and sold there. *Its dedication in one sphere implies its final removal from the other.* Even so, when the Christian yields himself to God, he thereby loses his place and voluntarily forfeits his “rights” in a godless world.

Now look at the positive demand in the vocation of Christian dedication. “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The word “transformed” is “*metamorphoumai*,” which gives us our English word, “metamorphosis.” “Transformed” describes a change from within. The world exerts pressure from without, but the Holy Spirit changes your mind and your life by releasing power from within. “Transformed” means that your outward expression is changed to be consistent with your inward nature. Thus, in “metamorphosis”, the outward expression more and more reflects the inner nature. Metamorphosis means that the true inward character is being brought to outward visibility. This word is used of Jesus in Matthew 17:2 on the occasion of His “transfiguration.” His Deity, hidden in humanity, came bursting forth to visibility, and “His outward expression was changed before them, and His face shone as the sun, and His clothing was white as the light.” This word is also used of the progressive change of a Christian in II Corinthians 3:18, and it refers to essentially the same thing as here in our text. To be transformed in the sense of these texts means to be like Christ both inwardly and outwardly. It means that the Christ who is literally in us begins to reveal Himself through us.

It must be remarked that both words, “conformed” (*sunscematizo*) and “transformed” (*metamorphoumai*), have to do with an outward expression. The *difference* between the two words is in the respective *originating sources* of these outward expressions. In the first case, the originating source is *external*, “this age.” In the second case, the source is *internal*, the “renewing of the mind” as an enhancement of the indwelling life of Christ. Ponder these words carefully and prayerfully.

“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Greek tense of both the negative and positive commands of verse two indicates continuing action. “Do not go on being conformed..., but go on being transformed...,” and the mind plays a key role in either action. Your “mind” refers to the way you think, your attitudes, your philosophy. The world constantly bombards us with its “mind-set,” its philosophy. Some people say that they are afraid they will be “brain-washed” by the church and the Bible — so they allow themselves to be “*brain-dirtied*” by the spirit of the world. Take your choice; there is no neutrality. *Brain-washed by the Word, or brain-dirtied by the world!* The Christian must be “brain-washed” every day by the Word of God, or he *will* be conformed to this age. The Word of God is the only source where we can find God’s mind in order to renew our own. D. L. Moody always wrote in his gift Bibles the words, “Either this Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.” Scripture or sin; the Word or the world; the Savior or Satan — the choice is clear. This clearly means that a daily devotional life is not optional in the Christian life. It is standard equipment, an absolute necessity. It is as necessary to the daily Christian life as eating is to the daily physical life. No reader of these lines expects to live many days in this world without regular eating, and no Christian should allow his daily devotional habits to be erratic, either.

Salvation is instantaneous, but sanctification (transformation into the likeness of Christ) is gradual. Someone said, “It took God only one day to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took God forty years to get Egypt out of Israel.” A *crisis* got the Israelites out of Egypt, but a *process* full of God, Moses, the Law, Aaron and forty years of miracles was necessary to get the mind and morals and manners of Egypt out of the hearts and habits of the Israelites. In the same way, it took God only a moment (what a

moment!) to get you out of sin, but it will take a lifetime to get sin out of you! Dedication involves us in the process of being transformed. What an adventure! No other vocation is as demanding or as rewarding as this one.

According to Romans 12:1-2, Christian dedication is volitional, total, sacrificial, radical, spiritual, moral, reasonable and vocational. Is this a big life, or what?

III. THE SURE CONSEQUENCE

Finally, Romans 12:2 reveals the certain consequence that follows Christian dedication. The person who dedicates himself to Christ on His terms will “prove in practice that the will of God is good, well-pleasing and complete.” These three adjectives might constitute a basic study of the will of God, but here they reveal the practical outcome of Christian dedication. Note that the will of God is “proved in practice,” not in speculation, or study, or consideration. Jesus said, “If any man will *do* His will, he shall know of the teaching.” Christians don’t *study* their way to *obedience* as much as they *obey* their way to *assurance*. It is probably true that more Christians *act* their way to *faith* than those who *believe* their way to *action*. Dr. George Truett used to say, “Act as if the Gospel is so, and it will prove itself to you.” Too many people stop with naked faith if their faith did not include action from its beginning. The will of God is proved in *practice*, not in mere proposition.

Note, too, that there *is* a will of God for the Christian. God has a specific plan for your life. Surely God is no less wise than an architect who guides his work by a blueprint, or an artist who follows a plan in painting, or a shipbuilder who conforms to a pattern in constructing a ship. This will is described in Romans 12:2 by three adjectives.

The will of God is “good.” It must be heavily emphasized that it is *God’s* will that is so described. The will of *many* is *not* good. Have you read the book entitled [The Diary of Anne Frank](#)? It records the experiences of a fifteen-year-old girl. She was a Jewess whose family had fled from Nazi Germany to the Netherlands. Later, after having been detected by Hitler’s police, the family was sent to Auschwitz, the German death camp in southern Poland. The only crime of this fifteen-year-old girl was that she was born of a particular racial stock. She described in her diary how on one occasion she had seen a group of Hungarian Jewish children in the death camp. They were standing naked in a cold and driving rain awaiting extermination in a gas chamber. They were there and subjected to such brutal treatment primarily because it was the will of one man — Adolf Hitler — that they should be there. *His* will was not good for anyone concerned. The will of many men has proved to be unspeakable evil, but the will of God has always proved to be good.

It should also be noted that even self-will is not good. Only God knows what evils have been wrought by self-will in this world. It was self-will that led Adam and Eve to commit the first sin. It was self-will that led them to think that they could elevate themselves to God’s level without His help. In fact, self-will is the very essence of sin. Sin may have many other definitions, but it is basically *self-will*. And self-will is not good. Our *own* will for ourselves is bad; *Satan’s* will for us is bad; even the will of our best friends for us may be bad. But *God’s* will for us is always good. In what sense is God’s will “good?”

God’s will is good in its *beginning* in your life. The fulfilment of the will of God actually began in your life the moment you received Jesus Christ as your Savior. Any truly converted Christian will freely admit that day God saved him was a good day in his life. Suddenly, he felt himself to be rightly

related to *God*, to his *fellow men*, to *himself*, and to the *world* in which he lived. He had made the *greatest choice* ever; he had had the *greatest experience* possible to man; he had received the *deepest joy* available to man; he had begun the *best life* a human being can live. It was a good day when you were saved; the will of God was good in its beginning in your life.

Then, God's will is good in what it *intends* to do with your life. It intends to rescue you from the penalty and power and presence of your sins; it intends to make of you a person of maximum usefulness. It intends to make of you a person who lifts the lives of others and glorifies God. And when your brief life is done in this world, it intends to usher you into a life of expanding growth and service for eternity.

God's will is good in what it *produces* in the world when it is obeyed by believing Christians. What happens when the will of God is obeyed? Where the will of God is done, the Gospel is preached, and helpless sinners hear about the dynamic of Calvary which is able to break chains that no other power can break. Where the will of God is done, churches spring up to minister to the physical and spiritual needs in their area of influence. Where the will of God is done, hospitals are established, and the healing of the sicknesses of mankind is made possible. Where the will of God is done, schools are established, and the ignorance of men is challenged. Where the will of God is done, the home is lifted out of the mire, womanhood is elevated, and children are given a chance. Where the will of God is done, social evils of every kind are challenged and arrested. The will of God is good when it is tested from the practical standpoint of what it produces.

If these things are true, then the will of God is not a course to be avoided, and it ought never to be a second choice for any of us. God's will is good, and it should be the sole pursuit of our hearts to *discover* the will of God and *do* it.

Then the text describes the will of God as "acceptable," or literally, the will of God is "*well-pleasing*" or "*satisfying*." The text does not say that the will of God is easy; it does not say that it is comfortable; it does not say that it is materially profitable; it does not say that it exempts from tragedy, but it does say that it is satisfying.

It is satisfying in that it is *able to satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart*. In John 4, there is recorded an incident that occurred while Jesus was passing through Samaria. He became hungry, and sent His disciples into town to get some provisions, as He sat by a well and rested. While He was waiting for the others to come back, a poor bit of wretched humanity came to the well to get some water, and Jesus began to talk to that broken woman. He spoke to her about a living water, a water which would be a well of water springing up in her unto everlasting life. You know the rest of the familiar account of their conversation. Finally the woman ran back into the town to tell the people in the village about Christ, urging them to come with her to see Him. About this time the disciples returned with the food and they said to Jesus, "Master, eat." However, Jesus, caught up in the nourishment of the will of God, said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." The puzzled disciples said among themselves, "Do you suppose someone has brought Him something to eat?" And Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

In Isaiah 55:2, the Bible addresses this question to every human heart: "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not?" Why, indeed, when there is available to everyone the will of God which perfectly satisfies the deep longings of the human heart? After a life of doing the will of God, and of observing others who did the will of God and many who *didn't* do the will of God, Matthew Henry said, "A life spent in the service of God, and in

communion with Him, is the most rewarding and pleasant life that any one can live in this world.” The will of God is deeply satisfying to the person who does it.

Also, the will of God is well-pleasing *even under unfavorable circumstances*. Gaze for a moment through the bars into a jail cell in the Roman colony of Philippi, and you will see this. Paul and Silas had broken up a vicious racket in Philippi, and they were put in jail because they were destroying the profiteering of some men who were exploiting a girl for money. The Bible says that they were “thrust into the inner prison, and their feet were made fast in the stocks.” But “at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” They sang at midnight! In prison! Someone called it the “first Christian singing convention,” and it took place at midnight in the dungeon of a jail! Dr. R. G. Lee, speaking about the unconquerable spirit of Paul, said, “If you put Paul in a barrel and put the lid on it, he will preach Christ through the bunghole. If you throw him in jail, he will come out of that jail with the prison door under one arm and a convert under the other!” The will of God is well-pleasing, even when it is obeyed under unfavorable circumstances. I can assure you of this: Life will be a terrible disappointment for you if you do not find and follow the will of God, but it will be unspeakably satisfying if you do.

The happiest people I have ever known in my life are those people who live with their eyes on Christ and are most caught up in fulfilling the will of God. Some of the most miserable people I have ever known are Christians who are trying to sidestep the will of God for their lives. Look at your own spiritual experience. Isn't it true that you have never had a deeper sense of fulfilment, or purpose, or abiding joy than you have had when you are most identified with the will of God? The will of God — wherever it takes you, whatever it costs you — is well-pleasing.

Finally, the text says that God's will is “perfect,” or literally, “*complete*” or “*full-grown*.” This means that the will of God *does not lack anything that is necessary for completeness*. Colossians 2:10 says, “You are complete in Christ.” And I might add that you are terribly incomplete without Him.

This is undoubtedly what many people need to learn. Many people refuse to do the will of God for their lives because they are afraid they will miss out on something that is pleasant or meaningful. I would be quite realistic here. The will of God will not free you from plaguing problems, and deliver you into a life of ease and ecstasy. But what you receive in doing the will of God is a thousand times better than what you forfeit.

Some people seem to think that the will of God is a puzzle to be solved or a burden to be endured, and that we would be happier without it. If it is a burden, it is the same kind of burden that wings are to a bird, or sails are to a boat. The will of God brings fulfilment and completeness to a human life.

Then the will of God is complete in the sense that it is *the ultimate achievement* that any person can accomplish in life. The greatest thing you could ever do with your life is to do the will of God. In fact, it would be utterly vain for you to be the President of the United States if it is the will of God for you to be a sacker in a grocery store. Dr. Truett used to say, “To *ponder* the will of God is life's greatest *consideration*; to *know* the will of God is life's greatest *knowledge*; to *follow* the will of God is life's greatest *pursuit*; to *do* the will of God is life's greatest *achievement*.”

A missionary said, “I have done *foreign* mission work, and *home* mission work, but the greatest work of my life is my *submission* work, and that began for me the day I decided to submit my life to the

will of God for me.” J. B. Phillips paraphrased our text in these words, “Let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice the will of God for you.” The only way to prove the will of God in practice is by *finding* it, *following* it, *fulfilling* it, and *finishing* it.

Several years ago, Charles Wellborn told this story on the Baptist Hour radio broadcast one Sunday. He said that during the Second World War he served in Italy. One day their outfit came to a ruined Italian town which had been bombed and shelled by Allied troops. Passing by the ruins of a home they saw a little lad weeping bitterly on what had been the front porch. As they talked with him he led them to the ruins of the kitchen where lay the lifeless bodies of his father, mother, and sister. Touched with his sorrow they took him with them; a small uniform with a jaunty service cap was provided for him, and “Tony” became the mascot of the company. Mr. Wellborn was his special friend. Time passed and finally the word went out from headquarters that all waifs and orphans must be sent to certain central points for relocation. The company was drawn up for review and the orders read. Little Tony stood smartly to attention at the Captain’s side. His friend had explained to him what must be done and had told him he must be a good soldier, that good soldiers always obey orders. When the word was given, Tony started stiffly to the jeep that would carry him away. About halfway to the jeep, however, Tony the soldier that he was *trying to be* gave way to Tony the *boy that he actually was*. Turning back with tears running down his face, he rushed to Mr. Wellborn, threw his arms around his knees and looking up in his face said, “I can’t go! I can’t go with them! I don’t *belong* to them — *I belong to you!*” You see, the only *logical* thing he saw to do in light of what *they had done for him* was *to give himself to them in return*. Today, many appealing voices are being heard in our world. Sounding through the din is the “still small voice” of Jesus.

*When I consider the “mercies of God,” I say to Him, “Lord, I can’t go with them! I don’t **belong** to them! **I belong to You!**”* As a Christian, I am a moral personality who has chosen to belong to Christ, and I am to live and serve from now on under direct orders from Him and in the energy of His indwelling Spirit.

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life -- your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you” (Romans 12:1-2, The Message, translated by Eugene Peterson)

SPIRITUAL LIFE MINISTRIES

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