

Living Sacrifices...

We want to continue to looking at scripture to determine what a true Christian should look like. Paul, in Romans 12, wrote about the type of commitment that the follower of God is expected to have. He introduced the idea in this way:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1–2).

Paul set a very high standard with these introductory verses. Afterward, through the rest of this context, he shows how these principles are to be put into action in a practical way. The language that Paul used to introduce this idea makes it clear that God's expectations for us are not light, or easy. He expects that we are going to have to work diligently to be the kind of people that He wants us to be. While we have seen this principle in our previous studies, Paul's instructions in this chapter make it clear: God wants every bit of us! He is not going to be happy with us if we are holding back part of ourselves for ourselves. This is one of the most difficult concepts for us as human beings to grasp. We have a natural desire to put ourselves first, to think of ourselves as most important. But God calls us to be something different than that. To make the choice to submit to Him and humble ourselves before Him (as we saw in the previous lesson). With this study, we want to take a look at just how far God expects us to go in serving Him!

Sacrifices...

Paul called upon his audience to be sacrifices to God. To understand what he is describing, we must understand that allusion back to Old Testament sacrifices. The people, whether of a Jewish background, or a pagan background (both were present in the Roman church) understood the idea of animal sacrifice. It had been a part of who they were before they became Christians. They knew that they had taken animals and slaughtered them to live in a pleasing manner before their God (whether true Jehovah for the Jews, or idols for the pagans). The process required that they take the animal to the altar, and then slay it. It gave its life up completely for the act of worship.

Paul used that imagery that was so familiar to instruct these Christians in the way they ought to think, and therefore in the way they ought to behave. Rather than serving Jehovah with dying sacrifices, Paul told these brethren that they needed to serve God as *living* sacrifices! Rather than taking something else and killing it, the Christian was expected to be a sacrifice that was living for the Lord.

The idea expressed here by Paul seems to be connected back to Romans chapter 6. There, Paul made it clear that one was to put the old man of sin to death, and then raise up the new man of righteousness. That new man was to be the slave of righteousness, the slave of God. This new man is the living sacrifice that Paul is requiring in this chapter! Instead of being put to death literally, the sacrifice is the new life that we live to God. When we think about the process of animal sacrifice, we know that the animal was given wholly over to God. There were certainly processes that the people went through, and rules that they were required to follow, but in the end the animal was dead and

gone. It certainly wasn't going to get up and walk away after the fact! This imagery is what Paul wanted his audience to consider when using this terminology. He wanted for them (and therefore us) to consider the ultimate end: the animal was given completely over to God. When we are called upon to be living sacrifices, we are being told just how completely we are to give ourselves over to God. We are to lay our lives on the altar for Him, giving up ourselves completely. We are not a sacrifice that is dying for Him (though that might certainly be required of some), but rather we are living for Him. We are not just waiting around to die...we are busy about living! There are too many Christians that are sitting around waiting to die, rather than living the kind of sacrificial life that God has required of them.

As Paul continued his instruction in Romans 12, he made it clear that God's standards were quite high. He said that in presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, the Christian was to present themselves as "holy and acceptable to God." This lets us know that it is God who sets the standard, not us. We have to conform to what He defines as "holy and acceptable." Remember, we have already established in previous studies that God has called us to be holy because He is holy. We are supposed to conform ourselves to be more like Him, more like His Son that has been given to us as a perfect example. If we are not holy as He describes and defines it, then we cannot be acceptable to Him either. Think of the implications of not be acceptable to the Lord. How can we be accepted by Him if we are not acceptable?

Paul said that this type of sacrifice, this type of conformation to the holiness of God is "your reasonable service." This word, *reasonable*, is defined by Strong as:

3050 λογικός [logikos /log-ik-os/] adj. From 3056; TDNT 4:142; TDNTA 505; GK 3358; Two occurrences; AV translates as "reasonable" once, and "of the word" once. 1 pertaining to speech or speaking. 2 pertaining to the reason or logic. 2A spiritual, pertaining to the soul. 2B agreeable to reason, following reason, reasonable, logical.¹

Some translations use the term *rational*, which is also a good translation. The idea being conveyed is that it is logical, or rational to give oneself wholly over to God. This flies in the face of modern "Christianity." Most people do not think it reasonable, or rational at all to serve God with the kind of dedication and devotion that Paul is describing here. The problem is, they are not thinking rationally themselves! Paul was not saying that we should do whatever seems to be rational in our service to God. Such a sentiment has led to people picking and choosing what they like and what they don't like from the scriptures. Instead, Paul is making it clear that there is nothing more logical than giving oneself over to God completely, because we know what God has done for us. What could God ask that would be too much in repayment for what He has already done for us? This is emphasized by Paul's previous verses:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are

¹ Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon 1995* : n. pag. Print.

all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:25–36).

When we understand what God has done for us, showering us with His grace and mercy, then it is reasonable for us to do whatever He demands of us! Even when He demands that we make our bodies “a living sacrifice” to Him, we understand that His demand is rational.

Notice that Paul makes his argument in this passage based upon what is “rational” or “reasonable.” This emphasizes the fact that God expects Christianity to be based upon reason, not mere emotion. God wants us to think through what He has done for us, and use that process to come to a conclusion that we should serve Him. It is not about what we feel, but what we are able understand through the thinking process that God has created in us.

In Romans 12, Paul did not leave us wondering what actions were “rational” in our service to God. He proceeded to write about what God expected of us as we make our bodies living sacrifices.

Do not be conformed to the world...

For one to be a living sacrifice, he cannot be just like the world around him. He cannot act just like all the worldly people act. Paul used a contrast to ensure that we understood that what God wants, and what most people do are two completely different things. Rather than being conformed to the world, Paul said that we must be “transformed by the renewing of your mind...” Conforming to the world is easy. It takes very little effort to just go along with the crowds, and do what we like, what we want to do to please ourselves. However, Paul emphasized the need to change the way that we think! This has been a main point of our study thus far: we cannot change the way that we act until we change the way that we think. In order to be living sacrifices, it is necessary to change the way that we think. We must renew our minds if we want to be transformed from the ways of the world to the ways of God. This transformation is declared to be the responsibility of the believer. Notice that Paul did not say that one would be transformed by another, but rather that they must do the transforming themselves. This is not to say that the transformation is not facilitated by God. After all, it is His word that provides for the transformation. But it is the choice of the individual to be transformed. He must make a choice: be conformed to the world, or be transformed by renewing the mind? God is not going to force anyone to go through this renewal of the mind. Each person must decide for himself to do so, and therefore lead to the transformation that God requires.

We can easily see that the change that Paul calls on his reader to make is not the natural response of people left to their own devices. We will, if not influenced by the word of God, do what is best for ourselves. We will conform ourselves to the world, because that is what is easy, and what ensures that we will not be singled out for ridicule and persecution. Conforming is easy. Transforming is difficult. The idea is a complete change from what you once were to what you should be. This should remind us once again of what we saw in Romans chapter 6. There is to be a complete change that takes place in the nature and character of the one who becomes a follower of Christ.

Paul used the same word in 2 Corinthians 3. There, Paul wrote of the delivering of the Law through Moses, and the glory that accompanied it. In fact, Moses’ face glowed! He wore a veil so that the children of Israel would not gaze upon the glory that was passing away (the glowing was diminishing.) The glory that was being delivered in Paul’s day was not going to diminish! It was not going to fade away. So Paul wrote:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).

We are gazing upon the glory of the Lord, as looking into a mirror. We reflect that glory as we adopt His instructions. We are being “transformed into the same image...” As we conform to His

image, we are being changed to look more and more like He looks. This is quite similar to James' instruction:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:21–25).

James uses the same imagery of looking into a mirror, only in his example the man does not conform to the image of Christ. He doesn't make the changes that God expects of him, and he therefore does not become transformed as he should be. He goes away looking exactly the same as when he came to the mirror. This emphasizes once again that the transformation process is a choice made by the individual. You will never be transformed against your will!

By the renewing of your mind...

The transformation that takes place begins with the renewing of the mind. We have, over the last few lessons, addressed the idea that one must first change the way they think before they can change the way that they act. Paul was emphasizing this very point. We must choose to renew our minds if we want to make the transformation that Paul was writing about. We must begin to think more and more like Christ, and less and less like ourselves. We have to choose to put aside our own desires, and the things we think might be best, and instead adopt His way of thinking.

The word that is translated as “renewed” in Romans 12:2 means:

58.72 ἀνακαίνωσις, εως f; ἀνακαινώω; ἀνανεώω: to cause something to become new and different, with the implication of becoming superior—‘to make new, renewal.’

ἀνακαίνωσις: ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός ‘but be transformed by the renewal of the mind’ Ro 12:2.²

We can think of this as a starting over to the way we think! We are learning to think in a completely different manner, one that will make us act in ways that we never would have considered before. If we are turning to the perfect law of liberty as our source, then we can be sure that we will act far differently than we did when we were a part of the world. We are going to leave that behind and be completely transformed into something new, something better...something superior!

Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

When one's mind is renewed, he is working to think like Jesus Himself. This enables him to test what is delivered, that which is taught. He is able to, through the testing process (studying of God's word) establish what the will of the Lord is. Paul used three words to describe the will of the Lord: good, acceptable, and perfect.

It should be pointed out that the Paul's instruction to “prove” the will of God is not intended to make us think that we have some say in what is good, acceptable, and perfect in the will of God. It is all good, acceptable, and perfect! Paul's instruction is intended to make it clear that we must work to come to understand the will of God, to understand that all that He has given is good, acceptable and perfect. Our job is not to try and figure out what parts of it are good, acceptable and perfect, but rather to test all that has been given through study and come to the understand-

² Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* 1996: 593. Print.

ing, the realization, of what His will is. Once we have proven His will, we are under obligation to put it into practice. How foolish would it be to understand that what God has given is His will, and then turn away from it without enacting it? Once again, this should remind us of James' warning in James 1! We would be like the man, having seen his reflection in the mirror, noticing corrections that need to be made, turning and walking away without action.

Our goal, as we deliver ourselves over to God as "living sacrifices" should be to work diligently to discover what is acceptable to the Lord. While we have looked at this concept in some detail earlier in our study, it is imperative that we understand that discovering the will of the Lord is directly related to becoming living sacrifices. We cannot follow Paul's instructions in Romans 12 without striving to understand (and put into practice) the will of the Lord!

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8–10).

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:17)

When we have accomplished what Paul describes in this context, we can have the kind of confidence in salvation that Paul had:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

Paul's description is of one who has been "poured out" completely. He has given himself completely to God and His will. He had worked diligently to do what God had commanded, and therefore He had confidence that he would receive the reward that God had promised. Through his writing, he also encouraged his audience that this reward would await them if they too would be obedient to what God had instructed. Of course, the same promise remains for us! We, if we turn ourselves completely over to the will of God can have confidence in our salvation just as Paul had confidence in his.

In the next lesson we will look at the instructions that Paul gave to the Roman brethren concerning more specific actions that showed that they were becoming living sacrifices. He showed them what being a living sacrifice looks like! It is our responsibility to look at the descriptions that are given, and put those ideas into practice. Unless we are doing what God has instructed, we are not a living sacrifice before Him. If we are not a living sacrifice, then we are not a part of His kingdom, and we are missing out on His salvation!

Questions...

1. Compare and contrast the ideas of “living sacrifice” under the New Testament covenant with that of “dying sacrifices under the Old Testament covenant.
2. How is the service that Paul calls on us to implement “reasonable”?
3. How do the terms “conform” and “transform” relate to one another in the context of Romans 12:1-2? Which is easier to do?
4. How do the instructions of Romans 12 reflect the teachings of Paul in Romans 6?
5. How does a person renew their minds?
6. How do we prove what is the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God”?
7. How can becoming a living sacrifice give us confidence in our salvation?