

Romans

Living Sacrifices

Romans 12:1-2

We have wrapped up the theological portion of Romans study together chapters 8,9,10 and 11, and now chapter 12, which describes God's call to response to God's Word. And we're going to see in the outline you have there in your bulletin that we can name the gifts of God, and we can respond to those gifts day by day according to his pattern being transformed by the renewing of our minds and by giving our bodies as well as our minds to him.

Listen as I read God's Word to you from Romans 2: 1-2. It's a familiar passage.

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 or reasonable, or even be translated, your true heartfelt worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let's pray one more moment.

Heavenly father, give us ears to hear what you have for us even in this familiar passage in your word we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

I want you to imagine it's a cool enough day. I want you to imagine that it's December 10th or 15th, and you have some new friends. You're 35 or 45, 55. You don't make new friends all that much the way it was in college days. You have new friends, and you're getting together with them for dinner at your house. And, between the main course and the dessert, you give them a card. That card has carefully chosen words describing how you're thanking God for this new friendship that you've had this fall. And they say, that's beautiful. Thank you for writing that. And we have a card for you two and you open the card. It's got beautiful words of thanksgiving, and we're praising God for relationships. And also in the card is a gift certificate. And it's to a lodge. It's the hot new lodge. It's the place everybody wants to go. You can't even get in that lodge. And they've found a three-day pass for the lodge. And you wrote them a card and said, thank you for your friendship. And they said, thank you for your friendship. And here's three days and three nights in the lodge. Is that an awkward moment? Something vaguely like that happened to my wife and me once. It was awkward. And so we went out and got online and quickly bought some tickets to the SEC playoffs, and we were even. No, that's not what happened. What happened is we said, wow, we better take this seriously. They're really thankful. And they give us a big gift and we should somehow, somehow reciprocate even though it's not obligatory.

And that's kind of what's going on in Romans chapter 12. We have had a recounting of the mercies of God. You see how it begins with a fourfold introduction. I appeal to you, therefore drawing a conclusion. Brothers, we can say today, maybe, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, the mercies of God have been recounted in chapters 1-11. And Paul says, after all this accounting of God's mercies, I want to tell you how you should respond to the gift God has given you. Now, this statement, which many of you may have memorized at some point in your life as Christians, if you have been, in places where Bible memorization is promoted, you may have memorized this, and I want to make sure it doesn't just roll off our tongue is a familiar passage. There are two parts to it. There is a great command - offer your bodies as living sacrifices, and there is a great enablement. You do that by not being conformed to this world, but by letting God, by being transformed, by the renewing of your mind. And the one who does the transformation is God the Father himself. Offer your bodies and God will renew your mind, so you can do so. Now he says, Let God renew your mind after he says, don't be conformed to this world or this age. Think the way God does, the way the King does, the way we think in the kingdom, not the way we think in this age that is, in this age, in this age, there is a lot of ideology, a lot of customs, a lot of ways of living, and they slowly impose a pressure upon us so that unless we're careful, that's what we resist.

We will be conformed to the patterns of this age. We have to receive the counter pressure. The counter pressure is God's transformative work which comes to us above all by the word and by the spirit. So Paul says, I appeal to you. I appeal to you. Therefore he's drawing a conclusion. If I may, what I'd like to do is run through Romans 1-11 in about seven minutes.

All right. So, Romans 1 tells us what the gospel is. The gospel is the righteous will live by faith, will live by faith from first to last. And we live by faith from first to last. Because in ourselves we will not live before God. In fact, what it specifically says in Romans 1:17 and 18 is a righteousness from God is revealed from heaven, from faith to faith. The righteous will live by faith. And then the very next line is because the wrath of God is revealed against all the unrighteousness and godlessness of men. We have to live by faith because we're not going to live by works. Now when you look at these two words, unrighteousness, godlessness, we might think God just saying, you know, you're sinners, you're sin. But actually two different words mean two different things. Godlessness is sin against God. Not thanking him. Cursing or blaspheming God. Giving all the credit to yourself. When God has favored you, simply forgetting about him for days on end by confessing your sins, not caring about what he thinks. That's godlessness. Just not caring about God. Unrighteousness is not sins against God, but sins against our neighbors. Unrighteousness is hatred, gossip, slander, envy, lust, thievery, dishonesty, injustice, indifference to the plight of the people around us. These are the problems that we have unrighteousness and ungodliness. Now summarizing it again in chapter three, Paul says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Now when we hear the word sin, we think, you

know, we know what that means. It's like the big Christian word for doing the wrong thing. But once again, it's not just two words that mean the same thing to sin is to violate God's standards, to miss God's decrees, ways, but to fall short of glory. The fall short of the glory of God is another matter. You understand, of course, that you were all made in the image of God, which means that our task or calling or opportunity in the world is to show through our life what God is like to the world, to show that God is kind and just and merciful and gracious and creative and generous.

When we do none of these things, or when we do them fitfully, we are falling short of the glory God intends us to have. God wants not just righteous deeds. He wants expansive kindness. He wants us to be creative and to write music, and to write poems, and to care for people in creative ways. That's what he wants.

So we sin and we fall short of glory because of our rebellion, because of our sinful tendencies. Situation looks bleak. But God the Father sent his Son and the son. Romans chapter three says, has justified us. Justified does not mean that God made us a little nicer and a little better. It means that God declared as an act of his free grace, that you don't need to be righteous or perfect in God's sight, that Jesus has died to cover all of your sins, so that when you stand before God at the end of your life, my life, God calls us to account for every word, deed, and thought.

God says forgiven, cleared of all charges, acquitted because all the condemnation would have fallen to you, falls to Christ. And beyond that all the righteousness of Christ is ascribed to you. And beyond that, if you did something that was pretty good but tainted by a selfish impulse, by a desire to be noticed, to be paid back, to be honored in some way or another, if you if you did a basically good thing, but it was tainted by selfishness, even that counts.

So that on your last day and on the last day, when we all appear before the throne of God, we will be declared righteous and just and clean. That's Romans 4:3, Romans 4. He says, let me illustrate. And he tells the story of David, whom we know late in his reign, or rather late. Maybe he was 50 or 55 years old, fell into some kind of a terrible chain of sin. He saw a beautiful woman. He wanted her. He lusted after her. He had the power as king to take her. And he did. She became pregnant. He didn't want the father, the husband, to find out that he was the father. And so he planned to have that man die the front lines of battle. And he did die. And then David sat on it for close to a year. The prophet said to him, you're the man. You've committed these sins. And he said, I sinned against the Lord. The prophet said, I've taken away your sin. David said, how blessed is the man whose transgressions do not count against him. That's the gift of chapter four and chapter five. Because of that, we're now reconciled to God. We have peace with God. We can stand so easy to miss the word stand in the Bible. We could stand before God instead of quivering or running away from God, we can stand in God's

presence. Not only so, but we have a fundamental chapter six break with sin. We're now dead to sin, alive to Christ.

We're united with Christ in His resurrection, and that means we are now capable of righteousness. That chapter says we are instruments and it could be translated very easily. Weapons of righteousness, mighty in God's arsenal to do good. Now, of course, as soon as we say that, to say we've defeated sin through Christ, we think, well, really? I mean, not so fast, right?

I mean, I know what my life is like. I know how I'm prone on days like today when we got one hour or less sleep, to be a little bit irritable and to be the opposite of calm when something goes wrong. It's so easy to slip into these things. I see by your faces that 279 of you were irritable this morning. And we didn't want to be irritable. We knew what it's like to be one hour deprived of sleep. We all hate daylight savings time. Just keep it the same. Please. And we do things we would rather not do, Paul says. Chapter 7 - Oh, the good that I would do, I find that I do not. And he laments that four paragraphs his propensity to sin, even though he knows better and yet there is no condemnation.

Chapter 8. For those who are in Christ Jesus. And in chapter 8 he says, look, you're united to Christ. There's no condemnation. You are slowly being renewed. God's renewing all the things. He's remaking the entire universe. You are part of that. There is more to come. Don't despair of your slow progress. And then, in case we're not sure, in case we don't know where we stand, Paul says, listen, everyone who calls in the name or name of the Lord will be saved.

No one who calls in him will be put to shame. Believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord. Confess it with your mouth and you will be saved. All these privileges that I've described, Paul says, are yours. And then he gets to chapter 12, in which he says, first of all, present your bodies as living sacrifices. I have to tell you, I am so glad it says, present your bodies, and I'm going to tell you why, because I have had so much time with people whose mouths are full of pious jargon I've given my heart to God, doesn't show very much.

I've given my life to God. I've given my mind, my spirit to God. People say, and I think sometimes I can see it, praise God, and sometimes I think I don't see it. And God does not say, give us, give me your heart. He says, present your bodies as living sacrifices. Now this present your body says two aspects to it.

The first one is the word present is fairly formal. It's like making a presentation. You present your God, your body to God, but you present your body, and your body means you. In the concreteness of daily life. It means your mouth, your vocal cords, your hands, your feet, your body. I don't want jargon, I want reality, I want to be able to see that you're actually giving yourself to me.

God says through the apostle Paul, I want you to give your body. Now, believe it or not, there's a short theology of the body woven throughout Romans and Romans, chapter one. Paul says that unbelievers pagans dishonor God with their bodies as they indulge all their desires. Pagans dishonor God with their bodies. And Romans six says, sin formally once, once upon a time reign in your mortal bodies.

But now their instruments are weapons of righteousness. Give your body to God. Chapter six says, now chapter eight says, we understand not so fast. The spirit gives life to our mortal bodies, even though they may be dead, meaning dead, headed toward death, finite living, 60, 70, 80, 90 years, but also dead spiritually, the God of time. So God is slowly, gradually, by his spirit, quickening our bodies and will one day completely redeem our bodies, which means that God redeems our bodies morally, so that our mouths and our hands do what is right, but he also redeems them eternally, or eschatological or teleological.

The end of life is that we will all be 27.5 forever. You will be five minutes older than your children and five minutes younger than your parents. We're all going to be renewed forever. But God is renewing our bodies now. So we offer our bodies to God, which is, you know, today's a perfect day for it to say that basic advice you hear about taking care of your body.

Eat well, sleep well. We didn't do that today. Eat well, sleep well, exercise faithfully, and so forth. This is all a part of God's actual will for us. He cares about our bodies. Now, I've told you enough stories about hiking and how I love to hike and Debbie and I took a long hike. My phone made me feel really good.

It said we weren't in a nine mile hike. It's absolutely false. We went a pretty long hike yesterday and we went to hike in Oak Mountain and you know, there's some ups and downs and there's some rocks and there's some roots and it can it can make you work. And my feet are bigger than my wife's feet.

She has little feet. You can look at them after the service. She'll be in the back. And smaller feet don't kind of negotiate the paths as well. I also just because I'm a man, I have bigger shoulders and bigger arms. And so she falls. I can grab her and hold onto her. It's my job to make my body strong for my wife.

I believe that to take the best care I can, we should take care of our bodies because our bodies, ours. And it's the Lord's and it belongs everybody around us. Take care of your body so you can serve God in the body. But of course, that's not all. When we serve God, we present our bodies. We present them as a sacrifice.

And it's described three ways it's living and holy and acceptable sacrifice. Now, living is pretty straightforward. A sacrifice is. Living is one that is not dead. In the Old Testament, the sacrifices that the people offered to the Lord were animals, often grain. But if it was an animal, the animal

slain once and done. But our bodies are not offered to God once and done, we offer our bodies, our whole selves to God over and over and over.

We keep on living that way. And not only so, but we also need to remember that we live.

And it's not killing us, if I can say it that way. There are people I've talked to, people to Christians who say something like this, I don't want to pray, Lord, I'll do whatever you ask me to do. I'll go wherever you ask me to go. I don't want to pray a prayer in which I say, Lord, do with me what you will, because I know what he's going to do.

He's going to say, you want to go to Germany, you want to go to England or Switzerland as a missionary. But I'm going to send you to Bulgaria to. I'm going to send you to Mauritius, which you never even heard of. And we don't we don't want to say Lord, wherever, because we're afraid that it'll kill us in this passage.

Just saying no. You live when you offer yourself to God and you offer yourself to God wholly, which means set apart to God. That's very familiar to all of us. And it also says your sacrifice should be acceptable to God. Now, we all know the way we give gifts, don't we? Can you, will you will you join me in this a little bit?

Imagine us at Christmas time. Again, I want you to finish these sentences. People who love books at Christmas time tend to give their friends books. People who love clothing at Christmas time tend to give their beloved friends and family. They tend to give them clothing. We tend to give what is acceptable to us, the pastor says, give what is acceptable to God.

Now, if you're immature, it's normal. It's natural. Many years ago, when my children were all under the age of ten, I happened to be one room away. When mom, my wife asked them, what are you getting daddy for Christmas? And my ears perked up when they began to whisper, we know, we know, we're getting daddy for Christmas. What are you getting him?

We're going to get him a Barbie doll.

Now, in case you're worried, they had not been observing my leisure patterns in recent weeks. They were going to get me a Barbie doll because they wanted a Barbie doll. And that's fine. When you're seven. But when you're 37 or 77, it's not fine. You give not what you feel like giving, but what God asking you of what's acceptable to him, not what's acceptable simply to you.

And then he says, this is all your spiritual. This is one of the hardest words, word spiritual, one of the hardest words to translate. You'll get ten translations. They'll they'll render it five different ways. The word is the walking cane. And that that's a word. It gives us logic and it means something like thought through heartfelt, sincere, true.

One translation says that is a genuine act. Now, what it's saying here is that Christianity, some people say sometimes Christianity is not a religion, by which they mean that religions tend to focus on rituals and times. And you meet at this place, and this time you turn to the east and you pray, and you pray five times a day, and it's often caught up with loyalty to tribe and clan and nation.

And that's not what Christianity is. Christianity is not a rote religion in which you do what your ancestors told you to do, because it's time to do it. Christianity is a faith, not a religion, in which we act from the heart, truly. And of course, there are times and places to gather. Nobody doubts that. But it's not simply or primarily about what you do.

And when you do it, it's a matter of the heart, and it shows itself in all kinds of ways. All right, how do we do this? How do we offer ourselves as sacrifices acceptable to God from the mind? And the answer is verse two don't be conformed to this world. Ask you to notice. Be grammarians with me for a moment.

Would you? I'm going to tell you that this is a present command. Present tense in the Greek means ongoing. Every day. Don't be conformed. It's not once and done, it's every day. Don't be conformed. It's an imperative. It's a command and it's passive. See, it doesn't say, don't conform yourselves. It says don't be conformed. And the idea is that the world is constantly squeezing you, pushing you, moving you into subtle and non subtle ways of living as the culture does in this age, as opposed to the age to come under the kingdom of this world, instead of under the King of all ages.

Don't be conformed to the image of this age, the thought patterns of this age. Now, there are many ways to work through that. You could. I'm going to do it by reminding you that other cultures had a hard time with us. So, for example, in the Middle Ages, if you read Christians Christian Literature, there's a lot of writing on honor.

You think, boy, they're talking about honor a lot. Maybe I missed the fact that honor is in the Bible more than I realized. No, it isn't. No, they lived in an honor culture and therefore they read honor into the Bible. We're constantly talking about honoring your leaders and honoring your parents and honor your grandparents. And if it's time to get married, you need to honor your father by marrying the person your father says you should marry for the good of the clan, and so forth.

This is Christian teaching. They were conforming themselves to the image of the age without knowing it. Today we do the same thing. We walk around Christians, walk around talking about transparency. Why? Because transparency is in the culture all the time. Friends, there's a time to not be transparent. That's called not gossiping or not taking a report where it doesn't need to go.

Transparency is kind of close to telling the truth. And so people think, oh, that's a Bible idea. No, it's not sort of, sort of not. Or how about this authenticity. We want to be authentic and we think, oh, that's kind of close. This is when ideas corrupt this the most, when they're kind of close or amenable to a biblical idea.

Transparency is kind of a truth telling. Authenticity is kind of like sincerity. So let's be authentic. If we could track what authenticity actually means in our culture, it means charting your own course, not doing what anybody else told you to do, not following the herd, not listening to authority. And I got to tell you, Christianity says we should not chart our own course.

We should follow the course God laid out for us. And by the way, it's not wrong to follow other people if they're wise and good. He who walks with the wise grows wise. Spend time with wise people. Heed their counsel. If someone wise gives you a piece of advice, listen to it. The culture would say, that's not very authentic, so much the worse for authenticity.

There are many other ways in which we can stray from biblical norms, and it's often with things that seem normal or common. I talked about the body. It's good to take care of your body. It's good to exercise. But the body can become a god. We spend all of our time take care of our body and wellness, and we forget about other things.

I had a conversation ten years ago, probably by now with Tim Keller. We happen to arrive at the exact same time that check into a hotel, at a conference. And, he said, hey, Dan, I like the piece you wrote. Gospel Coalition. Thanks. That was nice. I said, well, thank you. Then he said, you know, you upset some Lutherans.

Did you read the comment section? Gospel coalition site according to the Gospel Coalition site. I'm a moron, an idiot, a liar, a purveyor of falsehood, and various other crimes. I said to Tim, Tim, why would I look at the comment section? And he, kind of said, yeah, why indeed? That's sad, isn't it? It's sad that the Christian comment section at Reformation 21 or Christianity Today or Gospel Coalition looks exactly like the comment section in the New York Times, the Washington Post, with one exception there's no cursing.

There's no blasphemy other than that the meanness, the cruelty, the deception, the misrepresentation of what somebody said. One upping feeling good because you could slam a fellow Christian. It looks almost identical. Where are we learning? We're taking our cues straight from popular culture. And when we hear cursing and blasphemy on TV and it hardly bothers us at all.

So I didn't even hear it. You should hear it. You should be upset. You should protest, you should write and say, you people, you don't have to have your characters blaspheming all the time. You don't have to keep watching the show. The world is going to push you to conform if you're not careful. Got to resist. 1600 years ago, there was a man named Telemachus.

He was a monk. He felt God called him to go to Rome. The year was 390 A.D. he set himself up as a street corner preacher, and nobody paid any attention to him. Now I need to tell you something. Christianity became officially tolerated in the year 312 A.D. in 325 A.D. it was viewed as a recognized religion, and Christians could gather publicly and promulgate the faith all day.

In 380 A.D., the Roman Empire said, we are a Christian empire. We're going to follow the laws of the Bible in three A.D. tragically, the gladiatorial games went on another 24 years. While Christianity allegedly ruled in Rome, people were still going. One arena had space for 50,000, another had space for 250,000 people, and they could watch the games when Christianity allegedly ruled the day and watch people fight each other to the death as public entertainment, and Telemachus not having an audience with the people, no one listen to him, decided to go where the people were, and he went into the Coliseum.

Of course, what he saw horrified him, and he jumped into the arena to protest, imploring the two men who are fighting each other to the death to cease. Now the end of the stories told two ways where the next step is told, two ways it's told. Number one, two men stop fighting each other long enough to run them through and then resumed.

And the other version is that the Coliseum, which was by then disintegrating to some degree, the stones were 500 years old or more, picked up blue stones and stone him to death. Either way, he died. The conclusion. However, everybody agrees on. People noted, took heart, paid attention to his protest, and 13 years later the games were over. Now, he wasn't the only one, but he knew how to protest, how to avoid conformity to this age.

So what do we do? We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is also a present, passive, imperative present always transform. Passive. Now it's not the culture that's changing you. It's God who's changing you. Present passive imperative, always receiving the transforming work of God. The Bible is telling Paul saying, notice your influences, resist ones that are taking you the wrong direction. Consumerism. I just need a little bit more travelism. Travelism is I go to travel, I go to see the sights. I gotta go to the sporting event with my son, maybe a Division One. My daughter may be a professional athlete. I got to take her to all the places I got to travel, travel, travel, travel, travel. And then. Then all of a sudden you find you have no friends because you've been away 35 of the last 52 weeks and you think, I feel like I'm lost here in my own town or my own church? Yeah. Because you chose to conform.

Instead, let God transform you. How does it happen? It happens when we read the Bible. I know you know this, but I'm gonna say it anyway. When you read the Bible and meditate on it, turn it over in your mind, spend your time with it, maybe get a study Bible, look things up a little. When you spend time with other people, kind and loving and wise people, I'll quote it again. He who walks with the wise grows wise.

If you have wise friends, listen to them. They may be God's agents to transform your mind. Then, then by testing you may be. You may discern what is the will of God. The Bible actually has two words for testing New Testaments, two words for testing access multiple words. But I'm gonna talk about two of them right now. The two words I want to talk about right now are to test and to prove and to test and disapprove.

You know, there are labs that test medicines, and they test devices, technological devices to see if they work the way they're supposed to work. And Paul says, we are something like product testers. You've all seen the ads. Our paper towels really do absorb more moisture. Our diapers really do hold it in better than their diapers. Our glue can hold a truck that way. 7,000 pounds. And look, there are children in the truck. See how much they trust our glue. We're product testers. God says, test it out. Test and see if my word works or not. See if it leads you not into the easy path, but into the good path, the rich path, the way of life. And you will find when you do that. God's will is good. It's perfect and it's acceptable. Remember in verse one it said, offer sacrifices acceptable to God.

This time it's acceptable to us, acceptable to you. You will find that the Word of God, if you test it, is good and it's perfect and it is acceptable to you, it will please you. I'm. It's not a promise. Everything go easily in this world you will have tribulation. Don't be surprised with fire trials come upon you. The Bible says, but, but God will carry you through the trials.

So he says, now to all of this I want to suggest there is only one response, and that is in light of the mercies of God. Offer yourselves as living sacrifices. I'm going to tell you a story about something that also happened long ago when my children were little. And it goes like this I have three children and one of them is the most slender one by a margin.

She's she was a very slender child, skinny, we would have to say. And she's still very slender as an adult. When she was 15, sorry, 15 months old, she weighed 17 pounds. In case you don't know, that's not much for 15 months old. And she got a stomach virus and she couldn't keep anything, any liquids in her body for a couple of days.

And we took her to the doctor because we thought we saw the first signs of dehydration. And the doctor weighed her and she was down to 15 pounds. And that's not bad. Just 2 pounds, but it's about 13 or 14% of her body weight. That's a lot. And so the doctor said, good of you to come. Best thing to do right now really is to take her to the hospital, get some IVs and fluids in her that'll help her stomach settle down and she'll be fine. And so we did what we do in our family. And that is we divided up the labor and our family. My wife does the dirty paperwork, and she's pretty happy to do it. And I do the dirty, relational work, and I'm pretty happy to do that. And so she filled out the paperwork at the hospital. I went with our daughter to have the I.V. inserted into her arm. Now, for those of you know anything about getting our IV's in arms,

it's not always easy. And then you have a tiny little baby, and then you have dehydration, and there's not as much blood in there. And so, first of all, we're worried about that. But before you even get to that, you got to put the baby in the baby board. That is to say, you have to strap your child down. And by the way, when they're 15 months old, they don't have a whole lot of idea what's going on. They don't like it. They're crying. They're screaming. So at the strap her down while she's looking at me, why are you doing this to me? And then they start trying to get the needle in her arm And they tried. And the first time they missed and they tried again and they missed again, and they tried again and they missed again, and they tried again and they missed one more time. And now the blood's running down her arm a little bit. Not a lot. A few drops, and she's looking at me. She's got just a few words. She's using one of those words over and over. Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, why aren't you rescuing me? And as potently as an idea ever slammed into my mind, God gave me this thought. You weep because I was weeping. You weep with your child at the pain you were inflicting on her. For her good. For her good. And she's losing 4 or 5, six, seven drops of blood down her arm with the mind of a child that will completely have forgotten all about it. Within 15 minutes. But I gave my son for you. Not for his good, but for yours. Not 5 or 6 or seven drops of blood, but his very lifeblood poured out. Not with the mind of a little child that soon forgets with the mind of the infinite God, who knew exactly what he was doing and had known from before eternity. He did that for you. Is it not reasonable, right and true to give our bodies our minds to him?

Let's pray.

Father, we do pray that you would help us to meditate, to write, and all that you've done. Lord, it's theological, but it's also personal and practical. We pray that we would be moved to respond to all your mercies that we should know so well. And Lord, if we do not know, enable us to know what you've done. Take it to heart.

Pray in Jesus name. Amen.