

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **Dying, We Live**

*Romans 12:1c*

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May 3, 2009

# Dying, We Live<sup>1</sup>

## Scripture

For the past few weeks we have been studying Romans 12:1-2. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, “In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?”

And so I would like to take the next few weeks and look carefully at each phrase in the two verses in Romans 12:1-2.

Let’s read Romans 12:1-2:

<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

## Introduction

A *paradox* is sometimes defined as “a self-contradictory and false proposition.”<sup>2</sup> However, a *paradox* may also be defined as “a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true.”<sup>3</sup>

If someone says, “I am lying,” for example, and we assume that his statement is true, it must be false. The paradox is that the statement “I am lying” is false if it is true.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this material is taken from James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 23-34.

<sup>2</sup> paradox. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paradox> (accessed: May 01, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> paradox. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paradox> (accessed: May 01, 2009).

Sometimes people say that Christianity is full of paradoxes. Some say that Christianity is self-contradictory or false.

However, Christianity is true, and the paradoxes that appear in Christianity are seemingly contradictory but nonetheless true.

One notable paradox in Christianity is the *Trinity*. We say that there is only one God, but we also say that this one God exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The reason we know that this paradox is true and not false is because God has revealed himself in this way in the Scriptures. So, God says that there is only one God in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” And God says that there are three persons in the Godhead in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Another paradox in Christianity concerns the Christian life. We must die in order to live. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). And the Apostle Paul said, “If we have died with him [i.e., Jesus], we will also live with him” (2 Timothy 2:11).

It was these words that inspired this well-known prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much  
Seek to be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is by giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is by dying that we are born to eternal life.<sup>4</sup>

These words capture the essence of what Paul set down in Romans 12:1 as the first principle for living the Christian life. It is

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<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Mind Renewal in a Mindless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 24.

*the principle of self-sacrifice.* Paul said, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

In Paul’s day a sacrifice was an animal that was given to a priest to be killed in order to be offered to God. So Paul is saying that the Christian life begins by offering ourselves to God in order to die. The paradox is that by offering ourselves to God to die we are actually enabled to live for him.

Therefore, it is by dying that we are enabled to live. Remember that Jesus said that living for ourselves is actually death, while dying to self is actually living the abundant life. And so, as James Montgomery Boice asks, “What should we call this paradox?” Let’s call it, as he does, “Dying, We Live.”<sup>5</sup>

## Lesson

This principle of self-sacrifice is foundational to the doctrine of the Christian life. It is important, therefore, to explain it clearly and carefully. So, in our lesson today I want to examine four aspects of the principle of self-sacrifice.

### I. We Belong to Jesus and Not to Ourselves

The first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we belong to Jesus and not to ourselves.

Now, before I go further, I need to stress this very important necessary condition. We belong to Jesus and not to ourselves only if we are Christians. Clearly, if we are not Christians, we don’t acknowledge Jesus’ kingship and we frankly live for ourselves. But, the moment we became Christians we instantaneously belonged to Jesus and not to ourselves.

This is how Paul wrote about it to the Corinthian Church. He

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<sup>5</sup> Boice, 25.

said in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”

A few paragraphs later Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:23, “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.”

So, Paul is very clear. You are not your own, and you were bought with a price.

But, what is the “price”? The Apostle Peter tells us what the “price” is in 1 Peter 1:18-19, where he says that “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” So, the “price” that bought you was “the precious blood of Christ.”

Peter uses the word *ransomed*. I think we all know what a “ransom” is. It is “money demanded for the return of a captured person; it is the payment for the release of someone.”<sup>6</sup>

Do you remember the attempted hijacking of the American ship known as the *Maersk Alabama*? Somehow Captain Richard Phillips was captured by the Somali pirates. They wanted the ship owners to pay a ransom of several million dollars in order to get Captain Phillips back. On Easter Sunday, however, there was a dramatic rescue in which three pirates were shot, one was captured, and Captain Phillips escaped unharmed. In that particular instance the pirates did not get the ransom they demanded.

You and I were spiritual captives before we became Christians. We belonged to our father, the devil, and our will was to do his desires (John 8:44). We were engaged in all kinds of spiritually futile ways which we inherited from our forefathers.

But then along came Jesus. He said to Satan, “I want him. And I want her.”

But Satan said, “He is mine, and she is mine. You cannot have them.”

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<sup>6</sup> ransom. Dictionary.com. *WordNet*® 3.0. Princeton University.  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ransom> (accessed: May 02, 2009).

Jesus said, “No, I want them. They are mine.”

So Satan said, “Well, your life for theirs.”

And Jesus said, “Done!”

He went to the cross where he shed his precious blood, and ransomed you and me from slavery to Satan.

As a result we become Jesus’ purchased possession. We now belong to Jesus and not to ourselves.

John Calvin put it this way, “We are redeemed by the Lord for the purpose of consecrating ourselves and all our members to him.”<sup>7</sup>

Now, it is just here that many Christians go wrong in their understanding of this first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice. They don’t know that they now belong to Jesus and not to themselves. And they cannot understand why the Christian life will not work for them. After all, they have invited Jesus into their hearts; shouldn’t Jesus start doing things for them now?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let me say as clearly and pastorally as I can: If you are a Christian, Jesus does not belong to you in the sense that he is an accessory that you decide to wear on Sunday because that is when you go to church, but you leave him at home during the week because that is when you are in the world.

No, no! If you are a Christian, you belong to Jesus and not to yourself. If you don’t get this right, your Christianity won’t work for you. But, if you do get it right, then you have laid the right foundation for a meaningful Christian life.

So, the first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we belong to Jesus and not to ourselves.

## **II. We Have Died to Sin and We Are Now New Creatures in Christ**

The second aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we have died to sin and we are now new creatures in Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 262.

Paul has already said that several times earlier in this letter to the Romans. In Romans 6 he said that in relation to our sanctification, that is, our growth in holiness as Christians. For example:

- Romans 6:2—How can we who died to sin still live in it?
- Romans 6:11—So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- Romans 6:13—Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

So, what does Paul mean when he says that we have “died to sin” (Romans 6:2)? James Montgomery Boice says that dying to sin does *not* mean:

1. That it is my duty to die to sin.
2. That I am commanded to die to sin.
3. That I am to consider sin as a dead force within me.
4. That sin in me has been eradicated.
5. That I am dead to sin so long as I am gaining mastery over it.
6. That counting myself dead to sin makes me insensitive to it.<sup>8</sup>

What Paul is saying is that we have already died to sin in the sense that we cannot successfully return to our old lives. If you are a Christian, you were so radically changed that you are now a new creature in Christ. As Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

I remember talking to a professing Christian girl when I was at the University of Cape Town. She had grown up in a wonderful Christian home, attended a fine Christian Church, and enjoyed the blessings of a godly, Christian home. But she had come to a point

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<sup>8</sup> Boice, 28.

in her life where she wondered if her faith was real.

“Am I really a Christian?” she asked me. “Or am I simply living on my parents’ faith?”

“Well,” I said to her, “why don’t you put it to the test?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Why don’t you go and sin like the devil? Go and get drunk, have sex, tell lies, gorge yourself on pride and arrogance and envy, and so on.”

“Oh! I couldn’t do that!” she said.

“Why not?”

“Because I love Christ,” she said. “I can’t imagine doing anything that would displease him.”

“In that case,” I replied, “I do believe you are a genuine Christian because you really have died to sin and you are now a new creature in Christ.”

So, the first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we belong to Jesus and not to ourselves. The second aspect is that we have died to sin and we are now new creatures in Christ.

### **III. By Dying to Our Own Desires We Actually Learn to Live**

The third aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that by dying to our own desires we actually learn to live.

Self-sacrifice means:

1. Dying to our own desires.
2. Living to serve God’s desires.
3. Living to serve the needs of others.

Now, when we do this, we are told that God promises us an abundant Christian life, a joy-filled life, a blessed life.

But the problem is that many Christians really don’t believe this. They think that if they commit to the principle of self-sacrifice, they will be utterly miserable.

And so they say, “If I am going to serve God and serve others, what about myself? What about my needs? What about my desires? If I don’t take care of myself, who will? No, no. I can’t be-



lieve that this principle of self-sacrifice really works.”

But I ask, who are you going to believe? Are you going to believe yourself? Or, are you going to believe Jesus?

Jesus gave us the recipe for how to live the happy, joy-filled, blessed Christian life. Remember, Jesus said in Matthew 5:3-10:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called sons of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of  
righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We call these the Beatitudes—the way to true happiness and blessing. But this is not how many people think one finds happiness and blessing. What do they say? They say that true happiness and blessing is not found in self-sacrifice but rather in self-gratification. They say:

Blessed are the rich,  
for they can have all they want.  
Blessed are the powerful,  
for they can control others.  
Blessed are the sexually liberated,  
for they can fully satisfy themselves.  
Blessed are the famous,  
for they are envied.

So, which is it? Which is more fulfilling: self-gratification or self-sacrifice? Self-gratification never truly fulfills because it never fully satisfies. People who strive after riches, power, sex, fame, and so on always end up disillusioned because these things—riches, power, sex, fame, and so on—in and of themselves cannot satisfy.

I think it was St. Augustine who said that God has made us for himself, and we are restless until we find our rest in him. It is God alone who truly satisfies and fulfills and blesses.

So, listen to Paul when he says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

God does not lie. His word is utterly reliable. You will find that his will is “good and acceptable and perfect,” if you will do it.

So, the first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we belong to Jesus and not to ourselves. The second aspect is that we have died to sin and we are now new creatures in Christ. The third aspect is that by dying to our own desires we actually learn to live.

#### **IV. We Must Present Our Bodies as a Living Sacrifice to God**

And the fourth aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we must present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

This cannot be done for us. It is something we must do ourselves.

What an interesting mental picture Paul creates for us in Romans 12:1. A sacrifice is something offered to God by a priest. A priest would take a sacrifice offered by a worshiper, carry it to the altar, kill it, pour out the blood, and then burn the victim’s body. In that procedure the priest and the offering were two separate enti-

ties. But in this arresting image of what it is to live a genuinely Christian life, Paul shows that the priest and the offering are the same. Furthermore, we are the priests who present the offering, and the offerings we present are our own bodies.

Is there a model for this in Scripture? Of course. It is the model of Jesus himself, for he was both the sacrifice and the priest who made the sacrifice. I know that there is an enormous difference between the sacrifice Jesus made for us and our own sacrifices of ourselves. Jesus' sacrifice was an atoning sacrifice. He died in our place, bearing the punishment of God for our sin so that we might not have to bear it. His death was substitutionary. Our sacrifices are not at all like that. They are not an atonement for sin in any sense. Still, they are like Christ's sacrifice in that we are the ones who make them and that the sacrifices we offer are ourselves.

So, the first aspect of the principle of self-sacrifice is that we belong to Jesus and not to ourselves. The second aspect is that we have died to sin and we are now new creatures in Christ. The third aspect is that by dying to our own desires we actually learn to live. And the fourth aspect is that we must present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

## **Conclusion**

Self-sacrifice is not a popular concept in our day! No one wants to be a sacrifice. In fact, people do not want to sacrifice even a single little thing. We want to gratify ourselves instead.

Nevertheless, this is where the Christian life starts. It is God's instruction and will for us, and it is "good and acceptable and perfect," even if it does not seem to be.

Will you trust God that he knows what he is doing? Will you believe him in this as in other matters? If you will believe him, you will do exactly what Paul urges you to do in Romans 12. You will present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, and you will discover and prove that the will of God for you is indeed good and acceptable and perfect. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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**PRAAYER:**

O Lord, you call us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to you. Help us to do so fully, immediately, and completely.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.