

True spiritual formation starts to take place the moment an individual gives his or her heart to the Lord and experiences spiritual birth through Christ. He then enters into a personal relationship with God through his Savior Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit seals him as a child of God. In the book of Romans, particularly chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul writes to believers of how they ought to live. This part of the book shifts its focus as Paul now turns to the practical application of all he has said in the previous chapters of the book (1 to 11). For the purpose of this paper, we will examine these two verses of chapter 12 in detail so we may understand what the Lord wants us to know through Paul's address.

In verse 1 of chapter 12, Paul says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers..."* Paul uses a strong active verb to draw our attention to the important truths that were already set forth in the previous eleven chapters. He then clarifies to us with a substantiated phrase that tells us the reason for his urgency: *"in view of God's mercy"*. We have to have a proper view of why we ought to do what he wants us to do, and it is truly because of the mercy of God that we can have a way of restoring our broken relationship with him.

Once we have a correct paradigm, the next step would be *"to offer your (our) bodies as a living sacrifice."* This is perhaps one of the most crucial picture of how we are to live for the Lord. In contrast to animal sacrifices used in the Old Testament, in which cases the animals are dead, once we have a new life and spirit through the Holy Spirit, we are to present our bodies to be used of God for his glory. This is an amazing and important concept, because we understand that a dead animal cannot be restored to its life or get his life back once it is laid upon an altar to be sacrificed. In a similar manner, when we give our lives to the Lord sacrificially and consecrate ourselves to him only, we are not to take our life back to live for ourselves. To live as a "living sacrifice" requires commitment, a total abandonment of our will in order to gain the

will of God for our lives. This is perhaps one of the most difficult aspect of ones spiritual journey and formation. For while we have a new nature, our old nature still seeks the pleasure of “self” and self-fulfillment.

How should we present ourselves as a living sacrifice? It is by living a life that is *“holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship.”* Paul admonishes us that this new way of living is not merely a ritualistic event or activity; rather, it is a devotion that involves a consistency of heart, mind, and will. This also stems from an obedient heart to the Lord. It is a constant way of living. As Jesus himself stated, we must worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

In verse 1, Paul instructs us on how we should live. Verse 2 of chapter 12 tells us how not to live. Paul uses this method of writing frequently throughout the book. Here, he tells us that once we offer our lives as living sacrifices, then *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world”*. Needless to say, we need not look far to find images of worldly standards of living. The advancement of technology and media has so invaded our minds with what the world says how we ought to live, wear, buy, and even talk. Tolerance is being advertised as the correct way of viewing and accepting things. The patterns of this world are the things that take our focus off of the Lord.

This is detrimental to our spiritual formation, growth and health as the world seeks only to please itself with evil and corrupted mindset. So vital is this thought that Paul reminds us of this again in Ephesians 4:17-20 where he states, *“¹⁷(So) I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for*

more. 20You, however, did not come to know Christ that way.” Here, the (underlined) thoughts convey a swift decline in the moral and spiritual aspects of one’s life that is not given to the Lord.

In contrast again, Paul instructs us in Romans 12:2 to “*be transformed*” spiritually. How? *By the renewing of your mind*”. As transformation is not a single event isolated unto itself as a one-time event, we must renew our spirits daily with the refreshing words of the Lord. To accomplish this, we must spend time investigating his word to replace our sinful thoughts and habits with godly ways of living. Sadly enough, the average Christian in general spends a lot of time on everything and anything else but not enough time renewing their minds with the things of God. This is an important part of spiritual growth and formation. How is one to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ if the word of God isn’t studied?

“*Then*”, this word introduces the effect of a renewed mind. When we allow God to transform our lives with his word, we “*will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.*” In this final thought of the first two verses on Christian living, Paul gives us a notice of repetition of God’s will. As the first eleven chapters deal with God’s mercies, the following chapters after this point will focus on the will of God: how we are to live in regards to himself, to others, to governmental authorities and other areas of our lives. And as the *sacrifice* of our lives is *pleasing*, so is it also when we live according to his will.

In conclusion, true spiritual formation is a daily work of allowing God’s word to penetrate every aspect of our lives to transform us into the person he wants us to be in order to accomplish his will. God made us for his own good pleasure. We must seek to live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to him, and may we live so sacrificially.