

Living for God: A Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1–2 (ESV)

12 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 worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul is making an urgent appeal: Present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Be holy. Live in a way that is acceptable to God.

Paul is making a pastoral plea for Christians to be living sacrifices.

Paul's concern for the first-century Roman Christians is that they don't just believe intellectually, but that they have a faith that comes to Jesus with everything, lives that are all in for Jesus, that are on fire for Jesus, and that persevere in their faith through some of the darkest and hardest trials that life has to throw at them. To present their bodies to Jesus as living sacrifices and to live lives that are holy and acceptable to God.

The Apostle Paul Is Writing to an Audience Familiar with Sacrifice

First-century Christians in Rome would be very familiar with the idea of sacrifice. Jews, Romans, Greeks, and pagans all made sacrifices to their gods and viewed the emperor as divine.

They would bring or purchase an animal and take the whole animal to an altar. The animal would be killed before it was placed on the altar, and the blood would be drained. There would be a huge altar, and they would place their dove, lamb, or bull on the altar, and it would burn. As it burned, they would watch the smoke rise into the sky, and the smell of the offering would fill the air.

There was no sacrifice without death, and there was no worship without sacrifice.

But today, American Christians think they can worship God without making any sacrifice.

Roman historians share that just a few years after Paul penned this letter to the church in Rome, he would not only be imprisoned but also beheaded. Christians would be covered with animal skins and thrown into the Colosseum to be torn apart by dogs and wild animals for sport while the audience laughed, cheered, and applauded.

One Roman senator recorded that Emperor Nero was filled with such evil that he would cover Christians with tar, fasten them to poles, and light them on fire so that their burning bodies could provide light for the roads leading to his garden parties.

The call to follow Jesus is a call to die.

We die daily.

Luke 9:23 (ESV)

And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Every true Christian—man, woman, and child—is called to be a living sacrifice for God.

What's Your Motivation?

What's your motivation for being a Christian, for gathering for church?

The crowds followed Jesus to get something from Him.

There were massive crowds who followed Jesus wherever He went. The same crowd that crushed Him and the same crowd that celebrated Him is the same crowd that crucified Him.

Many people today are attending churches, conferences, Bible studies, and seminaries to get something from Jesus.

Many people attend church with an ulterior motive:

- Relationships: To be with family and friends.
- Culture: That's what we do in the South.
- To be seen: We want others to think well of us.
- Status and networking: It's good for my career.
- Transactional relationship: I'll do things for God, and He'll do things for me.

Why Should We Be Living Sacrifices?

We sacrifice our lives because Jesus is glorious.

“I appeal to you therefore...”

Romans 11:36 (ESV)

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

- From Him: He created you.
- Through Him: He sustains you.
- To Him: He holds your future and eternity in His hands.

Jesus is worthy of it all because all you have belongs to Him.

We sacrifice because Jesus is merciful.

Consider His mercy: Romans 1–11. Remember the gospel.

It's not about what we will receive; it's about the mercy we have already received.

Do Not Conform to the Ways of This World

You're living in a battle zone. Satan is a defeated foe, but he wants to take His image-bearers down. He wants to pacify you, distract you, keep you silent, and cause you to live like nothing has changed and live a powerless life.

Ephesians 6:11–12

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

My Testimony: When Jesus changed my life. When I came face-to-face with the mercies of God, Jesus changed my life.

Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind

Metamorphosis.

Sanctification.

We live for Christ daily.

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Renewing of Your Mind

2 Corinthians 10:5

“We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

Renew your mind in prayer.

Psalms 139:23–24

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Renew your mind by the Word.

Hebrews 4:12

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Renew your mind on mission.

Isaiah 6:8

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’”

Here am I. Send me.

Put your yes on the table.

God has made you for more.

Share the gospel. Make disciples. Serve others on mission.

Stay on the Altar

Church, let me ask you one final question.

What's keeping you from giving Jesus your whole life?

What are you holding on to?

What are you afraid to surrender?

What have you taken off the altar that God is calling you to put back on?

Because here's what I've discovered.

It's one thing to get on the altar.

It's another thing to stay there.

Being a living sacrifice isn't always easy.

Sometimes surrender hurts.

Sometimes obedience costs you something.

Sometimes following Jesus means saying no to everything your flesh is screaming yes to.

And there will be moments when you want to climb right back off that altar.

But hear me today.

Don't confuse the pain of surrender with the absence of God's goodness.

Just because it's difficult doesn't mean God isn't working.

Just because you don't understand His plan doesn't mean He's abandoned you.

And just because you haven't become the person God is calling you to be doesn't mean He's given up on you.

Remember Philippians 1:6:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

The God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

God is not finished with you!

So when your flesh is weak and temptation is strong, stay on the altar!

When the world makes sin look attractive and obedience makes you feel like you're missing out, stay on the altar!

When life throws you a curveball and nothing goes according to your plans, stay on the altar!

Student, when everybody at school is compromising and you're standing alone in your convictions, stay on the altar!

Young adult, when you don't know what comes next, when you're uncertain about your career, your calling, or your future, stay on the altar!

When you're lonely and tempted to compromise your faith just to be in a relationship, stay on the altar!

Parents, when you're exhausted, when you're worried about your children, when you've prayed and prayed and still don't see an answer, stay on the altar!

When your job is uncertain, when the bills are piling up, and you don't know where your next paycheck is coming from, stay on the altar!

When God calls you to serve, to share the gospel, or to go on that mission trip, and you're afraid of what it might cost you, stay on the altar!

And when life brings suffering you never saw coming—when you've lost your spouse, when you're grieving a child, when you're battling an illness and you're still waiting for healing—stay on the altar.

Not because obedience makes the pain disappear.

Not because faith guarantees an easy life.

But because the God who held you yesterday is the same God who holds you today, and He will be faithful tomorrow.

When you don't have the strength to stand, you can still surrender.

When you don't have the words to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for you.

And when you don't know what God is doing, you can trust who God is.

Church, don't climb off the altar just because the sacrifice gets uncomfortable!

Don't go back to the sin Jesus died to set you free from.

Don't let the world shape a life that belongs to Christ.

And don't let fear convince you to abandon what God has called you to do.

When you're weary, get in the Word!

When you're overwhelmed, get on your knees!

When you're discouraged, don't isolate yourself. Get connected to the church. Let your brothers and sisters in Christ encourage you, pray for you, and remind you of God's promises.

And when you're tempted to make your life all about yourself, get up and serve somebody.

Share the gospel.

Make disciples.

Live for something greater than yourself.

Because Jesus didn't die on the cross so that you could be forgiven of your sins and then spend the rest of your life enslaved to them!

He died so that you could be forgiven, set free, and transformed.

And the same God who saved you is the God who is transforming you.

You don't have to defeat sin in your own strength.

You don't have to manufacture your own transformation.

The Holy Spirit of God is at work within you.

So stop trying to take back what you've already surrendered.

Your life belongs to Jesus.

Your marriage belongs to Jesus.

Your children belong to Jesus.

Your future belongs to Jesus.

Your Lord is Christ. Your goal is Christ. Your life is Christ. Your purpose is Christ.

And in view of everything He's done for you, He's worthy of everything you have.

Come to the altar. Get back on the altar. Stay on the altar. God's not finished with you yet!

INVITATION

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ, today is the day to repent of your sin and place your faith in the One who died and rose again to save you.

You cannot transform yourself into a Christian.

You must be made new through Jesus Christ.

And Christian, if you've climbed off the altar, today is the day to surrender again.

Whatever you've been holding back, give it to Him.

Whatever sin you've been clinging to, turn from it.

Whatever future you've been trying to control, entrust it to Him.

Don't just ask God to change your circumstances. Surrender your life and ask Him to make you more like Jesus.

Come to the altar.

Get back on the altar.

Stay on the altar.

God's not finished with you yet!