



+ **YOU**

Spring 2024
Being an Authentic Church

Sermon Title: Authentic Worship

To be used with Session 1: Built on Christ

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

Connection with Bible Study: To complement the Bible study “Built on Christ,” this sermon will expand upon Peter’s reference to “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet. 2:5). The admonition for Christ followers to offer up spiritual sacrifices is a recurring theme in the New Testament, with the most complete statement of it coming from the apostle Paul in Romans 12.

Introduction: The sheer magnitude of Paul’s words beggars the imagination. “Present your bodies as a *living* sacrifice” (v. 1, emphasis added). Paul clearly intended that his readers (both then and now) make the vital connection with the Old Testament sacrificial system. The significance of the Old Testament levitical laws must not be minimized in our contemporary minds. For God’s covenant people Israel, nothing could be more sacrosanct in their worship of Yahweh. More vital still should be the connection Paul assumed his readers would also make with the cross of Jesus. His sacrifice is of supreme significance to us (Heb. 10:9-13). It is upon that foundational event—the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ—that each of us must daily offer our entire being as “living sacrifices.”

Paul’s subject in these two verses is authentic worship which he defined in the broadest possible sense. “This” (i.e., the offering of your entire being as a living sacrifice), Paul declared, “is your true worship” (v. 1). An authentic church consists of authentic worshipers, and this authentic worship requires an all-on-the-altar sacrifice of body, mind, and will.

1. The motivation for authentic worship is the mercies of God in salvation (Rom. 12:1a).

The “mercies of God” in salvation serves not only as a spiritual enabler for authentic worship but also as a strong motivator; and Paul’s point concerns the latter. So, what is it that should compel the believer to make such a sacrifice as Paul described? What is the only valid motivation for us to place everything we are, have, and hope to have on the altar before the Lord? Paul answered, “In view of the mercies of God (which he details in the preceding eleven chapters), I urge you (*parakaleō*, I plead with you) to present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (v. 1). There could not be a more potent motive for authentic worship.

2. The participants of authentic worship are all-on-the-altar Christians (Rom. 12:1b).

Paul deliberately used the technical terminology of the Old Testament sacrificial system to describe the actions of authentic worshippers of God.

- a. Like in the Old Testament, our sacrifice is a once-and-for-all decisive act. (“Present” is in the aorist tense.) When God’s people in the Old Testament presented their sacrifice to be offered to God, they gave up all further claims to what they offered. Similarly, our

sacrifice is tantamount to saying, “Lord, I place myself—all that I am, all that I can do, all that I have and hope to have—on the altar, relinquishing all claims to personal ownership.”

- b. Unlike in the Old Testament, ours is a “living” (present participle), perpetual sacrifice. When Jesus predicted Peter’s denial, Peter strongly objected, “Lord, I’m ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:31-34). It is ironic that Peter was willing to be a dead sacrifice but not a living one; and his subsequent denial proved it.
- c. Unlike the Old Testament, the priest and the sacrifice are one in the same. As believer-priests (1 Peter 2:5) we present our own bodies to the Lord, which is our “true worship.” F. F. Bruce noted, “The sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices, but in giving one’s own.”¹

3. The practice of authentic worship is a transforming life (Rom. 12:2).

In verse 2, Paul discussed the practice of authentic worship. Simply put, we are to stop masquerading as the heathens we once were. (Paul used the strong Greek negative *mā*.) It is not natural for a believer to conform outwardly to this world. Instead, we must continually let our outward expression of life reflect who and what we are now in Christ (i.e., “holy and pleasing to God”).

This practice of authentic worship brings us in line with the will of God, which is “good, pleasing, and perfect.” God’s will is for us to place our lives on the altar as living sacrifices to Him, and rather than continue to conform to the kind of persons we once were apart from Christ, we are to yield continually to the transforming, renewing power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works in us to make our lives expressions of who we now are in Christ.

Conclusion: If Paul had lived in 1875, Frances Havergal’s *Take My Life and Let It Be* would have been one of his favorite hymns. Havergal wrote, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Take my moments and my days . . . my hands . . . my feet . . . my voice . . . my lips . . . my silver and my gold . . . my intellect . . . my will . . . my heart . . . [and] my love. Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.” I believe Paul would say, “This is your true worship.”

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¹F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 2nd ed., in *The New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 213.