

*Romans 12:1-8. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. <sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. <sup>4</sup> Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup> If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

**The Book of Romans:**  
**The Basics of Christianity, One Word at a Time: Sacrifice**

Therefore. That's how our lesson for today begins. Therefore. It is a word we might pass over sometimes without much thought, but this singular word holds some rather significant weight in our lesson for today. The word is small but it packs a punch as it indicates that we should look back and reflect, as we prepare for a significant point to be made. For 14 weeks, we have gone through large chunks of 11 chapters of the book of Romans. Paul has laid out this beautiful dissertation on the grace of God. We worked through significant terms such as atonement, righteousness, reconciliation, and the like. He has listed and explained, taught and wrote about these wonderful gospel truths. And then he writes down this word (this three-letter word in the Greek) because he has in mind to make an important shift in our study. This little word calls us think about all that which he has poured out on the page about God's mercy and grace, we are to take all of that, remember it, treasure it, and then take appropriate action. And again, he sums things up rather succinctly: he says, "therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy".

In view of the mercy of God, in view of his undeserved love and favor. Never forgetting, but holding in our sights how God has done so much for us in Christ Jesus. In view of God's mercy, now we will consider how we are to a life that says thank you to God. For the next three weeks, we are going to wrap up our study on the Book of Romans as we take a look at some of the final instructions that the apostle Paul gives at the end of this marvelous letter. Today we begin that transition as we consider how we

may serve our God throughout our whole lives. Today as we continue in our study of the book of Romans, as we consider the basics of Christianity, we will consider our thankful service to God with the single word: sacrifice.

There's an old expression that speaks of looking at the world through rose colored glasses. It means that a person looks at everything in a rather optimistic light. Well in a certain sense Paul instructs us to look at the world through crimson colored glasses, that is, we see everything as those who have been redeemed, forgiven, set free, and made new by the blood of Christ. As we live out our lives, every aspect is effected by the mercy of God, and therefore the blood of Christ, the good news of Jesus effects how we see even the simplest of things. We see an opportunity to serve God in everything that we do.

Let's take a moment to think about what that means, that we serve God with our entire lives. For example, there is this question that is often used in the pre-marriage bible classes that I teach. The question is as follows: "Is washing dishes an act of worship?" What would your answer be?... Yes. It can be. For consider this; God is the one who gave you the food that you ate. He is the one who gave you the ability to work and live in the home that you live in, have the food and the dinner ware that you own. And perhaps God has given also given you a spouse as well. And so out of love for God and with a heart filled with gratitude for the blessings that God has poured out on to you, you wash the dishes, you care for the things that God has given you, you may even tell you wife or your husband that you will take care of washing the dishes or at least pitch in and help; and this is all can be an extension of your gratitude to God. God has given me all these things and in the grand scheme of things, he has given me so much more. Let me, let us do everything, every little thing, every big thing, to the glory of God and to the praise of his name.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says it this way, ***So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God – 1 Corinthians 10:31.*** Here in the book of Romans, Paul links our worship to our lives lived in thankful service to God and neighbor. ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.***

Last week we talked about the importance of standing in awe of God's work, especially what he has done for us in Christ. Paul burst out in a doxology of praise. ***Oh, how unsearchable the judgments of God!*** Oh, how merciful and great, and good and kind, our God is! It is good for us to gather in this place of worship and soak that all in, to sing his praise, to hear his word, to recall and proclaim his mercy as we stand in awesome adoration of our God. Our worship consists in much more than what goes on in this building. Our worship of praise goes hand in hand with our worship of service that we carry out in our daily lives, as we live lives of thankful service to God. And for this reason, Paul urges his fellow believers to go out and serve their LORD in their daily lives, ***to offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.***

Like we talked about before, this includes, even something as simple as washing the dishes. Whatever we do, let us do it the glory of God. In thankful service for what God has done, remembering how God has purchased and won us to be his own, we live

productive and God-pleasing lives to say “thank you” to our Lord. And so, consider what that means in your individual life. God has given each one of us different abilities and has placed us in different stations of life, let us see in our particular place in life countless opportunities to serve the Lord. I can serve my Lord as a father, as a son, as a leader in the church, as a good neighbor, as a productive member of society. Everything that I do, every role that God has placed you in, every tasks that the LORD lays before us is an opportunity to serve him, to give him praise and thanks.

As we carry out our roles in this life, we may not always look through those crimson colored glasses. Like many in the world around us, we take on these roles, we carry out these tasks in a way that is often very self-serving, rather than in a way that we can serve God and others. It is part of our human nature, and it is something that the world very much promotes, that we would look to be served rather than to serve. As a result we hesitate to give our time to helping others around the house, around the neighborhood, in service in God’s house because we so quickly wonder, “What’s in it for me?” It’s a difficult trap to avoid. It’s one that we fall into so frequently that it can very much effect the way that we treat others around us. Paul warns the believer to be on our guard so that we do not conform to such a worldly pattern, rather he encourages us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

And that brings us back to where we started, doesn’t it? How are we transformed and renewed in our thinking? How do we break from the worldly pattern of looking to be served and to be selfish?

We look at the one who was so selfless in our place. We look to Jesus Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. We go back to putting on those crimson colored glasses as we dig into God’s Word and stand in awe of his love for us. Through personal meditation in God’s Word, through group Bible study, and weekly worship, we are daily transformed and renewed in our thinking by the good news of Jesus. By his gospel we are sanctified, we are set apart to serve our God. By his Word of truth, we are filled up and fueled, compelled and then directed, in our lives of service to God.

This was Jesus prayer for his disciples that while living in a sinful selfish world, that God the Holy Spirit, would sanctify us by the truth of God’s Word. To hear the Word, to bask in the goodness of the gospel, to hear and learn what God’s will is for our life, is extremely important and it goes hand in hand with our lives of service. Such Bible Study and renewing our minds as we view God’s mercy leads and guides to action, to lives of active thankful service. We will give our time, ourselves, to selflessly fulfill the roles that God has called us to, in the home, in the community, and in our congregation.

One of the biggest criticisms of Christians and Christianity as a whole is the complaint that we don’t always practice what we preach. Or to say it another way, that we are not genuine in our faith. We may be accused of listening to a message that talks about service and forgiveness and we are slow to do both. We may talk about a Savior who is loving and compassionate, but we fail to reflect that in our lives. That kind of failure to live the message that we profess, can certainly rub both our fellow Christians, our family members, our neighbors, the wrong way and portray our faith, or our God, in

an unflattering light. We ought to be careful that we don't give the impression that as a Christian my only duty is to occasionally sit in a church building for an hour or so, or do a few tasks, or give a few dollars so that my membership stays active. Instead we ought to be regularly renewed and refueled by our time in God's house so that we may go out and serve our LORD in our homes and in our communities and in our jobs throughout the week. That is the kind of daily worship and praise of our God that the apostle Paul is promoting as he urges, as he encourages believers to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual, or genuine, act of worship. A genuine faith that clearly reflects thanks to God for what he has done for us can make a far more positive impression on those around us and it can give God the glory that is rightfully his. Here's a recent example of Christians offering themselves as a living sacrifice to the glory of God.

The Victoria Advocate, a newspaper in Texas, ran a story of how a team of volunteers including pastors and members of WELS congregations were able to help in hurricane Harvey relief efforts. A man named Emmett looked out the window of his house after Hurricane Harvey swept through the area and wondered how to clean his yard that was littered with trees and branches. The 82-year-old would not have to worry too long as he and his wife received a visit from several volunteers on September 1, ready to chop up the debris. The man commented with a chuckle that he never seen such workers in my life. With tools provided by Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Christian Aid & Relief, volunteers from Victoria, Edna, Austin, Dallas, Houston and Wisconsin were able to clean residences in Victoria, Edna, Tivoli and Seadrift. The volunteers cleaned up debris from 60 different yards from Thursday through Monday. These Christian men and women would start their days at 8 a.m. with devotion and work until the evening. Another member of the community who received help from this group of volunteers made this comment. "It was something they didn't have to do, but did it out of the goodness of their hearts,"

The goodness of Christ leads us to serve our Lord and each other as we have opportunity. In view of God's mercy, wherever we are, whatever tasks God places before us, whatever roles and stations of life the LORD puts us in, his Gospel, his good news of Jesus compels us to serve out of thankfulness. Refreshed by the gospel, renewed in our faith, in our thinking, and in our lives may the LORD lead you and me to use our different gifts to serve the church, to serve our families, to serve our neighbors to the best of our abilities and to the glory of God. Remembering what our LORD has done for us and continues to do for us, let us serve our LORD with lives of worship that includes both words of praise and lives of service. ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Amen.***