

“Therefore” // Romans 12:1–2 //

Romans #24

[Bumper Video: Jeff & Brooke from Apex Moving to Kenya]

Here at TSC we want to send every member. I don't think I can say it any better than Jeff said it in that video: to be sent **you don't have to** be a **pastor**, or a **church leader**, or even in **ministry**, you just have to have a willing heart.

- These are **ordinary people who put their 'yes' on the table** and let God put it on the map.
- As your pastor, I **live for** these kinds of stories.

A few weeks ago I told you that when it comes to the GC, **we have 3 options**: Go, Send, or Disobey. For those God has called to *send*, you can do so in a couple of ways:

1. You can give generously so that we can send others.
 2. You can pray faithfully.
- I hold here in my hand our **2019 Missionary Prayer Booklet**. Our **missionaries on the field** wrote out specific ways you can be praying for them and so we've compiled those prayers into one book.
 - Every morning I **try to pray for something from here...** and the Joshua Project “unreached people group of the day” app. It **keeps me connected** to what really matters.
 - We've printed about **2500** of these, so **if you promise you will actually pray** then you can pick one of those up on the way out and make it part of your daily quiet time routine. They are at our **Next Steps area**.
 - **If you take it and don't pray we are praying...**

Romans 12:1–2 / (P. 72 of RJ)

Since day 1 in this series, I've told you that one of the most important ideas in Romans is that **the gospel is not just the way that we begin in Christ; it's also the way we grow in Christ**.

By gospel, of course, I mean the completely unique religious message that Paul has spent **11 chapters unpacking**--that God accepts us not because of what we do or don't do, but because of what Jesus has done and offers to us as a gift.

- This separates the gospel from every other religious message in the world.
- Every religion in the world except for the gospel operates according to this claim: **I obey, therefore I am accepted**. The gospel reverses that: **I am accepted, therefore I obey**.

That message, Paul says, contains power. The gospel is the only thing in Scripture, other than Jesus himself, that is referred to directly

This gospel is power **not just for the unbeliever**, but for the believer, and today you'll see that more clearly than perhaps anywhere in the Bible.

- For **most of us in the church**, we grew up thinking of the gospel as only Christianity's entry point: the prayer you prayed to begin the Christian life; the diving board off of which we jumped into the pool of Christianity...
- And **thus, the gospel** was primarily a message for unbelievers, because once you've experienced that; you move on from it, and Christian growth consists of learning **new Bible facts; mastering new techniques: 5 principles for having a better marriage; 3 steps to being a good church member and 4 ways to get along with annoying people**.

I grew up this way. I grew up in a church that taught the Bible, but I grew up thinking that Christianity was primarily a **series of new things to learn and do**; new spiritual levels to attain...

- **Started when I was a kid: Blue envelopes** that used to sit in the back of the pew rack...
- **From that point on, Christianity was for me basically a series of new things to do**--Good Christians were tired Christians.
- New speaker:

But after a while, I realized that for all my attempts to please God, my heart wasn't changing. If anything, my efforts seemed to be having the opposite effect.

- I was growing **weary** of God; starting to **resent** him, even **hate** him.
- God was like the **merciless taskmaster** standing over me shouting "not enough! I want more!"
- It was like the **closer my feet attempted to follow** Jesus, the more my heart pulled away.
- **Luther: Dilemma of Great Commandment.**

So, the question was, "How can I fix my heart?" In **Romans 12:1-2**,

Paul encapsulates his answer to that: **12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.**

- The "**therefore**" of vs. 1 is the **hinge of the whole book of Romans**.
- Romans, you see, is divided into two major sections, In **the first 11 chapters, Paul tells you what** the gospel is; in the last 5 chapters unpack what you should be because of it.
- **These two sections are joined by a single word: therefore.**
- **Therefore--in light of all that we've just learned about the gospel, this is what you should be.**

Following that "therefore," Paul offers **2 things** that serve as a concise summary of the Christian life: he urges us to **present our bodies (to God) as a living sacrifice** in an act of **worship**.

Paul **continues his charge** in the 2nd verse: **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by (What?) the renewing of your minds..."**

- **The key word there is 'transformed.'** It means changed from within.
- **The word in Greek for transformed is "metamorpho-o."**
- 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, this may surprise you, but I'm not an expert on butterflies.** But I do recall a few insights from one of my favorite books, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. 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 turns its body into a little soup*. 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! And then, **without any classes, or coaching, or coercion**, it flies.
- **Paul probably didn't know much about butterflies either, but something similar happens to the believer.**
- **God releases gospel enzymes** into your heart that restructure it 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**. Imagine the caterpillar **trying to flap wings**. Tired! This is some of your spiritually
- Or to **switch the analogy: Sand**. This is religion for many of you.

God wants you to obey from the heart. As we've said throughout this series... he's not just after obedience...

And how does this happen? Vs. 2 says by the renewing of your minds.

- Bon Jovi and RUNDMC / Petra, Carmen and Sandi Patti

This is why we say the **gospel is not just for unbelievers. As we renew our minds in the mercies of the gospel, saturating ourselves in them, we are transformed into the kind of people who obey God from the heart.**

It's why we say the gospel is like a well. You get the best water from the well not by widening the circumference of the well, but by digging deeper into it.

- It's **not just the way we begin the Christian life**, it's the way we grow in the Christian life.
- The gospel is **not just the ABC's** of Christianity, it's the A-Z.
- **Renewing yourself in the love of God for you** is what produces love for God in you.

So what I want to do is go back through vs 1, and dig a little bit into Paul's summation of the Christian life: offering yourself to God as a 'living sacrifice in an act of worship' and I want to show you how the ability to do that is fueled only by the gospel.

And then, right at the end, I want to show you this concept is the key to **discovering something a lot of people ask me about: the will of God** for their lives.

1. The Christian life as 'living sacrifice'

("Therefore... I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice"
(12:1))

- Paul obviously is drawing on **Jewish imagery here**. Jews, of course, grew up offering sacrifices to God, but even Gentiles would have been familiar with this concept.
- But Paul's admonition to present your body as a sacrifice is distinct from other sacrifices in two ways:

The first is that the sacrifice **is living**.

- **Sacrifices in the OT were always dead**. That's what happens to something when you kill it. It gets dead.
- **But for us**, after we offer ourselves to God we stay alive. The problem with a "living sacrifice" is it keeps wanting to get up off the altar!
- But it points to the fact that **every single day I've got to reoffer myself to God**. And not just every day, but with every new situation. It's not a once for all deal.
- **When I was 16 years old I walked forward at a youth camp** and threw my stick in the fire. We were singing "*I have decided to follow Jesus....*" It was an important moment.
 - But every day since then I've had to re-up.
 - I've told you that **my wife and I** have added in a practice of reconsidering every year what God wants us to do. You see, I love it here. In most ways I am really comfortable. Am I still a living sacrifice? Am I ready to walk away from it all and go?
 - I have to do it continually with my possessions: **God, what do you want from this?** Why did you give me this? Am I acting like this stuff as my own?
- **Can you say that all that you are, all that you have--your talents, your possessions, your future--it is all on the altar to God?**
 - **I used to emphasize to high school and college students** the need to **offer their lives** as a blank check to God? I contrasted that with a gift card...
 - Venmo vs. bank account sign-in
 - Have you done that?
- **Illus. Most of us would not be as familiar with sacrifices** as Paul's original audience was. And in some ways I'm grateful for that. It's a messy business. But I do think we've lost out on the graphic

nature of this whole thing. *My experience with sacrifice.* **For the first time I understood Romans 12:1** Are you ready for this to be the picture of your life? Victory?

So, the first way this sacrifices differs from OT sacrifices is that it is not dead, but living. The problem with living sacrifices is that they keep getting up off the altar, so we have to re-offer ourselves to God!

The second way our sacrifice is different is that ours is not done to obtain salvation but in response to it.

- **Religious sacrifices in those days**--whether Jewish or pagan--were done to gain something from God: forgiveness or blessing or whatever.
- But Paul has spent 11 chapters explaining that we already have all of that as a gift in Christ. It's impossible to be more forgiven or get more blessed than we are already in him.
- In response to this sacrifice, Paul says, **why would you not want to offer your life to him?**
- I mean, first, **where would you be without Jesus?**
 - If what you believe about the gospel is true, what would your future look like without him? PAIN AND MISERY w/o hope, eternal condemnation
 - **DMLJ:** postage paid
- **And why would you trust anyone else with your life?** I will never understand how someone could believe God did what he did in the gospel and not trust him with their life! If he's trustworthy to take away your sin for eternity, is he not also trustworthy to with your future? With your relationships? Can't you trust him with who you date, and what you believe, and what you do?
- **C.T. Studd was a professional cricket player**--which doesn't seem that impressive now but back in his day it was one of the world's most popular sports. Studd (*when you have a name like Studd, you are destined to be a professional athlete--amIright?*) was a star on England's national team. (**Show pic:** he doesn't look like a professional athlete with the bowtie and all, I know, but things

were different back then--work with me, here) 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 spent the rest of his days in China, India, and then Africa, where eventually he died. This would be like Drew Brees or LeBron James doing this today. Naturally, people all over the world asked him why he did it. **He responded with a line I think perfectly summarizes the Christian response:** "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him."

So, that's the Christian life as living sacrifice. Paul says we do this as an act of worship. "...This is your true worship." he says at the end of vs. 1. **So, let's look at #2:**

2. The Christian life as "worship"

- The word "true" in front of worship there is the Greek word "logikos". What word do you think we get from this Greek word? "Logical."
 - This worship is a **logical--an eminently reasonable**,¹ common-sense response to what God has done.
- **Paul asserted in Romans 1 that the core of everyone's sin is a worship disorder.**
 - That might seem odd to you, because you didn't see them in the GoE bowing down to a statue. But they thought the knowledge and power promised to them in the forbidden tree had such worth that they gave possessing it more weight than obeying God.

¹ "All that needs to be said is that Paul used the term with the meaning 'rational' or 'reasonable', as was common in the Greek language. His purpose in doing so was to emphasize that yielding one's whole self to God is eminently reasonable. Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one's life to him is the height of folly and irrationality" (Schreiner, *Romans*, 628).

- **So with us, Paul says, at the core of all the rest of our sin is idolatry.** We decide something has such worth (**Worship = worth-ship**) and weight (**kabod**) that we think possessing it is the key to a happy life, and we prioritize it over knowing and obeying God.
- **So, let's just stop and ask: What is that for you?** What in your life has ultimate worth? What is the key to a happy life, what do you feel like you couldn't be happy without.

Let's do a little Idolatry Detection Test (You could even write your answer down in your RJ if you want) (Handful of ?'s)

- **The thing I'd be most worried about losing is _____.**
 - (What goes in the blank? Don't write down God. That's cheating)
 - Family / Money / Respect / Success)
 - *I'm not judging you for putting something down. Just because you write it down doesn't mean it is an idol.* But I'll show you something at the end of this that may be helpful.
- **Fill in this blank: The thing I'd be most worried about never attaining is _____.**
 - Riches: B/c life is just not worth pursuing without riches
 - Maybe it is Fame: ***The Natural*** with Robert Redford. "There goes Roy Hobbs, the greatest baseball player that has ever lived." That kind of thought drives certain people.
 - Maybe it is your kids turning out well, or your kids getting into the right schools
 - So, if one your kids starts doing poorly, you take it personally. You **start questioning** your worth.
 - Want some insight into **my wife's and my life?**
 - For me, the thing I have probably been most worried about never attaining is some stature of success. Like many mothers, she **tends to tie hers** to being a good mom.
 - So, a lot of my worries center around not succeeding in my career--if I'm a failure in my career I feel have little worth as a man. That's why my moods were always tied to how

well the church was doing. It's why *preaching a bad sermon* was so devastating to me.

- For Veronica, that doesn't affect her as much. If the church doesn't do well, she's not going to be happy about that, but it's not going to devastate her.
- But for her, if one of our kids not doing well, that's a different story.
- If you are single, maybe that thing you are worried about never attaining is companionship: Do you think your life will be pointless and meaningless if you don't get married? You can never be happy? Do you put **that much (kabod) weight** on it?
- **Fill in this blank: "If I could change _____ about myself right now, I would change it."** (Careers, living situations, looks, personality, spouse--don't write that down--marital status) (Again, nothing wrong with these desires for change, just want you to see something)
- Here's one: **Throughout your life, what have you been most willing to sacrifice for?**
 - Worship and sacrifice always go hand in hand, right? You are **willing to sacrifice and gain** the favor of whatever you worship.
 - Again, me: **I sacrifice for success. For reputation.**
 - Why do I have a propensity to overwork? I want to be successful. And why?
 - Because I want to walk across the street one day and overhear someone say, "There goes J.D. Greear..."
 - *Dumb, I know. Don't do this to me at the mall if you see me.*
- **What has made you the most bitter in life?**
 - What got taken away from you that you can't get over?
 - You got passed over for promotion; you didn't get selected for the team. that ex-spouse kept you from the family you deserved. You've never really been recognized for the

- awesome person you are. Your husband doesn't see it. Your kids don't appreciate it.
- Bitterness almost always points to something that has great weight in our lives that we've missed out on?
 - Similarly: **What can't you forgive?**
 - You know you should, but you *can't*.
 - **The Christian counselor David Powlison always said: The inability to forgive is almost always connected to an idol** you think **someone** robbed you of.
 - Here's another: **What are you willing to lie for?**
 - **Usually when you lie**, it's not because you are a dishonest person, but because you are protecting an idol. Your reputation. Your prosperity. Your comfort.
 - **Years ago I was preparing to teach on this** and I wanted to illustrate how most of my sins were connected to my root idols. So I asked Veronica to help me come up with a list of sins I struggled with most to see if we could determine a pattern. **FTR: What a mistake.** My wife started rattling off sins: I think she must have had a little list over there she kept by her bedside just ready for this. I thought: Next time I'm doing this all alone.
 - I already talked about how worrying and overworking were connected to my need to succeed. But we also figured out that even my propensity to bend the truth was connected to it. I'm tempted to lie sometimes because I want you to think that I'm more successful than I actually am. I want to cover up my shortcomings and exaggerate my accomplishments. Because your opinion of me makes me significant
 - (You say, "Man, you've really got problems. Are you sure you should be a pastor?") No. **But I'm the same as you**, I've just got the courage to stand up here and be honest about that. **Of course the reason I do so...** and one day as I walk across the street I'll hear you say, "There goes J.D. Greear, the most..."
 - **Where do you turn for comfort?**

- **When things go wrong--when you really get criticized**, when things fall apart in life, where do you turn to tell yourself your ok?
- For me, probably unsurprisingly, it's in my successes. I say to myself, "Well, I've built a great church." etc. I'm ok."
- Maybe it's your family. "Well, I'm still a good mom. My kids are great. I come from a good family. As long as that is in place I'm going to be ok."
- Maybe you look inward at your own talents: I'm still smart. I look good.
- Or you say, "I've still got a lot of money in the bank. I'll be ok."
- Maybe you turn to the comfort of food or drink or even pornography or shopping. You think, "Well, as long as my body feels good, I can be happy."
- **This is why we say idolatry is a factor behind** alcohol or food addictions or various obsessions. I'm not saying it's the only one, but for some people it is a factor: --you depend on the comfort those things give to be happy and you get addicted.
- **Whose approval do you seek?**
 - Last one: Be honest with yourself: There's somebody, some group, you want to hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant" from.
 - Your friends? Your husband or wife? Your dad? Your team? **Who is it?**

Look at it... Whatever it is you wrote down 2–3 times is likely an idol.

There's likely nothing wrong with any of the things you wrote down. Just that when they have ultimate worth, ultimate weight in your life--when they displace God, they lead to misery.

Paul says, "The **gospel should show you that the only one worthy** of your worship--the only one you can lean your soul on and find satisfaction from--is God."

As Creator **he could just demand** your worship; but he **became your Redeemer to show you** he deserved it; to show you that nothing is worthy of your worship except for him.

- Romance won't do it:
 - Lonely, unhappy, insecure single people become...
 - Problems like...
 - Marriage doesn't cure unhappiness--it usually just makes it worse.
 - "Will not support the weight of your soul." Your soul was created for God.
- Money and success won't do it. I remember an interview with **Tom Brady** on CBS, after he won his third Superbowl, where he said, "Why do I have three Super Bowl rings, and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, "Hey man, this is what is." I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: God, it's got to be more than this." **Of course, you know he's an unhappy** man. Leaving his pregnant wife for some new fling. That's what idolatry does to you. **He climbed, as I often say, to the top of the ladder** of success only to find out it was leaning against the wrong wall.
- Fame won't do it for you: Just last month (Aug 2019) I saw Katy Perry post on Instagram. "100 million digital singles and still insecure."
- Family won't even do it.
 - King David: "When my mother and father forsake me, the Lord will take me in" (Ps. 27:10). I wonder when I read that what happened? But David knew that God is even better than family.
 - He said, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart (and every relationship I depend on) may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Ps 73:25-26)
- **Blaise Pascal** famously said... The human heart is a vacuum.

- This means: **God is the missing piece** in your life. The arms you searched for in romance are his arms. The security you sought from wealth or from family is found in knowing him as Father.
- The approval you sought from your friends or public acclaim is found in hearing from him, "**You are my beloved son...**" and "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**"
- **Your soul was created for God.**

And the gospel proves that you. Again, in using the word "logikos," Paul is **inviting us to stop and reason** with me for just a moment:

- If you believe the gospel: that after you had rejected him, God was **willing to be tortured, humiliated and give himself up in death** for you, don't you think he's worth the offering of the rest of your life?
- Does it **make sense to trust him** with your eternal soul but not your day to day life?

So, this is Paul's summary of the Christian life: daily to present your body as a living sacrifice to God as an act of worship.. Thus, he tells us, vs. 2, renew yourselves constantly in the truth of the gospel, and as you do so, these things will come to us more naturally.

- **Remind yourself constantly of God's goodness and his glory.** Press deeper into the glory of the gospel.
- **And re-remind each other in small groups.**

And at that point, Paul says we'll start to "...so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."

Now, real quick here--I only want to set us up for the next few weeks--because Paul is going to on an outline in the next 5 chapters what is the will of God in various situations.

But what you should notice is that **the will of God here** is not so much a particular choice as it is a way of thinking that leads to right choices.

- **I say that because many think of the will of God primarily as a choice:** God, what school? What career? Should I date him? God, what is your will? Door A, B, C?"
- ~~And then we develop all kinds of weird ways of figuring out what he is saying, "Oh, this random thing happened and I think God was trying to speak to me." Or, "I tingled when the pastor said that," and I think it was God. John Muller was telling me about a guy he knew who made a major life decision because when they pulled in the driveway, some pigeons flew away. And the dad said, "Son, that settles it. I've been praying about a decision, and here God sent 7 doves to confirm it. The dove is God's animal, and 7 is God's number."~~
- **But in Scripture, the will of God is presented as something you become.** A way of thinking that you adopt that then informs your choices.

99.9% of the will of God is fulfilled by learning to worship God above everything else in your life and learning to offer your life as a sacrifice to him for others as he did for you.

I say that because many of you have tried to discern the will of God without really pursuing those two things. You've thought of God as your Magic 8-ball telling you which decision is the right one.

- **But what would your life look like if it was driven by a desire to please God?**
 - To have a life not driven by a desire for money or praise or a quest to have a certain kind of family situation or certain kind of marriage?
- In the same way, **What does it look like for you to see everything in your life--all your talents and gifts and opportunities--as something given to you to offer up in service to God and others like Jesus did for you?**
- **I'LL TELL YOU WHAT WOULD HAPPEN:** You'd start to see your talents and opportunities rightly and you'd start to make wise decisions.

MUSIC

IF YOU WERE doing those two things, you would in most every situation know what the will of God is.

The **will of God is more about having the right heart posture** of worship and surrender to God than it is figuring out some mystical code.

Again, many of you have tried to discern the will of God without really pursuing those two things. Ironically, you've turned the will of God into an idol, seeking to know it more than you seek to know him.

God's goal for you is for you to become the kind of person who thinks like him. Who worships him above all things and looks at your life like a sacrifice. Then you'll do the right things instinctively.

- **Think about it: The best employees** are those who don't need constant instruction, right? They are just so trained in the boss's ways that they do what he wants without him needing to tell them because they think like he or she thinks.
- **My goal for my kids** as a parent is not for them to be the kind of people who have to call me up and consult for every future decision they make. I want to train them to think maturely so that they act wisely without direct guidance for me.
- We should **never stop looking to God for guidance**, of course, but in many ways this is what God wants us to be like.
- **St. Augustine** may have said it best here also "God's goal for you is for you to love him and then do what you want." Because when you love him and think like him what you want is what he wants!
- ~~**DMLJ tells a story** about a dog owner he knew who every day for over a year walked his little dog along the same path in the city park. He hated having him on a leash, but and wondered, "This is cumbersome to me and to him. What if I took this leash off?" One day he tried it, and to his dismay shot off like a little gray bullet.~~

~~But after just a few moments comes back to path and trots alongside him on the path and does that from that point on. That's what God wants. (BTW, you can't apply this story to your cat: let your cat go at the park and it's just going to go out and torture and kill stuff and will only come back to you if its desperate and hungry.)~~

The point: When the gospel has transformed you into the kind of person who loves what God loves, you'll start instinctively to do what God wants. You'll naturally *discern the will of God*.

So **press into the gospel**: Because *those who believe the gospel start to live lives that look like the gospel*.

That's where we'll pick up next week--as Paul begins to unpack what this gospel-shaped life looks like. But, for now, I just want you to ask

- *Is your life a living sacrifice?*
- *Is he the thing you worship?*

If not, why not? Isn't it the most logical response?