

Romans 12:1c

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Last week we focused on why the focus was on the fact that it is our bodies that need to be sacrificed. We will move on from there this morning.

The next word we come to in our text is **“living.”**

Paul is about to tell us that our bodies need to be a **sacrifice**. And for many of his audience that word would be pregnant with meaning. They would immediately have a picture of **the priest approaching the altar** with an animal that would soon have its life drained out of it. It would then be offered in the appropriate manner. While Paul wanted to use the listener’s **mental image**, he had to **reshape it** some to make it fit his purpose. He had to provide a contrast to what was done in the Old Testament. The sacrifice that we are to give is a **living one**.

Some leaders in the Muslim religion prepare young people to strap on a bomb, go to a crowded area, and become a sacrifice for their god. I think about how much easier it would be to **do this** than to become a **living** sacrifice. To become a dead sacrifice the follower must only obey **one time**. He must only do an outward act that he mistakenly believes will usher him into a blissful state. He must only do that act **one time**. In fact, it is only **possible** to do it once if he is any good at all. But that is not the kind of sacrifice we as believers are called to. It may be the same kind **in its intensity**, but it is not the same kind in **its finality**.

The Christian is called to live a godly life. We are called to obey every moment of every day. We are never done until our lives end. Many religions make a great deal of **dying** for God. But Christianity makes a great deal of **living** for God.

Really, how much **glory** would God receive **for one act of obedience** when He has given His Son to die in our place? Doesn’t He deserve **more than that**? Wouldn’t it be much more glorifying if a person **lives his whole life** daily submitting to the Lordship of Christ? Doesn’t God deserve more from His creation than one dramatic act? And how much easier would it be to do one act of obedience than a lifetime full of them? I believe that those who believe that what God delights in is a glorious death are very very wrong. What God delights in is an obedient life that is lived in response to the grace and mercy that they have received at the hand of God.

Let’s look at another text to explore this idea.

1 Peter 2:1-5

1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,

2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Notice we see the same reasoning about why we should obey. The verse tells us what we must be doing, laying aside all those things that our flesh is so prone to do, picking up those things that lead to growth, and why? You have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Notice it isn't just saying that you recognized it as a fact. This is more than gnosis. This is epignosis. You have experienced it for yourself. And since that is true, we have every incentive to do those things we are told to do.

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

Then we are told what to do in relationship to Christ. We come to Christ, who is more than a stumbling stone. He is more than a cornerstone. He is a **living** stone. He is a **living foundation** of the Christian faith. He is not a dead sacrifice, like every lamb or every dove. He is living, a living piece of the temple of God.

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now what are we? We too are living stones. We are built on top of Christ who is the living cornerstone, the living foundation. And we are being used to build a spiritual house, a house where God lives.

Notice that we are not designed for living **alone**. God called us to be part of a whole. We are to be built **with other believers** into the dwelling God desires.

Then we are given more detail. We are a holy priesthood. We go to God in behalf of our brothers and sisters. And they go to God in our behalf.

And notice that it is not the leaders who are called priests. Every time the New Testament refers to priests it is talking about **ALL** believers. We are all priests.

We are all approaching God on man's behalf.

And what are we doing? What are we living for?

To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ. What are those sacrifices? It is possible they are the sacrifices we are talking about in our text in Romans. They are our bodies and those things that we dedicate those bodies **to do**. When we pray, when we praise, when we obey, when we love our brothers,

when we love our enemies. These are all sacrifices that our Savior finds pleasure in. So this text very much resembles our Romans text.

Now back to our text.

We are to present our bodies as living **sacrifices**.

We have been talking about the word sacrifice a lot in the adult Bible Study. And it has spurred on some good conversation and study. Frankly the study has been a surprise to me.

This is the English definition of the word for Sacrifice:

1. the offering of animal, plant, or human life or of some material possession to a deity, as in propitiation or homage.
2. the person, animal, or thing so offered.
3. the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim.
4. the thing so surrendered or devoted.
5. a loss incurred in selling something below its value.

We have been talking about what we think of when we hear the word sacrifice or sacrificial. Often when we hear the word sacrificial we focus on **the great price that is paid by us to give that which we give**. For instance we might say that someone had barely enough to live but they gave money anyway, they gave sacrificially, they gave until it hurt. The word has almost come to mean the pain we feel when we give something.

But as far as I can tell that is not how scripture uses the word. Normally when the word sacrifice is used, it is not referring to the qualities of the giver. But it is referring more to the function of the gift that was given. The focus is not on how great a price the offering cost the one giving it. It is referring to the offering itself. It is a sacrifice. Or it is referring to the act of the offering being processed, of it being sacrificed to God. And as we said before, this is often referring to the life being removed from the animal.

I think it may be very telling of our culture that when we talk about sacrificial we focus on the price to the one giving. When the Bible talks about a sacrifice the focus is on the worth of the recipient. We **do** have a tendency of making everything be about us.

We also discussed the sacrifice of thanksgiving. We discussed what that means to us. It was interesting as I studied this to find out that the Hebrew word for sacrifice of thanksgiving is a single word. And it essentially means a thank offering. It is thanks that comes from a person's heart when they recognize just

how blessed they are. The heart cries out in praise to its maker. It is a confession of the goodness of God. It is our hearts figuratively laying upon the altar the words of our gratitude for the goodness of God.

All of this enriches our text. It allows us to see what this sacrifice of our body is intended to be. It is a rational response to God in light of all we have been given. It is a mental laying of our bodies on an imaginary altar in recognition of the worth of God, and the worth of our salvation.

Think about this too. When someone presented a sacrifice, all right and title to that property was given up. That sheep was no longer owned by the presenter. It is now owned by the one it has been offered to. It is a willful choosing to give something over to the one being sacrifice to, based on the worth of the one to whom the sacrifice is given.

An obvious application at this point is, have we ever really given up right and title to our bodies? Or do we still think of them as our own? I am convinced that we cannot live the Christian life **as it is intended to be lived** if we do not cross that threshold. We must begin to think of our bodies as being owned by another. They are for a greater purpose than to serve our pleasures. In fact, this is the first threshold to cross in responding to the Gospel. We must view our lives fundamentally different than we saw them before the Gospel. The million dollar question is, do we?

Now, let's shift gears here a little. Animal sacrifices have been made from the time of Adam and Eve until the time the temple was destroyed in AD 70. And God took those sacrifices very seriously. They had to be made according to prescription.

Let's take a look at what happened when God **was not offered the** sacrifices He deserved or **as he wanted them presented**.

We start with the first offspring of Adam

Genesis 4:2-8 (NKJV)

2 Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

We see right from the start that God was very serious about sacrifices. And He was very specific about **those He would honor** and those that **He would reject**.

We cannot think that because we are now in the New Testament that God has suddenly become less discerning, less caring about the honor given to Him. We cannot think that just because we are not offering sheep, that means we are not offering anything. God still desires a sacrifice, but it is a living sacrifice that He now wants. And He is very picky about that.

Another side bar, notice he tells Cain that sin lies at the door. Often when our old nature raises up, we want our focus directed elsewhere. We want to blame our boss or our Mom or Dad or our wife or husband for the strong urge we have to do evil. We want to think that if they weren't here I wouldn't feel this way. But much of the time the problem is not them. The problem is in us. We must win this battle against the old man. We must win this battle against sin. And as long as we keep blaming it on someone else we will never win it. When we are truly rebelling against God given authority, when what we really resent is being told what to do, sin is knocking at our door and we have got to win that battle.

Let's look at another passage about the importance of the sacrifice.

1 Samuel 2:27-36 (NKJV)

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?"

28 Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire?"

29 Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?'

30 Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house.

32 And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever.

33 But any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age.

34 Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them.

35 Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever.

36 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, "Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread."

Remember the sons of Eli?

They were supposed to be offering sacrifices unto God the way that God prescribed. But this is what they were doing.

1 Samuel 2:12-17 (NKJV)

12 Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD.

13 And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling.

14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.

15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, "Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw."

16 And if the man said to him, "They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires," he would then answer him, "No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force."

17 Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

We see here that Eli's sons were guilty of an awful thing. Their sin was very great. And what was their sin? They caused men to abhor the offering of the Lord. They caused men to treat lightly the sacrifice that God deserved. They treated lightly the way that God chose to cover men's sin. They defiled an important ministry. It is interesting what we see later.

And we see more:

1 Samuel 2:22-25 (NKJV)

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Look here. Eli knew it. And it was his responsibility to do something about it. He needed a proper regard of God that would cause him to act in God's honor, to protect the ministry God had given him. That should have been the most important thing in the world to him. But it was not. He prioritized his love for his children over his love for his God.

23 So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people.

24 No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD'S people transgress. 25 If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?"

Notice the great tragedy. All Eli did was **talk**. All he did was **give a lecture**. He did nothing that would stop their evil actions. He did nothing to protect the ministry of God. He did nothing to clean up the priesthood. He cared less for the honor of God than his sentiment for his children.

The text goes on to say:

Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them.

God greased the tracks in the direction they were headed. He did not want things confused. He wanted them to continue to reveal what they were. And God had in mind exactly **what he was going to do**. He was going to kill them.

But notice what God said to Eli. God wasn't going to just hold Eli's sons responsible. God was going to hold Eli responsible too. He too was going to die for his disregard for the honor of God and the desecration of His sacrifices. As men there is a sense that anything that happens on our watch is our fault. Men, when God gives us a responsibility, we must do our duty. And if anything happens under our realm of authority, we are directly responsible. We cannot dodge the fact that we are at fault. Eli should have acted to stop his children from desecrating something as serious as the sacrifice to God. He should have overcome his sentimental affection with righteous indignation. But in the end he showed what he was made of. He would not do the right thing when it would disrupt his family. He did not have the will to stop their evil behavior. And so it cost him his life as well.

Let's look at another example.

1 Samuel 13:5-14 (NKJV)

5 Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits.

7 And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

8 Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

9 So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering.

10 Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

11 And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash,

12 then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."

13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Here we see it again. God is very picky about sacrifices to Him. He wants them **the way He wants them** and He **deserves them** to be just as **He requests** them. This is something we should learn about God. He is worthy to receive glory and honor. He is worthy to be worshipped **in the way He desires to be worshipped**. We cannot take the sacrifice He requests lightly. Look what happened to Saul. What did Saul do? Didn't he just take care of business? Didn't he just meet the need at hand? Didn't he just try to help God out in encouraging the people? No, at the end of the day, he appointed himself to give a sacrifice to God in a way that God did not want. He was disobedient. He was willful. He allowed the circumstances to determine what was needed instead of the word of the Lord. He reacted to the urgency of his circumstances instead of the voice of God. I have spent a lot of time on this topic this morning because I think it is important. We are called, even commanded, to give a sacrifice. And that sacrifice is our bodies. And it is not like the heathen religions. We are not to kill ourselves for God. We are to live for God. We are to give a living sacrifice. Why? Because God is worthy. We have tasted of His grace. We have received His mercies. We have received the favor of God when what we deserved was His wrath. Now, we have the Old Testament history of God. We no longer have to worry about **offering a blood sacrifice** in just a specific manner. We don't have to worry about how the lamb is killed and how it is bled out. We don't need to concern ourselves with which parts are burnt on the fire and which parts are destroyed. But we cannot allow ourselves to think that this means **God no longer cares about the sacrifice He is offered**. What He asks of us is in some ways **much more** than what He asked of the Israelites. He is asking for our lives. He is asking for

every **living breathing moment that our bodies exist on this planet**. And this is not some idle request or something that can be an afterthought to us.

God is calling for a sacrifice of our bodies to His worship. He has a right to it. We have every reason to give it. And He expects it from us. We cannot afford to take this lightly. We cannot be like the sons of Eli or Saul who treat this worship of God with contempt. We cannot think that it can somehow fit into a life of worship **to ourselves** and **to our pleasures**. This is a sacrifice that must be given and it must be given according to the prescription that God's word gives it. There can be nothing half hearted or lackadaisical about it.

God is not commanding us to give Him a sheep or a goat this morning. He is commanding us that we give Him **these bodies we live in**. And that is what He means. The question is, will we do it? Will we be like the faithful priests who took great care to give God exactly what He wanted in the way He wanted it? Will we be like Abel who gave to God the sacrifice that God desired? Will we give to God what pleases God?

Or will we be like Cain or Saul or Eli's sons and think to give God only what we determine to give Him in the way we determine to give it. That has never worked out well for human beings and I think it is safe to say that it will not work out well for us either.

So this week we have another opportunity to ask ourselves, am I living up to the commitment I have made. Am I giving God glory by giving Him my body, moment by moment, as a sacrifice to Him? That is what God is worth.