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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 12:1–2

True worship isn't just a song we sing; it's a life we offer

#### Notes

06/07 Rom. 12:1-2, "A Sacrifice of Living," Subtitle: Renewed for Worship, Main Idea: True worship isn't just a song we sing; it's a life we offer, Scripture: Micah 6:6-8 (Communion)

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**Title:** A Sacrifice of Living

**Subtitle:** Renewed for Worship: *what* to do and *how* to do it.

**Main Idea:** True worship isn't just a song we sing; it's a life we offer.

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-2; Micah 6:6-8

Every great masterpiece—whether a sweeping symphony, an epic novel, or the architecture of a massive stone fortress—has a hinge. It has a specific turning point upon which the entire weight of the structure rests and pivots. In the grand architecture of the Bible, that hinge is found exactly where we are stepping today: Romans chapter 12.

Think about the journey we have been on, both in this letter and in the scope of redemptive history. From the opening words of Genesis 1 all the way to Romans 11, Scripture has been detailing God's sovereign work: **creation, the fall, judgment, and the climax of salvation in Christ**. For the first eleven chapters of this letter, the Apostle Paul has been meticulously laying out this **divine rescue mission**. He has shown us **our utter depravity, our justification by faith, our freedom from sin's dominion, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the unstoppable, sovereign grace of God**.

Last week, we saw where all of this breathtaking theology inevitably leads. Paul spends eleven chapters explaining what God has done to rescue His creation, and by the time he reaches the end of chapter 11, **all he can do is burst into doxology—*Soli Deo Gloria***. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33). It is the absolute peak of the biblical mountain. Up to this point, the story has been a brilliant, blinding declaration of *what God has done*.

But right here, as we open chapter 12, the greatest plot twist in the Bible takes place. As the great commentator Douglas Moo notes, **Paul is shifting from the indicative—what God has done—to the imperative—what we must do**. The camera suddenly pans from the throne room of God directly to the altars of our lives.

Here in Romans 12, Paul shifts from the grand picture of who God is and what He has done, to the inescapable mandate of how we must respond.

Romans 12:1–2 “1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul answers **two distinct questions** in these **two verses**.

Today we are going to try and unpack these 2 verses, if we have time. As we do, Lord willing we will see this new scene in the meta narrative—the grand story of the Bible—begin to unfold in a way that will set the stage for the “mandate” theme that will carry us to the very end of the book of Revelation.

**The First question is, “What is a Sacrifice of Living?”**

And the Second, **“How do we offer a Sacrifice of Living?”**

Let's look at that first question together.

## I. What Is a Sacrifice of Living? (Rom. 12:1)

### A. It's a Response to the Bible's Ultimate Plot Twist (Rom. 12:1a)

- From Genesis 1 to Romans 11, Scripture details God's sovereign work: creation, the fall, judgment, and the climax of salvation in Christ.
- It ends in the *Soli Deo Gloria* of chapter 11. That is everything God is and has done.
- Now, the camera suddenly pans from the throne room of God to the altars of our lives.

Writing about these 2 verses, Douglas Moo states, *"The transition from Rom. 11 to Rom. 12... is not, therefore, a transition from 'theology' to 'practice,' but from a focus more on the 'indicative' side of the gospel to a focus more on the 'imperative' side of the gospel."*

*"The 'imperative' of a transformed life is therefore not an optional 'second step' after we embrace the gospel: it is rooted in our initial response to the gospel itself. To eliminate this part of Romans would be therefore to omit an indispensable dimension of the gospel itself."* I would add to what Moo wrote, that it would indeed

undermine the full consummation of the Gospel.

*Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (New International Commentary on the New Testament - NICNT)*

So let's begin to unpack these two questions in 2 verses together.

- Paul first says in Rom. 12:1, "**I beseech ("urge") you**" (parakalō; from *para*, "beside," and *kaleo*, "to call")
  - Paul begins this massive transition with a passionate, pastoral plea.
  - He is begging us as our spiritual father.

**We cannot hear the staggering truths of chapters 1-11 and remain passive.**

- Paul is begging us to pay attention to and respond to what he is about to present.
- Paul doesn't just hand us a light theological pamphlet in chapters 1-11; he hands us the most comprehensive, heavy, and breathtaking rescue manual in human history.
- (Romans 1-3) The Reality of our Ruin: We were not just making mistakes; we were enemies of God, completely dead in our sin, and sitting right under the holy wrath of the Creator.
- (Romans 3-5) The Shock of Justification: While we were still powerless, Christ stepped in. His blood completely satisfied the wrath of God, paying a debt we could never touch.
- (Romans 6-8) The Promise of Freedom: We were severed from the dominion of sin, given the very Spirit of God to live inside of us, and promised that absolutely nothing can separate us from His love.
- (Romans 9-11) The Mystery of Sovereign Grace: God, in His unsearchable wisdom, orchestrated all of history to graft us into His family.

When you truly comprehend the staggering reality of those eleven chapters, passivity becomes an impossible response. If you are trapped in a burning building and a firefighter kicks down the door, pulls you from the flames, and breathes life back into your lungs at the cost of his own life, you do not just brush off your clothes and casually sit back down in the ashes.

A rescue of that magnitude demands a reaction. That is why Paul says, 'I beseech you.' He is saying, 'Look at the cross! Look at the empty tomb! Look at the wrath you escaped and the grace you received!' You cannot look at the unsearchable, sovereign, saving work of God and simply fold your hands. God's mercy demands our motion. Because He gave everything to rescue us, the only rational, logical response is to give

everything back to Him.

- Paul then places the foundation for what he is about to share by saying, **"Therefore, by the mercies of God"**
  - Because of God's sovereign rescue through Jesus Christ of His creation, therefore we must act.
  - Doctrine demands duty.
  - Notice "mercies" is plural—Paul is pointing back to every specific act of compassion he just spent 11 chapters explaining and in reality, that which unfolds for us throughout the entire Bible that precedes it. We don't worship to earn God's mercy; we worship as a compelled—and undeniable reaction to it.

If I don't respond with acts of worship to the mercies of God, it is because I do not understand them.

If I don't respond with acts of worship to the mercies of God, it is because I am not looking for them.

If I don't respond with acts of worship to the mercies of God, it is because I reject them.

If I don't respond with acts of worship to the mercies of God, it is because I have forgotten them.

To see, understand, accept, and remember the mercies of God, compels me to respond in action to them. It is a logical—a reasonable and unavoidable response.

*I. What Is a Sacrifice of Living? (Rom. 12:1)*

*A. It's a Response to the Bible's Ultimate Plot Twist (Rom. 12:1a)*

That response is then...

## **B. It's a life lived for God as Our Acceptable Sacrifice (Rom. 12:1b)**

- **"To present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God..."**
  - Paul takes the deeply ingrained Old Testament imagery of the temple and flips it for the Church age.
  - God doesn't just want our spiritual intentions; He wants our "bodies"—our hands, feet, eyes, and our everyday physical reality and focus.

- This relationship with God that He has given us through Jesus Christ was not meant to be just a part of your life, it was meant to be the entirety of your life—it was meant to inculcate every aspect of your life, shape it, and direct it.
  - When you say that you “love” someone and you truly mean it, doing so demands that you leave in a manner that proves that love to them.
- Paul, as a Pharisee of Pharisees, would have had the *Shema* pulsing through his veins. What he says here in Rom. 12:1 is the culmination of what God taught all the way back at the formation of the nation of Israel. When he writes to the Romans about presenting their “bodies,” he is directly echoing the physical, all-encompassing devotion commanded in Deuteronomy 6.
  - In the *Shema*, Moses doesn't just stop at the inward command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
  - Moses immediately translates that love (Just like Paul moving from the doxology of the end of Rom. 11) into physical, bodily terms: binding the Word to their **hands**, placing it as frontlets between their **eyes**, talking about it when they **walk** by the way (feet), and writing it on their doorposts (everyday reality).
- Here is the Paradox of a Living Sacrifice
  - In the Old Dispensation, a sacrifice was brought to the temple to bleed and die.
  - Because Jesus is the final, substitutionary death who bled and died for us, the requirement has now radically changed

**The altar for our sacrifice no longer demands the permanent loss of an animal’s life as a temporary substitute for us; it demands the everlasting living life that is in Jesus Christ our permanent substitute.**

To the outside world, climbing onto that altar and surrendering the everyday reality of your life might sound extreme, radical, or even fanatical. But Paul fundamentally disagrees. When you look back at the sheer magnitude of the rescue mission God just accomplished, and when you consider the staggering depths of the God who orchestrated it, handing over your entire life is not an extreme

reaction at all. It is the only logical conclusion.

## **C. It's a reasonable Response to the "Unsearchable God" (Rom. 12:1c)**

- The text says that this kind of sacrifice is our "reasonable" worship (logikēn latreian).
  - The ongoing challenge of being a living sacrifice is that we constantly try to crawl off the altar of surrender that Jesus secured for us, and try to climb right back onto the exhausting altar of performance that He came to save us from.
  - To choose to do so simply just does not make logical sense.

Given the massive weight of God's mercies in chapters 1-11:

## **Giving God your whole life isn't a radical or fanatical response; it is the only logical thing to do**

Paul has answered our first question, "**What is a Sacrifice of Living?**"

- a. It is a response to the Bible's Ultimate Plot Twist.
- b. It's a life lived for God as Our Acceptable Sacrifice.
- c. It's a reasonable Response to the "Unsearchable God"

So, the second question that is answered by these 2 verses is, "**how do we offer a sacrifice of living on our life's altar to God?**"

## **II. How Do We Offer a Sacrifice of Living (Rom. 12:2)**

It is one thing to *say* we are a living sacrifice while we are sitting in these pews on a Sunday morning, but it is another thing entirely to actually *offer* that sacrifice on a Tuesday afternoon at work or in school.

If the greatest challenge of a living sacrifice is our tendency to slowly crawl off the altar, then how do we stay on it instead?

Paul doesn't just give us the command and leave us to figure it out; he gives us the exact mechanics.

He shows us that staying on the altar requires a complete change in the fundamental

purpose for our lives.

## **A. We Transform the Purpose Our Works to Be for Worship of God Rather Than for Self (Rom. 12:2)**

Verse 1 tells us **what to do**; verse 2 tells us **how to do it**.

- Paul first says that we must resist the Mold: "**Do not be conformed**" is a command—an imperative to stop allowing the spirit of this present evil age to press you into its temporary, outward mold (schema).

**(Illustration)** "The brilliant translator J.B. Phillips paraphrased this half of the verse in a way that hits right at the reality of our daily lives. He translated it like this: '*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.*'"

Think about how a heavy industrial mold or a bench vise actually works. It operates by applying relentless, heavy pressure from the outside in. It takes a piece of raw material and squeezes it, presses it, and forces it until that material eventually surrenders and takes on the exact shape of the steel container.

The culture we live in is a massive, high-pressure mold. Every single day, this present evil age is applying external pressure to your life. Through the media we consume, the shifting morals of our society, and the constant outrage of the day, the world is actively trying to squeeze your opinions, your schedule, your family, and your fears into its exact shape. And if you just passively sit there, embrace it, and even pursue it, you will be crushed into conformity—trapped into its slavery. You will look exactly like the world and will be forced to serve it.

Paul is pleading with us to step out of that press. But here is the catch: you cannot survive the external squeezing of the world just by trying to push back with your own willpower, or by just polishing up your behavior on the outside. If your internal composition is soft, the mold of the world will always win.

To stop being squeezed into the world's form, you have to fundamentally change what you are made of on the inside. You have to undergo a complete internal transformation, becoming a material that is so deeply changed that the world can no longer bend you."

So then, Paul explains just how to begin that transformation of your internal nature, by the renewing of our minds.

## **B. We Accomplish that Transformation By the Renewing of Our Minds**

***"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."***

- This is renovation through the Word
- We are called to undergo a complete, inward transformation (metamorphosis).
- You cannot transform yourself; you must submit to the Holy Spirit's work by the renewing of your mind.

So, what is the tool that the Holy Spirit uses and how do we submit to God through them so that we can renew our mind?

- Scripture gives us the exact mechanism for this renewal: **The Word of God**.
  - Colossians 3:10, 16

**Colossians 3:10 NASB95**

<sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—

So...

**Colossians 3:16 NASB95**

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- Paul says the new self is "**renewed in knowledge**" by letting the "**word of Christ dwell in you richly.**"

**Ephesians 4:23 NASB95**

<sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

**Ephesians 5:26 NASB95**

<sup>26</sup> so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

- Paul says you are renewed in the spirit of your mind, sanctified by the cleansing of the washing of water with the word.
- These verses tell us that we cannot experience renewed minds without a steady, rich diet of the reading and learning about the Bible.

## **C. We Renew Our Minds For the Ultimate Purpose, so that Our Works Become True and Sustained Worship of Our Compassionate God**

- The Masterpiece (poiēma): Ephesians 2:10 says, "**For we are his workmanship [or masterpiece]...**"

- That word *poiēma* directly connects to the idea of metamorphosis (transformation) in Romans 12:2. You are being renovated into a completely new creation, from the inside out, never again to be compressed into the old mold, but breaking out of it to be freed to live in the beauty of what God intended for you.

**Illustrate:** Butterfly

- The Purpose of the Renovation in Ephesians: **"...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them,"** perfectly parallels Rom. 12:2 < proving **"what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."**
- You aren't renewing your mind just to be smarter or to win theological debates; you are being renovated so that:

**You can actually *do* the works of worship that God has already laid out for your everyday life (the hands, feet, and eyes we just talked about).**

But why should we want to do these works?

**"So that by them you may prove to yourself and others what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."**

If we stay on that altar of being a living sacrifice

**The result of a Word-renewed mind is clarity: A transformed life of good works proves and approves that God's will is—good, acceptable, and perfect, to yourself and to others around you.**

What Paul wrote here is the point of all Scripture — it is the crescendo of the whole Old Testament that leads all the way through the doxology of Romans 11 and as is stated by the prophet Micah.

**Micah 6:6–8 NASB95**

<sup>6</sup> With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? <sup>7</sup> Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

**Micah 6:6-8** is the perfect Old Testament shadow of Rom. 12:1-2. Micah asks: "*With what shall I come before the Lord?*" Should I bring thousands of rams? God's answer anticipates Paul: He doesn't want dead animals; He wants a lived-out faith (doing justice, loving mercy, walking humbly).

**Conclusion:** For thousands of years, the people of God brought dead sacrifices to a physical altar. They brought the blood of yearling calves and thousands of rams, bringing the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. But the grand narrative of Scripture—from the opening words of Genesis all the way through the magnificent doxology of Romans 11—declares a breathtaking reality: God Himself stepped in to accomplish the sovereign rescue of His creation.

And here, in Romans 12, we arrive at the grand hinge of redemptive history. The plot twists. Because the final sacrifice has been made, the altar has fundamentally changed.

God does not want another dead offering. He does not want a superficial religious performance. As the prophet Micah reminded us, God wants a lived-out faith—a life of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with Him. He wants your hands. He wants your feet. He wants your eyes. He wants your mind completely renovated by the washing of His Word.

The altar no longer demands the loss of life that is in the blood; it demands us to live the life that is in Jesus Christ. True worship isn't just a song we sing; it's a life we offer.

*(Transition)*

We have just seen that the only logical, reasonable response to the mercies of God is to climb onto the altar and become a living sacrifice. But I want to remind you of something crucial this morning: You and I can only be *living* sacrifices because Jesus Christ was willing to be the *dying* sacrifice, once for all.

Paul urged us by 'the mercies of God.'

Right here on this table, we have the visible reminders of those very mercies. The bread reminds us of His body, broken for our sin. The cup reminds us of His blood, shed to satisfy the wrath of God. He paid the debt we could not pay, so that we could live the life we otherwise could not have lived.

As the men come forward to share this table with you, let us take these elements not just as a ritual, but as a moment of profound, reasonable worship. As you prepare to hold the bread and the cup, ask yourself, 'Is my life currently on the altar for Him?'

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:28 "28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Take a few moments of silent prayer with the Lord, ask yourself—ask the Lord if your life is currently on the altar for Him.

