

## **A Call For Consecration And Spiritual Transformation**

**(Rom. 12:1-2)**

According to the Fed's, Michael Franzese, son of N.Y.'s legendary Colombo Family Underboss John "Sonny" Franzese, was the biggest money earner for the Mafia since Al Capone. A 1986 Fortune Magazine cover story titled, "The 50 Wealthiest and Most Powerful Mafia Bosses," ranked Franzese number 18. At 34, he was by far the youngest on the list.

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

Referred to by the media as, "The Mafia Prince" and the "Yuppie Don," he was reputed to be a "rising star" in the family, destined to become boss one day. At the height of his career, he was generating \$6-8 million a week master-minding legal and illegal activities that included a gasoline distribution network that sold a half-billion gallons a month, a gambling operation that impacted athletes, union racketeering, auto dealerships and feature film production. His holdings included millions of dollars, several homes, a helicopter, a lear jet, and luxury boats.

So intricate were his activities, the justice department organized a 15 man multi-agency task force comprised of federal, state and local officials, with the sole purpose of bringing down the mob's most prolific young star. Famed Manhattan U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani led one of five prosecutions of Franzese, none of which after lengthy trials resulted in convictions. Law enforcement remained undaunted, however, determined to bring him down.

The mob life is a turbulent one, filled with treachery and deceit. At a relatively young age, Franzese appeared to be very adept at navigating the often dangerous waters of La Cosa Nostra, and insulating himself from law enforcements' ever expanding web while increasing his power and influence along the way.

But, God had another plan for Franzese. And it began on the set of a movie Franzese was producing in south Florida titled, "Knights of the City." The cast included Sammy Davis Jr., Smokey Robinson and a beautiful, 19 year old dancer from Anaheim, California named Cammy Garcia.

Michael says, From the moment he first met Cammy on the movie set, he was

completely captivated by her!”

Michael invited Cammy to join him for a cup of coffee. Five times she would accept his offer, yet never appear. She would very politely reschedule.

“One night, we were leaving a cast meeting and I noticed she appeared to be upset. I approached her, thinking this would be my opportunity to be a hero. We talked. She told me she was a Christian and that some things happening on the movie set did not sit well with her. She was planning to return home.”

She eventually would return home, accompanied by Michael.

A 19 year old dancer managed to do what a Federal task force could not. Michael was so taken in by Cammy and her genuine commitment to the God in whom she believed, that he planned to do what no other “made member” of La Cosa Nostra had done before him. Quit! Others before him had defected to become government informants, slipping into the cover of the witness protection program. But no one had ever quit.

The timing was right. The feds had managed to turn one of Michael’s principal business associates and hit him with yet another racketeering indictment. Seeing it as an opportunity to begin his break from the mob, Franzese instructed his attorney’s to negotiate a plea with the government attorneys. Rather than proceed to trial, he would plead guilty, do some time and gradually plan his defection from the mob life. He would marry Cammy, move to the west coast and settle there upon his release from prison, far from the mobbed up streets of Brooklyn. The government jumped at the opportunity to convict him. He would agree to a 10 year sentence, \$14 million restitution and forfeiture of considerable assets. The deal was done. Michael’s plan was in motion. Apparently, however, God had another plan.

Cammy had introduced Michael to her faith in Christ, an introduction that ultimately led to his surrender, not just to the law, but to the grace of the Lord Jesus. Vanity Fair called Cammy “the woman who changed the face of organized crime in America” because of her impact on Michael, an impact she continues today as his wife of 22+ years.

After serving five years in prison Michael was released on parole to begin his life new life with Cammy. But the government was relentless in their desire to have Michael cooperate against his former associates. And the family boss wanted him dead. Under tremendous pressure from both sides, he violated his parole and was

sent back to prison for what the feds assured him would be a very long stretch.

“This was the darkest moment in my life. Everyone was mad at me – the mob, the Feds, even my wife. What would Cammy do now? What about my kids? Would I survive the mob’s fury in prison? I was angry with myself, beaten down and emotionally drained. The pain I felt in my heart was unbearable. A guard walked by my cell and noticed my demeanor, and asked if I was OK. He left and returned with a Bible. I never saw him again. Angry with God, I threw the Bible against the wall. Although I had turned on God for that moment, God did not turn on me. The Bible fell open to **Proverbs 16:7** –

‘When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.’

The fellowship of a prison guard completed what Cammy had started. That night, alone and on my knees, I surrendered control of my life to the God in whom I had only up to then believed in.”

The fed’s plan for a very long prison stretch turned into Michael’s serving 3 years where he hungered after God, and developed his personal relationship with Jesus.

Upon his release, Michael was recruited to educate student and professional athletes about the dangers of gambling. Since 1995, Michael has addressed professional athletes with Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, and the National Football League, spoken at more than 400 Division 1 colleges on behalf of NCAA, and has launched Breaking Out, a foundation designed to deliver the gambling addiction prevention message to youth. He is a regular speaker at Christian events, including Churches, Men’s Groups. He is frequently the Keynote speaker at events for corporations, business and law schools, and law enforcement agencies. His book “Blood Covenant,” tells his story of transformation.

Michael Franzese came to discover and to experience the mercy of God, and as a result he surrendered his life completely to the Lord Jesus Christ. **Michael’s story of surrender, transformation, and service to God and others, introduces the subject of our lesson this morning in Romans 12:1-2:**

1 “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul’s appeal here in Romans 12:1-2 is based on God’s merciful provisions detailed in the first eleven chapters. The first eleven chapters of Romans tell the story of God’s merciful actions in providing justification for fallen humanity through Christ. Just think about what God has done for us. Our sin and self-will had alienated us from God, and doomed us to eternal condemnation. But out of God’s goodness and mercy He dealt with our sin problem. He delivered us from the penalty and bondage to sin by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. He has declared us to be justified, right in His sight, and has delivered us from bondage to our sinful human natures. He has provided us with His Holy Spirit so we can enjoy a victorious and abundant life right here on earth, and eternal life with Him in heaven. Beyond all of that, He has promised to keep every promise He has ever made. What a wonderful God, what marvelous provisions He has provided us.

In light of all God has done for us, chapters 1–11, Paul urges every believer to present themselves wholly to God; and to no longer be conformed to this present world order, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the Word of God. To put it another way, He urges believers “to turn our theology into walk-ology.” In other words, we are to live out our Christian faith in our daily lives. Paul’s thesis: *Beliefs should impact behavior*. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul urges two appropriate responses to the theology of chapters 1-11: First, Present Your Body To God (v. 1), Second, Renew Your Mind (v. 2)

### **I. Present Your Body To God (v. 1)**

1—Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Verse 1 describes “what” believers are to do in response to God’s mercy. Many commentators are of the opinion that this verse is one of the most important in the entire Bible; and what-is-more, it contains more key theological terms and truths for its size than perhaps any other verse of Scripture (Ken Boa, *Romans*, 361). Paul opens this new unit with the word “Therefore.” As you well know, the word therefore draws together all the doctrine or teaching that Paul has presented in chapters 1–11. In light of God’s mercy in providing reconciliation through the cross of Christ, Paul calls on these Roman brethren to present their bodies as living and holy sacrifice to God. Paul’s gracious appeal, urging voluntary compliance, reinforces what Christ Himself did for us. He voluntarily

sacrificed His body on the cross as an atonement for sin. In like manner, believers are called on to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, that He might continue Christ's work through us. *Sacrifice begins with surrender.* This ties in with Paul's earlier discussion in Romans 6 where he called on believers to stop presenting the members of our bodies to sin, as instruments of unrighteousness, and to present ourselves to God as those alive from the dead (6:13). Our bodies, comprised as they are of various parts, are capable of expressing either sin or righteousness.

Whereas the Old Testament priests presented the sacrifices to God as dead burnt-offerings, believers are urged to present themselves to God as living sacrifices. The tense of the verb *present*, describes a decisive, and once and for all presenting of ourselves to God. It also implies a glad, happy, willing offering of oneself. Although some feel inclined to repeat this once for all offering of themselves to God, in reality, what is in view here is a life wholly devoted to God's service. One commentator I read this week, says, he presents himself to God every morning when he awakes. He does this as an expression of worship and devotion to God. This is not a bad idea.

Paul continues that our sacrificing ourselves to God is an act of spiritual worship. Many translators point out that the Greek adjective *logikos*, which many render "spiritual" here, actually means "logical." In other words, our presenting ourselves to God as living sacrifices, is not so much a spiritual act, although I think that is involved, it is the only logical or reasonable response in light of all God has done for us. In my opinion, it is also an act of sacrificial worship. Our voluntary offering of ourselves to God expresses a heart of gratitude. It puts feet to our faith. Paul's whole point here is "Beliefs should impact our behavior!"

**Application:** So, how can we present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice? Every day should begin with, and be filled with thanksgiving, worship, and praise. Do you begin your day in God's Word, and ask His Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read? Do you redeem your drive time in the car by listening to Bible teachers on your radio or tape decks? Do you ask God to arrange divine appointments? May I suggest this prayer as you begin your day: "Dear Father, because of Jesus, I am yours." Call on a friend, or volunteer to help someone in need. Look for ways to demonstrate your love for the Lord in practical ways.

In verse 1 Paul explains *what* God desires, present your body to Him as a living sacrifice; in verse 2 he explains have *how* we are to respond to God.

## II. Renew Your Mind (v. 2)

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

Believers are commanded to no longer be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. These two processes are viewed as going on all the time, there is a continual struggle for our minds. Paul's use of "world" is not a reference to planet earth, but rather to the world system that is organized and controlled by Satan (lit. *aion* = "this present evil age").

The term "conformed" literally means to be molded or stamped according to a pattern. The verb "conformed" is passive, implying that if you don't actively and intentionally resist this present evil age, you will be conformed to it. The only other occurrence of this Greek word, "*do not be conformed*," in the New Testament is found in 1 Peter 1:14: As obedient children, *do not be conformed* to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." The context is very similar to that of Romans 12:2. Here Peter exhorts believers to abandon worldly lusts, and to pursue holiness in all our behavior.

Prior to coming to faith in Christ, our minds were controlled by the fallen philosophies of this age. **For example:** Live for the moment and don't concern yourself with consequences. You are the center of your universe; don't let anyone push you around! If you want something, go get it (partners, possessions, and power). People are important primarily because of what they can do for you. If they can't do anything for you, don't waste your time on them. Public opinion defines truth ... popularity is more important than holiness. Faith and everyday living are unrelated. There is no absolute truth. Our world screams tolerance (all religions are the same; accept and affirm same sex marriage).

Believers have been delivered from this present evil age (Gal. 1:4). We continue in this world as witnesses to the glory of God, but we are no longer dominated by Satan or the philosophies of this age. We are exhorted to no longer allow the world to conform us into its mold.

The antidote to avoid conformity to this wicked world requires transformation by the renewing of our mind. While it is not clearly stated, this requires the

daily study of, and commitment to, God's Holy Word. As Paul explained to the Corinthian believers in **2 Corinthians 3:18** "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." As we spend time in God's Word, the Holy Spirit transforms us progressively, day by day, into the very image of Christ. While this is the Spirit's work, it requires active participation on our part. I am of the opinion that unless we are actively pursuing God, very little if any spiritual transformation will take place in our lives.

On-the-other-hand, God's promise to the dedicated believer, who presents His whole being to God as a sacrificial offering, based on the mercies of God, and strives to renew His mind through meditation upon God's Word, will gain an increasing ability to recognize God's will (that which is good; i.e., acceptable, well-pleasing; and perfect). Dedication leads to discernment and discernment to delight in God's will.

### **Conclusion:**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do you want to be able to discern what is pleasing to God? If you do, then, ask God to help you quit being conformed to the perverted philosophies and practices of this evil age, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin transforming you by changing the way you think through the Word of God. Then, and only then, will you have the ability to be like the Holy One who called you, holy yourselves also in all your behavior (1 Pet. 1:14).

Closing prayer:

**Closing song:** *Touch The Sky*

Lord's Supper: play the song *In Remembrance of Me*

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

