

Briarwood Christian School Convocation
“Christian Education Outcomes”
Romans 12:1–2
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We will be looking at Romans 12:1–2 in this study. As I was praying about what to address to all the educators, leaders, administrators, counselors and coaches and those in the mission field of education, I thought of the students that many of you have and what I would say that would encourage you so that you might be used of God in their life. All those in education are in a position to be used of God in their life. I want to assure you that those students in about 50 years will never remember who the senator or governor of Alabama is right now but they will still remember you. I still remember some of my teachers and coaches, I still think about them and draw from those experiences with them. It is absolutely astounding and incredible the position of influence that God has called you to. What an enormous stewardship!

Here at Briarwood Christian School I remember last year two of the leaders presented to the parents that they wanted the students to do be in the Christian armada, the ships, of discipleship, worship, leadership and fellowship and then bring those Gospel ships to bear. I heard their hearts for these students to know Christ and love Christ and not just to get through school. They really wanted them to know the life changing power of the Gospel. They want every student to know the deep, abiding hope of Christ and that also guided me to what I needed to address in this study.

This isn't a place that I haven't gone before for it's a place I have resided in a long time. There were two men that affected my life. One is John Murray, a professor at the seminary I attended in Systematic Theology, and I have read everything he has written. He wrote the classic commentary, as far as I'm concerned on the book of Romans. His successor who was also a professor of mine in seminary and affected me as well was Sinclair Ferguson. In this study I will be using much of his material in what I'm about to say so I will go ahead and give him credit now. I knew I wanted to go to Romans. I can't give an exhaustive look at Romans in this study but I want to give you a few thoughts from this pivotal text of Scripture, particularly focusing in on the area of Christian education.

Romans 12:1–2 says *[1] 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.*

I don't believe the canon of the hymn book was closed in 1782 and I believe when God does something I believe He precedes it and accompanies it with the writing of God-centered, Gospel saturated, God exalting songs, hymnody and spiritual songs. But I have to confess I also love the hymns. There is weightiness to the lyrics of some of these great hymns. There is a gravitas there and that's why they move from contemporary to classics. That's why they keep showing up in the next edition of the hymn books. One of my favorite hymns is *Alas, And Did My Savior Bleed* and here are the first and last stanzas of that hymn;

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed,
and did my Sovereign die!
Would he devote that sacred head
for sinners such as I?*

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
the debt of love I owe.
Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'tis all that I can do.*

Here is a Christian life utterly devoted in response to the Savior who redeemed us. How do you get there?

This is the burden of the Apostle Paul throughout the book of Romans. Romans is like the rest of the epistles of the Apostle Paul for Paul takes great pains in chapters to tell you who you are in Christ. That is what he has done in the first eleven chapters of Romans and you can't understand Romans 12:1–2 that starts 'therefore' until you properly attach them contextually to the eleven chapters before it. Romans 11 ends with these three verses, [34] "*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?*" [35] "*Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?*" [36] *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Romans 1 starts out by saying 'I'm not ashamed of the Gospel.' The students today are in a world that is inducing every possible effort with unbelievable technology, gifts and skills to make them ashamed of the Gospel. What can cause them to be unashamed of the Gospel? Romans 1:16–17 says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

So what is this thing called *the Gospel*? I did learn in my tenth grade English class that whatever the definite article is modifying can be defined. That is why it is a definite article and not an indefinite article. It is this Gospel that the Apostle Paul begins to unfold. Romans 12:1 is what I call that Pauline epistle hinge verse and Paul seems to do this every time. Ephesians 1 through 3 tells you 27 times who you are in Christ. Then Ephesians 4 starts out [1] *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.* The next three chapters tells you what that walk from the One who saves you looks like. Every single one of Paul's epistles are set up this way.

After Paul tells you what your Gospel blessings are in salvation, for you can't live a life to be saved and he painstakingly makes sure you know that, then comes the hinge verse. Hence Romans 12:1–2. It's a hinge verse because the hinge has two bolts that are clearly brought out in the first eleven chapters. Bolt one, is the finished work of Christ as the Savior of sinners. Nothing has to be done to add to what Christ has done to save sinners which was His perfect life and atoning death. The only thing left to be done is the saving of the sinners.

Bolt two is the foundational and sufficient work of Christ to save you from your sins. In Christ you have a new perspective, a new heart, a new record, a new family, a new life, and a new home. The One who has come from heaven, the Son of God, in the line of David, fully God, fully Man, has now achieved what He has accomplished and only He alone could do. The lion hearted has become lamb like and has brought the atoning death for our salvation.

You would think the way Paul ended Romans 11 you would think he would have ended the book at Romans 11:36 which says [36] *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* But now he is going to tell us how to live, 'Alas and did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die?' My tears of grief over my sin would not repay Him but praise God I'm not set free to love Him. I present myself to You for that is all that I can do.

For those in education, I don't know exactly what you do but this is a bridge to communicate to students why they are here, how they are here, and where they can go.

Now how do I live in light of this finished work of Christ, as the Savior of my sins? This what Paul addresses in Romans 1 through 11. In Romans 1 there are the pagan Gentile laws. In Romans 2 there are the Jewish religious laws and it ends in Romans 3:23 by saying [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* That leads us to the judgment of God which is explained in Romans 4 and 5. Romans 6:23 ends by saying [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 7 begins to unfold the Christian life where now your heart is changed but you still have an old man living in you and you find yourself doing what you don't want to do. So how do you still deal with this body of death that is still clinging onto me?

Romans 8 deals with walking in the Spirit in the Christian life and then to the glories of the Christian life in Romans 9, 10 and 11. Then we end up here to live for the glory of God. We want the glory of God to go throughout all the world. How do you do that? You give yourself to Jesus, not as an act of salvation but out of love to the One who saved you. The problem is that you didn't get a new mind when you came to Christ. The first day you wake up after you have been born again, you still have 'stinkin thinkin.' You have been learning this for year and it didn't disappear.

So what does God call us to do in light of that? This is very clear in the text. We can't spread the glory of God in and through everything unless we are committed to living the glory of God. In other words, Jesus didn't save me to become the rabbit's foot in my pocket that I can call on when things get difficult. He is ready to do the extreme makeover but He first has to do the extreme take over. I present myself as a living sacrifice. Up until the resurrection of Jesus it was dead sacrifices. After the resurrection of Jesus, His death was once and for all as the Lamb of God and now there are living sacrifices which are you and me, those who have been saved.

Notice Paul didn't say 'for the mercies of God' but 'in light of the mercies of God' for this isn't what you do for God's mercy and grace but this is what we do because of God's mercy and grace. This is what we do out of love and gratitude for Him who deserves our life. So what is it that we do? Here are five things we do in response to what Jesus has done to you, in you, through you and for you.

The first thing is you now live a sacrificial life. You sacrifice your life to Him. Christianity is a marvelous free gift that cost you everything because it cost you, you. When you become a believer you don't simply rearrange the priorities of your life and put Jesus at the top. Jesus is not at the top of the list. Jesus is the list. Galatians 2:20 says [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* To me to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21). This is what the Apostle Paul calls us to. Jesus is the One who makes the list of priorities for you because your life is His. All I can do is now give myself to Him who has now saved me.

If this Jesus gave His life to give me life and if Christ is now my life, then I don't have any other option for I am His and He is mine. I am called to this sacrificial life. Jesus calls for every part of you and not just Sunday when you show up to worship at a church that preaches the Bible. It is absolutely crucial to gather together for worship with God's people on the Lord's Day. That is the thermostat but that is not what Paul is talking about when he says to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. He is calling for every day.

This reminds me of the hymn *Take My Life and Let It Be* and sometimes when I sing that I tremble because of the message in that hymn.

*1 Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.*

*2 Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.*

*3 Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.*

*4 Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.*

*5 Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.*

*6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.*

This is what I'm called to do, not for salvation, but for my Savior. Please Lord, loosen my grip on everything by putting Your grip on me. Also, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple is the place you bring sacrifices. Your life is the place of the sacrifice for Christ and your life is your sacrifice of thanksgiving and love. So God has given us this glorious Gospel whereby to live for Christ and die to self. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 16:24–25, [24] *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* If you're going to live, you're going to die.

Secondly, it's personal for you are called personally to intentionally present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service of worship. The text is in the tense, not a one-time thing, but you keep on giving yourself to this Christ who is now your life. If our teachers will embrace this, our students will adopt this. Once they are taught, they will see it and remember it as this is lived out in our lives. It lays the open door for us to teach the Gospel to them. It lays an imperfect example of a sinner saved by grace but with a new life that belongs to Christ.

I was converted at a funeral as I saw the power of the Gospel overcoming the sorrows of death and I had never seen it before. I remember going into the hallway and saying to God "If You can do that to people like this I'm ready to leave the emptiness of the self-centered, self-absorbed, violent, profane, immoral life that I've been embracing for I need this in my life, but because You do know, You gave Your Son so I give myself to Him." I got up off my knees and walked back into the room where everyone was and then for some reason I was driven back to that hallway and prayed 'Now God this is the big one, because I really mean this thing, so now that I've given my life to You, if there is anything You want me to do with my life, would You please let me know?' I had no idea where that was going to lead me but I am grateful to this day where it has led me. God is building into us a personal commitment to this sacrificial life. What am I sacrificing? I am sacrificing nothing more than what He has already given to me and I can't out give Him.

Thirdly, it is a total, personal sacrifice. We don't always know where this is going to lead us but it is an unreserved commitment. We don't negotiate with the Lord. We don't decide what to give Him and what not to give Him. I think Dr. Ferguson said 'I tremble when I hear any student who has graduated from Westminster Seminary fill out an application form for the ministry and put places that they won't go.' What kind of commitment is that? Well Lord I'm called to the ministry as long as it is in Alabama. I can certainly understand the desire. Do you think Peter and Paul told the Lord they would rather stay in Jerusalem? Again, we have no idea the full implications of surrendering our life to Christ but it's not negotiated.

Fourthly, it's doxological. Presenting yourself as a sacrifice to God is your spiritual worship according to the text. This is making our lives a worship statement to the glory of God. We praise God for gathered worship but your life every day is worship. Here is an example. When we teach our kids how to go to work for Jesus that is how the word professional was invented in our language, through the Reformation. When someone goes to work, whatever that work maybe you do your work heartily as unto the Lord. The way you work, why you work and how you work is a profession of your faith and you want to hear 'well done good and faithful servant' from the Lord. All of life becomes an act of worship. I Corinthians 10:31 says *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* We don't live to eat or drink but we eat and drink to live for Christ. Praise God for His patience as He gets us to these places, but that is where we ought to be focused upon for Christ.

Lastly, number five is Gospel logical living. Some translations of Romans 12:1 will say 'reasonable worship' in place of spiritual worship. The Greek word is most directly related to this word logical, but it's a logic rooted in the Gospel. I believe those translations are headed in the right direction but I believe Paul is saying that this life commitment is Gospel logic. This is where the Gospel leads you. This is the Gospel logic outcome of knowing the first eleven chapters of Romans. We praise God He is patient in our faltering in the midst of all of it which He has told us how He does that in Romans 7.

So how do we get to this Gospel logical living of doxological praise to the living God with a personal life given to sacrificial love of Him? We get there by the renewing of our mind. Romans 12:1 is where the supernatural, powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ displays and the glory of our God whom we can know accurately and intimately but never exhaustively, this is where language fails us. He gives the command but the command is in the passage. He says do not be conformed but be transformed which is something that is happening to you yet He is commanding this in your life. He is calling you to an intentional renewal of your mind but you can't renew it but He gives you the steps to renew it.

The word used for conform in the text means molded. Don't be molded to the world. This is why I wanted to share this with you most of all. Do you know what your students, our children, are exposed to? One is the gifted power of technology – social media. People are there thinking of every way possible to promote a world and life view that stands in opposition to God, even if they aren't thinking of opposition to God yet their world and life view is going to be in opposition to God. Our kids are fastened to it or drawn to it. It could be the television, computer, iPhone and the technology is designed to be addictive. How much time do our kids spend on technology? We want them to be with teachers we can trust who will show them how not to be conformed to the world and how God transforms the mind. Because the Christian that lives for the glory of God makes a difference for God, not by focusing on the horizontal but by focusing on the Vertical who makes us different.

The Bible calls Christians salt (Matthew 5:13). Whether you put salt on corn or green beans or whatever food, it doesn't take much salt to alter the taste, as long as the salt is salty. The salt has to be different. That is what we want for our kids. They are different for Christ to display His glory to others and not just to be different. We are not teaching people to be eccentric for just to be different without an intention is just eccentric. We want them to be different for Christ so that His preeminence and glory would be seen to others.

You have the opportunity to speak to their mind. Parents, preachers and teachers have the opportunity to speak to our kids. What brings vivacity and robustness to our calling? It is when we bring the Gospel through whatever discipline we have as we teach that discipline under the sovereign glory of God. We want a world and life view that is devoted to God's glory that is saturated with the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that our kids learn how all of life belongs to Jesus by bringing them to Jesus who is their life.

Acts 2 displays the vivacity of the church that starts with 120 and goes to 3,000, just counting the men, then people getting saved every day and another 5,000 where we see this explosive church. Acts 2 gives us the profile of this church and the first thing it says is they were devoting themselves to the Apostles' teachings, to know the Word of God that sets you free for the God of the Word. That's the glorious calling and privilege that we have that the renewed mind through the Word of God by the power of Spirit isn't molded to the world and every day its learning how not to be molded by world, yet to be transformed.

The word transformed in this text is where we get the word metamorphous. You don't transform yourself. You are transformed yet it is given as a command. How can I pursue being transformed because I can't transform myself? You pursue being transformed by people who are pursuing you, bringing the Word of God to the glory of God into your life for the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. That's how minds get renewed. So we are getting at where these children are going to spend eternity and how they are going to live their life on the way there, for Christ, in a broken world as the majesty and glory of Christ takes hold of us.

That's why the Great Commandment tells us that knowing the Word of God is not simply an intellectual exercise so we become compendiums of knowledge. The Great Commandment says to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30) for it produces lovers of God to then know how to love others as they love themselves for God.

They call Jesus the Teacher and for those in education, administrations, parents, that's your title. You are all Rabbis. We are teachers. All of Jesus' sermons He taught are so gloriously wonderful. I cannot imagine what it was like for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). These disciples were so discouraged and Jesus sits down with them. Luke 24:27 says *[27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Don't you just love that? Jesus took the Old Testament and showed them how it all had its fulfillment in Him which set up the New Testament that explains what He has done.

When these two give this account to the others they didn't go on about theology and history but after they had sat down with Jesus it says in Luke 24:31, *[32] They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"* Education brings the truth of God's Word in the preeminence of Christ for the explosion of affection to the Lord God where we love Him and love everything He loves. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments to be with my brothers and sisters who stand in such a crucial moment as they begin this school year. God, would You give them a freshness as they rise every morning to the past they have been called to? Give them an excitement to the call that they have in Christ and for Christ. Give them the strength they need in all the details, dynamics and challenges that happen. Father, I can't imagine trying to serve You in a broken world and dealing with so many dynamics of broken families, lives, hopes and dreams and seeing this every day in the lives of these students. I ask You Lord to fall upon them with power, freshness and Your presence day by day in their life. May they know the joy of the excellence of their discipline but also of the intention of their discipline as they serve you in this glorious vocation whereby students can have minds renewed, no longer conformed to the world with its death fuse but be transformed with the Gospel logic of a life given to Christ, who gave His life that we might have life. Bless their children Father. Bless their marriages. Bless their relationships. Make them a company of those called to proclaim the excellencies of Christ that the philosophies of men will be destroyed and our students will take every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ, in Jesus' Name, Amen.