

December 30, 2012 by Steve Brandon



A Call To Holiness, Part 1

Romans 12:1-2

1. God's Mercy
2. Your Body
3. Don't Be Conformed
4. Be Transformed

We are on the verge of another year. It's that time of year when people make New Year's resolutions. I Googled "top ten new years resolutions" and found a bunch of web sites that put together ten of the top New Year's resolutions. None of the lists were exactly the same, but there was a common theme. I've put together my most unscientific lists of the 10 most popular resolutions. Here it is.

- Lose Weight
- Exercise
- Quit Smoking
- Quit Drinking
- Eat Healthier
- Get Organized
- Get Out of Debt
- Spend More Time with Family
- Learn Something New
- Help People [\[1\]](#)

As you all know, most of these resolutions will quickly be broken. Many in the first week.

I have a friend who works at the YMCA. I remember her telling me once of the increase in activity at the facility just after the New Year. Many people have picked up a few pounds from the holiday festivities. Perhaps they have also picked up a few pounds from the past year. So, they feel the need to shed the pounds. Also, they feel like they want to turn over a new leaf. And so, they are eager to get to their new training regimen.

The first few weeks of the year, the fitness classes are packed! She told me that the regulars often get a good laugh at the crowds, knowing that they won't last long. By February everything dies down, and it's back to business as usual at the YMCA. Even when the YMCA makes attempts to keep the people interested in exercising, they still fall away from their pledge for the New Year.

Now, this morning, I'm not interested in persuading you to make a bunch of New Year's resolutions, only to see you break them within the next week. But, with the turn of the New Year comes an opportunity for us to think about how we will live in the next year; how we will live in 2013.

As I have thought about my life this next year, I have thought about Robert Murray M'Cheyne. M'Cheyne was a Presbyterian pastor in Scotland who died at age 29. And yet, in those few, short years, he has made a profound impact upon many lives in his day and in ours. One of the things that M'Cheyne said was this: "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness." When talking about "my people," he was talking about those in the church that he pastored. M'Cheyne was saying that his own personal walk with the Lord was the greatest thing that he could do for the well-being of the church.

And I agree. As a pastor of this church, the greatest thing that I can do for all of you is to live a life of personal holiness. A life where my communion with the Lord is true and genuine; where my love for the Lord abounds; where my labor for Christ comes from His power and not my own.

When I'm walking with the Lord, my interactions with all of you will be happier and healthier. My counsel to those of you in need will come from Scripture. My leadership given to the church will be in God's direction. As Eugene Peterson said to his elders: "I want to study God's word long and carefully so that when I stand before you and preach and teach I will be accurate. I want to pray slowly and livingly, so that my relation with God will be inward and honest. And I want to be with you, often and leisurely, so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other." [\[2\]](#)

That's what I want to be as a pastor. "I want to study; I want to pray; I want to be with you; as we do life together."

My message this morning is entitled, "A Call to Holiness." And know that I'm preaching to myself this morning. This is what I need, as your pastor. Personally, I feel that I have much room to grow in these things. I so want to live a holy life. I see my lack. I want to grow.

But, let's not fool ourselves, my message isn't merely a call to myself. It's also a call to all of you. I'm calling you all to a life of holiness in 2013. I'm calling you to live sacrificially in 2013. I'm calling you to give Christ your all.

I believe that greatest thing that you can do for the life of the church is to live a life of personal holiness as well. If you are a husband, your love for Christ will spill over into the way that you love your wife, spurring her on to greater zeal for the Lord as well. If you are a wife, your love for Christ will spill over into the way that you interact with your husband, spurring him to greater holiness as well. If you are a parent, your love for Christ will impact your children far more than you know.

Your children will learn far more from your actions and your attitudes than they will from your words. What you do and how you act will have far more impact upon your children than what you say to them. You will influence them toward Christ or away from Christ. We understand the impact that parents have upon their children. The same is true within a church family.

As you are walking rightly with the Lord, your example and your conversations will impact others. You will be able to encourage. You will be able to comfort. You will be able to exhort. As you serve each other from the overflow of your heart, others will be impacted. Perhaps far greater than you know.

We are not a church of disconnected people. Our lives are interconnected. At least they should be -- if you are on the fringes of the church, I encourage you to make some efforts to be engaged in the lives of others. My dream is for all of us to diligently seek the Lord in 2013 -- to see the ripple effect in all of us; to see His blessing come upon us all.

My text this morning comes from Romans, chapter 12. We will be looking at the first two verses. This is where we will park this morning.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

These are well-known verses. I know that many of you have memorized these verses. May the Lord grant mercy for you to see them afresh this morning.

Fundamentally, these verses are a pastoral call to give your whole self to the Lord. You can see it there in the middle of verse 1, "Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." In other words, give all of yourself to the Lord.

When it comes to ham and eggs, there's a difference between the pig and the chicken. They both contribute, but the pig gives everything. The call of these verses is to be the pig. Be the one who gives yourself entirely to the Lord.

The verses come in the context of a pastoral exhortation. Look again at verse 1, "I urge you." This has been translated several different ways. The Philips translation says, "I beg you." The ESV says, "I appeal to you." It is Paul urging and pleading with the Romans to live this dedicated, sanctified, sacrificial life.

Thus, the title of my message this morning is, "A Call to Holiness." In other words, this is a pastoral urging to live a dedicated life to God.

Notice that these aren't far distant people to whom Paul is writing. He is writing to well-known and loved friends. Verse 1 says, "Therefore I urge you, brethren." Paul knows these people. Paul loves these people. Over in chapter 16, Paul lists over 20 of them by name. Phoebe (:1), Prisca and Aquila (:3), Epaenetus (:5), Mary (:6), Andronicus and Junias (:7), Ampliatus (:8), Urbanus and Stachys (:9), Apelles (:10), Herodion (:10), Tryphaena and Tryphosa and Persis (:12), Rufus (:13), Asyncritus and Phlegon and Hermes and Patrobas and Hermas (:14), Philologus and Julia and Nereus and Olympas (:15). On top of this, Paul mentions several "households." The household of Aristobulus (:10). The household of Narcissus (:11).

These words of Paul come from love and care and concern and desire for the well-being of those who hear. This is my heart as well; I'm preaching to all of you as my friends. I'm preaching to all of you as ones whom I love. I want things to go well with you. And following Paul's counsel here in Romans 12:1-2 will only help you. So please know, church family, that I have your good in mind as I preach these things.

Before we get into our outline this morning, I want for you to notice the first word of this verse. It begins with "Therefore." This is a word of conclusion. It is a word of inference. It's a word of climax. In light of what was said before, this is the conclusion. And, if you know the book of Romans, you will know that this is the grand conclusion of the entire epistle. It is where the entire book climaxes. Right here. It is right here that Paul turns from teaching to application. It is right here that Paul turns from doctrine to duty. Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 are filled with practical ways to apply all of the doctrinal truths of chapters 1-11.

And, you must catch this link. Because, Paul mentions it in the phrase, "by the mercies of God." That's a summary way of putting chapters 1 through 11 -- "the mercies of God." Verse 1 says, "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." If you miss the riches of the mercies of God, then these commands will come upon you as the law from Sinai. They will come upon you with fear and dread. You will want to run away from them.

But, if you catch the riches of the mercies of God, then these commands will drip with grace. Rather than being fearful of them, you will run to them. That's my heart for all of us today, that we might run to these exhortations.

So, let's think about the mercies of God. That's my first point, ...

1. God's Mercy

Let's think about what Paul wrote in Romans 1-11. Do you understand God's mercy?

Romans 1:18 kicks off with the wrath of God. Often, when people think about God's disposition to the world, they often think that God has a heart of love to the world. For sure there is some truth to this. His love is the reason why He sent His Son into this world -- to be the peace child; to be the sacrifice for our sins.

But, there are plenty of people in this world with whom God is angry. Who is it? It's those who walk in their wickedness (1:18). It's those who do not give honor or thanks to the Lord (1:21). It's those who have rejected the glory of the incorruptible God (1:23) Not only do such people love their sin, but they engage others in it (1:32). God's wrath is against them. God's disposition to them is anger.

And what does the Lord do to such individuals? He hands them over to engage in their sins (1:24, 26, 28). In some regards, His anger is toward all of us. Because, all of us have sinned and rebelled against the Lord. As Paul says in 3:9, ...

Romans 3:9-12

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,

"There is none righteous, not even one;
There is none who understands,
There is none who seeks for God;
All have turned aside, together they have become useless;
There is none who does good,
There is not even one."

Paul's argument here is that everyone is under sin. It matters not whether you are a Jew, who have the oracles of God (3:2), or whether you are a Gentile, without the law. Each of us live in this amazing biosphere called, "earth." Each of us have been given a conscience, to know the difference between good and evil (2:15-16), and all of us have sinned (3:9). None of us will stand as righteous before God. Romans 3:19-20 says, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Such is the predicament of mankind. We all are sinners, deserving the wrath of God. But then, the mercy comes. Paul turns the corner in 3:21 with those great words, "but now." We are all under sin, "but now ..." Let those words sink in. "But now ..." "But now ..." These are the best words in Romans! But now, things are different. Yes, we are sinners. Yes, we deserve the wrath of God. But, God has done something marvelous for us. But now, He has manifested His righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:21-24

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

This is the mercy of God! He has given us, by His grace, the gift of justification. Justification means that we are declared "just" before God. In other words, God has declared us -- we who believe in Jesus -- to be "innocent!" Justification -- just as if I had never sinned!

The biggest objection to this is God's own righteousness. He can't sweep sin under the carpet! He must deal with sin! In order for God to be righteous, He must punish every sin. And God punished sin at the cross of Christ.

Romans 3:25-26

whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God can forgive sin, because He punished Jesus in our place.

I ran across a great illustration of this a few weeks ago. A man named Hayden Carlo lives in Plano, Texas. He was struggling financially to support his wife and two children. While driving his car one day, a cop pulled him over. Apparently, he had an expired registration sticker on his car. When talking with the police officer Hayden Carlo said, "[Officer] there is no explanation for why I haven't [completed the registration]. But, I don't have the money. It was either feed my kids, or get this registration done."

The excuse wasn't enough for the policeman to let him off without a ticket. So, he wrote a ticket, handed it to the 25 year-old man, and drove off.

When Hayden Carlo opened the ticket, he saw that the officer had placed a \$100 bill inside the ticket. Carlo said, "[When] I opened it up and

there's a \$100 bill; I broke down in my car." With the money, he was able to pay the fine and pay the \$50 registration fee.

Think about it, the police officer was just. He was fair. He issued the ticket to Mr. Carlo for driving without the proper registration. But, the police officer was also the justifier of Mr. Carlo. He paid for the ticket and for the registration. He paid for the fine. And he paid to make it right.

Such are the mercies of God. In Jesus Christ, God has punished our sin. But, in Jesus Christ, God gave us our righteousness as well. That's why we read in verse 26, "so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

I love how Hayden Carlo summed up everything. "He helped me out when I needed it and I appreciate that. I'll never forget that man." [\[3\]](#)
Such ought to be our perspective for God. He helped us out when we needed it. May we never forget Him!

This is why we live for Him. Look over to Romans, chapter 5. Verse 6 tells us that, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." And in verse 8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And in verse 10, we read, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." We were helpless. We were sinners. We were enemies toward God. But, by the kindness of His grace, He has reconciled us to Himself by declaring the sentence of death and by paying that sentence in Jesus.

This is why Paul can say in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life on Christ Jesus our Lord." Our sin deserved death. But, Jesus paid the penalty. And so, we get life.

And that's why, as Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The debt has been paid! There no longer hangs a sign over our heads that points out our sin! It has been wiped away.

You say, how can I know this in my life? We see in chapter 10, ...

Romans 10:9-13

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Isn't it amazing? We simply believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths, and we are saved from our sin!

This is not according to our works. Not according to what we deserve. But, according to the sheer mercy of God! Such is God's Mercy.

If you don't embrace the mercies of God, you will have no power to live a life pleasing to Him. Until you can say with Paul in Romans 11:33-36, ...

Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Until you can say these things, you will have little power to live a life of holiness. And so, as I call you this morning to holiness, let it begin with God's mercy. But, then, let it flow to your body. That's my second point, ...

2. Your Body

Paul says back in our text of Romans 12:1, ...

Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

At this point, Paul brings into mind the imagery of the Old Testament sacrifice. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were varied in form. There were the burnt offerings. There were the peace offerings. There were the sin and guilt offerings. On top of this, there were the daily sacrifices (one in the morning and one in the evening). On top of this, there was the yearly sacrifice during Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement).

The animals that were sacrificed varied as well. Bulls and sheep and goats and rams and pigeons and turtledoves. The way that the animal was offered was varied as well. Sometimes the complete animal was offered on the altar (as in the burnt offering). At other times, there were portions of the sacrifices that were to be held back to feed the priests.

But, regardless of the variety of sacrifices and animals, the custom was the same. People would come with their animals and present them to the priest. The priest, then, would receive the animal and pray over the animal. Then, he would kill the animal and burn it upon the altar. The deaths of the animals were for the sins of the people.

Here in verse 1, Paul calls us to present our bodies as sacrifices as well. Only, he doesn't want for us to be killed. He wants for us to be "a living and holy sacrifice." The imagery may be strange, but I don't think that the concept is too difficult. When we believe and trust that Jesus died for our sins, we ought to consider ourselves as dead to ourselves and alive to God.

Jesus clearly taught that there was a death in following Him. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). Dying to self. Following Jesus. I do believe that the same thing is taking place here. We are dying to ourselves. We are living for God.

Notice how God wants us to live. We are to be (1) living and (2) holy and (3) acceptable to God. When sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament, the animals needed to be without defect. God clearly prescribes how they were to be. You can read about it in Leviticus 22. If the animal is blind or maimed, it shouldn't be offered. If one of its limbs is fractured, it shouldn't be offered. If it has a running sore or eczema or scabs, it shouldn't be offered.

Do you remember what was happening during the days of Malachi? When they presented their offerings, they brought the blind and the lame and the sick (Mal. 1:8). Malachi asks the questions, "With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" (Mal. 1:9). The answer is obviously, "No."

And when it comes to the Christian life, we should present ourselves to God as a "holy sacrifice" -- one that will be "acceptable" to God.

Again, I want to bring you back to remind you that it's God's mercy that has brought us here. The reality of the gospel is that compels us to give of ourselves in this way. Scripture is full of connections between what God has done for us and the way that we live. On the macro level, most of the epistles are filled with this sequence: First, we read of the reality of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Then, we read of the resultant way that we ought to live in light of that reality.

Take Ephesians, for example. Three chapters of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Three chapters of describing our calling as believers in Christ. And then, Paul takes a turn in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, I ... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). Then, three chapters of describing our walk.

This is the reality of the 10 commandments (given in Exodus 20). "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). It's only after mentioning His powerful work in redemption that God then gives Israel the 10 commandments by which they must live. "You shall have no other gods before Me." "You shall not make for yourself an idol." "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain." In other words, the "I am" comes before the "you shall." That's how God reasons to us throughout the Bible. He first tells us what's true about Himself. Then, He tells us how we should live.

And there are times when the connection can be seen in a verse or two. Consider a few verses, ...

- He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed (1 Peter 2:24).
- He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Corinthians 5:15).
- We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).
- If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).
- You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:20).
- For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Paul's argument here in Romans 12 is exactly the same. In view of the mercies of God, give yourself entirely to the Lord. This is my call to you. Be a sacrificial animal that is given to the Lord in worship. In this way, we worship the Lord. Look at the last phrase in verse 2: "... which is your spiritual service of worship."

There are times that we can easily come to think that singing on Sunday morning is our time of worship, as if that is the only way to worship the Lord. But, not so, says this verse. This verse tells us that whenever our bodies are being used in a righteous way, we are worshipping the Lord. And so, as I'm calling you to holiness this morning, in many ways, I'm calling you to be a worshiper.

This past week, our Fighter Verse came from Revelation 5. It came from the great throne room scene when Jesus, the slain Lamb, is standing before the throne. Heavenly worship was taking place.

Revelation 5:11-14

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

And as you present yourself to the Lord as a holy sacrifice, you will be doing the exact same thing: worshipping the Lord. It may be that your singing isn't worship at all! If your heart isn't right, then it's not really worship.

Now, as I looked at verse 1 and tried to figure out some real, practical ways that you should present your bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, I found it difficult to narrow down some particular points of application. Then, it dawned on me that verse 1 is a picture of all Christian application. We are living sacrifices, given to the Lord. And all that we do ought to demonstrate this reality. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us, "You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

Think about the most basic of application for the life of a believer in Christ: the fruit of the Spirit. When we demonstrate love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control, we are a living sacrifice (Gal. 5:22-23). There is much truth to that, because many of these things require dying to ourselves. To love another, you must first die to your own wants and desires. To have joy, you must die to your own expectations. To have patience, you must die to your own time-frame. To have gentleness, you must die to your own way of doing things. To have self-control, you must die to yourself.

In a great measure, Romans 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 are all an expansion on what it means to be a "living sacrifice." We don't have the time to go through all of these this morning. But, I'm trusting that the Spirit of the Lord is placing some areas of application upon your hearts right now -- places where you aren't a living sacrifice; places where you need God's help to be a living sacrifice.

Let me help by looking at verse 2. I had every intention upon looking at verse 2 this morning. But, the reality of the mercy of God fueling our giving of ourselves to God, was big enough for today. But, verse 2 is a great summary of all ways that we need to be living sacrifices. Verse 1 is the picture. Verse 2 is the summary application. The whole of Romans 12 thru 16 are some particular applications.

Paul writes, ...

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We see two commands here in this verse. The first one is negative. The second one is positive. First, "Don't be conformed to this world." Second, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

3. Don't Be Conformed

Next week, we will look at these a bit more in depth. This week, we will let the Holy Spirit work.

Are there ways in which you are being conformed to this world? Are the world's attitudes pervading your attitudes? Are the world's values affecting your values. Are the world's goals becoming your goals. Do you love the world? Do you love the things in the world? We read in 1 John 2, ...

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

May the Lord work on your hearts right now. Perhaps you are now saying, "Hey, I don't like the way that the world is influencing me. What should I do?" Then, here's the second application, ...

4. Be Transformed

How? By the renewing of your mind. The reality of our life is that our minds need constant renewing.

Picture a still pond of water deep in the forest someplace. Now, picture someone tossing a rock into the pond. The ripples from the rock proceed to shake the pond. But, pretty soon, the ripples die down and the pond is still again. That is, until you throw in another rock.

Our minds are like that. We need constant reminders to ripple the waves of our mind in the right way. You can't learn something in the Bible once and think that it will always serve you well. You will easily forget.

We need constant reminders. That's why we would encourage you to read your Bibles. We need constant reminders of the way that God works in this world. If you are looking for a plan, M'Cheyne's reading schedule is a plan. Anything to help you read and renew your mind. Wouldn't it be wonderful if by the end of 2013, you will have read the entire Bible all the way through?

We need constant reminders: That's why we would encourage you to memorize Scripture. We need to bury God's word into our hearts. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You." If you are looking for a plan, the Fighter Verses is a plan. A verse or two every week. At the end of 2013, you can have more than 50 verses memorized if you but put in a little bit of work.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 30, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,2040218,00.html>

[2] Eugene Peterson, "Under the Unpredictable Plant," pp. 34-39

[3] <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/weird-wide-web/texas-cop-100-gift-poverty-poor-motorist>