

The Essentials of Commitment

Romans 12:1-12:2

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Introduction: Why do you suppose there are close to 159 million people in America who claim to be Christians and yet the Church is not making more of a moral and spiritual impact? Why is it that on Sunday mornings thousands of churches across the nation have more empty pews than full? Why is it that the average worship attendance is 90 (Barna, 1999)? Why is it that only 50% of the numbers on any church's membership rolls can be expected to attend on any given Sunday? I believe the answer can be found in one word, commitment!

Romans 12:1-2 (KJV)

¹ 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.*

² 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.*

In verse one Paul begins to challenge his readers to move to total commitment.

We have the misconception in our modern day churches that, sure preachers and missionaries and other full time Christian workers should be 100% committed, but for the ordinary church member something less is permissible. The problem with a lot of Christians is that they are at best only participating in church work or at worse are mere spectators.

We cannot remain as spectators looking on. Someone once described a football game as twenty-two men on the field badly in need of rest being watched by seventy-two thousand people in the stands badly in need of exercise. While football may be a

spectator sport for most of us, Christianity certainly should never be.

I. The Appeal to Commitment (v. 1a)

A. We Respond to an Appeal

Romans 12:1-2 (KJV)

¹ 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.*

Twenty times Paul says “**I beseech you**” = “**I plead with you**” (Beg)
That is all the gospel preacher can do. There are handcuffs and court orders to get people to do some things in this world, but all the gospel preacher can do to get people to do right and to live for the Lord, is to preach the Word of God and plead with people to obey it.

This section begins with “**therefore**” – it is the third and final “**therefore**” in the book, the others are (**Romans 5:1** and **Romans 8:1**).

Whenever a verse begins with “**therefore**” we know that it is intimately connected to what has preceded it and we need to stop and see what it is “there for.”

B. We Respond in Appreciation, “by the mercies of God”

In this case it is giving the motivation for the challenge he gives to his readers in verses one and two. “**Therefore**” we need to take a moment and look back at **Romans 11:33-35**.

Mercy is mentioned by Paul nine times in **chapters 1-11**, four times in **chapter 11** alone (**verses 30, 31, 32**). He ends **chapter 11** marveling at the mercy of God that saves us, and uses the mercy of God as the basis for his appeal.

Romans 11:33-36 (KJV)

³³ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

³⁴ For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

³⁵ Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

³⁶ For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.

The motivation for a Christian’s total commitment to Christ is found in all that Christ has already done for us. Paul begins in *verse one* by saying, “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**”

Notice that Paul does not issue a command here. Paul does not say, “I command you.” but rather “I beseech you or I beg you.” We don’t serve Christ “in order that we might be

saved” but because we are saved!

Paul goes on to make some very important points about the nature of our service to the Lord.

David Livingstone wrote in his journal on one occasion concerning his “selfless” life: People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paying back a small part of the great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind and a bright hope of glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.
—Giving and Living, by Samuel Young, Baker Book House, p.71

We are told that Henry Clay, the great statesman of another generation, once fell into hopeless debt. Notes for forty thousand dollars, an enormous amount of money in those days, were held by a bank in Lexington, Kentucky. Clay was preparing to sell off everything he owned in the world in order to satisfy that debt, when one day a stranger appeared at the bank asking how much Clay owed. When told the amount, he produced the \$40,000, thereby cancelling Clay’s debt. “Who shall I say has paid this debt?” asked the banker. “Just tell him it was paid by some of his friends,” responded the stranger. When Clay learned that his debt had been paid, according to one historian, “the strong heart melted, the frame shook and the great Clay, who never flinched before countless enemies, nor flinched in the face of any opposition, now wept like a child.” His debts had been forgiven. It may be that some of us are among those Americans who have abused the availability of easy credit terms. Perhaps we are facing our own small mountain of debt. I wish I could say to you that all your financial debts have been cancelled. Wouldn’t that be great—to begin today with a completely fresh slate? I can’t say that, of course. But I can say to you by the power invested in me as a minister of Jesus Christ that, by faith in Him, your sins are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. Today is a brand new day.— From a sermon by King Duncan in DYNAMIC PREACHING,

II. The Act of Commitment (vv. 1b-2a)

A. It is a permanent sacrifice

“... you present your bodies.”

The complete nature of this commitment is seen in the way Paul uses the language of sacrifice. The word translated “**present**” or “**offer**” (**paristasis**) is a technical term used for the ritual presentation of an animal sacrifice by the priest. And it is very important that we understand that this word; given in the Aorist tense means that it is a once for all time transaction.

We sometimes think that the individual who is continuously re-dedicating their life to the Lord is a very spiritual person. There is nothing wrong with re-dedicating our lives when we acknowledge that we have somehow lost our way and want God to resume control of our lives. There is, however, something wrong when an individual feels the

need to continually rededicate their lives to the Lord, because according to this verse this is intended to be a one-time total surrender of your life to God. **There is no such thing as a partial sacrifice.**

It is purported that a conversation took place in the barnyard between a hen and a pig. The hen and the pig were talking to each other, discussing the problem of human hunger around the world. They decided they would do something about it. So the hen said to the pig, "All right, this is what we'll do. Because people are hungry, this is what I propose. I propose that every morning, we provide a ham and egg breakfast to hungry people." The pig looked at the hen, and said, "For you that only requires involvement; for me it requires total commitment."

B. It is a personal sacrifice

"... you present your bodies."

He says that it is up to you to **"present your bodies"** as sacrifices to God. In fact it literally says **"you, all of you, present yourselves to God."** When he says **"ye"** here it is a plural meaning that he is not talking to just a select few, but to everyone.

- **What God wants from you is you!**
- **God does want your money.**
- **God doesn't want your time.**
- **God doesn't even want your talents.**
- **He wants you.**

If you give yourself totally to Him, all of those things come along.

One of the major problems in the church is a lot of church people are still coming to the services, trying to receive something, rather than to give something. You hear people all the time saying things like; "I didn't get anything out of the message." "The music didn't speak to me." "I didn't get anything out of the service."

Whether you realize it or not, these statements reveal a misunderstanding of the whole point of coming to a worship service. **Worship is not about coming to get something. It is about coming to offer something. Is this beginning to sink in your spirit?**

C. It is a practical sacrifice.

"... which is your reasonable service."

The word translated **"reasonable"** (**logikos**) is the word we get logic or logical from. Total commitment is the only logical course of action when we realize who God is!

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.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,

Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.
See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
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.

Author Unknown

I. The Appeal of Commitment

II. The Act of Commitment

III. The Assignments of Commitment (v. 2)

A. The Christian is not to Be Conformed to This World. (2a)

In verse two we are also told, **“And do not be conformed to this world...”** The word translated **“conformed”** (**suschematizo**) refers to the outward appearance or likeness, being shaped after the fashion of something. In other words, separated from the world and separated unto God.

Martin Marty said in an interview in the L.A. Herald-Examiner, *“Today you can’t say turning to Jesus means you are turning your back on the world.”* The church is to be in the world as a ship is in the ocean. We are to be in the world but not of it. But the church is taking on water. The world is seeping into the church so rapidly that the vessel is in danger of being submerged. The church, which is to influence the world, finds herself powerfully influenced by the world.

Remember the boy who put a sparrow in the same cage as a canary, hoping that the bird would learn to sing? But later he remarked disappointedly. “The sparrow doesn’t sound like a canary, but the canary sounds like a sparrow!”

We have the notion that we can be inundated by worldly values and yet meet our responsibility of keeping society from decay. If our assignment is to reclaim the moral ground of this nation for righteousness, how can we do it if we ourselves are guilty of the same sins? To change the analogy slightly: It’s hard to build a dam when you’re flowing down the river!

The late George Gallup said at a national seminar of Southern Baptist leaders, “Polls have uncovered an upswing in religion along with crime and immorality.” Gallop called it a giant paradox that religion is showing clear signs of revival even as the country is ridden with a rising crime rate and other problems that are regarded as antithetical to religious piety. That there is very little difference in the ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously—the levels of lying, cheating, and

stealing are remarkably the same in both groups. What an indictment of American Christianity to have religion up while morality is down!

B. The Christian is to Be Transformed by the Word (2b)

“... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The word translated “transformed” is (**metamorphoustai**), from which we get the word metamorphosis. Most of us remember enough from science class in school to remember what the process of metamorphosis is. It is the process by which a caterpillar is turned into a butterfly. It a change from the inside out and it is not just a physical change but a change of nature.

The significance of this word can be seen in the three other places it is used in the New Testament:

In **Matthew 17:2** and **Mark 9:2** it is used to describe the transfiguration of Christ – when the Lord’s true glorious nature was allowed to shine through so that his face radiated like the sun and his clothing was white with light.

The third and final place it is used is **2 Corinthians 3:18** where we read,

2 Corinthians 3:18 (KJV)

¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are “changed” (be transformed) into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Three important things about the verb translated “be transformed.”

1. It is a present tense verb – this means that it is something that is to be continuously happening. This is not a once for all time action, unlike the act of dedicating ourselves to the Lord. We understand from the present tense of this verb that what Paul is describing is a process, a gradual transformation.

2. It is a passive verb. Paul is not saying that we should transform ourselves but rather we should yield ourselves so that the Holy Spirit may transform us. Christians are to allow themselves to be changed continually little by little so that their life conforms more and more to the image of Christ.

3. It is an imperative. This means that this is not just a suggestion but a command.

“By the renewing of the mind”

It’s hard to serve God with our bodies when our mind is in the gutter.

Neil Postman of New York University (US News and World Report, Jan. 19, 1981). “What television does is to bring the whole culture out of the closet, because programs need a constant supply of novel information. In its quest for new and sensational ventures to hold its audience, TV must tap every existing taboo in the culture: Homosexuality, incest, divorce, promiscuity, corruption, adultery, and terrible displays of violence and sadism.”—Prairie Overcomer, June 1988

Philippians 4:8-9 (KJV)

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.

⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

I. The Appeal of Commitment

II. The Act of Commitment

III. The Assignments of Commitment

IV. The Accomplishment of Commitment

Romans 12:2 (KJV)

² 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.

A. We will be Enlightened in knowing the Will of God

As the golfer approached the first tee, a hazardous hole with a green surrounded by water, he debated if he should use his new golf ball. Deciding that the hole was too treacherous, he pulled out an old ball and placed it on the tee. Just then he heard a voice from above say loudly: "USE THE NEW BALL!" Frightened, he replaced the old ball with the new one and approached the tee. Now the voice from above shouted: "TAKE A PRACTICE SWING!" With this, the golfer stepped backward and took a swing. Feeling more confident, he approached the tee when the voice again rang out: "USE THE OLD BALL!"

Walter Knight told of an old Scottish woman who went from home to home across the countryside selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to an unmarked crossroad, she would toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed. One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times. "Why do you toss the stick more than once?" someone asked. "Because," replied the woman, "it keeps pointing to the left, and I want to take the road on the right." She then dutifully kept throwing the stick into the air until it pointed the way she wanted to go!

—Today in the Word, May, 1989

In order to know the will of God the Christian must be utterly surrendered to that will, no matter what it might be. Those who are not surrendered to God are not in a position to know His will. There can be no reservations at all on our part. Our very bodies must be presented as living sacrifices to the Lord; everything must be offered—nothing withheld. Illustration: "Will you promise to do something for me?" The object is to extract the promise from the other person before he knew what we wanted done and then to hold him to the promise. Often the immediate response is: "What is it?" In other words, that person was not prepared to promise to do the thing until he first knew what it was. So it is with

many Christians. God is saying to them, **“Will you do My will?”** They reply, **“What is it, Lord?”** In short we are only ready to promise God that we will obey His will when it has first been revealed. That is opposite of the Divine order which requires first unconditional surrender.

Trust? Do you really believe His will is good? If your son says, “dad whatever you tell me to do, I’ll do it.” How would you respond?

Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

⁶ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

B. We will be Engaged in Doing the Will of God

To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge! To do the will of God is the greatest achievement!- George W. Truett, quoted in “Toolkit,” Cell Church, Winter, 1996, p. 10.

C. We will Find Enjoyment in Fulfilling the Will of God

Illustration: The next year, Wolf and Holmgren went after Reggie White, a free agent who was one of the greatest defensive players in the history of pro football. Every team in the NFL would have liked to have signed White. An ordained minister, he said he would go where God wanted him to go.

Holmgren called White and left a message on his answering machine. “Reggie, this is God,” the message said. “I want you to go to Green Bay.”

Reggie White was not offended—not by Holmgren’s humor or by Wolf’s offer: \$17 million for four years.

Favre joined in the pursuit too. “I told him this was a great football town,” Favre said. “I told him he could make the difference. I also told him I didn’t want him hitting me anymore.”—Parade Magazine, August 24, 1997, p. 5

Genesis 24:1-14 (KJV)

¹ And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things.

² And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

³ And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

⁴ But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

⁵ And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?

⁶ And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither

again.

⁷ The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

⁸ And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.

⁹ And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter.

¹⁰ And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master *were* in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

¹¹ And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, *even* the time that women go out to draw *water*.

¹² And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

¹³ Behold, I stand *here* by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:

¹⁴ And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: *let the same be she that* thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

I first want you to notice that, after a 500 mile journey on camel, the servant arrived at the perfect place to meet a young, unmarried woman at the very time the women would be coming to the well to draw water. What luck! No, what providence! God had arranged circumstances perfectly for His will to be fulfilled in this situation. Abraham's knowledge, commitment, and trust were not in vain. God was working behind the scene. The servant realizes that this is a divine opportunity, so he prays for success and guidance in [verses 12-14](#). Many Christians today miss God's guidance and divine opportunities because they do not pray. Often we go through life just making decisions based on our own wisdom. We need to recognize that we do not have the wisdom to direct our own paths or to make right choices; we need to pray for God's wisdom if we are to receive His guidance.

Genesis 24:15-20 (KJV)

¹⁵ And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

¹⁶ And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

¹⁷ And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher.

¹⁸ And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

¹⁹ And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw *water* for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.

²⁰ And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels.

We see an example of God provision in these verses. God had provided an answer before the servant had even finished praying. This woman named Rebekah was the perfect bride for Isaac.

1. She was beautiful and although that is not the most important thing it is icing on the cake.

2. She was a virgin, which demonstrated her sexual purity. Sexual purity may not be a characteristic that is high on the list of this world's values, but is a very high priority with God.

3. She was kind, selfless, and hospitable, which was demonstrated by her willingness and her eagerness to help. Did you notice that the Bible emphasizes how "quickly" she emptied her jar and "ran" to water the camels? God had placed this man at the perfect place and time to meet the woman he had chosen for Isaac.

Genesis 24:26-27 (KJV)

²⁶ And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD.

²⁷ And he said, Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: *I being* in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.

Genesis 24:42-48 (KJV)

⁴² And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go:

⁴³ Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink;

⁴⁴ And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: *let the same be* the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son.

⁴⁵ And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew *water*: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee.

⁴⁶ And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her *shoulder*, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also.

⁴⁷ And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter *art* thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands.

⁴⁸ And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

One day Dwight Morrow and his wife, the parents of Anne Lindbergh, were in Rugby, England. After wandering through the streets they realized that they had lost their way. At this moment an incident occurred that entered into Morrow's philosophy and became

a guiding principle in his life. He stopped a little Rugby lad of about 12 years. "Could you tell us the way to the station?" he asked. "Well," the boy answered, "You turn to the right there by the grocer's shop and then take the second street to the left. That will bring you to a place where four streets meet. And then, sir, you had better inquire again." "This answer came to symbolize for Dwight Morrow his own method of approaching complicated problems," writes Harold Nicolson in his excellent biography. "It implied in the first place a realistic skepticism regarding the capacity of human intelligence...It was in the second place an object lesson in the inevitability of gradualness. And in the third place, it was a parable of how, when the ultimate end is uncertain, one should endeavor to advance, if only a little way, in the correct, rather than the incorrect direction. Bits and Pieces, Dec., 1991, p. 14