

Micah 6:1-8 New International Version (NIV)

Listen to what the LORD says:

“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.

²“Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.

For the LORD has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.

³“My people, what have I done to you?
How have I burdened you? Answer me.

⁴I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.

I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.

⁵My people, remember
what Balak king of Moab plotted
and what Balaam son of Beor answered.

Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

Romans 12:1-8

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

PRAY..

Introduction:

When reading scripture and we see the word "Therefore", we need to pause and ask, "What is it there for?" In other words, what has been previously read/said/heard, is linked to what follows. In chapters 1-11 Paul has developed his theology of salvation. He explains in great detail, the "mercies of God" mentioned here in verse 1. So it is on the basis of the generous, undeserved grace and mercy of God found in the life, redeeming death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, that Paul NOW goes on to say all that comes next, in the remaining chapters of his letter to the church in Rome.

Briefly, I want to recap what Paul has said in the previous chapters, regarding what constitutes the "mercies of God".

The "mercies of God" include but are not limited to:

1--Freedom from sin (Romans 6:16-18)

2--The gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23)

3--Peace with God (Romans 5:1)

4--Access to the Grace of God, and to God himself (Romans 5:2)

5--Salvation from judgement (Romans 5:9)

Now, on the basis of this reality--God's generous love and grace expressed in Jesus Christ--we, who are the undeserving recipients of these gifts--will want to live our lives as expressions of our gratitude for all that God has accomplished for us in JC!

Today our focus is on what it means to give our lives as "living sacrifices" and to consider the transformation that Paul calls for.

In the Midwest, there is a "new" accommodation available to travelers. Named "Subterra Castle", it has multiple apartments with full kitchens, bathrooms and fireplaces. This so called "underground mansion" is actually...a converted nuclear missile silo! The missile of course, has been decommissioned and removed, but for a price, you can stay in the remodeled, *transformed*, underground silo!

What is a "living sacrifice"? Sounds like an oxymoron to me.

In ancient Judaism, the sacrificial system demanded the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb, in order to "cover" or atone for the sin of the people. The priest, through the laying on of his hands, would in effect, transfer the sins of the people onto the lamb, by placing his hands on the head of the so called sacrificial lamb. Then the lamb was sacrificed--it died--in order to satisfy the judgement of God and to atone for the people's sins.

Now however, Christ has satisfied this debt once and for all through his death on the cross. So we no longer offer sacrifices in the way the Jews once did. But, a "**living sacrifice**" doesn't make sense, unless we think of it as "living sacrificially".

In the OT passage from the Prophet Micah, mention is made of sacrifice—of burnt offerings of calves or rams, or even rivers of olive oil. This, because there were offerings of "first fruits" at harvest time, in gratitude to God for the good harvest. But what does God desire?? None of these. What God desires most of all is changed behavior: to do what is good, "To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with y/our God." (Micah 6:8)

Now most of us enjoy our creature comforts. We are blessed to have not only our basic needs met, but far more. So to live sacrificially means being willing to "lay down our lives" in service, out of gratitude for all that God has done for us.

God created us--body, mind and spirit. We are designed for relationships with God and one another. We are made in God's image. We cannot

separate our souls or spiritual selves, our mind/intellect, from our bodies. They are all integrated, all of a piece.

Now to the original recipients of this letter--particularly those influenced by Greek philosophy—would likely be appalled by Paul's teaching. Why? They viewed the human body as an embarrassing encumbrance. The soul was trapped in the body, as if in a tomb. Physicality was negative but necessary. But here Paul teaches that by offering our bodies--the whole of ourselves to God in worship (and later, in service)--God is pleased. God does *not* want *just part of us*--just our souls or spirits. God wants *ALL of us*--our minds and bodies and spirits/souls as well--*our whole selves!*

Paul reminds the Corinthians (I Cor. 6:19-20) and us of this truth:

"¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

About two centuries ago, during a "missionary meeting" in a Scottish church, the ushers began to pass the offering plates. They were interrupted by young Bobbie, who asked if one plate could be placed on the floor. Then he stepped into it, announcing: "I shall give myself to God; I have nothing else to give." Little Bobbie grew up, and as an adult, Robert Moffatt (1795-1883) became a missionary, laboring for over fifty years, sharing the Gospel, and translating the Bible, on the continent of Africa.

The giving of ourselves to God—body, mind, and spirit—is an expression of our gratitude for the amazing "mercies" which God has lavished upon those who believe!

Next, Paul calls us to transformation. Now how many of you have ever tried to change something about your life? Think about that change you wanted to make. Were you successful? Maybe you wanted to get up earlier or read more, or exercise more and eat less.

Change is hard. We live in a society where we are not good with delayed gratification; we want instant results. However, no matter what the commercials tell you, they often promote falsehoods. It is not true that you can have a new smile "in one day." You cannot have your body transformed by plastic surgery or diet, or exercise or any combination of these—in a day or a week or even a month.

Transformation is a process and that process takes time. And, it all begins in our minds!

A couple of years ago an online company called Lumosity, advertised its website of games and brain-training exercises, promising rapid improvements in general intelligence by using their online products. They were sued and forced to settle with the US Federal Trade Commission, for making unsupported claims that it's products were scientifically validated. They were not. (Jeffrey M. Zacks, "Getting Smarter", AEON 6-14-16)

The point? We are always on the look out for quick fixes and instant solutions to whatever issues we are dealing with: addictions of all kinds, health issues, sleep or sleeplessness, weight loss or gain, physical fitness, relationships, and so on.

This paraphrase captures Paul's intent:

"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within,[so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all God's demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity."] (J.B. Phillips, paraphrase)

"Metamorphosis" is actually the word Paul uses (in the Greek) here for "transformation". And Paul says transformation begins in our minds because *how we think* and *what we think*, matters to God.

None of us--regardless of our age--are immune from social pressure to conform to the culture around us. This takes various forms today, through media there is pressure to conform in how we dress, the cars we drive, the food we eat (or don't eat), the personal care products we use, and so on.

Years ago, a pioneering television show called Candid Camera, became the first of what is now called "reality TV show." A hidden camera would capture the reactions of regular people in various situations. In one episode, an unsuspecting person boarded an elevator and naturally, turned to face the door. Then three actors entered the elevator and faced the rear. A hidden camera captured the angst of the first person. To turn or not to turn? Then a fourth actor entered the elevator, and like the other actors, faced the rear. In no time, the original elevator rider, turned to face the back wall. Now that portrays the impact of peer pressure! (Mark Batterson, Play the Man, p. 144-45.)

Paul warns of mindless conformity--just going with the flow. That's easier isn't it, than swimming upstream, against the current? Paul says God offers us inner transformation through the re-shaping or re-molding of our minds. How does that work? Paul doesn't spell it out here, however it is an inner work of the Holy Spirit. The theological word for this ongoing process is "Sanctification"!

How are we to understand "sanctification"? Frederick Buechner says this: "In Beauty and the Beast, it is only when the Beast discovers that Beauty really loves him, in all his ugliness, that he himself actually becomes beautiful...."

Similarly when we discover that God really loves us, in all the unloveliness of our sin, does the transforming, inner work of the Holy Spirit really begin...little by little... When the forgiven become forgivers, when the healed become healers, when the loved become lovers...when we begin to resemble the One who saves us, *then* we know we are becoming "sanctified."

(Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC, p. 85-86, modified by LMC)

Specifically, Paul teaches in I Corinthians 2:6-16 that the Holy Spirit ... searches all things, even the deep things of God. (v.10) In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that ..." we have the mind of Christ." (v.16)

What is to be our focus? In his letter to the church in Phillipi, Paul says:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

It is evident that many of these qualities are lacking in our society today. In fact, there is an abundance of the opposite of most of these in our culture right now--falsehood (vs. truth), lack of dignity (noble/nobility), lawlessness (right), impurity (purity), repulsiveness (loveliness), detestable (admirable), mediocrity (excellence) or disrespectability (praise-worthy-ness). Paul says focus on these positive qualities, not the negative ones!

A quick search on Amazon for "self-help/transformation" reveals 50,000 books available for purchase, on that topic alone! I'm sure that many of them are commendable. However, lasting change is not easy, and it must come from the inside out!

By letting God's Holy Spirit have its way within us, and by making conscious choices that reflect God's will, *we can influence others toward godly living, as opposed to being indistinguishable from the culture.*

For example, *consider the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat.*

A thermometer *merely reflects or measures* the current temperature in the air surrounding it. In that way, it "conforms".

In contrast, a thermostat has the ability to influence the temperature. The person who controls the thermostat, if you will, has the possibility of transforming or changing the climate or temperature in a particular situation.

Likewise, thoughtful Christians who are led by God's Spirit will live and behave in ways that are often contrary to our culture, by expressing ourselves in ways that reflect God's character and desires. *We can be those who influence others vs. our being shaped by and conformed to the surrounding culture.*

Sometimes we despair at ever seeing real change. Pedro Reyes, an artist from Mexico City, decided to do something positive. In 2008 he transformed weapons of destruction by melting down 1,527 pistols and reshaping them into shovels, used to plant 1,527 trees. This project called "Palas por Pistolas" or "Pistols to Shovels" was about transforming weapons intended for destruction, and transforming them into "objects of creation." In 2016 he took 6,700 guns that were turned in to or seized by police in the drug wars in Ciudad Juarez, and transformed them into musical instruments!

Friends, God wants to do something significant in your life and mine : Transformation!

But this transformation is not about your effort or mine as much as is about our gratitude and the Holy Spirit. It is about finding ourselves so deeply loved and forgiven, that we can begin to love and forgive others.

It is about "living sacrificially" and allowing God to transform how we *think* about ourselves and the gifts of grace that God has given...and the fact that there is more than enough to share with others...

"Living sacrificially" is about transforming how we think and how we behave.

"Living sacrificially" is about "improving our serve"!

Pray with me...

Holy Spirit come! Love us, forgive us, change our hearts, transform our minds from the inside out...so that we will "live sacrificially" for you and for our neighbors....

