

This morning we're going to begin a series of messages with the theme, "What Is Discipleship?" We'll be working from Romans 12. The first two verses of this chapter have been called the most memorable verses in the whole Bible when it comes to understanding what God expects of us. Today, we're going to talk about these two verse and what they have to do with our walk with God and one another.

OPENING PRAYER

ROMANS 12:1-2 (RSV)

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul wrote, **"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (v.1).** The call to present our bodies as **"living sacrifices"** screams at us, "You're not worthy! Your good works aren't good enough! You're a miserable failure! Get out!"

But consider the condition under which Paul makes this appeal: He began with the words, **"by the mercies of God...present your bodies as a living sacrifice."** God's mercy is the bedrock of all Christian service. We open our hearts to the homeless because God gave us a home. We speak words of encouragement to those who are weak because we have been encouraged by God's words to us. We make a contribution for the building up of our schools because God provided for us an education which changed our lives.

The Lord has never stopped pouring down into our hearts his love. There was a time when we felt we could never respond adequately to his mercies. For we were poor, miserable sinners in his sight. All of my good works were nothing but filthy rags in the pure light of Almighty God.

But then Jesus came to you; he came to me. And he said, **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,”** and he took us into his arms. He said, **“I am living water,”** and he quenched our thirst for the promise of eternal life. He said, **“I am the bread of life,”** and he strengthened us to live another day in his grace.

As I meditate on Paul’s appeal in the context of God’s mercies I get excited about it. I think, is it true God can use me? Can God can somehow bring glory to his name through my work?

Unfortunately, the appeal by Paul is only that. It’s an invitation to participate in God’s plan, God’s program to bring his light into the darkness of this world, to bring his life into those places where there is death and disease, to bring his love into conversations where there is hatred and anger and fear.

This invitation is powerful, and God is behind it, and his hand is on it, but we must take action.

I once heard someone say, “God is a gentleman.” I like the idea for God will not force you or me to do anything we don’t want to do. Like a gentleman, he opens the door for us, but we have to walk through it.

But then the analogy breaks down. God doesn’t force us to take action. However, once we pass through the door he opens, the Holy Spirit works in us to accomplish his will. We are not alone.

Here’s an example. Last week I buried my Uncle Bob. He was 83 years old. During the eulogies I learned something about him. A couple of weeks after he retired 18-years ago, he read a help wanted ad in the newspaper. Catholic Charities in Tacoma, Washington, was looking for volunteers who would use their own vehicles to transport the elderly and disabled to their doctors, to go shopping, and so forth. Uncle Bob thought that sounded interesting and he gave them a call.

So there I was, 18-years later, hearing about how Uncle Bob had driven hundreds of people thousands of miles around Tacoma for no other reason than that he saw a need and he filled it. And the people loved him. God opened the door for Uncle Bob to make a difference, and he walked through that door, and the Holy

Spirit blessed his heart to be a blessing to all those people whom he served with conversation and a warm heart. And he wasn't even a Catholic!

Paul wrote, **“present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”** We are **“living”** sacrifices because in our baptisms we were ushered into the new life through Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:4).

And we are a **“sacrifice”** because we have relinquished ourselves to the will of God, that he would do with us as he pleases.

Paul said our sacrifice is **“holy and acceptable to God”** because we are unique, we are different, we live in contrast to this world we live in. He was talking about our lifestyle. He was talking about the attitude of our hearts.

When Paul wrote that this is our **“spiritual worship,”** he was not talking about Sunday morning worship. He was talking about how we live.

Later on, St. Peter wrote, **“you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION” (1st Peter 2:9).**

We are **“a royal priesthood.”** As we know, the primary responsibility of priests in the Old Testament was to offer sacrifices, which were usually made with sheep and cattle. However, Paul was explaining that you and I, as priests of God, offer a better sacrifice: We offer our own bodies to God. But these sacrifices are different in a big way than what happened in the Old Testament times. For our sacrifices are alive; they are more alive than ever, for they have been made new by the blood of the **“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”!**

With Paul's appeal on our hearts, we read his words, **“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (v.2).**

This is a warning: We must contend with the world, over which the devil rules.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are engaged in a spiritual battle for our lives. It's not as though pastors were on the front lines and you all get to watch and cheer us on. For we are ALL priests of God! And the devil hates YOU! As I said last

Wednesday, we're either with God or with the world. There's no fence sitting for the Christian because the devil owns the fence!

When Paul said **"Do not be conformed to this world"** he was reminding us of the conflict we have as Christians. What you see all around you is dominated by sin, and it produces death on every level—physical, social, cultural, and spiritual death. Reject that and live! That's what Paul was saying.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there's more to our life than simple salvation. Indeed, if that was all there was Paul wouldn't have written, **"be transformed by the renewal of your mind."**

This is something which happens with God's help, which I believe begins by reading God's Word. Let me get us started: We're going to study Romans 12:9-13 in a few weeks after Palm Sunday and Easter. These words summarize the Christian life concisely. They help us to understand what it means to give our bodies as living sacrifices and to be transformed in our minds.

Paul wrote, **"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality" (Romans 12:9-13).**

Let's post these verse somewhere where we can regularly meditate on them and pray about them. In May, we'll study them together.

This week let us meditate on the awesomeness of our salvation under the Cross of Christ and our thankfulness for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

This week let us mediate on God's will for our lives, beginning with Paul's words of instruction right here in Romans 12. And let us seek his intervention when we are weak that we might rise up in victory in his service.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.