

Romans 12 (Part 1): 1 - Living Sacrifices

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Romans chapter 12. Are you there? These 2 verses, the first 2 verses of the chapter have been called the introduction to the remainder of Paul's letter to the Romans. I also read one particular commentator, no pressure or anything, for someone like me. But he said that these were the 2 most powerful and important verses in all of the Bible. I'm not sure about that. But it sure made me feel weird trying to communicate them to you. There is so much here.

We're going to read the first 2 verses and then I'm probably only going to get through verse 1 just because of the power and magnitude of what is actually being shared here by the apostle Paul. But it says in verse 1 of chapter 12,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 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." (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word. We believe in the power of Your Word. We believe that it is living and active and sharper than any double edged sword. And we ask You, Lord God, to use it in our lives today, to guide us, to direct us, and to increase us in understanding and wisdom. And Lord, as we often and should always pray, please help us to apply the wisdom of the Word to our lives so that we would be not just hearers, but also doers of the Word. Jesus name we pray, amen.

What great verses, offer yourselves as living sacrifices. This last Friday, I got an opportunity to fill in for Mike Case, who's been out with some health issues lately. Pray for him if you think about it. But Mike leads our Friday morning men's Bible study that meets at the same time as Women of the Word, 9:30 on Fridays. But since he was out, I got a chance to fill in for him. And we had a great time of discussion.

And I was sharing with the guys that when I was about 15 years old, I prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior. But I told them that it took about another 10 years for me to get around to inviting Him to be my Lord. And when I shared that, a couple of other guys mentioned that it was the same for them.

And this is a phenomenon that I believe can happen with many people. We come to a place in our lives where we recognize our need of a savior. We recognize our sin. We know that our sin has separated us from God. And we make a choice to do something about that. We say, you know what? I need a savior, and Jesus, I invite You to be my Savior. And that's all good, and fine, and wonderful, and great.

But many times, as in the case of myself and maybe some of you as well, there is a period of time where we live that life of Jesus as Savior. But we have not yet invited Him to be the Lord of our lives. Meaning, that we have not yet given Him that freedom to call the shots. In other words, we've still got our hands firmly on the steering wheel of our lives.

And that was my life, between ages like 15 and 25. I prayed, but I didn't pray for direction. I didn't pray for wisdom. I didn't pray over my life decisions. What I usually did is, I spent about 10 to 15 seconds praying right before I fell asleep and just thanking Him for dying for me on the cross. Because, I was impacted at the age of 15 with the fact that He had died for me on the cross. And I was really impacted.

I remember hearing for the first time at that age that He was forsaken for me. And I was impressed by that and moved by that and I was grateful. I was grateful for what He had done. But that's all I ever prayed. I was just said, Thank You. Thank You, Lord, for dying for me on the cross. Pretty cool of You. I'm really glad that You did it and that my sins are forgiven. And I knew that my sins were forgiven.

But when it came to my life... Oh, I was totally in charge. At least I thought I was. And I never prayed about my decisions and so forth, because Paul was in charge. Right? And that's just the way it was. Took, as I said, about 10 years later and some pretty colossal failures in my life to bring me to a place of recognizing that there's good reason for me to also now make Him Lord.

I didn't really understand that reason before. There was reason to make Him Savior. I didn't really have any reason to make Him Lord, because things were going okay. And I thought they were going fine. And I just was cruising on

through my life. But eventually I began the process of bending my knee and declaring Him to be worthy of being Lord of my life.

And by the way, I'll tell you that process continues to this day. It's not a once-for-all invitation that we give to the Lord, to be Lord of our lives, but it does have to begin at some particular point in our lives. And I do not believe that just because you have made Jesus your Savior, that it automatically follows that you have made Him your Lord. Right?

Usually we need something to happen in our lives to open our eyes. And for me it was the colossal failure of my marriage, particularly. Praise God! I'm still married to the same woman. But my marriage failed nonetheless. And failed miserably. And that was what it took in my life to show me that I was a really, really, bad lord, small l of my own life.

Now for others it could have taken something else in your life. I wish that I could have just been reading my Bible and seeing all the reasons that are given in the Scripture for making Jesus Lord. And I would have looked at those and went, wow, He deserves to be Lord of my life. I'm going to make Him Lord. I really wish I could have done that, but I didn't.

It took like a 2x4 across the head to get my attention. And to really draw me out of this deception that somehow I was worthy of leading my own life. And calling the shots in my own life. And there are verses in the Bible that cause us to... Well, I don't know if they cause us to recognize but they ought to cause us to recognize that crowning Jesus, Lord is a good thing to do. But often we don't hear them.

We don't hear them. We see them but we don't really hear them. And we're happy making Him Savior, Jesus, I'm so thankful You are my Savior. And now I'm going to go on and I'm going to live my life. And do it my way. Because you see making Him Lord is the same as making Him Savior, in the sense that it's an act of the will.

I had to recognize that I needed Him as Savior, to make Him Savior. Then I had to, later on, recognize that I needed Him as Lord, to make Him Lord. But that was an act of my will that had to take place. I had to put it forward and say, I need this.

I want to show you a couple of passages that speak of this setting of our will, act of the will. And the first one is in 1 Peter chapter 3. Look at this on the screen. Peter writes and says,

1 Peter 3:00 (ESV)

In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord.

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That's a great verse. But who's he writing to? He's writing to Christians. He's not writing to unbelievers. Okay? What does he say to Christians? Hey guys, he says, in your heart, make sure Jesus, is Lord. Make sure you've set Him apart as Lord. That's a message to Christians. Isn't that amazing?

Let me show you another one from James 4:7. It says,

James 4:7 (ESV)

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

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That is what it means to make Him Lord. It's an act of submitting the will, the life, to Him as Lord. But again, James is writing to believers. Not to unbelievers. And to those believers, he says, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*"

There is biblical proof to show us that this is an act of the will that Christians have to go through. And here's the question that obviously I want to ask for everyone in this room and everyone within the sound of my voice. We have people watching today live on the internet, and so forth.

Here's the question: Have you discovered yet a reason to make Him Lord? I'm assuming right here that you've discovered a reason to make Him your Savior. But have you determined... Have you figured out yet why it's a good idea to make Him, the Lord of your life? And that's an important question for us all to ask.

And Paul begins Romans chapter 12, by essentially appealing to us to do that very thing. To make Him Lord of our lives. He's going to use different words to do it. I might not have picked these words, but the words say it just the same.

He begins by saying, first of all, "*I appeal to you..., brothers...*" Now that word, appeal is very important. An appeal is something you make to someone, or a group of people, to get them to listen to your side of the story so that they will make a decision based on your appeal.

When we were raising our kids— when they were little, we gave them an appeal process. When they got a little bit older. If we told them that we wanted them to do something or whatever, they could come back and they could appeal. And we allowed them to do that because otherwise you just make your kids really frustrated and angry.

Frankly, when a parent says, because I said so..., it doesn't really work very well. It's fun to say, but... And so we gave our kids the ability to appeal. Didn't mean we accepted their appeal, necessarily. But we did listen.

But that appeal process is one in which you argue your case to get the person to come over to your side of thinking. Paul begins this section it says, "*I appeal to you.*" Now your Bible might have a different word if you have a different translation. It could be, "*I urge you.*" But it speaks of that very sort of a thing where Paul is telling you and I, to listen to reason, and then make a choice based on an act of the will. All right.

And what is he telling us to do? I appeal to you to do, what? Well, he goes on to say, "*to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,...*" I don't know if that sounds to you like an exhortation to give your life to the Lordship of Jesus, but it is. It's very much that sort of a statement. He's telling you, I appeal to you brothers to give your lives to Jesus completely. But he uses sacrificial language to do that. And we'll talk about that in just a moment.

But this is interesting sort of sacrificial language, because it's different from Old Testament sacrifices. In the Old Testament, when you brought a sacrifice to the Lord, it was always... It was like an animal. Or it was maybe a grain offering, or a drink offering, or something like that. But it was always something outside of you. It wasn't you that you brought as an offering.

But in the New Testament Paul says, here's what I want you to do. I want you to bring 'yourself. That's very different in terms of a sacrificial offering. Don't bring an animal. Don't bring food. Don't bring drink. Bring you. Bring you. And put yourself on the altar.

Now, there's one interesting thing about all the things that were put on the altar, particularly animals, in the Old Testament. They all ended up dead. Every single animal that was brought to the altar of sacrifice had something in common with all the others. They died. And their lives were laid on the altar as a sacrifice, a stand-in, sort of temporarily of the worshiper.

But this is different. You are now on the altar, but you don't die. That's the second really interesting thing about this sacrifice. First of all, it's you. And second of all, you don't die. But you are very much alive on the altar to continue to live your life to the Lord. And the imagery here is unmistakable. Paul is calling you and I, to completely give our lives to Jesus. To surrender to Him, and to say, I'm Yours, do with me as You will.

But remember something I said just a little bit ago. Most people need a reason to do that. And if you don't really feel like you have a reason to do it, you're probably not going to do it. I mean, Paul can say all day long, hey, I appeal to you, I urge you. Give your life to the Lord, and to His total Lordship. But if you don't see a reason to do that, you're going to go, okay. Yeah, thanks for that. That's good. And then just move on.

And we do that, don't we? We hear all kinds of things in the Word of God. But we don't really have a bucket to put it in. There's no place to really file that in our lives. Where do you file that exhortation? Give your life to Jesus. Well, it's got to be filed under a reason to do it. Do you...Have you yet found in your life a reason to give your life to Jesus Christ?

Well, Paul's going to give you several reasons here from the Word. Look again, in verse 1 with me. This is as far as we're going to get today. So, here we go. The first word we looked at was, appeal. The second word I want you to look at, is the reason or the beginning of some of the reasons that Paul is going to give you for giving your life to Jesus.

He says again, "*I appeal to you therefore...*" You guys remember your grammar? How many of you slept through grammar? I did. Yeah. But I have actually, learned more about grammar since getting out of high school, than I did when I was in high school. I was a terrible student, much to the chagrin of my father, who was the Superintendent. But that's true. But I was a lousy student.

But I've learned that the word words like, therefore, it's an adverb. And it's a connecting word that connects a current statement with a past action or information. And the current statement is give your life to the Lord, surrender to His Lordship. In the words, offer yourselves as living sacrifices. But the previous...

What it's connecting is, the previous 11 chapters. Paul is saying, "*therefore,*" and you remember that little rule, whenever you see the word therefore, you've got to stop and ask yourself: What is it there for? And it is there to direct you

and I, back to everything Paul has said up to this point. He has told us so many incredible things about our salvation. And now he says, based on that information, or therefore, give your lives to God. Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice. Right? Therefore.

Do you remember some of the things that he brought out in those 11 chapters? And they're all reasons for why you and I, should give our lives completely to God. Let me put some up on the screen here for you. This is beginning. Okay, here's a good reason:

Because you are FREE from the penalty of sin

Because you're (now) FREE from the penalty of sin.

There's a good reason to give your life to the Lord. Secondly:

Because you are FREE from the penalty of sin
Because you are FREE from the power of sin

Because you're free from the power of sin, not just the penalty, but also the power of sin to control your life.

Here's something else he said to us:

Because you are FREE from the penalty of sin
Because you are FREE from the power of sin
Because you are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit

Because you're now indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

You should give your life to the LORD;

Because you are FREE from the penalty of sin
Because you are FREE from the power of sin
Because you are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit
Because you are now sons and daughters by adoption

Because you are now sons and daughters by adoption.

You should also give your life to the LORD,

Because you are FREE from the penalty of sin
Because you are FREE from the power of sin
Because you are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit
Because you are now sons and daughters by adoption
Because you are now eternally linked with Christ

Because you are now eternally linked with Christ.

How about this:

Because you are the elect of God, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son

Because you are the elect of God, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Here's another reason:

Because you are the elect of God, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
Because you're beyond all possibility of condemnation

Because you're beyond all possibility of condemnation. Remember that one?

Here's another one:

Because you are the elect of God, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
Because you're beyond all possibility of condemnation
Because no charge can ever be laid against you that God will entertain

Because no charge can ever be laid against you that God will entertain

Or:

Because you are the elect of God, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
Because you're beyond all possibility of condemnation
Because no charge can ever be laid against you that God will entertain
Because there's nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus

Because there's nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What Paul is saying, in light of all these statements that I've made from Romans chapter one through Romans chapter 11. In light of all that, based on all that, give your life to God. Give your life to Jesus. Surrender it to Him. Lay it at His feet. Do it this way, offer yourself as a living sacrifice. And that's the language he uses.

And then, without missing a beat, Paul goes on in this very verse to give us 2 more reasons to lay down our lives. The first one is, he says, it's holy and acceptable. And then the second thing he tells us is, it's our spiritual act of worship.

What does it mean when Paul says that laying down your life to God, offering up that sacrifice of you is holy and acceptable to God? That's an interesting thing. Holy simply means set apart. It means it's special. Your life is for a special purpose. And when you give it to God, it's a holy thing. But it's also acceptable. Your life given to God is an acceptable sacrifice.

We don't really have a great appreciation for what it means to offer up an acceptable sacrifice till you read through the Old Testament and you find out how people offered up unacceptable sacrifices. Right?

It starts way back in Genesis chapter 4 when Cain and Abel offer their sacrifices to God. And Abel's sacrifice, you remember the Lord accepted. But Cain's was not accepted. (Genesis 4:4-5)

And then you go through into the history of Israel, and you find out that there are many times throughout the course of their history where God said, I don't accept your sacrifices. And He told them why. Because they were doing it as religious practice, but their hearts weren't in it. They weren't truly worshiping God. They weren't living their lives for God. And therefore, their sacrifice was unacceptable. Well, when you understand what the Old Testament says about acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices, this statement gains a lot more meaning for you and I.

When you offer you as a living sacrifice, it's holy, but it's also acceptable. Why is it acceptable? What made it acceptable? Let me show you the explanation or the answer to that from 1 Peter. It says,

1 Peter 2:4-5 (NIV84)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As you come to him, the living Stone rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, (look at this) offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (and then the last three words) through Jesus Christ.

Guys, do you understand how important those 3 words are? You're... The offering of yourself to God is acceptable to God because it's offered through Jesus Christ. It's offered and that means through His blood, through His sacrifice on the cross.

Guys, do you understand something? And this is very important. An unbeliever or someone who has not received Christ as Savior, they can't offer themselves to God. It would be unacceptable, because the offering is unacceptable apart from the cleansing work of Jesus on the cross.

Have you ever read in the Old Testament and wondered why God was so picky with sacrifices? I mean, He told them when they would bring an animal sacrifice, He'd say, listen, if the animal has a deformity, or if the animal has a blemish, or a spot, or a wound, or something like that, don't offer that animal as a sacrifice. Only offer an animal that is without spot or blemish. Right? Why? Because only that is acceptable.

Why is it acceptable? Because it's a picture of the sacrifice that you and I, would offer under the New Covenant when through the blood of Jesus Christ, we would offer ourselves. Guys, do you understand? You are offering yourself without spot or blemish? You might say, well, wait a minute, pastor Paul, you don't know my life. My life is full of spots and blemishes. I get that. That's the way you see yourself.

But do you understand how God sees you? Do you understand He sees you as cleansed. He sees you as innocent. You have been acquitted in His sight and through His blood. You have been purified. That's pretty good news. And that's why you are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is a sacrifice made through Him. Very important thing.

But there's another reason that he gives here, of why we should do it. He said,

*...it is HOLY and ACCEPTABLE to God; and
...it is your spiritual worship.*

John 4:24 (ESV)

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

...it is (actually) your spiritual worship.

The NIV actually says, *"your spiritual act of worship."*

Wow, what's that all about? To offer yourself as a sacrifice is spiritual worship. Here's a passage to look at John 4. Remember that meeting that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman by the well? And He talked to her about worship. And He said to her,

*...it is HOLY and ACCEPTABLE to God; and
...it is your spiritual worship.*

John 4:24 (ESV)

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

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There must be a spiritual element, an aspect to our worship or, it's not genuine worship. Worship is of the spirit. Worship is in the spirit. And we go, wow, what is that all about? Paul tells you what it's all about. It's offering yourself.

You want to be the most spiritual person you can be in the offering of these sacrifices to God. Offer yourself. Give God yourself. He's waiting for you to give Him permission to be the Lord of your life. And when you do that, Paul says, that is your spiritual worship.

Isn't that amazing? Think about all the things that we consider to be worship. When we talk about worship, I went to church and we worship today as a body. And what are we talking about when we say we worshiped God? Oh, we're talking about the worship team. We're talking about the music they played. We're talking about maybe some of the specific lyrics that somebody will say, oh, I just love that one song that we did today. It's just it's just so good. And it just really helps me to worship God. I love those lyrics..., or something like that.

For some people it isn't worship, unless you close your eyes. For others, it isn't worship unless you raise your hands; or just a hand. You go to some churches and it's not worship unless you get up and move around. You ever been to a church that dances? I have. Interesting. There's nothing wrong, essentially.

I've been to churches where you're not worshiping God unless you shout. I mean, they take very seriously that Scripture that says, shout to the Lord. And they do it. And some churches hand out little percussion instruments on the way in, when people are coming in. And if you don't use those, you haven't worshipped God. I mean, people come with all kinds of stuff. Hey, if you don't fall down on the ground during the song service, you haven't worshipped God.

Some people... I mean, I'm looking at one side of the equation. Then you get on the other side of the equation. Some people haven't worshiped God unless they've been in a quiet, dark, little place, with candles lit and listening to liturgical, responsive, worship music. That sort of thing or whatever. To them that's worship.

Guess what guys? None of that is worship. None of it. Worship... Those are vehicles that we use to worship. Music is not worship. If it was, then the Beatles would be worshiping God. Music is a vehicle that can be used for people to enter into worship. Raising your hands can be an expression of worship. But it is not worship itself.

You can come to church, sing the songs, raise your hands, close your eyes, shout, dance, jump up and down, and fall on the ground, and you have not worshiped God at all. Because worship is, at its core, spiritual. The essence of it is spirit. It is not fleshly. It is not carnal. It is not something you can hear with your ears, or touch with your hands, or see with your eyes. It happens in here. (Pastor Paul places hand over his heart.)

And Paul tells you, that one such expression of spiritual worship is when you invite Jesus Christ, to be the Lord of your life by saying to Him, I offer myself to You today as a living sacrifice. I give myself to You. That's spiritual worship. You want your worship to mean something when this music starts, and the lyrics are being sung, and the lights go down, and people are raising hands? Then add this to your process, Jesus, I am Yours. And you have begun to truly worship the Lord. To give yourself to Him is your spiritual worship.

I want to end with one more biblical reason to give your life to Jesus as Lord and Savior. It's out of 1 Corinthians though this time. It's 1 Corinthians chapter 6. Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. (therefore) glorify God in your body.

Now I don't know if this reason to give your life to the Lord, really resonates with you, or, speaks to you in your heart. But what Paul is really saying here is that, because Jesus Christ, suffered on the cross, He has a right to call you His own.

He earned the right to have you belong to Him because He suffered. He suffered, He bled, He died. And that gave Him the right to say, this one's Mine. This one belongs to Me. Because of His suffering, He deserves to have our lives. He deserves to be the Lord of our lives.

It's hard making someone Lord. There's that part of our fleshly makeup that resists the idea of making someone Lord of our lives. We like very much to be in control. We like very much to call our own shots. It pleases us to be able to do so.

But when we finally find a reason to say to ourselves, you know what? This isn't working. This personal lordship that I have placed over my life, with myself as lord, this isn't working. It isn't working in my marriage. It's not working in my home. It's not working in my heart. It's not working anywhere. And you know what? I think I need to crown another king.

I think I need to step aside. I need to get off this throne of my heart. Take off this little tinfoil crown that I fashioned for myself and I need to give this place of ruling and reigning to someone who deserves to be here.

And Jesus You deserve to be here for all the reasons Paul cited. For all the reasons that we haven't yet cited but are yet in the Word and for all the reasons that the Lord makes clear to you and me. When He allows us to bottom out in our lives and hit a brick wall. For all those reasons He deserves to be Lord, amen.