

Scripture Reading:

Romans 12:1 “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. **3** For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. **4** For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, **5** so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. **6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; **7** or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; **8** he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **9** Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. **10** Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; **11** not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; **12** rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; **13** distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. **14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. **16** Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. **17** Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. **18** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

"Being Living Sacrifices"

We come this morning to the third message in our series on covenant renewal worship: We have considered how God calls us together with the call to worship and then how we are reminded of the Gospel, the Good News with a time of confession and absolution. We are then consecrated by God, nourished at His Communion Table & commissioned to serve in the world.

- This morning we will study the portion of the service we refer to as the consecration of God’s people.

This is perhaps the most familiar portion of the service, even if the word is not: The elements here are certainly the most universal among American churches today.

- In almost all contemporary services in Christian Churches; you will find singing, preaching, offerings and prayers being done each week.

Unlike consecration, we are familiar with the other terms we use for the elements⁴ of worship. We can relate to the “call to worship” because of mom calling us to dinner, or being called into work on your day off. We are familiar with confessing our sins & hearing the Good News and we certainly know that communion refers to the Lord’s Table! When we come to our commissioning it is easy to relate that task to the Great Commission.

- So what does it mean for God’s people to be consecrated?

It means more than just being holy or set apart: It means being changed and prepared for service:

- It means being the living sacrifices that the Apostle Paul commands us to be in our text!

Again I would remind us that this review of our worship comes at a good time following our journey through the Book of Acts; where we learned that the Holy Spirit is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

- We know that He will do this through the Church and that the Church is made up of various parts who all have their roles to play, as Paul described in detail in our morning text: The “many members in one body.”
- To be effective in the Kingdom we must be consecrated so we are prepared to be God’s instruments.

We could think of a few examples from the world to better understand the importance of all of this:

We will be blessed with some beautiful music this Christmas season which our talented members will begin practicing this afternoon.

- How beautiful would the Christmas concert be if they did not have written music to follow & spend any time practicing together?

Last week we talked of sports teams or military units with their need to show up on time, prepared for the contest: But being prepared involves getting the training & practice they need as a team.

- The bottom line is that we are consecrated in the worship service to prepare us to better serve God’s Kingdom in the various callings we have throughout the week!

We see this clearly as the Apostle Paul moves on in our text: After reminding us that we are all members of the Body of Christ, Paul then tells us to use the gifts that God has given us and then he makes it very personal and practical beginning at verse nine: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

Now IF we are honest, NONE of that comes naturally to us as children of Adam: The old nature is still with us. We would rather be loving ourselves, focusing on our happiness, avoiding tribulation and letting everyone else fend for themselves.

- That was certainly reflected in the election results here in California and much of the nation this past week!
- If the Holy Spirit is going to use us for His work, we need to be changed and that is what consecration is all about!

However, Paul starts not with the examples of practice or training that I have used above, but with a very strong Biblical picture: Sacrifice.

- He calls on us to be living sacrifices.

The God who created all there is in six days could fix everything in short order if He chose to do so...

- But we know from the Scriptures that He is going to use us as the Body of Christ!
- Those redeemed sinners who Jesus came to save and empower!
- What we need to remember and understand is just how difficult that task really is!

It is what happens here during our time of consecration that is critical and very practical: It is here where we become the living sacrifices the Apostle Paul commands us to be.

I will not have time in this single sermon to fully explain or illustrate how the many sacrifices in the Old Testament inform us about this time...

- But I hope that I can at least get you to see a bit more of what is given to us in the Old Testament and would commend the Book of Hebrews for your further study.

There are three major sacrifices that establish the pattern we see in our Covenant Renewal Worship... The writer of Hebrews goes to GREAT length to explain how all of this relates to the work of Jesus & how we CANNOT go back to the animal sacrifices now that Jesus has fulfilled them all...

- To put it simply, all of the Old Testament worship pointed forward to what Jesus would do and all New Testament worship celebrates and applies what Jesus has done!

The first major sacrifice was the sin offering: Here the focus was on the death of the animal and blood. This is remembered during our time of confession where we hear the Good News that Jesus has paid the price for our sins as THE sacrificial Lamb and that we are now forgiven!

- The second major offering was the burnt offering or what should more accurately be called the Ascension Offering.

The focus here was not on the death of the animal or its destruction, but rather on its transformation. The priests were given meticulous instructions about how the animal was to be brought near to God, properly divided and placed on the altar at which point it is transformed into smoke:

- Smoke taken up into the glory cloud of God as a sweet savor.

The final offering is the peace offering which is where the Saint who is forgiven and changed can now sit and enjoy a meal with God:

- We will focus on this next week with communion.

To properly understand the importance of consecration this week, we must be sure that we do not confuse the first two offerings. There is NO forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood and no one may attend the marriage feast without the proper wedding garment as we learned last week. When we come to the ascension offering, the animal's death was not the focus, but rather how it was changed:

- Thus forgiveness of our sins is not the end of the matter when God moves to renew covenant with us as His people.

Jesus has paid the price for our sins and has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven which the tabernacle and temple were modeled after...

- Something discussed at great length in Hebrews.
- There in chapter four we see the Word of God as a sharp doubled edged sword that could divide between the bone and the marrow. The image of sacrifices and the Priest's knife would certainly have come to mind to these Jewish readers.

[& to us IF we know the Old Testament!]

Let me read just one of the many descriptions of these sacrifices:

Leviticus 8:18 "Then [Moses] brought the ram as the burnt offering [or ascension offering]. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, 19 and Moses killed it. Then he sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. 20 And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. 21 Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was an [ascension] sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to Jehovah, as Jehovah had commanded Moses.

- What changes those animals in these Ascension sacrifices?
The knife & the fire...
Picturing the Word & the Spirit!

- **With all of that in mind let's consider what is done during this time of consecration in the covenant renewal worship service.**

As we saw last week, following the declaration of the Good News we join with the hosts of heaven in singing the praises of our great God. In Revelation chapter five we are told that we sing a new song to the lamb: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe & language & people & nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

We continue our consecration by reading a portion of Scripture in unison or responsively... But this is not just an academic class room like what we might find at a University or even a good Seminary. Here in the midst of God's renewal of His covenant, the Holy Spirit is going to use His Sword, the Word of God, to properly prepare us to be a sweet smelling savor before our Holy God and to serve in His Kingdom: In a word, we will be changed.

- **I guess this is the point this week where we must again ask if we REALLY believe that this is what is happening to us?**
- **IF we do, it will transform how we sing, how we read or listen, how we pray and how we give!**

Always remembering that we are NOT mere spectators...

- **Rather we are participants in worship!**
- **Singing, reading, listening, learning, giving and praying.**

Some churches follow a lexicon of Biblical readings so all of the Bible is read over a three year period during this portion of the worship service.

- **We have chosen to focus on key passages that are instructive to the Saints and critical in our battle with the world today:**

For example we read the Law of God and the account of Creation on a regular basis as we did this morning. These are critical portions of God's Word for today's great battles.

- **Then we sing a song of response and I read the morning text and preach the sermon.**

This is perhaps the easiest place for some to slip into thinking they are just spectators... Nothing could be further from the truth IF we really do believe that the Holy Spirit is with us using the Word of God to reorder and change us!

- **This is the practical portion of the service not because I include the appropriate applications in my sermon but because we believe that the Spirit uses all of the message to transform us!**

This is truly where we are filled with the Spirit, or slain in the Spirit or moved by the Spirit: Experiences many charismatic churches often try to achieve in other ways today.

- **We believe that it is through God's Word that the Spirit does His most extensive work to prepare us, to consecrate us for God's service in this world.**

This is again an important place for the instruction of our children:

Not only in terms of what they will hear and understand, but in their learning to be attentive & participating. Edith Schaeffer would often draw illustrations with her children and grandchildren to help them focus and understand what was being said:

- **It can be as simple as training children to keep their attention focused on the pastor during this time of instruction.**

You will be amazed at how much even our young children will learn and we also try to keep them engaged with illustrations and/or questions they can understand... This is important because it also teaches the adults some of those critical lessons! Obviously, many in our modern age are shocked to see our children present in the worship service... Especially a service that includes a thirty to forty minute sermon!

It is important because we really DO believe they are in covenant with God & members of the Body of Christ, their obedience reflects proper training from their parents!

- **The rest of us learn lessons about patience as parents deal with the times of testing that always come!**

It always amazes me to see how many folks who don't think children can handle such things, have no problem taking them to a theater for a two hour movie! [*& expect them to be quiet with no bathroom breaks*] And of course, here again, we must be the ones setting the good example as their parents or as their sponsors!

After the sermon we continue our consecration with a song of response and then read a passage of Scripture together focused on the importance of tithing and giving.

- **Many churches downplay the offering not wanting to appear too materialistic and thus remove a very practical and important part of our consecration.**
- **This is not something we focus on because God needs the money!**
- **The giving of our tithe reminds us that ALL our increase comes from God's hand!**
- **The giving of special offerings reminds us that we are part of the Body of Christ & have an obligation to help those in need.**

God blesses us with material things so that we can use them for the advance of His Kingdom!

It is much the same when we come to our time of prayer: We are not praying so that God will get the latest update on what is happening here at Church of the King or come to realize that we have needs...

- **We are praying because we are commanded to come before His throne boldly and learn to realize that the prayers of the Saints are a delight to God!**

In the New Testament both our gifts of money and our prayers are seen as extensions of the Old Testament sacrifices that pointed to the finished work of Jesus...

- **They are pictured as sweet-smelling savors which go up before God, like the smoke from those ascension offerings...**

Philippians 4:16 "For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."

- **Our prayers also ascend:**

Revelation 8:3 "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake."

- **A powerful picture!**
- **One that should remind us of the importance of our prayers and why we should be praying along!**

With both giving and praying, we as adults again set the example for our children to follow:

- **Do they see us as faithful and cheerful givers who are training them to be and do the same?**
- **Do they see us as faithful prayer warriors who are teaching them to be the same?**

So what does all of this mean? What are we teaching and passing along to the generations to come?

I have made the case that this is the practical part of the service...

- **But how is it practical, what happens to us, what do we learn & how do we become properly equipped?**
- **Understanding our ascension and worship of God with our singing gives us the right focus for all of life, learning as Paul declared to the Greeks at Athens, "In Him we move and have our being!"**
- **Our readings from the Scriptures and listening to the sermon brings knowledge & wisdom.**

Here we learn the right ideas & lessons about how we are to live as those who trust & obey, those who love Jesus & keep His commandments...

- **We simply can't do that if we don't know what they are!**

Tithes & offerings put a focus on our wealth, great or small, and our needs...

- **The practical stuff of life that is often ignored in 'spiritual' circles!**

With the giving of our tithes & offerings in our time of consecration, we learn that God loves to bless His people and gives us the wealth and ability to serve in His Kingdom.

- **And finally our time of prayer reminds us where our true source of power lies as the God who made heaven and earth receives and hears our prayers and our lives as a sweet smelling aroma!**
- **Right worship gives us a right focus for all of life...**
- **Singing the new song keeps our eyes on Jesus**
- **God's Word gives us knowledge & wisdom**
- **Tithes & Offerings remind us that wealth is a gift from God**
- **In prayer we see that true power comes only from the very throne of God...**

We must remember the importance of all of this as we obey each week the Apostle's command that we began with this morning:

"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."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 96:

"1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. 3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. 4 For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. 6 Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength. 8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.""