

# SUBJECT: CONFORMING OR TRANSFORMING

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 12:1-2

*From the sermon file of Dr. Doyce H. Nolan*

**Text:** *I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a young executive, Charles Olcott seemed to have it all-- a loving wife, three boys, and all of the gifts of a successful business career. He was transferred to Miami in 1983. Shortly after they started attending church and had an encounter with Christ. As new Christians they diligently searched for scripture truth of how they should live their lives. But, two years away Charles and his family would come face to face with the real cost of their spiritual commitment.

His professional career was soaring. In 1986, at the age of 39, he was named president of a five-billion-dollar corporation. It was here that his faith would be put to the test. The parent company was negotiating with a British corporation for control of the fast food empire. As president, Charles Olcott was assigned the task of checking over the figures to substantiate the companies position. He went over and over the figures until after mid-night. Something was wrong, the figures just didn't add up.

The next day the management team met to make the final presentation plans. During the planning session Charles voiced his concern over the figures that were to be presented. The chairman of the management team told him to "sleep on it." Through the night Charles kept thinking about how hard he had worked for his position as president of this large corporation. He knew that if he voiced opposition, by not going along with the rest of the management team, he could very easily lose his job and everything he had. He prayed and sought God's leadership for his life. That morning he had perfect peace as he walked into the meeting room, a peace that only comes from one's close relationship with Jesus Christ. The chairman of the board looked at him and said one word.. "Well?" Charles told him that he wasn't able to support the figures. The chairman said "Then you are off the team!" Charles walked out of the room and called his wife... "Honey, I've been fired." (Market Place Perspective, 1st quarter 1994 page 2)

Would you have done what he did? Or would you have considered the mortgage on your home, kids in braces, your career, your future and just kept your mouth shut? My feeling is that every one of us wishes that we could do what Charles Olcott did; to walk away from it instead of taking the easy way out. In our heart we know that conviction is more important than compromise? At least I would hope that your conviction is more important to you than conforming to the "management team" or with popular opinion!

But in reality most of us are trapped in the conformity position. On a regular basis we compromise what we know to be right because of what others might think. Where does the strength and integrity of a Charles Olcott come from?

The answer is given in our Scripture. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Paul is saying that if you want to escape the trap of conforming to the behavior and customs of the world you have got to become a "living sacrifice." Well, what does that mean?

At the time of this writing it was a common practice to sacrifice an animal in religious ceremonies. So the people knew exactly what Paul was saying; A living sacrifice means that if you want to be free from compromise and conforming, if you want to be a person of conviction and conscience, then give up your rights to survival!

There is a requirement to be set free from the trap of compromise. It comes when you decide that you don't have to survive, you don't have to win!

You can choose self-survival or self-sacrifice!!

Self-survival is to choose to do and to be whatever it takes to preserve your image, your popularity, your position, and your standard of living! Are you guilty of compromising in order to stay in your comfort zone? Friend, let me tell you, once you began to play the game, there is no end to how far it will go. Self-survival cuts corners, lies, uses people, takes advantage of the system, and before you realize it, you have lowered your standards to fit in with the "management team" or some certain group! Deep down inside you have a gut feeling that this is not right! You wish there was a way out! If this is where you are then listen very closely: There is a way out!! Let's examine it.

## I. THE BENEFITS OF SELF-SACRIFICE. (vs. 1)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

I know this sounds difficult, but there are rewarding benefits in being a living sacrifice.

### 1. It Produces Moral Courage.

- a. Moral courage is the ability to do what is right regardless of the consequence. And this is where the water hits the wheel.
- b. Illustrate:  
During World War II a small village of 900 in southern France managed to save 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust. This required the support and involvement of every person in Le Chambon, France. How did 900 people protect 10,000 Jews? Because they chose self-sacrifice over self-survival! They were willing to take the risk of arrest, imprisonment and death by Hitler's forces.

### 2. It Produces Moral Freedom.

- a. Moral freedom is the ability to end people-pleasing and status-seeking once and for all! Develop the attitude of not caring what people may think!

b. Illustrate:

After the last supper Jesus got up from the table and washed the feet of the disciples and wiped them with a towel. He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, "Oh no Lord, your not washing my feet! Jesus said to him, "Peter you don't know what I am doing, but you will later understand." "Oh no, Lord, you shall never wash my feet!" Then Jesus said to him, Peter, unless I wash your feet, you have no part with me." (Jn 13:2-8)

- In present day words Peter was saying, "Hey Lord, if I was leader, you sure wouldn't see me washing feet, this is beneath your status! What would people think if they saw you doing this? How can you stoop so low as to wash the feet of a bunch of smelly fishermen and tax-collectors?"
- Paul tells us how our Lord could do this in Phil. 2:5-8. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; And, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."
- Jesus was willing to sacrifice Himself because He had nothing to prove, nothing to loose and nothing to hide. He knew what He was there to accomplish and He wasn't afraid of loosing friends, His reputation or His image! That is how He could get down on His knees and wash their feet.

3. It Produces Self-Esteem.

a. Illustration:

Michael Ramsey was always in trouble with the law as a teenager. His father was in prison and his mother was gone. Michael struggled with his classes, and skipped school a lot to hang out on the streets. He had no confidence in himself and his future looked dark. That is, until that day he pulled three people from a burning building. After that incident, he got a tutor, went back to school and started working as an AIDS counselor for Ad Hoc Group Against Crime. He was being interviewed about how he felt about the big change in his life. He said, "For the first time I feel proud about myself." What brought on this change? He had learned that he didn't have to win.

4. It Produces Unlimited Options. (Acts 20:22-24)

*"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, Except that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."*

Imagine conversation between Paul and his friends: "That's a dangerous option, Paul. If

you go there they will stone you!" Paul answers, "So what? That's been done to me before!" "But Paul, you don't understand, if you don't lighten up on your preaching they will send you to prison." Paul responds, "Man! I sure hope I get to go to Rome! I was telling one of the guards there about Christ when they released me the last time. Maybe I can follow up and lead him to salvation!" "Paul, you better stop preaching all together or they will kill you!" "Well, if they do that will just solve my dilemma, for I have work to do here, but I sure wouldn't mind going on to heaven!" My point: Paul didn't have to survive!

#### 5. It Produces Leadership.

- a. The story of Joan of Arc, a French peasant who, at the age of 18, led the French army against the English during the Hundred Years War, was recently on television. It is reported that before her first battle she said, "I will lead the men over the wall." One of the generals said, "not a man will follow." She said, "I won't be looking back to see if they are." The men did follow and in just 8 days, they ended the battle that had gone on for 8 months.

In the spring of 1430, while attempting to free another city she was captured and the next day burned at the stake. Before the fire was ignited she was given one last chance to recant and betray her country. She replied, "One life is all we have and we live it and then its gone. But to surrender what you are and to live without belief is more terrible than dying, even more terrible than dying young." My point: Joan of Arc didn't have to survive by compromise.

The benefits of being a self-sacrifice: Moral integrity, moral freedom, self esteem, unlimited options and leadership all belong to people who live according to conscience and conviction instead of compromise and conformity. The question...

## II. HOW DO YOU BECOME A SELF-SACRIFICER?

### 1. Stop Going Along With The Crowd. (Matt. 21:8-11; 27:15-17, 21b-22)

- a. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city shouted, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee!" But a few days later things had changed... the crowd shouted "crucify him!" That afternoon Jesus was nailed to the cross. Never listen to the crowd! That's what survivors do. They are always concerned with public opinion, which is most of the time, false.

### 2. Start Going For An Eternal Future. (Luke 12:4-5)

- a. Crowds come and go, but God never changes. It is His approval that really counts. Learn what He wants from you, go where He directs you and stick to it.

## Conclusion

My precious friend, when you make up your mind to be a self-sacrificer you will find life more pleant because you be released from conforming with the management team nor with the opinion of the crowd.