

"Living Sacrifices" • Romans 12:1-2

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Breakfast*

1. One fine Spring morning on a farm in the country, a chicken and a pig were talking
2. The smell of a breakfast of ham and eggs came from the farmhouse
3. The chicken breathed deep and said to the pig, "Ah, doesn't that smell good?"
4. The pig replied, "Maybe to you but not to me. After all, in a breakfast of ham and eggs, while you're only involved, I'm totally committed."

B. *Commitment*

1. Commitment is a dirty word today
2. In fact, many people make jokes about the "C" word
 - a. usually they joke about it in reference to marriage
 - b. some men are accused of having the dread affliction called *commitmentphobia*
3. But even *apart* from marriage, the idea of *commitment* has fallen on hard times
 - a. in this self-centered, self-absorbed world
 - b. being devoted to something or someone other than yourself is considered too demanding
4. The result is a dull mediocrity for most lives
5. For you see, nothing truly great or excellent comes without commitment and devotion
6. All those men and women that we honor both now and in the past are people who excelled because they were committed
 - a. true, they haven't all been committed to the most noble things
 - b. but they were committed
 - c. and it was that commitment, that determination to press beyond the boundaries of complacency and mediocrity, that changed not only their lives, but the world around them

C. *Today*

1. The Apostle Paul lays a bold call to *commitment* before us today
2. There is no way to soft sell what we read here
3. What we find is a radical call to total commitment

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 1*

{1} I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable

service.

1. Paul begins with an earnest word of request: **"I beseech you therefore, brethren"**
2. It has taken 11 chapters, many verses, and a several months for us to get to the point where Paul transitions from doctrine to deeds, from belief to behavior
 - a. up to this point, Paul has only rarely told his readers to do anything
 - b. and such instruction was only incidental to the truths he was explaining
3. It isn't till we reach v. 1 of chapter 12 that Paul makes the full turn to begin applying the truths of the gospel to their daily lives
 - a. and so it every was with Paul's letters
 - b. he was always very careful to lay forth the truth before he called for action
 - c. he knew that right behavior has to be based on right belief or it is doomed to failure
4. But now that he has fully explained the gospel of Christ, he moves to apply it
5. His first exhortation comes from an earnest and yearning heart
 - a. we see this in his passion filled words,
 - b. **"I beseech you brethren by the mercies of God "**
 - c. there is a note of fervent pleading in these words
 - d. as an intimate friend or brother pleads with another over some issue of life and death
6. You see, Paul wasn't just a man who had studied books about the gospel and listened to the testimonies of others
 - a. he knew what it was to KNOW GOD and His mercies
 - b. he knew the power of the Holy Spirit and deep communion with Jesus
 - c. he could see the issues of life clearly because he had gained the perspective of eternity
 - d. and it was out of this settled assurance in the reality of heaven and hell that he wrote these words of challenge
7. And his challenge was this: **"present your bodies a living sacrifice,"**
 - a. while these words may appear more poetic than anything else to us in the 20th Century
 - b. we need to look at them in the light of the original audience to whom they were written
 - c. when the Romans first received and read this letter, these words would come almost as an affront to their intellect
 - 1) remember that the religions of the ancient world still practiced animal sacrifices
 - 2) and that is the way they would have understood these words at their first reading
 - 3) they would see that Paul was calling for them to offer, not some bull or goat, or bird as an offering on the altar to God
 - 4) but themselves!
 - 5) in their mind's eye, as they read this word "Sacrifice" they would see

- an altar
 - a) covered with blood
 - b) and the body parts of an animal
- 8. But then they would notice that Paul didn't say they were to offer themselves simply as sacrifices to God
 - a. no, they were to offer themselves as LIVING sacrifices
 - b. an offering of blood is not what they were to give
 - c. rather, they were to offer their lives, their LIVING!
 - d. God does not want self-immolation
 - e. He has no use for a lifeless corpse
 - f. no, what He wants is us, alive, but totally devoted to Him
- 9. When Paul says that we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, he means the whole person, body soul, and spirit
 - a. we can't just offer God our physical bodies but offer our minds to the world
 - b. by "bodies" here in v. 1, Paul means the whole person, our *selves*!
- 10. No longer living for self, we live for Him
- 11. That is why he goes on to say that this sacrifice is "**holy, acceptable to God, [and] which is your reasonable service**"
 - a. God does not turn away such an offer
 - b. in fact, it is what He looks for from us
 - c. that is why Paul says it is our reasonable service
 - d. that word "**service**" is a word which speaks of the formal religious worship offered by professional priests
- 12. Every god of the ancient world had its forms of worship by which people would service it
 - a. they would come with offerings of goods or money
 - b. they would perform various acts of devotion
 - 1) such as meditation
 - 2) or dancing or singing
 - 3) or bizarre rites involving barbaric practices
- 13. But the worship of the true God is summed up in this: that we offer *ourselves* to Him
 - a. He is not appeased by the roasting carcass of a cow
 - b. nor is He soothed by religious rites and rituals
- 14. What He asks for, is US
 - a. as Christians, we are all priests
 - b. but we do not serve God in the hallowed halls of some cathedral made of stone or brick
 - c. our service is in the cathedral of this world
 - 1) in the highways and byways of life
 - 2) in the marketplace; Costco, Sportmart, WalMart, Home Depot
 - 3) Wendy's, McDonald's
 - 4) at school, at work, at home
 - d. and our worship is not limited to what we do inside the walls of this building
 - e. real worship is a living sacrifice; a life wholly devoted to God

- f. we can as readily say "I am going to work to worship the Lord" as we say, "I am going to church to worship the Lord."
15. And Paul sees this offering of ourselves to God as entirely **reasonable!**
 - a. as far as Paul is concerned, offering ourselves to God is as plain as the nose on our faces
 - b. after all, does not God know everything?
 - c. does he not know the end from the beginning?
 - d. does He not love us with a perfect and infinite love?
 - e. does He not long to bless us with untold grace and mercy?
 - f. and is He not able to?
 16. Then the only REASONABLE thing to do is turn ourselves over to Him without reservation
 17. After all, consider the alternative . . .
 - a. the alternative is to keep control of our lives to ourselves
 - b. yet we don't know what the next hour holds, let alone tomorrow or next week
 - c. who would you more readily trust to fly you to Colorado in a Boeing &^&
 - 1) a commercial pilot with hundreds of hours in the air
 - 2) or yourself?
 - d. how much more ought we to trust our lives to the God who created us and has fantastic plans for us?
 18. We hear stories of other times and other places where people have died, and are dying for their faith in Christ
 - a. and we ask ourselves, "Could I lay down my life for Christ if put to it?"
 - b. but you know what; that really isn't the right question
 - c. the right question is this, "Am I willing to live for Him?"
 - d. you see, we are all living for something; the only question is WHAT?
 - e. the only thing worth living for, ultimately, is Christ
 19. When James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the captain of the ship sought to turn him back.
 - a. the captain said, "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages,"
 - b. Calvert only replied, "We died before we came here."
 20. He was a man who well understood what it meant to offer himself as a living sacrifice
 21. What are you living for? What is the work of your life aimed at?
 22. Several years ago, on an extremely hot day, a crew of men were working on the road bed of the railroad when they were interrupted by a slow moving train
 - a. the train ground to a stop and a window in the last car -- which by the way, was custom made and air conditioned -- was raised
 - b. a booming, friendly voice called out, "Dave, is that you?"
 - c. Dave Anderson, the crew chief, called back, "Sure is, Jim, and it's really good to see you."
 - d. Dave was then invited to join Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad, for a visit in his personal coach

- e. for over an hour the men talked and then shook hands warmly as the train pulled out
 - f. the crew immediately surrounded Dave and to a man expressed astonishment that he knew Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad as a personal friend
 - g. Dave then explained that over 20 years earlier he and Jim Murphy had started to work for the railroad on the same day
 - h. one of the men, half jokingly asked Dave why he was still working out in the hot sun and Jim Murphy had gotten to be president
 - i. somewhat embarrassed, Dave explained, "Twenty-three years ago I went to work for \$1.75 an hour and Jim Murphy went to work for the railroad."
23. Both men had started, side by side, on the same day
- a. but their perspective and commitment meant all the difference in what happened in their lives
 - b. what are you working for?
 - c. what are you living for?

B. Commitment

1. Paul calls for his readers to make a total commitment to God
2. They are to offer Him all they have, and all they are
3. A look at history shows that God takes such offerings and uses them in dramatic ways
4. The name "Henry Martyn," may not ring a bell for many of you but missionaries to Asia are quite familiar with him
 - a. you see, Martyn graduated from Cambridge University with honors in both mathematics and classics,
 - b. he had the prospect of a brilliant academic career
 - c. instead, he chose to serve the Lord in India.
 - d. he was all of 25 when he arrived there, and at the age of 31 he died
 - e. yet in those six years, Martyn translated the New Testament into three languages: Hindustani, Arabic, and Persian
 - f. only eternity will reveal how much his work meant to thousands of other missionaries who have gone to Asia
 - g. and how many people were saved because of it.
 - h. Henry Martyn had a profound sense of the sacredness of time and the greatness of his obligation toward God
5. Friends, think of what God could do if we would lay aside our excuses and petty desires for ease, and we really sold out to Him
6. Alexander the Great once approached a strongly fortified walled city with only a small group of soldiers [\[1\]](#)
 - a. standing outside the walls, he raised his voice and demanded to see the king
 - b. when the he arrived, Alexander insisted that the king surrender the city and its inhabitants to him and his little band of fighting men
 - c. the king laughed, "Why should I surrender to you? You can't do us any

- harm!"
- d. but Alexander offered to give the king a demonstration
 - 1) he ordered his men to line up single file and start marching
 - 2) he marched them straight toward a sheer cliff
 - e. the townspeople gathered on the wall and watched in shocked silence as, one by one, Alexander's soldiers marched without hesitation right off the cliff to their deaths!
 - f. after ten soldiers died, Alexander ordered the rest of the men to return to his side
 - g. the townspeople and the king immediately surrendered
 - h. they realized that if a few men were actually willing to commit suicide at the command of this dynamic leader, then nothing could stop his eventual victory
7. Many people today are willing to die for some cause, some philosophy, even some petty and passing pleasure
 8. Just think how much power Christ could have in our area with just a portion of such commitment
 9. Some time back, World Vision magazine ran the story about a young pastor named Tim Dearborn
 - a. he had to share a cab with four other people in Bangkok, Thailand
 - b. one of the passengers was a Marxist revolutionary on his way to India
 - c. the communist quizzed Tim at length about his faith
 - d. finally, he said, "How can you be a Christian? Don't you realize there's no way your cause can win?"
 - e. Tim asked, "What do you mean there's no way my cause can win?"
 - f. the communist explained: "I am on my way to India to organize fishermen to overthrow their oppressors.
 - 1) And I am quite willing to lay down my life for the revolution.
 - 2) Your American Christianity is preoccupied with what your God can do for you.
 - 3) And dying for self-interest is a contradiction in terms!"
 10. What separates the great heroes of our faith from the average Christian?
 - a. is it intelligence?
 - b. is it faith?
 - c. do they know something others don't?
 - d. do they have a special line on grace or the power of the Spirit?
 - e. maybe they had more time or more money
 - f. no, it is none of these things
 - g. the difference is this:
 - 1) they were totally committed
 - 2) they were sold out to God
 - h. and there is nothing we lack they had
 - i. they made a choice--we can make that same choice

C. V. 2

{2} And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will

of God.

1. Verse 2 is intimately linked to verse 1
2. if we are to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, we must make a distinction between the world and the Kingdom of God
3. We must decide from which source we are going to take our directions and cue
4. Paul says we are **not to be conformed to this world**
 - a. the word "**conformed**" means to be pressed into a mold
 - 1) the root of the word means "a shape which changes often"
 - 2) it refers to the outward appearance of a thing
 - 3) like when we change clothes
 - b. the world is constantly changing in its fashions and fads
 - 1) what was in yesterday is out today
 - 2) what's in today will be out tomorrow
 - 3) but if you wait long enough, the old fashions will re-appear!
 - 4) that's why a lot of men hang on to their old ties
 - 4) and you hippies who hung on to your old threads are probably really happy right now as MOD is back in style
 - c. the pressure to conform is intense
 - 1) you adults, remember what it was like in junior and senior high?
 - 2) remember the pressure to conform or endure the wrath and ridicule of the fashion police?
 - 3) even today, many of you have to endure the pressure to conform at your jobs
 - 4) this goes on even in families
 - a) competition in jobs, vehicles, vacations, houses
5. Why is the pressure to conform so great?
 - a. because there is a longing in every human heart to *belong*
 - b. people want to be loved and accepted
 - c. so they are willing to go to almost any length to be accepted by a group
 - d. they will shave the sides of their head, die the rest of their hair orange and purple, dress all in black, and put a safety pin through their tongue
 - e. now, let's be honest, nobody does that because it's *pretty*
 - f. they do it so they can be a part of the group
 - g. it doesn't matter if others belittle them, just so long as they are accepted by their group
6. But Paul says we are not to be pressed into the world's mold
 - a. by **world**, he means this present evil age which is ruled and orchestrated by Satan
 - b. make no mistake, it is the devil who stands behind the world's romance with fashions and fads
 - c. his whole goal is to keep people so busy worrying about their appearance and social standing that they never have time to stop and consider the deeper issues of their souls
7. Just as Paul gets practical in these verses, I'd like to take just a moment to get real practical with them and ask some searching questions
8. Please know that as I ask them, I am not doing so from some lofty position

- of perfection
9. I hesitate to ask them because they are so deeply convicting for me personally
 10. But they are timely and very germane to what we read here
 11. Paul tells us not to be conformed to this world: But are we?
 12. Consider this:
 - a. How much time do I spend preparing ourselves to go out in public?
 - 1) now, we need to strike a balance here
 - 2) were are not supposed to be slobs
 - 3) but neither are we to pile on rich and sumptuous adornment
 - 4) the whole question can be boiled down to this: "Do I dress to attract the attention of others or to inspire them to envy?"
 - 5) rather, our aim in apparel and appearance ought to be such that people are not distracted from their attention to or desire for God
 - b. some more questions . . .
 - c. how much time do I spend staying abreast of what's fashionably hip?
 - d. how concerned am I about what others think of me and how much do I let their opinion affect the way I live?
 - e. how much of my money do I spend to acquire what the TV, radio, and magazines tell me I need to be happy?
 13. Paul follows up the negative command to not be conformed with the positive one of **"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,"**
 - a. "**transformed**" means to change form
 - 1) it's the word "metamorphosis"
 - 2) which is the word we use to describe the transformation a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly
 - 3) it's the same creature, but it has gone through a radical form change
 - b. it's the same word that was used in the gospels to describe the change the appearance Jesus had during the transfiguration
 - c. how does this transformation of our minds take place?
 - d. by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit as He works through the Word of God
 14. Michaelangelo called sculpture, "The making of men"
 - a. he said that he could see the form of a statue in the untouched block
 - b. he said that all he was doing was liberating the form from the surrounding stone
 - c. sometimes he used a large mallet and broad chisel
 - d. at other times he worked with a small hammer and a minute pick
 - e. sometimes he would knock off a large portions of stone. Other times, a tiny grain
 - f. the whole time, all the block had to do was yield to the Michaelangelo's hand
 15. And that is our task as well
 - a. we just yield to the Holy Spirit as He works to bring us to that image of Christ we are predestined to be conformed to
 - b. you see, apart from the truth of Christ, we are blockheads!
 - c. and sometimes the Holy Spirit will knock off large sections that hinder

- d. at other times it may be a small grain of a subtle opinion
 - e. slowly but surely, our minds are renewed and we become more like Jesus
- 16. Isn't it interesting what Paul DIDN'T say about our being transformed:
 - a. he didn't say it came by being slain in the Spirit
 - b. nor by standing in some miracle healing line at Mighty Mikes Miracle Ministry Meeting
- 17. We are transformed by the renewing of our MINDS
- 18. And that only takes place by a regular and consistent investment in the Word of God
- 19. Paul concludes verse 2 with "**that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**"
 - a. when our minds are being renewed,
 - b. then discovering the will of God becomes much easier
- 20. Far and away, the biggest of people seeking counseling is to discover =what God's will is
- 21. Paul gives the prescription for discovering God's will right here
- 22. There are 3 steps:
 - 1) Present yourself to God as a living sacrifice
 - 2) Do not be pressed in to the world's mold
 - 3) Be transformed by the renewing of your mind
- 23. I guarantee you, if you do these three, you will discover God's will for your life

III. CONCLUSION

A. A Challenge

1. I hope every person here realizes that having studied these things this morning, we are faced with a decision
2. Quite frankly, it's not something we can duck
3. Paul and the Holy Spirit have backed us up against the wall and we must chose
4. To say, "I'll think about it later" is in fact to say "No" to the challenge
5. These verses are a benchmark against which we are to measure ourselves
6. Will we respond with ready and open hearts?
7. Will our prayer and devotion be, "Here I am Lord. I offer all I am, and all I have."
8. "I offer you my heart and mind - renew them to think Your thoughts after You."

B. Cortez

1. When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships.
2. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

3. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move, forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way.
4. In the same way, there is simply no retreat for the Christian
5. There is only one direction to go, forward!
6. So let's go, not with dogged or reluctance, but with commitment and desire

C. Dorothy

1. As we conclude, remember the *Wizard of Oz*?
2. As Dorothy and her pals emerged from the forest, they saw the Emerald City just ahead of them
3. It lay on the other side of a large field of poppies
4. As they followed the path through the poppy field, the aroma of the flowers lulled them into a deep sleep
5. Their quest was nearly lost to slumber, though they were within sight of their destination
6. Well friends, heaven is not that far away
7. Time is short and the New Jerusalem lies just up ahead
8. The path they lie through a few more days, maybe, months, maybe even years
9. Don't be lulled to sleep by the poppies of this world
10. Keep moving, keeping running!

[1] James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 102-103.