

We are building on our study of holiness to the “and now” or the “so then” application of the study. Every teaching has an application; we are not to be hearers of the word only, but doers. We must apply it to be faithful listeners. When we learn something from God we should ask, “And now, how do I respond? or, “So then, what am I called to do?”

In our study of Holiness, we learned we do not deserve what we have already been given, nor what we will receive at the end. We also have responsibility for living holy in response to God’s loving gift. We seek holiness, in spite of sufferings, either by sin or enemy, and pursue it no matter how dark the world gets. As children of God, we are always to live for the glory of God, even in the face of great costs. St. Paul was a great example of this.

When I think of Paul and his pursuit of holiness, I cannot help but think of his instructions to Timothy, specifically his last letter to Timothy. 2nd Timothy was likely the last written work of Paul; he wrote it while imprisoned in Rome awaiting execution under Nero. Shortly after writing it, he died for his faith making these his last written words.

Over the next few weeks, we will examine 2nd Timothy and portions of 1st Timothy. We will search them, looking for the “instructions” Paul passes down to those performing the ministry of Jesus Christ. We’ll look at Paul’s special commands to Timothy, his disciple and spiritual son. He urges him to live out his faith, to fulfill his duty, to suffer as a good soldier in order to fulfill his Holy Calling. We must note, Paul was living the example that he urged Timothy to follow. Few, besides Jesus, were ever more committed to fulfilling these instructions than Paul; he followed them to his death. As such, we must consider the weight of these words, while we suffer to a much smaller extent, to live out our faith.

All Christ followers suffer to some extent. There are costs for avoiding sin, proclaiming the Gospel, and from persecution in the world. We are instructed to be faithful and serve joyfully while suffering. Most say we are crazy, but Christians serve God willingly, even eagerly in hardship, because we received mercy and love from God. We have our hopes set on the highest calling... to be like Paul in this world; better said, to be just like Jesus!

Let’s use Romans 12:1-2 as transitional verses between our studies. These verses are of great power and insight. There is likely no other scripture presenting our calling so simply.

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.

Today we will break Rom 12:1-2 down into four segments:

1. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God...

Paul is appealing to us **because he must appeal**. To appeal means to entreat, or encourage by instructions. To comfort someone, undergoing difficulties or mental fatigue, so they will pursue a good course of action. Paul asks us to take a course of action which is not normal

in the flesh. To do this he must appeal to us; in the same way a mother or father might beseech a child to study hard in school, or take needed medicines. Appealing calls us to understand the urgency and difficulty of the message. We must note, Paul is not suggesting; he is challenging us to take a difficult course of action.

To make a difficult choice we need a reason why and an expected outcome of our choice. The reason why Paul urges us to follow his instructions is because we have already received mercy. The expected outcome is transformation and discerning the will of God. Obeying Paul's instructions is the only reasonable path for people already saved by God.

God's mercy towards us is unimaginably great. He saved us from sin. He made peace when we were at war. He sacrificed his Son on our behalf, giving us an eternal reward in the now and in the heavens later. Romans teaches us God offers mercy and compassion and healing and blessings to all, not based on human exertion, but upon his love. We do not work to receive blessings, but in light of so great a love, Christians actively respond to God's mercy.

A good example is a faithful child of a good parent. The child should desire to live in harmony with mom and dad, based upon the kindness they have shown, and the life given. Yes, obedience is expected, *and will be enforced*, but how much more wonderful it is when children obey out of admiration for their parent's love. In the same way, Paul appeals to us to live in response to God's mercy... though he could have said "wrath, discipline, natural authority and God's right", Paul points to a higher reason... God's compassionate mercy.

2. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship

Paul encourages us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. An OT sacrifice died once. Paul said we are to *live sacrificed to God*. This is the foundation of "not counting our lives dear to ourselves, but trusting them to God". This attitude reflects the pathway of holiness.

To be a living sacrifice assumes there will be things to surrender or a hurt, loss, or conflict. To live holy and in agreement with God and his ways, we sacrifice our pride. We sacrifice our fleshly ways. We sacrifice our will. We lay these down daily and willingly out of response to God's love. **Let us not forget**, this is how Jesus loved us and still loves us. Could you imagine if Jesus did not humble himself before you were saved? How about after? Do you think there were times today that Jesus had to put on humility, patience, and love, in dealing with you? Of course! And He does this out of response to his own compassion. Now we are to respond like Christ and live in humility, compassion, and holiness.

Colossians 3:12–13 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be

able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

These scriptures show the right response to God's compassion. We are to live in Holiness with God, partially by the way we treat others. This love for God and others will lead us to holy and acceptable behavior. Holiness is the only reasonable response to God's mercy. It is also genuine spiritual worship of God. Yes, we can sing with our mouths, but God wants genuine worship, from our hearts, our ways, and attitudes.

But we ask, "How do we do this? The world is crazy. There are so many issues. How can all my actions and ways be holy and acceptable?" Paul answers our questions.

3. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind

The Christian life is one of daily transformation. This renewal from the flesh to the Spirit is found by daily living as sacrifices. We sacrifice the things of this world that would interrupt us from our calling in Christ. To do this we must daily, actively, and purposefully engage the father. We must set our minds on things above not things on earth. We do this because *we cannot serve God and mammon*. We must get our renewal from God, not the world.

Our thinking must be renewed daily for the flesh is hostile to God and cannot please God. We reside in fleshly temples and must therefore sacrifice our fleshly ways to be transformed by God. Look at this amazing promise.

Philippians 3:19–21 {The fleshly person's} "end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

We must be transformed by God and He promises to do this as we come to him for renewal. I promise you, "If you are not daily interacting in humility with God, you will live a life of fleshly appetites and struggles. You are flesh and spirit. The side you give the most attention to, will control your life". I urge you, choose wisely, out of worship and response to God's mercy.

Living continuously sacrificed and transformed is a journey with many ups and downs; fortunately, Romans 12:2 also provides a map or blueprint of our walk.

4. By testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect

We can discern the will of God by testing. Testing means to examine or analyze an action, thought or attitude. We ask, "God, is this feeling I have holy? Is this what Jesus would do? God, I want to discern your will; is this of you?" Rest assured God will answer.

When I was in the military, seasoned instructors would present us with problems and give us no guidance on how to solve them. They called it "stump the chump". Their thinking was after much effort and exasperation we would eventually humble ourselves and ask for an

answer from them. They hoped, by our many failures, we'd be willing to get the answer from them. Once we were broken, they'd tell us how to do it, and the answers seemed so easy, obvious, right in front of us the whole time. (Often, we only sought answers to stop the punishments they dished out from doing it wrong. Ugh! That's not like Jesus!)

God doesn't play stump the chump! We already lived in failure before turning to him. Now that we have turned, we have found mercy, healing, rest for our souls and answers. Our spiritual answers require wisdom from God, and He promises to give it.

James 1:5–8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James 3:17–18 The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

God wants to give you answers for every challenge you face today. Come boldly before his throne, ask, and seek; you will find. For all who ask of God receive answers and strength to complete the task He assigns; but I caution you, we must be genuine, we must be willing to trust and obey what He says.

A note on doubt: *All of us have areas we struggle to let go of. Experience teaches us we can trust God even more. Over time, doubts disappear based on the history of blessings from trusting God. Everyone embarking on a journey has doubts. The trick is, do not let your little doubts keep you from trusting and stepping out with your mighty God!*

Living this way will serve you well. It will lead you to the pattern of Jesus. If you follow this pattern you will start by knowing what is good, then what is acceptable. Then you will learn what is perfect. *When Ashley was five, she made a decent finger painting, but it would never be acceptable in an art gallery. As she grew and disciplined herself, her work became better and better. If she pursued art daily, her works would one day be perfect. In the same way, take each day as a chance to make one more step towards the perfection God offers.*

Over time, your whole life will move beyond what is simply good, to what is acceptable and eventually perfect. This is the pathway of the sanctified, the way of the warrior, the footprints of true disciples following Jesus. Let him lead you today!

Next week we will start a study of Paul's final words to a young man named Timothy. These words offer great insights on how we can take what we have learned and apply them daily. By doing this, we will finish the race God set before us and become the people God desires us to be in this generation.

Homework: Read 2 Tim 1, pay close attention to verses 8-14. Come prepared to discuss next week.