

## **A Living Sacrifice**

Trinity CRC, May 2, 2021 AM  
Romans Series

**Romans 12:1-2**  
Rev. Richard deLange

Reading:

Romans 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. <sup>2</sup>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.

Dear Redeemed Children of God,

I doubt there was ever a willing sacrifice. The sheep weren't lining up for a chance to get slaughtered and roasted at the temple! The doves weren't flying around, then landing on the tip of the priest's knife to volunteer their bodies. The bulls didn't make a stampede for the altar to get their throats slit so their blood could be sprinkled around. Even young Isaac had questions about what his father Abraham was going to do with the fire and the knife but without an animal to present to God. Abraham didn't tell the boy what the plan was because I'm pretty sure Isaac would have raced back down the mountain much faster than his father's elderly legs would carry him.

So what in the world is Paul talking about here in Romans 12 when he says to the church, "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice"?

### **A Response**

I think you understand that Paul is not speaking physically here. He's speaking spiritually. Along with that, we need to understand that is a call to discipleship. But what we first want to consider is that Paul's call here must be understood in light of everything beforehand. In other words, it's a response to what has been taught up to this point.

Whenever we read the word "therefore" in the Bible, we should always ask ourselves this question: What is that *therefore* there for? You like that? 😊  
Seriously, ask, why is this sentence starting with the word *therefore*?

It's a word Paul uses about 120 times in his New Testament writings. It's pretty significant. So let's just have a little English lesson here for a minute. One man taught it something like this:

Webster's Dictionary will tell you that *therefore* is a conjunction. So you might ask, "A conjunction! Well, what's that?" Webster's online dictionary says it's "an uninflected or indeclinable linguistic form that joins together sentences, clauses, phrases, or words." And again, we ask, what is that supposed to mean? We know that joining is connecting but what does *indeclinable* mean? Guess

what? Webster says that *indeclinable* means something is *unchangeable*. So what does that mean for the word *therefore*? The word *therefore* refers to something that can't be changed which connects two things together. So, the word *therefore* is there to tell us that what is about to follow is unchangeably connected to what comes before it.

So what is Paul joining? What is Paul saying is unchangeably connected? This. Using the words some of us have come to associate with the Heidelberg Catechism, Paul is connecting sin and salvation with service. He's connecting guilt and grace with gratitude. He's saying to us, if you believe everything written in the book of Romans about sin in chapters 1-3. And if you even more so believe all the good news about God's grace in chapter 4 to 11, then you've got to respond in a certain way. Your response to God's grace must result in a change of life. That's the unchangeable connection.

In other theological terms, Paul is turning in this letter from what we call orthodoxy to what is called orthopraxy. The prefix *ortho* means correct or right. Doxy refers to beliefs and praxis is about practice, doing or actions. This means that Paul has spent 11 chapters teaching right beliefs. He's been saying to the church, "This is what sin is and here is what grace is and how it comes to us through Jesus." But now it's time to switch gears. We move from all this talk about right things to believe and we're going to talk about the right way to live. All the right beliefs Paul has taught us in chapters 1-11 are unchangeably connected to what is about to come. We'll now focus on right behaviours. Right living or proper behaviour is the right response to all that God has given us in Christ.

So that's what the *therefore* is there for. If everything up to this point is true—and it is—then Christians ought to respond a certain way. We ought to let our right beliefs lead us to right actions.

If you heard the sermon last Sunday, you might see how this ties in with Romans 11 where Paul taught Jews and Gentiles alike that we should not take our salvation for granted. It is a huge blessing to be grafted into the roots of Jesus. You see, if you think it's great to be saved by grace but don't care about how you live, then Paul says, you're missing the point. You're taking salvation for granted. Salvation is free but it calls for a God-honouring response. That's why I mentioned earlier that it's about discipleship. This is about how we follow Jesus in this world, in our daily lives. The point of salvation is not merely to be saved from sin but to be saved into a new way of life, a life that is marked by grateful service in the kingdom of God.

## **Grateful Living**

Secondly, as I already hinted at, we must understand that this response is about grateful living. It's not about doing something to earn or guarantee our salvation. Paul could not be clearer than he already has been in the book of Romans. Salvation is a free gift from God, paid in full by Jesus on the cross and through his resurrection. When you get that, gratitude should be the result.

I was reading about a mom in a Washington restaurant with her son. Cari was just about to take her first bite of pizza, lifted it to her mouth and breathed in a small piece of burnt dough on the crust. The pizza hadn't even touched her lips but she suddenly found herself gasping for air as that small piece of dough somehow choked her. She quickly grabbed her water and tried to wash away whatever was blocking her airway. But it didn't work. In seconds she realized she was unable to breathe and would die.

With panic in her eyes, she motioned to her son that she couldn't breathe. The young teenager quickly shouted, "My mom is choking! She can't breathe!" But no one came to her aid. Mom recalled later how several people just stared at them. "Are these women who notice my situation not going to help me?" she thought. Her son shouted again, "My mom is choking!"

That's when a Canadian man—O Canada!!—visiting in Washington jumped into action. He grabbed the woman and gave her the Heimlich... twice. She coughed and it was over. She could breathe again. She writes about her rescuer, "I grab your arm and quite honestly, I don't want to let go. This arm (and the other one) has wholly and completely saved my life. When no one else was willing, you saved me. I sit there coughing and not letting go of your arm and I don't know what to do or say. It's not that I'm embarrassed (I really don't get embarrassed that easily). And it's not that it's awkward. It's the enormity of the fact that you, a man I do not know, has just saved my life.

*Thank you* is just too mundane for the situation."  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post\\_4291\\_b\\_3588893](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post_4291_b_3588893)

That's what Paul is writing as well. True gratitude results in action. "Thank you" is where it starts. However, Paul is saying, "Because of all the mercy that God has given to us in Christ, the appropriate response is gratefully giving your whole life to God." "Offer your body" is saying give your whole being to God. Say to him, "You've saved my life. I cannot even begin to pay you back for that. But I want my life to show you—and others!—that I'm grateful for your salvation. My life is not and can never be the same as it was before. You've changed me. I want every breath I take and every action I make to be a thank you to God."

True gratitude recognizes that God has saved us because he loves us. If he didn't love us, he'd look at us dying like the people in the restaurant just stared at Cari as she was choking to death. God loves us selflessly. That is, he doesn't save us because he needs us. Let's be realistic about that! God doesn't need you and me. He was doing fine before we came along. That's humbling, right! But he saved us anyway. For our good. Out of love.

So we don't have to do anything. We couldn't save ourselves. But he saved us. And not just for this life but for eternity. All we can do now is live our lives in a way that says, "Thank you!" Better yet, in a way that shouts "Thank you! Praise be to God." Paul is calling us to live a life of grateful response for all that God has done for us in Jesus.

## Sacrificial Living

Finally, the interesting and challenging part of this grateful living is that it is best when we make it sacrificial. As I said, it's not that God needs us. Rather, it's that his grace invites into a whole new way of living. It's following Jesus. Discipleship. It's taking up our cross and in the process discovering how sweet it is that we are yoked to Jesus and that he's carrying it with us, making the burden light. Even joyful.

Now, there's a difference between joyful and easy. It isn't necessarily going to be easy to offer your whole life to Jesus.

I'm reminded of the chicken and the pig talking about what humans eat for breakfast—bacon and eggs. The pig says to the chicken, "For you it's easier. They just want a donation from you. But for me, it's total commitment."

That's Paul's attitude as he writes these words of Romans from his prison cell in Rome. That's not easy or fun. Yet, Paul is not sulking or licking his wounds. He's confident that God has saved him for a purpose. And we can be equally confident. Again, it's not that God needs us to do something that he himself can't do. He is fully able. But he invites to leave the life where self-service is the name of the game and to enter into the life where he is in charge and we submit to him. Why? Because we know he loves us and that he is inviting us into a life of commitment that is better than anything this world can offer us.

So, we've been in this pandemic for over a year now. Has it been easy? Has it been hard? Have you spent more time complaining than giving thanks? Have you responded to it with anger because of all the changes it has forced on you? Maybe you spend time blaming the government for their actions or inactions. We've all heard lots of different responses in the news. Every day the reporters seem to find another angle on this COVID crisis which has someone complaining or grumbling or angry about how our premier or someone else has failed them.

The pandemic has taught us all how easy it is to complain and how hard it is to be thankful and to live a thankful and sacrificial life. It's taught us that sacrifice goes against our (sinful) nature, and even more so in the western world where we are used to having our worldly comforts and human freedoms. We are very often quick to complain. We think of all we're missing out on. And that's understandable.

But if we, first of all, rest in the Lord, rest in the comfort of knowing that he saved us completely, then rest in knowing that as we offer our lives to him—in good times and in bad times—he has us in his care. In the process, you'll discover that your life has the most meaning possible. So you'll continue to ask him, "What can I do to show your love and grace to the world today? In my current situation? How do I sacrifice my selfish desires and let my life gratefully serve God's purposes now?"

Friends, we need a bigger purpose and a bigger perspective than what we get by listening to our selfish interests. This world can hold us back. It can make us self-centered. It can fill our mouths with complaints about what we're missing out on and what all the incompetent people around us are doing or not doing! But Romans 12 is calling us to change our perspective to "God loves me. He died for me! He's given me grace upon grace upon grace. God has this situation in his loving and sovereign hands. And God has a new way of living for me, a life that he's inviting me to live at this time. He's going to teach me important lessons in this time. Now as I offer my life to him today, he's going to help me see afresh how he's got everything under control. I might not understand it all. But I get that I'm his saved servant for such a time as this. And my life will be full, my heart will be full when I sacrifice my own desires and offer my life fully to God's desires.

This sacrificial living is part of our growth. It's learning that God is sufficient. That we don't need all kinds of other things to make us happy or give us joy. Things never truly satisfy us. They often only make us hungry for more.

I watched what I considered a really dumb movie a few nights ago. But it had one redeeming part. A young man of great wealth came from the big city into a small village where he met people who were—in his estimation—very poor. But he learned through his time with them that money was not a key to happiness. Service was. He saw the village mayor truly serving the people, picking up groceries or medical supplies for people. When the mayor received a huge donation, he shared it with everyone. As the young man watched and began to serve, to give instead of receive, he also began to sacrifice everything. And in doing so, he found greater purpose in his life.

William Booth who started the Salvation Army said, "When I got the poor on my heart, I couldn't get them off my heart." His heart burst with passion and compassion for people and that required a lot of sacrifice. Likewise, Alexander Duff from the Church of Scotland in the 1800s was moved to become a missionary to India where life was not easy but God's blessings on him were great.

As an old man, he never lost his passion. In fact, he was teaching missions in a church one day and ended up collapsing on the floor during his speech. When he woke up, he was in a back room getting medical attention. He said, "Where am I?" They said you collapsed while teaching. You need to rest. "No, he said, I must get back in there." They said, "If you go back in there, you'll die." He responded, "If I don't go back in there, I'll die!" Again, a man of passion and compassion who sacrificed for the sake of Jesus, the Gospel and the love of his neighbours. Such things did not seem like sacrifice any longer. They were just part of the joy of sacrificial living for Jesus, the deeper and more fulfilling part of living a life of gratitude for Jesus' grace to us.

Ultimately, friends, our salvation and our example come from our Lord Jesus. He set aside or sacrificed the glories of heaven to come to earth as a human. He faced opposition and death threats repeatedly throughout his ministry. He sacrificed the easier road which his disciples encouraged him to take, a road

which would have avoided the cross and—they thought—would lead to a kingdom on earth. When Satan came to him and offered him all the kingdoms of this world—a supposedly easy road to avoid sacrifice—Jesus refused. Instead, he walked the road of suffering for our sakes. When it was hardest, he pleaded with his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane saying, “Let this cup of suffering pass; yet not my will but yours be done!” In the end, it was his sacrifice that brought life to us.

So Jesus rightly tells us to seek first the kingdom of God and all his righteousness. Make that your aim in life. And regardless of the obstacles, challenges and struggles, regardless of what sacrifices that may bring, this is where you’ll find true life.

Amen.