

Subject: *A Living Sacrifice*

Scripture: *Romans 12:1-2*

After eleven chapters of teaching about what God has given believers, Paul now reminds believers of what they need to give God. The key to Christian living is not trying to get more from God, but in giving all we have and all we are to Him. God gave Himself for us so that we might give ourselves to Him.

One of the main themes in the Bible is sacrifice. From Genesis to Revelation there is the scarlet thread of redemption. It begins in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned. They hid from God because of sin and shame, even though they made fig leaves as a covering. But God shed the life of an innocent animal and made them a covering of animal skins. This was the first sacrifice for sin. Then we read about the sacrifice of Abel and the altar of Abraham. We read about the Passover lamb, the Day of Atonement, and the whole sacrificial system of Israel in the Old Testament and continuing into the New Testament.

When Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist introduced Him as “the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). In Revelation we read about the heavenly scene: “Worthy is the lamb that was slain.” Christ’s sacrifice for sin is one of the main themes in Scripture.

- 1) The black thread of sin and judgment
- 2) The golden thread of God’s glory and grace
- 3) The scarlet thread of sacrifice and redemption

As Paul begins the second main part of this letter to the Romans, he speaks about another kind of sacrifice. This is not a sacrifice for sins, but the sacrifice that believers offer of their lives in response to God’s sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Some people think the Christian life is all about what we get, but it’s actually about what we give. What are the elements of this sacrifice?

1. We offer a grateful sacrifice

This sacrifice is not out of sense of obligation or duty, but out of sense of gratitude and privilege. Paul begins in verse 1 with the word “beseech” (urge), not a command. It is the idea of exhorting or encouraging. It is related to the word “Comforter” used of the Holy Spirit, “one called along to help or encourage us.”

This sacrifice is based on “the mercies of God.” God’s mercies refer to all the blessings that Paul has mentioned in Romans 1-11. God’s mercies include His love and grace. The mercies of God are in the power of salvation, and reality of justification, sanctification, and glorification. His mercies include His righteousness imputed to us by faith. His mercies include reconciliation, eternal life, and eternal security. His mercies include faith (mentioned 30 times in Romans 1-11), peace, and hope. His mercies involve being a part of God’s eternal purpose (Rom. 8:29-30), being His heirs, and sharing in His glory.

We tend to think of the time and energy and resources we give to Christ as great sacrifices, but actually they are very small in comparison to the mercies of God. The primary motivation for faithful obedience and worship is not the threat of God’s discipline or the loss of rewards, but an overwhelming sense of gratitude for God’s abundant mercies.

2. We offer a personal sacrifice

This is a call for every believer to present his life as a sacrifice. In Bible times the priests offered sacrifices for the people, but now every believer is a priest offering himself. Nobody can do that for you. This is a personal sacrifice. Christ died for you personally and now it is your privilege to offer yourself to Him in return. This personal sacrifice involves the soul, the body, the mind, and the will. Paul assumes they have already made a sacrifice of their soul in salvation (“brethren”).

When Christ was on earth He said, “Whoever will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.” It was a call to personal sacrifice. He said, “Whoever will save his life will lose it, but whoever loses His life for my sake, will save it.” It was a call to personal sacrifice.

3. We offer a living sacrifice

In old times God’s people offered the sacrifices of dead animals, but now we offer our lives daily to God. It is a day-by-day sacrifice of our will to His will. In a sense we must die to self and offer ourselves to God. As a living sacrifice we yield ourselves to God and lay our lives on the altar in submission to His will and purpose. We understand that our lives belong to Him.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* ²⁰ *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

4. We offer a holy sacrifice

As we present ourselves daily to God, it is as an act of worship. Our lives are a holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. Our lives are reserved for God’s sacred purpose. Worship is not something we do on Sunday only; it is a way of life.

5. We offer a reasonable sacrifice

The word “reasonable” comes from a word that means logical. In light of what God has done for us, this is the only kind of life that makes sense. This is what Isaac Watts had in mind when he wrote that great hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my life, my soul, my all.*

In this first verse of Romans 12, Paul gets at the heart of Christian living. It’s all about sacrifice. That is the very thing many people forget or something they want to avoid if possible. They will serve the Lord and worship the Lord, as long as it’s convenient and comfortable, but don’t expect them to make any sacrifice. And some churches are trying to make it easy, and they present a message that may include Christ’s sacrifice for us, but leaves out the part about our sacrifice for Christ. It costs something to be a Christian. In fact, it costs everything. It costs your whole life.

If you are not willing to offer your life as a sacrifice to God, it may be that you have never understood or accepted His sacrifice for you.