

Signs of Life (Sacrifice) – Romans 12 (verse 1)

I. Introduction:

- A. According to IRMI, a risk management company which works with industrial insurance companies,
1. about 100 years ago, **80%** of the US population was involved in some aspect of farming. Today, it is **2%**.
 2. And today, the average farm size is **434 acres**, but **55%** of all US farms are less than 100 acres.
 3. I was shocked to read that **57%** of all farms produce less than \$10,000 in annual farm sales.
 - a. Another **19%** produce from \$10,000 to \$49,999, annually.
 - b. In other words, the average farmer makes less gross income than I do.
 4. The article went on to say **52,000** American farms have been forced to earn additional income from “**agritourism**” or “**agritainment**.”
 5. I.e., instead of growing and harvesting corn, many farmers turn their cornfields into **mazes** for games.
 - a. Or they create places for **paintball wars**, or they actually encourage **hunting** on their properties.
 - b. They make their barns into **BnB’s**, and their most productive valleys are turned into **wedding venues**.
 - c. They create **haunted houses**, **petting zoos**, and non-professional **rodeos**.
 - d. They rent **horses** and **campsites**; they host **food preparation classes**.
 6. Last year Judy & I joined our daughter & Sahalie, paying money simply to look at, and smell, lavender fields
- B. I bring this to your attention, because like those farms thousands of **churches** have become places of “**eccletainment**.”
1. Thousands of churches have forgotten the purpose for which Christ established His “**ecclesia**.”
 2. And potentially **any** church can become a victim of the economy or a victim of modern society, thinking to itself, if it doesn’t come up with some form of money-making entertainment it will die. **Any church**.
 3. That means that you and I need to be reminded of what Christ expects of us as members of His church – and it is not about our entertainment.
 4. From time to time we need a refresher in Christian living – in living as a fingers or arms of the Lord’s body.
- C. As we heard last Sunday, churches are made up of its members.
1. Our church is as spiritual, or as worshipful, or as serviceable as the character of our average member.
 2. And if one member suffers spiritually, the whole body suffers to some degree.
 3. For this reason, we looked at the subject of forgiveness last Sunday night.
 4. And for this reason I feel lead of the Lord to look at other aspects of our practical Christian lives.
- D. What are some of the things that God wants to see in us – as individuals, and as a Christian body?
1. We might turn to several New Testament epistles to find an outline – i.e., **Ephesians** & **Corinthians**.
 2. But we find many of them in this very helpful chapter in Paul’s epistle to the **Romans**.
 3. For the next few lessons I want to remind us all of things which should be found in us and as such, they things which should be a very real part of our church.
- E. But before we look at **verse 1**, let me remind you that this is **chapter 12**.
1. In this book with sixteen chapters, the first two thirds are filled with **doctrine** – major, minute & magnificent.
 2. In other words, before we get to **how** we should **live** as Christians, we need to understand how we **became** Christians. And that requires doctrine in one form or another. And there are many other doctrines.
 3. I make a promise to you: I will never allow our church to become one dimensional.
 - a. While preaching the gospel and Christ, over and over again, we are not going to be known as unconcerned about the rest of the Bible – unconcerned about Bible doctrine.
 - b. The shallow gospel preaching of tear-jerking stories – which is the only thing found in some Baptist churches – will not characterize us as long as I am your pastor.
 - c. While striving to teach the whole counsel of God, including detailed doctrine, we still need to see the importance of living holy and godly lives, by studying chapters like this one.
 - d. And while trying to live for God, I’ll try to remind you that it is the Lord who should be our focus not ourselves.

- e. **Worship** is as important – or more important – than our **work** or the **wounds** we suffer in His name.
- 4. I admit that maintaining a proper balance as a church is sometimes difficult, but it is really important.

F. Tonight, let's consider the first verse of this chapter.

II. "I beseech you therefore, brethren."

- A. After 11 chapters of doctrine, Paul turns to these Christians and pleads with them to live godly in Christ Jesus.
 1. He calls them "**brethren**," not in the sense that they were Jews as he was, because most of them were not.
 2. No, they were his "**brethren in Christ**;" children of the same Spiritual Father, birthed by the same saving grace.
 3. They were his brothers and his sisters, not his children or his grandchildren – his brethren – his equals.
 4. He implies, "**based on that saving grace which we have examined in detail, I beg you to seriously consider what I am about to say to you now.**"
 5. And he pleads with them because they could either listen to him and apply what he was saying, or they could turn away.
 6. And that choice is something laid before us as well.
- B. Paul says, "**Please, oh please, my brethren present yourselves, as living sacrifices to our Saviour.**"

III. I beseech you, "by the mercies of God."

- A. I have heard preachers – I call them "**preachers**," because the term "**pastor**" really shouldn't be applied.
 1. And the truth is, I have been shamefully guilty of this.
 2. I have heard preachers plead with their people to tithe because their church was running short of funds.
 3. Two things about that: first, there is nothing like that here in this chapter.
 4. In fact, in no scripture will you ever find Paul pleading for tithes and offerings.
 5. And then, nothing should be done primarily for the **sake** of the **church** or the sake of the **preacher**.
- B. Based on the free and unmerited mercy of God, our **hearts** and entire **lives** should be given to the Saviour.
 1. It was through the mercy of God – the multiplied mercies of God – that the Lord channeled His love to us.
 2. It was through mercy we were not consumed in wrath. It was by God grace, we were given life.
 3. Now, based upon that regenerated life, that previously non-existent spiritual life, Paul beseeches us to give ourselves to the Saviour.
 4. And even though he will get to some specifics, they are things like love, joy and hospitality, not to tithes and offerings.

IV. He says in a rather general way, I beseech you to "present your bodies a living sacrifice to God."

- A. The word "**present**" – "**present your bodies**" – is quite interesting, but I'll spare you some of the details.
 1. However in **Lk. 2:22** we find that word in Mary & Joseph's "**presenting**" their eight-day-old baby to the Lord.
 2. In **Luke's** next verse, he reminds us that this was supposed to be something every Hebrew couple did with their first born son. They were to give him back to the Lord in light of the first Passover.
 - a. This first child didn't belong to the parents. They were only the custodians of Lord's child.
 - b. By God's grace and mercy, those parents were given a baby, and he was not slain during the Passover.
 - c. He belong to the merciful God.
 3. And in much the same way you and I have been spared from the wrath of the Death Angel, and as a result we belong to the Lord.
- B. That same word is also found in the **first** chapter of **Luke** when God's angel was speaking to Joseph.
 1. But there the word is translated differently.
 2. "**And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that STAND in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.**"
 3. It was Gabriel's practice to present himself before the Lord, ready to do whatever he was commanded.

4. That too should be our attitude. That too was what Paul was saying.
5. I beseech you to yield yourselves to the God who saved you by His mercy, ready to do what He should ask.

C. And that is the same word Paul used in **Romans 6:16** – *“YIELD yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instrument of righteousness unto God.”*

1. Isn't it true that you have been given life, when at the time you were dead?
2. Then yield your life – your body and each of the members of your body – unto God who gave you that life.

D. And certainly no one should be confused about the word *“body.”*

1. It is impossible to make it refer to anything but the physical structure in which our souls dwell.
2. That Greek word is translated *“body”* about 150 times, and the only other way it is used is as *“slave,”* and even in that it makes perfect sense.
3. God, as if He had no other claim upon us, by the rights of saving mercy, owns us – body, soul and spirit.

V. *“That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.”*

A. Present your living body as a **living** sacrifice, in contrast to the sacrifices of the Old Testament which involved **dead** animals.

1. How can that be? Doesn't a sacrifice involve death? I.e., didn't Jesus die as a sacrifice for my salvation?
2. Yes, it is true, but remember that with God nothing is impossible.
3. Not only does the Lord ask for the sacrifice of our living bodies, but He permits and expects us to continue to live in them for His glory – constantly sacrificing it to Him.
4. We are to be **sacrificed** but still we **live**. Our bodies are given to **Him** but retained by **us**.

B. The New Testament reveals something which many people in the Old Testament didn't realize.

1. **Their** sacrifices were essentially **symbolic**.
2. Yes, when they took a lamb out of their flock in order to make the Passover sacrifice or one of the burnt offerings, they lost some income. In fact, their sacrifice may have been on several levels.
3. But the New Testament teaches us that those Passover lambs and goats, were emblematic of Christ Jesus, the Lamb which taketh away the sin of the world.
4. Paul tells us that it is not possible for the literal blood of bulls and goats should take away sin.
5. The Old Testament offerer was, by faith, supposed to trust God for cleansing and forgiveness of sin.

C. But **this** sacrifice to which Paul refers, was **not** supposed to be **symbolic** in any way.

1. This was a real sacrifice of real bodies, even though the Lord graciously lets us continue to use them.
2. And yet as Christians our **eyes**, for example, should belong to Him, and our **hands** should serve Him, our **tongues** should sing His praise and our **feet** should carry us to places where we can share the gospel.

VI. This living sacrifice must be **HOLY** and **ACCEPTABLE** unto God.

A. The word *“holy”* means holy as God is holy – **sanctified** – and by application it implies *“sinless.”*

1. The purpose of this chapter is to remind us that God has standards which reach beyond the stratosphere.
2. And this is for all of us. What the Lord requires of me is no different from what he requires of thee.
3. I am not foolish enough to say that I fully satisfy His Heavenly standards.
4. But neither am I so foolish as to say that it is okay to have lower standards than what God has.
5. The holy God is not satisfied with a life of twenty percent sin and eighty percent non-sin.
6. What He requires is 100% holiness, which is 100% greater than even 100% non-sin.

B. What the Lord wants of us – expects of us – is an *“acceptable offering.”*

1. Of course you know the account of Cain and Abel. We see that God has rules in regard to sacrifices.
2. What a gracious gift He has given to us in permitting us to be **acceptable** offerings.
3. I know what sort of person I am. I know how worthless I am. And the Lord knows me better than I do.
4. And yet, by grace through the righteousness of Christ, the Lord is willing to accept me as a sacrifice.

5. The moment I think of myself too highly, and Cain did his sacrifice, my gift will be rejected.
6. Paul want us all to be **well-pleasing** to the Saviour. This should be our desire as well.

VII. After all, it is our reasonable service under the circumstances.

- A. And again, the circumstances are that we have been saved by God's grace.
 1. It **makes sense**, it is **reasonable**, it is only **rational** that we be willing to return to our Saviour what is most precious to us.
 2. Like priests, we have been given the privilege of serving God in the sacrifice of this offering.
 3. The giving of our physical lives, including our bodies, should be a part of our worship.
 - a. I won't say that the Lord doesn't love to hear your songs of praise.
 - b. He longs to year your words of thanks.
 4. But there is no real worship until this is carried out in body, soul and spirit.
 5. There is no acceptable service, if we are willingly living in any form of sin.
 6. There is no acceptable service, if we are refusing to give the Lord our eyes or our minds.
 7. How can I do less than give Him my best and live for Him completely?
- B. I was reading through some quotations by Charles Spurgeon & found a statement he made about this verse.
 1. He said, *"I scarcely like this word 'SACRIFICE,' because [what Paul says here] involved nothing more than a REASONABLE service.*
 - a. *If we gave up all we had and became beggars for Christ, it would display no such chivalrous spirit of magnanimous conduct after all.*
 - b. *[Because] we should be gainers by the surrender."*
 2. The point is: while Paul and the Holy Spirit may call the surrender of our lives and bodies a *"sacrifice,"* the fact remains that it is a sacrifice which blesses us more than it actually contributes to the glory of God.
 3. Even though, due to the weakness and sinfulness of the flesh, God must **beseech** us to present ourselves as sacrifices to God, we are abundantly blessed when we do.
 4. There is no better place to be than laid out on the Lord's altar ready for service.
 5. There is no better life to live than the life which has been put into God's hands – willingly sacrificed.
 6. There is no better church in the world than the one whose members are carrying out their reasonable service.