

## Romans 12:1-2, Let's Be Reasonable, 1/3/21

Not only are we transitioning to a new year, we are making a transition from head and heart to our hands in our study of the book of Romans here in chapter 12. As one theologian says, "What God has given to us in chapters 1 through 11 gives way to what we are to give to God in chapters 12 to the end of the letter."<sup>1</sup> Think of this transition as two sides of the same Gospel coin, which must constantly be flipped throughout our journey with Christ. One side belief and one side practice. The more you believe the truths of the gospel from these first 11 chapters, the more you will be empowered by the Spirit to practice these truths in every area of our lives, and the more you live out the gospel, the more the gospel will become real to you and deeply saturate your soul. Let me show you this pattern in our text this morning Romans 12:1-2.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy (Gospel Belief), to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship (Gospel Practice).*

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed (Gospel Practice) by the renewing of your mind (Gospel Belief).*

*Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Gospel Belief and Practice).*

This will continue throughout the rest of the letter, and this is the pattern for living our Christian life. I gave my life to Christ in the late Spring of 2000 just as I was preparing to graduate from High School. And so I met up with Pastor Bob who was discipling me and I said, "I just gave my life to Christ...now what do I do?" Thinking he was going to lay out a whole plan for the rest of my life, tell me where God wants me to go to college, what to do about the relationship I was in, what God wanted me to be when I grow up." He just said, "I don't know but start with memorizing Romans 12:1-2." I felt like I just got "Mr. Miyagied" [Picture]. You want to be able to defend yourself against bullies? Go wax my car." "You want to know what God wants you to do? Go memorize Scripture." Scripture Slide But now looking back I'm so thankful for that answer. I think one of the worst things you can do to a brand-new Christian is give them a list of dos and don't's. Possibly trapping them into a legalistic mindset. Instead, you want them to see for themselves how the gospel changes everything and give them a gospel roadmap to guide them. This one little passage of Scripture gives us the roadmap for our journey with Jesus Christ. And this is relevant for you if you are a brand-new Christian or just recommitting your life, and just as relevant if you have been a Christian since before TV was invented...which was 1927 in case you were curious. And it's a perfect place to start fresh the New Year. 2020 was so hard, I know we would all love to hit the reset button [Picture]. We may not be able to hit the reset button on the events and circumstances of our world, but we can reset our journey with Jesus Christ this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Moo, *Romans*, comments from intro to chapter 12.

### **Reset Your Motivations v.1a**

*Therefore, I urge you (beseech), brothers and sisters...* We don't say I beseech you. You don't say to your barista I beseech you for more whip cream on my mocha latte. Meaning- This is a word that a coach would use before the big game- it's a motivational word, dig deep and find a reason to play with everything you got. So what is the motivation for our journey with Jesus? *in view of God's mercy...*

This little phrase is Paul's way of saying, if you are looking for motivation, look no further than the gospel! This mind-blowing, amazing gift of sheer grace- salvation through Jesus Christ (that I just described in detail over these 11 chapters).

This separates the gospel from every other religious message in the world. The Gospel is the antidote to the treadmill of religious effort. Every religion in the world except for the gospel operates on this premise- *I obey, therefore I'm accepted.* My motivation for obeying is so that God will accept me. So I obey out of fear of punishment or like a worker earning a wage...like a slave. But the Gospel says *I'm accepted, therefore I obey.* My motivation is now out of gratitude, genuine desire to please God, not like a slave, but like a son.

Do you need to reset your motivation in your journey with Jesus Christ? Does your journey with Christ feel more like drudgery of a slave or joy of a son? Maybe it is because you have been feeding the lie that that the Christian life merely consists of a list from your taskmaster...new Bible facts; a list of bad words to avoid saying, mastering new techniques: 5 principles for having a better marriage and 4 ways to get along with annoying people.<sup>2</sup> But after a while on that treadmill...You will realize that for all your attempts and effort, your heart isn't changing. If anything, you may find your efforts seem to be having the opposite effect. You find yourself weary of people who can't keep up with you, increasingly with a spirit of judgmentalism and pride, or maybe growing weary, and despairing because you can't do enough...or just bored of God and his rules...God may seem like a merciless taskmaster standing over you... "not enough! I want more!" And the more you try the more your heart just pulls away. If that's you, you are exactly where the Church of Ephesus was in Revelation 2- "You are doing good things but you have forgotten your first love." And Jesus called them to hit the reset button...go back to your first love, go back to the motives of the gospel when you first realized your great need for a savior and what Jesus did for you and you will find all you need to reignite your heart's motivations to follow Christ with joy...no matter where that leads you in your journey, no matter how difficult or what it costs.

### **Reset Your Aim. v.1b**

*to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

Notice Paul is clearly borrowing language and imagery from the OT sacrificial system. The priest would present a whole animal onto the altar to be consumed as a substitute sacrifice for the

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<sup>2</sup> Idea from J.D Greear Sermon on Romans 12:1-2.

sins of the people. This sacrifice was acceptable and pleasing to God if two things were true: 1) if it was **holy**- that is unblemished, and 2) if its aim, purpose was **“true and proper” worship**. This is the Greek word “Logikos” where we get our English word logical. I think the King James gets the translation better for the context, our *reasonable worship*. In other words, For Israel, the only reasonable response to God for who He is and what He has done is worship.

So here’s what Paul is saying to us. **The only reasonable response to the grace and mercy of the Gospel is to aim our whole lives toward worshipping God.** God wants our whole lives surrendered to His plans for us, full obedience to Him. Notice it wasn’t part of the animal...It’s not partial surrender. “God you can have my Sunday mornings between 9-12, but the rest of the week is mine.” “God I will sacrifice my time to serve you but not my finances.” “I will surrender my finances but not my sex life.” When we bargain with God it shows that we haven’t fully embraced the implications of the Gospel. I could describe my early attempts at purity like this. I was playing “Price is Right” with God. How close can I get without going over the line with my relationships, in what images and movies I watched, to see how much I could get away with and still follow Jesus. But inevitably I would fall prey, go too far, get sucked back in to bad habits. What changed is when I began to change the aim of my heart- to aim way higher. Instead of saying, how close can I get, start saying how can I worship God with my purity. This is daily, waking up each day and saying, today I want to surrender my whole life to you, to follow you today with my thoughts, attitudes, actions in worship. This is what the Holy Spirit will work with. Total surrender. What are you aiming at?

**C.T. Studd** was a professional cricket player for England’s national team--which doesn’t seem that impressive now but back in his day it was one of the world’s most popular sports. At the height of his career, he wrestled with the thought that his life was yielding little eternal value, and he sensed God’s call to carry the gospel to the nations. He left the sport and spent the rest of his days doing missions work and serving the needy in China, India, and then Africa. This would be like LeBron James or Patrick Mahomes doing this today. Naturally, people all over the world asked him why he did it. He responded: **“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.”**<sup>3</sup> This is aiming at worship, now it doesn’t mean we all will leave to become missionaries, but it is approaching God with this heart posture of worship.

### **Reset Your Methods. v.2a**

***Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***

Two commands here: the first is negative- Do not be conformed, the second is positive- be transformed. JB Phillips takes verse 2, and translates the negative command this way. ***Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold.*** That’s the imagery here. The “world” is the Bible’s way of saying the system of belief, attitude and actions that go against the character and ways of God. For Star Wars fans, we could say Don’t become a **clone trooper for the Empire**. Now that’s not easy to do. **Scripture Slide** Have you ever tried to swim upstream? One of our greatest fears

<sup>3</sup> Originally sourced from Grubb, Norman P. *C. T. Studd, Cricketer & Pioneer*, 1982.

as human beings is to be rejected and left out. We want to fit in, we want to swim with the current...to not jump in the “wife or husband bashing circle” we will stand out, and that may come across as “better than thou.” To not gossip about other kids at school or our boss may cause people to think you are boring or prudish. To not conform to the sexual or social standards of our culture will cause you to stand out as narrow-minded or even worse you may be labeled as a “bigot.”

But it’s not just saying NO to conformity, it’s saying YES to transformity (not a real word). *Be transformed* is passive, this must be done by someone else, which is the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is “metamorphao”... Clearly, we get our word metamorphosis from it, the word we use to describe what happens to a caterpillar when they sew themselves up on a cocoon and emerge as a butterfly. Now, I’m not an expert on butterflies (lepidopterist) but I do remember some things from one of my favorite books, **The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Picture)**. When the caterpillar is in the cocoon, it isn’t just rearranging pieces on his body. He’s not in there reading manuals about flight or working out. He actually releases enzymes that are transforming the nature of his being. And these cells rearrange into a new creation with wings, antennae, eyes, and all the rest. After a few weeks, he nibbles a hole in the cocoon and out pops a **butterfly (Picture)**--! And then, without any classes, or coaching, or coercion, he flies...unless he gets eaten by a bird first.<sup>4</sup>

Something similar happens to the believer **(scripture slide)**. The Holy Spirit releases gospel enzymes into your heart as you “renew your mind”, that is, saturate your minds and hearts with the truth of the Gospel, and in doing so, the Holy Spirit restructures you from the inside out so that spiritual flight becomes second nature. This is different than religious change. Religious change is mechanical. It tries to get you to conform your behavior. God wants you to obey from the heart. And so it is both NO and YES. Like the two sides of the gospel coin. NO to conformity without the YES to the Spirit’s transformation will lead to a life of frustration, gritting our teeth and griding legalism. YES without the NO to conformity will lead to moral compromise, and trying to serve two masters, the world and God. But NO and YES will lead you on the path of loving surrender and joy in our journey following Jesus Christ. Reset our motivation, aim and method...

**Title Slide** Now, we are half-hearted creatures- because here’s what many of us are feeling. We want to say- YES surrender to God, I’m ready, I want that...BUT there is a part of us that is terrified of that kind of radical decision because we worry what that might mean. What is God going to ask me to sacrifice? Where is he going to send me? Isn’t that going to cost me too much...it’s risky to my plans and security. Secretly, we think God is going to pull a fast one on us, rip us off. That He will ask us to give up something that will make us miserable. In reality, He’s actually just trying to free us and give us a life worth living!

For centuries, African tribes have had a simple yet genius way to trap monkeys. Their method? Take a coconut and bore hole in the coconut, tie it to a tree, and then for the bait, put a piece

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to J.D. Greear for some of the language of this illustration.

of fruit, like a little piece of a banana. Here's what happens, the monkey will reach his relaxed hand in the coconut, grab the fruit, but when he attempts to remove the fruit, his fist with the fruit is too big to get through the hole. The trapper just walks calmly with a net ready to put it over the monkey. And the monkey just works harder to get that little fist out with the fruit but will refuse to unclench his fist, to his own demise...<sup>5</sup> Now, this is not an endorsement of trapping monkeys, I don't want PETA to try to cancel me.

Here's my question- **What's in your coconut?** What is it that you are clinging to that is preventing you from following God's plan for your life? We want to follow Christ, but we just want to take this sin habit with us, this relationship that is bankrupting my spiritual life, this good thing that has become an idol that controls us like our reputation, career ambitions, security, comforts. Jesus said these words, **"If you cling to your life, you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will find it."**-Jesus, Matthew 10:39. You know why I can trust him that He's telling the truth? Because He gave up his life to find me.

God is not trying to rip us off, he's trying to free us from what's holding us trapped, holding us back from finding peace, finding true joy and fulfillment, holding us back from being effective in service to the Lord and getting to be part of the adventure on mission with Him. Is your fist in the coconut? Or open-handed, lifted in whole life worship to God? Today on this first Sunday of 2021, you can hit the reset button by surrendering your whole life in response to mercies of God as an act of worship. Today is a new day in your journey following Jesus Christ.

**Communion Slide**

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<sup>5</sup> Originally heard this illustration from Skip Heitzig, later researched it for validity.