

Acceptable Sacrifice

Reasonable Worship

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You know, in view and in light of the things that we've been talking about the last couple of weeks regarding the standard of what is truly righteous and what God has done for us, it just further highlights the level of mercy that he has shown us. When you realize that you truly not only fall short, it's not like you just barely fall short of the standard but every single day you fail to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and his mercy far abounds and exceeds our sin. I just, man, to sing that together with you as fellow sinners, and I know I say it every week but it makes such a difference to come together with you and to sing those kinds of things to our God, and I just want to keep doing it. I want to sing and sing and sing and sing his praises and maybe one of these days we could do a service where we just do that for hours. That's what heaven is going to be like. I mean, you think about that. I mean, heaven is going to be us calling to remembrance what the Redeemer has done for us; the mercy he has shown; the grace he has shown; and we're going to do that together like that but even better with millions of people. Man, I can't wait.

There are just a couple of announcements I want to make you aware of before we get into our message this morning, but first Denver Clark made me aware of an opportunity through the Belmont Village Ministry, it's called the Virtual Dementia Tour which is not a band, but it's a program that they've put together to help give you insight into what it's like to have dementia. So I'll just read this really quickly to you. "Greetings friends of Belmont Village. We would like to invite you to join us on an emotional journey to experience the realities of life for persons living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Please see the attached flier for information about the Virtual Dementia Tour, and after experiencing this sensory tour, you'll better understand the overwhelming effects of the aging process when combined with dementia. This life-changing experience can also help you make a better caregiver and better care-giving and health decisions by knowing what your loved one may be coping with on a daily basis." That will be on Monday, October 29, that's tomorrow, from 4 o'clock to 7 pm. If you are interested, please talk, can they talk to you, Denver? Denver Clark, raise your hand. Right there. Find Denver after the service today for more information.

Then also we have a praise that the land that we've been trying to acquire out here, that has finally gone through after a year and a half of pursuing it and jumping through lots of

hoops, and the Lord used various people and relationships and so basically about 50 extra feet of land out here now belongs to us and we swapped it with 50 feet down there that we owned before. So the county owned this, we owned that. We said we don't want that, they said we don't need this. So we traded. So I don't know what needs to be signed, we'll finish that and finalize it but it's been approved which means that gives us more options for future building projects and expansion and all that. So we've been praying about that for a while and so we give thanks to the Lord for providing for his church.

So with that, I want to call us to the word of God. We're going to be in Romans 12 again. This is part 3 in our series entitled "Reasonable Worship," and this part 3 will be entitled "Acceptable Sacrifice," and as we turn there, I want to ask you a question: do you care about pleasing God? Does that factor into your thinking? Like when you make your plans for the day, does pleasing God enter into that equation? Does that make its way onto how you evaluate what you do, the decisions that you make, the big ones and the little ones? When your life gets tough and you don't know what to do, where does pleasing God stand on your priority list? Or is it just about what will make the most financial sense? Or what will make things easier? Or what will get the people around you to do what you want them to do to make your life better? Where does pleasing God factor into that?

So with those questions in mind, listen to Romans 12:1-2. It says,

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let's pray for the Lord's help this morning.

Lord, we come to you. Lord, we know that you are here and we acknowledge that you know our hearts and that you dwell among us. So Lord, we want to be honoring and pleasing to you, so please show us, show us how. Convict us. Encourage us. Strengthen us. Form us and transform us into the image of Christ we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So just to review, "Reasonable Worship" is our series title and it is basically the idea that it is logical to worship God. That's really what this comes from in verse 1 where it says that this is your reasonable service of worship. This is your logical service, your rational service. This is the only thing that really makes sense when you understand what Paul's been talking about in the book of Romans. So it is logical for us to worship God and it is reasonable for him to call us to give our entire life to his service, and we looked at a few reasons. First, the purpose of our existence is to worship God. Okay, so the very reason that you exist is to worship him, therefore it's reasonable that he should call you to do this. He's not asking you to do something that is beyond what you've been designed to do.

2. The purpose of his commands in the Old Testament and the New were to make it clear that he expects this from us. So you've been created and designed to do this and it's been communicated to you, that expectation, and all of creation communicates this.

3. His judgment is based on this standard of worship. So it's reasonable to call you to worship God because if you do not, you will be judged. If you fail to worship God, you are under his wrath and so Paul begs you, "Worship God."

4. His mercy has been shown to you so that you would worship God. Mercy was needed because we had rejected his glory and we were neither capable nor willing to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. His mercy and compassion was on display when he promised a Savior and a Redeemer over and over in the Old Testament. His mercy was shown by providing the law of Moses as like a red flag warning of sin and judgment so that we would see our great need. That was his mercy warning you, showing you where you lack. His mercy found its culmination in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ so that salvation could be by faith and not by works because no one could ever be saved by works. But you see, if Christ had not died, salvation by faith would be impossible. So because he died, the faith of the patriarchs and the faith of the prophets and the faith of all the faithful people in the Old Testament, that actually was counted as righteousness for them, but if he did not die, it would have counted as nothing for them. They would have died in their sins just like you and me.

So in the death of Christ, salvation by faith was made possible, in fact, it is the only way of salvation. He has mercifully postponed judgment so that more and more people will hear the Gospel and believe. This is what 2 Peter talks about, that God is not slow concerning his promises. People say, "Why does he wait? Why does he wait? Why doesn't he come now?" And the reason is that he does not want anyone to perish. He does not want any of his children to perish and so he has put up with many wicked people, many wicked tyrants over the history of the world so that you would come into existence and that you would come to faith. How many of you are descendants of some wicked king, some wicked tyrant, and maybe even the direct descendant of some wicked man or woman, and if God had not been patient with them, you would not be here and you would not experience the mercy of God?

So his mercy has been shown through history to provide that opportunity for people to hear the Gospel and be saved and because of his mercy, the Gospel has come down and been passed down to you and you have believed and you are forgiven of sins. You no longer are under his judgment. But more than that, his mercy has provided more than just forgiveness, more than just avoidance of judgment, it has set us free from the power of sin in our life. That which we have come to hate, that which separated us from him, that which causes so much trouble in our own heart and in relationship to other people, he has set us free from that so that we no longer have to live in it. He has given us a new heart that wants to please him. He has provided his Spirit to empower us and to pray for us according to his will. He has given us his word to direct us and he is organizing all things for our good so that we would be conformed to the image of God, and he has promised

the redemption of our bodies and the renewal of the universe so that we might have hope and nothing can separate us from his love.

His mercy has provided more than forgiveness, it has provided all of these things and do you know what? His mercy was even at work when Israel rejected Jesus. When the people of Israel, when the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day rejected him, that was God's mercy because if they had not rejected him, he would not have been crucified; because he was rejected by his people, he was crucified as an atoning sacrifice for sins and not just for the Jews, not just for his own people but for the Gentiles as well, and because they rejected him, he was crucified so that all who believe might be saved through him. You and I, like wild olive branches, were taken from the wilderness and grafted into the special olive tree of the people of God and those Jews who rejected Jesus, they were broken off, those branches, the natural branches were broken off so that we could enter in and so that people of every tribe, tongue and nation could be a part of the kingdom of God and be among his people. He did all of this so that he could show his mercy on all who believe. That's essentially a summary of the book of Romans.

So now he has placed you and I here as a witness to his mercy so that we might proclaim his excellencies in a dark world, therefore, because of all of this, it is only reasonable and logical for you and I to do what we were born to do and do what we were born again to do, to present our bodies as a sacrifice to God. Because of all of that, it's only reasonable. You see, Jesus has been reversing the curse. Romans 1:18 and following, people reject the glory of God, they're given over to their lusts, to a debased mind, and their bodies are dishonored because their bodies are used for unrighteousness and, therefore, under the wrath of God. Listen to Romans 1:29, "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." But now even though they use their bodies for all of those things, by God's mercy your body and mine are no longer used for unrighteousness but rather as a sacrifice to God and they are transformed from that thing, that thing that was completely unacceptable, into something that is holy and acceptable to God. Jesus is reversing the curse starting with your heart, moving out into your body, and eventually the entire creation will be redeemed. He is reversing the curse.

So in this series talking about reasonable worship, we are saying that it is reasonable to present your entire body as a sacrifice. So in part 1 we talked about the fact that worship is our purpose; part 2 we talked about how God's mercy has accomplished all these things. So it's logical but I want you to notice something here, that these sacrifices are to be acceptable to God. So you don't define what this sacrifice looks like. You don't just come up with your own ideas about sacrifice. It has to be acceptable to God.

That comes from the word there in verse 1, "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God." What does that word "acceptable" mean? It means "well-

pleasing; pleasing to God." It gives him pleasure. It gives him joy. It is something that he delights in, he likes. Our sacrifices are to be something that God likes, something that God wants, something that God enjoys, that he takes pleasure in. This is not about pleasing yourself and not every sacrifice is acceptable to God. Listen to Isaiah 1:11-20, he says, "'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword.' Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

You see, God is not pleased though we get emotional at a song, God is not pleased just because I drop money in the offering plate. You don't make up for your sins by doing religious rituals and religious acts; by participating in the right programs. In fact, there was one guy that I knew that he was in a long-term adultery that he had kept hidden for years and he was found out and just steeped in immorality, just uncontrolled lust, but he would come to church and raise his hands and he would sing loudly and be very enthusiastic about anything you asked him to do, and in talking with him, one of the things that made him feel really good about himself was that he gave his tithe faithfully. Is God pleased with a sacrifice like that? Is God pleased with all that service? Is God pleased with giving up stuff so that you could get God to bless you and overlook your active rebellion? Is God pleased with that? No. No, he's not. You're making up your own version of what the sacrifice is like Cain. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, Cain's was not. Cain didn't do it in faith.

Not every sacrifice pleases God but on the flip side, do you realize that it is actually possible for you as a believer to please God? Or have you bought into the lie that it is impossible for you to please God? Sometimes we get confused by an over-simplistic theology that says we could never please God, okay? We get confused about the difference between you before Christ and you after Christ; the difference between you before you believed and you after you believed. You understand what I'm saying. After you are saved, you are able to please God. Now it's true, we can never be perfect in this life but that does not mean that God is not pleased with the good that you do when it is done in faith. Hebrews 11:6 says if you don't have faith, it's impossible to please God and that's the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. An unbeliever does nothing from faith, not true faith in God and, therefore, nothing they do pleases him, but the acts

that you do as a believer when done in faith, actually please God. He takes pleasure in it. It makes him happy to see you living in the way that he has called and designed and saved you to do. When you pursue righteousness by faith, you are able to please God.

Have you ever heard it said that the only difference between a believer and an unbeliever is that believers are forgiven? Have you ever heard that, that that's the only difference? That's not true. There is a vast difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Not because of you, it's not something that you can boast in yourself, but because of the work of God. There is a gigantic difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Everything we've said before. A believer believes God and then God, by his Spirit, gives you a new heart that actually loves him. His Spirit dwells in you. The difference is that believers believe God, they worship God, and they submit their lives to his service and they have the Holy Spirit in them conforming them to the image of Christ, which means that a believer will live a life of ever-growing conformity to the will of God and it is impossible for it to be any other way. Do you want to know why? Because God won't let you not grow. He will not let you. Now you may not grow as much as you should, you may hinder that process, but you will grow and one way that he will do it is he will discipline you so that you will share in his holiness and share in the peaceable fruits of righteousness, that's Hebrews 12. When you do not conform your life to his image, he goes to work on you. When you don't do it willingly, he moves you but you have to participate in the process as well and one of the ways that he motivates you to do that is through his discipline.

Now if you refuse to follow his will, you refuse to conform yourself to his word and his ways, when confronted by a brother in your sin and you do nothing in response, what happens then? It's called church discipline. That's what church discipline is for, because a believer when confronted by another believer will repent. If that first step they don't do it, you bring two or three witnesses to say, "Brother, you need to turn from your sin." They will do it. A believer will turn. At some point in that process, a believer will turn and if they don't over like four steps of people calling them to repent, if they refuse then, then what are you to do? You treat them as an unbeliever because all of the external evidence that you can see points to that fact and this is a warning to them to turn and repent. You see, you and I should expect ourselves and each other to live a life devoted to God. We can expect that. We can expect that of each other.

Now is this a harsh, "You'd better keep the rules" kind of thing? No, this is love because we know the destructive nature of sin. Sin destroys. It is antisocial. It destroys relationships. It destroys lives. It results in death. That is the fruit of sin. So we call each other by God's grace to walk in conformity to his will; to be acceptable to him.

Unbelievers are incapable of pleasing God, Romans 8:8, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." But you are not in the flesh as a believer. You're not. But if it is possible to please God, it's also possible to displease him; to do things that he finds unacceptable, things that he does not enjoy, that he does not like, that he does not delight in. Now this, as a believer, does not mean that he hates you. It doesn't mean that he no longer loves you. It doesn't mean that he doesn't delight to call you his child, but he is

displeased with certain actions that you take. That's why this phrase, this kind of popular phrase that when God looks at you he sees Jesus and not your sin. Again, that's an oversimplistic way to look at it. That is actually not true and not helpful. That phrase and that concept is not found in Scripture. When God looks at you, he sees a sinner whom he sent his Son to die for; whose sins have been forgiven; and who he is actively working on to conform into the image of his Son. That's who he sees and to the degree that you look like Jesus in your attitudes and actions, he is well-pleased. To the degree that you do not look like Jesus, he is not pleased but he is committed to your sanctification and he is not pleased to leave you in sin and immaturity. He's arranging all of your circumstances so that you will let go of sin and idolatry and that you will be conformed to the image of Christ doing the things that are pleasing to him.

When he looks at you, he sees all of your sin but sees you as forgiven and being sanctified and the person who through the course of their life he will conform to the image of Christ until that final day when he redeems your body and you are now fully conformed to the image of Christ, perfected. This isn't some like cosmic card trick or like Jesus is standing in front of you and like, "Nope, they're not here." That's not what's going on here and I think that's much more profound that God sees the reality and he loves you and he's working for your good.

So don't be discouraged if you find that you are not what you should be. None of us are what we should be. So don't feel sorry for yourself. Get up. You're loved. You're forgiven. Get up. Renew your mind according to his will. Be transformed by it and offer your entire self as a sacrifice to him, that sacrifice that is acceptable to him.

So how does this affect your every day? Well, it should be your number 1 goal. Pleasing God should be your goal and purpose every day. Listen to these passages. Galatians 1:10. Go ahead and write them down so you can look them up later. Galatians 1:10, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." So there's a dichotomy. You know, you cannot serve two masters. You cannot please yourself and God and you cannot be devoted to pleasing men and please Christ at the same time.

Colossians 1:10, he saved you "so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." There's a purpose for your salvation.

1 Thessalonians 4:1, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more." So excel in those instructions. That's 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

Next is 2 Timothy 2:4. It says, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." You see as a soldier, that encapsulates and defines everything you do. When you're a soldier, they own you and so everything that you do is done to please the one who enlisted you.

2 Corinthians 5:9, "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."

Then Ephesians 5:10, "trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." This is a major theme in Scripture. A major theme in Scripture. So your aim every single day ought to be to please God and to do what is acceptable to him.

We're going to talk about, let me see, there are many different ways that this shows up in specifics but let's talk about this, Romans 14:18 talks about how you are to deny your own rights if it means the edification of a fellow Christian. So for instance, like giving up alcohol so that you are not a stumbling block to a brother. Differing opinions about the best way to raise your kids. The best type of schooling situation. Whatever, all of those things. If you are willing to deny your own rights and to set aside your own opinions and not to quarrel over them for the edification of a fellow Christian, Paul says that he who serves Christ in this way "is acceptable to God and approved by men."

In Philippians 4:18, Paul says this, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." So when they supplied for Paul's needs, that was a pleasing sacrifice to God. They supplied for his needs out of their own poverty, out of a genuine love and a genuine concern for his welfare and for the progress of the Gospel and that was well-pleasing to God. He didn't say, "Hey, good job but don't get cocky and do you know what? You can't please God anyway but this was nice." That's not what he says. He says, "This is well-pleasing to God."

Colossians 3:20, Paul calls, "Children, be obedient to your parents for this is well-pleasing to the Lord." And there was one person who was defined by being well-pleasing and that is Jesus. When he was baptized God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." He did the same thing in the Transfiguration, he was well-pleased with Christ. So if you want to see what it looks like to be well-pleasing to God, look at Jesus.

So our response to the mercy of God is to offer our bodies as an acceptable sacrifice, our reasonable service. So let's define what this means. I'm going to give you two main headings here and we're going to cover a lot of ground. Number 1: acceptable sacrifice defined, and I'm breaking it under two subheadings. I'm taking after Ty right now. So an acceptable sacrifice defined, what is that? Then secondly, an acceptable sacrifice applied. Okay, so we're going to look at the definition and the application.

So the definition is in verse 1, "to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God." There are two key words here, "living" and "acceptable," and also "holy." So there are two key words of an acceptable sacrifice, right? It means living and holy. So what does he mean by living? Okay, it just means alive and he's been talking about this in the book of Romans already, but the word "living" here is one of three characteristics of the sacrifice, right? Living holy and acceptable all describe the sacrifice

and we have already talked about acceptable so far so we're just going to talk about living and holy now.

So the word "living" is talking about the spiritual state of believers. Okay, living. The spiritual state of believers. This is who you are. Romans 6:11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." 6:13, "do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." You have been made alive. Romans 8:13, "for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Those who believe in Christ have been made alive and are called to give this new life to him as a sacrifice.

So those who are alive give their life to Christ, so what does that look like? What does this life, this new life look like? What is it defined by? What is it characterized by? The next word in our passage there is "holy." This living acceptable sacrifice is holy. Holy, this sacrifice is holy. If you want to offer an acceptable sacrifice to God, it's as one who is alive from the dead, you're no longer living in sin but now you're living to God and now it needs to be holy, which means that it is dedicated to God; set apart for a special purpose.

So the idea of this word "holy" is that it is not used for anything else. It's like in the temple you had different dishes and bowls and instruments that were used in the service of the temple and they're made from the same material but some of them take out the trash and some of them are used to offer incense. What's the difference between those? Nothing intrinsically. The difference is what they're used for. What makes one holy is that it is dedicated completely unto service to God and if one of those instruments was defiled, it was broken and smashed and thrown away because they used it for something else or it touched something unclean.

So an instrument that was sanctified to be used for God, it had to have blood from a sacrifice sprinkled on it to sanctify it and then it was only to be used for what God had defined it for and that's the only difference. It was a picture of how set apart God is. Richard Mayhue put it this way, he says, "God's holiness is his inherent and absolute greatness in which he is perfectly distinct and above everything outside himself and he is absolutely morally separate from sin." So those are the two aspects of holiness, like majestic holiness, he is just set apart, he is just different, and then his ethical and moral holiness. So he is separated from sin, he is perfect and he abhors sin and he demands purity in his moral creatures.

Jesus is called the Holy One of God and the Holy Spirit, obviously, is the Spirit of God. This is a definition, this is a major attribute of God that defines everything that he is and because he is holy, he requires his people to be holy. Leviticus 19 says, "Speak to all the

congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.' And he says this many times in the Old Testament and I won't quote all of them but it's picked up again in the New Testament, so not just before Christ, not just before Jesus came, not just before Christianity, but even afterwards. 1 Peter 1:15 says this, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" You're set apart. You have been chosen by God. You have been washed clean and you have been dedicated like a priest, like an incense laver in the temple, you have been set apart to be completely used for God's service. Nothing else. Nothing. That is what we're designed to do and that's what we're saved to do, to be a living sacrifice that is holy and that is what is pleasing to God.

Now there are so many commands regarding what holiness looks like but one, for instance, is 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and following. He says, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification," it's the same root word for holiness, "your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification," or holiness, "and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you." You see, this does not mesh with modern evangelical Christianity. This doesn't mesh with our current world that makes sexual immorality seem like a game, like it's not a big deal, or that you get to define what it looks like. If we are to be acceptable sacrifices to God, it needs to be holy, set apart, according to his standard and his likeness, and that God still cares about that. He still cares about how you live your life.

Can I just say something? Some of the things that I've said over the last three weeks outside of this room would get me killed. We'd have riots on the streets if you say these kinds of things in the right venue, and what's been amazing is to see how receptive God's people are to this kind of a thing, where people are saying amen, this kind of thing motivates you, it doesn't offend you. That is truly the work of God in the heart, that this is acceptable to you; that what is acceptable to God has become acceptable to you as well. So praise the Lord because I probably would have to go into hiding for some of these things, right?

But we are to be set apart for service to God. This is the purpose of our salvation. Ephesians 1:5, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will," so that we would be holy and blameless before him. Romans 7:4, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." That's the main thing I want you to see, that you have been joined to Christ in order that you may bear fruit to God. Romans 6:6, "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin."

6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." 2 Corinthians 5:15, "He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Then 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

So that's how you define what an acceptable sacrifice is. Is it living? Has it come to faith in Christ and been recreated in his image? Born again? Are you alive to God? And secondly, is it holy. Is what you're doing holy? Is it in accordance with his righteousness? How would you know? How do you know if it's acceptable to God? We've got to know the word better. We've got to go to the word. You see, if your goal is to please him and you know that he has given you the instruction so that you can know what is pleasing to him, you need to get into the word. Honestly, some of you here are really really well-versed in the Scriptures but I would say a majority are not. We know our doctrine, we know our Gospel, but we don't know where to find it and we don't know what the implications are. We've got to grow in this. We have to if we want to offer acceptable sacrifices to God.

So now, that is the acceptable sacrifice defined, now here's the acceptable sacrifice applied. Okay, how do we do this? I'm going to give you five applications, okay? Just go ahead and write these down. 1. The first application is intentional transformation. Intentional transformation. 2. Humble stewardship. 3. Enthusiastic service. 4. Sincere love. 5. Patient endurance. And I'm not going to spend an equal amount of time on all of these.

First, let's start with intentional transformation. Verse 2 of Romans 12. So he's been explaining already, right, what we are to do: offer sacrifices acceptable to God. Now he starts getting into how this happens. How do you actually do this? And it has to start, first, with verse 2, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." If you want to be a living sacrifice to God, the first place it has to start is in your mind and you have to understand something, that you are naturally conformed to this world. Okay? So the way that you operate if you are not purposefully renewing your mind in accordance with the will of God, then you are conformed to this world's way of thinking and the way I think about it is this, right: gravity pulls everything down and if you want to make Jello, you've got that liquid and you pour that into the Jello mold and gravity pulls that down into the mold and forms it after the likeness and the shape of that mold, okay? So gravity automatically naturally pulls it down and that's the shape that it will take. You naturally are conformed to this world and if you wake up and do nothing, you will be conformed to this world. If you wake up and just go to work and just react to the news and just react to the emails and just react to the tasks, you are automatically conformed to this world because this world wants you to conform to it, because your flesh and what's easy conforms to it, and because the devil wants you to conform to it.

This world wants you to conform to it and so you wake up first thing in the morning and you flip on Facebook and everything on there screams materialism and self-promotion and immorality, whatever it is. It gets you all riled up about all the crazy stuff going on in the world, as though you're going to fix it. You're being conformed to this world. You flip on Fox News to get your marching orders for the day, to define what's important and what's not. That's conformed to the world. Or CNN. Or MSNBC. Or ESPN. People getting all fired up about things that don't actually matter. Or getting fired up because the way that they define what is good and right is according to their own standard and if that is what you are just constantly slamming into, the gravity of all of that is just going to pull you and shape you into that mold.

If you want to be conformed to the image and the will of God, you have to purposely be transformed and that means your mind needs to be renewed. That means that's going to take some humility on your part to recognize that you don't have it all together and that you don't naturally have it all together, and the way that you think about things is not necessarily the right way and probably is not the right way. So to be transformed, you've got to start in the very core of your being and work your way out and remodel, reassess, tear down, rebuild your thinking to be in accordance with the image of Christ and the will of God, and you do this in your mind, starting there, so that, it says, you may prove what the will of God is. That word "prove" literally means "to approve." The idea is to approve after a process of testing and examining.

So when you look at your world and you look at your parenting and you look at your marriage and you look at how you interact with one another and how you go to work, you need to train your mind in accordance with the will of God so that you may look at that situation and sort it out and test and approve God's way. You need to examine the situation in light of God's word and in light of how you ought to think and act and feel and do and do that. Like we said from Ephesians 5:10, trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Philippians 1:10, "so that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."

So do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Don't let the gravity of life pull you into the world's mold. This will of God is good, acceptable and perfect. Good meaning morally excellent. Acceptable is the same word we talked about before, pleasing, well-pleasing. And perfect meaning complete; mature; without blemish. Don't be satisfied with a half-hearted approach to being transformed into the image of Christ.

So that is intentional transformation. The second application of an acceptable sacrifice is this: humble stewardship. Humble stewardship. Look at Romans 12:3-5, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Humble stewardship. I want you to look at the end of verse 3 there, we are to think rightly about ourselves, right, in accordance with the

measure of faith. What does that mean? What is this measure of faith? There are different opinions on this but I think the best way to take this is that it is a measure of the stewardship that God has given you. It's not the measure of confidence, it's not the measure of how much you believe God because we're called to serve beyond our confidence. We're called to obey when we are not confident, when we are afraid. We're called to serve whether we're comfortable or not.

So it's not in accordance with your confidence, the best way I think to take this word "faith" in this particular context is that it is a trustee-ship. It's a stewardship. It's something that has been given to you to be faithful in. It's not the most common way this word is translated but there are places where this is documented in Josephus and Plutarch and Publius, these are all extra-biblical authors, not Christian authors, but the idea of like a government position being entrusted to somebody; military commands; positions of power, and I think that this is actually in line with a lot of the ways that Paul talks in other places. Romans 3:2, "Great in every respect. First of all," the Jews, "were entrusted with the oracles of God." That word "entrusted" has a similar root to the word for "faith." Titus 1:3, "at the proper time manifested," God did, "even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior." This also fits with Romans 12:6 where prophets are given a specific message, right? So in their prophecy, they're to prophesy in proportion to their faith or in proportion to the stewardship that God has given them. So a prophet, God gives a prophet a word to speak to a specific people. Specific words to give to specific people and that is a stewardship from God and he is to be faithful with that. So that was stewarded to that prophet, he is to take that and he's not to go beyond that and he's not to do any less than that. He's to do exactly what he's been stewarded to do. As we know in 1 Corinthians, Paul says, "You ought to consider us as stewards of the mysteries of God," and it is required that a steward be found faithful. There is also a parallel passage in Ephesians 4:7, "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

So each of us have been given a measure of grace, a measure of ability, resources and opportunities to use for the building up of the body. It's been measured out. None of us has been given the whole thing, none of us is Jesus, okay? Only Jesus possesses all of the gifts and each of us as stewards of God's manifold grace, his varied grace, are to use that to serve. This is 1 Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

So what am I saying here for this passage? So Paul says this, "By the grace given to me," he's exemplifying this, "By the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you." Okay, when was the grace given to him? Paul used this phrase over and over and over but essentially it was the message that God gave him as the apostle to the Gentiles. God gave a particular sphere of influence and within that sphere he was fully going to use that to call people to the Gospel and to walk worthy of it. So in accordance with the grace given to him, "I say to everyone among you do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think." Each person is to think soberly and accurately about themselves. Now this does not mean running yourself into the ground and pretending like you're useless. That's not what it means. It's not over there being like, "Oh, you know, I'm just not as

good as So-and-so. I guess I'm useless." That's not humility, okay? It's having a right view of yourself; a correct view of the stewardship of the grace that God has given you.

So think about this. Okay, this is the main thing I want you to take away from the message today: what has God given you in your life? What has he given you? Because there's nothing that you have that you don't have by the grace of God. Every single thing is a gift of God to be employed in his service. What do you have? What kind of knowledge? What kind of abilities? What kind of talents? What kind of resources? And what kind of opportunities do you have? Use that to serve God. Okay, you might be really generous but dirt poor. God has not given you the opportunity or the resources to give a whole lot of money so don't sit there and be like, "Oh, I can't do anything." No, what has he given you? Use it.

It's like when Jesus fed the 4,000 and there's all this crowd and there's way too many people and it's time to feed them and Jesus says, "Oh, I have compassion on them. Let's feed them." And the disciples are like, "Um, we couldn't work for a year to feed all these people." You know, Jesus says, "You guys need to feed them." They're like, "We couldn't possibly feed them. We don't have enough." And he looks at them and he says, "What do you have?" "Five loaves and two fish." I could only imagine them being sarcastic about it. "Uh, sure, um, here, I've got this in my pocket." And Jesus takes that and multiplies it, multiplies it and feeds thousands and thousands and thousands, they couldn't even eat all of it.

What do you have? Use it as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, conforming your mind and transforming your mind in accordance with his will so that you would discern his will and then use what you have to fulfill his will in the service of his kingdom, in the service of his saints. So if that means that you are wealthy, use that. If that means that you're a preacher, then preach. If that means that you are to lead, it says do it with zeal; do it with diligence; go all out. But don't think more highly of yourself than you should because you're not the only one, and don't look down on people that have a different gift or calling than you, and don't be jealous of those who have a different calling than you. Use what you have.

So I could preach forever and I'm sure you would love it but I'll just summarize the last three points here. So that means after you have given, after you have a humble stewardship mindset of the things that you have, then employ those in enthusiastic service. 4. In sincere love without hypocrisy, associating with the lowly, it says. I just commend the rest of Romans 12 to you. Associate with the lowly. Don't be haughty. Don't be wise in your own estimation. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love and give preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in the Spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, and persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints and practicing hospitality.

Then lastly, sincere love and then patient endurance. Romans 12:17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." That includes your wife or your husband, by the way. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own

revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Patient endurance.

So this sacrifice, just to close this out, if it's to be acceptable to God, it's to be living and holy and what does that actually look like? Intentional transformation of your mind. Humble stewardship. Enthusiastic service. Sincere love. And patient endurance. Do you care about pleasing God? Does that matter to you? Then you know what to do. So let's do that together and he has given us the ability to do that and we take joy in that, don't we?

Let's pray.

Lord, you have given us everything and we want to return that to you. May we be living and holy sacrifices that are acceptable to you. Teach us, Lord, how to discern your will, conform us to your image, transform us into your image. Show us, Lord, what you have given us and how we can use it. Help us, Lord, to serve with enthusiasm. Help us to love sincerely and help us, Lord, to endure patiently through this wicked world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.