

Romans

#23: Authentic Christianity

Romans 12:1-2

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- March 1, 2026

Good morning, Grace! What a day! Hey, listen, we're studying the Book of Romans this school year, and we turned the page. We're starting a whole new chapter, but actually we're starting a whole new theme, a whole new movement, a whole new subject matter in the book. And we're starting chapter 12 now, and we're going to look at verses 1 and 2.

Chapter 12 begins the section on the application of Christian doctrine. There have been very few moral declarations or commands in chapters 1 through 11, and the reason is because it's saturated with doctrine.

Romans 6:12

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

So, you can see in that first giant section, chapters 1 through 8, that the only part that's commanding anything is found in chapter 6, verse 12: **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”**

Romans 11:18

Do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

And then in the next giant section of doctrine, chapters 9 through 11, there's only one command there, chapter 11, verse 18, where it says, **“Do not be arrogant toward the**

branches”—towards Israel. “If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.”

Why is it happening this way? Well, because in chapter 1 through 11, it’s doctrine. Paul knows that there are only three things you can do with truth, for the most part. Explain it, approve it, and apply it. You can’t apply until you first explain it and then prove it. So now he’s in the application section, chapters 12 through 16.

What we need to understand today is that verses 1 and 2 are the foundation, the bedrock, of the rest of the next five chapters. This section is the definition of what it means to be an authentic Christian. What does an authentic Christian look like? Well, it starts out with a wellspring in verses 1 and 2, and everything else in chapters 12 through 16 is a result of these two verses. You have to get these two verses right. If you want to become like Christ in all of life, start here. If you want to guide someone, if you want to disciple someone, tell them to go to the foundation: verses 1 and 2. Start here.

Before we get going, I want to give you a heads up on verses 1 and 2. To understand the deeper meaning, you must first grasp the mood in which Paul is writing. It’s in the mood where you find the passion and the heart of Paul. The apostle has a fear for you and me. And he fears that we would waste the only life we have. And so, inside Paul’s mind, he understands that every decision has a price tag. And this is the most important and most expensive price of any choice. You cannot afford to get this wrong. Paul is saying that, in light of the dignity of man, given all this freedom—this whole section, chapters 12 through 16, is about freedom and choice—you can choose. And this is where the fork is. You can make a difference, or you can waste your life. A lot is going to happen today. That’s why I rolled up my sleeves.

Romans 12:1, 2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2: **“I appeal to you”**—*I urge you*—do you hear the mood? **“I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

Paul is writing these two sentences with great passion, because Paul knows this to be true: that you can believe in Romans chapters 1 through 11. You can cite them, you can believe the doctrine; but still not be completely surrendered to God Almighty. You can still choose to waste your only life.

And so, Paul is almost in a panic. He’s speaking with urgency here for us to grasp that God alone is the only one who can say, *Loving me is the best choice you’ll ever make. Completely giving your life to me is the best choice you’ll ever make.*

Let’s take a look at the first sentence here. And I’m going to mark every single word, just to let you know. Sharpen your pencil.

Again, a lot of the deeper meaning and the difference it makes in your life is in the mood. There’s a panicked urgency in here. And we can see that because he says, **“I appeal to you…”** I love this translation of the first word in Greek. **“I appeal to you ... I urge you therefore ...”** One translation says, **“I exhort you ...”** He’s on his knees begging, *Listen to me! This is the most important choice you’re going to make for the rest of your life, and you’re going to make it every single day. This is a high price tag.*

And what is it? He’s going to appeal to us to surrender our lives completely to the Lord for two reasons. The first one is the nature of God Himself. He says, **“I urge you therefore ...”** Whenever you see “therefore” in an epistle you just read what’s before it. And the first reason

he's urging us is because of the nature of God. In the context of "therefore," he's remembering back to chapter 11, the last few verses, 33 through 36, where he's talking about the greatness and the glory of God; that God is rich and He's powerful and He's wise and He's glorious. He's overwhelming us with mercy and grace. In contrast to you and me, we forget most of our past. We have no idea what's going to happen in the future. We have very little consequence in the present. He says, **"I urge you therefore..."** I'll just remind you of this from last week. **"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! Therefore how unsearchable are His judgments and how unfathomable are His ways! 'For who has known the mind of God? Who is His counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to Him that He might have to repay him?' For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God be the glory forever and ever."**

I am begging you, in light of who you are and who God is, don't waste your life. Yahweh is the only one who can save. Surrendering your life, loving God, is the best choice you'll ever make.

That's not his only reason—the nature of God. But he urges us also because of what God has done. **"I urge you ... by the mercies of God ..."** Look at all that God has done. Let me just remind you—I'll just survey a few chapters, if you don't mind.

"I urge you therefore" because **He provided a propitiation, a redemptive sacrifice, that we might be right with God. (Ch. 3)**

"I urge you therefore" because **He gave us the gift of Jesus' righteousness. (Ch. 3-4)**

"I urge you therefore..."—**we now have peace with God. (Ch. 5)**

"I urge you therefore ..." because **we have been totally reconciled with God. (Ch. 5)**

"I urge you therefore..." because now **we enjoy freedom from the power of sin. (Ch. 6)**

"I urge you therefore ..." because of **the permanent presence in our souls of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. (Ch. 8)**

"I urge you therefore..." because **we are now fully adopted into His family as sons and daughters. (Ch. 8)**

"I urge you therefore ..." because **nothing, no thing, can separate us from His love. (Ch. 8)**

“I urge you therefore ...” because **when God makes a promise, God keeps His promise. (Ch. 9-11)**

“I urge you therefore, my brothers and sisters,” because of **who God is, because of the mercies of God and what He’s done.**

Surrender your entire life to Him. What else can this man say to us? Is he not appealing to the highest source of motivation? Every decision has its price tag. This is the most important one. *I’m begging you, get this right!* This is the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and he’s saying that God alone can say, *Loving me is the best choice you’ll ever make—loving me completely and totally.*

Let’s go on to the next word—“to present.” Think of that as a military term: Present arms! And you are bringing it up for a formal presentation. When we present, we present our bodies. Well, that’s odd. Why would he say “bodies?” Why not money or something? If He gets your body, He gets all of you. When you go places, you take your body, and you bring everything about you with it. So, when he’s saying, “present your bodies,” it’s a physical thing. If He just wanted your money, we would say, *Yeah, I’ll write a check. You go.* And so, He wants all of you. That’s the point. He wants all of you.

And He wants you to do what? Present your body as a living sacrifice. We’ll look at these words differently. First, “a living sacrifice” as opposed to a dead sacrifice. Because with a living sacrifice it’s a choice. The whole emphasis in this section is that it’s a choice. You have to choose to get up on that altar with your body. You have to choose to stay up on that altar with your body. You have to choose not to get down from that altar of sacrifice with your body. And how often do you do this? All the time. As some know, it’s one day at a time. Because that’s all you can handle right now. That’s all any of can handle.

So, we have to choose to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. And just visualize you using this living sacrifice to worship God. Everywhere you take it it’s an instrument of worship. So, you’re at home worshiping God with all your choices. You go to work, you go home, you’re on a date—that date is worshiping God. It’s what you choose to do with the body. You’re just scrolling through what movie to watch next. *All right, here we go, everybody. He’s going to use his body to worship. Let’s see how he chooses.* Your body becomes a tool of worship.

And I want to mention sacrifice. We have to stop and look at that word, because we’re Americans, and that’s a Hebrew word. The American worldview looks at sacrifice as: *I own*

something, it belongs to me, I can do whatever I want with it, and I'm going to choose to ... Then I give it to the Lord, or I give it someone else. I have sacrificed it. Oh, it costs me!

That's what a sacrifice means; it costs you something. That's not Hebrew, though. The Hebrew worldview is that everything belongs to the Lord. So, when a Jew is taking a calf to be offered as a sacrifice, it's God's calf. The Jew is just returning it to the owner. And so, everything we have is on loan from God, and everything we have is given us in stewardship, and we're just bringing it back. There's no cost to it.

What Paul is saying here, the point, is that you need to give your body as a living sacrifice back to its original owner. That's part one. Part two is that you don't pay the price for holiness. You pay the price for compromise. There's not a cost associated with giving God everything. There is a cost for your independence. That's what it means by **“presenting to God your body as a living sacrifice.”** Paul is saying, *Come on! Do this and the rest of life works its way out.*

“I appeal to you, I urge you therefore, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ...”—this is kind of odd—**“holy and acceptable to God.”** It looks like I have to get my life holy and acceptable, and then I can bring my body as a living sacrifice. No, no, no, it's actually saying something that is different than that. It's saying that, no, He's going to make it holy and acceptable. You can't wait around for that to happen. He looks at your life and says, *Ummm... but I can make something out of that. I can work with that. You just bring me what's left and I'll fix this thing up.*

It's like the song “Just As I Am.” That's what He wants us to say—“Just as I am.”

It's just another expression of hearing it again: loving God completely is the best choice you'll ever make. Only God can say that.

Before we leave this part of the passage, this is a regrettable translation, and it's the most common one. That complete surrender of your body as a living sacrifice? That's an act of spiritual worship. And the reason I'm finding it ineffectual is because “spiritual” is usually the way that that Greek word is translated. Okay, are you Greek scholars ready? The word in Greek is *logicos*. Anyone? Yeah, the word means “logical.” I think they tried to church-ify it or something. Or they're trying to keep us from seeing it for what it is.

Paul is saying that this is the most intelligent, reasonable thing; Mr. Spock would do this. This is making a lot of sense. As a matter of fact, you keeping your body, your life, to yourself—

what are you going to do with it? I'll tell you: you're going to abuse it, misuse it, or just waste it. You'll just spend it on yourself. And Paul is saying here, *You know what makes perfect sense? If you had two brain cells and they touched each other, they would come to this conclusion: that in light of who God is—therefore, in light of the mercies of God and all the things that God has done, you should surrender your complete life—every aspect, every compartment of your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

You know, when I look at this passage, that verse, the way I've applied it in my life (and it's happened to many of you) is a phrase we say around here. It's in the building only. But sometimes we'll say "born again *again*." And I know it's a scary thing to hear, because the way it's said it's not true completely. If you're born again and you surrender your life to Jesus Christ (we've studied that already), it is sure that He will never leave you or forsake you. You can't leave your salvation.

But we say "born again *again*" because so many of us completely surrender ourselves to the Lord and enjoy that "Wow, I have peace with God" feeling. And then, life happens. And sometimes it's intentional that we compartmentalize our faith. Or sometimes it just happens. Or we're holding onto something, and we don't even know how it got there. The worries of the world are starting to choke us out.

And then we have this moment that feels very much like that first born-again experience, when our faith stalls and it just can't get past something. It turns out that something is like the first born-again experience. It's a word that rhymes with pride. Yeah, we're just proud and we won't let it go. And then we finally release it. We finally realize that we don't have a right to happiness. It doesn't matter what the Constitution says. I don't even have a right to physical health. I thought I did, but I don't. I thought I had a right to the money I earn or time that's mine. Whatever it is, you realize that it's staggering your spiritual growth. It's something between you and your relationship with God. And you can sing, "I surrender some" or "I surrender most." But you can't sing "I surrender all."

And then you have this breakthrough moment that feels a lot like being born again *again*. And you say, *I am a living sacrifice and everything's up there—all of me.* And you're at peace with God again. It is delightful. And now you don't have to be healthy. And you don't care if you're happy. It's not my stuff anyway. You're free.

So, some of you may need to be born again the first time. Some of you might need to be born again *again*. You're going to love what's on the other side of that pride.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Do you want to see verse 2? **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

We're going to have to hurry through this. “Conformed to this world” is the Greek word *morphe*. You are being molded. It's a passive word, meaning it's happening to you. The picture is of dough being pressed by a cookie mold, and you do what that mold says. And that's what the world is doing to you. You're just sitting back, and it's going to bring you to some place that says “I, me, and mine”--whatever the cultural application of that is.

Paul is saying, *Don't imitate the world around you.*

Oh, so I should just isolate and find a couple of people and wait for Jesus.

No, don't isolate. Paul is going to say, *Don't be morphed into the world, but be insulated and get out there in the world. Be amongst it.* How do you get insulated? By being transformed—that's the key word. Not *morphe*, but metamorphosis. It means your essence, your form, is being changed from the inside out, and it's passive. This process is being done to you.

And so, the picture of metamorphosis is a caterpillar becoming a butterfly, a tadpole becoming a bullfrog. They were, and then they became. And it happened to them.

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

And if you understand the power of passivity in this, Peter and John are talked about in this way in Acts 4 where it says, **“When the crowd saw the courage”**—there’s the attribute—**“of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled and ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”**

I don’t know if you’re hearing the insults, but *These two guys are courageous. They’re not particularly smart, and they’re kind of bland. Hmm...oh, they were with Jesus!* They spent time with Jesus and they were transformed. They became something in their conversion. That Spirit that was given to them causes who they were meant to be to break out from the inside out.

Here’s a great picture of this. I stumbled into this this week. Glen Keane was the chief animator in charge of the artistry of *Beauty and the Beast*, the cartoon. And he stalled at the climax when the prince breaks through the Beast. He just didn’t know how to draw it. He didn’t know how to help people visualize what was taking place, that the prince was in there trying to get out. And his boss said, “Look, you need to take all the time you need, because this is what matters. This is what the whole storyline means.”

And it wasn’t until he started reflecting on his own personal walk with Jesus, his own faith, that he thought, “Wait a minute ... it’s Christ in me breaking out. Now I can draw it.”

Here, listen to his testimony. It’s fascinating.

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Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Wrc8DCk520>

“...and as I started animating it, I realized that, for me, it’s really an expression of my spiritual life. There’s a verse in the Bible that says, ‘If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away and all things have become new.’ And I wrote that on my exposure sheet there as I’m drawing this. Because it’s really about an inner spiritual transformation that’s taking place with the Beast. And I saw it as a parallel of my own life, and I got to express that. It

was sincere, it was real for me. It was very real for the prince. And I don't know that there's ever an illustration that's clearer as to what can take place in a person's life spiritually that this animated character transforming from an animal to the prince."

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Isn't that a fun part of the story that you didn't know? A cartoon illustration ...

How is a person transformed if it's passive? How is a person changed from the inside out? How do Peter and John do it? They spent time with Jesus.

And so, Paul is saying, *Yeah, well, He's ascended, so you need to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* That is, spend time with Jesus in the written form. And the tense that it's written in means that it's continual; it's constant. We're trying to change the very way we think. We're trying to adopt and take on an entirely different worldview. So, it's not just a disciplined reading of the Bible, but it's trying to know the author of the Bible. And it's a choice, because it's work.

This is the work part of it. And so, if you find yourself saying, *You know, I don't read my Bible much, and the study part of it seems difficult,* I think what you meant to say is, *Oh, I'm conformed to the world.* Those are the two choices: to be conformed or to be transformed. What you meant to say is, *Oh, I'm being disciplined by the podcasts that I listen to.* What you're saying is, *I'm a follower of my social media account, and it feeds me (because of the algorithms) only the things that I like to hear, and only the things that agree with my values anyway.*

Because the Bible is going to tell you you're wrong, and your algorithm won't. Do you want to be transformed? Do you want the Christlikeness that's already in you to break out? You have to spend time with Jesus. And you have to do it in a disciplined way.

Hebrews 5:13-14

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Listen to the author of Hebrews. He's talking to us like a coach here. Look what he says in chapter 5: **"Anyone who lives on milk, being still a baby, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."**

Did you hear? Grow up. Put your little baby bottle down. Get a knife and a fork. You're going to eat steak. And that is going to require you to be constantly training yourself in the Word of God. And then it is the water that hits the seed that causes life to break out in the soul and the spirit. It has consequences. Choose well.

As a matter of fact, he says, *Why are we doing all this? What are we transforming our minds, and why are they being renewed?* Why? So that by the testing of it, you'll be able to discern what the will of God is.

The whole section—not just right now—but chapters 12 through 16—is all about choice and how to make choices, and the ethics that God lives by that define what is right and real and true. Do you know how to do that? You be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll know what the will of God is. The will of God is good and acceptable and perfect. And you'll be able to discern that. You'll be able to make sense of it.

Paul is begging us. Can you hear him today? Do you understand the urgency with which he's talking to us? This is the fountainhead. This is the slab. This is how you make all of life's choices. **"I appeal to you"—"I beg you"—"I urge you"—"I beseech you therefore, because of who God is, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God"—what He's done—"to present your bodies as a living sacrifice"** all the time. He'll take it. It's acceptable and pleasing, which is your most rational, logical, intelligent form of worship you could participate in.

God is the only one who can say, *Surrender it all to me. It will be the best choice you ever made.*

And then he goes on. He says, **“Do not be conformed to this world. You’ve got to be transformed, and that transformation happens by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

That’s how we’re to live our lives. That’s how we live a life with no regret. That’s how we enjoy the presence of God in our lives.

Some of you know this story of William Borden. He was famous because his nickname is “the millionaire missionary.” The reason is because he was born to an exceptionally wealthy family. He was the right heir for it. His family was famous in Chicago. Today they would be billionaires, in silver mining and real estate.

For his high school graduation, his mother gave him an around-the-world trip. And in that year that he spent abroad, God broke his heart. And he had a deep concern for the people of the world who had never heard of Jesus, and he wanted to bring the forgiveness that comes from the gospel. And he resolved to be a missionary by the time he got home.

He went off to Yale—Borden of Yale—and he wasn’t especially famous because of his intelligence or his athleticism, or even for his wealth. It was because of his love for God. That’s what people knew about him. And he was known for his generosity. He gave away thousands of dollars. He said he couldn’t afford a car, and that was partially true, because he kept giving away the money his parents sent for a car.

And in that last year at Yale, he got bit with the clarity of a vision from God, and that was to be a missionary to Muslims in China. He went to Princeton next, and it’s been recorded that he gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions and Christian organizations while there. And upon graduation at twenty-five years old, he was off to Cairo, where he could learn Arabic so that he could go to China and bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the Muslims there.

But it was in Cairo that he got spinal meningitis. And it didn’t take long to get to his brain. And that didn’t take long to take his life.

And his death became famous. It was in every major newspaper in the world. And many of them said, *What a waste—a twenty-five-year-old multimillionaire, and this is how he dies. What a waste.*

His biographer was given his Bible, and when she opened the cover, she read this: “No reserve, no regrets, no retreat.” And then everything made sense, didn’t it?

The people whose minds are conformed to this world—what a waste. But to men and women who have been transformed by the renewing of their mind, and they knew what the will of God was for their life, and it’s good and acceptable and perfect—they want to live a life with no reserve, no regret, and no retreating.

What does this say to you? What are you going to do with the only life you have? How could you possibly live it with no reserve, no regret, and no retreat? There’s one way to live that way. It’s that way. You live a life completely surrendered to God; it’s the most reasonable thing you could ever do. Only God Almighty could say, “Loving me and completely surrendering to me will be the best choice you could ever make.”

Life holds one regret, I would say: not having been a saint. And this is what keeps you from regret.

So, let’s do this. How about this? Let’s stand, and we’re going to read this together, and then we’ll sing as a congregation—get your heart right, get your heart ready first—“I Surrender All.” There, you know the lyrics. Let’s all stand and read this, and then we’ll sing.

“I appeal to you, I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Michael, please lead us so I won’t.

[Michael:] Let’s sing this together.

*I surrender all, I surrender all
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.*

*I surrender all, I surrender all
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.*

[Prayer]

Lord God and Father, I ask that You would take these lyrics that are sung with voices, that they would be lyrics of our soul and spirit, that we would surrender our lives completely to You; that we would seek out those compartments in our lives that we have hidden from You--as if that could happen--or we've withheld things from You; that we might have an experience of complete surrender, maybe born again again, for some. May they see You for who You truly are and have a new realization of Your holiness and majesty. And so, we give ourselves all to You.

I'd ask that You would help us understand that; that You would give us the courage. I ask that Your Spirit would not just give us wisdom, but the courage to apply that. Lord, we celebrate You and all You are and all You've done for us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.