Let Us Be “Living Sacrifices”
Romans 12:1,2 (NKJV)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Romans the twelfth chapter. And let’s read verses 1, 2.

ROMANS 12:1,2 (NKJV)

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.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

PRAYER

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Introduction

ILLUSTRATION

Several years ago, cartoonist Ed Fisher released a cartoon that pictured a huge altar with many steps leading to the top; like the kind you might see in the ruins of the ancient Mayans in Central America.

At the top of the altar in this cartoon stood the priest with a sword in hand ready to perform the sacrifice. And down below there are these two guards dragging a noticeably reluctant young man up the steps to become the next sacrifice.

And the caption beneath the cartoon has one of the guards saying to the other, “The young people don’t seem to believe in anything these days.”
Perhaps that’s the image that comes to mind when you read what Paul says here in VERSE 1 about “presenting your body as a living sacrifice to God.”

Perhaps you think, “Why in the world would I want to do that? After all I give the LORD an hour or two of my time on Sundays, and I “plop down” a few bucks in the offering plate each week. But “presenting my body as a living sacrifice to God” seems to be taking Christianity to the “extreme.”

Unfortunately, this seems to be the thinking of a lot of Christians today. Many want to “set their own limits” and “draw their own boundary lines” as to how much of their lives they will commit to the Lord. They want discipleship to be on “their terms,” not the Lord’s terms.

This is certainly NOT the kind of Christianity Paul is calling us to here in ROMANS 12:1,2.

In these two short verses, Paul is describes the Christian life as the Lord intends for it to be lived.

In these two short verses, the apostle Paul answers two very important questions for us about this issue of being “A LIVING SACRIFICE.”

First of all, let’s consider..........

I. Why Should I Present Myself To God As A “Living Sacrifice? (v. 1)

Romans 12:1 (NKJV) 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.

1. Notice the tone Paul uses as he writes this verse. He doesn’t cajole or threaten or demand; he says, “I beseech you...........I beseech you.” In other words, “I am urging you to do this.” “I am encouraging you to do this.” TO DO WHAT?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, that you present your bodies A LIVING SACRIFICE.”
2. Now, what are THE MERCIDIES OF GOD that Paul is referring to? They are the mercies of God's forgiveness of our sins by what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

*By His mercy and grace God has saved us.
*By His mercy God has reconciled us unto Himself.
*By His mercy God has adopted us as His children.
*By His mercy God has made us join-heirs with Jesus Christ.
*By His mercy God has set us free from the penalty of our sins.
*By His mercy God has blessed us with the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

And it is upon the basis of GOD'S MERCIDIES that Paul “urges” us to “present our bodies as living sacrifices” to God.

3. The practice of “offering sacrifices” is something that is foreign to those of us who live in 21st century America. None of us has ever had the experience of bringing a bull, a calf, or a lamb to a worship service and throwing it upon the altar of sacrifice.

4. But the 1st Century believers who were the first to read Paul's letter, were very familiar with the practice of offering sacrifices; it was a normal part of their worship services.

Even the “pagan” religions of Paul's day offered “sacrifices” as part of their pagan rituals. Most offered animal sacrifices, but many of the more satanic and occultic religions offered babies or women as “human sacrifices” to their pagan gods.

5. Its possible some of the early Christians were a bit “taken back” by Paul's admonition to “present their bodies as living sacrifices,” until they understood what Paul meant.
6. Paul was reminding them that animal sacrifices were no longer necessary because Jesus Christ, “the perfect Lamb of God” became the final sacrifice for our sins once and for all when He gave His life on the cross.

And now, in light of God’s great mercy, God demands of us in return, that “we present our bodies as LIVING SACRIFICES.”

In other words, we no longer have to “bring” a sacrifice to worship, WE OURSELVES ARE THE SACRIFICE!

7. Jesus came to be our SUBSTITUTE! He came to be our SACRIFICE. He gave HIS LIFE to you and for you; and He wants you and me to TURN AROUND AND GIVE OUR LIVES BACK TO HIM. He wants YOU and He wants ME........that is the OFFERING He desires.

-He doesn’t just want your money! He wants YOU!
-He doesn’t just want your time! He wants YOU!
-He doesn’t just want your talents! He wants YOU!
-He doesn’t just want your Church attendance! He wants YOU!
-He doesn’t just want your Christian service! He wants YOU!

If He doesn’t have YOU, then your money, your time, your talents, your Church attendance and your Christian service don’t mean a thing to God!

8. Dr. Ray Pritchard once said, “The trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.”

I can identify with that, can’t you? Despite our best intentions we still sin and make mistakes. We promise our love and devotion to God and yet, still at times our hearts are drawn to the things of this world. We try to read our Bibles and spend time alone with God in prayer and yet we are often distracted by lesser things. We promise God we will try harder and do better, and yet we still fail over and over again.
And as a result, our Christian life is a lot like a roller coaster ride with lots of PEAKS and VALLEYS and HIGHS and LOWS.

But listen carefully! “Living sacrifices are NOT perfect sacrifices.” Only Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God was a PERFECT SACRIFICE.

Becoming a “living sacrifice” is not a one-time event! It is a life-long process of daily worshiping and serving and obeying God by dying to self and to be consumed by the flames of undying love for God.

9. Then you notice, Paul goes on in verse 1 to describe the type of offering you and I are to be. He says........

Romans 12:1b (NKJV) “......present your bodies as living sacrifices, HOLY and ACCEPTABLE to God.”

What Paul is saying is God wants us to demonstrate we are “wholly His” by living lives of HOLINESS! We don’t become HOLY by our own human effort; we become HOLY by totally dedicating our lives to GOD, allowing Him to separate us from the sinful and godless of this world.

10. Paul concludes this first verse by saying, “which is your reasonable service.” In other words, in light of GOD’S MERCIES ........in light of everything GOD has done for us.......is it unreasonable or unfair or unjust for GOD to demand that we give our lives back to Him in SERVICE and in SACRIFICE?

We all know the answer to that question, don’t we?

ILLUSTRATION

Queen Mary made it her practice to visit Scotland every year. She was so loved by the people there that she often mingled with them without any protective escort. One afternoon while walking with some children she traveled farther out into the country than she had planned. Dark clouds came up unexpectedly, so she stopped at a country home to borrow an umbrella. The queen assured the owner, “If you will lend me an umbrella, I will be sure to send it back to you tomorrow.”
The woman didn’t recognize the queen and she was reluctant to give this stranger her best umbrella; so she handed her an umbrella she intended to throw away. The fabric was torn in several places and one of the ribs was broken.

The next day, the woman heard a knock on her door. When she opened the door she was greeted by a Royal Guard who was holding in his hand the tattered umbrella. He said, “The Queen sent me to return your umbrella and to thank you for allowing her to use it.

When she closed the door, she broke down in tears. She said, “What an opportunity I missed. I didn’t give the Queen my very best.”

10. Brothers and sisters, one day you and I are going to stand before the King of all kings; the One who SACRIFICED His very life for you and me. Will we be guilty of giving Him the worthless “leftovers” of our lives? Oh, may we not cry out, “What an opportunity I missed. I didn’t give the King of all kings my very best!

(PAUSE)

WHY SHOULD YOU AND I PRESENT OURSELVES UNTO GOD AS LIVING SACRIFICES? BECAUSE OF THE MERCIES OF GOD TO SAVE US. But now the question is.............

II. How Do I Become A Living Sacrifice? (v.2)

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)  And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

1. In this second verse, Paul gives us very clear and practical instruction on how to be a living sacrifice.
First of all, Paul tells us..............

(A) What Not To Do

v.2a “And do NOT be conformed to this world........”

Paul is saying, “Don’t let the world press you into its mold.” “Don’t copy the sinful behavior and practices of this world.”

Sadly, one of the biggest criticisms of Christians these days is that it is getting harder and harder to tell the difference between Christians and non-Christians.

Now certainly, Christians are NOT perfect. We struggle with temptation every day just like everyone else. Sometimes we struggle with sin......sometimes we fail......sometimes we get discouraged......sometimes we do stupid things.

But when the world looks at us and they hear us professing our faith in GOD, and they see us engaging in the same sinful habits they engage in.......and using the same sinful language they use.......and going to the same sinful places they go to.......and acting in the same sinful ways they act, something is dreadfully wrong!

If the world can’t see any difference between US and THEM why would they ever want to become a Christian?

But on the other hand, when they see us trusting in GOD even in times of great adversity; and they see us loving each other and working alongside each other even when we disagree; and they see us fighting to preserve our marriages and our children; and they see us giving selflessly for the good of others; they can’t help but notice the difference Jesus Christ has made in our lives. They can't help but notice that we have presented our bodies to Christ as “living sacrifices.”
Secondly, Paul tells us............

(B) What To Do

v.2b “.....but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

I like the way the New Living Translation words it: “Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

The word Paul uses for “transformed” here the word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.” The word metamorphosis describes a radical transformation.

For example, when a caterpillar undergoes a metamorphosis it goes through a radical transformation from a worm into a caterpillar. Likewise a tadpole is “radically transformed” into a frog.

When Jesus was “transfigured” on the Mount, his appearance was radically transformed into radiant light.

You and I are radically transformed from the inside out by the power of GOD’S WORD. And this transformation is not a one-time event, it is a continual process.

You see, if you and I are contantly feeding our minds on worldly things, sinful things, and ungodly things, it “retards” our transformation.

But when we saturate our minds and fill our hearts with the word of GOD, God’s Holy Spirit transforms us by the renewing of our mind. We start to think more like Jesus thinks! We start to see the world more like Jesus sees it! We are “transformed” by the renewing of our minds.

So Paul tells us WHAT NOT TO DO, “do NOT be conformed to this world.” And he tells us WHAT TO DO, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”
Now thirdly, Paul tells us……

(C) What We Will Receive

v.2c “that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

One of the most frequent questions Christians asks is “How can I know the will of God for my life.” Paul is answering that for us in this second verse. If you and I will not conform to the evil ways of this world……and we will allow God to transform our thinking by the renewing of our mind, GOD PROMISES WE WILL KNOW HIS GOOD……ACCEPTABLE……AND PERFECT WILL.

How does God do this? One day at a time! When you and I “present our bodies to Him as living sacrifices” and we live each and every day to please Him, God reveals His will to us one day at a time.

CONCLUSION

Brother Jeff Callender tells this cute story of about his little daughter. He said, “A few days before Christmas, our 3 year old daughter was all caught up in the excitement of gifts and giving.

“One morning she was picking up, examining and shaking the packages trying to guess what was inside. In her excitement, she accidentally knocked a big red bow off one of the packages. She quickly reached down and picked it up off the floor. She put the big red bow on top of her head and with a twinkle in her eyes and a beaming smile on her face she said, “Look at me daddy, I'm a present!”

Every child of GOD should say to the heavenly Father, “I'm Your present.” In view of Your mercies, and all You have done for me, I present myself to You A LIVING SACRIFICE!

What shall I give to Christ today, To Him who gave Himself for me? I'll give to Him my life, my love-- For time and for eternity. --Anon.