

ROM 12:1-2—HOW TO BE “SPIRITUAL”

INTRO: Many people like to say they are “spiritual, but not religious.” Spirituality is a popular subject for books, new age gurus, and other things. People have a hunger for something deeper than all the surface aspects of daily life. Perhaps the most popular version of what a “spiritual” person is like is a mystic, maybe alone on a mountain top, meditating. That is really a caricature of what true spirituality is.

Christianity has a long and well-developed history of deep spirituality. Richard Foster has written quite a bit about spiritual disciplines. In his books *Celebration of Discipline* and *Spiritual Classics* he identifies 12 spiritual disciplines: inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study which are avenues of personal examination and change; outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service to others help prepare us to make the world a better place; and corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration bring us nearer to one another and to God.

So in the Christian tradition, spirituality is not withdrawl from the world and is not limited to such things as meditation and fasting. Instead, real spirituality is holistic. It involves the inner life, the outer life, and life together in the presence of God.

There are many passages in the Bible that talk about spirituality. One of the most important is **Rom 12:1-2**. It’s just two verses, but these two verses give us a good picture of what a truly spiritual person is like **[READ]**.

PROP: These verses are telling us that true spirituality is our response to God in all areas of our lives.

O/S: As we will see, true spirituality is: corporate, outward, inward, and is the expression of a new relationship with God.

CONTEXT: **v.1** begins with the word “Therefore.” When we see the word “therefore,” we need to ask ourselves what the “therefore” is there for. In this case, it is relating back to what has just been said in **ch.11**. Paul is writing this book to the church at Rome. The Romans are all gentiles. Before Christ came to earth, gentiles were in darkness, far from God, worshipping all kinds of man-made gods. **Ch.11** is all about the fact that the Jews—God’s own “chosen people”—by and large have rejected Jesus as their savior and Lord. But in the plan of God, God used their rejection to bring salvation to us gentiles. That is the context for today’s passage. And Paul begins **ch.12** by observing that:

I. True spirituality is corporate, not just individual

Paul begins by saying [READ 12:1]. He is picking up on the saving mercies God has shown to people who had been far from him. What he is saying is: **“God has shown a special grace and mercy to you. He has saved you when you didn’t deserve it and couldn’t earn it. He and he alone has caused you to pass from death to life. Since that is true, what are you going to do about it?”** Our whole life is to be a *response* to God’s mercies, not something designed to try to get him to *show* us mercy or favor. The rest of **vv.1-2** tell us how we are to respond to the special grace and mercy God has shown us.

But first we need to see something. Paul says, **“Therefore I urge you, brethren.”** The “you” is plural. That is also true in **v.2** where he says **“so that you may prove”** (or, as the ESV puts it, **“that by testing you may discern”**). Remember: Paul is speaking to the church. His use of the plural rather than the singular is making the point that Christians are not Lone Rangers.

Three weeks ago when we were talking about Mark 10, we emphasized the point that when we come to saving faith in Christ, he adopts us into his family—our true, everlasting family—the church. Paul is cementing that same point here, not only by using the plural for “you” but by specifically referring to “brethren” or “brothers” in **v.1**. He is saying, **“Don’t think that you can live this life alone. True spirituality does not consist of withdrawing from the world or separating yourself inside a monastery. Instead, true spirituality is lived out in the presence of and in concert with your brothers and sisters in Christ. They are your family. Help them. Support them. Work with them, and care for them. God has given them to you as a means to reveal himself to you. So make use of his means.”**

That is why the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration are so important. They bring us nearer to one another and to God. But what then?

II. True spirituality is outward or physical

v.1 says we are to “present our bodies...” Christianity is not merely a doctrine to be believed. It is that, but it is more. It is a life to be lived in the body. Just as the body is the instrument through which *sin* manifests

itself in the world, so now our bodies should be the instruments through which grace and goodness manifest themselves in the world. Paul made this same point earlier in Romans. In **6:13** he said [READ].

12:1 goes on to say, **“Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.”** This is very interesting. In the OT, when Solomon dedicated the original Temple, **2 Chron** says, **“Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house.”** On the day of Pentecost, **Acts 2** says that **“suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.”** What God was doing on the Day of Pentecost was symbolically drawing a connection between the temple and the church. He was saying, **“The temple was merely a type or a shadow pointing to my true temple, the living temple: the church.”** Indeed, on multiple occasions, the NT specifically says that *we*, the church, *are* the “temple of God.”

But because we are a living temple, we are to be living sacrifices. We are *not* consumed by the fire of God like the OT sacrifices. Rather, we are *empowered* by God. Our sacrifice is to be “living.” IOW, it is to be continuous and perpetual, not a one time thing. **v.1** says our living sacrifice also is to be holy. The word “holy” signifies both being set apart and being without spot or blemish/pure. IOW, all of our lives are to be pure and holy, set apart for the Lord and given to him. God is saying, **“I don’t want just some kind of ceremonial surrender to me, like sacrificing an animal or even just paying a tithe or attending church services—I want you: all of you, all the time, in every area. I have forgiven you; I have given you new life; I have come into you. What does that mean to you?”**

It’s like what we said when we were talking about **Mark 10** three weeks ago. In that passage Jesus takes the things that are most important to us—our money, our family, our home, and our job—and asks us: **“What is more important to you, me or them?”** It’s the same here. We present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was in prison. Yet he could say, **“I will not be put to shame in anything, but with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”** Can we say that? That is what **Rom 12:1** is trying to get us to say.

Why? **v.1** says that offering our bodies as holy and acceptable living sacrifices is our “spiritual worship.” So, in God’s sight, “spiritual” is not just some kind of fuzzy feeling or mystical experience but is intimately related to what we do with our bodies, how we act, how we live our lives.

But the word translated here as “spiritual” is very interesting. The word is *“logikos,”* from which we get the word “logical.” It relates to reason. In this case, it is talking about what is the reasonable, logical response to what God has done for us and is doing in us. Consciously offering ourselves to God in all areas of our lives all the time in daily sanctification is simply the logical, reasonable response to the one who has saved our lives, done everything for us, and given us new life.

Tim Keller once had an illustration that went something like this: Think of a single mom who doesn’t have much, but she has a son whom she loves. So she works more than one job and sacrifices everything she can so that he will be able to get a college education and a good job and be able to be a success in ways that she never could. And that’s what happened. He went to college, got a good job, and is now successful, all because of her. But now he really never calls her or sees her. He’s not mean; he sends her a card on Christmas and her birthday, but that’s pretty much it. Do you think that is really a reasonable response for all that she has done for him?

What about us? Are we living for Jesus or just sending him a card on his birthday? We owe him everything, yet how often is he in my thoughts? How much do I love him? And is my love for him—for who he is and what he has done for me—the motivating factor of my life?

If you are “living,” you are living all the time. You don’t live one day but then cease to live the next day. It’s the same with being a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice. We are to put Christ first every day; we are to be holy every day; we are to be well-pleasing to him every day. (And, BTW, the word “acceptable” in **vv.1-2** means “well-pleasing.”) It’s the way Jesus acted toward his father. In **John 8:29** he said, **“I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”**

That’s also why Jesus told us in **Luke 9:23** that we are to “take up our cross every day and follow him.” The cross means sacrifice. Dying to our own ungodly desires and living to him, what pleases him, what is acceptable to him. Not sometimes; not once a week; but every day. That’s how we are to live in the presence of Jesus. That is why the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service to others are so important. They help prepare us to make the world a better place. This leads us to the fact that:

III. True spirituality is inward or mental

What we do with our bodies first begins in our minds. You can change your behavior but still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. **v.2** begins by saying [READ]. To not be conformed to this world

means to stop being molded by the value systems of this world, but to undergo a deep inner change by the qualitative renewing of our mind. That is where the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study are so important. They are avenues of personal examination and change,

We all know the saying, “Garbage in; garbage out.” That’s why the Bible tells us to **“take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”** This is a battle. We are bombarded every day, all the time, with images, philosophies, temptations, and all kinds of things that lure us away from Christlikeness. So we need to consciously reflect on: **“How am I spending my time? What shows am I watching? What images am I drawn to?”** Remember: true spirituality is our response to God in all areas of our lives, all the time.

And this is important practically. The second part of v.2 says that, as we take our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, as our mind is renewed and we start thinking like Christ, we become transformed. That word translated “transformed” is the word *“metamorphoō”* from which we get our word metamorphosis. It is the same word that is translated “transfigured” when Jesus’s appearance was transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is also the same word used in **1 Cor 15** which talks about how our bodies will be “changed” when the resurrection occurs.

This shows how profound taking our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ, renewing our minds, and thinking like Christ really is. It is saying that we are to be changed on the *inside*—to be just as white and pure and holy and different from the world—as Jesus was on the *outside* on the Mount of Transfiguration. And it’s saying that our minds, our thoughts, our values, our priorities, are to be just as vibrant and living and Christlike as our bodies will be when we are resurrected and living on the new earth. This is what real spirituality is! But there is more. All this is telling us is that, ultimately:

IV. True spirituality is the expression of a new relationship with God

Our mental transformation is of profound practical importance. The NASB says that our minds are transformed [READ]. The ESV puts it like this: our minds are transformed **“that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”** The translations are slightly different. But the wording here means: **“To prove whether something is worthy or not; to draw a conclusion about worth on the basis of testing; to bring forth the good in us or to make us good.”**

What it is getting at is that as our minds start thinking like Christ, that will affect everything about us. Then, as we confront the tests, trials, hardships, and opportunities of life, we will *know* what God’s will for us is in any situation and, as a result, we will *act* as Jesus would in that situation. Our lives will reveal Christ in us. That’s why the literal translation of v.2 is that our minds are renewed and transformed **“in order to prove by you what is the good and pleasing and perfect will of God.”** Our thoughts and our actions will be in sync and will demonstrate what is good, what is pleasing to God, and what his perfect will is. That is real spirituality.

There have been studies done of people who say “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” A third of adults under age 30 identify themselves that way. Such a mindset tends to be associated with intellectual progressivism, a mystical hunger, and an anti-dogmatic, experimental approach to religious belief. The focus is on the individual’s inner dimension of life. The result, however, is that what works for one person—to make them feel better or deeper or in touch with ultimate reality—may not work for someone else. And there is no way to tell if any of it is objectively true or lasting.

That’s where Jesus is different. He is not just some guru or wise person or even a deeply spiritual person. He claimed to be God himself come to earth as a man. And he said he would prove it by doing something that is impossible for anyone who is only a man, namely, he would be killed and buried, but he would bodily rise from the dead. If he did—and he did—that is objective, historical proof that Jesus is exactly who he claimed to be, and it validates everything he said. Therefore, in Christ we can know what true spirituality is. We have the ability to live a whole life, a complete life: body, mind, and spirit, individually and corporately, in a real, personal relationship with the living God. That is real spirituality.

CONCL: The corporate aspect of spirituality is important, because, as John Donne said, **“No man is an island, sufficient unto himself.”** We are part of a family, a family God has given us to nurture and help, to find fellowship and joy. But true spirituality is also individually transformative. It transforms us on the inside as we renew our minds so that we start thinking like Christ, feeling like him, and valuing what he values. And that leads to a transformation of our outward behavior.

A truly spiritual person will be obvious by how they think, speak, and act, because they will be demonstrating by their lives that they are in a deep, meaningful, personal relationship with the living God. Because their minds have been transformed by God, by his Word, and by his Spirit, truly spiritual people will be demonstrating by their lives what is good, what is well-pleasing to God, and what is God’s perfect will. Others will not be able to help being drawn to God through such truly spiritual people.

So think about the inward spiritual disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. They are avenues of personal examination and change. Are we doing these? Ask yourself: How might I improve? Then there are the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service to others. These help prepare us to make the world a better place. Again, how are we doing in these areas? What should I change in this area of life to be more like Christ? Finally there are the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. These bring us nearer to one another and to God. What are some ways we might improve these as a church. We have a golden opportunity now with Maxx coming in as our new pastor to think more deeply about this and take steps to make us more of a loving family. I hope and pray that all of us get on the road to true spirituality.