

Homily 20 on Romans

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, and being transformed by the renewing of our mind to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Scripture: Psalm 50:13-51, Proverbs 9:10, Isaiah 1:12, Daniel 3:15, Matthew 5:3, Romans 12:1

Topics: "Spiritual Sacrifices", "Holy Living"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God, emphasizing the need for a holy and acceptable lifestyle as a reasonable service in response to God's mercies. He highlights the distinction between the material sacrifices of the past and the spiritual sacrifice of praise and good works required of believers. Chrysostom urges believers to purify their bodies and minds, offering themselves fully to God in a way that pleases Him and reflects His will for their lives.

Transcript

Rom. XII. 1

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

After discoursing at large upon the love of God toward man, and pointing out His unspeakable concern for us, and unutterable goodness, which cannot even be searched into, he next puts it forward with a view of persuading those who have received the benefit to exhibit a conversation worthy of the gift. And though he is so great and good a person, yet he does not decline beseeching them, and that not for any enjoyment he was likely to get himself, but for that they would have to gain.

And why wonder that he does not decline beseeching, where he is even putting God's mercies before them? For since, he means, it is from this you have those numberless blessings, from the mercies of God, reverence them, be moved to compassion by them. For they themselves take the attitude of suppliants, that you would show no conduct unworthy of them. I entreat you then, he means, by the very things through which you were saved. As if any one who wished to make a person, who had had great kindnesses done him, show regard, was to bring him the benefactor himself as a suppliant.

And what do you beseech? Let me hear. That ye would present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. For when he had said sacrifice, to prevent any from thinking he bade them kill themselves, he immediately added (Greek order) living. Then to distinguish it from the Jewish, he calls it holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service. For theirs was a material one, and not very acceptable either. Since He says, Who has required this at your hands?

Isaiah 1:12 And in sundry other passages He clearly throws them aside. For it was not this, but this with the other, that He looked to have presented. Wherefore he says, The sacrifice of praise shall glorify Me. And again, I will praise the name of my God with a song, and this shall please him better than a bullock that puts forth horns and hoofs. Psalm 50:23; 69:30, 31 And so in another place He rejects it, and says, Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink goat's blood? Psalm 50:13 and proceeds with, Offer unto God a sacrifice of praise, and pay your vows unto the Most High.

Psalm 49:14 So Paul also here bids us present our bodies a living sacrifice. And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look upon no evil thing, and it has become a sacrifice; let your tongue speak nothing filthy, and it has become an offering; let your hand do no lawless deed, and it has become a whole burnt offering. Or rather this is not enough, but we must have good works also: let the hand do alms, the mouth bless them that cross one, and the hearing find leisure evermore for lections of Scripture.

For sacrifice allows of no unclean thing: sacrifice is a first-fruit of the other actions. Let us then from our hands, and feet, and mouth, and all other members, yield a first-fruit unto God. Such a sacrifice is well pleasing, as that of the Jews was even unclean, for, their sacrifices, it says, are unto them as the bread of mourning. Hosea 9:4 Not so ours. That presented the thing sacrificed dead: this makes the thing sacrificed to be living. For when we have mortified our members, then we shall be able to live.

For the law of this sacrifice is new, and so the sort of fire is a marvellous one. For it needs no wood or matter under it; but our fire lives of itself, and does not burn up the victim, but rather quickens it. This was the sacrifice that God sought of old. Wherefore the Prophet says, The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit. Psalm 51:17 And the three Children offer this when they say, At this time there is neither prince, or prophet, or leader, or burnt offering, or place to sacrifice before You, and to find mercy.

Nevertheless, in a contrite heart and an humble spirit let us be accepted. Daniel 3:15-16 And observe how great the exactness wherewith he uses each word. For he does not say, offer ἱεῖς ἑαυτῶν ἑαυτῶν, ἑαυτῶν Exodus 29:39, Septuagint your bodies as a sacrifice, but present (ἱεῖς ἑαυτῶν ἑαυτῶν, ἑαυτῶν see below) them, as if he had said, never more have any interest in them. You have given them up to another. For even they that furnish (same word) the war-horses have no further interest in them.

And thou too hast presented your members for the war against the devil and for that dread battle-array. Do not let them down to selfish appliances. And he shows another thing also from this, that one must make them approved, if one means to present them. For it is not to any mortal being that we present them, but to God, the King of the universe; not to war only, but to have seated thereon the King Himself. For He does not refuse even to be seated upon our members, but even greatly desires it.

And what no king who is but our fellow-servant would choose to do, that the Lord of Angels chooses. Since then it is both to be presented (i.e. as for a King's use) and is a sacrifice, rid it of every spot, since if it have a spot, it will no longer be a sacrifice. For neither can the eye that looks lecherously be sacrificed, nor the hand be presented that is grasping and rapacious, nor the feet that go lame and go to

play-houses, nor the belly that is the slave of self-indulgence, and kindles lusts after pleasures, nor the heart that has rage in it, and harlots' love, nor the tongue that utters filthy things.

Hence we must spy out the spots on our body upon every side. For if they that offered the sacrifices of old were bid to look on every side, and were not permitted to offer an animal that has anything superfluous or lacking, or is scurvy, or scabbed Leviticus 22:22-23, much more must we, who offer not senseless animals, but ourselves, exhibit more strictness, and be pure in all respects, that we also may be able to say as did Paul, I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 2 Timothy 4:6 For he was purer than any sacrifice, and so he speaks of himself as ready to be offered.

But this will be brought about if we kill the old man, if we mortify our members that are upon the earth, if we crucify the world unto ourselves. In this way we shall not need the knife any more, nor altar, nor fire, or rather we shall want all these, but not made with the hands, but all of them will come to us from above, fire from above, and knife also, and our altar will the breadth of Heaven be. For if when Elijah offered the visible sacrifice, a flame, that came down from above consumed the whole water, wood, and stones, much more will this be done upon you.

And if you have anything in you relaxed and secular, and yet offerest the sacrifice with a good intention, the fire of the Spirit will come down, and both wear away that worldliness, and perfect (so Field: manuscripts carry up) the whole sacrifice. But what is reasonable (ἀλογιστὸν) service? It means spiritual ministry, conversation according to Christ. As then he that ministers in the house of God, and officiates, of whatever sort he may be, then collects himself ἵψι...ἵψι, ἵψι»ἵψι, ἵψι±ἵψι Ezekiel 44:19, and becomes more dignified; so we ought to be minded all our whole life as serving and ministering.

And this will be so, if every day you bring Him sacrifices (3 manuscripts yourself as a sacrifice), and become the priest of your own body, and of the virtue of your soul; as, for example, when you offer soberness, when almsgiving, when goodness and forbearance. For in doing this you offer a reasonable service (or worship, ἱερίῳ ἄσχετον ἰσχυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ), that is, one without anything that is bodily, gross, visible. Having then raised the hearer by the names bestowed, and having shown that each man is a priest of his own flesh by his conversation, he mentions also the way whereby we may compass all this. What then is the way?

Ver. 2. And be not fashioned after this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

For the fashion of this world is grovelling and worthless, and but for a time, neither has ought of loftiness, or lastingness, or straightforwardness, but is wholly perverted. If then you would walk upright (or aright ἀΐϵϵ ἱϵϵ, ἀΐ½°), figure not yourself after the fashion of this life present. For in it there is nought abiding or stable. And this is why he calls it a fashion (ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ); and so in another passage, the fashion of this world passes away. 1 Corinthians 7:31 For it has no durability or fixedness, but all in it is but for a season; and so he calls it this age (or world, Gr. ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ & 241 ἱϵϵ), hereby to indicate its liableness to misfortune, and by the word fashion its unsubstantialness. For speak of riches, or of glory, or beauty of person, or of luxury, or of whatever other of its seemingly great things you will, it is a fashion only, not reality, a show and a mask, not any abiding substance (ἀΐ½' ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ, ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ). But be not thou fashioned after this, but be transformed, he says, by the renewing of your mind. He says not change the fashion, but be transformed (ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ, ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ ἱϵϵ), to show that the world's ways are a fashion, but virtue's not a fashion, but a kind of real form, with a natural beauty of its own, lacking not the trickeries and fashions of outward things, which no sooner appear than they go to nought. For all these things, even before they come to light, are dissolving. If then you throw the fashion aside, you will speedily come to the form. For nothing is more

strengthless than vice, nothing so easily wears old. Then since it is likely that being men they would sin every day, he consoles his hearer by saying, renew yourself from day to day. This is what we do with houses, we keep constantly repairing them as they wear old, and so do thou unto yourself. Have you sinned today? Have you made your soul old? Despair not, despond not, but renew it by repentance, and tears Hilary on Psalm 119, and confession, and by doing of good things. And never fail of doing this. And how are we to do this?

That ye may prove (things more expedient (further), and know) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Either he means by this, be renewed, that you may learn what is more expedient for you, and what the will of God. Or rather, that you can get so renewed if you learn the things expedient, and what God may will. For if you see this, and know how to distinguish the nature of things, you are in possession of the whole way of virtue. And who, it may be said, is ignorant of what is expedient, and what is the will of God? They that are flurried with the things of this world, they that deem riches an enviable thing, they that make light of poverty, they that follow after power, they that are gaping after outward glory, they that think themselves great men when they raise fine houses, and buy costly sepulchres, and keep herds of slaves, and carry a great swarm of eunuchs about with them; these know not what is expedient for them, or what the will of God is. For both of these are but one thing. For God wills what things are expedient for us, and what God wills, that is also expedient for us. What then are the things which God wills? To live in poverty, in lowliness of mind, in contempt of glory; in continency, not in self-indulgence; in tribulation, not in ease; in sorrow, not in dissipation and laughter; in all the other points whereon He has given us laws. But the generality do even think these things of ill omen; so far are they from thinking them expedient, and the will of God. This then is why they never can come near even to the labors for virtue's sake. For they that do not know so much even as what virtue may be, but reverence vice in its place, and take unto their bed the harlot instead of the modest wife, how are they to be able to stand aloof from the present world? Wherefore we ought above all to have a correct estimate of things, and even if we do not follow after virtue, to praise virtue, and even if we do not avoid vice, to stigmatize vice, that so far we may have our judgments uncorrupted. For so as we advance on our road, we shall be able to lay hold on the realities. This then is why he also bids you be renewed, that you may prove what is the will of God. But here he seems to me to be attacking the Jews too, who cling to the Law. For the old dispensation was a will of God, yet not the ultimate purpose, but allowed owing to their feebleness. But that which is a perfect one, and well-pleasing, is the new conversation. So too when he called it a reasonable service, it was to set it in contrast with that other (v. note p. 496) that he gave it such a name.

Ver. 3. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.

After saying above, I beseech you by the mercies, here he says again, by the grace. Observe the teacher's lowliness of mind, observe a spirit quite subdued! He means to say that he is in no respect worthy to be trusted in such an exhortation and counsel. But at one time he takes the mercies of God along with him, at another His grace. It is not my word, he would say, that I am speaking, but one from God. And he does not say, For I say unto you by the wisdom of God, or, for I say unto you by the Law given of God, but, by the grace, so reminding them continually of the benefits done them, so as to make them more submissive, and to show that even on this account, they were under an obligation to obey what is here said. To every man that is among you. Not to this person and to that merely, but to the governor

and to the governed, to the slave and to the free, to the unlearned and to the wise, to the woman and to the man, to the young and to the old. For the Law is common to all as being the Lord's. And by this he likewise makes his language inoffensive, setting the lessons he gives to all, even to such as do not come under them, that those who do come under them may with more willingness accept such a reproof and correction. And what do you say? Let me hear. Not to think more highly than he ought to think. Here he is bringing before us the mother of good deeds, which is lowliness of mind, in imitation of his own Master. For as He, when He went up into the mountain, and was going to give a tissue of moral precepts, took this for his first beginning, and made this the foundation, in the words, Blessed are the poor in spirit Matthew 5:3; so Paul too, as he has now passed from the doctrinal parts to those of a more practical kind, has taught us virtue in general terms, by requiring of us the admirable sacrifice; and being on the point of giving a more particular portrait of it, he begins from lowliness of mind as from the head, and tells us, not to think more highly of one's self than one ought to think, (for this is His will), (many manuscripts om. for etc.), but to think soberly. But what he means is about this. We have received wisdom not that we should use it to make us haughty, but to make us sober-minded. And he does not say in order to be lowly in mind, but in order to sobriety, meaning by sobriety (ἡ σωφροσύνη) here not that virtue which contrasts with lewdness, nor the being free from intemperance, but being sober and healthful in mind. And the Greek name of it means keeping the mind safe. To show then that he who is not thus modest (ὁ ἀνὴρ ἡσυχῆς, ὁ ἡσυχῆς ἄνθρωπος), cannot be sober either, that is, cannot be staid and healthful minded (because such an one is bewildered, and out, of his wits, and is more crazed than any madman), he calls lowliness of mind, soberness of mind.

According as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. For since having gifts given them had made many unreasonably elated, both with these and with the Corinthians, see how he lays open the cause of the disease, and gradually removes it. For after saying that we should think soberly, he proceeds, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith, meaning here the gift by faith: and by using the word dealt, he solaces him who had the less, and humbles him who had the greater share. For if God dealt it, and it is no achievement of yours, why think highly of yourself? But if any one says that faith here does not mean the gift, this would only the more show that he was humbling the vain boasters. For if that which is the cause of the gift (so Field with most manuscripts: Vulg. If the faith by which miracles are wrought is the cause of the gift), that faith by which miracles are wrought, be itself from God, on what ground do you think highly of yourself? If He had not come, or been incarnate, then the things of faith would not have fared well either. And it is from hence that all the good things take their rise. But if it is He that gives it, He knows how He deals it. For He made all, and takes like care of all. And as His giving came of His love towards man, so does the quantity which He gives. For was He Who had shown His goodness in regard to the main point, which is the giving of the gift, likely to neglect you in regard to the measure? For had He wished to do you dishonor, then He had not given them at all. But if to save you and to honor you was what He had in view (and for this He came and distributed such great blessings), why are you confounded and disturbed, and abusest your wisdom to foolishness, making yourself more disgraceful than one who is by nature so? For being foolish by nature is no ground of complaint. But being foolish through wisdom, is at once bereaving one's self of excuse, and running into greater punishment.

Such then are those, who pride themselves upon their wisdom, and fall into the excess of recklessness. For recklessness of all things makes a person a fool. Wherefore the Prophet calls the barbarian by this name. But the fool, he says, shall speak folly. Isaiah 32:6 But that you may see the folly of him from his own words, hear what he says. Above the stars of heaven will I place my throne, and I will be like the Most High. Isaiah 14:14 I will take hold of the world as a nest, and as eggs that are left will I take them away.

Isaiah 10:14 Now what can be more foolish than these words? And every instance of haughty language immediately draws on itself this reproach. And if I were to set before you every expression of them that are reckless, you would not be able to distinguish whether the words are those of a reckless man or a fool. So entirely the same is this failing and that. And another of a strange nation says again, I am God and not man Ezech. 28:2; and another again, Can God save you, or deliver you out of my hand?

Daniel 3:15 And the Egyptian too, I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. Exodus 5:2 And the foolish body in the Psalmist is of this character, who has said in his heart, There is no God. Psalm 14:1 And Cain, Am I my brother's keeper? Genesis 4:9 Can you now distinguish whether the words are those of the reckless or those of the fool? For recklessness going out of due bounds, and being a departure from reason (whence its name recklessness, ἀνὴρ ἑκὼν ἄλογος), makes men both fools and vainglorious.

For likewise, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord Proverbs 9:10, so then the beginning of folly is surely not knowing the Lord. If then knowing be wisdom, and not knowing Him folly, and this ignorance come of haughtiness (ἀνὴρ ἑκὼν ἄλογος), (for the beginning of haughtiness is the not knowing of the Lord), then is haughtiness the extreme of folly. Such was Nabal, if not to Godward, at least toward man, having become senseless from his recklessness. But he afterwards died of fear.

For when any falls from the measure of wisdom, he becomes at once a coward and bold (ἰσχυρὸς καὶ φοβηρὸς... ἄνθρωπος ἄλογος Ar. Eth. iii.), his soul having been made feeble. For as the body when it loses its proper tone having become out of condition, is a prey to any disease, thus too the soul when it has lost its greatness of nature and lowly-mindedness, having gotten any feeble habit (ἀνὴρ ἑκὼν ἄλογος), becomes fearful, as well as bold and unreasonable, and loses its powers of self-consciousness.

And he that has lost these, how is he to know things above himself? For as he that is seized with a frenzy, when he has so lost them, knows not even what is right before him; and the eye, when it is dimmed, darkens all the other members; so does it happen with this recklessness. Wherefore these are more miserable than the mad, or than those silly by nature. For like them they stir laughter, and like them they are ill-tempered. And they are out of their wits as the others are, but they are not pitied as they are.

And they are beside themselves, as are these, but they are not excused, as are these, but are hated only. And while they have the failings of either, they are bereaved of the excuse of either, being ridiculous not owing to their words only, but to their whole appearance also. For why, pray, do you stiffen up your neck? Or why walk on tiptoe? Why knit up your brows? Why stick your breast out? You can not make one hair white or black, Matthew 5:36 and you go with as lofty gait as if you could command everything.

No doubt you would like to have wings, and not go upon the earth at all! No doubt you would wish to be a prodigy! For have you not made yourself prodigious now, when you are a man and triest to fly? Or rather flying from within, and bloated in every limb? What shall I call you to quit you of your recklessness? Shall I call you ashes, and dust, and smoke, and pother? I have described your worthlessness to be sure, but still I have not laid hold of the exact image I wanted. For I want to put their bloatedness before me, and all its emptiness.

What image am I to find then which will suit with all this? To me it seems to be like tow in a blaze. For it seems to swell when lighted, and to lift itself up; but when it is submitted to a slight touch of the hand, it all tumbles down, and turns out to be more worthless than the veriest ashes. Of this sort are the souls of these men; that empty inflatedness of theirs even the commonest attack may humble and bring down. For he that behaves recklessly must of necessity be a thoroughly feeble person, since the height he has is not

a sound one, but even as bubbles are easily burst, so are these men easily undone.

But if you dost not believe, give me a bold reckless fellow, and you will find him more cowardly than a hare even at the most trivial circumstance. For as the flame that rises from dry sticks is no sooner lighted than it becomes dust, but stiff logs do not by their nature easily kindle up, and then keep up their flame a long time burning; so souls that be stern and firm are not easily kindled or extinguished; but these men undergo both of these in a single moment. Since then we know this, let us practise humble-mindedness.

For there is nothing so powerful as it, since it is stronger even than a rock and harder than adamant, and places us in a safety greater than that of towers and cities and walls, being too high for any of the artillery of the devil. As then recklessness makes men an easy prey even to ordinary occurrences, being, as I was saying, easier broken than a bubble, and rent more speedily than a spider's web, and more quickly dissolved than a smoke; that we then may be walking upon the strong rock, let us leave that and take to this. For thus in this life present we shall find rest, and shall in the world to come have every blessing, by the grace and love toward man, etc.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/homily-20-on-romans/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net