

A Passionate Plea for Holiness (Part 1)

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Amen. We'll take your Bibles tonight and open them to Romans chapter 12.

! You would agree, especially the first two verses.

Though it's all good, right? It's all good. Before we read the text, Romans 12, 1 and 2, I'll read it here in just a moment. When I speak the words gospel preaching, what comes to mind?

Good news, okay? And that's what gospel means, doesn't it? The word gospel means good news. When we say gospel preaching, I'm willing to say that most of us would be thinking of something like this.

That the sermon would be a passionate plea for sinners to repent and come to Christ, come to faith in Christ. That's what we would think of generally when we talk about gospel preaching.

[1:29] Gospel preaching. And we would be right about that. That conclusion would be right.

Gospel preaching. I mean, that is what it is. The gospel, or as Wes mentioned, the good news of Jesus Christ is what this lost and fallen world needs.

Right? Absolutely. Death is sure. Sin the curse. Christ the cure. As that's gospel preaching.

Gospel preaching is the passionate plea for sinners to come to Christ. Come to faith in Christ. Let me ask you another question. Is that all the preachers are to do when they preach?

No. Of course not. There is a plea, also a plea, that should be directed toward Christians in preaching.

Hello? Hello? Sorry if I embarrassed whoever that was out there. I didn't mean to do that. Well, where was I?

[2:42] We have an example of that right here in this text for tonight. There's a plea here, and it's a very passionate plea. In Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

And so, the Apostle Paul is the preacher, in a sense, through a letter he's preaching. Okay?

Preaching. I'm sure that these letters were read out loud in the worship service, and so in a very real sense, the letter itself is a sermon.

It's preaching. He's preaching. He's also teaching. So, the Apostle Paul is the preacher, and the Apostle Paul is the one issuing a passionate plea in these two verses. But it is not for sinners to come to Christ.

Though it is as much a gospel sermon, gospel preaching, as anything else. Any other kind. Or the other kind. Not for sinners to come to Christ, but it is for Christians to be holy.

That's what he's saying. And he's very passionate about it. Even more passionate about it than maybe the English text, just on the surface, leads us to understand.

[3:57] There's depth of passion here. Alright, so, here, look at it. Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

That's the New King James Version. Some of you have other translations, and so right off you understand and see that it reads a little bit different than that. We'll get to that here in a little bit. So, there it is.

This, really, I think, very famous passage. It's very familiar. Passage of Scripture. And as we look at it this evening, and really we're going to take a couple of Sunday nights to look at just these two verses.

Because these two verses are crucial. And they are, and I'm going to explain a little bit later, they represent the door into Paul's very practical teaching on holy Christian living.

[5:17] And so we need to get these two verses down. And as we look at them, we're going to consider four important truths about holiness. About holiness.

Or what I would call an all-or-nothing Christianity. Here are the four, all four, though we'll just see two of them tonight. There's the call of the holy, or the call to be holy.

Second, there is the consecration of the holy. We'll see those two here tonight. Third, the character. The character of the holy.

And then finally, the confirmation. The confirmation of the holy. All right, those four. So first, tonight, the call. Paul's issuing a call here.

It's a plea. A very passionate plea. In fact, I would say that the Apostle Paul is such an example of a preacher who has a passionate heart for the spiritual well-being of those he ministers to, was ministering to.

[6:26] A passionate heart. Paul's the epitome of that. And you might remember when we were looking at chapter 9 and the first few verses of chapter 9.

And then again, a similar thing is written. Paul writes a similar thing in chapter 10. That Paul expressed his heart's desire for the lost to be saved.

In fact, he was even willing, even though he knew it was not possible, he was even willing that his name be stricken or blotted out of heaven. If doing so would somehow bring his lost brothers and sisters of Israel to Christ.

He had a passion about that. He had a passion about that. For the lost to be saved. You can't deny it. And then here in chapter 12, it is important that we see that he is just as passionate here.

In these verses. We get that sense of Paul's deep burden and passion. Now clearly, Paul is pleading with his readers.

[7:36] And so, what does it say? Paul said, I beseech you, therefore, brethren. Now that doesn't sound to us much like passion. Passion.

It sounds kind of archaic, actually, to use the word beseech. That sounds so King James-ish. And it really is. And some of you have other words there, like the word urge.

Or I can't remember some of the other words that are used. But it is important that we know that Paul is issuing a very passionate plea.

It's a plea. He is urging them. He's pleading with them. Literally, we could translate this, I beg of you, please.

And what's interesting, too, to note, the word beseech is the same word as the word, a little different form, but the same word as the word that Paul uses, or rather Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit.

[8:40] The comforter. Now, it's not translated comforter here, because that's not the idea. It's not the way the word is used. But it is the word parakaleo.

From the word parakletos. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the divine paraklete. The one called alongside, who comes alongside of us.

That's what the word means. Para is a preposition. It means beside, alongside. And kaleo, which is the word he uses here, means to call.

Call you alongside. And really, it comes with it, this deep emotion. And plea. It's really as if Paul is saying, he's not saying anything about the Holy Spirit here.

That's not the reference. But the idea is the same. He is saying, come with me. Come alongside with me in this. In this presenting of yourself.

[9:41] As a sacrifice. A living sacrifice. Holy. One that is acceptable to God. Say, come and join me in this. Parakaleo.

I beg of you. Please. See. Such passion. That's what I want you to see here. Right here on the front end. The passion. The burden. That Paul had for his readers.

But you must notice. And I've already mentioned this. And it's very clear. That Paul is not pleading for lost sinners to be saved. Not this time. This time, Paul is pleading with Christians.

He said, brethren. He's not leaving the sisters out. Okay. I don't have to spend time explaining about, you know, the male kind of dominance of the Jewish people.

But he is including all of us. All right. Male and female. And so he's talking to Christians. It's a plea to Christians. And this is a call issued to the believer, the follower of Christ.

[10:43] And this is a call to be holy. Plain and simple. Now, you know, there is plenty of preaching today that is directed toward the Christian. In fact, I would go so far as to say that most preaching in

the pulpits, preaching in the context of the local assembly of the body of Christ, most of it is directed toward Christians.

Most of my preaching is. I think preachers ought to try harder, including myself, to, on a regular basis, issue and preach sermons that are directly pointed to and issued to non-believers who are present in the body of Christ, in the assembly.

I wrote my whole dissertation on that subject. And yet it's still difficult to do that because most of the Bible was written to believers. And yet we can find kernels of truth and inferences and references and implications of gospel truth that can be preached directly to unbelievers present when the church assembles.

And it happens every Sunday. But most preaching today is directed toward Christians. Wouldn't you agree? It is. And clearly, there's plenty of preaching and teaching in the church today that focuses on Christian living.

Like, you know, preaching and teaching in the context of marriage and parenting and finances and spiritual ethics, religious ethics and moral issues and so forth.

[12 : 25] And that's okay. But there is a scarcity of preaching on holiness. Which, by the way, I think, would eliminate many of the problems we have with moral issues in the church.

We don't have to directly preach on certain issues. What we need to do is preach on how we are to relate to Christ in our living that we're to live holy, to be holy before Him.

And there's not a lot of preaching on holiness today. And yet that is what the subject is. The call here is for believers to place their lives, all of it, everything about it, into the hands of God.

The call here is for a complete and total surrender of everything to Him. That's what Paul is saying. In fact, the language of the text, in this text, gives us the imagery of Old Testament sacrifices. That's what Paul chose to use.

[13 : 36] The image of the Old Testament sacrifice. He's bringing that into his teaching. And he's saying we're to present. That's a word that harkens back to the sacrificial system.

To present, he says, your bodies, a living sacrifice. And so the call here is for believers to climb up on the altar in that sense, in a metaphorical sense.

To climb up on the altar as sacrifices. As a sacrifice as a dead sinner, but a living saint in Christ.

And we need that, don't we?

That kind of commitment in the church today. We are lacking that kind of commitment. We've all seen people walk an aisle during the invitation.

We have watched and witnessed people praying the, quote, sinner's prayer. And we have watched people as they have followed Jesus in believer's baptism.

[14 : 43] And we're thrilled by all of that. And we've seen numbers of people over the years, quote, join the church. It's God who adds to His church. But how often have we seen those same people become living sacrifices?

How often have we thought of that in our own lives? That we literally see ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord.

Everything about us, lock, stock, and barrel. That's what we need in the church today. Now, what is the premise upon which Paul's call, this passionate plea is made?

What's the premise? Well, it is everything that he has said in the first 11 chapters of the book.

Everything that he has laid out for us.

And all the doctrines he has not only introduced, but has hammered out for us so that we understand them. In a sense, Romans 12, 1 to 2, then, as I said a moment ago, represents a huge door in the letter.

[16 : 02] It's a door, a huge door, a very significant door. A door into holy Christian living. Now, every door swings on a hinge, doesn't it?

And the hinge of this huge door is the word, therefore. That's why therefore is so significant in Scripture. That's why preachers make much of it, usually, when they come upon it.

Now, not every time it appears is it significant. This time it is. And perhaps one of the most significant uses of the word therefore. It's like a hinge.

And the hinge, this therefore, is the hinge of the door that leads to Christian living, holy Christian living. Paul said, I beseech, urge, plead with you, therefore, brethren.

Now, this hinge connects the door of holiness, as I've said, but it connects it to something. Right?

Every door has a hinge, and the hinge connects it to something.

[17:03] Usually a door frame. Okay? But in this sense, because every door swings on something, what is it? What is it that this door is connected to?

The mercies of God. That's what he means by that phrase. By the mercies of God. That's what this door to holy Christian living is latched to, or hinged to.

And swings open on the basis of the mercies of God. And Paul has already revealed what those mercies of God are.

Have we been listening? He's been doing it for the last 11 chapters. The mercies of God. And we could really summarize what Paul has said about the mercies of God.

We could sum it up with three powerhouse words. Theological words. And I know it's been a long journey in our study of Romans. But you might remember that at several junctures along the way, we covered these theological words.

[18:16] They're powerhouse words. There's justification. There's sanctification. There's glorification. We could sum up the 11 chapters under those three words.

Really, we could. And so Paul's plea, his call to holiness, must be obeyed in view of those three things. Justification, sanctification, and glorification.

I like the way Kenneth Wiest, in his word studies, I like the way he put it. Let me give it to you. This is what Kenneth Wiest wrote. He wrote, in view of the fact that we are justified, declared righteous in our standing before God, in view of that fact, be holy.

In view of the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is doing a work of sanctification, making you more like Jesus, be holy. In view of the fact that we are yet to be glorified, seeing Jesus one day, to be forever with him in the heavenlies, in view of that fact, be holy.

Be holy. That's a pretty good commentary on what Paul's getting at here. Based upon the mercies of God. Now, the call of the holy.

[19:47] That's the first thing. The call of the holy. The call, the plea to holiness. Let's go a step further. And see the consecration of the holy.

Now, I use the word consecration almost as a synonym for holiness. And that really is what it means. The dictionary defines consecration as something ordained as sacred and holy.

And that's what we're to be. Consecrated. Ordained as sacred and holy. Now, look at what Paul wrote in verse 1 again.

Let's look at the whole thing again. I beseech you, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Now, that's a mouthful, isn't it? I mean, it really is. A mouthful. So, we really need to take this one piece at a time. Kind of like eating an elephant.

[20:53] You know, how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. And so, let's take it one piece at a time. I know some of you are thinking, elephants?

Who would eat an elephant? You ever had elephant? Neither have I. I've never had alligator either, but one just nearly had me. Anyway.

I can't get that alligator off my mind. All right. So, we're taking this step at a time. And there are four things to see here. Under the consecration of the holy.

There is, first of all, a decisive act. You can't hardly miss that in how Paul writes this. He's talking about a decisive act we are to take or make.

Decisive act of consecration. Paul said, present your bodies a living sacrifice. Present your bodies. That is your bodies.

[21:55] Everything that you are. Present as a living sacrifice. Now, the verb present is written in such a way, and I'm not going to get into the grammar of this, but just understand sometimes a Greek verb is written in a certain tense that suggests the idea of ongoing continuous action.

That's generally a present tense verb. This one is a different tense. And it means done. Done once and for all.

So, it's not an ongoing presenting and representing and representing. Sometimes our commitment needs to be renewed. But here's what Paul is saying, like it or not.

He's saying, once and for all, present yourselves, your body, a living sacrifice unto the Lord.

You see, again, I would remind you that Paul is using language that hearkens back to the Old Testament sacrificial system. And so, when a person offered a sacrifice in biblical times, they would bring the animal to sacrifice, a lamb or whatever it may be, to the priest to be sacrificed.

[23 : 13] And the animal to be sacrificed was then presented to the priest, handed over. Here's our word, present. And it's a technical word that relates to the sacrificial system.

He would present the animal to the priest. And then that sacrificial animal was burned, consumed by fire.

And then, and this is key, understand that the person presenting the sacrifice to the priest had to give up all rights for that animal, on that animal.

All rights, all possessive rights, had to give it all, turn it all over. He could not change his mind. He could not take the animal back. And after the priest was done with it, he couldn't have any of it back. He relinquished all rights as possessor of the animal. That's the way it was in the Old Sacrificial system.

[24 : 18] So, what is Paul saying? He's saying that just as the lamb or sacrificial animal was presented to the priest, you are to present yourselves.

Your bodies. He uses the word bodies. I think it's a term that's all inclusive of all that you are, and who you are, and what you have, and what you can do, and everything. To present it over to the priest, to the Lord, as a living sacrifice.

And it is to say, Lord, I place myself on the altar. All that I am. All that I aspire.

All that I desire. All that I can do. All that I have. Everything. All of me. Here it is.

I place it all on the altar. Here I am, Lord. And I present myself, then, to the highest priest. The Lord Jesus Christ. Our great high priest. As a living sacrifice for His glory.

[25 : 27] Now, then, putting those two together. Taking the Old Testament sacrifice system and the way it was done. And bringing that over into the spiritual application. Do you understand the seriousness of what Paul is saying?

The absolute finality of what he's saying. This is for keeps. There is no escape clause on this. When the Lamb of the sacrifice, Lamb of sacrifice was presented to the priest, its throat was slit. Its blood was shed, drained out. And then, when its dead carcass was consumed by the fire of the brazen altar, it was too late to request its return.

So, Paul's plea, then, is for a decisive act of total consecration. It's not to play footsie with the altar of God.

Like, I think it was Charles Stanley, a number of years ago, wrote a book. I can't remember the title of it now. But he was bringing this whole concept.

[26 : 46] In fact, it may have been this passage. Bringing this into play. And he's saying, we don't climb up on the altar and then climb off and then climb on and climb off. And we don't get up on the altar and keep one foot on the ground like we've got one foot in heaven and one on the earth.

You know, we just kind of play footsie with God in our commitment to holiness and living holy before Him. This is a decisive act.

Not only is there a decisive act, but there is also a deliberate activity of consecration. An activity. Again, consider the word present. I've already said the certain tenths of the verb means it's done. It's once, it's done, and that's it.

It's done. But it is also an active verb. All verbs have voice, active, passive. Greeks have a middle voice.

[27 : 52] This is not passive. This is active. It's active. That is, there is an ongoing activity as a result of what's been done.

This placing yourself lock, stock, and barrel on the altar. Whatever God wants. There is, based upon that one act. Decisive act.

An ongoing activity. An activity of holiness. Of holy living. The word holy, in verse 1, is a noun, of course, and the meaning of it is this.

That which has been deliberately separated unto God for His service. For His service. You see? A deliberate separation unto God. Separation of your life unto God for whatever He wants. Whatever He wants.

[28 : 50] For His service. And for His glory. We are yielding ourselves to God. We are surrendering our lives to God for whatever He wants to do to us, in us, with us, through us, for us.

Whatever He wants. And so then, all of the, quote, reserved, no trespassing, private property signs are all removed from your life. This is what Paul is saying.

Let me give you an illustration. Illustration from the potter. We've all seen a potter do his work or her work. It's interesting, isn't it, even to see it live, to see the potter working with the clay.

We use that as an illustration. The Bible uses that illustration quite often. The potter, you know, he'll take the lump of clay. We've seen him do it. He'll take that lump of clay and he will put it on the wheel.

Potter's wheel. In fact, he really kind of throws it right there in the middle. And then he begins to pump the kind of foot treadle at the bottom there.

[30:02] You've seen these old-time pottery things. I'm sure they're more mechanized now. And that wheel starts to turn and the clay, that lump of clay, that ugly lump of clay sitting there in the middle of the wheel, it starts to turn round and round and round.

And then he takes his skilled hands and fingers and he begins to shape it and mold that clay into whatever thing he wants, whatever he wants to make, whatever he desires.

But suppose, in that lump of clay, there is a hard piece of material in there. It's clay, but it's hard. And so it's not pliable and it's not able to be molded by the potter's hand.

And no matter how pliable the rest of the clay is, that hard part, that hard lump, makes it impossible for the potter to make his vessel whatever he desires to make.

Because for the potter, it's all or nothing. Either it all has to yield to him or he can't make anything out of it. Right? It's just logical.

[31:19] Well, of course, we are the clay in the spiritual sense. And again, the Bible uses that analogy in a number of places. We're the clay and of course, God is the potter. He's the potter.

And, you know, life, I guess, is the wheel. Go round and round and round and part of the life is the work of the potter's hand. As the potter moves his hand and caresses the lump, our lives, and shapes it and molds it and so forth into whatever he desires to make.

Because he's the potter. But suppose, you won't have to suppose, we know that it's often true, there's some hard lump in the clay.

Some part that is not pliable, not yielded. Or, you know, it's a private property sign that's been erected in some part of our lives.

Or, no trespassing, God, not here. And so it's not pliable. He can't mold it the way he desires in a sense.

[32:32] And so, no matter how pliable, how moldable or yielded the rest of your clay is, that hard part, that hard lump, makes it impossible for the potter to fashion a beautiful vessel or useful vessel.

I say impossible, but it's not impossible for God. God then has to, like the real potter, he has to go to work on it, doesn't he? And he'll squeeze it and slap it and punch it and, you know, all kinds of things.

That's part of the turn of life too, isn't it? And what we need to do is yield it all to him. Yield it. Now, the real potter, he's going to work on that hard lump and it's going to be pliable.

He's going to make his vessel that he desires or he's going to throw the lump away. He's going to throw it all away. And God the Father can do that as well if he wishes. Now, that analogy, I think, helps us understand Paul's meaning here in this passage.

We are to purpose in our hearts to say daily, Lord, whatever you want, wherever you want me to go, whenever you want it, however you want it, I'm yours.

[33:54] Every part of me. So, there's a decisive act of consecration. There is a deliberate activity, ongoing activity of consecration.

Then third, the divine acceptability of total consecration. Paul speaks of it this way as being acceptable to God.

this is acceptable to God. This is what God wants. In fact, this is the only thing that will be acceptable to Him. Total yieldedness to Him.

It's acceptable. Now, I have some sobering news. Nothing short of a full body sacrifice will be acceptable to God.

it's all or nothing. There's no such thing as partial commitment. Consecration. Partial consecration. No such thing as that. Now, I'll quickly add that there is, of course, degrees of consecration throughout our lives that gets into the issue of sanctification.

[35:05] I mean, after salvation, we do begin to make more and more commitments to God as our knowledge of His Word grows and as our knowledge of His will increases and so as God leads us deeper and deeper and deeper in our knowledge of Him, our devotion increases.

But that's not partial consecration. Partial consecration is no consecration. Our son Chris was just married, of course, you know, to Tony and she's our new daughter-in-law.

We're happy about that. But suppose as they were making their vows, the wedding ceremony, and making their vows, suppose Chris had said to Tony, Tony, I love you with 99% of my heart. How do you think that would have gone over? Yeah, that's good. Or suppose he would have said, and Tony, I promise to be your faithful husband 364 days a year.

But I just want one day for all the other women in my life. How do you think that would have gone over? She would have thrown him to the alligator.

[36 : 33] And me too for being his father, maybe, I don't know. See, for Tony, it's all or nothing. But hey, that's 99%. What's wrong with that?

I mean, isn't that a good percentage? It just won't work that way, will it? Now, you are the bride of Christ. Right?

what kind of vow did you make when you were wedded to Christ in salvation? Wasn't it all or nothing?

See, we're talking about the consecration, the separatedness, holiness that God wants of us, every one of us.

It's a decisive act, a deliberate activity ongoing, a divine acceptability. And one more.

[37 : 40] There's also the devoted attitude of the consecrated, of consecration, devoted attitude. Paul said, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

That's how it's worded in the New King James. Your reasonable service. Now, from that translation, don't get the idea that Paul is saying, hey, it's the very least you could do. Now, that is true, I guess, to point, but that's not what he means.

He's not saying it's the reasonable thing to do. So, that is true. It's reasonable. No other course of action is reasonable than to present your body a living sacrifice unto God, holy and acceptable unto Him.

That's really not what he's saying. The translation is unfortunate. Some of you have a different version, and so you already know probably what I'm going to say, but the word that's translated reasonable is really the word that's better translated spiritual.

It means spiritual. And the word translated here, service, is the word that means worship. The better translation is worship.

[39 : 03] Some of the New American Standard ESV bring this out pretty clearly. And so you put the two together and we have an important truth. A believer's offering of his or her total life, everything, as a sacrifice to God, is his or her sacred service to him.

That's our sacred service. Our spiritual worship. And not just worship on Sunday. We really have a hard time understanding the full meaning of worship.

Because we think worship is what takes place here. And it does. And should. There is worship. And we should experience worship in the context of the assembly of God's people, of the body of Christ, when we get together like we did this morning and tonight.

Worship is something much bigger than that. It's a total life thing. Ruth Bell Graham. I never forget this as long as I live.

I read it I don't know umpteen years ago. I probably have already quoted this here because I like it so well. But Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of Billy Graham, she said she had a plaque above her kitchen sink.

[40 : 24] And on the plaque it read worship services held here three times daily. You ever thought of washing dishes as worship? Then we need to rethink what we understand about worship.

Because when Paul says that this is your reasonable service or your sacred service of worship, the Lord he's talking about everything you do.

Everything. Everything is holy. Everything you do and think and places you go and activity you involve yourself in, whether in public or private, should be able to be approved by God.

That's holiness. So, when we bring all this together, we're about finished here tonight, makes perfect sense really.

Perfectly logical. And Paul's being very logical here. He's saying a lot but it flows very logically. The decisive act of consecration, the deliberate activity that's ongoing, the divine acceptability of it, of our consecration, these three result in a devoted attitude of consecration which is worship.

[41 : 50] Something that flows out from within the believer and leads to worship and service. Worship and service. And that's the only reasonable thing to do.

The only rational thing. The only thing that makes any sense for the believer based upon all that God has done, all of His tender mercies.

The only thing that makes any sense is to worship Him and to serve Him with everything.

Everything. Everything we are, everything we have.

is to worship Him.