

What does the Christian life look like? What does a Christian businessman, a Christian mother, a Christian father, a Christian child, a Christian student, a Christian citizen look like? How should they live? This is a very important question for us to consider today because many people, although they call themselves Christians, act in a way that is completely contrary to what Christ commands. They are Christian in *name*, but not in *deed*.

But Christ saved us for a very specific purpose: so we could offer our lives as a sacrifice to God, and not any longer to sin. Romans 6:1-2 says: **What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?** If you want to know what Christian living is, Romans 12:1 offers us what is perhaps the most profound 深刻 yet simple description of the Christian life in all the Bible.

(Romans 12:1) **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.**

First, why we are to offer our bodies (ourselves) to God a living sacrifice?

In this verse the Lord is calling Christian believers to offer their lives to God in full-time service. He **beseeches** 恳求 or *calls* us to do this **by the mercies of God: by the mercies of God... present your bodies a living sacrifice.**

- The word “**by**” the **mercies of God** can refer either to a channel or a motive: **I beseech you therefore, brethren, to present your life as a sacrifice to God through the mercies of God** (as a channel), or **because of the mercies of God** (as a motive).
- In this context it is best to view the word “**by**” as a motive or reason to offer your life to God: I beseech you, because of the mercies of God, to offer your lives to God in full-time Christian service. By adding the word “**therefore**” – **I beseech you therefore, brethren** – Paul shows that he is talking about the reason or the motive for the Christian life.

The only true and proper motive for living a life that is pleasing to God is the mercies of God. The right reason for offering your life to the Lord in worship today, and in your work and play everyday, is all the mercies God has given to us through Jesus Christ. Holy, Christian Living is saying “Thank You” to God for all He has done for us.

There are many wrong motives for trying to live a good, moral life.

- 1) Some are motivated by selfish ambition – they want to feel good about themselves or be praised by others for leading a good life. (Now, what is meant by living a good life to them is not necessarily living a life that is good in God’s eyes, but a life that is good according to human opinion and community standards.)
- 2) Others are motivated by fear – they want to get on God’s good side and they don’t want Him to punish them so they hope that by living a morally “good” life they will end up in a good place.
- 3) Still others are motivated by custom and tradition – they try to live a good life because they were brought up with good morals, and if it was good enough for their parents and grandparents it’s good enough for them. They are against sin just because they feel it is indecent or improper, not because they love God as their Saviour.
- 4) Other people are motivated by humanitarianism 人道 – they believe in the power of man to make this world a better place and they want to do their part and leave their mark.

But there is only one motive for good works and moral living that is truly Christian and truly acceptable to God: being thankful to God for all His mercies. This is the only motive that can produce genuinely sacrificial living and giving, and the only motive that pleases God. This is the faith motive. Hebrews 11:6 says that **without faith it is impossible to please God.**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. This is a command. This chapter is full of commands, about 45 of them. And so are chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16. But in chapters 1-11 there are almost no commands. The first 11 chapters are filled with the Good News of the rich mercies of God shown to poor sinners through Jesus Christ:

- the mercies of what God has done for us in Christ and is still doing in us, and also the mercies of who we are and what we have in Christ.
- A study of these first 11 chapters will reveal an stunning array of mercies God has shown to His enemies who deserve to perish eternally under His wrath: the precious gift of His Son Jesus Christ to pay for our sins at the cost of His own sinless life; the gifts of free forgiveness of all our sins, justification apart from works, peace with God and full reconciliation 和解, the Holy Spirit who changes our lives and comforts us; the gifts of the assurance of no condemnation and of complete victory over all sin and trouble; the gift of God’s eternal and gracious election in which He freely chose to save many sinners.
- These chapters overflow not just with God’s mercy, but with His mercies, which keep breaking in upon our weak and sinful lives, until we reach the finish line in eternal glory!

After 11 chapters of God’s mercies, believers are called to offer their lives to God as a sacrifice. Let us never say we have no reason to do so! Dear Christian, if you ever grow weary of living the Christian life because of the opposition you face, or find

yourself becoming lukewarm in your devotion to Him and His Church, review His mercies and let them rekindle the fire of holy living, and refuel your zeal for service. God's mercy provides you with enough reason and resource to offer your life to Him 1000 times, not just once! Paul says here that offering your life to God in sacrifice is your reasonable service, which means that this is really the only fitting, proper, logical and reasonable response to all God has done for you.

Second, what exactly are we called to offer to God as a living sacrifice?

What is the Christian's calling in this world? As I mentioned earlier, there are many, many commands from God given in chapters 12-16: commands about hospitality, patience, serving the Church, humility, paying taxes, putting off lust and envy and drunkenness, pursuing peace, bearing each others burdens, praying for the progress of the Gospel, and many others. But all these commands stand on this one Mother Command: **Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.** Every genuine act of Christian service comes down to this: *presenting your bodies to God.*

But does God just want our *bodies*? Doesn't God want our hearts and minds? Certainly!

- In verse 2 He calls us to **be transformed by the renewing of our minds** so that we can know and do His good, acceptable, and perfect will.
- In Romans 6:17 Paul gives thanks to God that the believers at Rome obeyed the truth **from the heart**. God does not accept heartless obedience or mechanical worship.
- Neither does God accept Christless fanatics or mindless martyrs. He says in another place that if we deliver our body over to be burned but have not love, we profit nothing! (see I Corinthians 13)

At the same time, our hearts and minds are embodied 体现. God made us in such a way that our hearts and minds are expressed through our bodies. **Out of the heart the mouth speaks**, said Jesus. Both in Paul's culture and in ours, we have a tendency to separate mind from body, or heart from body. We like to think that we've given our *hearts* to the Lord, even while we devote our *bodies* to this world.

- This is very common in North American evangelicalism. We separate *faith* from *life*, *private* from *public*, and *heart* from *hand*, the *spiritual* from the *physical*.
- Like the true story of the young American lady who went to church every Sunday and Bible Study every Wednesday night while her full-time job was as a receptionist with Planned Parenthood, signing up clients for abortions all day long 5 days a week. The worst part was this: it never occurred to her that she was not pleasing the Lord with her life because, after all, she had given her heart to the Lord! She had separated her heart from her body, her spiritual life from her physical life.
- Like the professing Christian I once asked why he never sang in the worship service: his answer was, "I sing in my heart."

It is this temptation that Paul is fighting when he says through the Holy Spirit: present your bodies a living sacrifice! You cannot offer your heart to the Lord, while you offer your ear to gossip, your mouth to rage and filthy talk and lies, and your hands to wasting your time on your computer or stealing from your employer. You cannot live for God on Sunday and for Money on Monday. You cannot truly give your heart to God when you withhold your tithe from Him. Don't give Jesus your heart - He wants more than that. He wants all of you. Give Jesus your whole person, all of you, all the time! Give your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God.

Because of the mercies of God Who gave up His Son for you, soul and body, present your whole embodied self to Him as a living sacrifice! Your ear, a sacrifice to God. Your eye, a sacrifice to God. Your hand, a sacrifice to God. Your family, a sacrifice to God. Your intellect, a sacrifice to God. Your education, a sacrifice to God. Your money, a sacrifice to God.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days, let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing, always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love: my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself and I will be every only all for Thee. (Frances Havergal)

In Romans 6 Paul has already explained what it means to present our bodies. There he is describing the wonderful blessing of being a Christian: by faith you are united to Christ's death and to His resurrection. When He was crucified, your whole old, sinful life which you lived in the body was nailed to the cross with Him and killed. When He rose, a whole new, Godly self to be lived in the body came to life for you with Him! And then, in one of the very few commands found in chapters 1-11, Paul applies this wonderful gift of salvation in this way:

- **Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members (the parts of your body) to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** (Romans 6:12-13)
- **Just as you once presented your members (the parts of your body) as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.** (Romans 6:19)
- In another place Paul describes the life of faith in this way: **I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** (Galatians 2:20)

So if your body is living in sin – in pornography, in drunkenness, in lying, in signing abortion consents, in withholding your tithes from God, in not getting into your car to worship with God’s people (worship is a very bodily thing!), in playing video games when you’re supposed to be working – you must ask: where’s your heart? Are you really walking with the Lord? Do you really love Him? For, whatever lives in the body comes from the heart. Out of the heart are all the issues of life. (see Proverbs 4:23)

God saved us so that we might present to Him our whole life lived in these bodies of ours! This is really wonderful. Take a look at your body. Even if you think you’re good looking and feel very healthy, it takes almost nothing for a tiny organism to crawl in and put you down in your bed with a box of Kleenex on one side and a bucket on the other. Your body bruises, and it aches. Maybe its hard of hearing, maybe overweight, maybe underweight, maybe brittle, maybe diseased, maybe impulsive, maybe nervous, maybe near-sighted, maybe stiff. Our bodies are decaying 腐烂bags of bones, all headed for the grave. But God has brought us from death to life so that in our weak and fragile and disabled bodies we may offer ourselves to Him! Not because we are so great or beautiful or strong, but because we belong to Jesus Christ who bought us body and soul to be His very own. So put out of your mind any thought that your body will ever deserve acceptance with God. It won't. If you are acceptable, it is through Jesus Christ. Through His perfection, not yours. By His mercies, not by your might.

And someday He will raise these bodies from the grave and make them Christ’s glorious body and we will offer our bodies to Him as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice forever in the new creation – with no aches or pains or anxieties to slow us down!

Thirdly, in this verse Paul teaches us what is the very essence of the Christian life.

Look at the words the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, uses to describe the life of the Christian who has been saved from beginning to end by the mercies of God: **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.** (Romans 12:1) In summary, the Christian life is *presenting a sacrifice to God as your reasonable service*. This is the language of worship. In fact, that last word, *service*, could be translated *worship* because it refers to the service that the priests offered at the tabernacle. Hebrews 9:6 reminds us of **the priests who go regularly into the first part of the tabernacle, performing their service.**

What is the essence of the Christian life? At its very heart, all true Christian living is worship.

- It is worship in the special sense of gathering on the Lord’s Day in corporate worship to devote our lives to Lord as a sacrifice of praise. When we gather for worship, we are doing much more than singing a few songs, listening to two sermons, saying a few prayers, and then going home again. We are coming to offer ourselves to God – we are giving ourselves and everything we have up to Him, willing to lose all for His sake, all our possessions, even our lives, in order to honour Him. He is that important. We are declaring His *worth*., in order to say thank you to. Apart from this, all our acts of worship are meaningless.
- The Christian life is worship in the general sense too: every day of the week, every hour and minute of each day, at work and at home and on the road, giving your life to God, aiming to please Him and praise Him all the time in everything we think, say and do! All of life is an offering of ourselves up to God. All of life is worship. **Through Jesus then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.** (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Do you think of your life that way – as *worship*? An offering to God? No longer do we have to offer sacrifices for sin like the priests in the Old Testament because the final High Priest has come, Jesus Christ. He has offered the final sacrifice for sin, and with the sinless sacrifice of His own precious blood on the cross, **He has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins.** (Hebrews 10:12) So **there is no longer any offering for sin.** (Hebrews 10:18) But that does not mean sacrifices are over for New Testament believers. Sacrifice is the essence of all true worship of God; where there is no sacrifice there is no worship! The worship we are called to present to God is the sacrifice of praise as a response to all that He has done for us.

There are many, many duties in the Christian life. We have already said that Romans 12 alone lists 45 of them! But let us never forget God is not really interested in us merely doing good things and being nice to people and getting service awards from the Rotary Club or the government. He wants *worship*. He wants it all to be a sacrifice *to God*. Whatever you do, do it not to please men but to please God. That is the essence of the Christian life. Apart from this, good deeds and morals are not acceptable to God because they are not done for His glory.

Fourthly, in Romans 12:1 we are instructed in the kind of sacrifice God wants our bodies (and lives) to be.

Paul uses three adjectives to describe this sacrifice of our bodies God calls us to present: the sacrifice must be *living, holy, and acceptable* to God.

- *Living* means the sacrifice of a person who has become alive to God through Jesus Christ. **Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life.** (Romans 6:13)
- *Holy* means made pure by the blood and Spirit of Christ. It does not mean that God requires you to be personally sinless before He will accept your sacrifice. It means that you see your sin and continually ask God to wash away all your sins, trusting that the one sacrifice of Christ for all sin is a fountain of cleansing for you daily. It also means that you seek in the power of the Spirit to please God because you love Him, and to walk in His commandments because He saved you.
- *Acceptable* means a sacrifice that is agreeable to Him *because* it is living and holy. It meets His standards.

Verse 2 describes more fully how to present yourself as a holy sacrifice acceptable to God. We will look at that in the next sermon, Lord willing.

But let me conclude this morning's message on this note. God wants us to live a holy life – free from sin. God wants us to make it our aim to please Him. That is the sacrifice that pleases Him. And so part of what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him is to do all can to live a holy life in our bodies. To aim for holiness with our bodies.

- No, holiness never saved a person. Only Christ's holiness saves you and makes you acceptable. Period.
- But when God saved you He gave you His Spirit to rule you. Now what He is looking from your saved life is an obedient life, a holy life, a life lived in the way of His commandments, a life that is pure and relationships that are pleasing to Him.
- He wants us to put to death all the sin – all the impurity, all the inconsistencies, all the bad habits, all the wasted time and energy and foolish talk that we put our bodies through – and put on all the beauties of Christ, so that the life we live in the body looks more and more like His Son.

People have all kinds of aims for their bodies. Some aim to be powerful, others to be good-looking, still others to attract others to themselves. All around us, men and women and children glorify their bodies. But when we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God gives our bodies a new aim: by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God. **Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)