

A Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1&2

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. 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.

Exegetic:

The Apostle Paul here “Urges” us he “Beseeches” us. Why does he use this? He is an apostle is he not? Why does he entreat the church instead of taking command and ordering it so? Paul wants people to feely choose to serve God.

It is because Paul calls the newest Christian: “brother”. Paul does not order he approaches the people with concern and deep affection. Paul also knows the nature of man and so he uses entreaty instead. Paul knows that Men and Women have a choice and often choose contrary to God's wishes and so he entreats them. He exhorts them; he encourages them to choose to worship God wholly. Not be complacent or apathetic in their service to God. He entreats them towards righteousness.

We are encouraged to take on the mind of Christ and dedicate ourselves to him.

Homiletic:

One there was a farmer, his cows were wandering all over the field and he rode behind them on his horse trying to drive them toward the pen. The cows moved forward but very often then went of to the side to a nice looking patch of grass. This would frustrate the farmer something terrible so he got himself some help. He started using a prod and got a dog to help rain in the cows. Well quite soon the cattle did not appreciate the prodding and the dog's “assistance”. They started to go farther and farther afield to get away from the farmer. When the dog came near they would nudge it or canter off. They started to ignore the barking.

One day when the farmer was out in his field he saw his neighbor and he was astonished. The cows were literally following him to the barn? This greatly shook up the farmer who was having difficult and so he called his neighbor up and asked him what his secret was.

The successful farmer said to his caller that if he wanted his cow to follow him, they needed to love, trust and respect him. He said that at first, the cows wouldn't respond and he had a choice, he could prod them or he could lead them. He could force them or he could entice them with the goodness. After that he told the farmer

that he was patient with them, and he said that he would encourage them when they did well.

The farmer who called was astonished. He thought about it for a few moments and came to realize that bossing and forcing was not the way to get compliance from his heard. It was consistent encouragement, and reinforcement of the wanted behaviors.

Friends, Paul entreats in this way because he wants to lead the people not drive the people.

Wow. This is a great lesson for all of us in the first two verses of romans. First we see that as a leader Paul provides opportunity and encouragement. He entreats instead of bullies. Okay so as leaders and fathers and mothers in Christ we provide opportunities and encouragement to serve God. It is not about forcing but inviting and entreating.

Are we different now that we are saved? Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to renew and transform our minds? Have we chosen to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices to God? Do we choose to do what he wants us to do or do we simply satisfy ourselves? We have so much freedom. We have so many choices and we have God's grace that has given us these things yet do we choose to serve him? We are free to choose our actions; the caveat is that we are not always free from the consequences of our actions.

Now let's look at verses 3-8

Humble Service in the Body of Christ

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Exegetic

The people were warned against being arrogant and prideful. He was essentially saying: "Stop fooling yourselves and deluding yourself, look inside and be honest with yourself." He then tells us that every one of us has a purpose and that we have been granted gifts by God to be used in his church and for the benefit of the body. If you are missing or don't participate, what is missing? Every person is important in the body. What role does God want you to play in his church?

There is church 7 days a week; we are the church 7 days a week, but we only get together once in a while most predominately on Sundays.

Did you notice that Paul says for us to use the gift we are given? If you are a prophet then prophesy... and so on. In other words, do what God has given you gifting's to do. If you are a bookkeeper and God wants you to do that then do that. If you are a teacher and God wants you to teach Sunday school then do that. In short, USE the gifts that God has given you.

Remember the parable of the 10 talents. What are you doing with the talents that God has given you? Are they buried in fear or are they being invested to the benefit of the master?

The only way to build faith is to exercise it. You have to "go out on that limb" face your fear and believe in Jesus and his promises.

You are created a new creation in Christ Jesus. Hallelujah! As we allow the Spirit to work in us. Our minds are being transformed. We are in the process of sanctification. Christ has covered us in his righteousness; yet we need to put away the old and embrace the new.

Turn with me briefly to Eph. 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Today we need to choose to put aside the old man. We must choose to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices to the will of the Father.

Homiletic

Let's go back to our farmers...

The one farmer is out in his field and has meticulously tilled the soil and cut his furrows. The soil is prepared; it is moist and ready to receive the seed that he is going to plant. So he brings out the seed and in equal measure places the seed in

fertile soil. He has a vision. He knows what the crop will look like and he works to see it happen.

The other farmer only tends his field on Sundays. He goes out and cuts some furrows and scatters handfuls of seed on the soil. Some of the seed lands in a good place others not so good and so the crop is inconsistent.

If the land had a choice what would it say? "Leave me alone I just want to be exactly as I am" or would it be receptive to being productive and fruitful? As humans we have been granted the grace of choice.

Now if we were to say that the seed were the word of God, The water on the crops the Holy Spirit and the soil your life. Do you want to let the farmer prepare you to receive the seed or do you just want to take your chances. Are you tilled? Is your spirit ready to receive the word of God? As a Christian have you prepared your hearts to receive from God today? God's word is going to come out from his farmers... The question to ask is will it land on fertile soil?

What are the pitfalls for the Christian

Dull indifference – Life can be hard. In fact, it can harden a person's heart. It can also be hardened by the constant bombardment of earthly pursuits and interests. And so as a result of all of that influx, the church, spiritual life and obedience to God become second to the draw of the outside world.

These things have tempted me myself. I love to competitively shoot metal plates and paper targets. For me it is fun, yet 95% of all of the matches are on Sunday. Rim-fire night is Wed nights, when there is prayer. Will I offer up my life to God or pursue my own enjoyment? Here is a secret folks. I have found even more enjoyment in time with God. When I go into the woods or when I have spare time, which lately granted isn't that much, I go with the Lord. Knowing I have served him well and I can fellowship with him joyfully.

But why does it matter? It is because the desire to participate in Church goes away. This is why the bible tells not to forsake the gathering together of the assembly as some do.

When church is thought of as getting in the way, it becomes something that has to be done to fulfill an obligation on Sunday. It becomes a chore instead of a joy and a time of refilling. Ultimately, the Christian suffers a dull indifference. Their faith may wither and eventually die. They have chosen...

Sentimental Fervor – Wow how can fervor be bad? I like to think of it like this: "The rocky ground is hot, quick growth happens, everything looks great, but the roots are shallow. Fervor without study or relationship leads to legalism and bondage. But

the flourishing seed has nothing in reserve, there is no depth to draw from in drought or even extended dry weather. In these circumstances it dies. What about too much rain? With no depth to it, it washes away. In short, when adversity comes it is weak and will yield.

The third pitfall is:

Stifling Worldliness – More progress is made here but there is no harvest of fruit of the spirit. If worldly from the beginning there is a competition within the Christian between the spiritual and the worldly. In this case worldly usually wins by reason of its strength and hold upon the person's life. It is in this case that the person has not truly surrendered their life as a sacrifice to God.

Here is what I am getting at... We as the church need a common fruitfulness. All good soil produces good fruit. If and when it shows up we have the joy of a harvest.

When Christ preached and people did not follow, was it a failure or was it simply that many chose not to profit by it. The truth is that although we have the same reward in heaven of eternal life, all who profit from the truth of the Gospel don't profit in equal measure... For me it is not good enough that some fruit is obtained but rather that there is an abundant return!

I once heard another preach say: "There is no limit to the possibilities of divine grace if only we will let them be realized in our own lives.

What is the purpose of all this?

We demonstrate the love of Christ to each other and to the world around us. We live a life of purpose and fulfillment in the richness and joy of serving God.

Do we want to see love in action or love inaction?

So what does this look like in our lives? What is the requirement of this fruit? We serve the God of Love. We should put our love into motion through our gifts.

Love in Action or Love Inaction

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Today as we examine our hearts do we:

- Sincerely love those around us
- Hate evil and evil actions
- Celebrate and embrace the good
- Stir up our excitement about Jesus and his church
- Joyfully hope knowing that he cares for us
- Remain patient when struggling or sick
- Pray Faithfully
- Share with the Lord's people who have need
- Practice hospitality

Let's move on down the passage:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Today do we:

- Show kindness and patience with those who are not nice to us
- Bless and not curse others when they offend us
- Mourn with those who are mourning
- Live in harmony with each other
- Put aside our pride

When we are tested:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

My friends, Romans 12 is clear. We are entreated as Christian brothers and sisters to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice, as a form of worship we live for him. Do we offer up humble service in the body of Christ, exercising our gifts for the benefit of others? Do we put our love and joy and faith into action to reap a harvest?

These are the questions before each of us today. Only you and God can look into your heart and know. It is not for us to judge each other. Our relationship is with the creator and he has commanded us to love each other.

We must put our love into action... or as the bible says it: “Faith without works is dead!”