

## OFFER YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE

Romans 12:1-2

Key Verse: 12:1

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

What is the first image that comes to your mind when you hear the word “living sacrifice”? How about the following cartoon? There is a huge altar with many steps to the top. Two guards are dragging a very reluctant young man up the stairs to be the next sacrifice.

Maybe that's the image that comes to mind when you read what Paul says in today's passage about “offering your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

Perhaps you are thinking, “I am not sure I want to go that far. After all, I give God an hour or two of my time on Sundays and also give offerings whenever possible. I think that's enough for now. I am not sure I want him to take control of my whole life yet. What if he wants me to do things that I don't like?”



*“Except for the actual sacrifice, all this is largely symbolic.”*

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Sadly, this seems to be the thinking of many believers today. Many want to follow Jesus, not on his terms but on their own terms. They hold back because they think their plans are better and they secretly fear that God may force them to do things that you may not like. However, that is not the kind of believers Paul is seeking in today's passage. Instead, he calls us to fully offer ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. He then explains

why we should offer ourselves totally to God as a living sacrifice and how we can become a living sacrifice.

## I. A LIVING SACRIFICE (1)

Let's read verse 1 together. *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."* Whenever we see the word "therefore," we should always go back to the preceding verses and review what they say. In this case, "therefore" refers back to what Paul has been saying in chapters 1-11. He began by showing that we all are hopelessly and helplessly lost in sin and under his wrath. He sums it up in Rom 3:10-12, *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* If this is our true condition, then we all need one thing above all else: God's mercy. Thankfully, our God is full of mercy. His primary display of mercy is at the cross, where Jesus died for sinners like us. Rom 5:8 says the following: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* But we also know that we experience his great mercies every day in many ways. Micah 7:18 says the following: *"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."* His mercy is what keeps us from getting what we do deserve. We have all disobeyed God thousand times. We deserve his judgment. If God wasn't merciful to us, none of us would have been here today. Why should we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice? Paul says that it is God's mercy that motivates us. The proper response to great mercy shown to us by our loving God is to offer ourselves totally to God out of gratitude. In Isaac Watt's amazing hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," we read these words: "Love so amazing, so divine; demands my soul, my life, my all."

Captain Shaw was a medical missionary with the Salvation Army serving at a leper colony in India. One day, armed guards brought him three men bound in leg irons and chains. The shackles the lepers wore on their wrists and legs cut and tore into their diseased flesh. The sight of the three men in chains broke Captain Shaw's heart, and he was moved with compassion. "Please unfasten the chains," he demanded of the guards. "It is not safe," one guard replied. "These men are dangerous criminals as well as lepers!" Captain Shaw told the guard that he would take responsibility for these three men. He then took the keys himself and tenderly set the men free, treating their bleeding ankles and wrists. About two weeks later Captain Shaw had his first reservations about what he had done. He had to make an overnight trip and dreaded leaving his wife and child alone. Still, his wife assured her husband that he had done the right thing and that she was not afraid to stay alone with God watching over her. The next morning she was startled when she went to her front door and saw the three criminals lying on her steps. When they saw her, one of them explained why they were there. In broken English he said, "We know the doctor go. We stay here all night so no harm come to you." These men experienced the doctor's mercy and then responded out of gratitude by serving him.

Then what does it mean to offer our bodies as living sacrifice? We who live in 21<sup>st</sup> century America are not familiar with the practice of offering animal sacrifices. None of us has ever had to bring a lamb or a bull to worship service and let it slaughtered and burned as an offering. However, this is exactly what the Jewish people in the Old Testament had to do when they wanted to worship God. It was a normal part of their worship service. So does this mean that we should now offer our physical bodies on the altar in place of animal sacrifices? Actually, this is not what Paul is saying here. In fact, we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices because these were just a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Because of his ultimate, once-for-all-time sacrifice on the cross, the Old Testament sacrifices became obsolete. So if God doesn't accept animal sacrifices any more, then what should we now bring to him? Instead of animals, we are to bring ourselves to him. A bride does not turn to her groom on her

wedding day and say, "I offer you my cooking ability." Nor does the groom say to her, "I give you my bank account." No, in a marriage ceremony they vow, "I offer you myself." Likewise, we offer God ourselves, not just our time, money or talents. May God help us to offer ourselves fully to the Lord and totally committed to him.

Let's think more about this living sacrifice. First of all, we must realize that becoming a living sacrifice isn't an automatic process. It requires our personal decision. No one can do it for us. After reading a biography of missionary Adoniram Judson who served in Burma for forty years, I was very scared to go out as a missionary because that book really taught me how hard the life of missionary can be. I had to really wrestle with my fear and love of this world. But eventually I made a decision to entrust my life to God because I knew God loves me and he would lead me in his best way.

Second, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process. As Dr. John pointed out in our Friday bible study meeting, the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. Despite our best intentions and efforts, we still make mistakes and sin. So we need to renew our commitment. We need to find out which parts of our life are not yield to God and put those back on the altar. For example, when troubles arise and things do not go according to our plans, we tend to worry and forget to trust God. We are tempted to crawl off and take things into our own hands. But you must stay put and remind ourselves that God is in control and we are safe in his arms.

Third, our sacrifice must be holy and pleasing to God. According to the law, the animals that were offered to God must be without blemish or defect. Likewise, we should offer God our best and live a life that honors and glorifies his name. If we have sinned, then we must come to God for cleansing and renewal. Lev 1:9 says, "*... the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.*" Just as the animal sacrifice were a pleasing aroma to God, our life can please him

when we live a life according to his will. God does not ask us to live the way we want; he has given us a book to tell us how to live. We must read it and obey it. For example, we teach young people about sexually pure life because that is what Bible says. This is very opposite to the world's culture. But we must not follow the trend of this world because we can never please God by doing what our sinful desire wants. Instead, we must live to please God by doing what he wants us to do.

Lastly, worship is a lifestyle and daily experience. Worship is not just about things that we do in this room on Sunday mornings. It is not restricted to a specific building or a particular day or time. Rather, worship starts from deep within our hearts. True worship is the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices to him and living holy and pleasing lives, every day of the week. We gather together to worship God on Sundays and then scatter the rest of the week to worship him wherever he has placed us. So the question is not, "Did I like the music today and did the service please me?" The real question is this: "Is my worship, both here and outside this room, pleasing to God? Does my everyday life honor and glorify his name?" A. W. Tozer wrote, "If you will not worship God seven days a week you do not worship him on one day a week."

## II. BE TRANSFORMED (2)

So we learned why we need to offer my bodies as a living sacrifice; this is the only reasonable response to what God has done for us. Then the question is how we can become living sacrifices. In verse 2, Paul gives us very clear and practical instruction on how to be a living sacrifice. Let's read verse 2 together. "*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" He gives us one "Don't" and one "Do".

First, the “Don’t” part. Paul urges us not to conform to the pattern of this world. What it means is that we shouldn’t copy the immoral and sinful behaviors and life styles of this world. Rather, we should hold on to godly values and spiritual principles. It’s very easy for us to blindly follow the pattern of this world if we don’t stand firm. Young people especially feel peer pressure to conform every day because it is our nature to want to be liked and fit in. Sometimes the FOMO (fear of missing out) causes us to make bad choices. Joe once shared that it is very hard to have social life in college if you don’t drink. It is not easy and costs a lot to stand your ground. However, we should remember that Christians are “set apart” people. We are chosen to please God and seek his approval, not the approval of this world. In John 16:33, Jesus tells us that we are going to have trouble in this world. We are not going to be able to live for him and simply “go along to get along” with the crowd. Instead, Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. Jesus set the example for us to follow. He did not choose the easy road, the path of least resistance, or the broad gate. So we must do the same. Matthew 7: 13-14 says, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

Second, the “Do” part. Paul urges us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The NLT version translates it this way: *“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”* The word Paul uses for “transformed” is the word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.” The word metamorphosis describes a radical transformation. For example, several years ago I purchased an educational kit that gives kids the opportunity to observe ladybugs through every stage of their lifecycle. It was a lot of fun to watch ladybug goes through a complete metamorphosis: from an egg to a larva, then to a pupa and finally to an adult ladybug. If you compare the larva and the adult ladybug, you cannot see much resemblance at all. It completely takes another form; this is what metamorphosis does to the bugs. Do you know that God started great “transformation” or “metamorphosis” in you when you accepted Jesus as your personal

savior? Much like the adult ladybug can never go back to being a larva, once you experience God's transformation, we can never go back to your previous form. Do you want to remain as an ugly larva forever? No, we want to continue to grow and be transformed into something beautiful and holy.

Then how does God transform us? God transforms us by the renewing of our minds. We act as we think. All sin and all obedience begin in the mind. So the key to transformation is to change the way we think. The best source for changing our thinking and renewing our minds is God's word. Hebrews 4:12 says the following about the power of God's word, "*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" This means that we need to have a regular habit of reading and meditate on the word of God. The more we study and apply the word of God to our daily life, the more we will become and think like Jesus. One Bible commenter asks the following question: "Are you a thermometer—adjusting to the temperature of the culture, or are you a thermostat—changing the climate of the culture?" Don't be a thermometer but be a thermostat. Don't be conformers but live as transformed people.

Look at verse 2 again. "...*Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" One of the most frequent questions Christians asks is "How can I know the will of God for my life." And here is Paul's answer to this question. He says that when you wonder what God's will is for your life, the first place to start is by living out today's passage. As we trust him and actively offer ourselves to him, God will direct us and guide us towards what he wants us to do in the future. When God called Abraham to go to a place he would later receive as his own, he went even though he didn't know where he was going. He didn't have a detailed itinerary or all the answers but he obeyed God. And today everyone knows what God's will was for him: to be a father of faith.

In today's passage, we learned what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Let's respond to God's great mercy by presenting our bodies and minds as a living sacrifice. Let us stop following the pattern of this world. Instead, let us to be transformed in Jesus Christ until his good, pleasing and perfect will is fulfilled in us.