

**LIVING BY FAITH IS LIVING FAITH
ROMANS 12:1-2**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

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Thank you for sticking with me through these very difficult eleven chapters of Romans. They have been packed with some very profound and difficult theological concepts. But as you will see, it was important to Paul that we have a clear understanding of the Gospel before going on to describe how we should live as believers, especially in community with one another.

Our world finds itself in total moral chaos and confusion. It seems that we cannot come to any kind of consensus on what is right and wrong, and we have trouble defining ethical behavior, and therefore we are confused.

In today's culture, ethical behavior is defined negatively, with people asking, "What can I get away with without breaking the law and going to jail?" I'm sad to say that attitude has found its way into the church. People want to have their fun and be worldly, so we bend and redefine the rules, so we can justify questionable behavior. Christians ask, "How far can I go without actually breaking the rule?" If you take time to reflect on this attitude it immediately reminds us that was the exact attitude of the religious people, the Pharisees of Jesus' day. If you go back and read the Gospels, those were primarily the only group of people that angered Jesus.

Why? Because that attitude shows a lack of love and respect for God. That approach to life tries to earn righteousness and favor with God, but the sad fact is; it only angers God.

This kind of so-called Christians, along with the world, will never find peace and joy. They will never be able to find a true ethic, because the Judeo-Christian ethic is like

no other. Our ethic is not built on rules and regulations. Our ethic emanates directly from the nature and the character of God. Paul took 11 chapters to define the nature and character of God so that when he tells the Christians in Rome how to behave in the next 5 chapters, it will make perfect sense to them.

Let me give you an example: Since Paul has already talked extensively about sexual immorality I'll use this as an example. If you are truly a believer, you won't approach sex with the attitude of, "How far can I go without technically breaking the law," you will reason, "God is pure. Jesus suffered and died to make me pure. I will do nothing that will even remotely carry me towards impurity." If love for God is our motivation, if trying to be more like Jesus is our goal, we will be living so far above the law, that rules and regulations won't mean much.

Paul talks about our lives being living sacrifice, but sacrifice is not a word we like to hear. Let me give you an example: Maribeth and Joe asked if we could help them through another degree program. So Luig and I sat them down in the living room and I went into my lecture mode. I said, "I'm willing to make this sacrifice, but you have to promise that you will do your best and finish this program. There will be times you'll feel like giving up, but I want you to hang in there and keep on trying, because you made this commitment. Now there will be times when it is painful and difficult but you can't quit. There are things you will not want to do, but you'll have to do them. Do you understand?"

They nodded in understanding and then in Joe's most serious voice he said to Luig, "It will be just like being married to dad, right mom?"

I think that Christians don't live successful lives for basically two reasons. The first is that some think just gaining more knowledge is what the Christian life is all about. These types of Christians read all these self-help books, they read and study the Bible, they go to Bible studies, small groups, and all sorts of religious seminars. However, what they fail to realize is that unless you put into practice what you have learned, all the knowledge in the world is useless.

Let me give you an example: Let's say that I'm overweight and I want to lose some weight. I go and buy all kinds of nutrition books and go to nutrition seminars. I buy exercise books and watch all sorts of exercise tapes. I can read the books, go to all the seminars, and watch all sorts of tapes, however, if I don't change my eating habits and if I don't exercise, I won't lose any weight. Many Christians are like that; they read, study, and go to seminars ... but they never change their thought patterns or behaviors.

On the other hand, there are Christians that simply run around doing religious stuff, they have all sorts of strong convictions, and obey all kinds of rules and regulations. However, in reality, they don't have a clue as to what is really right or wrong because they don't know what's in the Bible. In fact, I would guess that most Christians in the United States never study the Bible and most don't know the major events in the Bible.

Again, let me use the overweight issue. I decide that I'm going to diet and exercise; so I determine that I will limit my food and drink intake to pizza and beer. And I'll go to the health club, get on the machines and do stuff. The outcome will be that I will gain weight and probably hurt myself. I really believe that many Christians, including a lot of us, have all sorts of crazy religious rules and ideas floating around in our minds. And the sad thing is that the theology that we live by is theology given to us

by some pastor, or some friends, or some superficial reading of Scripture. I've got to be honest with you; I know only a very few of us here at Devon Church who seriously study the Bible and put into practice what we learn.

Let me state what Paul wants us to understand in this transition between the first 11 chapters of Romans and the rest of the book: **AUTHENTIC GOSPEL LIVING IS BASED ON A GOOD SOLID GOSPEL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S LOVE.** If we don't know God, particularly as He has defined Himself in the Bible, we cannot possibly live an authentic Christian life.

I. CHANGED BEHAVIOR (Vs. 1)
IN ORDER TO LIVE AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE, WE MUST PUT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE INTO ACTION. CORRECT ACTION IS DEPENDENT ON GOOD THEOLOGY.

Verse 1 reminds us that an authentic Christian life will be characterized by changed behavior. In other words, **IN ORDER TO LIVE AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE, WE MUST PUT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE INTO ACTION. CORRECT ACTION IS DEPENDENT ON GOOD THEOLOGY.**

A. GOSPEL MOTIVATION

In the first phrase, Paul talks about authentic Gospel motivation. Look how he starts this section, "Therefore, I beg you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercies to..."

I had a seminar professor who always used to say, "When you see the word therefore, you have to ask, 'what is the therefore there for?'" You remember from last week we talked about Doxology. Paul spent 11 chapters in deep theology, some of it we could only understand at a superficial level, and some we couldn't even begin to

understand. But he ended the section by singing praises about God's infinite riches, His wisdom, and His knowledge. God's riches had to do with His grace, mercy, and salvation of undeserving sinners like you and me. His wisdom had to do with how He continues to sanctify us and how He causes us to grow. His knowledge had to do with His foreknowledge, His predestination and election of us to be His children. And now, after all that deep theology, Paul is going to give the Christians in Rome some very practical theology. This will be very simple and straightforward.

The 'therefore' signals Paul's movement from the Gospel message to Gospel action. John Stott said it's like the interaction between doctrine and duty, belief and behavior. It is the connection between systematic theology and practical theology. You see, systematic theology without practical theology deteriorates into dead orthodoxy. Christianity simply becomes the pursuit of knowledge. On the other hand, practical theology without systematic theology deteriorates into sentimentalism, a feel-good religion with no foundation.

So, the 'therefore' signals us that Paul is going to teach us what all this deep theology means for everyday living.

Next, he says, "I urge you, I plead with you." This is an interesting word. It is the same root word that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit by. It has a legal sense. Listen to the wide semantic range it has. Paul could be saying, "I encourage you, I counsel you, I call out to you, I comfort you, I stand by you and I exhort you." The Holy Spirit approaches us in all these ways. Through Paul, The Holy Spirit is urging and advising these Christians to make this movement from knowledge to action. As we read and study

the Bible, and as we listen to preaching and teaching, our goal is not to get information, our goal is to let God the Holy Spirit change our thinking and behavior.

Then He addresses them as brothers and sisters. Now remember, he addressing a very diverse group of Christians. He has put them all at the same level. It doesn't matter if they were rich or poor, Jew or Gentile background, slave or free, government official or common person. Paul's message has been this; everybody got into the church the same way. All were sinners, all were freely forgiven by God by grace through faith, and God personally chose each one of them. They were all hand picked by God. No one was more or less important than anyone else. They were family. They were brothers and sisters in Christ. These next chapters will teach them how to live like family. Titles, offices, money, prestige, education, all mean nothing in this family and there is nothing to boast about.

If you remember one thing about Paul's theology in these first 11 chapters it should be this. There is no one who is good ... no not one. I think that Paul wants us to know that we are bad, bad, bad, bad, bad. There is none that is righteous, no not one. If we don't know that and accept that, there is no way we can ever gain the proper motivation for Gospel living.

That brings us to the phrase, "in view of God's mercies." Here is the plain, simple, and only motivation to live godly lives, gratitude expressed in passionate love; God's mercies are all about His loving undeserving sinners. I don't think I can say this enough. None of us are good. Even now, after being redeemed by God, if God were to judge us based on our thoughts and behaviors, we would deserve hell. You have to understand that. If you're sitting here this morning thinking that in any way you're good,

you cannot successfully live the Christian life because you have the wrong motive. If God were to judge me based on my thoughts and behaviors, I would spend an eternity in hell. I deserve that. But instead of tormenting me, God chose to torment Jesus on my behalf. God chose to save me. He predestined me for salvation. He elected me. I don't understand that and I certainly don't deserve that. Why God chose me and why Jesus died for me ... I'll never understand. I deserve death ... He gave me life. I deserve torment ... He gave me peace. I deserve to suffer ... He gave me joy. I deserve His hate ... He gave me His love. I deserve to be called His enemy ... He calls me His son. I deserve to be separated from Him for all of eternity ... He promises to never leave me nor forsake me.

When we think about this incredible love that God has for us, when we think that Jesus suffered and died for us and when we think that in spite of how dirty we are, the Holy Spirit continues to live in us, guide us, and comfort us, we should fall in such passionate and intimate love, that we would do anything for our Lord. Love for God, not for religion is the only proper motivation that will allow us to live the Gospel life.

B. GOSPEL BEHAVIOR

With this kind of motivation, Paul is not bashful about describing Gospel behavior as sacrifice. He says, "Present your bodies as a sacrifice." The word for present is a religious term; when people brought their animals to the temple to be sacrificed, they had to present the animal to the priest first be inspected for purity and to have no deformities, then the priest would offer the sacrifice up. We are to present ourselves before God for service knowing that we are impure and defective. However, we also

know that God looks at us through the shed blood of Jesus. So even though God sees us as individuals, He sees the purity and perfection of Jesus on us.

Sacrifice is a violent word. I know there are really kind people who think the Old Testament sacrifices were done humanely and painlessly but, I think the Old Testament sacrifices were violent and dirty. I believe the worshipper and the priest wrestled to hold the animal in place and then the priest slit the throat of the lamb. The lamb's knees buckled, it jerked, and died. The reason I believe it was done this way is because the Old Testament sacrifices were meant to be a type of Christ's death on the cross. Jesus died in the most humiliating, dirty, and painful way possible. The sacrifice of Jesus was a nasty, horrible, dirty thing, sacrifice is a messy business.

And now Paul says, in light of what God did on our behalf, out of love, we are to offer our bodies as a sacrifice of love. Only our sacrifice is to be characterized by three things. Our sacrifice is one of living for Christ. Paul has discussed the theology of this earlier. When we identified with Jesus in salvation, we died with Him, out of love for Jesus, we let go of our self-centered, self-absorbed way of life, and embrace the lifestyle Jesus lived.

Which brings us to the next description of our living sacrifice; we are to be holy. In the Bible, holy means to be set apart for a specific purpose. Let's take an ordinary cup; if we take this cup and designate that it only be used in church to serve communion, we would be making it holy. That would mean we couldn't use it to drink water or coffee from any more. It would only be used to hold the communion wine each time we celebrate communion.

Here is where it gets interesting. Paul addresses this letter to the Christians in Rome ... those who are loved by God ... those who have been called by God to be saints. There's that word holy again. 'Saints' is the plural of the word holy. Paul considers the Christians at the church in Rome to be saints. You and I are saints. We are holy ones. What that means is that our new lives in Christ have been set apart to serve God. That's the way we are to wake up every morning. We must learn to open our eyes and say to God, "Lord, here I am. Send me." I know we have lost the sense of Jesus being Lord of our lives in the church today; I want us to remember that God is the King and we are His servants. If we want to live authentic Christian lives, we need to understand that God has set us apart for His service. We are saints, and we need to catch that vision and start living up to it.

Which brings us to the final description of this holy and living sacrifice; this sacrifice of our bodies is pleasing to God. Love is about giving and receiving love. Not love according to MTV but love according to God. God did not withhold anything from us. He gave us His one and only Son, Jesus. But my guess is we withhold plenty from God. We are more concerned for our wants and desires than we are for God's. The person, who is totally sold out for God, actually has the ability to make God feel loved. That blows my mind. I can either make God feel loved or I can make God feel used and rejected.

C. GOSPEL WORSHIP

This is what Gospel worship is all about. Paul says that this type of life, one dedicated totally to God, is our spiritual act of worship. I know what the translators mean when they translate this word as spiritual, but the word is much more than that. The word

they translated spiritual from is the word logos. It can mean rational, reasonable, logical, or it can refer to the inner person, the mind or the spirit. I think Paul has all of these nuances in mind. However based on his sentence structure in light of the phrase, “In view of God’s mercies,” I think this phrase should be translated, “This is logically how you should worship God.” What I think he is saying is something like this. “When you think about the love God showed us in giving His life to redeem us, it logically follows that the way we worship Him is to give our lives to Him in love.” Using my body to glorify God is the appropriate love response to His giving His body up for me. That’s what I think the word translated as spiritual means. So what is the appropriate body response of love to God? It is using my eyes to see the needs of people around me. It is ears to listen and hear the needs of people around me. It is using my mouth to uplift people. It is using my feet, my hands, every part of me to bring healing and salvation to the lost. Our eyes were not meant to look at pornography. Our ears are not meant to listen to gossip. Our mouths are not meant to be running and spewing out stupid stuff. Our bodies are not meant for immoral acts.

Listen. I know churches argue about what types of worship services they want. What kind of music should we sing? What kind of prayers should we pray? How should we celebrate communion and baptism? People have a lot of stupid ideas about worship.

Are you really concerned about appropriate worship? It’s not about the rituals we perform on Sunday mornings. Worship is what we do with our bodies in everyday life. If you’re not actively serving Jesus every day, every hour, then what we do here on Sunday is garbage. Worship can’t happen on Sunday if it’s not happening Monday through Saturday. The only appropriate worship that follows Jesus’ death on the cross is

our surrendering totally to Him. You see: **IN ORDER TO LIVE AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE, WE MUST PUT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE INTO ACTION. CORRECT ACTION IS DEPENDENT ON GOOD THEOLOGY.**

II. CHANGED THINKING (Vs. 2a)
AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING IS DEPENDENT ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING AND A TOTALLY CHANGED MINDSET.

How do we pull this off? Well in order to change our behavior, we first need to change our thinking as described in the first half of verse 2: **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING IS DEPENDENT ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING AND A TOTALLY CHANGED MINDSET.**

A. SAME OLD SAME OLD / BORING

Most of us just keep on living boring lives, doing the same old same old day after day. Paul says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” Paul is saying something like, “Quit letting this culture force you into its mold.” Don’t let yourself be squeezed into thinking like culture thinks. The word for world is actually the word for age. The world here means the normative, popular culture. Let me give you an example: most of us get our definitions from television, radio, magazines, misguided teachers, movies, MTV, etc. They tell us what beauty is, what normal behavior is, what desirable things are, what has value and what doesn’t have value, what is success, etc.

And I’m sad to say that Christians have bought into this stuff 100%. Most of us get our ideas about love, dating, marriage, and relationship from television. Because of that here is the sad truth; there is just as much lying, cheating, deceiving, gossiping, stealing, sexual immorality and other sins going on in the Christian church as there is with the unbelieving world. The only difference is that we are hypocrites because we

claim to be God's children, but the truth is we have been squeezed into the world's mold. I use the word squeezed because that's not what we were created for. We have been forced to take on a shape and existence that is foreign to what God designed us for. I used the word squeezed because the force comes from without. Satan is the one doing the molding, the bending and the scheming. Paul exhorts us to stop doing that. Quit watching television. Quit watching the news. Stop watching movies, reading the paper and other magazines.

Paul goes on to say, try a new way of living. Try something that is transformational. Try something that is sensational. Start by reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible. Start listening to Christian radio. Start reading only Christian books, whether they are fiction or non-fiction. Fill your mind with godly input. Start to think like God thinks. Start to value the things God values. I know older people can change and I challenge all of us to change. Ask yourself this just as I ask myself, "I'm 54 years old. What have I done for God? I've done nothing important. Here I am, rapidly approaching old age and death, and I really have nothing to show for my life. Oh, I have money in the bank, property that's paid for and a lot of material things, but I'll be facing God pretty soon, and really, I'm kind of bankrupt when it comes to loving sacrificially like my Lord Jesus."

I don't know about you, but I read books on Mother Teresa, and I watched a movie about Father Damien. I read stuff by Henri Nouwen and deeply desire to do something noble for Christ. Don't you have that desire to do something out of pure love for God?

And you younger people, instead of going to movies and concerts, let me challenge you here this morning. The problem is that most of you have been so squeezed into the mold of this world, you're probably afraid to take me up on this challenge. InterVarsity is sponsoring Urbana 2003 this year, December 27-31. Go and listen for God's call on your life. I dare you ... if you have the guts. But alas, many will make excuses like it's boring, or I don't have the time. But the real reason you won't go is because you're scared. Go and watch God transform your life.

B. TRANSFORMATIONAL / SENSATIONAL

Look at that sentence, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." That word transformed is literally metamorphosis which is a process that takes place from the inside out, it is a continual process. That is how we become authentic. It is as dramatic as a caterpillar weaving itself into a cocoon, undergoing all those changes, and emerging as a beautiful butterfly. God is not interested in superficial, outward change. Any hypocrite can pretend. God wants authentic change, and that comes only from the inside out. We renew our minds by filling them with God's truth. But my guess is that sadly most of us will walk out of here this morning and not change a thing about our lifestyles, the way we think or the way we live because we have spent so much of our lives conforming to the world and culture, that we have become comfortable. But I hope not because there is a great deal at stake here. The truth is: **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVING IS DEPENDENT ON A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING AND A TOTALLY CHANGED MINDSET.**

III. CHANGED INSIGHTFUL LIVING (Vs. 2b)
THE MORE WE BECOME LIKE JESUS; THE EASIER IT IS TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF GOD.

This authentic Christian living has a cumulative effect. The more we conform our thinking to that of God's the more our behavior becomes like Jesus. The more we act like Jesus, the more we think like Jesus. The more we think like Jesus, the more we act like Jesus. The result of all this is the changed insightful living described in the second half of verse 2. Here is what happens: **THE MORE WE BECOME LIKE JESUS, THE EASIER IT IS TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF GOD.** I teach small groups, and I have taught Spiritual Disciplines classes before. And as a pastor I always hear people say, "I'd like to know what the will of God is for me," or, "I'd like to hear God speak to me. I don't hear His voice and I don't know what His will is for my life." Well there's no secret. There's no mystery. The problem is that we really don't want to know and do God's will.

A. KNOWING GOD'S WILL

First, knowing God's will is easy; His will is very plain and very clear. As we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will be able to understand and agree with God's will. Let me make it simple; you see the wording of this sentence is that we will not only understand and agree with God's will, we will understand and agree with it with a view to put it into practice. And there's the problem. You want to know God's will? The Bible says that it is God's will for you to use your mouth only to say good things. Your mouth is to be used to praise God and build other people up. Now you know God's will. Do you want to do it? It is God's will that you be absolutely sexually pure in thought and in action. You can twist it, and if you want, I can spell all that out but purity in mind, body, and spirit is what God's will is. Do you want to do God's will? It is God's will that you give much more than 10% of your money away. Do you want to do

God's will? It is God's will that you actively witness to people about Jesus Christ. It is God's will that we feed the poor, visit the sick, clothe the naked, welcome and help the down and out. Do you want to do God's will? It is God's will that we forgive those who wronged us. Do you want to do God's will?

You see, God's will is perfectly clear. If you don't know God's will, or haven't heard Him speak, then you are not reading the Bible. Turn off the television. Put down the newspaper. Remember, it's not supposed to be easy. It wasn't easy for Jesus to die on the cross. We are to be holy, living, pleasing sacrifices. It is a sacrifice of love that saved us. It is a sacrifice of love that is our appropriate response to God.

B. LIVING GOD'S WILL

And once we know God's will the last challenge is living God's will. God's will may look difficult but His will is truly good, pleasing and perfect. God's will is a lot like our sacrifice. Our sacrifice is living. God's will is good. His will is that we have life and live it to the fullest. Our sacrifice of love to God pleases Him. Once we find and embrace God's will for our lives, we will find it to be pleasing. Our sacrificial lives are holy. God's will is perfect. Can you start to see how God's love and our appropriate response of love dovetail into one another? Here is how it works: **THE MORE WE BECOME LIKE JESUS, THE EASIER IT IS TO HEAR AND UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF GOD.**

Paul sets up the book of Romans in a way that demonstrates what the authentic Christian life is all about. In the first 11 chapters, he reasoned out a careful theological position describing who we are and who God is. Based on this carefully reasoned theology, Paul will now tell us what the ramification of these truths are for the way we

live our everyday lives in the context of Christian community: **TRULY, AUTHENTIC GOSPEL LIVING IS BASED ON A GOOD SOLID GOSPEL UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S LOVE.**

God really does intend to build something beautiful in our lives, but the nature of Christian beauty involves sacrifice. Listen to this example Renoir's life gives us. Renoir, the French painter continued his painting even when he experienced excruciating pain from rheumatoid arthritis. When asked why he continued to torture himself this way, his answer revealed his heart. He said, **"The pain passes ... but the beauty remains."**

I beg you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's incredible love and mercy, present yourselves to Him for service in love as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice. This is the reasonable response of worshipful love due Him. And stop being squeezed into the world's mold. Instead continue to be transformed by the renewing of your mind in Christ Jesus. Then you will know and live God's good, pleasing and perfect will. Amen.