

Living Day by Day

by Ray C. Stedman

I believe it ought to be against the law to read or quote the first two verses of Romans 12 without having read the last verses of Romans 11. They belong together. But unfortunately these two verses have been cut off from the ones in the preceding chapter. The two verses that open Romans 12 are an appeal from the Apostle Paul to bring your body to God and give it to him to use. But all the great reasons for doing this are in Chapter 11. There Paul says,

**Oh, the depth of the riches, the wisdom and
the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
“Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his adviser?”
“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?”
For from him and through him and to him
are all things.
To him be the glory forever!**

Therefore, ... {Rom 11:33-12:1a NIV}

Because he is like this – rich and wise and great and glorious, a God of love and mercy, and you are like this – ignorant of the future, forgetful of the past, unable to control the present –

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. [Literally, “which is your logical service, that which makes sense.”] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. {Rom 12:1-3 NIV}

These are familiar words. I know you have read them many times. I like the way the Jerusalem Bible translates the first sentence:

**Think of God’s mercies, my brothers,
and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is
worthy – by offering him your living bodies.
{Rom 12:1 Jerusalem Bible}**

That is what we sing in that great hymn, *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*: It closes,

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

That is what Paul is urging us to do here. He says God is interested in you bringing your body and making it available to him. When he says to “present your bodies,” he uses what the Greeks call the aorist tense. That means it is something you do once for all; it is not something you do over and over again. You do it once, and then you set the rest of your life on that basis. So there comes a time when God wants you to bring your bodies to him.

It amazes me that God would ever want our bodies. Why does he want my body? I can hardly stand it myself, at times! But God says, “Bring your body.” Perhaps the most amazing thing is that Paul has been talking about the body all the way through this section of Romans. In fact, he tells us the body is the seat of what he calls “the flesh,” that antagonistic nature within us that does not like what God likes and does not want to do what God wants. We all have it, and somehow it is located in or connected with the body. Our body is the source of temptation. It is what grows weak and wobbly. That God would want this is amazing! And yet he does.

Some of us, I know, feel like saying, “Lord, surely you don’t want this body! Let me tell you something about it! It’s got B. O. It snores. It has a bad heart, Lord. It has a dirty mind. You don’t want this body. I have trouble with this body. It is always tripping me up. My spirit is great, and I worship you with my soul – but the body, Lord, that’s what gets me down!” But the Lord says, “Bring your body. Let me tell you something about it. I know all about it. I know more about it than you do. I know all the things you tell me about it plus some things you haven’t learned yet. Let me tell you something. By means of the blood of Jesus, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, I have made it (what does Paul say?) holy and pleasing to God.”

That is the beautiful appeal of this verse. It is not telling us we have to get all cleaned up and get our lives straightened out in every way and become perfect before we can offer ourselves to God. Paul’s word is, “I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices. Bring your bodies (that is what it says in the Greek word – your bodies, not yourselves) as a living sacrifice unto God.” Bring it, with all its problems, with all the difficulty you have with it, with all the temptations and all – bring it just the way it is! I don’t know how that affects you, but that encourages me greatly. All the other religions that I know of in the world tell us that somehow we have to straighten out our lives first, and then offer them to God. God never talks that way. He says, “You come to me just the way you are. I am the answer to your problems; therefore, you must start with me. You can’t handle those problems yourself. Don’t start with thinking you have to get them straightened out. Come to me, because I have the answers for your problems.”

Furthermore, Paul tells us, this is the only thing that makes sense. “This is your logical worship.” This is the way you worship God. I hear a lot of people talking about worship these days. When you come to a church, you come to worship corporately, together. But worship doesn’t start or end in church. You are worshipping or you are not worshipping all week long, depending on what you do with your body. Is it his? Is it his to use right where you are – at your work, in your home, with your family? Worship is allowing God to use your body and to be the dynamic that works through that body in every situation. God says that is your logi-

cal worship. That is the only thing that makes sense.

God says if you use the body that you have, you will misuse it, abuse it. You will use it for things the body was never intended to be used for. Or you will use it in such a way that it will be destroyed or hurt. We know this is true. But if you give your body to God, he says he will use it rightly. You will either ruin it, if you use it yourself, or you will spend so much time preserving it, painting it, pouring lotions on it, exposing it to the sun, and all the other things we do, that you will never get around to using it for what God has intended it. “So bring it to me,” God says, “and I will use it wherever you go, and I will use it in such a way as to bring peace and to give joy and to heal hurt and show love and healing and grace wherever you are. I will bless the world through your body.”

Therefore, the only logical, sensible thing to do with your body is to bring it to the Lord and say, “Lord, here it is, just as it is, without any attempt to improve it or make it better. Take me, Lord, and begin to use me.”

Well, that sounds like a great deal, doesn’t it?

You say, “Okay, Lord, but how do I do this? How does it work?”

The Lord says, “Well, you bring your body, and then there are two things I want you to do after that. Once you bring your body to me, I will take it.” But then there are two things that you need to keep doing:

- First, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.”
- Second, “But be transformed by the renewing of you mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

These two commands are both in the present tense. That means they are things that you keep on doing. You bring your body once – you give it to God and you base the rest of your life on that commitment – then you go out and do these two things every day:

First, “**Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world.**” Literally, this means “the schemes of this world,” the schemes that men come up with, by which they regulate and run their lives. The word of the Lord is, “Stop being conformed to that.”

“Oh,” you say, “I know what that means. I know exactly what you are talking about. That means you should not smoke or drink or play cards or, if you are really, really spiritual, you sell your television set and never drink coffee or tea again.” You say that is being spiritual and not being conformed to the world.

There are a lot of Christians who have thought that. I grew up thinking that if you stopped all these things that the world does you were being spiritual. And there was always a particular list of forbidden activities. A lot of other things the world did were not on the list, but the things mentioned above were always on it. And if you stopped doing those things you were not being conformed to the world. I had to learn, through rather painful experience, that has nothing do with spirituality at all. Those things are neither good nor bad in themselves.

I know people who have given up all of them, and yet they are still saturated by the spirit of the age. That is what this word really means. It doesn't mean “be not conformed to this world,” it means “be not conformed to the pattern of this age, the spirit of the age, the philosophy of thought and of life that surrounds us on every side.” God says, “Don't give way to the schemes of men, the schemes by which they live their lives.”

The spirit of the age, you see, is always the same. It never changes from generation to generation. The basis of it is clearly the advancement of self. Everybody in the world lives to advance himself. Just listen, and you will see how true that is. You hear them talk about it. “What do I get out of this? What is in it for me?” That is the spirit of the age. “What's my angle; how can I work this for my benefit? Unless there is something in it for me, I'm not interested!” That is the spirit of the age.

What the Word is saying to us is “Don't be stuck in that kind of thinking, because that is what is wrecking life among men. That is what brings the heartache and ruin and disaster into our lives. Don't live on that basis anymore. Don't get sucked into that kind of thinking; it's wrong! It is an approach to life that is twisted and distorted, and it won't work. Don't be trapped by it.”

What is the spirit of this age? We all know what it is. It is my personal happiness. If the advancement of self is the basis for all life, then the goal of all life is my happiness. You hear that on

every side. Unfortunately, it has infiltrated the church as well. Christians talk this way just as much as anybody else. They say, “The reason why I am working and living is so I can have my needs met, my desires fulfilled.” I hear people talking about church this way. “Why do you go to church?” they are asked. “Because it meets my needs.” Or you will hear them say, “I'm thinking of leaving this church and going to another one.” If you ask them why, they'll say, “Because this one doesn't meet my needs.” As though the only reason for ever going to church is to have your needs met! That is the thinking of the world; that is the spirit of the age. And to be conformed to that way of thinking is to be conformed to the world, regardless of whether you drink or smoke or chew or play cards.

Then there are *the methods of the world*. You only have to look around to see what those are. They are rivalry and competition, getting ahead of the other guy, getting there first, grabbing what's mine before someone else gets it, hanging onto everything I've got no matter what it costs in terms of hurt or pain to someone else. That is the method of this age, isn't it? That is very clear.

The apostle is saying, “Be not conformed to this world. Do not conform any longer. Don't let the world around you pressure you into thinking that way any longer.” No doubt every one of us realizes how much pressure we are subjected to. The pressure to conform pervades all of society. Even in the church itself people talk this way, think this way, live this way. All around us is a whole climate of life that is saying, “Conform!” It is pressuring us, squeezing us, insisting we conform, making it costly to us if we don't.

I heard this week of an incident in the life of Jerome Hines, the Metropolitan Opera singer. Many of you know the story of his life – how, as a boy growing up in California, he became convinced that he had a good voice. Someone urged him to train it, and so he did. He became possessed of a desire to become a star in the Metropolitan Opera Company. That was what he lived for. He built his life around that, gave up all other activities, all other pursuits, all other pleasures, to give himself to the necessary work of training to become an opera star. He learned the arts of intonation, of musical projection. He learned several languages so he could sing operatic roles. He gave himself to that

tremendous desire within him to be a star in the Metropolitan Opera. It finally came true. He became a star. And he said it was empty, hollow. One day he heard a man singing. The voice was as good as his, and the man could have done what he did. He heard Beverly Shea singing, "I'd Rather Have Jesus." The words he sang were,

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
I'd rather be His than have riches untold,
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hands
Than to be the king of a vast domain,
And be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

That song got to Jerome Hines. He began to think about it, and, out of that incident, he became a Christian. But he didn't quit the opera. A lot of people thought he should have. They thought the opera was "worldly"! No, opera is not worldly – except to those who think like worldlings and live like wordlings in the opera. Jerome Hines stayed in opera, but everything was different. He was not longer singing for the advancement of Jerome Hines, he was singing for the glory of God. He dedicated his art, his work, his all to that purpose. That is right. God doesn't take us out of the world; he wants us to live in it, but to change our thinking. Jerome did.

A few years ago Hines had an opportunity to sing the role that he had always wanted to sing. He trained for it, with months and months of hard work, and he was given the role. He was contracted to sing that role in the opera for ten years. When he went to the opera to practice he found some people performing a rather lewd dance. He asked, "What is this?" He was told, "This is the choreography that introduces the opera." He said, "There's nothing in the opera like this!" "No," they said, "we're changing it a bit, modernizing it, bringing it up to date." Jerome Hines said, "I won't sing if you are going to have this kind of a dance in it." He was told he had better go talk to Mr. Bing.

Jerome Hines went to Rudolph Bing, the Metropolitan Opera general manager, and said to him, "Sir, if you have that dance in the opera then I am not going to sing in it." Bing told him, "If you don't sing, you will be ostracized and blacklisted in opera because you are under contract to sing."

Hines said, "Sir, I can't sing in that opera. I am not going to let my name be used to entice people to come in to see filth like this. You can break me, sir, and the union can break me. I've worked hard for months to train for this role, but I will not sing in your opera if that dance is in it." Bing said, "Jerome, you don't have to sing. If you really feel that way, you don't have to sing; we'll get someone else. But we can't change the contract." So Jerome Hines had to give up that role. It cost him, over the period of ten years, something like a hundred thousand dollars.

How many of you are willing to give your body to God in such a way that you would be willing to give up a hundred thousand dollars rather than do something with your body that would be offensive to your Lord?

That is what Paul is talking about by not being conformed to this world – not going along with its pattern of thinking, not being willing to go in for all that it goes in for in its pursuit of pleasure and happiness.

"That's tough," you say. You bet it's tough! If you do that day after day it gets very hard, because you are under constant pressure – and it gets to you after a while. "Everybody is thinking this way, everybody wants to do that, nobody understands you – so why don't you give in?"

There is only one answer to that question. In order to stand up against that kind of pressure you need what Paul talks about next: "**but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**" There is no way that you can keep from being conformed to the world unless you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind. Something has to happen to your thinking. You can't go on thinking the way the world around you thinks and still not give in and be conformed to what it does. What we need is a change of thinking. That comes day by day by being renewed again and again and again. You need a mind that will see through all these silly schemes of the world. There is that kind of a mind. In the Scriptures it is called "the mind of Christ," {1 Cor 2:16}. The mind of Christ is the way of looking at life as Jesus does, seeing life as he sees it. It is seeing what is really there and not what seems to be there, seeing what really is important, not what looks to be important. You can't have that mind unless you are having your mind renewed every day.

The mind of Christ, of course, looks at the world and does not say that the basis of life is the advancement of self. When it looks at the world it says that the basis for living, the reason for life, is to serve God and to advance his will. Not your will, but his will be done; not the building of your kingdom and your empire, but the advancement of his kingdom. This is the basis for life. This is really what human beings are here for. And to maintain that kind of thinking in the midst of the world takes a renewed mind.

I was talking with a young businessman this past week. He told me that he sat down a few months ago and made a list of all the reasons why he is working at his company – the advantages it gave him, the salary, the prestige and status, the opportunity to rub shoulders with men in his profession who could help him, the opportunity to be involved in work in which he found intense pleasure and delight. Then, when he finished the list, he looked at it and said to himself, “That’s just the human list – the things that just anybody would put down. I’m a Christian. I ought to have other reasons than these for being here.” So he took another piece of paper and sat down and began to list all the reasons why God wanted him there. He began to see things that he hadn’t seen before. He saw that God had him there because the fellow at the desk next to his needed help. He had an opportunity to bring a witness to that whole organization that wouldn’t be there otherwise. He had occasions to help people with their problems and give them Christian insights to help solve their personal and emotional problems. He began to list all the reasons why God had him there. When he finished, he began to realize that these were the reasons why he was in that job. How much money he made and his advancement were really very trivial; the enduring thing, the thing that would last forever, was not what he got out of it, but what God got out of it.

That is what this passage is talking about – renewing your mind so that you see life the way God sees it. The mind of Christ sees that the goal of living is not to please yourself but to please God. And the way you please God is to depend on him, to expect him to work through you, where you are; to expect that he has the power and the wisdom and the strength to somehow, in the situation in which you find yourself, do things in ways that you can’t anticipate or even dream of. God is pleased when people venture out in faith.

This past January, at the men’s conference, I shared with the men a paper that I had found describing *the two kinds of theology* there are in Christian life today. It was put in terms of the Old West. One was called *Settler Theology*, and the other, *Pioneer Theology*. This paper had some very interesting ways of expressing these differences:

In Settler Theology, the church is the courthouse in a little town; it is in charge of everything. In Pioneer Theology, the church is a covered wagon, out on the trail, never stopping, moving on and on, involved in battles and bearing the scars of many fights, getting stuck in the mud and getting pulled out again. That is the church, a covered wagon.

In Settler Theology, God is the mayor. He lives up on the top floor of the courthouse and keeps an eagle eye on everything going on in town. In Pioneer Theology, God is the trail boss, rough and rugged and tough and hard-hitting; he won’t let anybody stop – he keeps them going down the trail. He gets down, shoulder to the wheel, when they get stuck in the mud.

In Settler Theology, Jesus is the sheriff. He wears a white hat and goes around and plugs all the bad boys that come into town. He is always determining who goes to jail and who doesn’t. In Pioneer Theology, Jesus is the scout, out ahead of the party, telling where the wagon is to go next, exposed to all the dangers of the trail. He is the pioneer par-excellence, everyone looks to him as the model of what a pioneer ought to be.

In Settler Theology, the Holy Spirit is the saloon girl. She keeps everybody comforted and happy. In Pioneer Theology, the Holy Spirit is the buffalo hunter, out providing the meat for the wagon train, feeding them daily. He amuses himself by going up to the courthouse window every Sunday, when all the settlers are having an ice cream party, and firing off a tremendous blast from his shotgun that scares the living daylights out of all the people inside.

In Settler Theology, the preacher is the banker. He keeps all the resources in town under control. Everything has to go through him. In Pioneer Theology, the preacher is the cook. He just dishes out the food that the buffalo hunter provides. He’s no better than any of the other pioneers, he just keeps them fed.

This paper is a tremendous gathering-up of New Testament Christianity. Christians are not sent into the world to build their own little nests, to feather them up and keep them nice and comfortable, and to try to get by without being polluted by the things around them. That is what we often think, and that is what we often hear, but that is not what it is all about. We are sent into the world “like sheep in the midst of wolves,” Jesus said {cf, Matt 10:16}. We are exposed to danger and pressure and trouble and battle all the time. The only thing that will keep us from succumbing to all this subversive propaganda to which we are constantly exposed is that we constantly have our minds renewed by the Word of God.

How do you get your mind renewed?

Well, it happens at church, to name one place. This is why we have the exposition of the Scriptures on Sunday morning when we come together and hear once again what the truth is – not what everyone around is telling us is true. That philosophy is wrecking everybody else’s lives, but here you learn what the truth is, what really helps and heals and works.

Your mind is renewed in your personal Bible study, when you sit down with the Word of God. When you are confused and don’t know where you are, you renew your mind by reading through a passage and thinking it through and letting the Word speak to your heart. Then you go back to your routine and determine that your life will be in line with the Word of God.

The rest of the book of Romans is designed to tell you how to have your mind renewed so you won’t be conformed to the spirit of the age. This is where we learn that the methods of the Christian are not rivalry and competition, but obedience to the Word of God and a heart that expects God to operate. Then life becomes exciting. God wants your life at work and at home to be exciting, with this constant battle around you, so that you might understand how to live and overcome and conquer in the name of Jesus.

I don’t know what you are going to be doing this week, but I know that living a Christian life isn’t something that is done only in church. It is done wherever you are. It starts with a change in your thinking. You don’t let yourself think like other people around you think. That can only come as you are exposed to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Now, what are you going to do with your life? Are you going to wrap it up in a napkin of affluence and bury it in forty years of self-indulgence? Well, that would be the dullest experience you could have. When you get before the throne of God, all you will find out is that you have wasted all those years. Oh, you will be there, if you know the Lord, but you will find you have wasted your life, and it will be worth nothing before his throne. And you will have lived the dullest kind of existence.

But if you are willing to bring your body to God and say, “Lord, here it is. I have trouble with it, and I’m sure you will too, but here it is. You wanted it. I give it to you for the rest of my life, to be your instrument for whatever you want.” God says, “All right, I’ll take it.” If you then, on that basis, begin to recognize the systematic brainwashing of the world and refuse it, and constantly renew your thinking in the truth as it is found in Jesus and the Word of God, then I will tell you something: You are going to have an exciting life, beyond what you ever dreamed. It will never be dull. It will be awfully hard sometimes, but never dull, never boring.

What are you going to do with your life?

I had a friend many years ago who was walking through the Union Station in Chicago. It was a busy, crowded station. He had been thinking of what he might do with his life. It suddenly dawned on him, as he was walking across that crowded station, that the only logical thing he could do with his life, since it belonged to God and had been redeemed by the Lord, was to give it to him and ask him to use it. Right in the midst of the crowd he stopped and drew a little mark with his toe. Then he stood on it. He said,

“Lord, here I am. I am yours. The rest of my life, whatever you want me to do, if you will show me and convince me that is what you want, I will do it. The attitudes you want me to have, that is what I will have. As I study and read your Word, I will try to carry out what you tell me to do, and think the way you tell me to think. Here I am, Lord; you do with my life as you want.”

Now, that was a commitment service held in Union Station in Chicago that nobody knew about but this man and God. But God picked that man

up and began to use him in remarkable ways. He has traveled the world and has touched hundreds of lives because God used him that way.

If you want to stand where you are now and draw a little mark on the floor with your toe, that's fine. Give yourself to God, if that is what you want. He doesn't make anybody do this.

That is why Paul puts it in these terms: "I beseech you, brothers, I beg you. It is the logical outcome of your life, the only thing that makes sense." But will you give yourself to him, so you can never forget that you did it right here and right now? Every time you come back to this spot you will think about it. "This is where I gave myself to God. This is where I said he had a right to use me. He can use my body and all that I am for the rest of my life."

Some of you have already done this, and I am not asking you to do it again, unless you feel that you need to renew that. But for those of you who have never given yourself to God, this is the place. I beg you, brothers, to present your bodies as living sacrifices unto him. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, and you will prove that God's will is not only good, but it is acceptable and perfect, as well.

Prayer:

Our Father, you know what each heart here is saying and thinking before you. As you read our hearts now, Father, as you hear a cry that says,

"That's what I want to do with my life. I want to be your man. I want to join the pioneers. I don't want to settle down and be a religious settler trying to enjoy the same comfort and self-indulgence and ease that the world around me is enjoying, but covered over with a religious glaze. I want to be a man or woman out on the firing line, out in the frontier, living life as you want it to be lived, challenging the forces around and resisting the brainwashing of the world. Lord, I give myself to you for that reason. Take me and use me just as you please."

Lord, wherever you hear that cry, we pray that you will help that person to understand that this is exactly what you are doing, that you mean this, that you will take them and use their lives for your glory. May this moment never be forgotten. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.