

## Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

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

How do we live our lives in a way that is most pleasing to God? How do we wake up and go through our days in way that will bring pleasure to Christ? What does God really want from us? What does He want us to do? What does He want us to think?

If you are a Christian, these are **real questions** you have asked. They are things you may have answers to. But if you are like me, you're always wanting to know more about how to live this Christian life that God has blessed us with.

Well Paul knew that these are **the questions of a Christian** so Paul, from now to the end of the book will answer these kinds of questions. He will tell us what is important in the Christian life.

But look at how the book of Romans is divided. Paul spends 11 chapters on what some would call pure theology. So he spends 11 chapters telling us what is **true about us** and **true about God**. He teaches us about the salvation that God has provided for us. Then he only spends **5 chapters** on telling us how to live.

I think there are at least two important truths to glean from this.

First- a believer cannot live the Christian life without having a fundamental understanding of how Christ has saved him. In the Christian life, we don't obey in order to **win** something from God. We obey **BECAUSE** we have **already received** something from God. It is vital that we understand just what we have received.

Only then can we live the Christian life with the proper attitude and with the proper focus.

There tend to be two errors in the Christian life that we all tend toward. The first error is to think that doctrine is **all that matters**. When we believe this we spend a lot of time reading and studying. We want to know the nuances of the texts.

We might want to know what people have thought about these texts throughout history. And we look down upon anyone who doesn't have a high view of doctrine and won't study their bibles.

The people with this error may not regard **active service** as being all that important. They easily live with more of an **internal** focus, not an **external** one. They may have brothers and sisters around them with needs, but that really isn't compelling to them. They may have known sin in their lives, but they think that what really matters is the doctrine they believe.

The other error is those who think that doctrine is boring and really, not very important. These people tend to skip **the beginnings of the epistles** and get right to what they regard as the **meat** of the scripture. They want to get right to where they are given instructions. They want the practical truths, the useful truths. They tend to say, just tell me what to do and I will do it. Tell me what needs done and I'll get it done. Tell me what behavior to change and I will change it. But these people will have a tendency to have all kinds of attitude problems because they have not grasped the depth of grace. They will look down on others who are not as busy as they are. They will tend to be not very gracious or loving toward others. And it is all a result of **not doing what they do based on being what they are**. They have not understood doctrine enough to know the "why" behind all Christian living. So while they might be trying to do **the right things**, they end up doing them for **the wrong reasons**. How can you tell? **They will resent that their contribution, the work they do, the service they provide, is not appreciated enough by others.**

This brings us to the second important truth. The first was- a believer cannot live the Christian life without having a fundamental understanding of how Christ has saved him.

The second is that when one has a proper understanding of his salvation he will **apply the gratitude** that those truths convey in **a life lived for God in this body**. There **ARE** things to do. There are needs needing met. There are sins needing overcome. There are paths that must be changed in order for us to please and glorify God.

You see there is a fundamental connection between **who we are** in Christ and **what we do** in Christ. We can never separate the two except to study them. All through scripture we find that **life and doctrine** are both important. And we cannot live the proper Christian life without both of them playing their proper role. **Proper theology drives proper behavior**. And the epistles always give us a proper balance of both.

So if you tend toward being a do-er, prioritize times to read the theology part of the epistles. It will keep your motives correct. If you tend toward being a thinker, focus on what scripture **tells you to do** and prioritize a time to get off your chair and do it. Both are absolutely essential for the Christian life.

When we focus on the truths of God we may experience things that are wonderful. We may want to bask in their glow and repeat that experience again and again. This often comes from the wonders of God's truths, from theology. But in the end we must keep the perspective that these experiences are given to

us in order **to empower Godly living**. They are not given to us as only an end in themselves.

Another thing to remember in our transition from a primarily **doctrinal focus** to more of a **practical application focus** is what happens to us if we don't have both. If a man does not have good doctrine, it will negatively affect his life. Until, ultimately, it is shipwrecked. He may be proven to not be a Christian after all. But it is also true that if a person's life is not lived in a godly manner, eventually that person's theology will shrink to allow for a powerless Christianity. You can take that truth to the bank. **We as believers MUST grasp the truth with our minds while we grasp the plow with our hands. Healthy faith and healthy doctrine.** We learned about that in Titus.

There is one last thing I would like to say about the relationship of **living to doctrine**. When we are faced with temptation, when we feel very strongly that we must do some wrong **thing**, we must **do something** about that. The world would say use your stubborn will power and just don't do that bad thing. But that doesn't have much power for changing behavior. And even if you can resist evil with willpower, all that will happen is your pride will grow. You will start thinking too highly of yourself.

But the Christian, based on true doctrine, must take another approach. We must go back to our doctrine. We must go back to Romans 1-11. And we must remember that we are no longer the person we were. We have been regenerated. We are a new person. All of our sin has been placed on Christ. Our sin is taken care of. He paid for it all.

Now **we claim that new status by faith**. We can face our temptation and call it what it is. But we can also **claim that we no longer are in the control of that sinful influence**. God has cut that power cord in us. We have the freedom in Christ to resist it. We can, by faith, say no to sin and yes to Christ. Yet all of this is not based on commands we are given. **It is based on truths we believe**. It is based upon that which has been done for us, not that which we are commanded to do.

So you see that we cannot afford to sway to one extreme or the other. We must know our doctrine. We must understand that salvation is by Grace alone through faith alone. We have to get that implanted very firmly in our minds. And then we need to go about doing all those things that we are told in the New Testament that please God, believing that we have the power to do them based on the mercies of God toward us.

Now, let's lay out the outline for the rest of Romans. (Refer to handout)

Chapter 12:1,2- General introduction to the section

Chapter 12:3-21 Christians in relationship to the church

3-8 The Christian's life in the church

9-21 Christians in relationship with fellow members

Chapter 13- Christians in their relationship to the world

Chapter 14-15:13 Christians in relationship to the church

Two problems-

The attitude of the stronger brother to the weaker

The attitude of Jews to Gentiles and vice versa

Chapter 15:14-33 Paul's personal expression

Chapter 16:1-16 Greetings and salutations

Chapter 16: 17-20 Final warning against false teachers

Chapter 16:21-24 Greetings from those with Paul

Chapter 16:25-27 Paul breaks into a doxology

Now let's start into our text.

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

**I beseech you-** The word used for beseech is parakaleo. It is the same root as the word used for the Holy Spirit- the paraklete. It means to come alongside to help. Now look at Paul's approach here. Paul could have simply said "present your bodies a living sacrifice." I mean, that, after all is reasonable. But I think what Paul demonstrates to us is the difference between telling and helping. It is the difference between sheer authority and loving authority.

Many of us are in positions of authority. And in those positions we have the choice of whether we want to lead like Paul or lead like the heathens. Christ told us that the Gentiles lead pretty much by lording everything over you. And we can do that. No one can argue that we don't have the right to issue commands according to our discretion. But, because we have the right, does not make it right to do. We do better to follow the example of our author this morning. Paul says I beseech you. I urge you. I implore you. I come next to you and tell you that this is what you must do, but I am here to help you do it. I will do all in my power to enable this action on your part. I will consider what I can do, what I can say, how I can lead, to make this thing do-able for you. I don't give this command

from afar, relationally. He is essentially using a word that tells his audience, I am in this with you. I will not abandon you in the process.

That is how we are to lead our families. That is how we are to lead in the church.

Our hearts must be hooked to those we serve. Our energies must be used to enable others to do those things that we are instructing them they must do.

There are lots of words Paul could have used here but he used a relational word, a connected word. And he uses that word in conjunction with one of the most difficult things, and one of the most necessary things that a believer ever does.

The sacrifice of one's body.

How often do we paraclete? How often do we let people know by words and deeds that we are with them in their struggle to do the right thing? And I especially mean that where it is the hardest- with those we are closest to.... With those who see us for **what we are** when we quit putting on our public act? Do our commands come with the willingness to do all that we can to aid their obedience? In fact, do we even consider the best way to address each other in a way that will most likely inspire their obedience? Paul did! And we should follow his example.

**therefore**

Next Paul says "therefore". Therefore is a thinking man's word. A therefore is based on a series of truths, that when considered, leads to a conclusion. In our text this "therefore" is based on something that can be described several ways. Our passage gives it a name. **The mercies of God**. Another way to describe it is to say Chapters 1-11 in Romans. You see, those **are** the mercies of God that this verse is appealing to. We will delve into this a little later.

Our purpose here is mostly to emphasize that Paul fully expects Christians to use their minds. He expects us to follow his line of thought. And he expects that when he is done explaining to us the wonderful mercies of God, that we have seen in the salvation provided by God, that we would join him in understanding that these mercies deserve our full allegiance, they deserve all we have to give. How could we possibly think otherwise? That is what the therefore is there for.

**brethren,**

We learned earlier in Romans that flesh and blood cannot please God. If a person is in the position of flesh, if they are not reborn, if they are not a child of God, if they are not a brother, they cannot possibly do this thing that Paul is exhorting. Oh there are many religions that encourage people to do something like this in the flesh. They ask their worshippers to do all kind of fleshly sacrifice and fleshly mutilation. They do child sacrifices. They cut their bodies. They punish their

bodies. Why? Maybe it is because Satan always tries to provide a forgery of the truth. He always makes his lie look like something that is true. So the imitations of true worship always have elements that are close to true worship.

But what Paul is commanding in our text can only be done by true believers. He is not addressing unbelievers. If he were, he would address them with their need to believe in Christ, the need to respond to His call on their lives. He would not instruct them to do anything else in order to be made right with God.

Note too that Paul used a word that put him and his listeners on the same plane. He did not say children, although he could have. He could have emphasized his exalted position as apostle. But he didn't. He speaks to them as one of them.

We do well to follow this example as well. Even with our kids, especially our older kids, when we minister to them, we are in many ways like them. If they are in Christ, they are our brothers and sisters. We should consider that in our day to day dealings with them.

And Paul uses a word that does not differentiate the Jew and Gentile. He uses a word that does not separate the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish. He uses a word that brings all believers together at the foot of the cross. Brethren.

### **by the mercies of God**

I mentioned this a bit earlier. We see much made of the mercy of God in chapters 9-11. It is always important that we keep our definitions clear. Remember the difference between mercy and grace?

Mercy is God withholding from us the judgment we deserve. It also means the pity of God for our condition.

Grace is God giving His good stuff to those who do not deserve good stuff. It is unmerited favor.

Well Paul is focusing here on the wrath of God that **has been withheld** from us. And also the fact that God is not just focused on all the things that **we have done to deserve that wrath**, but is more focused on **the terrible condition we have gotten ourselves into**. God has felt sorry for us. He has moved to action based on our pitiful state. We have seen 11 chapters of God's mercy. We have been given great insight into that mercy that we would never have known about if the Holy Spirit had not revealed all of this to us. This is **mercy** we would not have received if Christ had not died for us.

The whole logic of everything that Paul is going to instruct from now to the end of the book is **based upon this truth**. Our behavior is based upon the manifold mercies of God toward us in the salvation plan.

Paul fully expects this truth to grip our hearts and give us an eagerness and willingness to do things that we could and would **never do** except for that appreciation. He expects that the gratitude that fills our heart through faith will be turned to obedience in our daily decisions and actions.

### **that you present**

The word used for present is a technical word used to describe a priest placing a sacrifice on the altar. Our English word is not as limited as this Greek word is. The Greek audience would have immediately understood what was being spoken of here. Paul is talking about what is normally done by priests to animals when they are being intentionally offered to God.

So the Greek listeners would have understood that what is being commanded is something that is serious. Once the animal was sacrificed, it didn't get to be sacrificed again. If you had a chicken and a pig making their contribution to a ham and egg breakfast, this sacrifice would be like the contribution of the pig, not the chicken.

This would be understood. This was nothing that anyone would take lightly. It was a serious mental image that was being created. It would be solemn and devoted. The consideration would be a sober one. This is a serious commitment. We are, in this action, putting ourselves unreservedly at God's disposal.

The Greeks would have understood that they were offering themselves as slaves. Yet it is not something that was forced upon them. They were beseeched to do this. It was a willing sacrifice. It is a voluntary slavery. A slavery in which one delights.

Paul is saying- hand your body over.

Willingly give your bodies over to the lordship of another.

Who of us, this morning, really believes that we know how to live our lives better than God knows how our lives should be lived? Would any of us really raise our hands at this point and say, I do! I think I know how to live better than God.

No, I doubt any of us are that foolish.

But let me ask a question that is closer to home. What thing are **you afraid to** submit to God for his direction on what you should do? What are you afraid to trust God with? Do you realize that this is really the same question?

What are you afraid to trust God with?

Are you afraid to trust Him with the choice of who to marry?

Are you afraid to trust Him with the running of your household?

Are you afraid to trust Him with the way you interact with people in the church or people in your family?

How about the safety of those you love?

How we spend our evenings?

How we use the resources He has provided?

What will happen to us in the future?

We all have our own waterloos, our own temptations. But this word **present** means a surrender to the will of God that encompasses all those things and more. It is an absolute surrender of our bodies to the will of God.

I read something I really wanted to share with you. It was an illustration by Dr. A T Schofield.

He once owned a dog that he took for walks. The dog was new so the Dr kept him on a leash. He trained him on that leash to the point that he thought the dog was ready to accompany him without a leash.

The day that the Dr let the dog off the leash the dog took off. He was gone. He roamed the neighborhood on his own. But then the dog encountered something. The owner never knew what it was. Maybe it was unfriendly dogs. Maybe a neighbor took a switch to him. The owner didn't know, but suddenly the dog returned to him. And since that time the dog stuck with the owner whenever they went on walks.

Somehow that dog decided that slavery to that owner was the best option in the options that were in front of him. Slavery to that owner was much more desirable than the freedom to roam unrestricted. There was more happiness to be had in **fellowship with** the owner than in **freedom from** the owner. That is the picture of the voluntary slavery that Paul is talking about here in our text.

Martyn Lloyd Jones says this

“In a sense you are free, but in this other sense you go into a voluntary submission and hand yourself over to God because of His great mercy with respect to you, and because this is right for you, and best for you. All of that is in this wonderful word “Present”.”

And what is it that we are to present? What is God asking for?

We are to present **our bodies**.

Isn't that a bit odd? Why our bodies? Our bodies are crude and physical. They aren't heavenly by any means. Their processes can even be vulgar. There is nothing lofty about them. They aren't ethereal. They are earthly.

We would think that God would want something better than that. We would think God would want something more spiritual than that. Maybe our hearts or our minds. But not our bodies.

This passage would have been a big surprise to most Greeks. You see the Greeks had a tendency to think that the soul or spirit are good but the body is bad. The body is material. They tended to think that our souls are trapped in our bodies. By thinking that way they could think that the thing that really matters is the soul. This thinking would allow them to visit the temple prostitutes one day and worship God that evening and it would present no difficulty to them. It did not matter what they did in their bodies. The only thing that mattered was their souls.

But that is not how scripture presents this topic. Initially our bodies were created by God and they were good. Then sin entered the planet and now our bodies house us and they also house sin.

But there is another truth. You will never do anything in this lifetime in your service to God that is not done through this body. And God wants this body to be controlled. He wants it under the power of His Holy Spirit. And God wants it to be used for His service. Because, unlike the Greek model, God fully intends to house us in bodies of some sort for eternity. And this body that the Greeks tend to make light of, Christ is going to do something miraculous. He fully intends to resurrect it.

We will talk more about this next week.

But the question for this week is, have we really ever offered to God, in solemn seriousness, our bodies for His service? If we have never done that, we must. It is a reasonable request. If you have not understood this bodily offering to be required, I urge you to do business with that this week. If you want to live a faithful Christian life, you must offer that body that you live in to God. It must be done. You must understand that this is what you signed up for. What you do with your body and in your body is no longer under your control. You must offer up that control to God.

And second, if you have made that commitment, are you living up to it. What parts of that commitment are you taking back? Have you grown slack in that commitment, thinking of your body as being your own? Do you think that you can live however you want as long as you don't violate clear commands? That is not what you are called to. Your calling is higher than that. Our bodies are to be lived in such a way that, in essence, we no longer direct their use. We receive

God's direction from His word on how to spend the years that we get to use these bodies. We use our bodies in the way our commander tells us to use them. I want to end with a question for all of us. If we were to do this one simple thing, how many of our perplexing problems would go away? How many of our problems are created because we will not fulfill this one simple requirement? And when will we learn like the dog in the illustration that we are always best when fellowshipping with the Master under His direct control?