

Living Sacrifices

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is Romans chapter 12, verses 1 to 8. That's page 1139 on the Pew Bibles 1139.

Romans chapter 12, verses 1 to 8. 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. 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.

For by the grace given to me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

[1 : 28] We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith.

If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously.

If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. This is the word of God. Thanks, Ruth, for reading.

If you keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 12, that would be a great help as we look at that together. Page 1139. There's no outline this week.

It's the heart of the Christian life. Then we're going to look at the ins and outs of the Christian life. And then we're going to look at the engine room for the Christian life. That's the outline. It just didn't get to the notice sheet in time.

[2 : 34] Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy and kindness to us in your son, in the gospel about him, and in your word to us in Romans.

Romans, help us this morning, we pray, to discern how we should now live in light of your mercy to us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this morning we get told by the Apostle Paul how it is to be a reasonable person. How to be a reasonable person. The word doesn't quite come through in translation, but in Romans chapter 12 verse 1, just those last few words, it says this is your true and proper worship.

And that word true and proper is translating a word that kind of means rational, sensible, reasonable in the Greek. And I guess if you think about your life and how you want to define your life, lots of us are not particularly excited by the idea of being known as a sensible person.

Some of us maybe would like that, but if you think about what you'd want written on your gravestone as an epitaph for your life, that they were a sensible person, isn't particularly exciting. But when you think about the alternative, when it comes to the big choices that we make in our lives, none of us would really want the alternative, would we?

[3 : 54] That people would look at us and say they just didn't make sensible choices. They were silly. Instead of being rational, they were irrational. They were unreasonable as a person.

None of us really wants that. But to be a reasonable person, you have to live for the right things. We have to offer ourselves, our lives to things.

We all do that all the time. We offer our lives to things. We offer ourselves to pleasure. We offer ourselves to goals. People who are offering themselves this morning to the Glasgow 10K run, the men's 10K.

Offering ourselves to certain goals we have in life. Maybe we offer ourselves to the workplace, to a career, to qualifications, perhaps to a partner, to children for their happiness and their flourishing.

When we offer ourselves to something or some things, we then sacrifice other things that we would have done instead. We're making those kind of decisions all the time with our time and our money.

[4 : 53] And the question is, what's sensible? What is it rational to offer your life to? Now, we've reached chapter 12 of Romans, and the writer, Paul, has spent 11 chapters straightening out our understanding of what's really at the heart of the Christian faith.

The gospel. The news about Jesus that we as Christians believe. And here in chapter 12, verse 1, Paul says, if you believe those things that Christians believe, this is how you should then live.

This is the difference it should make. So we're going from what we believe in our heads to what we live out with our whole of our lives. So our first point this morning, the heart of the Christian life.

And that's in verses 1 and 2. Paul describes it as being a living sacrifice in verse 1. If you look at verse 1, And that word living sacrifice, it's like a contradiction, isn't it?

If you thought in the first century about making sacrifices for God, you would think about killing something. Think about killing an animal. The heart of religious sacrifice at that time was you went to the temple, with an animal, and it got put on the altar by the priests and was killed.

[6 : 18] So it's as though Paul says, instead of offering an animal to God now, offer yourself as a living, put-to-death thing. And there were two main types of sacrifice in the biblical system at that time, before Jesus came.

There were sin offerings, and there were friendship offerings. Sin offerings you made to God, because you'd sinned. You'd turned away from God. You rebelled against God.

You brought a sin offering, as prescribed by God. And the animal bore a sin-bearing substitute for your sin. So as the animal is offered, God forgives you.

It's called a sacrifice of atonement. It brings you back into right relationship with God. But in Romans chapter 3, Paul made clear that none of us ever need to make a sin offering again.

What we do is we put our trust in Jesus, and in Jesus, God has provided the sin offering for the whole world. That was clear in Romans 3.

[7 : 21] He was our once-for-all sin-bearing substitute on the cross. So we say in our communion service, as Anglicans, we say, He, Jesus, made there, by His one offering of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, atonement, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

It sounds quite wordy, but that's because Thomas Cranmer, who wrote it, was making clear, absolutely clear, no one can make any mistake, none of us have to make a sin offering again.

Jesus paid it all. But at the temple, as well as making that offering, and the priest doing that, you'd also bring another type of offering. You'd offer out of thanksgiving to God, out of an expression of your fellowship with God.

You'd make a sacrifice. You'd maybe take your best animal, or the first fruits of your harvest, and by taking it to the altar, you were saying to God, thank you. You were saying, you come first.

I trust you with what you provide for me. I recognize all good things come from you, and I also recognize that you come first in my life. It was an expression of that.

[8 : 28] So how are those offerings fulfilled now for us as new covenant believers, as believers in Jesus? Well, Paul tells us, not by offering an animal, but by offering ourselves.

And when we offer ourselves, we die, but we don't die. The sacrifice keeps crawling back up off the altar. And every day, we choose to lay down our lives again for Jesus.

So to live the Christian life, you come and die. Jesus was very clear about that, wasn't he? And Paul is very clear here. You put to death the idea that you get to choose how you should live.

That gets put to death. And in its place, you say to God that his will will be done in your life, that he can choose how you should live.

You do his will. That's the call, to be a living sacrifice. And it's comprehensive. Did you notice that? He says in verse 1, offer your bodies.

[9 : 31] For lots of spiritual people, that would have sounded quite surprising. There's always been a branch of religious thinking that says, religion, it's all just about the inner peace.

It's about what's going on on the inside. It's about my soul, my spirit, but not my body. And that can lead you into thinking, as long as my inner peace is right, what I do with my body doesn't matter.

So my religion doesn't impact the way I work or the way I treat other people. It's got nothing to do with politics or the public square. It's just about me having a sense of contentment in my inner life.

And we see that thinking today in the world when we think even of people who describe themselves as a spiritual person. We tend to think about, oh, they must mean their inner peace, their inner life, rather than thinking, they must be someone who's striving for practical holiness in their life.

But what Paul says here in 12.1 is that the Christian life, it's much more all-encompassing than that. It's about everything. Inner life, yes. and outer life, soul and body, public and private, internals and externals, so that what I do with my body really matters to God.

[10 : 47] Jesus rose from the dead physically, actually. Our future hope is for an actual physical new heaven and new earth where we'll have resurrection bodies. And so our living sacrifice today for God involves everything that we are.

Now, Francis Schaeffer, who was a 20th century Christian, he talked a lot about this and he talked about how being a Christian involves the total man and the total woman in the total world.

In other words, being a Christian, there's not, quote from someone else, there isn't a square inch of your life over which Jesus Christ doesn't now say, that's mine.

That's mine now because your life is a sacrifice to me. So Francis Schaeffer gave this great example where he was speaking at a conference and he made this point.

He just, he said, he was assuming in his point that Christian businessmen and business women and business owners will give substantially the profits that they have to support gospel work in their churches and around the world.

[11 : 56] And in assuming that, he made the point, he said, if every Christian businessman or businesswoman or business owner or employer operates in exactly the same way as the non-Christians around them and makes the same profit as the non-Christian employers and business owners and gives that profit to support gospel work, the gospel will advance less than if they make less profit so they've got less money to give, but they do that because they're running their business in a radically different way.

Do you see what he's saying? Because you commit, as a Christian, to treat your employees differently to how you would have if you were a non-Christian, because you commit that you might make less profit in your business, but you want to be a good steward and a good ambassador for Jesus in the business world with your customers, with the people who work for you, you might find that your profits take a hit, but it would have a transforming impact on the world.

People will see that and see that the Christian life makes a real difference to the whole of life. Now, you might not agree with that. You might need to think about that. What would that really look like?

You'd have less money to give to gospel work, but you'd have earned that money in a distinctive way. But Francis Schaeffer's point, really, was a deeper one than that. It was every Christian thinking about the whole of my life.

How do I do it differently because my life is now a living sacrifice to be holy and pleasing to God? What kind of a colleague does it make me?

[13 : 32] What kind of a friend does it make me? What kind of a dad does it make me? It's comprehensive. And it's all called, at the end of verse one, worship. You see that? This is your true and proper worship.

God is as concerned for what we do Monday to Saturday as he is with what we do when we gather on a Sunday. And we have tried to reflect that here at St. Silas in the last couple of years.

We ran the course in our growth groups, Fruitfulness on the Front Line, about how each of us makes an impact for Jesus where we are. We've had these This Time Tomorrow interviews on Sunday mornings asking people about where they work or, if they don't work, where they'll be during the week, how they serve Christ there.

And it's why we have to be careful about how we use the language of worship about what we do on a Sunday. Traditionally, people would call the Sunday gathering a service or an act of worship together.

And it is. If our churches today, if in our church someone says to you, oh, I wasn't at church yesterday, what was the worship like? What do they mean? We tend to mean the singing, don't we, by the term worship today.

[14 : 42] Now, I wouldn't go as far as to say it's wrong to call our singing worship because it is worship or at least it should be worship if we mean it. But we just have to, whenever we do that, think to ourselves, what we don't mean by that, we don't mean that anything else we do in the rest of our lives is any less than worship.

We're all worshipping something with the whole of our lives. When it comes to our opportunities to worship God, there isn't a sacred, secular divide in our lives.

So our Christians in Sport group meets each month. That's sports people encouraging each other to think, how do I worship God with the gift of sport that he has given to me?

Billy Graham's wife had a sign up above the kitchen sink, divine service performed here three times a day. She's saying, this is where I worship God. Well, maybe it was where Billy did. Hopefully he was doing some washing up as well.

But it was her sign to say, everything we do is an act of worship to our great God. So that's incredibly challenging, isn't it, folks?

[15 : 51] That we're called to let God in like that. Offer the whole of who I am to him. But it's also wonderfully empowering. Do you see that? How fulfilling that is.

That every task that you do, no matter how boring or menial or undervalued by the world, matters deeply to God as worship. He wants to know, who are you worshipping with what you're doing there?

Are you worshipping him? If it's 2am and you're changing a baby's nappy and you realise that because of what you're doing, tomorrow your brain's going to be like mush and you're not going to be able to do what you planned.

Or you're weaning a baby and you've spent every spare minute of the week blending vegetables that you know will end up on the floor. Or you work in a call centre where you know it will only be a matter of minutes before someone is really rude to you and you wish you didn't have a job.

Or you come to a church full of doctors and professionals and you wash pots in a restaurant kitchen. Or you don't have a job but you volunteer in the local charity shop and you feel that people look down on it.

[16 : 57] How wonderful to know that every minute of every day by saying to God I do this for you and by thinking how can I do this as well as I can for my heavenly father you are living out this great calling for your life.

Stacking shelves in a supermarket at night. An act of worship to our great God. A living sacrifice because of his goodness to us. It gives everything we do great dignity to realise that every day God is deeply concerned about what we're doing for him and what he's calling us to today.

You know I speak to people who have got in a real bind about saying I just wish God would tell me what he wants me to do with my life. As though they're living with a paranoia that maybe God wants them to be somewhere else doing something else.

But Romans 12 allows us to think no God wants to know what am I doing for him today. God's called me here. How can I do it for him as an act of worship.

It's comprehensive. It's really really good. Just two further points on this. Martin Lloyd-Jones let me just say he was a preacher in the 20th century in London a Welsh guy.

[18 : 08] He did ten sermons on Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. So that's why I'm going like the clappers here. We've got one sermon on 1 to 8. It's comprehensive. It's distinctive.

It's distinctive. We get that in verse 2. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So we should be able to look at our lives and think there's certain things I'm not doing and there's certain things that I am doing that look completely nuts to my neighbours.

And we shouldn't be embarrassed about that because there's a pattern in the world and we don't conform to it anymore. And some of us need to get over our fear of that.

We're too afraid that if we look different people might be mean to us. And we're too afraid that if we look different people won't be interested in hearing what we think.

[19 : 06] I mean basically in the first few years I was a Christian that was my basic evangelistic strategy was as long as I'm as similar as I can possibly be to my friends they won't think I've gone completely mad and they might listen to hear what I think about Jesus.

But God's evangelistic strategy for the world is that we are really weird for Jesus. I don't mean like weird in ways that Jesus doesn't call us to you know that we just look plain odd okay but that by being obedient to Jesus by transforming our whole way of life so that it's all for him we look so distinctive that the world sees an alternative to the pattern of this world and they want to know more about Jesus the one we follow.

So we don't conform we're transformed and that comes by following the way the Lord has renewed our minds verse 2 be transformed by the renewing of your mind that God has changed our hearts and our minds by all that we've heard in Romans 1 to 11 so that we see his will as good and pure and right and lovely and admirable and we want to live like that.

We let it transform us so that we're distinctive. So that's our first point the heart of the Christian life being a living sacrifice. It stands like a headline over the next five chapters of Romans be a living sacrifice and immediately we get practical application.

So our second point is this the ins and outs of the Christian life. Now what I mean by that is he starts with something within ourselves our attitude and then he moves to actions outside of ourselves in verses 3 to 8.

[20 : 44] So there's the inward thing in verse 3 if you have a look. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

In other words take what the gospel says about who you are and hold it up like a measuring stick against yourself. That's how you think of yourself now.

Think of who you are in line with what your faith tells you who you are. Now when we do that we hear two things broadly from Romans so far. you're so flawed you're so set against God you're so sinful the only way for you to have eternal life was Jesus had to die for you and yet you're so loved Jesus gladly died for you.

So that's the mindset the gospel gives us. Humble confidence humble security. Tim Keller says this about it there's no swaggering and there's no snivelling. I don't think more of myself and I don't think less of myself no instead I just think of myself less.

That's what's going on inside us in verse 3. And it leads us to the service Paul calls us to in verses 4 to 8 of the chapter. Look with me at verse 4. For just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so in Christ we though many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.

[22 : 22] I don't know what you think about that but I think this is completely radical teaching for the church in our culture that when we make decisions about what we do for the church for the church we're in the mindset we're to have is the church is a body and each of us is a limb in that body.

So if I choose not to meet with God's people if I choose to prioritize something else over meeting with God's people it's like watching somebody struggling along with a missing leg because I'm not there.

And being on our own doesn't do us much good either does it in that picture? It might seem like the best option if we're thinking selfishly to stay on the edges of church not to be relied on because then we don't need to be there but body parts are not much use once they've been sewn off and in the same way we're only going to truly flourish as the people we are with the gifts God's given us when we're connected with the body that God gave us those gifts to operate with and notice as well in the picture that it means everyone is gifted in verse 6 he says we have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us everyone has grace gifts from God each of us is needed because we're all parts of the body it doesn't matter how visible our gifts might be or how unglamorous and unnoticed our gifts might be let's think about how that works

Andrew is leading the band today and so he's up front he's playing the guitar he's singing we can all hear his voice he taught us a song and it's easy to look up to that isn't it and the children I know look up to Andrew because they see him up front and he's good at the guitar and he's got these musical gifts and we notice them but thanks to verse 3 Andrew doesn't let that go to his head because we open Romans and it tells us and him Andrew is totally depraved he is so sinful I can't even see where he is but he's over there and he is so sinful the only way that God could approve of him was Jesus had to die a bloody death on the cross for him so he doesn't let it go to his head and then we look at Gordon Henderson sitting over there and a few months ago our drains blocked under the church hall it was not pleasant it was messy for a couple of days Gordon was working with drainage people clearing what we could politely call sludge out of pipes under the church hall so that our toilets could work again but verse 3

Gordon doesn't think any less of himself because he served us in that way because he opens Romans 8 and it tells him God loved him before the dawn of time chose him Jesus was glad to die for him because he loves him he'd have come and died on the cross if it had only been Gordon or only been Andrew and God has chosen him and adopted him with glorious hope of future glory see what it's saying we're all the same in the gospel we've got different gifts but we're all just broken sinners who have been perfectly loved by a magnificent saviour and yet wonderfully as well we're all so different gifted uniquely like different parts of a body to make a contribution to the church that matters and the invitation then in verses 6 to 8 is just to live that out you can't just think well I've got a gift so that's going to be useful to somebody you actually have to put the gift to work that's why you get these gifts mentioned seven of them in verses 6 to 8 and each time it's kind of if that's your gift get on and use it if it's prophesying then prophesy in accordance with your faith if it's serving then serve if it's teaching then teach encourage then give encouragement give generously lead diligently show mercy cheerfully it's not an exhaustive set of gifts of course there are other lists in the New Testament of our gifts and we could probably think of many more but they're just examples of ways that we can serve the body how do you know what your gifts are well it's worth praying about isn't it asking God to make that known to you and maybe asking some friends who would be honest with you is there something other people have recognised in you or is there a need that you've noticed and you think why is no one doing that maybe maybe it's because you're gifted at that and other people just haven't noticed because they're not gifted has God given you a burden to help in a certain way so just a word on what that could look like at St Silas you should have been given these sheets on the way in

[27 : 13] I know they're not very colourful we put the original diagram on the screen and we're going to look at this tomorrow night at our annual business meeting but it's just a way of trying to encapsulate some of what we're about as a church that around this circle are a lot of our activities as a church but at the middle of it is what the heart of our core convictions are as a church ministry of the word and prayer that is that we believe the way God is going to grow us as his people and grow us numerically is if we commit to faithful bible teaching to prayer prayerful dependence on the spirit and godly living obedient living so we have the ministry of the word and prayer at the heart of the church and if we go outer ring from there you can summarise our activities in these different ways there's certain things that the best we do just to make the rest of it possible magnification in the top right there is about what we do on a Sunday that we come together to glorify God and build each other up magnification and there's various different things that need to happen on a Sunday ways that lots of us serve for that to be effective then moving down a column you've got down in the ring you've got membership membership is about how we welcome visitors with our vision that those who visit return and those who return stay if that's appropriate for them and they might be

Christians they might not be Christians but that's encouraging people to step from visiting to being members of the church and there's various different things that are required for that then we could think about mission that our vision is to reach grow and send and this is the reaching out bit of our vision the ways that we individually through one-to-one witness to friends seek to tell them about Jesus the ways that we run activities we run evangelistic courses seeker courses holiday club sports mission international student outreach then you could think about maturity that's the grow element of reach grow and send the ways that we have activities to help us grow in faith and hope and love through midweek fellowship groups for example and different areas of ministry then there's ministry ministry is about trying to just mobilize and train each of us to be serving in some way and one aspect of that ministry is mercy ministry the ways that we show God's love to our world by seeing the needs and seeking to help there so as a church we believe through Romans 12 that every member counts every member ministry and we want everyone to be doing something and no one to be doing too much so as you pray today or this week why not look at that and be asking yourself is there a place that God might be calling me to serve as a member of his body here if we gave some training in a certain area do you feel you could step into service in some way so we've thought about the heart of the Christian life being a living sacrifice and we've thought about the ins and outs of the Christian life a gospel humility on the inside that means we serve the body of Christ the church family but why would we ever do this that's our third point the engine room of the Christian life why is it sensible why is it rational well for that we go back to verse 1 perhaps the biggest therefore in the whole Bible

Paul wrote all those chapters 11 chapters and then he says therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice so why would any of us choose to take our hands off our own life and offer it to God and where does the power come from to do that every day day by day the answer is in a deeper view of God's mercy to us and that isn't a view we have with our eyes it's a view we have with our hearts that we look at his mercy with our hearts and think if Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself for me why wouldn't I now be willing to sacrifice myself for him that's why it's reasonable that's why it's sensible it's why being a half hearted Christian really just makes no sense at all it was the realization of

Count von Zinzendorf in the 18th century he was a courtier in Germany and he was going through a town one day with a procession and he went into the local art gallery and he never came out and the people who were with him in his entourage were waiting outside for him and eventually it got really embarrassing and they thought well maybe he's not well and they went in to try and find him and they found him transfixed gazing at a picture and it was of Jesus with his arms stretched out on the cross and underneath it said all this I've done for you what now will you do for me it was a life changing moment for him and for each one of us that's where we look with our hearts to get a deep view of the mercy of God we'll all offer ourselves to something what's it going to be well when we look at the cross we see Jesus offering himself he was willing to take his hands off his own life and when he did that he fell into nothingness as he faced

God's wrath for our sin so that when we choose to take our hands off our lives we fall into his let's pray together let's have a moment of quiet just to reflect on Romans 12 1 to 8 what the Lord may have been saying to each of us and then I'll lead us in a prayer and then he If I want to be cōng and en likewise to be released in a tournament and then I'll butts in a Vancouver Kane Kane it Well in a dentro and then I'll Nered strengthen the whole■■■ and the acc partners to be guardian Father God, we say, as Paul said in chapter 11, who was ever given to you that you should repay them?

[33 : 53] And we thank you for what you've given to us. We thank you for your mercy. By your spirit, we ask that you would give us a deeper view of that mercy, that more and more it would be our joy.

We would see it as the only reasonable, sensible, rational thing to offer our whole bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. We're going to respond to God's word by singing together. And while that's going on, we've got prayer ministry over to my right if you'd like prayer or to give thanks for anything.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.