

Theme: Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1-8 (EHV)

Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship.² Also, do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you test and approve what is the will of God—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.³ So by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you.⁴ For we have many members in one body, and not all the members have the same function.⁵ In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us. If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith.⁷ If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach.⁸ If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully.

If you are around my age and grew up in the '80s you probably remember the movie *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Now, I was only six years old back in 1984 when the movie came out, so I was definitely not allowed to see it when it came out in the theater, but I can remember all of the upper-grade students in my school talking about the movie, and in particular talking about this one really violent and gross scene. If you've seen the movie you probably know what scene I'm talking about. Without going into too much detail, it involved Indiana Jones observing the evil cult's high priest sacrificing a man by pulling his beating heart out of his chest and then lowering the man—somehow still alive and screaming—into the swirling lava pit. It's not a scene you easily forget, especially if you saw it as a child. (Coincidentally this scene was part of the reason for the creation of the PG-13 rating, since *Temple of Doom* had only been rated PG.)

So, when you heard me read Paul's words from v. 1 of our text for today, urging us to “**offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**” is that the type of imagery that popped into your head, some kind of “human sacrifice” that God is demanding? What on earth is Paul talking about then when he speaks of us being “**living sacrifices?**” Well, it obviously has nothing to do with some sort of terrifying human sacrifice ritual. But it does involve “living” and it does involve “sacrifice.”

Let's read the words of v. 1 again, “**Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to God—which is your appropriate worship**” (Romans 12:1).

What Paul is speaking about is living our lives, using the body God has given us in service to Him and for His glory. Paul not only tells us that this is “**pleasing to God,**” but that it is also “**appropriate worship.**” This means that our worship of God isn't just singing, preaching, and praying in church on Sundays, but actually takes place throughout the week. We can worship God by doing and saying things that are pleasing to Him. Whether it is doing our work to the best of our ability and to His glory, loving our spouse and family, caring for those in need, or yes, singing songs of praise to God, our entire lives can be filled with worship to God when what we do and say is done from a heart of faith and love toward God.

It is a “sacrifice” because it is a ‘giving up,’ an offering of something to our Savior in thankfulness for what He has done for us. We know that we can never fully repay Him for taking our sin and our guilt upon Himself on that cross, but what better way can we thank Him than by giving our whole life as an offering to Him?

How is this done? In what ways can we be **“living sacrifices”** to God? Paul explains this in our text as well. It starts with being **transformed** and **renewed** in our hearts and minds from worldly, selfish thinking, to thinking in God-pleasing ways. Paul writes in v. 2, **“Also, do not continue to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you test and approve what is the will of God—what is good, pleasing, and perfect.”**

The good news is that even though we cannot perform this transformation on our own (notice, Paul uses a passive here: **“be transformed”**), God can, and He has in you and me. The greatest miracle of all took place inside of you at your conversion when God brought you to faith in His Son Jesus through the saving message of the Gospel! A “new life” was created inside your heart and mine; a **“new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:24 ESV).

While we know that we’ve been **“transformed”** into Children of God through the blood of Christ and know that we have a **“new self”** of faith living inside of us, at the same time we also know that because we still have our sinful flesh clinging to us. As long as we are in this life there is a strong urge inside each one of us, no matter who we are, to be **“conformed to this world”** (v. 2). Therefore, we are in constant need of **“being transformed”**—that is, being spiritually renewed and refreshed each day.

The cleansing and renewing of our hearts and minds is found in the confession and forgiveness of our sins which we receive through Christ’s shed blood on the cross. Think of the words of the *Offertory* which we sing every Sunday after the sermon. They are taken from the words of **Psalm 51:10-12**, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me”** (NIV). David, the man who wrote this Psalm, knew where to turn for a **“new heart”** and a **“renewed, willing spirit”** and it wasn’t to himself, or even to others. He turned to His Savior to have **“the joy of his salvation”** restored. God is the heart changer! He is the life **“transformer”** and He has given you and I the ability to tap into that **“transforming”** power at any time!

He has given us His **“transforming”** Word, which points our hearts and minds to Jesus. Very simply, He is the key to true **“transformation.”** Not some Law-based, step-by-step “how to” program, but rather the Gospel of Jesus. The writer of **Hebrews** tells us, **“[look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2). Look to Jesus! Look to the One who **“authored,”** or created your faith. He is also the One who will **“perfect”** it on the Last Day when **“we shall be like Him”** (1 John 3:2) perfectly! Look to the One who **“endured the cross”** for you so that you might enjoy the glories of heaven with Him. Look to Jesus, the One who now sits on **“the throne of God”** and holds you safely in His powerful, loving arms and carries you through this life. Look to Jesus and see His great love for you! There, in His love, is where you’ll find heart-**“transforming”** and life-**transforming”** power!

Jesus’ love will inspire us to put God’s **“transforming”** power to use in our lives. Paul writes about some of those ways in the last verses of our text.

He reminds us that being a **transformed**, **“living sacrifice”** for Jesus means living **humbly**: **“So by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you”** (v. 3).

It also means **humbly** using the gifts God has given You in service to Him and to others. Paul reminds us in v. 5-8, **“In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us. If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith. ⁷If it is serving, then serve. If it is**

teaching, then teach. ⁸ If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully.”

What gifts has God given You? Notice that most of the gifts listed here aren't what we might consider “miraculous,” but they are incredibly important when it comes to building up the “**body of Christ**,” His church. “**Serving...teaching...encouraging...contributing...leadership...showing mercy.**” Even the gift of “**prophecy**,” which Paul mentions here, has at its root meaning refers to speaking God's Word. When we speak God's Word, Paul reminds us to “**do it in complete agreement with the faith**” (v. 6). In others words, in agreement with the rest of God's Word, since that is what our faith is based upon. These are gifts that the Lord has given and worked in many of us here today. He wants us to use them! Not just for your own good, but for the good of others and for His glory and as an act of worship to Him.

As “**living sacrifices**,” **transformed** and **renewed** by our Savior Himself, may we all daily, humbly offer our very lives in thankfulness to Jesus. As we will sing in our next hymn,

*Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.”*

*Take my will and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne. Amen (Hymn 783 v. 1, 5 LSB)*