

Present Your Bodies

by Raymond Golsworthy

The sermon emphasizes the importance of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord, motivated by the mercies of God, and experiencing the perfect will of God in our lives.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, Romans 3:21, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:11, Romans 12:1, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 1:21, Hebrews 10:5

Topics: "Living Sacrifice", "Spiritual Surrender"

Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on the profound call in Romans 12:1-2 for believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God, emphasizing the basis of this plea in the mercies of God revealed throughout the earlier chapters of Romans. The sermon delves into the spiritual mercies of justification by faith, crucifixion with Christ, union with the risen Lord, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, highlighting the need for a deep understanding of these truths to motivate a complete surrender to God. The nature of the plea is explored, focusing on the significance of offering our entire being to the Lord as a living sacrifice, and the wonderful result of responding to this plea is discussed as experiencing the fullness of God's eternal purpose and design for His children.

Transcript

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

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12:1-2

Introduction

The epistle to the Romans stands out in our bibles as a great mountain range of divine truth. As we quietly survey its monumental chapters we find we are confronted with a positive panorama of divine revelation; the great Himalayas, we could say, of our salvation. In the first eleven chapters, for instance, we have a whole series of immense spiritual truths rising up majestically before us. We refer here to the massive truths of justification by faith (Chapters 1-5), crucifixion with Christ (Chapter 6), union with the risen Lord (Chapter 7), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 8) and finally the marvel of a new spiritual Israel (Chapters 9-11). Then, at that point, we are confronted with the well-known climax of the whole epistle, the apostle's impassioned plea that we present our bodies to the Lord, a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This

verse constitutes what is perhaps the highest peak in the whole mountain range, a positive and urgent call from heaven to a personal surrender to the God of our salvation. All that has gone before in the epistle has clearly led up to this point and all that will follow in the concluding chapters surely issues from it. "Present your bodies."

Here, then, is a tremendous and solemn call to which all of us must pay very particular and careful attention and this is what we plan to do in the following paragraphs, depending entirely on the Holy Spirit.

The basis on which the plea is made

Paul simply says, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies." In other words, he would have us know that it is because the Lord has been merciful to us that we are to present our bodies back to Him. Now this, of course, could be regarded as just a generality, but without a doubt Paul had something much more than that in mind when he penned those words. Certainly all of us will agree that the Lord has been very merciful to us in these general ways: the food we eat, the water we drink, the clothes we wear and, indeed, the very air we breathe; all are expressions of his mercy. Doubtless, many of us could speak as well of special occasions when we have clearly known God's unmistakable protection in times of emergency and danger. And this, too, has been amongst his mercies. But Paul's specific thought in our verse goes far beyond all this, precious though we know it is. In the verses before us, the apostle is thinking particularly of those spiritual mercies of God which he has been patiently and carefully unfolding in the earlier chapters of his letter. And he would have us know that it is because of those mercies, first and foremost, that we should present our bodies to the Lord, a living sacrifice. In his appeal Paul is calling for a tremendous thing, nothing less than a laying down of all our being upon God's altar. Just as Abraham sacrificed his beloved Isaac on Mount Moriah, and as Hannah handed over her precious Samuel to the temple courts, so would Paul have us present our own bodies to the Lord, as a living and loving sacrifice. Such a surrender requires some tremendous inward motivation and that motivation, Paul says, is abundantly to be found in the mercies of God. To have heard about those mercies and to have understood them by the help of the Holy Spirit, is to be abundantly motivated and conditioned for all the claims of God's altar. "I beseech you", he says, "by the mercies of God."

Here, then, lies the need for a God-given understanding of those first eleven chapters of Romans. Think, for instance, of that initial and overwhelming mercy of justification by faith. While the opening chapters of Romans had shown the apparently inescapable dilemma in which the whole of humanity is found, because of the fall of Adam and the resultant sinfulness of our human hearts, Romans 3:21 comes out with the almost unbelievable words, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, even the righteousness which is by faith."

Thank God, there is another righteousness available to us, the righteousness of God donated to us on the basis of our simple trusting faith. The fact is that God's own Son has Himself paid the price. He Himself has done a redeeming work for us on the cross. Our debt is fully paid by Him and God can now credit his own perfect righteousness to those who will humbly and gratefully believe. Such is the whole theme of the first five chapters of Romans. What a mercy indeed, complete justification by simple faith, the free gift to us of God's own perfect righteousness. Could we do other, then, than sing with Wesley...?

"'t Is mercy all; immense and free. For O my God it found out me!"

And what shall we say of the associated mercy of crucifixion with Christ as explained in chapter six? Here we learn that, not only have our sins been dealt with at Calvary, but also our old sinning selves have

likewise been brought to an end in the representative dying of our Lord. Whatever we may think, God, for His part, sees our old man as crucified with Christ at Calvary. And so may we! Having identified ourselves with Christ for our forgiveness, we may now rightly claim that we ourselves have died in Him. Anyone knows that a dead man is freed from sin, or from sinning (Rom. 7), and this, thank God, is the precise position to which we have legally been brought through our personal involvement in the representative dying of our Lord. And according to our faith it will be unto us. As we reckon on this full truth of Calvary, irrespective of what we may feel, we shall somehow find that death of Christ mysteriously and mightily operative within us by the Holy Spirit, with the glorious result that sin will no longer have dominion over us. (Rom. 6:14). O what a mercy this is, day by day deliverance from the very power of sin. All this, of course, should be explained in fuller detail, but here we are simply pointing out that this, too, is one of the particular mercies to which Paul is alluding in our passage and on which he bases his tremendous plea.

Chapter seven is the chapter of our new marriage to the great risen Lord. To our intense relief, we find that the old struggle to attain practical righteousness through a vigorous, but altogether futile, union with the law is now terminated. Our death with Christ has annulled that marriage and we are now free to be married to our risen Lord! Married to the law before, but now married to the Lord! What a mercy indeed that is! A new day has dawned, our Maker is our Husband (Isa. 54:5).

In chapter eight, as we said, we have the marvellous mercy of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the promised Comforter. He is the One who resides within us, helps us in all our confessed infirmities and strengthens us for all our responsibilities. What a mercy, again, this is, our very bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and He abides within as our perpetual enablement. Indeed, what a gracious God we have and what mercies He has planned and bestowed! All along, from the beginning to the end, we are the undeserving recipients of a whole progression of infinite favours. A merciful God has done it all!

This, as we have been saying, comprises the whole basis of the apostle's plea, the mercies of God. If we can but glimpse those mercies, as unfolded to us in the letter, we shall be more than ready for the altar. Even though it does cost all, we shall gladly pay the price and, in consequence, enter into a new and glorious experience with our blessed Lord. Before we go into that matter, however, let us say a brief word about:

The nature of the plea itself

Here, of course, we concentrate on the words, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Notice, first, that we are to present our actual physical bodies, and it is to be a living sacrifice. As Abraham presented Isaac and Hannah presented Samuel, so are we to present our bodies, a living sacrifice.

Paul had touched on this matter previously, specially in chapter six where he said, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness ... but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). Again in verse 19 he says, "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness ... even so now yield your members servants to righteousness."

Yes, indeed, we are to present our bodies. Even they are to be living sacrifices, and God evidently has plans to make use of them also! But when we so present the body, we obviously present as well all that is within that body. This includes our minds and hearts and wills and even our inmost spirits. All is to be for Him, and dedicated to his use. All is to be one living sacrifice.

The plea then, in its ultimate simplicity, is that we make a full and glad surrender to the Lord. Much has been said and written about this and we do not feel led right here to enlarge in any way upon it. Action is what is needed rather than words and that, perhaps, is where most of us are still failing. We know that it is costly (or is it?), but we would say that it is far more costly for any Christian to attempt to by-pass this essential call, or to expect fulfilment, or even happiness, on any other basis. That is why we have attempted to supply some extra motivation in what we have been saying about the mercies of God. If our fellow-believers could only see those priceless mercies given to us from God, they would not be able to hold back. Their hearts would melt in gratitude and they would gladly present their all to Him, as those that are alive from the dead.

How we thank God for those who, in past generations, have personally heeded the plea and have gone on to, "Prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Some of their stories have been told us in factual Christian biographies and we thank God for everyone of them. But with most the record is only with the Lord and the day will declare it. These have been amongst God's hidden ones, yet all the time 'men of the altar'. They too, in their day, pondered God's mercies and in response presented their bodies as a living sacrifice. And, thank God, even to this very day in which we live there are those who have gratefully presented all, taking up the cry of Paul, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Their hands have been given to the Lord, perhaps to hold the Bible while they plead with men to be reconciled to God. Feet, as well, have been at His disposal, to run in the way of his commandments, bringing glad tidings and publishing peace. Voices also have been altogether His, and likewise the heart and the will. All have been presented and then blessedly renewed by God in the power of Christ's resurrection. Such have said from the heart:

His hands and feet and heart, all three

Were pierced for me on Calvary,

So here and now to Him I bring,

My hands, feet, heart - an offering.

These, without a doubt, are the lives that have had the sacred glow and have known the burning fire. Dying daily, they have lived daily, all of them willing sacrifices on the altar of the Lord. They have followed in the footsteps of the One who said, "A body hast Thou prepared Me, ... Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7).

We will not say, more about this just now, but our verses in Romans 12 make it abundantly plain that this surrender of all is to be a definite and known crisis in the Christian life and one that will then lead to a corresponding daily attitude of being sacrificed unto the Lord. We ask you then, as we conclude this point, have you glimpsed those outlined mercies of the Lord of which the apostle speaks? And, as the hymn writer puts it,

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid,

Your heart does the Spirit control.

May the Lord help us all to face this vital question.

The wonderful result of responding to the plea

We refer here, of course, to the concluding words of verse two, immediately following the plea of verse one. Having issued the call to complete sacrifice, the writer goes on to say, "That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." That, evidently, is the intended result of the sacrifice. We present our bodies and thereupon begin to prove the will of God. Now, lest there be someone who is inclined to think that that sounds rather ordinary or commonplace, let us hasten to explain.

We venture to say that those words regarding proving the will of God are seldom understood by the people of the Lord, certainly as far as their full, deep and intended meaning is concerned. Young people, particularly, are inclined to read and interpret those words in terms of an individual finding out God's will for his or her life, or as regards some particular decision that has to be made at some particular time. The argument is, make a full surrender to the Lord and personal guidance will thereafter be no problem; you will somehow know the pathway to be followed in that particular and personal matter. Now that, of course, is blessedly true and many of us have proved it again and again, but we would insist right now, that that is only a very small part of what the apostle is seeking to say in these verses. It is wonderful that God does graciously guide the footsteps of His children and involve Himself in their daily problems, but we repeat that that was not what was primarily in view in the verses now before us. When all is said and done, we do not lay all on the altar purely and simply that we might know the blessedness of divine guidance! Thank God, the promise given here carries us to something infinitely greater and far beyond all that, as we shall now seek to show.

Knowing the will of God, in this context, has to do, mainly, with our having actual and personal experience, right now, of all that God eternally intended and designed should be the portion and inheritance of the sons of men. In this particular setting we could quite justifiably read will of God as purpose of God, meaning God's own inscrutable plans and designs for His human creatures as set out in His Word. As one translator has put it, it is a matter of putting God's design to the test of our own experience. That, we say, is proving in experience the will of God. It means that we begin to taste, deep in our hearts and lives, what God Himself had in mind when He first made the human creature. And who can tell in human words the infinite blessedness of that? That, however, is the portion of those who have been to God's altars. And that is what we have here called the wonderful result of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice. In the power of Christ's resurrection we shall begin to live and move in the area of God's timeless purposes for the sons of men! Indeed, indeed, what a wonderful result!

All of this, most certainly, requires fuller explanation and some degree of illustration, but for the present we can only state it and leave it for those who have ears to hear. Suffice it to say that God's altar leads us right into God's eternal purpose, it introduces us experimentally to the great divine design for the favoured sons of men, something that has been in God's heart from before the foundation of the world. And we repeat that the way in is the altar. From our side we wholeheartedly present ourselves a living sacrifice, and straightway we begin to have indescribable experience of that perfect will of God, in that fuller and more glorious sense.

It has been said that the altar is the gateway to heaven and we verily believe there is a spiritual heaven of God's eternal purpose for the sons of men.

All this is a tremendous subject and it is one that positively permeates our Bibles. It takes us back, for instance, to the great key-word of Gen. 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion." Notice there is mention here of two things: a character-likeness to our Maker and then a shared authority with our Maker. All this is part of the great original design. This double

blessedness and much more besides, we shall certainly prove when we have been to the altar. We shall begin to wear right here in this world, the very image and likeness of our glorious Lord and then to exercise an inherited dominion in the spiritual world. Under the headship of Christ (and of course, with the sublime servant-spirit of the great king Himself), we shall reign as kings. We shall know in experience this marvellous predetermined will of God.

This and very much more, is included in what we have called the wonderful result of responding to God's plea. As we gratefully make the unconditional surrender, we shall discover for ourselves that the altar is, indeed, the gateway to a present, inward, and indescribable heaven. It is a heaven of deep and blessed fellowship with our Maker, a spiritual union and communion with Him and a great throne partnership with our beloved and exalted Lord. And, thank God, it is something present and in the Spirit and yet designed and planned before the foundation of the world. We should add, perhaps, that the battles which are always to be our portion in this world, will definitely continue and, indeed, intensify, but inwardly the heart will be at rest. Even while hell rages against us, we shall know ourselves to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places and quietly reigning with Him. We shall be proving the perfect will of God!

In closing we would ask you earnestly, "Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Have you presented your body a living sacrifice and all that it contains?" It costs everything, we know, but what is that in the light of all that God has done for us in Christ and compared with the spiritual gains that will surely follow, even now, for ourselves, for others, and for Him? O may the Lord enable us, right now, to present our bodies a living sacrifice!

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