

Living Sacrifices! Romans 12:1-2

We come to these verses at the beginning of chapter 12 which really begins a new section in the Book of Romans. And we said that Romans 12:1-2 are important for a couple of reasons. One is that it is a bridge to what Paul has just said in the opening eleven chapters and also the bridge that takes us to all the ethical commands that Paul gives us in the next several chapters that basically covers all of life and all of our relationships. So these verses are of the utmost importance.

And we recognize that Paul connects the ethos of this passage to what he has just said. The first word that he says here is the word “therefore.” In other words, as we listen to these commands and precepts for holy living they are based upon something. They are based on the doctrines of who we were and who we are — of justification, and we are being sanctified in the present life, and one day we will ultimately be glorified by the God who controls all, and is now our God through the sacrifice of Christ. The popular teaching of this book is to go straight to the commands of these chapters without laying the foundation of what has been said. We love to hear things that we can do, or instructions in how we should act. But why do we do the things that we do? Why do we need to become who we are not? And the doctrines of the opening 11 chapters indicate who we are and what God has done, “therefore.” That is the strength and the foundation. If you do not understand the foundation then they are just empty and arbitrary commands.

The other thing that these verses do is link not only what goes before but the commands that come after these two verses. Paul says here, **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.”** This is what this section is all about - the response to the mercies of God. The mercies of God is God’s pity upon those who are in a distressful condition that cannot help themselves. Mercy is an action word - it moves with compassion to help those in that pitiful condition. And here we are in willful rebellion and in the slavery of sin, and God comes to lift us out of the mire of sin to give us a new standing and new life in Christ. Based on this mercy of none other than God - you need to love, forgive, bless others, weep with others. None of these commands have any strengths or intensity when we separate them from these opening two verses. And right here the reason why we act and function in a distinct way different from the world and society around us is because of the mercies of God.

Now what are we to do? How are we to respond that God has justified us in Christ Jesus? How are we to live as those who are recipients of the wonderful and glorious mercy of God? And as you look at verses 1-2 it is foundational for the other commands that come after. How are they foundational? It is because these commands in the opening two verses are God-ward in that they have God as central, and after this the primary teaching is how we function toward one another. But the overflow of correct living or godly living toward others is having a mind set on God. The overflow of our love and devotion and delight in God causes us to live and function differently toward every other person in our lives, and function differently in every situation that we find ourselves in. And it is all in a response to God and his mercy that we hear these commands. So let me ask you this morning as you look at your life: is your heart, mind, soul, and strength primarily motivated by God and what he has done for sinners like us

in Jesus Christ? Could you call yourself - a God-centred, God controlled individual who is responding to all of life, to all the people in your life based on his mercy to a sinner like you? And that leads to another question: what does that look like? And Paul indicates what it looks like through the command here in verse 1. And I want us to look through and see the command, and then secondly see how he describes the command. I hope this will really challenge us to live in light of who we say that we are and the relationship that we have with our great God.

1. Based on the mercies of God we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices. V.1b.

It is amazing when it comes to sacrificing our time, assets or whatever, you can really see who you love and who or what you are devoted to. And when it comes to following Christ we say that we love and adore him but when it comes to obeying him that is another matter. And sacrifice gives up what I can have in order for the joy and happiness of another. It is willing to have less time and even greater burdens and problems in his or her life for the benefit or the joy of another. And there is no love without sacrifices. I often have heard a spouse say, "I am not even on his radar, he doesn't ever consider me, but he says he loves me." That is not love and I think that we would all admit that. But why would we ever assume that our love for God could be any different? If there is no willing and fervent sacrifice then there is no love. Jesus said in John 14:15, "**If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**" Matthew 16:24 records, "**Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'**" If you are overwhelmed with the love of God in Christ through his bountiful mercy to you - the outcome is a life of sacrifice.

Now, look at what Paul says here, "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.**" Notice here Paul uses the word "present." And the word that is being used here is the word of the worshiper coming to God to offer the appropriate sacrifice - to present means to offer, and the offering is to God. We realize in the sacrificial system the offerer would bring an offering because of his sin, and there was a punishment for his sin. There was a substitute, and the victim, in this case the animal was the substitute. The animal got what the worshiper deserved. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, and all those sacrifices pointed to the one perfect sacrifice that would come when God the Son came and took on humanity and lived that sinless life and died as our perfect substitute.

Now we know that Paul is not talking about us presenting our bodies as a sacrifice for sin, and somehow dying and atoning for our sin. And the reason why we know that is because this is a response to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. Paul is making this appeal based on the mercies of God that have already been given. Based on that mercy through Christ already given, present your bodies as living sacrifices. We read in Hebrews 10:14, "**For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.**" He has done it all. And the other reason we know that this is a response to what God has done through Christ is that this is a living sacrifice. It is daily, hourly, moment by moment in how we live and function.

Think of what Paul says early in Romans 6:4, **“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”** We were buried with Christ - we were sacrificed with Christ, but now God has raised us up with him to walk in what - newness of life. There is life that has been given to live - not for ourselves but for Jesus Christ - for our great God, and our life is to be a moment by moment sacrifice for Christ. And the meaning of newness of life is that it is a life that is different. We are compelled to walk differently because we have this new life in Jesus Christ.

And let me ask you: is your life being lived according to the newness of the life that he has given? Is it controlled and dominated by the mercies of God? The amazing thing about this sacrificial living for God is that it is possible for us to live this way precisely because of the mercies of God. But living for God takes effort. It takes tenacity. It takes the ability to say no to self and yes to whatever God is calling us to. And there are some really hard relational commands that are below in the text. And they are great in theory, until we have to love people we do not want our love, or we have to humble ourselves below those we think we are above, or forgive others whatever they have done against us, or not take vengeance but leave that in God's hands. And so many will say something like this - It is just too difficult. I have been burned too many times. Or, I just can't! But here is what Paul is commanding us - present your bodies as living sacrifices. That command is too great. But the impetus of this command is not looking at the worth or lack of worth of others but the worth of the mercies of God. It is based on the mercies of God. Look at the cost and sacrifice that was needed that I might have that forgiveness of God. Look at the new life he has given me. You see - “I can't do this” is really I won't. It is a failure - not to love the other person but to love God so much so that we would live out the gospel - live it out and in light of his mercies.

Can someone look at your life - whether it is your spouse, children, or other members of the household of faith - and say based on what you sacrifice for, spend you time in, how you talk and where you put effort into that you are a lover of God? Again, it is so easy to say that I love God, but our life speaks loudly what we love and what we sacrifice for. We need to keep meditating on the glorious mercies of God and let that change us.

2. We need to see a description of this command. V. 1b.

It is amazing because we can give commands but really do not know what they look like in real life. Husbands can be told to love their wives, but what does that mean? What does that look like to really love my wife and honour my God in obeying that command? And listen to how Paul describes it, because he doesn't leave it up to the husband to decide what that love looks like and how it functions in Ephesians 5:25-28, **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who**

loves his wife loves himself.” Paul explains that command. You are to give yourself for her. You are to know the word so that you can help live out the word. In order to be a godly husband you have to be a person of the book. You have to love her as you love your own body. Think of all the care you take for yourself and all the thought you give yourself. Take that same care and thought for your wife. Paul explains the command to love your wife. And here he does the same thing: what does it look like to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God? And he uses three words here to bring out the meaning. We will look at two of them this morning.

Look at what he says, **“to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”** What are we presenting? And it is our bodies. And please do not misunderstand that he is not somehow saying that we do not honour God and glorify God with our minds, because right in the next verse, he will say that we need to renew our minds after Christ and the gospel. And he is also not saying that our bodies need to look a certain way. Some of us are old and wrinkled, others are heavier and some skinny, and we have different shapes and sizes. It is not talking about the way that we look. In fact we even read of Jesus over in Isaiah 53:2, **“For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.”** If you think that you miss the whole point. It is talking about our behaviour - how we function because of our love for Christ. John Piper says, **“The body is given to make visible the beauty of Christ.”** So as we look at the extravagant sacrifice of Christ for sinners like us then how we live and function in our bodies we are to make that known.

And the application of presenting our bodies is enormous. Our eyes are part of our bodies. What are we looking at; what are we watching? In this age of instant entertainment and media or video clips it is so easy to want to veg and put something before our eyes. But our eyes are for God. They are for him and his glory. How much even are our eyes looking at the pages of Scripture? Our eyes are a window of the soul. How about our tongues. It is amazing how couples talk to one another and condemn one another, and never feel any twinge of conviction because it has become so normal. James says so correctly in James 3:10, **“From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”** Our tongues, what comes out of us, what we talk about should always have the mercies of God and his glory as guiding principle. It is his glory and his glory alone. How are you speaking?

How about your hands and feet. Our feet take us to places and our hands accomplish things. Are they taking us to places and doing things where we can praise God or grow in his likeness? It might be that we are doing activities that are not sinful in and of themselves but if those activities have become dominant in our lives then our lives are not sacrifices to God. They are just lived like others around us. Paul says present your bodies - it takes in all that we do. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, **“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** All of life is to be a visual demonstration of the beauty of his mercies. We have been given this mission to dominate every area of life, and it is a glorious mission.

The second word that is used here to describe the sacrificial like is the word “holy.” We are to live holy lives - lives completely sanctified for Christ. When something is holy we realize that it has two aspects - one is that it is morally righteous life that

lives the way that God wants us to live. And the other is that we are God's - we are his and given to his purposes and his alone. And really when it comes to holiness we do not hear many sermons that teach about the need if we are going to honour God then we need to be holy. And it is not that we never talk about sin and what we should be doing, but so often sermons are more self-help lessons that are not tied to the gospel. We are certainly saved from sin and the penalty of sin, but we are also saved away from sin toward holiness. Listen to what J.I. Packer writes, **"In reality, holiness is the goal of our redemption. As Christ died in order that we may be justified, so we are justified in order that we may be sanctified and made holy."**

Listen to 2Tim. 1:8-9, **"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."** Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:7, **"For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness."** And right after those wonderful verses that we are saved by grace through faith and that is a gift of God we have Ephesians 2:10, **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** And listen to what J.C. Ryle writes about this, **"We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world. . . . Jesus is a complete Saviour. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer's sin, he does more—he breaks its power."**

We many times are very good at explaining what we have been saved from but not what we have been saved to. We have been saved from sin to holiness - from the power of sin to live for Jesus Christ. We think that if we are really going to be gospel centred and Christ centred in our lives that we can never talk about rules and commands and regulations and precepts but Paul goes right from doctrine to command. Just read this chapter. Don't do this and do this! And it is all tied to the mercies that we have received in Jesus Christ. The outcome is to be a holy life lived before God. We realize when animals were brought to the place of sacrifice before God that they had to be without defect or any abnormality. And it spoke of holiness. We are righteous in standing before God because of the spotless and holy life of Christ that was offered on our behalf. Now as believers we are called unto that holiness.

The reason we do not like that calling so often is that it takes effort. Sanctification takes effort and we are just too lazy. It is easier to say that I love you than being willing to serve you or forgive you. We like to say I believe and love God but let me ask you - do you really? Are you loving him with the life and body that he has given you? Are you living a life that is sanctified - holy in God's sight? This is a life that not only believes the gospel but there is evidence. How? Through the way that person lives as a living sacrifice to God. Live that life for his glory. Let the gospel control and direct all of life for His glory.