

Romans 12:1-2 Sermon Manuscript

“Living Sacrifice”

Have you ever known a friend who always went beyond and above what was required for their work? I knew and currently know of a friend who is like that. His name was Rick and he's a little bit of a quirky guy. He worked in the custodial department at Grace Community Church with me and though he was in his late 60s, this man's work ethic was like none other. He would put us young guys to shame. And he would always have a smile on his face and crack jokes and have a good time. I never heard him complain even once. You could tell he loved working as a custodian, while me on the other hand...trust me....there were times I did not look forward to working certain days. Before he was a custodian he worked a previous job that was very physically demanding where he would have to load bags of concrete or something heavy like that onto a conveyer belt and do that same motion over and over again. It was a “chain-gang” type of job he would call it. Most of Rick's co-workers would finish typically on the daily around 1-2 jobs of loading and unloading onto the conveyer belt. But Rick worked so hard that actually he would finish 3 jobs typically every day because of how fast he was moving. In fact, I learned that he worked so hard one day on that job that he essentially passed out and fell from the conveyer belt (which was a long way down) and broke his arm.

When you talk to him and ask him why he's like that, he would point you back to the Lord. The more you spent time with him, the more you would realize that the source of his strength and the source of his energy and excellent work ethic and attitude all came from his love for the Lord and how thankful he was for God's mercy to him. He didn't see his work as a burden but as a blessing and a privilege. He went above and beyond what was asked of him because he was man transformed by God's mercy. I saw him recently at Shepherd's Conference, faithfully removing those overfilled trash bags and I said “Hey Rick! How are you?! And he would say “Ah (He would salute me) pastor Teru...good to see you my friend, haha!” My dear friend Rick is a picture of what a living sacrifice should be and look like. Someone who presents himself as a living sacrifice because of God's mercies.

Well, we come now to the part of Romans, Romans 12, where we are going to see a lot more application. We are going to see a lot more commands and the “do this and do that” of Scripture because the apostle Paul has laid down the major doctrinal foundations in Romans chapters 1-11 for why we are to act in a certain way. What is unique about the apostle Paul and his letters from other authors in the Bible is that he tends to give the doctrinal foundation or reasons for the commands to live in a certain way before he gives us the command. That seems to be his pattern...which is helpful because we actually are given the motivation and the reasoning for why we need to act in a certain way. It's like if Paul was our parent and he told us to stop doing something and we ask him “why”? He doesn't just say “because I am the apostle Paul and I said so.” He gives us the reason for it by saying also “because that is sinful, dishonoring and offensive to the God who loves you and Christians are not supposed to act this way.”

And so we come to Romans chapter 12 verse 1 which starts with “*Therefore...*” If someone says “therefore,” that means that he was giving a previous argument or foundation for him saying “therefore” as the conclusion. What is Paul pointing back to? Well in a big picture

sense, the therefore is referring back to all eleven chapters of Romans 1-11. God has hammered home in these chapters the fact that His grace and His righteousness and His mercy are free and unmerited. It is granted by Him as a gift to undeserving sinners like you and I. And last week we looked at how God is weaving redemptive history and how He has designed it to where no one would be able to boast in themselves but in God alone. The Jews were chosen as God's special people, yes, but they blew it by failing to believe in the Messiah and failing to submit to His righteousness. So salvation is extended to the Gentiles who now believe, but the Gentiles cannot boast either because salvation originally came first to the Jews and furthermore, they stand by their faith, meaning the only reason why they standing in their salvation is because God granted them the faith to believe in the first place! The Gentiles also cannot boast and think that God is done with Israel because one day salvation will return to the Jews and all Israel will be saved!

Why did God go through all this trouble of ordaining Israel's unbelief in order for salvation to go to the Gentiles and in order for salvation to once again go back to the Jews?! So that God may have mercy on all! One of the key verses from last week in chapter 11 was verse 32: *"For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all."* God wanted to show and to magnify to the whole world how merciful He is in saving sinners from their sin. And that is why Paul ends with the doxology at the end of chapter 11 in verses 33-36: *"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid to him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."* Chapter 12 verse 1 *Therefore, on that basis, I exhort you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice-living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."*

In light of all the mercies that God has shown to you dear brothers...When we were guilty in our sins, He declared us righteous, when we couldn't pay our debts back to God, God forgave and pardoned us, when we were condemned in our sins, Jesus reversed our condemnation, when we were a slave to sin and to the Law, Christ freed us from the power of sin and from the Law and adopted us into His family where we can cry out to God the Father as "Abba, Father..." in light of God's mercies, you need to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, and pleasing to God. Notice Paul doesn't say "therefore I *command* you..." but rather he says "therefore I *exhort* you." That word "exhort" is from *parakaleo*, which is the word used to describe the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the comforter or encourager. There are no threats here, "Do this or else!!"

Paul uses a more familial softer term because in light of all the grace that we have seen God showed us from Romans 1 thru 11, offering our lives on the altar of God's worship should be a natural desire that we should have. Maybe you think of sacrificing yourself to God as something like the cartoon by Ed Fischer where there's a huge altar with many steps leading up to it. And top of it stands a priest with a sword ready to slay its next victim. On the bottom of the steps you see two guard dragging a rather resistant young man up to the top to get slain. Then there's someone who looks like a chief of the tribe who says to the other guy standing next to him with the punchline, "the young people don't seem to believe in anything today!" No, no, no, the least that we can do in light of God's mercy is to present a life to God that is marked by His mercies.

When Paul says bodies he means our whole lives, our entire being should be a living sacrifice unto God. This is a direct allusion to the Old Testament sacrificial system where the priest would set apart an unblemished or holy animal that was pleasing in God's sight to kill and sacrifice for the sins of himself and others. So in the same way, we are to offer up our whole life for our old self to be "killed and slain at the altar" so to speak. Except what's the difference? Those animals are dead, but we are what? Alive! In other words, the path to be spiritually alive in Christ is to die to sin. It is to die to the world! It is to die to your fleshly desires and all of what is displeasing to your Lord! That's what our Lord said in Luke 9:24 *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."* Notice also it says offering up our bodies as a sacrifice is our spiritual service of worship. Steve will like this, I think the King James gets it right this time when translates this part as "which is your reasonable service of worship." The word for "spiritual" is *logikos* which is where we get our word logic from. It's rational, it's reasonable, it's logical, it's what makes sense and is orderly. Let me put it another way. To not respond worshipfully by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is pure insanity. It is irrational and illogical. Why would anyone in their right mind reject the full, free offer of grace and forgiveness, salvation from sin, wrath, condemnation, and hell, eternal life, infinite spiritual blessings, a resurrected body, eternal joy and happiness and peace, and to live forever in that bliss in heaven with the glorious Triune God?

Have you ever wondered why anyone would reject that? I'm sure you've experienced that, I'm sure you've seen that on those "Way of the Master Street witnessing clips. After the Christian is done presenting the glory of the gospel and God's kindness and love for them, they respond non-chalantly with "well, I'm glad that's working out for you, but you do you and I'll do me." Or if you ask if dying in your sins and going to hell forever concerns them, and they say "no, not really." I believe Blaise Pascal, the famous French mathematician and physicist of the 1600s, recognized the sheer insanity of rejecting Christianity and thus came up with Pascal's Wager argument, which is an argument purely from logic where basically he said "if there's a chance that hell exists, why would you risk finding out that hell is real and risk being condemned forever when you can believe and end up in heaven. The worst case scenario if you at least believe is that when you die, you find out there's nothing in the afterlife. But if you do not believe, then you might be right in that there's no hell, but if you're wrong, you will suffer the most serious of consequences." Now I personally wouldn't recommend using Pascal's wager in your gospel presentation or when you are defending the faith because our faith is a certainty, not a probability, and my worldview is based on the presupposition that God just "IS" and that you cannot make sense of or talk about morality, salvation, creation or anything of that matter without presupposing (not hypothesizing) a Christian and biblical worldview.

And what does offering up our bodies as a living, holy and pleasing sacrifice look like on the day to day? It looks like verse 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 pleasing and perfect."* The verb for "be conformed" is passive verb which means it is being done to you. Which is to say when you are not actively being transformed from the inside out by the renewing of your mind, you will, and I say, "YOU WILL" be conformed by the world. The world and all its evil, wicked, perverse pagan practices and influences will not stop for you Christian to catch up in your sanctification and holiness. The world is relentless and ruthless and will not stop its evil and its lusts for anything. If you hang out with wicked people all the time or

watch dirty and filthy movies and tv shows all the time, then you are going to be influenced by those and you will adopt the language and way of living of those people or those people on the screen. Don't let the world conform you to its standards! We talked about that in family camp right last September? Not compromising with the world? The world is like tide of a river going against you and you are trying to swim against the tide up the river. As soon as you stop fighting the current and coast, you will naturally be swept away by the current. That is the picture of being conformed to this world. All the devil wants you to do is to stop putting in the necessary effort to fight. He wants you to coast, he wants you to compromise here and there and just live a comfortable Christian life because he knows if you do that, he has won the battle.

Now hear me out, I am not advocating for a separatist, hermit like mindset where you just close yourself off to the world and live on an island. I think that is the temptation of older folks where they not only get stuck in their comfortable and traditional ways, but also see the increasing wickedness of their times and they are so horrified by it, they isolate themselves from it until the day they die. May God never allow me to become a jaded, grouchy, pessimistic old hermit who isolates himself from society! I want to be like Ray Comfort who is 74 years old riding through wicked Santa Monica on his bicycle with his trusty little poodle dog, both in sunglasses, proclaiming the gospel to strangers! No, the Bible calls us not to be of the world, but in the world. We need to be in the world, interacting with sinners so that we would be a purifying light to those in darkness. You can't proclaim the gospel being isolated and separated from the world. But you do need to be separated from sin and that takes discernment. And discernment and transformation into Christlikeness starts and comes through what you put in your mind! And what is the best thing to fill your mind with that leads to a holy and obedient life?! God's Word!! Psalm 119:11 says, *"Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You."* The famous evangelist D.L. Moody once said, "Either sin will keep you from reading the Bible, or reading the Bible will keep you from sin." So read your Bible. You need to be in the Scriptures. And I know and I confess that I don't read the Scriptures as I should. What about you?

We need to saturate our lives and immerse ourselves in the Bible because that is how you are going to approve or show what the will of God is in your life, that will of God that is good and pleasing and perfect. And what is the will of God for your life? 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 3 says *"for this is the will of God; your sanctification...and then he gives an example of what that sanctification looks like in the area of sexual purity for the Thessalonian believers, "that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you."* Have you ever asked what's God's will for your life is when it comes to which college, or which person you should marry? Well, the Bible doesn't reveal which college you should go to or whom specifically you should marry, but it does reveal that God's will for your life is your sanctification.

Now you know the reason why sinners reject the gospel, even though accepting the gospel is the most rational and logical and sensible thing to do? The Word of God gives us the reason. It's because their minds are not logical, because it is darkened by sin. Ephesians 4:17-19 says unbelievers *"walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their mind, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart."*

And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” Romans 1 says that those who suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness are given over to a “depraved or debased mind.” We were once all like that, living our lives in the futility of our minds, our minds being darkened. And the only reason why we came to our senses and saw the beauty and glory of the gospel was because God opened our minds to see that wonderous reality of the cross. If salvation were up to us, we would never be drawn to the good news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins because we would see it as foolishness and offensive to our pride. That’s actually what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:18 *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to them that are perishing...but...but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God!”*

It’s only because of His mercy that we are standing in this room desiring to worship the Lord corporately. It’s only because of His mercy that we are who we are today. The apostle Paul said, “I am what I am only because of God’s grace...” That’s all we can say, “I am only what I am only because of His grace, His mercy, His love. So dearly beloved, if you have been walking with the Lord for a long time, but maybe you have been plagued by various sins and your love for the Lord has waned, remind yourselves of the mercies of God, of how costly Jesus’ sacrifice was to pay the penalty for your sins and how much He loved you to procure righteousness for you. And if you are listening here today and have not yet experienced the mercies of God, know that mercy triumphs over judgment, that if you are acknowledge your sin and your need for a savior and turn in your mind and heart from sin, if you are willing to lose your life for Jesus’ sake, he will save you from your sin and you will find life. Ephesians 2:4 says, *“But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved.”* Christ offered up His life as a sacrifice on the altar of your sins, so that you would then become a living sacrifice for Him. *“So by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a sacrifice-living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your rational service of worship.”*

Benediction:

Jude 1:20-21

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”