

Worship Basics – Living Sacrifice
Romans 12:1-2

All of Life is Worship

Turn to Romans 12. In the last few messages, what we've said about worship has to do with what happens when we gather together.

But one basic truth about being God's people is that our God has guidance about what we do when we're together in front of him, and he also has guidance about all of life.

Many religions are not like this. Their god does not actually care how they live, so long as the people perform certain worship. But the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, is not like that. He cares about all of life.

God gave Moses clear instructions on the tabernacle and sacrifices, which is roughly parallel to what we do when we gather, but God also gave Moses clear instructions on all of life, so that Israelites would live their whole lives obediently.

We are not surprised by this anymore, that God our Father and Jesus our Lord care about all of life. But we don't normally make all of life *worship*. Our text today does make all of life *worship*.

Our text today is Romans 12:1-2. In this Scripture Paul uses OT worship language to make our whole lives worship.

¹ 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.

I urge you on the basis of God's mercy

Romans 1 to 11 are the story of human sin and God's mercy on humans. Our text, Romans 12:1-2, are a big turning point in this letter we call "Romans." Chapters 1 to 11 are about God's mercy to people, and then Romans 12-16 are about how we will respond.

Since God has been merciful to us (Rom. 1-11), how will we respond (Rom. 12-16)?

Listen to this, earlier in Romans (5⁷) *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.* ⁸ *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

¹⁰ *For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

God began to deal with us, and everything we do with God is our responding to him. He invites and we come, he calls and we answer, he offers and we take, he gives and we thank him, he began and we respond.

I urge you on the basis of God's mercy. Because God started all this when we were sinners and his enemies, we now ask the question: since God has been so kind to me, so merciful, what will I do? Because God has been merciful, let's do this.

Sacrifice – not what we give up, but what we give

The word “sacrifice” means something different in our English than it means in the Bible, and that affects our text, which says we should *offer our bodies as a living sacrifice*.

In English, “sacrifice” describes loss for some more important loyalty. People are willing to *sacrifice* their freedom in order to be safe. That means people are willing to *lose* their freedom, to *give up* their freedom, in order to be safe.

In the Bible, *sacrifice* is not about “loss.” In the Bible, a *sacrifice* is a particular kind of *gift*, a gift to God, a present to God. When we give each other gifts, they normally cost us something. We gave something up to get the gift we give away.

But when we say, “here is a present for you, here is a gift for you,” we are not talking about the \$20 we gave up, that we spent and lost, to buy the gift. This is how we should understand *sacrifice* in the Bible.

“Sacrifice” means a worship *gift*, a worship *present*, a worship *offering*.

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice

We make our bodies a living gift to God, a worship gift to God. The last worship teaching was about bringing a gift to the king. In this text our whole selves are the worship gift.

Picture yourself making a pile of rocks. Actually, it is an altar. You are outside somewhere alone, and there are rocks around, and you pick up one rock at a time that is as big as you can carry comfortably. In this way you build your altar.

And once you have a pile made, you crawl up on this pile, and you lie down on your back, facing up, and you say to God: “God, I'm yours. Jesus, I'm yours.”

In the OT, that was a death position. You gave an animal to God by killing it on an altar. Paul deliberately used OT language here in Romans 12:1-2, “offer” and “sacrifice” and “holy” and “worship.”

There are two big differences from the OT sacrifice. One, you offer yourself not your animal. Two, God wants you living not dead.

The thing to grasp is that we are giving God a gift. We ourselves are the worship gift. We ourselves are a living worship present to God. We are the offering.

This is your true and proper worship. This is the key thing I want you to get today: our whole lives are a worship gift for our King, a gift for our Rescuer and Champion.

A living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. “Holy” at its core means “belongs to God.” We think of holy as clean, or pure, but that is not what “holy” really means. Holy means “belongs to God, for God’s special use, God’s personal property.”

This is your true and proper worship

God has changed our whole lives. Our bodies are a BIG part of our salvation, because they will die and then they’ll be raised again. We’ll get this body changed and transformed, but it is not a new body, it is this body made new.

Remember the empty tomb. When Jesus got *his* resurrection body, which is the first production of *our* resurrection bodies, there was no body left in the place where they buried him. The tomb was empty.

God, in his mercy, has not just rescued our souls. He has rescued our bodies as well. So true and proper worship would be to use our bodies in a way that pleases him.

So it makes sense that we would make our present bodies a living sacrifice, as God’s personal property, and pleasing to him. This is worship that makes sense.

What I’m saying here today is not to change what we do day to day. It is to change how we think about it, how we picture it. Think of every day in which we live faithfully as a present to God, a living gift to God, an offering that pleases him.

Remember of course that faithful living includes God forgiving us our sins, every day, and us forgiving each other, every day. That’s all a part of faithful living.

Every day in which we go through the day living faithfully is a gift that pleases God. It is the right response to a God that rescued us while we were sinners and enemies. Begin like this: *Today, God, my body is yours, a worship gift to you. I want it to please you.*

Don’t be conformed / shaped by the world, but be transformed / changed by the renewed mind

The Bible assumes that God’s people are in a constant battle to live as God’s people. If you feel like it is a battle to live like one of God’s people, and you often don’t do well, you should know that the Scripture assumes all of this from beginning to end.

Sometimes this struggle is pictured as a worship choice, worshipping God or an idol. Sometimes the battle is between our flesh (the dark and rotten part of being human) and the Holy Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit war against each other. And there are others.

In Romans 12:2 we get the battle as a fight between the world around us and our new mind. The first part of Romans 8 connected our new mind to the Holy Spirit. When we decide to follow Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to change how we think.

Don't be conformed to the world, don't be shaped by the world, don't follow the pattern of the world, but be changed and transformed by the new mind that the Holy Spirit is building in you.

The world around us is a dark place and it always has its hands on us to shape us. The dark world around us pulls on us, tugs us, the world has plans for what we should be, and it is working on us so that we will think and live in its way.

The mind – our lives are full of feelings and experiences. And behind these experiences and feelings we have a mind that observes and evaluates. It includes our conscience, but it is bigger than that.

Our feeling and experience can say that something is good, but our mind says “no, I'm pretty sure this is not God's way, this is not good.”

Or we experience something as bad or frightening, but our mind says, “God says he is with me and I can trust him and I should do that.”

Don't ignore your feelings; I am not saying that at all. Take them seriously, and get to know them. Some people don't know what they feel. See if you can figure out what you feel. But you've a mind behind that, and the mind makes important choices.

AND, making the right choice is worship. It is making our selves a gift to God that pleases him.

When Paul writes, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God,” and then when he writes, “don't be shaped by the pattern of the world but be changed by the mind that the Spirit renews,” he saying the same thing in two different ways.

The basic call is this: because of God's mercy, offer you bodies as a living and pleasing sacrifice to God; this is true and proper worship.' That's the basic call.

How should we do this? “Don't be shaped by the pattern of the world but be changed by the mind that the Spirit renews.” That's *how* we offer ours bodies as a living sacrifice, a thank-you gift to God, for his personal use.

Final stage – then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will. (12:2b)

This comes some way down the “transformed by your mind” process. It is not easy to sort out exactly what kind of process Paul pictures here.

But in broad terms, the real goal is not just to be changed by our new mind. The real goal is to be able to figure out how God wants us to act in a particular situation. We have lots of instruction in the Scripture about how to live.

But it still is often not clear to us, in the actual situation, what God would want us to do. Paul pictures some kind of progress here that is not quick.

Eventually, if we resist the world with its hands reaching out to shape us, and if we follow the Spirit and the new mind, we will grow in our ability to know what would please God. And in that way we become a more pleasing worship offering to him.

Application – Church Body Life

What do we actually do about this? What comes to your mind when you think about giving your body as a living sacrifice?

What comes to your mind when you imagine not being shaped by the world, but being changed by the new mind the Spirit is building in you?

Most of us think about something private to do – we should pray more, or read the Bible more, if we’re going to make our bodies a living sacrifice. Or we think about some sin we assume most others don’t know about, and we think we should stop that.

I’ll tell you what the Scripture does with this, and it is probably *not* what you were thinking about.

Beginning with the very next verse, Romans 12 speaks about how believers treat *each other*, if they serve *each other* and how they serve *each other*, if they view themselves as part of a body of Christ with many different members.

Love must be sincere. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Share with the Lord’s people in need. These are the kind of things we read in the rest of Romans 12.

My Story – Private Bible Reading to Group Life

When I was a young man, I found out that the Scriptures were rich, and I found that studying the Bible was my most powerful way of meeting God.

Not church, which was usually not very meaningful. I did not care about singing in those days, I just wanted the Bible taught, and was often not satisfied with that. My richest experience came privately as I got to understand the Bible better.

But the Bible, I noticed after a while, aimed me toward the group, just as Romans 12 is doing here. Romans 12 was one of many texts that aimed me toward the group.

So I became a “church” guy, not because I found God at church, because I did not, I found God in the Book. But the Book in which I was finding God aimed me at the body of Christ, so I pursued the body of Christ out of raw obedience to the Scripture.

I have slowly over the years come to be fed by the group, and meet God powerfully in the group, in all parts of group life. When this church started I was just beginning this process. A lot has happened since then.

All of Life is Gift to God, Living Gift, Living Present

This is true and proper worship. God has promised to resurrect our bodies to eternal life, and he has given his Spirit to renew our minds.

So our worship is to make our bodies a living gift, a living offering, to him. We do this by living according to what the Spirit is doing in our minds.

Our text uses “pleasing” twice, in 12:1 our bodies are a pleasing gift to God, and in 12:2 we become able to know what God’s pleasing will is.

Here’s how to please God: *today, my body is yours, a worship gift to you. I want it to please you. Guide my mind with your Spirit. Amen.*