

**Not Ashamed
(Week 29)
Romans 12:1-8
“Living Sacrifices”**

Introduction

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.”
Romans 12:1

The first eight chapters of *Romans* deal with doctrine. ***We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, and that not of ourselves. It is the gift of God lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8 roughly translated).*** We learn from those first eight chapters that all who are “in Christ” are secure and have been forever and completely delivered from God’s wrath.

“Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”
Romans 8:1

Chapters 9-11 deal with dispensation. God has a plan to save a vast number of Gentiles, and He will then, once again, shower His grace upon His chosen people of Israel.

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.”
Romans 11:25-27

When we get to the last section of *Romans* (Chapters 12-16), Paul shifts from doctrine and dispensation to Christian duty. Now that we fully understand the gospel and the workings of God to deliver it to his chosen elect, what then, are we to do as a result of the grace that we have been given? This is the message of ***Romans 12-16***. And it begins with a beautiful picture of sacrifice. God’s requirement for each and every believer is that they “place themselves upon the altar” for His glory. We have been shown much grace and have been gifted exceedingly more than we deserve. This should stir in us a devotion that cannot be expressed in mere words. God doesn’t want just our “lip service”. He longs to have us... not a portion of us, but all of us. Paul calls this type of complete devotion a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God”. As my favorite pastor, Dr. J. Vernon McGhee has said:

“In the first part of Romans the reader saw displayed the helmet of salvation and the shield of faith. But in this last section, the feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. We are to stand in the battle; we are to walk in our life; we are to run the race.”

J. Vernon McGhee commentary on Romans

Many believers today are living defeated lives. And I believe the reason for this is that although they have come to Christ by faith, they have never taken the next natural step in their sanctification process, and that is to surrender their bodies over completely to the guidance of The Holy Spirit. They are in essence trying to please two masters. They long for all that God has for them, but they are still very connected to this world and its fleeting pleasures. The only way for a believer to truly overcome this world’s temptation and walk in victory is to become a living sacrifice.

In ***Romans 12:1-8***, we see what God requires. His desire for us is that we **Sacrifice our Bodies**, so that we may **Serve The Body**. Anything less, will leave us feeling empty and defeated in our Christian walk. Please allow me to explain.

Sacrifice Your Body (vs. 1-3)

“Therefore brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.”
Romans 12:1-3

Man, in his natural state, is a “sensual being”. This simply means that we operate based upon our body’s senses: “How does this look?”; “How does this feel?”; “How does this sound?”; etcetera, etcetera. The natural man does whatever he feels will make him happy. This is why there is so much strife in our world today (and since time began). Mankind wants what it wants and goes about in perpetual motion to satisfy self. The insatiable desire within each of us to live only to gratify self is so powerful, that were it not for government and laws to restrain the people, we would live as animals and not men. This is exactly how bad things had gotten before the great flood.

“When The LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, The LORD regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was deeply grieved.”
Genesis 6:5-6

That same self-serving wickedness is in the heart of every lost soul on the earth today, my friend. There is just a lot of structural organization that has been put in place to restrain it. Not to mention, the presence of The Holy Spirit, residing in the Church, that keeps this absolute evil at bay (**2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**). But, make no mistake, the heart of the natural man is both depraved and self-consumed.

“The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable — who can understand it?”
Jeremiah 17:9

So what does The LORD require of us? He wants us to surrender our bodies over to Him as living sacrifices. When a sacrifice is placed upon the altar after it has been slain, it cannot ever get up again and be the way it was. We have been called to lay ourselves upon the altar of God and forsake our old way of living. We no longer live to please our senses, but rather, we live to please The Spirit of God. We go from selfish to selfless, from “sensual” to “spiritual”. This is what it means to become a living sacrifice. As Paul has said in Galatians:

“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with The Spirit.”
Galatians 5:24-25

So, instead of living by our senses, we live according to the will of God. This is done by diligently studying His Word and praying in The Spirit, so that He will guide us. This continual process leads us to a transformation in our way of thinking. We no longer conform to this world’s sensual standards, but rather, we are being transformed in our way of thinking. In short, we start thinking like Christ and not this world. Then we will become holy and pleasing to God; this is true worship (**vs. 1**).

Do you find yourself committing the same old sins of the flesh over and over again? Surrender your whole body over to God. He doesn’t want just your “heart”. I would give almost anything, if the phrase “Give your heart to Jesus” had never been uttered. It implies that Christ wants only a portion of us, and not the whole. Give yourself to Jesus, *all of you*. Surrender your body to the Spirit of The Living God and let Him control your passions and desires. He absolutely can and will give you the victory over your sensual nature. He will transform you from sensual to spiritual.

Would you like to know why there is so much anxiety and depression in this world? Because focusing on ourselves continually will lead us into a downward spiral of despair. We were not created to live for ourselves, that is the sin nature of a fallen world separated from God. We were created to **serve HIM**. That requires humility and selflessness. We are not meant to **“think of ourselves more highly than we ought” (vs. 3)**, but rather, in humility, we see ourselves as God sees us. We are not invaluable, but we are also not the “greatest thing ever”. Both false humility, as well as, pridefulness are sinful attitudes to have. Only in Christ can we become all that we are meant to be. We have value, when we have things in proper perspective. And the proper perspective is to consider God’s mercy and grace towards us, and then offer ourselves to Him completely in return. Only then can we be pleasing to God.

To Serve The Body (vs. 4-8)

“Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. According to the grace given us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith; if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.” **Romans 12:4-8**

I think a great many Christians today confuse holiness with service. They think that they serve God by going to church, reading the Bible, and keeping themselves from sin. In fact, many have comprised long “lists” of sins that they no longer commit, and by so doing, they think that they are serving God. This is absolutely not true. Do not confuse holiness with service. The reason that we are called to sacrifice our bodies is so that we may serve within the body of Christ! We are made holy in order to be able to serve.

Allow me to give an example. The word “holy” simply means being set apart for a purpose. Make no mistake. God wants His people to be holy. In His Word he says:

“But as the One Who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I Am holy.” **1 Peter 1:16**

In my house, there is a china cabinet. And inside that cabinet are some old dishes that I have collected to remind me of the dishes I had as a kid. You didn’t know that I had a softer sentimental side now did you? Anyway, those dishes have been washed and set apart as special. But if they are never used, then they have been pretty much set apart for no reason. Only when they are used can they ever serve their true purpose.

In much the same way, God wants you to become a living sacrifice. He wants to make you holy as you surrender your entire body over to His will. But He doesn’t want you to be holy just so that He can admire you. He makes you holy so that He can USE you. You see, we have been set apart for a purpose. Listen to what Paul says about your becoming a living sacrifice:

“...I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.” **Romans 12:1**

The words he uses there for “true worship” (*logikos latreia* in the Greek) can also be translated “reasonable service”. *Logikos* is the word from which we derive our word “logical” and “*Latreia*” is a word used to describe the sacrificial service of a priest. So let me break this down for us. God wants us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, so that He can make us holy. The logical (reasonable) thing for us to do, after we have been set apart (made holy), is to serve as priests within the body of Christ. Don’t confuse holiness with service. They are not the same. To be holy and do nothing with it is of no value! The whole point of being set apart is so we can serve in the body of Christ. Oh how I wish that I could get all Christians to understand this! Feeling stagnant and unfulfilled this morning? Then SERVE! God has set you apart for service. We are to sacrifice our bodies, so we can serve in The Body of Christ. No

Christian is exempt from serving in the church. You cannot have true worship apart from genuine service. (How many times can I say “service” in one paragraph?)

Paul goes on to describe for us the multi-faceted organism that is the Church of Christ. Not only has every member of it been set apart to serve, but they have each been gifted to serve in different ways. Spiritual gifts (*Charisma* in the Greek literally meaning “*grace gifts*”) have been bestowed upon every believer in Christ. Just like snowflakes, no two believers are alike when it comes to the way that they have been wonderfully made to serve within the body.

Paul lists for us in this passage several, but not all, of the grace gifts. A more exhaustive list can be found in **1 Corinthians Chapter 12**. Spiritual gifts can be divided into three separate categories:

1. Sign Gifts: Gifts that were of a miraculous nature given to the early church as proof of the gospel message. (ie. Healing, speaking in tongues)
2. Speaking Gifts: These gifts have to do with the preaching and teaching of scripture and the gospel message itself (ie. Preaching, teaching, evangelism)
3. Serving Gifts: These are various gifts of service to be used to edify the body of Christ (ie. giving, serving, exhortation, mercy)

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift. Some have multiple gifting. These gifts are bestowed upon each believer as a measure of grace, to enable them to function within the Church. Every gift is therefore important and vital to the health of the Church. God has fully equipped every congregation with all that it needs in order to glorify Him. When members of the Church refuse to employ their spiritual gifts for whatever reason, the Church is weakened, just as a physical body with portions of itself that are paralyzed is unable to function at its full capacity. The Church desperately needs each of its members to do their part.

Paul lists for us here in **Romans 12** only some of the speaking and serving gifts that are necessary for the church to carry out its mission: prophecy (or preaching), teaching, serving, exhorting, giving, administration, and mercy. It is interesting to note that he does not mention the “sign gifts” like he does in **1 Corinthians 12**. I believe (as do many others), that this is because the book of *Romans* was written some four years after *1 Corinthians*, and the sign gifts that were so very necessary at the onset of the gospel message were no longer necessary. They had served their purpose to give legitimacy to the message, but now the gospel had taken hold, and the elect were coming to Christ in droves. No longer were miraculous signs and wonders needed to validate the gospel. The message was itself valid enough for those who would believe. Think about it for a moment. Did God have to perform a miracle for you to believe? Or, was the Holy Spirit able to convince your heart about Jesus simply because of The Word of God?

“So faith comes by what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.” **Romans 10:17**

Paul tells us that each of these gifts are to be used in proportion to the faith we have been given. In other words, we serve based upon what God has shown us to be true. I preach what God has taught me, just as others serve based upon the measure of faith that they have received. It takes all of us, working together with the faith that we have been given, to serve in the body of Christ. Simply put, we all need each other.

So I ask you this morning; Have you surrendered your body over to Christ to be set apart? And if so, are you now serving within the body of Christ? Do you know your place in the Church? What is your spiritual gift? You have been set apart to serve. To be a living **Sacrifice** is to give your body over to God, so that He can set you apart to **Serve** in The Body of Christ. Don't confuse holiness with service. The former is done so that the latter is made possible. Otherwise, you'll be just a clean dish in a china cabinet serving no particular purpose. Feeling empty this morning? Become set apart so that you can serve. Present your body to God as a living sacrifice, and begin your logical service as a priest of God! The Church desperately needs your help so that it can continue its mission to go and make disciples.

And let all of God's servants say... TRUTH!!!