

September 12, 2021 - David Baumgartner

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Preacher: David Baumgartner

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Well, good morning, everyone. God is good. And all the time. Amen.

We're going to be continuing our study in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. If you'd please turn with me to Romans chapter 12. This morning, we're actually turning a corner in our study of Romans.

Paul has blessed the church of Rome with 11 chapters of doctrine. This is a propositional truth. Truths that we can live by.

Now, at this point, as in all his letters, he's going to be moving into what's some practical application. And this morning, we're only going to be looking at two verses.

But I think that you'll find them very familiar verses. Perhaps some of you have even memorized them. So let's go ahead and read in chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

[1:10] Paul says, I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Heavenly Father, we are so glad to be here today to delve once again into your holy word. Lord, you have allowed us this privilege. This is your word, Lord, to us.

And we're so grateful that we can study your word freely and just delve right into it. We thank you, Father, for all that you do for us. You are such a merciful God and great is your faithfulness to us. So please open this word to us, Lord, and that you'd be glorified in our midst. In Jesus' name, amen. There's a short story that's told by Elizabeth Elliot.

[2:20] Now, this is not in the Bible, but it's a good story. One day, Jesus was with his 12 disciples and he says to them, pick up a stone and follow me.

And so Peter, he begins to grumble, you know, what am I doing this for? And Jesus kind of senses that and so he says, do it for me, Peter. So they all pick up stones and Peter, he picks up this tiny little pebble.

And so they go for a walk. And so after a little bit, Jesus says to his 12 disciples, okay, now it's time for lunch.

He waves his hand and he turns all of those stones into pieces of bread. Delicious, toasted, buttery bread.

And what's Peter got? Well, Andrew and James, you know, others, you know, they've got these great loaves of bread. Peter's got this little, like a crouton. And so, you know, he's kind of grumbling some more.

[3:23] Say, okay, Jesus says, okay, lunch is over. Pick up 12 stones and follow me. So Peter, at this point, he says, I got this now.

I know what Jesus is going to do. I got it figured out. And so they go and he picks up the largest stone that he could find. He could barely carry the thing. And so they go for this long walk and they come to this body of water.

Jesus says, okay, throw your stones into the water. And so they do that. Kapoosh. Peter's kind of going, okay, where's my bread?

There's no bread. And Jesus looks at him and he says, Peter, for whom are you carrying that stone? Are you doing it for me? Are you doing it because of something that you're going to get?

I really like that story because, for one thing, it's easy to pick on Peter. And he's not here, so I think that we can freely do that. But the other reason is that I think it asks a really good question is, why do we serve the Lord?

[4:32] Why do we worship God? It's a good question. In our text this morning, as we read it, we notice here that Paul says that believers are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.

So right away in our text here, we sense that this passage is about worship. Your spiritual service of worship, he says.

Now, we know, as we've studied worship before, that includes many things, right? I mean, we can worship God in many ways through praise, through our thanksgiving. We can also worship God through our giving.

We can worship God through the deeds of service that we do others. But, friends, I'd like to make this proposition here that above all, above all of those things, prayer, praise, giving, acts of service, there is one act that is supreme.

And that's for the worshiper to offer himself as a living sacrifice. I believe that's the central concept of this section that we just read.

[5:39] Being a living sacrifice. And that's the primary sacrifice that we're to offer, I believe, is ourselves. You might want to ask this question.

When the people, when the original readers heard about this, what would they have thought? How would they have understood what Paul was talking about? Well, for one thing, we know that everybody knew that a sacrifice involves something being put to death.

Right? I mean, you've got the Jews and you've got the Old Testament sacrificial system. But even the Gentiles, you know, you hear about how they would sacrifice to their own gods.

Maybe the god of Dagon, you know, or something like that. It called for a death. But what about a living sacrifice? Well, a living sacrifice describes the spiritual state of believers.

Those who believe are alive in God, in Christ Jesus. Look with me back in Romans 6.11. Or look on your handout. Paul says, even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but what?

[6:52] Alive to God in Christ Jesus. So this message here, this passage is for our church family, friends. That's who it's for.

And I believe that there's four elements or four parts that we can see here regarding a living sacrifice. If you look with me in your handout, how do we become a living sacrifice?

Well, first of all, it implies that our soul has already been given to God. So we must first believe in Christ Jesus for salvation.

Notice here, he says, I urge you who? Brethren. He's talking here to his church family. This call to offer ourselves, it's not something that can be done just by anybody.

No, this only applies to believers. Those who have been regenerated. You may recall early in Romans, Paul was talking about unbelievers.

[7:57] And he says in Romans 8, verses 7 and 8, he says that the mind set on the flesh, he's talking about unbelievers, is hostile towards God. For it does not subject itself to the law of God.

For it is not even, get this, not even able to do so. For those who are in the flesh cannot please God. That tells us regeneration comes first.

In fact, in order to appreciate all of God's mercies, we have to have the spiritual eyes to see them, to appreciate them. In other words, we must be regenerated.

The psalmist in Psalm 116 asked this question, Lord, what shall I render to you for all your benefits? Paul gives us the answer here. The first one is this. Place your faith in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, what must we do? We must give our bodies to the Lord. Give your body to God. Look with me.

[9:03] He goes on. Present your bodies. A living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Notice here he uses this verb here, to present.

We're to present our bodies. That the verb form of that word, present here, that comes from the concept of bringing something before another person's presence.

And here it's actually a technical term for the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. When the worshiper would yield up or give up or offer up a sacrifice, the worshiper would place the animal before the altar there, and the animal would be killed, and the entire animal would be burned up. And that's because it symbolized that it belonged to God. All of it. The offerer could not reclaim some of it later for himself. And this ought to remind us that sacrifices are costly, aren't they? They're a whole animal. And I think it's intended to be that way. But here's this question here. What does it mean to offer the body as a living sacrifice?

[10:21] You ever wondered that? Well, first, a living sacrifice is one that remains alive. When the animals were sacrificed in the Old Testament, that was a one-time deal.

But God wants us to be a perpetual offering. That's even in the tense of the word here. A perpetual sacrifice. You might want to ask this question.

Why does God want our bodies? Why does He want that? Well, first of all, we know that we're temples of the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that God made our bodies.

And in this time frame, for now, we have the privilege of being His ambassadors. And you think about that. We're His hands. We're His feet.

We're His voice. Our bodies are to be for Him. Paul would say in his letter to the Corinthians, he says in chapter 6, all things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.

[11:26] All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet, the body is not for immorality.

It is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. What an amazing thing to think about our bodies that way.

The Lord is for our body, and our bodies are for the Lord. Isn't it amazing how much power that our bodies have over us in terms of just maybe perhaps hindering the work of the Spirit in our lives? In that same letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about, I buffet my body to make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

What's he talking about there? He's talking about just how the control or the lack thereof of our bodies for immorality.

[12:38] We have all heard about well-known Christians who did not keep their bodies in subjection and how it affects the church. It affects people.

Paul would say again in that letter, in chapter 6 to the Corinthians, flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

For you have been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body. God wants our bodies. He wants bodies that are holy, if you see in the text there. That means set apart for God. You may recall the animal sacrifices. What were they? They weren't supposed to have any blemishes.

[13:41] They're not only holy, but acceptable, well-pleasing to God. Paul said this earlier in Romans, in chapter 6. He says, Do not let sin reign in what?

Your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts. And do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves as those, here we go, alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

So, we need to believe in Christ, to trust Him unto salvation. Secondly, He wants our bodies.

You believe that? Yeah, He says it. Thirdly, we must give God our minds. Give God our minds.

Look with me, verse 2. Paul says, Do not be conformed to this world. Just to stop right here for a second. We all know there's a connection between what a person thinks and what a person does, right?

[14:53] Yeah, there is. That word there, conformed, it's actually from where we get the word schematic. It literally means here to be stamped, to let someone's mind to be molded, like a piece of metal would be.

Do not be conformed to what? This world. Now, the world here is not cosmos. No, rather, it's talking about the present age. And it's talking about the speculations, the opinions, the hopes, the aims,

the aspirations of the world.

It's talking about the way the world thinks. And so, to conform to this present age is talking about embracing and thinking, embracing the thinking patterns of this present evil age.

That's what it's talking about. Now, John says in his first epistle, we know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

So, if we conform our minds to this world, what is that going to look like? Yeah. Yeah, we know.

[16:13] Do you ever notice how the world is trying to squeeze us into its mold? You notice that? Literally, TV programs, especially, perhaps radio.

I was listening to a guy named Votie Bachman. Bachman. Do you guys ever listen to him? Yeah, great speaker. He's talking about this book by Marshall Kirk.

The title of the book is called After the Ball, Strategies to Get America to Accept Homosexuality.

And in this book, this guy identifies three strategies how to get America to accept homosexuality.

The first one is this. You desensitize the culture. In other words, you get people used to seeing it all over the place.

You bombard the media. You normalize homosexuality. So much so that you just get used to seeing it every program, every night, every program, every night.

[17:20] You just get to seeing it. Secondly, not only is there desensitizing, there's secondly, you jam. Jamming. You get people to associate the other view, like straightness.

You get them to associate straightness with negative things, like the KKK, or maybe the Nazis, you know, Adolf Hitler, or something like that. And so the plot of the story will be, look how narrow-minded these people are who would be for straightness.

Look at how hurtful they are. And then the third thing is conversion. And that's where you actually get people to identify gays as an aggrieved minority.

And so, you know, the public opinion becomes, we gotta do something. We gotta do something to help these poor people out. And if you don't, you'll get canceled. That's the strategy, friends, of making, getting us molded into the way the world thinks.

How does that go with Scripture? Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their minds, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.

[18:53] Those are our marching orders. So, literally, we should stop allowing ourselves to be molded by the world. What should we do instead?

Well, look with me, verse 2. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That word there, you've heard this word before, metamorphosis, the butterfly that comes from the cocoon.

The idea here is making your outward appearance match what's already inside. That same word was actually used to describe Jesus.

In Matthew 17, it says that he was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his garments became as white as light. What we're told here is that we can either be conformed to the world or we can be transformed by the Lord.

Both of these words are passive. Passive tense. And so the question is which one will we allow?

Paul would say in his letter to the church at Colossae, put on the new self which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created them.

[20:15] So, this is one reason why we get together so that we can use the scriptures and the work of the spirit, our fellowship to help us to be transformed into God's image.

Interacting with God's word. Thirdly, we must prefer God's will over our own. Notice he says that you may prove what the will of God is.

That word there prove is just talking about drawing a conclusion about the value of something. In this case, he's talking about preferring God's will over our own.

And friends, this requires faith, doesn't it? It sure does. Faith is like a muscle. It needs to be exercised. You may have heard this phrase that God is my co-pilot.

No, he's not. God ought to be the pilot. You're the co-pilot. How are we doing in this? How are you doing in it?

[21:30] Here's a test. We all have our days planned out when we wake up in the morning, right? And then sometimes there's a curveball thrown at us.

An unplanned event. How do we react then? No, God knows about these things. And maybe that curveball was thrown your way just so that you'll learn to trust him more.

Hopefully, over the course of our lives, we will trust the Lord more and more. Would you want that? Yeah, I do too. I believe Paul is speaking from experience here.

I really do. Because once we learn to prefer God's will over our own will, we will find God's will to be good. Notice here, verse 2, good, acceptable, perfect, good.

Good. Do you remember how earlier in Romans how the world is trying to invert what is good? How the world is saying that things that are good are evil, but the things that are evil, the world says good?

[22:38] No. Good from what the Lord says. It's good in itself. Good for us. Good in the scriptures. It's acceptable. In other words, it's pleasing to God.

Think about a parent. If you're a parent, what do you want from your children? You want obedience. You want something. You want your will because it's right.

You're watching out for them. It's what he wants. And it's perfect. That means complete. There's nothing that can be added to it. And so, more and more, we want to give up what we want and instead prefer what the Lord wants.

Lord, I want what you want, not what I want. What a target to live under, friends. What a goal to make that your goal. And this isn't done just once.

The tense of the word suggests that we do that all the time. So you summarize these four things. The supreme act of worship to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

[23:43] We need to be a believer. We need to give him our bodies. We need to give him our minds. We need to prefer his will over our own.

Have you noticed here that Paul says, I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God? You know, it's really fascinating here.

Verse one is not a command. It is not an imperative. No, it's a plea. Paul is begging his group here. He's saying, I plead with you. Do this. And that's because Paul didn't want to command his readers here because it's an attitude of worship.

How we present ourselves or herself to God is crucial. It's an attitude of worship. The truth is, no one can force us to worship.

[24:43] You can't. It only comes from God. And so I'd like to look at some of the reasons behind Paul's urging here. I find two of them.

Notice he says, therefore. Did you catch that? In other words, in consideration of all the mercies that God has revealed in these past 11 chapters.

Now, normally, when we think of mercy, we think about not receiving the penalties that we deserve. But the word here is actually a different word.

It's the word here that would be concern over other people's misfortune. Maybe some of your Bibles has the word compassion. Mercies, plural that is, of God, refers to all the kindness that God has extended toward humanity.

How has God been kind to humanity? Have you ever thought about that? How has he been kind to believers? Maybe you've heard people say, what has God done for me?

[25:54] Wow. I went through all of these 11 chapters. Here's what believers have been given from the Lord. Chapter 1.

Hold on. Buckle your seatbelts. Chapter 1. We're given grace, apostleship, peace, righteousness.

Chapter 2. God's kindness, forbearance, patience, glory, honor.

Chapter 3. Righteousness, justification, redemption. Chapter 4. Hope, promises from God. Chapter 5. We're preserved by God.

We're loved by God. We're given the Holy Spirit. We're saved from the wrath of God. Chapter 6. We walk in newness of life, are given eternal life. We receive teaching.

We are given freedom from sin. Chapter 7. We're given joy. Chapter 8. There's no condemnation. We're adopted. We're children of God.

[26:54] We're heirs of God. We're fellow heirs of Christ Jesus. We are overwhelmingly conquerors. Nothing can separate us. Chapter 10. We're given faith.

Chapter 11. We're grafted into that olive tree. I'm sure I missed many things here. But by the end of chapter 11, is it any wonder how Paul was so caught up in these blessings that he broke into what Frank talked about last week?

This doxology? This spontaneous praise to God? Do you remember the first time you realized God's mercy in your life?

Yeah, I see a lot of you shaking your head. It's probably when you first realized how Jesus paid for your sins and thereby placing you in a righteous standing before Almighty God.

surely all of this ought to lead us to say how can we say thanks to God? What shall we render to Him?

[28:08] He gave us the answer. Offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Secondly, it's a reasonable response. Look with me here.

He says in verse 1, which is your spiritual service of worship. Spiritual, that word there, that's from where we get the word logic.

It's talking about something that's intelligent, reasonable, but in a spiritual sense. Service of worship here is actually one word and it was actually used earlier in Romans chapter 9, verse 4, used of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, referring to the temple services.

Here's the main point. God deals with us as both rational creatures, but also as spiritual beings. And just consider, friends, Jesus gave His life for us.

He became a dying sacrifice so that you and I could become living sacrifices for Him. It's the only reasonable thing that we can do.

[29:18] and let us show our appreciation. Let us give ourselves as an acknowledgement of all of these things here. All we are, all we have, all that we can do is for the Lord.

I'd like to end here with a story that's told in 2 Kings. 2 Kings, we're told about this series of miracles that were performed by the prophet Elisha.

And in chapter 4, there's this account of this Shumanite woman. And oftentimes, Elisha and his servant would walk by this Shumanite woman.

And just, here's the thing, just merely by walking by this woman, she could detect that there's something different about that guy. How amazing that is.

And so she asks her husband, husband, would you build a little room for this guy so that when he comes by he can stay here and be refreshed?

[30:31] And so the husband did that. And eventually, Elisha performed some miracles for her and her husband. For one, Elisha gave them was the Lord, but through Elisha gave him a son, and then later on brought the son back to life.

The main point here is that there's something about his presence that, that, that it may, perhaps it was his demeanor that showed that he was different.

There was something about him that made him different. And I just wonder this question here, what are people saying about you and me when we walk by?

Is it enough for people to say, boy, that person's really different? The way we carry ourselves, maybe the way they hear, what they hear when we speak, maybe the way we treat our spouse. Believers, consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31:40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.