

Therefore

To the Romans...Pt. 20

Today we come to a new section in our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. The *final* section, the beginning of the end really. And, as I feel like we've said so many times, it's *really* important. I think of Romans like this...I got into collecting vinyl records last year during the pandemic. It goes well with my other hobby, collecting books. I get to hunt for treasures in both, and then I can listen to the records, *while* I read the books – win-win.

There are some artists, that I want to own several of their albums. That's one of the things I like about vinyl, the deep-dive patience in an age of digital shorts. But then there are some bands that I'm like, "You know what, just give me the best of." My latest purchase is a lovely two-disc set of *The Cars* greatest hits. The song "Drive" came out when I was just the right age to get all the feels. So I will put the album on and it's just one great song after another.

Romans is kind of Paul's greatest hits. Start to finish, they just keep coming. Listen to how one commentator describes just the first two verses of this section we're starting today. "Romans 12:1-2 is one of the best known passages in the New Testament. It's fame is justified: here Paul succinctly and with vivid imagery summarizes what the Christian response to God's grace in Christ should be. The verses have a pivotal role in Romans." (Moo, 748)

We're going to be in the first half of Romans chapter 12, this week and next, and I want to use these pivotal verses to talk about the kind of church I want us to be. We've been separated for so long during this pandemic and it's important to me that as we begin to return to normalcy, we don't lose some of the lessons that we could learn from the crisis. In other words, let's not just go back to business as usual, but let's see if we can't hone in a little closer as to what this thing called "church" is supposed to be.

Never waste a crisis, as they say. I'm actually going to do a series about church culture after we're done with Romans, but some of the ideas will emerge in these next couple of weeks. We are a church in which you get gospel ministry when you come here. There are pastors - I'm doing it right now - who bring the gospel to bear on your life, and the lives of your children, and you change and grow.

But we want to become, increasingly, a church in which you don't just come to *receive* that from a limited number of people but a church in which *everyone* is equipped and knows how to give it to one another. We're supposed to be a priesthood of all believers. Every member doesn't just *receive* it but knows how to *give* it and how to serve others with it. And the verses we're studying this next couple of weeks will help us with that.

But we're looking at Romans 12:1–8 today. It starts with this amazing word: “therefore.” Now this comes after *all* of Romans 1–11, which is an incomparable survey of the gospel and Christian truth. It's all about God and sin and salvation and the Holy Spirit. And Paul says, “Therefore.” He says, “*If you believe what I'm saying, if you understand and believe everything I've told you about Christian truth, then you will live like this.*”

And actually, the whole rest of Romans is about that, but especially these verses, and especially verses 1–2 are a little summary. It's an amazing, remarkable classic summary in which Paul says, “If you really understand the gospel, you'll live like this.”

Well, let's take a look at the text and then we'll jump in. **Romans 12:1–8**, “*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. 2 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.*”

3 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. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

“6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

I was consulting our London pastor friend of the last century, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, on this text and I was humbled to discover how many sermons he preached – not on these verses – just on the first two verses of Romans 12. Again, we're doing eight verses today, Lloyd-Jones preached – on *just* Romans 12:1-2 – ten different sermons. I didn't even get to read them all, but the passage is easily rich enough to deserve that kind of treatment.

I did think this was helpful as we start in. He's talking about Paul's shift from more theological ideas, to practical application and wants to make sure we don't look at one as greater than the other. He notes that in the Book of Acts, before the earliest followers of Jesus were called “Christians”, they were called “the people of the way”.

And then he says, “Christianity is not only a way of thinking but a way of living, a way of behaving. That is the essential characteristic of this Christian faith. It was never meant to be doctrine only. It is doctrine and the doctrine comes first; it is truth, and truth comes to the mind, and demands an intellectual response and assent. But Christianity does not stop there. Our artificial distinctions not only do violence to the Scriptures but also do harm to us. Christianity is primarily a way of life and the object of the doctrine is to enable us to live that life.” (MLJ, 5)

So let’s take a look at this way of life. What we actually have here is, first of all, Paul in a nutshell gives us the essence of the Christian life. If you believe the Christian truth, what does it mean to live the Christian life on the basis of that? He gives us the *essence* of the Christian life, then he gives us some *aspects* of the Christian life, and finally he tells us the *power* we need for the Christian life. That’ll be our framework this morning.

First, The essence of the Christian Life. And the essence is in this most striking phrase: “If you believe everything I’ve told you, if you understand everything I’ve told you, you must be *a living sacrifice*.” Now what’s a living sacrifice? It’s weirder than it looks, because the word sacrifice in Greek is actually the word for “killing”. Therefore, what it’s literally saying is, “Make your life a living killing.” So it’s deliberately paradoxical.

And it’s true that most everybody reading this, the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, would all know about animal sacrifices that happened in temples all around the world and happened, of course, in the Jewish tabernacle and temple. They would understand the idea of animal sacrifices being killed and offered up as sacrifices to God, but to call it a “living sacrifice” is deliberately paradoxical. It’s Paul’s way of saying that the Christian life is both like *and unlike* those old sacrifices.

Now first, let me give you two ways in which Christian living is *unlike* the old sacrifices. First of all, the old sacrifices were *bloody*. Why? Because they were atoning for sin. Sin needs punishment, and the sacrifices represent the fact that punishment must be due. Therefore, in the Old Testament, bloody sacrifices were ways of getting atonement and salvation and getting yourself right with God.

And that is absolutely not true of Christian living. You do *not* say, “I’m going to live for you, Lord. I’m going to live the life you want me to live, and *then* you’ll forgive me, you’ll accept me, and you’ll take me to heaven.” No! Jesus’ sacrifice is a sacrifice that ends all guilt offerings and sin offerings. This is different. This is an offering of gratitude and praise. So first of all, when we say you are pursuing an existence as a living sacrifice, it does *not* mean you’re atoning for your sin or procuring God’s favor.

Secondly, the Christian life is unlike the Old Testament sacrifices because the Old Testament sacrifices were *over*. When you offered your sacrifice, when you brought your animal, your grain, or whatever you brought, once you offered it, it was over. But a living sacrifice is never over, is it? There's a saying that belongs in the pastoral cliché hall of fame, but it's true; The trouble with a living sacrifice is it keeps crawling off the altar.

See, the old sacrifices were no problem. You killed it, and then that was it. They burned and it was over. A *living* sacrifice means every day, every hour, every moment - right *now* - you have to deliberately, consciously and continually offer yourself to God. It's constant. It's never over. It's intense. So in those ways, Christian living is *not* like the Old Testament sacrifices.

But in what ways *is* it? He wouldn't have used the word sacrifice with that word killing in it unless *something* was put to death; something was killed. What is it? I'll tell you what it is. You're not living the Christian life unless you put to death the idea that you have a right to live as you choose. I can't believe I'm saying this in the middle of America. But there may not be anything more important for me to say at this moment in our history.

There probably has never been a culture in the history of the world more averse to the very essence of what it means to live a Christian life. Do you understand that? If indeed America is a Christian nation – and I don't think it is – but if you think it is, then it's a very poor one. And I don't mean just from a secular perspective, the church is just as guilty of missing the mark.

What it means to live a Christian life is that you put to death the right to live life as you choose. You put to death the idea that you belong to yourself. You put to death the idea that you know best what should happen in your life. You put that to death, and you give it to God. It feels like a death to really say to God, “You know best, and I just trust you. And here's what you say in your Word, and I don't like it, but I'm going to do it. I don't choose anymore.”

It feels like a death, but on the other side it's life. That's why it's a living sacrifice. It's a sacrifice that leads to life. I've used this illustration before, but it really fits what I'm talking about. And it kind of ties into graduation season, so bonus! It's about a great missionary of yester-year named Julia Lake. When she was a teenager, in the 1930's, she was very moved by the messages at a Christian conference and decided to give her life to Christ in a special way. She said, “My heart is to go to Asia for a lifetime of missionary service.”

So when she graduated from high school, she kept her resolve, and she did her research. She went to the Presbyterian missionary agency, and they told her how difficult and dangerous it was – the communist revolution was stirring – but she was undeterred. So they said, “Ok, but there are two things. You have to get the proper training. And one other thing, you have to be married.” They did not send single American women in mission agencies to Asia. There were a number of safety and cultural reasons.

So one night near the end of high school, she sat down and prayed, “Lord, I take my hands off my life. I give you everything. I don’t care about a comfortable life. I don’t care about a safe life. I’m going to give you my whole life. Everybody else is getting ready for all sorts of success but I’m going to give myself to missionary service. I’m going to do all the training I need. There’s only thing I need from you...I just need a husband.”

And so first of all, she went to a Bible college. And she got all the Bible and theology and cross-cultural training and missions training. And at the end of Bible college, no husband, no boyfriend, no prospects. So she went on to two years of seminary - graduate school with a missions emphasis. And she finished top of her class, but...no husband, no boyfriend, no prospects. And years later she tells her story, “The night before I was supposed to graduate, I sat in my dorm room an angry young woman.”

She said, “God, how could you do this to me? I have nothing else I can do. I have nowhere else to go. I’ve put everything into this. I have no other prospects. I committed my whole life to you. I took my hands off my life. I gave my life to you, and I only asked for one thing, and you didn’t do it. How can you do this to me?” And she wrestled and she struggled.

And incredibly, I think, that night she suddenly realized something. She suddenly realized she’d been kidding herself. She suddenly realized she wasn’t miserable because she had taken her hands off her life; she was miserable because she *never had*. She realized she had developed an idea of a heroic life. She had developed an idea of a noble life. She said, “If I could live that, then I’d know I had value; I’d know I’m a person of worth.”

So she had this idea of a noble, heroic life, and she was telling God, “That’s the life you have to give me.” And she was telling God, “And here’s *how* you have to get it for me.” She was doing everything she could to basically put God in her debt so He’d have to do it. And so she began to realize, “I’d never taken my hands off my life. I was *using* God; I wasn’t serving God. I was telling God what He had to do.”

And then she says, “That night, for the first time, I took my hands off my life. I said, ‘You know where I should go. You know what I should do. You know best.’” Now, let me ask you something this morning. If that girl, who spent a third of her life getting ready for missionary service, saying goodbye to everything, saying goodbye to fun, to safety, to comfort, to everything, and thought she had taken her hands off her life, and that night realized she never had actually done it...do you think you have, then? I doubt it.

But that night, as she prayed, Julia said, “I knew God was infinitely wise and infinitely loving. And because He’s infinitely wise, I’ll do everything the Bible tells me, even if I don’t like it.” See, if you say, “Well, I trust the Bible, but I don’t like this or that; I do this but I don’t do that,” you’re on the throne of your life. You’re picking and choosing. You still belong to yourself. You still are basically deciding how things are to go. You are not a living sacrifice.

And I think the final thing I’ll say about this point is important. Look at the very end of **v.1**, “*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.*”

The word “worship” there means “service”. And one of the ways you can actually translate the word spiritual is the word “true”. And so what it’s really saying is “your true service.” “Give yourself, sacrifice yourself, lay yourself out for God, put yourself in service to Him, make *Him* the thing you live for, be a sacrifice for Him...because you’re sacrificing for something anyway. You’re worshipping *something*. You’re laying out yourself for something.”

Do you believe that? See I imagine there are people right now in the room – or maybe watching online - I don’t know where you are, but if you’re not sure you’re a Christian, or if you’re thinking about Christianity, at this point in the sermon, which is about half over, you’re saying, “This is Christianity? Hmm. I think I’ll pass. I want to be free. I don’t want to live a live of service and sacrifice.”

Please don’t kid yourself. Everybody lives for something. You have to live for something, and whatever you’re living for you are sacrificing for, you are a sacrifice for, you’re in service for. You are *not* free. If you say, “Well, I don’t know if I believe in God; my career is the most important thing to me,” it’ll drive you into the ground.

Or if you say, instead, “Well, there’s one person in my life. The love of this person is really the main thing in my life...” Do you realize if that person rejects you it will devastate you? And even if that person just falls apart it will devastate you. You’re *already* a sacrifice for something. You’re already worshiping something. You’re already in service to something. You are not free.

And if you say, “Yes, I am. I’m totally independent. I don’t give my heart totally to any person. I don’t give my heart totally to any cause. I am an absolutely independent person. I belong to myself.” No, you don’t. Because if you are that kind of person - and there are people like that - you will die lonely, and that means you’ll be a sacrifice on the altar of your own independence because you’re serving your independence, and it will flay you.

One of my musical heroes – I have a *lot* of his albums – turned 80 this week. But Bob Dylan had it right...
You might like to eat caviar, you might like to eat bread
You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-sized bed
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes
Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody

You’re going to have to serve something. You’re going to have to be a sacrifice for something. You’re going to have to give your life for something, and only God is infinitely wise and infinitely kind. Only God is infinitely wise and infinitely loving. Anything else will devour you. Make your life a living sacrifice. If Julia hadn’t taken her hands off her life by that night, do you think you have?

Secondly, The aspects of the Christian Life. And here’s where I’ll be briefer. “What does that really look like?” you say. Well, Paul immediately goes into detail. I can’t cover it all today – again, I’m *not* preaching ten sermons on this passage. But I would like to show you three aspects of this idea of being a living sacrifice. Being a living sacrifice affects your life in three ways.

First of all, it affects *all* of your life. Notice how it says, (v.1) “*I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your **bodies** as living sacrifices ...*” Now that would have been *very* strange to Paul’s Greek *and* Roman readers. Because the Greeks and the Romans thought of the body as unimportant and the spirit or soul as the principal thing. In fact, Eastern religions believe the body and the physical life is actually an illusion and the purpose of contemplation is to transcend that and get into the realm of the spiritual.

Now when Paul says, “I want you to offer your *bodies* as a living sacrifice,” he doesn’t mean, “I only want your bodies; I don’t care about your souls.” Inner attitudes are important. But what he’s saying is, to make your life a living sacrifice is to say it’s not enough simply to have a Christian belief or a Christian inner peace.

Your body is how your soul acts in the world. Your soul can do *nothing*, your thoughts can do *nothing*, your feelings can do *nothing*...except through your body. And therefore, when he says, “I want your bodies,” what he’s really saying is, “I want every part of your life, public and private, individual and social, inner and outer.” That’s what he’s saying.

And that means, especially when he gets to this place in v.2 where it says, “*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*” One of the things it means to be a living sacrifice is for you to *think out* the implications of Romans 1–11, which is the gospel, for *every* area of life. And if you’re not doing that, you’re not making your *whole* life a living sacrifice.

I love what Karl Barth has to say about this in his Romans commentary. “A wide reading of contemporary secular literature – especially of newspapers! – is therefore recommended to anyone desirous of understanding the Epistle to the Romans. If our thinking is not to be pseudo-thinking, we must think about life; for such a thinking is a thinking about God. And if we are to think about life, we must penetrate it’s hidden corners, and steadily refuse to treat anything – however trivial or disgusting it may seem to be - as irrelevant.” (Barth, 425)

If you see your faith as a “church” thing, but not a “work” thing...or not a “relationship” thing...you’re not being transformed. Let me give you an example. You may not like the example, but it’s still a good example. Francis Schaeffer was a Christian leader who was well respected in the 70’s and 80’s. He eventually became a key promoter of pushing evangelical faith into the conservative political realm – which I think has caused many problems for the church today – but that’s an important thing to remember as you hear this quote. This is no liberal.

At a big world conference in 1976 he gave a talk aimed at Christians who were business owners and employers. Here’s what he said: “The Bible does clearly teach the right of property, but both the Old and New Testament put a tremendous stress on the compassionate use of your property. If at each place where the employer/owner was a Bible-believing Christian the world could see that less profit was being taken out so the workers could have appreciably more than the going rate of pay, the gospel would have been better proclaimed throughout the world than if the profits were the same as the world took and then large endowments given to Christian missions and other projects.”

Do you hear what he's saying? He's talking about the principle of gleaning from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, it said if you owned a field you were not allowed to take full profit out of it. You were not allowed to harvest all the way to the edges of your land. Instead you left a good amount of grain on the edges so the poor could come and, with their labor, take some of the profit themselves. You were not allowed to take the full profit and then give it away to charity. You were supposed to *limit* your profit so more people could actually benefit from your field.

And Francis Schaeffer was saying, "If everywhere in the world Christian business owners and employers were *known* for taking less profit out so they could pay their employees a lot better, that would be far better for the gospel than if you just take all the same amount of profit out that all of the other business owners do, and then you give it away to charity." Now maybe you say, "Well I don't like that particular application. I don't think that's fair." Well, maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

By the way, I do think it's fair, but that doesn't matter either. The point is what's Schaeffer doing? He's *thinking*. He's trying to be transformed by thinking the gospel out in every area of his life. Are you doing that? You may not like where his thinking led him. You may agree or may not agree with it and say, "Oh, that doesn't work out." Ok, but are you doing it? If you're not doing it, your life is not a living sacrifice. To be a living sacrifice means you're thinking this out for *every* area of life.

The second aspect is a living sacrifice affects the inner self-life. **Verse 3** says, "*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.*"

Paul is saying that if you understand the gospel you will not think too highly of yourself. On the other hand, you will have a sober - that word sober means "accurate" - you will not think too low about yourself either.

And we've often pointed out that everybody in the world has a self-image usually based on effort and achievement. You decide, "I'm a good person because I *do* this or I *am* this." And if you are doing what you say your standards are, you feel good about yourself. You might feel superior. But if you fail, you feel terrible about yourself. You'll feel inferior.

But Christians have access to an absolutely unique kind of identity and self-image that nobody else does. Because the gospel says you're a sinner and you deserve to be lost...but you're completely loved in God because of what Jesus Christ has done. I like to say the gospel humbles us to the ground and lifts us to the heavens at the same time. It keeps you from pride and self-loathing. And so if you *do* hate yourself or you are puffed up, you haven't brought the gospel into your inner being.

To be a living sacrifice is not just “Christians live good lives.” A lot of people think that, and sure, but a lot of *other* people live good lives. I know some atheists who are exemplary people. And therefore, the essence of being a Christian isn’t living a good life - though a Christian is not less than that, a Christian, of course, *will* live a good life - but it’s the *reason*. It’s the power. It’s the living sacrifice. It’s the giving up of your rights to self-determination. And that transforms you from the inside out.

The third aspect we’re told here - and I already alluded to this - is if you begin to make this decision and become a living sacrifice and work this out into every area of your life, you will become a *servant*. It affects not just all of your life and your self-life, but it affects your service life. That is to say, the last part of this passage talks about gifts. These are abilities to minister.

It mentions things like preaching, administration, counseling, mercy, caring for the poor, leading. I’m paraphrasing some of them; it would be a whole series to go through and look at each Greek word and get into it. But these are all ministry abilities. These are all things people do to minister in a church, to serve in a church. I want you to notice two things about these abilities.

First of all, Every Christian has a gift. **V.6** says, *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us*”. To whom are the gifts given? To “each of us”. The second word is, Every Christian is different. He says, “We have *different* gifts.” What does that mean? It means, on the one hand, there should be no “unemployed” Christians – I’m not talking about in the economy, but in the church. There should be no passive Christians. There should be nobody who comes to church just to recharge your batteries in order to get out there and kind of live life the way you want.

Now there are seasons. The Bible recognizes some seasons are more active than others. So maybe you’ve just had a baby, or you’ve come through a big transition or recovering from a medical challenge. There are seasons where margin and rest are even more necessary than others. I find Christian ministry burnout can be just as much a problem in our Protestant work-ethic culture.

But typically, when you come into church you ought to be saying, “How can I serve? How can I do these things?” You shouldn’t come just to be served but to serve. Do you remember **Mark 10:45**? “*Jesus Christ did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.*” So how can you be following Jesus if, basically, you come to church in order to be served, not to serve. What that means is you must not only *get* gospel ministry; you must learn how to *give* it. We’ll talk about this more next week.

But also notice everybody is different. Everybody has different gifts. We're like a body, Paul says. And so the finger is not a foot and the eye is not an ear, and so forth. You've heard that image before. But here's the implication. Every single Christian is as unique as a snowflake, as unique as a fingerprint. You have certain experiences, certain gifts, and certain abilities.

Which means because you are here in Austin, sitting here today, if you're a Christian and you have these gifts, that means there are some people out there that only *you* can touch. There are some people out there in your neighborhood, in your work networks, only you can reach, and they won't be reached if you think of yourself as mainly coming simply to have *your* spiritual needs met, not basically to be equipped as a servant.

There's an *adventure* out there. There are all sorts of things. If you come and don't serve, you're resisting the will of the Holy Spirit for you, because the will of the Holy Spirit for your life has to do with the gifts and the experiences he has given you. And when I say "the church" I don't mean to restrict it to just Southwest Family Fellowship, that would be selfish. Of course there are opportunities to serve here, but there are lots of para-church ministries to partner with as well. But wherever in the body of Christ you serve, by all means, serve! There are people out there with your name written on them, as it were.

If your inner life has been changed, your understanding of yourself has been changed, all of your life has been changed, because you made yourself a living sacrifice, you will not just simply be a person who comes passively and receives ministry; you'll say to the church body, "Show me what I can do."

Third and last, The power of the Christian Life. I've already alluded to this, but I think one of the things you see in the Bible is that the essence of being a Christian is not living a good life but *why* you live a good life and *the power* for living a good life. That's what's distinct. Here's a disclaimer again, just to be clear. A lot of people who are not Christians, a lot of people in other religions, a lot of people with no particular religion, live very good lives. They love their neighbor. They care for the poor. They keep their promises. They're people of integrity and charity and generosity. Absolutely.

And the Bible gives a lot of good reasons why that's a good thing. God helps people who don't even believe in Him be good. Why? Can you think of what a nasty place this world would be if only Christians lived good lives? And I am loath to look down on anyone's motives for charity. I mean, if you're being charitable and living a life of integrity, peace, and generosity, in some ways I don't care what your motives are for doing that. I'm glad you're doing it.

Having said that, what makes Christians different is not the fact they're the only people out there being honest and caring for the poor and keeping their promises, but they have an inner power for doing that that will give them a consistency and durability in that good life that nobody else has access to. Do you know what that power is? It's a new motive.

If you don't believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, what does motivate you to live a good life? Some people do it out of custom. "That's just the way I was brought up." Some people do it out of prudence. There are a lot of people who say, "There is no absolute right and wrong, there are no moral absolutes, but the prudent thing to do is to live a good life. That helps everybody."

Some people do it out of religion. That is, they're afraid. "God is going to get me if I don't live a good life. God is going to punish me if I don't live a good life." Well, fear and logic and custom are not going to get you to live like you ought to live...when nobody is looking. It's not going to get you to live the good life *all* of your life.

What Christians have is the opposite of those things: an inner joy and an inner love that pull them from the inside. It's a joyous pull from the inside, not a kind of begrudging external force from the outside.

And here's how that works. Paul starts out with (v.1) "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters...*" And that word "urge" is a word for "exhort" that specifically *doesn't* mean command; it really means urge. All of the commentators say it's intriguing that Paul does *not* say, "I command you." He could! He's an apostle.

And what he's asking for is something we're obligated to, but he says, "I urge you." Then he says, "*...in view of God's mercy...*" That word "view" is not an intellectual word; it's a heart word. He says, "Look at his mercies. If you see his mercies, then what? "*...to offer your bodies...*" And that word "offer" is a very important word. It means voluntarily.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells a story in one of these sermons of a medical colleague of his who had a little dog. And every day, he used to walk that little dog on a leash through a park near his home. Every day the same path. And the little dog was always straining at the leash, wanting to get away. And one day the doctor, the owner, decided, "I know my dog pretty well. I've gotten to know him, so I'm going to risk it." He got out there in the park and unleashed him. And the dog took off like a bolt, out of sight.

The doctor's heart sank a little bit, and he was pretty anxious, but he said, "No. I'm on a walk with my dog, so I'm just going to stick to the path." And he continued walking. About 10 minutes later, to his great relief and joy, he saw a little gray lightning bolt coming this direction, and the dog trotted right alongside him and, from then on, always went on a walk with his master without a leash.

Lloyd-Jones says, "What happened?" The dog offered himself. Before, he *had* to have a master, but now he offered himself. He was still a servant. "This is still my master. You still take care of me. I'm still taking the walk because you want to walk at the park." No leash, though. And Lloyd-Jones says that's what you have to do if you view the mercies of God. But wait. No, not just the mercies of God.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of voluntary submission when he says in **John 10:18**, "*No man takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*" Jonathan Edwards actually says he thinks – and it's speculative, but I believe he's right – in the garden of Gethsemane, in prayer just before he was arrested, Jesus began to experience the horror of what he was going to experience on the cross: the divine justice, the punishment we deserve poured out on him. He started to taste it.

Edwards says it's almost like if Jesus hadn't even begun to taste it until he was already nailed to the cross, maybe he would have said, "Hey, now that I know what this is like, I never should have gone through with this." But no. In the garden of Gethsemane, it's like the Father is giving him a taste. He says, "Do you still want to do this for them?" and Jesus said, "Yes."

Why did he offer himself as, not a living sacrifice, but a destroyed sacrifice? Why did Jesus do that? Why did he take his hands off his life? Out of love for you. Now take your hands off your life out of love for him. See, Jesus took his hands off his life and he became a dying sacrifice. You take your hands off your life and you'll become a living sacrifice. What will flow into you is this newness of life you've always been looking for.

If you keep your hands on your life, you're going to be always angry, always upset, always driven, just like that woman before she took her hands off her life. Why did she do it? Because she knew God was infinitely wise and infinitely good. How could she know that? The cross. That's how you know he's infinitely good. That's how you also know he's infinitely wise. That's how you know you can trust him. Jesus took his hands off his life for you; now you take your hands off your life for him.

I want to close by showing you **Romans 12:1** in the old King James Translation – let’s get some class in here, this is the Shakespearean version - “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is **your reasonable service.***”

Remember we translated that last part as “your spiritual act of worship.” It’s a hard phrase to translate, but one of the ways...it’s the Greek word *logikos*, which actually means “rational”. So there’s a sense in which to offer yourself as a living sacrifice...to take your hands off your life...is the only *reasonable* thing to do.”

How can you come to grips with someone who gave himself utterly for you...without you giving yourself utterly to him? It’s the only reasonable way to respond. To *not* do so is not just a violation of the moral sense; it’s a crucifixion of the intelligence. It’s just not rational. It’s the gospel according to Star Trek – Kirk would respond to Jesus out of emotion, Spock out of logic! Both are legitimate.

Jesus took his hands off his life and fell into nothingness. *You* take your hands off your life and you’ll just fall into his. And he’s the only Master who won’t consume you. He’s the only altar that will give you life and won’t kill you. Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God...View the mercies of God, especially in Jesus Christ, until you *want* to offer yourself. Next week we’ll talk more about what our life *together* will look like if you do.

Let us pray...