



Romans 12:1-8 - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer 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. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Live as living sacrifices!



To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen (Revelation 1:5b-6)

I wonder if many of us living at this time and in this place really know what it means to sacrifice. We get the idea, the definition of sacrifice, I think – to give something up for the sake of someone or something else – but do the “sacrifices” I’ve made in life compare to those of previous generations? Do yours? I realize it’s dangerous and maybe a little unfair to paint with such a broad brush, but I haven’t lived through a great depression – and so I don’t know from personal life experience the sacrifices involved – maybe I don’t eat this week so my kids can. I haven’t served in the armed forces and been shipped overseas to fight an enemy that threatened our country – so I don’t know what it’s like to be ready to lay down my life for a friend. Or think about sacrifice when it comes to your faith. We just celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, calling to mind the heroic stand Martin Luther took before the most powerful people in the world. *We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone!* But Luther wasn’t the first one to stand up to the powers of the day – other reformers came before him, took their stand, and were killed. I’ve never even come close to having to make the choice between standing on the truth of God’s word or keeping my head on my shoulders...and I don’t think I’m alone. In modern life, “sacrifice” comes to mean little more than buying the 48” flat screen instead of the 55” you really wanted. “Sacrifice” means going out to eat once per week instead of twice. “Sacrifice” means giving an afternoon of my time or a \$20 out of my wallet instead of using those things for my own personal enjoyment. So, as a society, I think we need to reinvestigate our ideas about “sacrifice.”

In Old Testament times, sacrifices were a common occurrence. The burnt offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the fellowship offering, and the grain offering were all part of the daily, weekly, and festival worship of God’s people. The repeated, over and over, sacrifices demonstrated one truth abundantly clearly – a sacrifice was required for sin. Over and over again, animals were ceremonially slaughtered and offered up to God to drive home the point. Every sacrifice of the Old Testament pointed ahead to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** Jesus’ death on the cross is the once-for-all sacrifice for sin – no more bulls, rams, sheep, or goats – only Christ. Even though the old covenant of animal sacrifice found its fulfillment in Jesus, the notion of sacrifice was not an uncommon one. Among all the different kinds of Old Testament sacrifices, there was one thing all they had in common: All the sacrifices were lifeless. Whether it was a bull ceremonially slain and burned on the altar or it was a wave of grain or a measure of wine, these sacrifices were lifeless, they were dead, so to speak. So what a strange juxtaposition that Paul should tell the Roman Christians and us, **offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.** *Living* sacrifices! What? Why? How?

Before we answer those questions of “What, why, and how?” let’s start where Paul starts; with the right motivation. Why did Old Testament believers make all those sacrifices? God loved them, wanted to teach them, and point them to Christ and his ultimate sacrifice. These sacrifices would stress that the whole life of the believer is involved with his relationship with God. What reason does Paul give for us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices? **“Therefore, I urge you...in view of God’s mercy.”** Our entire lives as living sacrifices are lived **in view of God’s mercy**, his undeserved love for sinners shown to us in Jesus Christ. Paul starts off his encouragement with the word, THEREFORE. So, he’s giving this encouragement based on everything he’s already said in the book of Romans...which is a lot! Does any of this sound familiar? **There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...But**



God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord...Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

THEREFORE.....in response to all of this, offer your bodies as living sacrifices; not in an attempt to “get right with God” because Jesus has already accomplished that for you. There’s your answer for the “why offer myself as a living sacrifice?” The Christian’s living sacrifice is more than a goat on the altar, more than a bushel of wheat, or a few shekels to support the church’s work. The Christian’s sacrifice is his or her whole life. When we were baptized into Christ we died with Christ, we were raised with Christ, and so we have no life except the life of Christ living in us through faith. Paul says it this way, **this is your spiritual act of worship**. Our worship is more than just being in a certain place (church) at a certain time (Sunday morning). Yes, public worship among God’s people is important, but being a **living sacrifice** means that our every thought, our every attitude, our every action is lived in constant thanksgiving to the God who saved me in Christ and for the good of the neighbor next to me.

Sound like you? This is the constant challenge of being a **living sacrifice** – the “how?” – because as long as we live in this sinful world, we have a sinful nature inside of us that wants to serve only itself. Paul says, **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. This is not a one-time thing. This is a life-long, constant pursuit. **Do not conform...be transformed**. The word Paul uses here for “conforming” with the world describes a pattern of thought or behavior. So, has my mode of thinking and my way of acting been patterned and conditioned by the world around me? In my conversation and my conduct, am I discernibly different from my unbelieving neighbor? It’s scary how easily this can happen. *I see everyone else at work cutting out early and complaining to get their way, so maybe that’s how it works...I notice he makes less money than I do, but his house is bigger and his car is nicer than mine...I need to keep the peace, so I’m not going to say anything when my friend drifts from the faith, because after all, that’s his choice, and I should respect that...Nobody has time or money to help those who need help, because, come on, I’m not going to dip into my vacation days or vacation fund.* As Christians we are *in* the world; not *of* the world, but sometimes when I look in the mirror, it’s hard to tell the difference. In my honest moments, I realize I’m not much of a living sacrifice. I look more like a cookie cutter product of the world around me.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Be transformed, Paul says. Notice that’s a passive verb. The fact of the matter is, such a remarkable transformation is something you’d never be able to work up in yourself – and neither could I. It comes from outside of us. **Be transformed by the renewing of your minds**. We call such a “change of mind” repentance – a change of mind about sin, a change of my way of thinking about life, a change in my direction – a turnaround from serving only myself to trust in my Savior. Repentance, this change and transformation of the mind, is a gift of God’s Holy Spirit through his Word. I need to hear a clear message of who I am by nature and by sinful choice – a sinner. I am convicted by my sin so that I can be healed by the gospel. I face the facts about the ugliness of my sin, so I can see unclouded the beauty of my Savior. For every time you and I failed to live as **living sacrifices**, Jesus made the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice to pay for every single one of our sins. He took your sin and mine upon himself. He became what he was not – sin itself - so that he could declare us to be what we were not – forgiven children of God, holy and spotless in his sight. That’s his promise; that’s his proclamation of who you are because of Christ. He set us free from sin, Satan, and slavery to self – he sets us free to live in a world that he’s given back to us.



But how? **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought...Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body.** As each individual Christian offers his or her body as a living sacrifice, the Holy Spirit wants us to realize that we are not just individuals. We are all members of one body – the Christian Church. Just as there are many parts that make up one body, so in the body of believers there are many “parts”- individual Christians with unique gifts and specific skill sets. **We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.** Maybe you can fix anything with WD-40 and a Craftsman wrench. I can’t – so be a Mr. or Mrs. Fix-it to God’s glory and your neighbor’s service. There are some here who can play instruments and there are some of us who need a clear day to play the radio – so play to God’s glory! Maybe you’re in a position to support the work of the gospel in a financial way – so give generously! Maybe God’s given you the gift of encouragement – being able to put your arm around someone who’s had a bad day and you get to be the voice of the gospel to that person - so encourage! Don’t get the idea that the only way to live as a living sacrifice takes place on this 12 acre campus. Look where God has put you in life – as a father, mother, son, daughter, employee, friend – and live as a living sacrifice in all your walks of life! Whatever your gifts are, use them for God’s glory and in service to your neighbor.

Do you see what that means? We’re united in Christ in a pretty profound way. An arm floating out in space doesn’t do much good. But when it is connected to the rest of the body it can function as God intended; in relationship with the rest of the body. No matter what gift you have, use it generously, diligently, and cheerfully. Don’t lament the gifts you don’t have, embrace the ones you do! The whole body couldn’t be an eyeball. How would you hear? The whole membership of the church can’t be leaders, because who would encourage? Use your gifts to build up of the church and for God’s glory even if YOU might consider yourself unimportant. The mission Christ gives the Church is bigger than any one of us, but in his grace he involves *all of us*.

We live as members of one body **“in view of God’s mercy.”** We live and move and have our being **“in view of God’s mercy.”** We are not our own, we were bought at a price. And that price is the precious blood of Jesus covering over all of our sins. As living sacrifices, we die every day to sin and self but we’re raised to life in our Savior as we live as members of one body. So live – as a living sacrifice – for the good of your neighbor and to the glory of God!

Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:7)