

God's Mercy in Your Life

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Romans 12:1

We turn the corner this morning to our last major section in the book of Romans. Paul has labored for 11 chapters now to lay a solid theological foundation upon which he will devote the remaining five chapters to building upon. As we read God's Word over time and grow in our understanding of how it was sovereignly collated by God, we begin to see certain reoccurring writing styles emerge in particular authors. One of the writing styles that we see often, especially in Paul's New Testament epistles, is that of indicatives preceding imperatives. Another way to say that would be doctrine before duty. Doctrinal theology has been the theme of chapters 1-11, but now Paul will take that doctrinal foundation and build the practical theology framework of the Christian life on it. The believer's sanctification is Paul's overarching theme in the final 5 chapters of his letter to the Romans. This where Paul answers the question, "What are we to do with what we have learned? How are we to apply it?" We see this same structure in Ephesians, Galatians, and Colossians:

Ephesians 1-3 Doctrinal foundation | 3-6 Practical application

Galatians 3-4 Doctrinal foundation | 5-6 Practical application

Colossians 1-2:5 Doctrinal foundation | 2:6-4:18 Practical application

Warren Wiersbe rightly said, "We must translate our *learning* into *living*."

In Romans 8:29 Paul said that we, predestined believers, are to be conformed to the image of His Son. It's this sanctification process that Paul has in view and appeals to in Romans 12:1-2. He begins by telling us that God wants our bodies in verse 1 and he will conclude in verse 2 by telling us that God wants our minds and our wills. God wants us to yield or present our bodies, our minds, and our wills to Him as instruments of righteousness. Our text this morning calls us to a full devotion to Christ. In light of all that we have learned to be true about God and his rich mercy toward undeserving sinners, How then should we, who have been saved by His grace, live? Paul speaking under the inspiration of the Holy spirit says this:

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. 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. Romans 12:1-2

1. WE OFFER OURSELVES TO GOD BECAUSE OF HIS MERCY. (v. 12a)

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

Paul said, “I appeal to you”. It is interesting to note that Paul isn’t commanding here. Though he could have rightly used his apostleship as a means of eliciting hearers, rather, he comes as a brother appealing to brothers. You see, “I appeal to you” is the language of grace. In Paul’s letter Philemon he said, “Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you” Philemon 1:8-9.

When an appeal is made, it’s made on the basis of something. Paul tells us what the basis of his appeal is when he says, “I appeal to you brothers, *by the mercies of God.*” The basis or the undercurrent of Paul’s coming argument is that we have, in Christ, been the recipients of God’s lavish mercies. Paul’s use of the plural “mercies” is a Hebraism that points to God’s numerous or abundant mercies. What is mercy? We commonly define mercy as God withholding what we rightly and justly deserve. It has the idea of God showing favor, kindness, and compassion to the undeserving. We deserve exclusion from even the faintest particle of God’s goodness. We deserve to be shut out from God’s grace. We deserve the death and condemnation that our sin has rightly earned. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5). Jeremiah, in Lamentations 3:22, reminds us that God’s mercies never fail and never come to an end! We see God’s mercy in:

A. You were bought (reconciled) with a price.

For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:20

B. The precious blood of Christ.

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:18–19

C. Mercy is the motivation for a life of worship.

Kent Hughes reminds us that, “There is scarcely anything more important for building our commitment (devotion to Christ) than an increasing understanding of the greatness of God and His mercies to us.”¹

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness From Heaven*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 213.

Paul, in Titus 2:11-14, says that the grace of God trains us to live holy lives. He says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Have you tasted this mercy and grace? If not, the first thing you need to do is come to the fountain.

2. WE OFFER OURSELVES TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. (v. 12b)

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God

The first thing we must be reminded of before we look at the particulars of our devotion to Christ is that the Christian life is a life of death. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" Luke 9:23. The Greek word (*arneomai*) which is translated "deny" has the idea of renouncing or refusing. In other words, Jesus was saying, "Those who wish to follow me must take up their cross (an instrument of death) and die to their own desires."

Paul uses similar language in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 when he says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

The language that Paul uses in Romans 12:1 (present, sacrifice, holy, and pleasing) stems from the Old Testament sacrificial system. When an offering was brought to the altar it was consecrated to God and, therefore, no longer belonged to the one who offered it, but to God. So it is in the Christian life; Christians no longer belong to themselves (live for themselves) but to God who redeemed them. Let's look at the language Paul uses in verse 1:

A. Present your bodies

Paul represents us (believers) as priestly people who, in response to God's mercy, present our own bodies as living sacrifices to God. Peter says, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a *holy priesthood*, to offer *spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" 1 Peter 2:5.

The word "present" is important. It means to offer or to bring into one's presence. God is calling every believer to bring their bodies into His presence, that we might unceasingly offer them up to him as a spiritual sacrifice. Paul used the word "present" numerous times in Romans 6 as he

taught on the reality of the justified believer being dead to sin, but alive to God. Turn back to Romans 6; I want to show this to you in three particular verses:

Do not present your members 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 6:13

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? Romans 6:16

I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. Romans 6:19

What does Paul mean when he says “bodies”? Does he mean our physical, flesh and bones bodies? A cruise around respectable commentaries would leave you divided as to whether Paul meant literal bodies or if his use of the word “bodies” was just a way of saying that God wants your “everything”. A study of Paul’s use of the word “body” elsewhere in his writings would bring us to the conclusion that Paul is indeed referring to our literal physical bodies in verse 1. Paul says that we are to present our literal bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Where would we turn to look for principles that teach how we use the body that God has given us as a means of worship? Paul gives us a wonderful theology of sin and the body in 1 Corinthians 6:

1. Your body is meant for the Lord - (v. 13).

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

2. Your body is a member of Christ - (v. 15).

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

3. Sex outside of the marriage relationship makes Christ a party to fornication - (v. 15)

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?

4. Sex outside of the marriage relationship is to sin against God’s purpose for your body - (v. 18).

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

5. Your body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit - (v. 19).

Or 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...

6. You are to use your body to glorify God - (v. 20)

For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Your body is so important to God that the consummation of redemption will include a glorious resurrection of the body. Death isn't separation from the body eternally – We are going to get a resurrected body in which no vestige of sin will remain. In Philippians 3:20-21 Paul says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

B. Living sacrifice

Not only are we a temple and a priest, but we are also the sacrifice. Here again we see language from the Old Testament sacrificial system. But there is a major contrast between what Paul is saying here and the preparatory Old Testament sacrificial system. Paul says that we, believers, are to present our bodies as a "living" sacrifice. We present a body that is alive from the dead. Remember what Paul said in Galatians 2:20? He said, "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."

The word living also carries with it the idea of permanence. In other words, we are to present our bodies as a "continual" or ongoing living sacrifice. All of life is worship (1 Corinthians 10:31). Woe to us if we think that worship (offering yourself to God) is confined to two hours on Sunday morning.

There were two "living sacrifices" recorded in the Bible. These two examples give us an idea as to what it means to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. The first was Isaac (Genesis 22). He willingly put himself on the altar and would have died in obedience to God's will, but the Lord sent a ram to take his place. Isaac "died" just the same—he died to self and willingly yielded himself to God's will. When he stepped off the altar, Isaac was in a sense a "living sacrifice." The second living sacrifice we see is that of Jesus Himself. He was the perfect "living sacrifice". He gave himself up in obedience to the Father's will. God is calling each one of us to daily present the members of our bodies to him as a living sacrifice – as an act of worship.

C. Holy

Holiness means set apart. God has called His children to live in this world in such a way as sets His holiness on display. We are called to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that without holiness no man will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Often times we want to know how close to the sin line we can get without crossing it. Is it okay to kiss a young lady to whom you're not married? Is it okay to go to the bar if I'm not planning on drinking? Is it okay to watch the movie that I know doesn't honor Christ if I fast forward through the scenes that are bad? Holy is a radical word. Holiness doesn't ask the question, "How close can I get to the sin line without stepping over it?" James uses two words in James 1:14 that should sober us as we think about God's command that we pursue holiness. Those two words are *lured* and *enticed*. James says, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Sin is seductive. It is easy to be lured and enticed. No fish begins his day with the thought, "I just can't wait to bite a surgically sharpened steel hook today." We need to be careful that we don't put ourselves in compromising places where we can be easily tempted. God has saved us and set us apart from the world.

Let me connect the pursuit of holiness to the grace and mercy of God again here for you. Paul, after concluding in 2 Corinthians 6 that the believer is the temple of the living God says, "*Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God*" 2 Corinthians 7:1. Mercy and grace must be our motivation to live holy lives.

D. Acceptable to God

Acceptable means "well-pleasing" to God. Remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:9? He said, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." We are familiar with that verse. But do you know what the following verse says? Paul says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Romans 3 tells us about how we used our bodies before God saved us:

Mind - Doesn't understand God (v.11).

Heart - Doesn't seek God (v. 11).

Throat - Open grave (v.13).

Tongue - Practice deceit (v.13).

Lips - Spread the poison of venomous asps (v. 13).

Mouth - Full of curses and bitterness (v. 14).

Feet - Swift to shed blood (v. 15).

Eyes - Look away from God (v. 18).

But that is not who you are anymore if you know Christ. Those members of your body that were once slaves to sin are now to be offered to Christ as instruments of righteousness. We are to seek to please God with the use of our bodies. This includes:

1. What you put on it - Does what you clothe your body reflect the Christ that your lips profess?
2. What you put in it. - Moderation and self-control can be difficult, but it honors God.
3. Where you take it - There are places in this world I would not want to be if Jesus came back!
4. Your Mind - What do you think about?

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8

5. Your Eyes - What will you look at? Job made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1).
6. Your Mouth - What will you allow to come out of it?

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. James 3:5–6

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

7. Your Ears - What will you listen to? Oh be careful little ears what you hear.

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body. Proverbs 18:8

8. Your Hands - What will you use them for? Are they serving others?
9. Your Feet - Where will they take you?

Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil. Proverbs 4:26–27

3. WE OFFER OURSELVES TO GOD BECAUSE TO DO SO IS REASONABLE IN LIGHT OF THE MERCY HE HAS LAVISHED UPON US. (v. 12c)

Which is your spiritual (reasonable) worship.

The word translated “spiritual” in some of your some of your Bibles is the Greek word (logikos). It’s the word from which we derive our English word “logical”. It goes without saying that the presentation of the body as a living sacrifice is most certainly spiritual worship, but a better translation is that the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice is your reasonable or rational worship. Paul is in essence saying, “Total commitment or total devotion to God is the only rational response when you really see how merciful God has been to you. Partial commitment or incomplete devotion is irrational.

Not only is Paul highlighting the rationality of presenting your body to God as a living sacrifice, but it’s very possible that he is drawing a contrast in the final phrase of verse 1. Rationality and reason both have to do with the mind. It is very possible that Paul is trying to make the distinction between that which is thoughtful and intentional and that which is merely mechanical or automatic. John Murray says:

A great many of our bodily functions do not enlist volition on our part. But the worshipful service here enjoined must constrain intelligent volition. The lesson to be derived from the term “rational” is that we are not “spiritual” in the biblical sense except as the use of our bodies is characterized by conscious, intelligent, consecrated devotion to the service of God.²

In His hymn *When I survey the Wondrous Cross*, Isaac Watts penned the words, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!” Can you say that? I hope so. God wants your body to be used to worship and honor him! In light of the riches of God’s free and unmerited grace, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (reasonable) act of worship. God, give us the grace to make it so!

² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 112.