

Worship the King

Part 7 – “Living Sacrifices”

Romans 12:1

Chapter 12 of Romans marks a division of emphasis in the epistle. Paul begins by making a grand declaration about the first principles of Christians living. His words in the first two verses may be appropriately considered a manifesto on the Christian life. Paul continues to demonstrate the practicality of theology. Christian living is always a theological matter and theology is always related to life. Having written so much about God's grace and the related doctrines of his mercy, his free justification, and his absolute sovereignty in Romans 1 through 11, Paul now begins to explain how this marvelous grace is experienced in the life of the Christian.

For much of the rest of the book, the apostle is going to be addressing what grace produces in the Christian life. While it is true that Paul has already addressed some of the practical implications of God's grace (chapters 6 & 7) it is chapter 12 which opens the final section of the letter and a more comprehensive focus on Christian living. It is also in the opening words of this final section where Paul makes a connection which is particularly significant for our current series of sermons on worship.

Main Idea: Genuine worship includes our whole-hearted obedience to the Lord.

1. The Appeal

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...”

- “I appeal” – The word translated “appeal” or “urge” is stronger than a mere suggestion. But it does not have the characteristics of a command with sanctions (“Do this or else!”). It is an exhortation. This is not meant to lighten importance of the exhortation but rather establish a tone that is grounded in an outpouring of mercy for the Roman Christians.
- Paul employs the language of worship ritual. The sacrificial system had been at the heart of the worship of God's people since the Exodus. The varied sacrifices prescribed by God were regular reminders to the people of the basis upon which they could relate to God – through the blood of an innocent substitute.
- Certainly the image of a *living* sacrifice would have been incongruous. How can a sacrifice live? Sacrifices always culminated in a death. But here the liturgical category of sacrifice is applied to the life of the Christian. No more bloody sacrifices are necessary since Jesus has already offered himself once for all. So in the Christian life sacrifice is now a living state.
- There are three words that modify “sacrifice” – Living, Holy, and Acceptable (to God).

2. The Clarification

“...which is your spiritual worship.”

- Salvation is the free gift that costs us everything. Christian discipleship means giving the totality of ourselves to God. And to make what he is writing more clear, Paul calls this whole-hearted devotion to God “your spiritual (or reasonable) worship.”
- a) Spiritual – Is in some translations *logiken* is rendered “reasonable” or “rational.” In Greek philosophy “spiritual” and “rational” were often considered side-by-side as complementary

realities. Many New Testament scholars contend that the *logiken* of Romans 12:1 should be considered virtually equivalent to *pneumatikos* (spiritual) indicating an totally commitment to God which constitutes “spiritual worship.” It is a judgment call. But the ambiguity of the translation plays well into the fact that worship is multi-dimensional.

b) Worship – In some cases the word *latreian* is translated “service.” Like “sacrifice” *latreian* is a word drawn directly from the realm of worship ritual. But here that word is applied beyond the prescribed rituals of worship to the daily lives of God’s people. The fact that various translations use either “worship” or “service” actually helps us understand the depth of the Bible’s teaching on worship. Along with adoration, homage, and rituals, worship also encompasses acts of service to God.

- This point of clarity is vital because it demonstrates that Christian worship is not a once a week activity. For the Christian worship is not confined to a particular day or particular place. Christian worship is a twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week activity. It is a whole life activity. In other words, the kind of worship God wants from us is something that encompasses our whole life. This is not to downplay the importance of Lord’s Day corporate worship in any way. Rather, it is a reminder that God has designed worship to be something which characterizes all we do.
- “Those who worship God give their entire lives over to him so that he is honored and praised in everything they do.” – Thomas Schreiner (646)

3. The Reason

“I appeal to you **therefore**, brothers **by** the mercies of God...”

- Notice the two connecting words: “therefore” and “by”. The purpose of those words is to connect ideas. Paul’s appeal for Christians to offer themselves as living sacrifices is based upon the truths of the gospel explained in chapters 1-11.
- The basis of the Christian holiness that God is calling us to, in the whole of the second half of this book, is God’s mercy. Paul is calling us to live for God, to love God, to obey God, to delight in God’s word; to delight in God’s will, to delight in God’s law, to live it out because of the mercy of God toward us. So that Christian living, Paul says, is founded on our having received grace and on our understanding grace. Paul is exhorting us to obedience to God because of what God has done for us. He says, in light of God’s grace and mercy, you do this. You be a living sacrifice, you give yourself as a sacrifice for God in view of the mercies of God, you do this.
- This is vital for us to understand at the outset. The Christian life is not defined by the equation: do these things and live. The Christian life is grounded in the fact that through the Lord Jesus God has already given us life. On the basis of that mercy we are now to live. In this way, the Christian’s “doing” is transformed into gratitude for grace received not a payment for services expected. Christian obedience is not something whereby acceptability with God is secured. God’s grace not only has the goal of seeing us justified before Him and accepted and accounted as righteous, it has the goal of making us to be righteous.