

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: "Living Sacrifices"

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:1-2

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Isn't it sad when Christians are exactly like everybody else? They profess with their mouths that Jesus has saved them and changed them, but there is zero difference between their lives and the lives of others. What's really sad about it is that the lack of difference whispers to a hopeless world that they really don't need Jesus. After all, he can't really change you that much because we're the exact same.

But where should the difference lie? Everybody has to eat, drink, sleep, drive, work, love, laugh, wear clothes, communicate, etc. So, on some level, there won't be any difference between unbelievers and followers of Jesus, and that's fine. This just means that the some of this isn't about participation in certain actions, but some of it is about attitude, heart, and motive. For example, while noble, the Amish community has completely separated themselves from the outside world, and they have created their own bubble to live in. This can't be what Jesus and the New Testament writers are talking about.

So, we have to figure out, in what ways are believers called to be distinct and unique? We all know that light and darkness aren't the same, but both realities have to occupy the same space for you to observe and articulate the differences. So, how should we live in the world and with the world but not play by its rules? What should it look like for these differences to take shape in us? It's questions like these that Paul is bumping up against in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, this is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here, Paul is calling his friends to a special kind of life. And he's using strong and pregnant language to do so. When he uses the term "living sacrifice," he's suggesting so many different things:

1. This is a phrase that encapsulates how a Christian's life should be described after they understand the mercy of God in the gospel (12:1). Paul continues to talk about this through Romans 12-16.
2. Paul is careful with his language. He says to offer your bodies (plural noun) as a living sacrifice (singular noun). And in doing this, he's reminding the Romans of their continued need for unity.
3. This is an allusion to the Old Testament sacrificial system. In the OT, an Israelite would bring God the best of their flocks as a sacrifice, and the sacrifice would be pleasing to God. And doing this cost the worshipper something (their best livestock).

4. In 12:2, Paul gives two descriptors of living sacrifices. They should be conformed to this present, passing world; and they should be transformed by having their thinking continually shaped by the gospel. This is how living sacrifices should function.

And if we take our time, and consider well what Paul is saying, he helps us answer our questions about why Christians look like everybody else, and what should be done about it. The simple answer is that we should be living sacrifices. But this is also complex and difficult. Why?

Living sacrifices should be known for their gracious non-conformity, their normal abnormality, and their humble transformation *because of* and *for* Jesus.

Sadly, heeding this call is often just too hard for us so we just settle for looking like everybody else, and sometimes that slips into mindless compliance with the way the system does things because that's just easier and it doesn't cost us anything. But if truly grasp the mercy extended to us in the gospel, we will see that whatever it costs to passionately follow Jesus is worth it. Living sacrifices aren't after cultural decency, popularity, fame, broader networks, bigger houses, or faster cars. Living sacrifices are supposed to lay down their lives for others to know God. They are called to dying and living in such a way that God is pleased, and the gospel is seen as awesome.

And there's only one real reason why we're called to live this way, and this reason includes and gives life to every other little reason. We should be living sacrifices because because Jesus is the supreme living sacrifice for us. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world He has taken our rebellion, our pride, our guilt, and our victimization into himself at the cross. But his sacrificial death wasn't the end of his story. He rose again as the perfect sign that God's new world had invaded this passing, present age. He is the consummate place where all the mercies of God are on display. He lived in the world, but didn't conform to its ways. Rather, he came to bring lasting transformation to a fractured, lost world. He was the living sacrifice *in* the world so that he would be the living sacrifice *for* the world.

And now he wants us follow in his tracks - to be living sacrifices *in* and *for* the world. He wants us to reflect him by trusting him and obeying him. And again, no matter what it costs, it's worth it.

For Discussion:

1. Where in your life are you attempting to be on spiritual autopilot?
2. Personally, what stood out to you most about this message?
3. Who is someone that you know who rightly fleshes out these ideas of being a living sacrifice?
4. In what ways are you unwilling to make sacrifices to more intentionally pursue Jesus?
5. How in your life have you seen God's mercy on display?
6. In what ways do you feel yourself tempted to conform to the world's way of doing things?