

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14

LESSON 42 – A LIVING SACRIFICE – Romans 12:1-2

There is a quote in the book Transforming the Inner Man that says, “The trouble with living sacrifices is, they keep crawling off the altar.” The only reason we would crawl off the altar is that we don’t believe it’s a good place for us to be. The Christian who is fully committed to Christ soon learns that God’s altar is a good, pleasing and perfect place. This lesson will show us what it means to be a living sacrifice to God.

The Core of Our Commitment to Christ

Presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice to God is at the very core of our commitment to Jesus. Paul makes an appeal to the Roman believers here at the beginning of chapter 12, “I urge you, brothers and sisters...” It is the appeal of a counselor not the command of a dictator. After all he has covered in the first 11 chapters, Paul now makes a call...a plea for action. Paul’s position throughout his ministry was that he was in the fight with his fellow Christians...not ruling over them. Paul is essentially summarizing all that he has written up to this point and asking his readers to act on it.

Mercy is mentioned by Paul nine different times up to this point with four of those in chapter 11 alone. In fact, he ended the chapter by praising God for His mercy. If we tell people to present themselves as living sacrifices without giving them the reason to do so, we’ve left off the important part of the message. Our motivation for giving ourselves fully to God is the mercy He’s demonstrated toward us.

The core of our commitment to Christ is the mercies of God He’s poured out upon us. What God has already done for the Christian is the basis of everything the Christian does for God.

The Characteristics of Our Commitment to Christ

In the second part of verse 1, Paul gives us what it means to be fully committed to Jesus. So what does it mean to be totally committed...to be a living sacrifice?

Commitment to Christ is not something that just happens. It is an act that we are aware of when it happens...a choice we are conscious of making. The word offer...or present...describes how the priest would bring an offering and lay it on the altar. It is the idea of giving up everything. When we offer ourselves, we are making a conscious choice to sacrifice ourselves to God.

When we offer ourselves to God, we present all of who we are. We present our thoughts, our emotions, our rational processes, our decisions as well as the physical parts of our body. If you’re wondering if you’ve ever made this conscious choice, you most likely haven’t. You would remember giving everything you are to Him.

“Living sacrifice” can be somewhat confusing for us since sacrifices are usually dead. The Old Testament sacrifices were dead but the New Testament sacrifices are living. That is the essence of what Paul is talking about here...living but dying to self in service to Christ.

The goal of offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is service. In Luke 1, the father of John the Baptist prayed that, "Enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." That is a perfect example of what it means to live as a sacrifice to Jesus.

Dedicated people don't wear a label, they demonstrate their dedication. They go places and do things for the cause of Christ. Living sacrifices don't just sit around. They act to fulfill God's plans and purposes for them in this world.

When we sacrifice ourselves to God, we do it as an act of worship. The decision to live committed fully to God is the purest form of worship there is. All the efforts we put into our worship services mean nothing if we've not worshipped God by committing ourselves to Him. When we've done that, all the other aspects of worship take on new and genuine meaning.

Paul goes on to say that commitment to Christ is reasonable. It's logical, sensible, reasonable...it's what should be expected of someone who is genuinely grateful for what they've received from God. The normal thing for a Christian to do is present themselves to God as a living sacrifice.

Unfortunately, today is the opposite of what it should be. Those who have committed themselves completely to God are considered fanatical while those who lead lukewarm lives are considered normal.

The Conditions of Our Commitment to Christ

When we give ourselves totally to Him, it means we are transformed. We don't hold back special parts of our lives for ourselves...everything is given over to Him.

When Paul talks about conforming to the world, his focus is on the external being out of sync with the internal. In other words, Paul is saying, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold." If we are conformed to the world's standards of behavior, we are hiding who we are in Christ. The reality of our lives as Christians is Christ living in us and that is what should be reflected on the outside.

When Paul talks about the "world" he's talking about the values and worldview of those who live apart from God. There are two ways of looking at life that can shape who we are...God's perspective and the world's perspective. The pressure to conform to the world's standards is always there but the Bible tells us this world is evil and is passing away. Paul says we must constantly resist being squeezed into the world's mold that focuses only on the here and now.

Instead of being conformed to this world, Paul says we are to be transformed so we can discover the good, pleasing and perfect will of God. That word transformed appears only three other times in the New Testament and it means to be changed from the inside out. Paul is saying here that by renewing our minds we are letting the person we are inside come out so others will see that we belong to Jesus.

We are transformed from the inside out by the renewing of our minds. As our minds conform to the truth of God and His Word, our lives become transformed. We should be changed as we get closer and closer to Him in this life, knowing that ultimately when we see Him face to face, we will be completely changed...we will be like Him.

We are not transformed by trying to resist the external pressure of the world. We will only be transformed by the renewing of our minds from within. The way we do that is by letting the Word of God fill our minds so we learn to think...and as a result...act like God. As the Word fills our minds, the things of this world are pushed out of our minds. The Word of God filters out the impurities in our minds that we pick up just by living in this world.

Transformation is not something we do but is something that is done to us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. It is our responsibility to make ourselves available to the Spirit so He can do His transforming work in us.

The Consequences of Our Commitment to Christ

Here is what happens when we become living sacrifices to Christ and have our minds renewed by the Word...

We will know the will of God – This is probably the number one desire of every Christian. God will show you His will to the degree that you are committed to carrying it out.

We will do the will of God – Because you're committed to Christ, you'll find yourself doing the will of God when He shows you what it is. Testing or proving the will of God means doing it.

We will enjoy the will of God – The will of God will be "good, pleasing and perfect" to you. Once you get in the will of God, you will find it to be the most exciting and blessed place you could ever be.

We are just getting started in the practical application section of Romans. Committing yourself to Christ as a living sacrifice is the foundation for all that follows. It is the key to finding and living and rejoicing in the will of God.