

A Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1–2 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: We are at a major turning point in the book of Romans. Someone has compared **Romans 1-11** to the closest thing to a **Systematic Theology**, a sort of Seminary Textbook, that we have from the Ancient World. If that is true, chapters 12-16 of Romans could be compared to a first-century **Christian Living** bestseller. The first 11 chapters tell us what God has done on our behalf. The remaining 5 chapters tell us how our Monday mornings should look different as a result.

Note carefully how Paul makes this shift - he doesn't give us a list of rules, do this and don't do that; instead, he employs the greatest weapon in the teacher's arsenal - the **METAPHOR**.

Reason acquaints one with Truth; Image acquaints one with Meaning.

- **Chapters 1-11** were analytical because technically precise language engages our faculties of reason and familiarizes us with the text's factual claims.
- But in **Chapter 12**, the approach shifts to imagery and metaphor, because Paul is no longer just declaring the theological imperatives of truth; he is guiding us into the caverns of meaning.

One of the great errors of modern Christianity is that it jumps too quickly into Metaphor and imagery and thus provides an inaccurate landscape of truth.

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose we were going to reimagine the construction of this stage area; we may come up with a dozen ideas for how it could or should look, but only after we study the architectural renderings will we discover that the actual stage is solid concrete, limiting our ability to redesign.

In the pursuit of truth, **analysis** must precede **artistry**.

After 20 weeks of analyzing the blueprints, we are not equipped to step into the actual scene of Paul's metaphor, and the difference is astounding.

ILLUSTRATION: I had studied the hills and valleys of Gettysburg, PA, for several years, but recently I stood on Cemetery Ridge, hiked up Big Round Top, and climbed through Devil's Den. One experience enlightened and expanded the other. So, now that we've studied the topography of redemption, Paul invites us to climb on the bus and enjoy the tour.

In the verses that follow, Paul introduces us to FOUR IMAGES that paint shades of MEANING onto the outline of TRUTH.

- A sacrifice on an altar (12:1–2)

- A part within a body (12:3–8)
- A member of a family (12:9–16)
- A soldier in an army (12:17–21)

Every one of those pictures says something different, and every one of them is meant to live in your mind and shape the way you walk out of this room. We are going to take them one at a time.

This morning let's begin with the first - a **Sacrifice on an Altar**.

I want to draw your attention to three things: the **Tone**, the **Image**, the **Explanation**.

1. The Tone

TEXT: Romans 12:1–2 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,

Verse one gives us remarkable insight into what made Paul one of the greatest leaders in all of history. Think about it - Paul was, perhaps, the greatest of the Apostles.

- **He had Power - Acts 19:11–12 (ESV)**¹¹ ...God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul
At Lystra, the power of God was so strong on Paul that he was confused for the god Hermes.
- **He had Rank** - As an Apostle, Paul had the authority to command obedience. If he walked into this Church, I would very simply turn the service over to Paul. He outranks me.
- **He had Heritage**- he is described as a Hebrew of Hebrews.
- **He had Education**- he studied at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel, the Greatest of the first-century Jewish teachers.

Yet, when Paul begins to apply the message of Romans, he does not **COMMAND**, but rather **APPEALS**.

GREEK NOTE: The word is *parakalō*, to come alongside and urge.

- **Jesus** said it this way: You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. (Matthew 20:25–26)
- **Peter** agreed when he said, Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)

Paul doesn't command; he appeals to them as a brother...

ILLUSTRATION: There comes a point in every sermon where the Pastor must, for the good of the people and the good of his soul, leave the pulpit and take a place in the pew. Reminding myself and reminding you that this teaching is for us, not y'all.

The tone is that of a brother, appealing to his family.... NOT BY VIRTUE OF HIS OFFICE... but by the mercies of God.

ILLUSTRATION: We've all heard an officer declare "STOP in the name of the Law." That is to say, "The reason I can order you to stop is that I am vested with said authority by the law of the land... and if you fail to heed my order, you will have to answer for it before the Judge."

Well, on what reason does Paul rest his appeal? The mercies of God! What mercies of God? Those delineated in the previous 11 chapters. Based on that. God's saving mercy poured out line after line... the mercy that saved you, justified you, sanctifies you, will one day glorify you, seals you unto the day of redemption... based on those mercies, Paul makes his appeal to you as brethren.

That's the tone...

2. The Image

What is Paul appealing to us to do?

1b. to present your bodies as a **living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Both the Jews and the Gentiles could relate to this image. The Jews were familiar with the sacrificial system throughout the Old Testament period; the people of God would bring animals to the priest, who would then take the animal, kill it, and then place it on the altar on behalf of the person who brought it. The Gentiles knew of similar sacrifices made to the pagan gods. Paul says that what those animals are as dead sacrifices, you become in life.

Bodies are to be understood as the outer shell that houses the entire person. We see this indicated in **Romans 7:23** where Paul refers to his body as the place where wars between his mind and his members take place. So your ENTIRE person is to be a Living Sacrifice.

So when Paul says present your bodies, he is saying present your entire person.

ILLUSTRATION: Dr. Bill McCray of Dallas Theological Seminary tells a story: *A chicken and a Pig were walking down the road, and they saw a billboard that said, "Feed the poor." So the chicken turned to the pig and said, "That's a good idea - feeding the poor - let's you and I create a **ham and egg breakfast**." The pig turned to*

*the chicken and said, "I don't know about that - **for you it's just a contribution; for me it's a total commitment.**"*

Make no mistake - God is not looking to become one of your hobbies. Jesus Christ is not seeking more fans. He's not looking for social media followers. He is not even looking for ONE day in SEVEN or ONE dollar in TEN. He is looking for complete and total surrender.

In other words, you place your YES before Him, prior to knowing the question.

We tend to overanalyze obedience. The result is what engineers call Analysis Paralysis.

ILLUSTRATION: One of the greatest lessons my dad ever taught me was soon after he was saved, Brother Goody Voss led my Dad to the Lord and immediately after Dad received Christ as his Savior, Brother Goody said, "Now Carl, we meet on Sunday Mornings at 10AM for Sunday School, 11AM for Church, Discipleship Training is at 5PM, then the Evening service is at 6. Wednesday nights are at 6 PM. You'll need to be at all those gatherings. We will baptize you this Sunday. When you get paid, take 10% of what you make and write a check to the Church." Do you know what my Dad said? "Got it." Not, "Well, you know I need to pray about that..." NO! It was simple - if the God who died for me said jump, my only question is how high.

LISTEN, Life would be so much easier for some of you if you stopped trying to analyze it and just did what God said.

ILLUSTRATION: In the last letter Paul ever wrote, he summed up his entire ministry by saying, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come". The drink offering was the final offering made while the altar was red hot. Wine would be poured on that red-hot altar and would sizzle into vapor. Paul says, that's what my life is like...but there are no complaints, no regrets.

The Tone, The Image...

3. The Explanation

How do we heed Paul's brotherly appeal and present ourselves as living sacrifices?

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

A Living Sacrifice:

a. **Doesn't See the World as Normal** - ² Do not be conformed to this world.

"This world" is *aiōn*, it is speaking of this age, this present order of things that is organized as if God did not exist. It is not the planet. It is the pressure.

It is the ten thousand voices that tell you every day what a successful life looks like, what a beautiful body looks like, what you deserve, what you should be afraid of, what you should be ashamed of. It takes no effort at all to think like everybody around you. It is like breathing.

WORSHIP - You see the world system that demands as much from you as God does, and life is a constant decision about which one you will worship.

You've heard me say before - the word WORSHIP is taken from an Old English word Worth Ship, which speaks to the value of the goods and cargo on a sailing vessel.

Worship is deciding who or what is worthy of your sacrifice -

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine a young lady is dating a guy who says, "Sleep with me. Give me the most sacred part of you. That part of you that was only intended for one person." But in the back of her mind, she knows that God says, "Keep yourself pure for marriage; that part of you was meant to only be enjoyed by a person with whom you are in Covenant for life." Now - those are two competing commands. The one she deems most valuable is the one she worships and obeys.

The guy says, "Conform to me, conform to the world... everyone does this". God says, "You have been bought with a price; honor God with your body."

99% of the people you encounter on a daily basis are simply trying to fit in, and they will go to any lengths to do so.

- If everyone else has a new vehicle, they will go into debt to drive a car they simply cannot afford.... Why? The World demands conformity.
- People drink things they don't like, say words they weren't raised to say, go places and do things that they know better than to do simply because it will keep them off the radar of the world as odd.

Well, let me tell you - the world is going to Hell; being odd ain't so bad.

A Living Sacrifice doesn't see the world as normal...

- Doesn't See Transformation as Passive** - but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Transformation is more crockpot than microwave.

It is what Eugene Peterson called, "Long obedience in the same direction".

ILLUSTRATION: One thing that can frustrate people new to the faith is that growth is like a tree: in the first few years, the tree doubles in size every few months. But then, as it reaches maturity, the growth changes and slows; it isn't always obvious.

Many times it's happening in the root system far from the gaze of men. But it is happening.

Spiritual maturity is like that - day by day as we get into the Word, God's thoughts slowly but certainly become our thoughts.

"As a man thinks within himself... so is he".

But don't wait to be zapped.... Get in the word... let the word do the work.

A Living Sacrifice doesn't see the world as normal...transformation as passive...

c. **Doesn't see God's Will as Obvious** - that by testing you may discern what is the will of God.

The word for "**discern**" is dokimazō, to test a coin to see if it is genuine. A renewed mind can tell counterfeit from real. It can look at a decision and say, is this good? Is it pleasing to Christ? Is it what the Word calls perfect?

You do not need a voice from heaven when your mind has been renewed by heaven.

NOW, let's be clear. Some things are obvious. If God's Word says "Do this", then it is obvious that you should do this. However, most life decisions aren't that simple.

- God says most of us should get married; He says we should marry within the faith, but He doesn't tell us which woman of faith we should marry.
- Scripture says we should work, but what job are we to take?

For those things, we must learn to discern the will of God.

God does not reveal His will to people who have not surrendered theirs.

INVITATION/CONCLUSION: Howard Hendricks used to say, "The trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar."

That is true, and that is why the aorist "present" of verse 1 has to be followed by the present-tense "be transformed" of verse 2. There is a day you climb on. And there is a lifetime of refusing to climb off.