

Present your bodies a living sacrifice

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Prof Donald Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, and the twelfth chapter, reading at verse 1.

Romans 12 and verse 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body's living sacrifice, holy, accepted unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The Apostle Paul was, by any standards, a remarkable man. A man of gigantic intellect. A great organizer.

An intrepid traveler. A great pastor. And sometimes also a great diplomat and a great politician.

This epistle is a great summary of the core of the Pauline Gospel, the Christian faith.

Very closely argued. Very carefully structured. And Paul has spent some 11 chapters expounding the great doctrines of the faith, intermingled with practical teaching.

[1 : 31] But it's now come to the point where he wants to spend the remaining chapters, around the five more chapters, on the outworking in great detail of what this Christian faith means.

And here, as this new section begins, Paul is giving us a great summary statement of how we ought to respond to what God has done for us.

And I want to spend some time this morning exploring what Paul has to say to us within this particular verse, and perhaps the following verse as well.

The challenge here for our own discipleship, our response to what God has done. As is the custom in the New Testament, all Paul's directives and challenges begin with a statement reminding us of what God has done.

And so he starts with the mercies of God. Before he says a thing about duty or principles, he wants to remind us again of where it all begins.

[2 : 57] It begins with what God has done. The mercies of God. And Paul has gone through those in the previous chapters.

He has spoken to us of justification by faith alone. The way that God has freely forgiven all our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ.

God has justified the ungodly. That's the first of God's great mercies. And then God has sanctified us in union with Christ.

God has made us new women and new men. We are new creations in Christ Jesus. And God has poured upon us his Holy Spirit.

And in doing so, God has given us the strength to cope. So that we are led by him. And we are helped by him.

[3 : 59] We are even prayed for by him. And because he is innocent so close to us, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

And God has pledged that he will work all things together for our good. And God has pledged that nothing in all creation, nothing in time or eternity, shall ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So these are God's great mercies. Justification, sanctification, the outpouring of God's Spirit. These aren't challenges, these aren't things to do.

These are things that God has done. God has given courage. God has given strength. God has given a love that never lets go.

And God is working in our lives to ensure that his own outcomes are fulfilled. These are the mercies of God.

[5 : 15] And on these mercies, perhaps, there are just three comments that ought to be made. First of all, that all of them flow from the divine pity.

That's where they all come from. Not from any bargaining on our part, or any merit, or any deserving or achievement on our part, but simply from the pity of God. Looking down upon us as a race. Looking down upon our world. And being pained by what he saw, and grieved, and moved to pity. And looking down upon you and me. In our puny humanity. In our sinful helplessness. In our inability to save ourselves. And God taking pity upon us. Paul never forgot. That he had a past. A past that was indefensible. [6 : 27] A past in which he made havoc on the church of Christ. A past in which he was the chief of sinners. A wise man lived among us not long ago. Reminded us. That every saint has a past. And Saint Paul. Well, he had a past. And God looked upon him in that past. With pity. God looked at this man. Who hated all that God was doing. And God took pity upon him. And that's why. If you'd ask Saint Paul. Why become a Christian. He'd have said to you quite simply. It pleased God. It was the pity of God. That lay at the root of everything. God's clemency. And God's mercy. That's why it was justified. [7 : 30] That's why it was sanctified. That's why God gave him his Holy Spirit. Because God took pity upon him. It all came from God's pity. And the second comment I wanted to make on this. Is the assurance that Paul had. Because he knew that God's mercy had reached him. And he knew that God's pity had reached him. And he had absolutely no doubt about it. And sometimes in our spiritual culture. We have been so suspicious of having assurance. And almost taught. That it was best not to have it. And almost taught that assurance. Was a sign. Of a lack of humility. Or that some of assurance. Was a form of pride. [8 : 28] And I don't think Paul would have understood any of that. In fact Paul. Couldn't have kept on going. Had it not been for this. Unshakable assurance. That. God loved him. And his assurance. As to God's pity. And God's mercy. He knew that God had justified him. And forgiven him. He knew that God had changed him. He knew that God had given him his Holy Spirit. And maybe because God had such. Great work for him to do. God gave him this. Tremendous assurance. About all these things. And he would tell the church in Galatia. The son of God. He said. He said. Loved me. And gave himself for me. And in some ways. That's where Paul found. His whole sense of identity. [9 : 27] Who are you Paul? Oh he says. I am the man loved by the son of God. The man that the son of God. Gave himself for. That's the man who I am. Of course Paul knew too. That he was a sinner. And the slave was indefensible. But Paul knew that to him as a sinner. God had shown mercy. And Paul had this assurance. And Paul cherished the assurance. Of the love of Christ. For him personally. And all of us need to know. As we face the struggles. Of our own existence. And of our own discipleship. All of us need to know this. Whatever else we can afford. Not at all. In our relationships. In our marriages. We need to know. We need security. We need to know that we are loved. In this one above all. [10 : 23] We need to know that we are loved. Every one of us here this morning. Are to make the most urgent. Priority of all this. Great question. Do we know. That we are loved by God. And we're right there. And with this assurance. We should live without it. Because one day. Stresses will come. That we can't handle. Unless. We have this rock. Under our feet. This. Blessed assurance. That Jesus is mine. This knowledge. Of the love. And of the pity of God. And Paul knew that. Paul had come to the persuasion. That nothing would ever separate him.

From the love of God. In Christ Jesus the Lord. Many things would try. And many things had tried. And sometimes perhaps. Paul's faith.

[11:18] Had been shaken. But he had come to the persuasion. That nothing would separate him. From God's love. And I tell you. Paul couldn't have lived the way he did.

If he hadn't been certain. Absolutely certain. With regard to that one fact. That he was loved by God. And loved. By the Son of God. And so he knew.

That he owed it all to God's pity. And he knew. That he was loved by God. And there was something else too. The sheer sense of wonder.

That Paul had. As he contemplated. Those great blessings. That God had bestowed upon him. So lavishly. If you go back.

Into the previous chapter. You'll see that. He brings that out. So, so powerfully. From verse 33 downwards. In chapter 11. He's gone on with his exposition.

[12:19] Through those. Eleven great chapters. And then suddenly. Stops and sees. And away. The ground he's traversed. And he stands.

On this great mountain peak. And looks back. Over all the terrain. Over all those mighty doctrines. And those unimaginable blessings.

And he breaks forth. In the spontaneous doxology. All the depth of the riches. Both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

How that searchable his judgments. And his ways. Past finding out. Oh, he says. The sheer wonder of it all. That there should be God.

That there should be such a God. And that he should have such a son. And should show such love. And that this God. Should justify the ungodly.

[13:15] And come and dwell in sinners. And that such a God. Should love me. And take. Give himself. For me. All the depth of the riches.

Both. Of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable his judgments. All the mysteries of life. And for Paul.

The greatest wonder. And the greatest mystery of all. Was. Why me? And he said it. Not as he stood him in the wreckage of life.

In the sorrow of bereavement. In the pain of loneliness. In the wreckage of a damaged career. In the midst of personal tragedy. And then saying.

Why me? But saying it. In the tremendous assurance. Of the love of God. And saying then. Why me Lord? Why so good to me? And why such love for me?

[14:16] All the depth of the riches. Both. Of the wisdom. And the knowledge. Of God. And so there he is. With all those mercies. He owes them all.

To God's pity. And is absolutely sure and certain. With regard to them. And filled with a sense of wonder.

Now he wants to let those mercies speak. I beseech you by the mercies of God. And he wants them. To argue with us.

And persuade us. To live in a certain way. And he goes on. To give us his exhortation. Present your bodies. And so on. How should we then live?

If God has shown such mercy towards us. How are we to respond? We'll see some of the details. Of what Paul says to us here.

[15:14] Notice first of all. That it is the service of our bodies. That Paul is wanting. And challenging us about here.

Present your bodies. In living sacrifices. He isn't wanting some. Merely ideal service. Or some resolve.

That yes. In some way. We will serve God. He doesn't want us to say. Yes I will go. Like the son. In the parable.

Who said to his father. Yes I'll go. And never wait. He doesn't want merely. Someone will give. The life of contemplation. Or the life.

Of the study. Or the life. Of good intentions. But he says. Your bodies. I want the service. And three dimensional.

[16:13] Time space reality. I want the treaty. To be. Service with your bodies. On this earth. I want your physical strength.

For God. I want your manual dexterity. For God. I want your coordination. For God. I want your craftsmanship. For God.

Because. Paul had given his own body. He had given that body. To the lash. He had given that body. To those. Tremendous journeys.

He had given that body. To shipwreck. He had walked. For Christ. He had made tents. For Christ. He had written. For Christ. He had labored.

And toiled. For Christ. He had been stoned. In that body. For Christ. He had given his body. To the Savior. And that's what we want.

[17:09] Not the thag ends. Of our lives. Not the years. Of decrepitude. And decline. But the years. Of strength. And vigor. The years.

When we have the physique. For service. Present your bodies. Living sacrifices. Look after them. Use them. For God's glory.

Don't abuse them. Keep them fit. For the service of God. Christ took flesh. Christ took a body. That gives our bodies.

Such dignity. We need those bodies. To serve. And so I say. Present your bodies. There is also. Challenging us.

As to our minds. Present your bodies. In reasonable service. In reasonable service. That is. In almost. In logical.

[18:06] And. In intellectual service. He wants the mind. For Christ. He wants. Thinking. Christians. St. Peter says.

St. Peter says. Gird up the loins. Of your minds. How many loins. Again. Paul says. Gird about. With the truth. Christ is the word.

And the reason. Of God. The Christian faith. Is not a demand. That we sacrifice. Our intellects. But that we give.

Our minds. Our reasons. Our rational powers. That we give them. To the Lord Jesus. And enlist them.

In his service. That we use. Those minds. That he has given us. To wrestle with the truth. With the word of God. With those great stories.

[19:03] Those mighty concepts. Those. Milders. Profound doctrines. That led the apostle Paul. To break out. As we saw. In that doxology.

All the depth. There is nothing. In the whole world. So. Intellectually. Stimulating.

As the Bible. There are great. Linguistic challenges. Great historical narratives. There are the most astonishing.

Philosophical and theological concepts. There is such tremendous. Imaginated portrayal. Of the truth of God. Every kind of literature. There is poetry.

There is narrative. There is proverb. There is epistle. There is here and there. Myth. And fable. And there are parables. All these things.

[19:58] To challenge the mind. Let your minds loose within the word of God. Then all the challenges facing the church of God.

These need your minds. How to organize the church. How to evangelize. How to comfort and encourage our fellow believers. These need your minds.

And all the challenges of the world. At which we live. The challenges of science. Of our environment. These things need Christian minds.

Not saying that we must all become some kind of theologian. I'm saying simply. That when you become a Christian.

You give your mind over to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for many of us. The moment of our conversion. Was also the moment of our intellectual awakening.

[20:59] I was mentally asleep. Until I became a Christian. And Paul was saying. I want your body. And I want your mind.

And I want your intellect. And I want that intellect. In the fullest. And in the most active. And in the most vigorous activity possible. I really wanted. Going full blast for Jesus.

And there is a great, great encouragement. As we do that. That Christ himself. Is the truth. And therefore. There is no area of truth.

Of which I need to be afraid. There are theories. That are threatening. There are hypotheses.

That are threatening. That there is no truth. That is threatening. And I would. Need to say. The clearest.

[21 : 56] And the most unmistakable terms. We never have the right. Not to know. We cannot go back. On the quest for knowledge.

We cannot stand today. On the threshold. Of embryo research. Or stellar research. Or genetic research. Or even nuclear research. And say. No, no, no, no, no.

Don't ask those questions. And don't go down those roads. Because. I heard. A voice that said. I am the truth.

And there is no truth anywhere. But truth. As it is in Jesus. There isn't a subatomic particle in the universe.

But he created. Or a gene. In the whole ecosystem. But he created. There is no mystery. In any force.

[22 : 55] Gravity, light. Or whatever. Of which he is not the master. And so. In those fields. Let the Christian. Work fearlessly.

And in those fields. Let the believer. Be zealous. And work with utter and total integrity. Because. God wants your mind.

There is no place. For intellectual cowardice. In the Christian faith. You present. Your bodies. Your bodies. In reasonable service. Your mind. Fully engaged.

For God. And so. God wants our bodies. And God wants our minds. But also. We're told this.

That God wants. Sacrificial service. In living sacrifices. Sacrifices. As Paul says. Because there is a cost.

[23 : 53] To you. There is a cost. To discipleship. A wise man said. Grace is free. But grace isn't cheap.

That's why. Paul says. That we are to be. Living sacrifices. We are indeed. To be burnt offerings. On the altar. Of the will of God. Just as I am. Without one plea. That thy blood was shed for me. O Lamb of God. I come. And I come saying. Now to be thine. Yea, thine alone. O Lamb of God. I come. We belong to him. We are utterly. We are utterly. Holy. Entirely. At his disposal. Are we? That's a Christian position.

[24 : 56] We are burnt offerings. On God's altar. Arrive. Holistically. Totally. Unreservedly.

At the disposal. Of God. And there is inevitable cost. And Jesus never hid that cost. Jesus said. There are things to renounce. And to turn ones back on. And there is a cross. That we have to bear. Not the cross.

Of the common afflictions. Of this life. But our enlistment. In the army of Jesus. Exposing us. To all the malice of hell.

And all the cunning of pandemonium. Because we are marked men. And marked women. There is the cost. The sometimes dreadful cost.

[25 : 57] Of self-knowledge. There is the cost. Of our accountability. To the church of Christ. There is the cost.

Of the world's misunderstanding. And the world's score. Which my personal pride. Fills so keenly. But I must live.

As a sacrifice. And I must know the cost. And I must know the pay. There is no deception here. Jesus did not say.

Go through that straight gate. And live happily ever after. But Jesus said. Take up your cross. And follow me. And so.

There is a bodily element here. And there is an intellectual element here. And there is a sacrificial and a cost element here.

[26 : 56] And maybe today some of you can understand. If I say that maybe some days you ask. Whether life might not have been easier.

If you had not become a Christian at all. And because you know that things have happened. Because that's what you are. And Paul himself renewed.

That same situation. As we saw in the chapter we read. The cost that he had to bear. And yet surely.

The moment we ask. In that very moment we know. How worthwhile it's all been. The reward's been that we've been with Jesus. And we would not exchange.

The cross. And the cost. For the comforts. And the insecurities. The insecurities. That the world offers us alternatives.

[27 : 58] We bear the cost. I don't say. We always bear it gladly. That we bear it. We offer our bodies. As living sacrifices.

In reasonable. A rational service. And take that word service as well. Because it really means worship. And we offer ourselves to God.

In reasonable worship. It's a remarkable fact. That in the New Testament. The word for worship. None of the words are used. Of the public gatherings of the church.

We speak of public worship. As a worshiper. Coming to church. Now. Don't misunderstand me. The New Testament. Lies very great stress.

On believers. Coming together. For teaching. And praise. And so on. But it never actually. Describes those gatherings.

[29 : 03] As worship. And I'm making that negative point. Because I want to make. What I think is. A fundamentally important.

Positive point. And namely. That worship is something we do. All the time. That our lives.

Our worship. And that the whole. Of our lives. Our worship. It troubles me greatly. That people.

That people think. Sometimes. That only ministers. Are in full time. Christian service. And that only.

In the sphere of the sacred. And the church. And the public worship. That only in these spheres. Do we really serve God. That. One of the great achievements.

[30 : 01] Of the reformation. Was to bring out. Very very clearly. That every believer. Had her own. Or his own.

Vocation. Preachers. Have a vocation. And in that vocation. They worship God. And nurses.

Have their vocation. And in that vocation. They worship God. They give their bodies. And their minds. To their own work. And teachers.

And policemen. And joiners. And labourers. And those in the cleansing department. Those in the armed forces. Those in all areas.

Other professions. They are all. As Protestants. In their vocation. Politicians. Every single one of us. We have our God.

[30 : 57] Given vocation. We have our calling. And worship. Is to serve God. In our calling. To serve God.

In that calling. In the most efficient. And in the most effective. Way that is possible. To be. To shine. As nurses.

Because we are Christians. To shine. As politicians. Because we are Christians. To shine. As joiners. And builders. Because.

We are Christians. To shine. As seamen. And fishermen. Because. We are Christians. And in and through these. And there and then.

In and in what we are doing. In our daily secular lives. That there. We are salt. And there we are light. And there is. Our reasonable service.

[31 : 51] We don't tag it on. At some point in life. Being a Christian. Being a Christian. Is what we are. Serving God. Is what we do.

Worship. Is what we offer. In every moment. Of every day. We give this. To God. For. For Jesus sake. And so.

There we are. The apostle. Telling us. That we are to. Present. Our bodies. Our minds. Sacrificially. And worshipfully. To God. And then. Paul. Adds to that. A couple of points. I just want to raise. Very briefly.

They're closely linked. Don't be conformed. To this world. But be. Transformed. He tells us. By.

[32 : 47] The reunion. Of your mind. You see. That mind. That intellect. So important. To the apostle. So. Don't be conformed. But be.

Transformed. Don't be conformed. To this world. To this age. Don't be worldly. What is the great thing.

About the world. It is. That it is an age. It is defined. In a way. By time. And the worldly person. Lives for time.

And the things of time. He lives for temporals. And for temporalities. It is utterly illogical. And yet. It is almost universal. That we live.

For this age. We live for the things of time. And for the things of sense. And we don't have a perspective. At all. On. On eternity. I might have been more mischievous.
[33 : 46] And said that. The world is about money. And I do worry. A lot. That we have managed. To redefine the world. In terms of what are.

Relatively innocent pleasures. And I have forgotten. That to Jesus. The world was mammon. And the world was money. And the havoc.

That that particular form of idolatry. Is doing today. Within the church of Christ. The world is time. And the world is money.

How often you hear it. Time is money. That's what the world. What worldliness is. Living for time. Living for money. But instead he says. Be transformed.

Be transfigured. Get another form. And. We know of course. That. The form that Paul has in mind. Is the form of Jesus.

[34 : 44] And. Although I can't go into this. There are two marvelous things about. Jesus has two forms. He has the form of a servant. And he has the form of God.

And. When we're told to be transformed. We are being challenged. In those two areas. To bear the image of the servant.

And to bear the image of God. And Christ took the form of a servant. And. He was willing to be nothing. The kind of transformation that Paul wants.

Is that we should have. The mind of Christ. Who was willing. To be nothing. To be the least esteemed.

And the least influential. And the least powerful person. In the world. As he hung. Upon that cross. And.

[35 : 53] If there's one thing. The church of God. Needs today. It is to be populated. With Christians. Who have.

The mindset. Of a servant. The willingness. To be nothing. In some ways. What. What Paul is suggesting. The thing is that. He wishes the church.

Were full of nobodies. People. With no sense of self-importance. People who knew there were nothing. Be transformed. From being.

Important. Somebodies. Into the form. Of a servant. Christ. Likeness. Made himself. Of no reputation.

That's what he was. Then beyond that. He was also. In the form of God. And there's something. Going on here.

[36 : 48] I'm going to change direction here. Because. It's no longer. A challenge. To us. Or to me. To be. God like. With the great promise. That God. Is working in us.

With this. Great. And. Outcome. In view. That one day. We shall be partakers. Of the divine nature. We shall be. Ourselves.

Bearers. Of the image of God. We shall be Christ-like. And I suppose. I come back again. To the same thing. Because.

The wonder of it is. That there really is no contradiction. Between. The form of God. And the form of a servant. Because. Because it was in the heart.

And the very depths. Of God himself. That the impulse. To take the form. Of a servant. Arose. God. God.

[37 : 46] The son. Was willing. To become a servant. Was willing. To become nothing. And to bear God's image. Is to be willing.

To serve. And willing. To be nothing. And willing. To go into the far country. And to wash the feet. Of the disciples. Because. It was. As God. That he humbled himself. And became a servant. And chose.

And chose. To go. Towards a humiliation. I have not come here. This morning. To. Castigate. Or criticize. The standards. Of your discipleship. Because I'm sure. That in all. Important respects. They excel my own.

[38 : 42] And I haven't come. To send you on guilt trips. Or to say. Could do better. I haven't come. To castigate. I want to bring you back.

Where we started. With the mercies of God. Speaking to you. The mercies of God. I beseech you. By the mercies of God. Let's hear those mercies. Let's hear what God has done. And let us respond.

To those mercies. In all the eloquence. The days when you feel tired. Think of Jesus.
At the well. The day you feel too depressed. To rise and face your duty. Think of Christ in
Gethsemane. The day you feel sore.

[39 : 39] Think of Jesus on the cross. The day you feel lonely. Remember the cry. My God.

My God. Why have you forsaken me? Let the mercies of God. Speak to you. Let us join in prayer.

O Lord. O Lord we ask you to. Remember us in our frailty. In our incomprehension.

In our inability to see. In our reluctance to act according to what we see. enable us Lord to hear the
word of your mercies to let those mercies speak to us may they constrain us may we become other
than we are more than we are may we become God like, Christ like and divine and become those
things especially in those areas where we might think that those are not really God like qualities, the
qualities of service and humiliation and yet these above all mark and distinguish you from all other
gods and all other pretended deities have patience with us Lord forgive all our sin for Christ's sake,
Amen