

Romans 12:1

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.

I noticed something as I studied for last weeks sermon that I think we need to revisit. It has to do with the word “present”. The word present is in the **aorist** tense. In English we read it as **present** tense. So you could get the idea that you **do this thing** and then you **keep** on doing it. But that is really not what it says. And the Greek audience would have understood this. What it really means is to *make a decisive dedication of your bodies*.

This is something you do at one time and it is once and for all. As I was considering this I thought, how could this be true? Surely we cannot do this one day at one point in time and then never need to do it again. But that is what it says. The more I thought about it, the more I believe an accurate illustration would be marriage. This is what I mean.

Those of us who are married have a marriage certificate. It represents a **single day of our lifetimes** that we made a pledge to our spouses to be married to that person for the rest our lifetimes. Now, is that pledge still in effect? Yes it is, as long as that person is alive. But how does that relate to our day to day behavior?

That pledge of marriage meant to me that, from that day on, my life would change. I would no longer consider other options for a marriage companion. I would, from that day on, consider it my responsibility to provide food, clothing, and shelter for this woman. It would now be my responsibility to keep her safe, as much as is possible. I understood that this pledge would change my behavior and would be an underlying consideration in every decision I made. In that sense it was an aorist event. It was a once and done decision.

Now, what about those days when I put myself first and forget to consider my wife as I should? Does that ever happen to us? Of course it does. If you are anything like me you continually need to reorient. You continually must reprioritize. You need to consider the implications of that previous pledge and how that relates to the decision in front of you. But when I fail, must I get re-married? Must I schedule a day to restate those pledges? No. That pledge has already been made once and for all. What I need to do now is to reorient to that pledge.

I think that is exactly what our word “**present**” means. Once we understand the implications of the gospel, once we grasp what Paul is saying, once we understand what Christ has truly done for us, we understand **the**

implications that truth has to our lives. We owe ourselves to Christ. There is no other possible conclusion we can come to when we understand what Christ did for us. So we reach that point and we say to God, what can I do? What do you want me to do? What can I possibly do that will **please you**, that will give you what you **desire from me** in response to what you have **given** to me?

That is exactly the attitude we have to read verse one with. It is only then that we get the gist of it. And what must we do?

Present, once and for all, in a pledge like a marriage pledge, present your body to God. Mentally lay your body before God like a priest putting an animal on the altar. On this day pledge your body to be used for God's purpose from this day forward.

This event, this offering, does not need to be done day after day. But the pledge needs to be **reoriented to** every day, just like a marriage decision. So I guess the first question we must ask ourselves is- "Have I ever **presented** my body to Christ for His purposes alone?" "Have I ever relinquished my right to use my body as I chose and handed that right over to my maker?" "Have I ever **even understood** that this body I live in is not my possession? It is God's. And it is His right to order its use as He sees fit?"

How many of our problems would no longer be problems if we would do that one thing? How many of our problems would disappear if we were to orient our thinking this way? What would our lives look like if we were to wake up each morning oriented to the fact that the shell of a body that I live in is not mine, it is God's? I think we would do well to think about this this week.

There are a couple of more things we can learn about this response that God expects from us.

First we can see it is a willing response. This is not something that God does **to us**. There is a hyper-calvinist idea that says that our wills actually do very little intentional activity. They would say that our wills are carried along like a boat on a river. Nothing needs acted upon. Nothing needs decided. Nothing needs done. God will do it all. But clearly this command this morning is given to us by Paul from God. This is something **we can do**, we **should** do, and we **must** do. And it will not get done if we do not intentionally **do it**. Now it would **never** happen if God did not move upon our hearts to do so. But that does not remove the responsibility from us to **do this thing**, once He has **enabled** us to do so.

Second this activity is one in which we are **giving** to God, not **receiving** from Him. I emphasize this because sometimes we get the wrong idea about true

spirituality. Some people find themselves in a spiritual and emotional malaise because they confuse what they are supposed to **receive** and what they are supposed to **give**. Sometimes we place ourselves in the grips of sin and we are confused as to how this could happen to us. We may have **prayed** for God to give us victory. We may have **asked Him** to take away our **wills** to sin. We may have **asked Him** to take away our **desire** to sin. We may have **asked Him** to give us power over our temptations. But have we ever started where Paul says to start? Did we **present our bodies as living sacrifices to God**? Did we orient to the fact that **our lives are completely God's**? Did we give our bodies to God, keeping no ownership rights for ourselves? Often the answer to our dilemma is to **begin where we are** by orienting our lives to God's commands. We need to start where Paul starts. We need to start faithful living the way God says to do it. We start by giving all that we have to God. We start by sacrificing what we are on his alter. And we start with the mental and willful offering of our bodies. Until we start this process by **giving**, we are not prepared to do the **living** that we will need to do.

Now let's look at this idea of presenting our bodies. There is no reason to believe that this is not talking about our physical bodies with all their abilities and capacities. I think the translations that say present "yourselves" instead of present your bodies take undue liberties. They end up not only translating but they also attempt to make application. I believe we do well in this passage to take it most literally.

Now, why is this so important? Why does Paul emphasize that we present our physical bodies as part of the process of living for God in this world. I am going to borrow heavily from Martyn Lloyd Jones this morning. And we will rely heavily on supporting scripture. This is one of those topics that is very easy to get help with by reading other scriptures. There is a lot said about the topic of our bodies, which gives us evidence that it must be very important in our walk with God.

So why is it important to present our bodies?

The first reason is that in the Christian life the whole person will be saved Paul devotes a whole chapter in I Corinthians to this topic. He wanted his readers to fully understand how the resurrection of **the body of Christ** and the resurrection of **us and our bodies** relates. Among other things he says this:

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 (NKJV)

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So Paul is telling his readers, first, our bodies, as they are, cannot go to heaven. They contain corruption. And that corruption cannot be allowed in our eternal dwelling. But don't get the wrong idea. The body is very important. It is so important, in fact, that if Christ's body did not raise, neither would any of us enter heaven. We are inextricably linked to our bodies.

And when God raises us up, He is not going to just raise our souls. He is going to raise us up in new bodies. They will be different, but they will still be physical bodies.

I don't pretend to understand all the implications of this. And I am not sure how much scripture actually tells us of the inter-relating of the body, soul, and spirit. I don't think we could understand it even if it were told to us. But we know enough to know that our bodies are important because God is going to save the body, soul and spirit.

The second reason that it is important that **we present our bodies** is because there is **a unity of the parts of our being** .

We know that faith without works is dead. James tells us that. And if we think about that for just a little bit we see the connection between **what we think and believe** and **what we do in this body**. We can never disconnect our bodies from ourselves. We can never say that it does not matter what I do in this body. We can never say that the body is bad but the soul is good. We are one united being, **body and spirit**. Paul shows us that relationship in I Cor 6:19

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

The reasoning in this scripture is much like the one in our text. Our bodies are important. And our bodies are not ours. They have been bought and paid for. They are owned **by** another. They are owed **to** another. So we cannot view what we do in these bodies as being insignificant. And we cannot view what

we do in these bodies as being **our prerogative**. The Holy Spirit lives in these bodies of ours. That makes what we do in them very, very significant.

Now the third reason that it is important that I present my body as a living sacrifice: The body is the instrument through which our souls act out our faith.

You might think, well it only matters what I believe. It does not matter what I do. Do I have faith? Do I believe in God? Do I understand salvation? Good. I've got all that right. Now, you might say don't talk to me about how I live in my body. That is my business. I resent your intrusion. That is private, between me and God.

Well that is patently the wrong attitude to carry.

Let's look at what Romans 6 already told us

Romans 6:11-13 (NKJV)

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Paul makes it painfully clear that we cannot separate our beliefs and our actions. We cannot live in any sin where **that sin is telling us what to do** and we continue to be its lackey and **do what it tells us**. That cannot be the permanent state of a believer. The Holy Spirit is not sympathetic when you shape your theology and your ideas of God's sovereignty to allow for this kind of nonsense and rebellion. It is He who says **DO NOT LET SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY**. And if He **commands** victory over sin, He **enables** victory over sin. If anyone ever tells you that they are a believer but God is making them sin, rebuke them, and then if needed, disassociate with them. You see our bodies are where we live. And if we possess the miracle of faith in our souls, that faith will be lived out in these bodies. Our wills will be acted upon by the Holy Spirit in such a way that **what we do in these bodies** will be changed. That **faith** must express itself. And the only arena it has to express itself is in our bodies. So it is our bodies that will show up to meet each other's needs. It is our bodies that will show up to worship and fellowship together. It is our bodies that will show up to exhort and comfort our brothers and sisters. It is **our bodies** that will show up to share the gospel with those who need to hear it. It is **our bodies** that will live holy lives, sanctified for God's

use. It is **our bodies** that will not partake in the fleshly activities we would have done prior to our salvation. And let me go on.

It is **our bodies** that will give our employers the hours of work that we have promised to them by taking their paychecks. It is **our bodies** that will say no to laziness and rest when it gets in the way of carrying out our responsibilities to those that God has given us to care for. It is **our bodies** that will be ruled by the priorities of scripture instead of the priorities of flesh and selfishness. That is what we are talking about this morning. That is what it means to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

The Fourth reason to present our bodies as a living sacrifice is that the body is one of the chief sources of temptation and sin.

We see in scripture that if we give our bodies free reign, if we allow them to control us, instead of us controlling them, we soon find ourselves in a great deal of trouble.

Look at what Peter says.

1 Peter 2:11-12 (NKJV)

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

See how Peter starts the same way as Paul. He begins by begging, by imploring, by encouraging. But he gets quickly to the same point as Paul.

Abstain from lusts which war against your soul.

Our bodies are a problem. They are the entry point for most sin. And they carry sin residue of their own.

Let's look at some more verses.

Romans 7:5 (NKJV)

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

We see here that when we were living in the state of flesh, in an unregenerate state, the sinful passions were always at work in our members, in our bodies. They were a continual barrage. And what was the effect? The fruit of death.

Where is our enemy most likely to attack our souls? It will be at the point of our fleshly lusts. It will be at the point that our bodies or our egos want something. It will be at the point of relational strokes or physical strokes. It will be at the point of the things we have allowed our flesh to fixate on.

Now if we believe **we have the right** to fixate on whatever we want, if we think that **we are free** to allow our bodies free reign and free attention, if we treat our bodies as if they **are good life guides**, good luck. We are inviting even more warfare in our souls. We are stupidly making our lives much harder than they need to be.

But if we will do what God says, we will take that body, that source for so much of our trouble, so much of our warfare, and we will say to God, "Here it is." "Here is my body for you to use." "I know that I don't know how to properly use it." "My seamer is broke". There seems to be ways that are right but they don't go where I thought they would. My way of trying to get everything I think I want leads to a dead end. It does not make me happy. It only robs me of those things that are most important to me. So I present this body to you, as yours, and I will do with it what you say.

The fifth reason we should submit our bodies as living sacrifices- There is great danger in allowing the body to control us.

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

**1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world,
according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works
in the sons of disobedience,
3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our
flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by
nature children of wrath, just as the others.**

Paul lays it all out here clearly. We know how we used to live. Maybe our lives were not horribly evil by most people's standards. But according to God's standards they were despicable. We were walking according to the world's dictates. We did what we felt like doing. When the world appealed to our sensibilities, we took its offering. When the devil offered us the fruit of rebellion, we took it and it tasted sweet to us. And it was **he** who was a work in us. He is the prince of that realm. He is the power broker of evil desires. And we simply lived according to what our flesh wanted. The lusts of the flesh were our collar and the devil held the leash. Sometimes our behavior may have appeared as moral upstanding behavior. Sometimes it would look dark and evil. But at the end of the day it was all from the same source. We were living according to what our bodies wanted.

Romans 8:12-13 (NKJV)

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Well we saw what our old behavior consisted of. And now Paul tells us we are debtors, but it sure isn't to what **our bodies** want. Now we are a debtor to what **our Savior** wants, to what **our Master** wants, to what **our redeemer** wants. So if we persist in living for the body, for the flesh, and essentially for the devil, we will prove that we were never really born again. We were never really saved by the Spirit of God.

But if **by the Spirit** we put to death **the deeds of the body**, if we submit our bodies to the Lordship of Christ and allow **Him** to control us. If we say yes to what Christ wants and no to what our bodies tell us to do, then we will prove that we are Christ's. We will prove we have the Holy Spirit in us. And we will prove that we have received that salvation that was promised to everyone who believes.

So it is important that we submit our bodies because there is great danger if we do not. We could prove ourselves to be unregenerate.

And the sixth and last reason we should present our bodies- I am meant to **glorify** God with my whole being-

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV)

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

How many times have we seen this now? The logical reasoning for our response seems to be **in just about every mention** of us surrendering the use of our bodies for God's purposes. It is because **we owe it**. We were bought. We have received Grace. It is only logical. It is only reasonable. We do it because there is no way we can think about this that would have us come up with another conclusion.

We live in a body. Our first misconception might be like the slogans of the pro-abortion propaganda. They say that a woman has a right to her body. Well I don't know how that works out in a worldly system of government but I know **for sure** how that works out in the **Kingdom of God**. **No we don't have the right to our own bodies**. They are not ours to make decisions with.

They were bought. They were paid for. And when we use our bodies for purposes contrary to the will of God we are essentially stealing.

Suppose I were to go bankrupt and Brad purchased my house. Then Brad were to tell me, Jon, you can live in that house, but these are the conditions. You must clean it. You must maintain it. You need to mow the lawn and trim the trees. And any time I send someone to stay with you, you must show them warm hospitality.

What would you think of me if I were to let the place decay, if I were to have wild parties and tear out the walls, if I were to bludgeon everyone that Brad sent to stay with me? You would say, Jon, you are evil. That is not your house. Look at the grace you were shown that you are even allowed to live in it. A great price was paid for you so that you could live there. You are spitting on that grace.

If that were the situation we would grasp the injustice immediately. Well, that is the position each of us are in. We are living in a body that belongs to God. And He has told us how to live in these bodies. To the degree that we regard our bodies as being owned by God, our behavior will change. We will no longer be asking, "How can I live so I don't do anything wrong." We will begin to ask, "What does God want to accomplish in my surroundings and how can I use this body to accomplish those things?" After all, if God has a will, and God owns my body, doesn't it make perfect sense that He would use this body to accomplish His will? They are both His.

And what is God's end goal? What does He want at the end of the day? What does He want every day of our existence to show off?

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

This is what God wants from us. This is what God has a right to expect from us. He wants us to Glorify Him. He wants our existence to be to the praise of His glory. He wants the things **we do** to show off the grace that He has given to us.

Let's look at the end of the I Peter passage again.

12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Here is one way that God is glorified when we abstain from the flesh. It will glorify God when unregenerate people have to tell the truth about our behavior. It will give God glory when they say that they had an example of Godly living in their life. They saw Christianity being lived out. They saw the difference Christ makes in a life. And they saw it in **us**. They may have spoken

against us. They may have hated us and persecuted us. But in the court of God where no lies can be told, the truth will be spoken by them and they will be forced to say that these Christians.... They lived as if their bodies were owned by God.

Let me ask you this morning. How have you been **using** your body? How have you been **regarding** your body? And would a camera on your life be evidence for the praise of God's glory?

That is what we are for. Will we display it this week?

Remember, this is not just a sermon. These are words straight from God. He says, Present your bodies a living sacrifice.