

# Sacrifice for God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us pray one more time. Father, as we come before you today, we just ask again for your Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives.

Please open our ears. Please soften our hearts. Please allow your word to take root in us, that we might want to do what you say, that we might wish to obey you out of the joy of our hearts, that you might strengthen us and strengthen your church.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen. What is worship? If you are a Christian today, you know that you are to worship God. In fact, you would want to worship God.

That's what a Christian is, is it not? It's someone who wants to worship God. But what does that worship actually look like? How does it work itself out?

Rather hilariously, I once heard someone joke, if worshiping God means we are to live in a musical. You know how musicals go, right? Every few minutes or so, someone suddenly breaks out into song, and then somehow everyone then joins in and miraculously knows all the lyrics.

[ 1 : 19 ] Is that what worship is? A constant song and dance in which all Christians somehow learn as soon as they trust Christ. Well, today our passage will help us understand what true worship looks like.

And sorry to disappoint musical fans, but it probably won't quite look like a Christian Mamma Mia. But as we explore this passage, what we'll discover is why we have called our third habit of grace in this series, sacrifice for God.

Because, actually, as we'll see in a moment, that's essentially what worship is. It cannot be reduced to singing or music, although don't get me wrong, singing is an important part of the Christian life.

If you look at our sermon archive, there is an entire sermon devoted to singing from a few years ago, and you can go to listen to it if you want to know what the Bible says about that.

But worship is really about sacrificing for God. That's what we were made for. It's an essential habit.

[ 2 : 37 ] And just like how you cannot call someone who has no habit of playing football a footballer, you can't really call anyone who doesn't seek to develop this habit of sacrifice a worshipper.

And so this morning we're going to basically just look at Romans 12, verse 1 to 8, to help us understand what this habit is all about. I was originally going to go to Philippians as well, but in the end I figured just staying in Romans 12 for today would be more helpful and manageable for us all. So that's what we'll do. And here is our first point. De-exhortation, sacrifice for God. Paul begins Romans 12 with an appeal.

Therefore, I urge you. I beg of you. I say this as of utmost importance. So although Paul isn't giving an order, you know, you must do this, there is clearly a sense of urgency here.

What he says, we must hear. So what does Paul urge us to do? Verse 1, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

[ 4 : 03 ] Now straight away, such language takes us right back to the Old Testament, doesn't it? In particular, it takes us back into the temple.

The sacrificial imagery used here evokes an animal being bound and brought to the altar, where it is slotted, its blood collected, and sprinkled on the altar's side.

The carcass of the carcass of the animal is then carefully prepared, as it is skinned and cut into pieces, its internal organs washed, before the entire animal is placed on the altar and burned completely.

Paul himself would have witnessed this firsthand many times. And what would this Old Testament ritual have communicated? No one could miss it.

It was a picture of something being totally given over to God. In Leviticus, a sacrifice could have more than one function, depending on what type of sacrifice it was.

[ 5 : 15 ] But regardless of the type, it would still be a gesture of wholehearted devotion to God. There is no part of the lamb or the goat or the pigeon or whatever it was that would have been left out of the offering.

It's all or nothing. And it's also costly. Imagine the expense of taking the best animal in your herd down to the temple in Jerusalem just to be burned up.

That was the animal that probably would have produced the best offspring, and it wouldn't have been easy to give up. But that's what the Old Testament worshippers of God did.

And now, here in the New Testament, once again we find talk about offering sacrifices.

But here perhaps is the first big surprise of the passage. You see, offering animal sacrifices, that's an Old Testament thing, isn't it?

[ 6 : 32 ] But surely in the New Testament there is only one kind of sacrifice? Surely there is only Jesus, our precious once-for-all sacrifice?

Those animals are no longer necessary. And indeed, you are right. The sacrifice of Jesus is absolutely precious and foundational.

You know, you'll find that we wouldn't be able to escape talking about Jesus' sacrifice even in this very sermon. And yet, here in Romans 12, we are brought to the realization that these are not the only sacrifices on offer in the Bible.

We don't just have animal sacrifices, and we don't just have Jesus Christ as our sacrifice, because here in Romans 12, we discover we're the sacrifice.

It isn't a goat or a ram, but we who are to be totally consecrated and devoted to God. And in that sense, we are just like the animal sacrifices of old.

[ 7 : 54 ] We are to give our whole being. That means our offering to God isn't just the songs we sing. Rather, it is every thought we take, every decision we make, every action we take, and that is to be laid on the altar to God.

It's all or nothing. My old pastor, Von Roberts, has a rather light-hearted illustration to make this serious point.

Imagine, he says, a conversation between a chicken and a pig. They are discussing their contributions to a traditional English breakfast, which has bacon and eggs, if you didn't know that.

The pig says to the chicken, for you, you just have to make a donation. For me, it's total commitment. But of course, we aren't exactly the same as those animal sacrifices either.

For one thing, the animals being sacrificed are dead, aren't they? But we are living sacrifices.

[ 9 : 15 ] Paul deliberately describes us that way. You see, dead animals are passive. They didn't choose to bring themselves. But we are living.

We are alive. We are active. And we are to offer ourselves. We are actually to make the choice to give of ourselves.

We voluntarily give of ourselves in full, not in part. We give not just our Sundays, but our Mondays to Saturday.

We give not just church life, but work life, home life, family life, friendship life, private life, all of life.

Notice how concrete Paul gets. He says we are to offer our bodies. So this isn't abstract. If God has changed our inner being, we now offer our outer being.

[ 10 : 23 ] They are no longer instruments of wickedness, as Romans 6 verse 13 says, or solely for our own purposes, but instruments that belong to God for his use.

And our bodies, notice, is meant to be holy and pleasing to God. In other words, as we use our bodies in sacrificial service, we should be using them with purity, and using them with sincerity and integrity before God.

So, take my feet, for instance. Everything I do with my feet is to be done for Jesus. My feet should be offered up as a sacrifice for God.

And so the question is, am I using my feet deliberately to move towards that lonely person that no one is talking to?

Am I using my feet to help drive someone to Bible study because he can't go on his own? Or take another body part. My tongue should be offered up as a sacrifice to God.

[ 11 : 35 ] And so am I using my tongue to encourage the sister in Christ over there to continue trusting in Jesus? Or to make that particular decision for Jesus even though it's going to be a hard one?

Or am I using my tongue in such a way that I'm constantly putting other people down? If all of my body is meant to be laid on the altar and become a sacrifice for God, then am I cultivating habits with my feet and my tongue and my eyes and my hands and every other body part to show that? Am I cultivating bodily habits that are holy and pleasing to God? And here is one more thing about being a living sacrifice.

A living sacrifice perpetually lasts. You see, once an animal is burned up, that's it. It's a one-time deal.

But by naming us as living sacrifices, God says, we are different. We are not just something that is brought once and then burned up, but something that never dies but is perpetually offered day after day.

[13:03] You know, in some ways, it is much harder to live for someone than to die for someone, isn't it? If you die for someone, say that you push them out of the way of an oncoming car and then you take the hit yourself, it is a one-time deal.

But if you live for someone, like in a marriage, where a husband is called to completely dedicate every area of their life every day to honour their wife or to consider their well-being in every decision that they make, I think all those in a marriage understand how challenging that can be, can't it? you have to do it not just once, but every single day. But that is what sacrificing for God is all about. It is not a one-off, but a daily thing to do. And that's why I call this sacrifice for God a habit. We are meant to ask every day, what can I sacrifice for God?

How can I sacrifice for God? And it is a habit we are to cultivate because, as the end of verse 1 says, this is what true and proper worship is all about.

[14:43] But just before we move on from this point, I want to briefly reflect on why this seems so foreign now to us. sacrifice. You see, I can't help but notice that in recent times, the language of sacrifice has dropped from our Christian vocabulary, hasn't it?

Yes, of course we talk about Jesus' sacrifice, but we seem to talk very little nowadays about our sacrifice for God, perhaps because it might sound legalistic.

And for sure there is a legalistic way of talking about sacrificing for God, and my next point later on, I hope will help us see how we can avoid that, how we can be more gospel-centered about this habit of grace.

But Romans 12, verse 1 is clear, we are to be living sacrifices. It is absolutely essential to be Christian. So why is it we have failed to see this nowadays as part and parcel of our Christian life? Here are three possible reasons. Number one, we have subconsciously bought into self-gratification. Wei Han, who is the director of a missions organization, CMS Victoria, once made the observation that a lot of the books in the Christian bookstores nowadays stress fulfillment.

[16:12] So for example, note the subtitle of a best-selling book, what am I here for? So the emphasis is on your personal fulfillment, finding your purpose.

Or here is the title of another best-selling book, The Secret to Love That Lasts. Again, emphasizing this time, relational fulfillment. Now, these books are not all necessarily bad.

They surely have some good stuff to say. But, Wei Han says, notice the way in which the frame of reference has shifted from sacrifice and suffering as an inevitable part of the Christian life that must be embraced, to fulfillment becoming the main frame of reference.

purpose. And that, he says, seems to move us one step further away from the pattern of scripture and one step closer to the world's pattern, which sees self-gratification as something to pursue. After all, doesn't the world often say, do this or do that because you deserve it. And yet, when Jesus calls us to come and follow him, he is clear.

[17:36] He says, come and die. So, could we have bought into the world's way of thinking a little more than we realize? And then, number two, we have subconsciously bought into self-absorption.

That is when we have unwittingly bought into the lie that what we have is ours, when in fact we are mere stewards of all that we have, even our bodies.

And when we lose sight of this fact, we begin to think in this way. Why do I have to give up my weekend, or my lifestyle, or my me time, or my convenience, when the reality is none of it is actually mine, God's?

We are merely his stewards in his world, using his gifts for his good purposes.

But perhaps we have become self-absorbed. And number three, we have subconsciously bought into self-preservation.

[ 18 : 54 ] sacrifice. So this is when we have redefined the very idea of sacrifice. Sacrifice simply becomes the idea of giving up something.

Now, what's wrong with that? You say, isn't that what sacrifice is? Not quite. We need to add a few more words. Sacrifice is actually the idea of giving up something at a cost to ourselves.

But sometimes we seem to think that the moment it costs something, we shouldn't do it. Oh, so sure, I can help out in that activity, but if it costs me extra time to sleep in, nope, sorry, tak boleh. If it costs me my reputation, nope, not doing it. If it costs me my leisure time, no way. That can be our default attitude.

Now, I am not saying that we should do things in a way that would lead to burnout. We are living, not burnt-out sacrifices, remember?

[ 20 : 08 ] That would be unwise. There is a time to say no to things. But I am challenging us to consider whether we have led self-preservation or to use the modern lingo, self-care become the ultimate value in our lives rather than Jesus.

For that is what we are called to. We are called to get into the habit of making sacrifices in such a way where, yes, sometimes there is a cost.

We have to bear it. sacrifice is meant to shape the whole orientation of our lives. But how can that happen? How is this call of Jesus to come and die to ourselves even possible?

Well, that brings me to my second point, the basis. Because of the sacrifice of God. We sacrifice for God because of the sacrifice of God.

Did you notice what is the very first word of Romans 12, verse 1? Therefore. And of course, whenever you see therefore, you should ask, what is the therefore?

[ 21 : 35 ] Therefore. What does it refer back to? And in fact, verse 1 helpfully sums it up for us. Because before it exhorts us to become living sacrifices, what does it say?

In view of God's mercy. That is really Paul's one-liner for all that he's been talking about in Romans 1 to 11.

You see, in Romans 1 to 11, what is Paul identified as humanity's biggest problem? It is that we don't worship God. And because we don't worship God, we are people whose bodies are used for all sorts of evil.

Look at what Romans 3, verse 13 onwards on the screen says. Our throats are open graves. Our tongues practice deceit. Our lips have nothing but the poison of vipers.

Our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Our feet are swift to shed blood. But Romans tells us God offers mercy.

[ 22 : 46 ] Not because we are worthy of it. We are so obviously not. But precisely because we are not worthy of it. Otherwise, mercy wouldn't be mercy.

mercy. And here is the thing. He offers mercy by also offering a sacrifice. Imagine that.

Religion, we think, is all about what sacrifices we make to God, right? I reckon you can see that in all the major world religions. But in the Christian faith, God also makes a sacrifice.

More than that, he presents himself in the person of his son as a sacrifice. A sacrifice of atonement, satisfying the demands of justice along the way.

And remember, his sacrifice is active. It's voluntary. He chose it. In John 10 verse 18, on the screen, Jesus says, I lay my life down of my own accord.

[ 24 : 02 ] I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father. Jesus chose to do this. He was obeying his father, not being forced into it.

And it is costly. It is no one than God's only begotten son laying down his life for us.

The thing that God asked of us in sacrificing for him, he's done it himself. And this is how he justifies us and gives us a new status, righteous in Christ.

And wonderfully, that is not all. Romans 5 to 8 makes clear that through the sacrifice, he also gives us a new heart, a new life, with new desires.

He has given us his spirit. And in so doing, we now see what kind of God we are worshipping. We see who we are making sacrifices for.

[ 25 : 13 ] We see his character. You see, Paul spent 11 whole chapters making sure that we see God's mercies for what it really is, before he gets to the exhortation of chapter 12, doesn't he?

Because he knows, end of chapter 11, that we need to take in the depths of the riches and of the wisdom of God. The incredible way that he shows mercy before he can say to us, now go present yourselves as a living sacrifice.

You see, when we see the fullness of all that God has done for us, that is when it will make total sense to go sacrifice for God.

In fact, that is what the end of verse 1 is getting at. You would see that it says that this is your proper worship before God, or if you have the older NIV, it says your spiritual act of worship. and that word translated proper or spiritual in the Greek is actually the word *logikan*, which actually means logical or rational.

[ 26 : 36 ] The point Paul is making is that you would want to offer your bodies as living sacrifices because in the end, it is actually the only reasonable response you can make do not do so is actually irrational in light of what God has done.

And so how can we cultivate this habit? Only by constantly feeding on God's grace shown to us. That's why we constantly survey the wonderful cross.

That's why we constantly feed our minds with those wonderful truths that God accepts us not on the basis of our performance but on the basis of the death of his son.

That he has brought peace where there was hostility between us and him. That he has poured out his spirit into us so that we might have hope that never disappoints us.

These are all truths that we can ponder with wonder so that we can turn our hearts and turn to him. It is the gospel alone that ensures we can be living sacrifices.

[ 27 : 58 ] But now let's get into the nitty-gritty. What does sacrificing for God look like? Now the full answer is actually found in the whole of Romans 12 to 16.

read on and you'll discover what it looks like in our service to outsiders or to the government or to our weaker brothers and sisters.

But for today I would just like to concentrate on the verses immediately following verse 1. And this moves me to my third point for today. By mutually sacrificing for one another.

We sacrifice for God because of the sacrifice of God that's the first two points by mutually sacrificing for one another.

That's the third point. Now so far in our series the habits that I've been concentrating on have been fairly individualistic in nature haven't they?

[ 29 : 01 ] We've talked about confessing and meditating and those are things that we typically do on our own. today's habit can sound quite individualistic too.

But someone pointed out to me this week something that I haven't really thought about before. Look again at verse 1. Notice how Paul phrases it. He asks us to offer our bodies plural not singular.

And he's addressing not just another individual but rather his brothers and sisters again plural. He seems to think of this habit not merely in individualistic but communal terms.

He seems to think that becoming living sacrifices is something we do together. And that is confirmed by what he says next. Paul, having already told us to offer our actual bodies to God, now moves on to develop the now familiar idea of the church as a body in verses 4 and 5.

And there are two things he wants to communicate in those verses. Firstly, he wants us to remember that although our bodies all individually belong to Christ, we also collectively form one body.

[ 30 : 28 ] We are united by faith in Jesus Christ. And if that is true, then secondly, we don't just belong to God, we belong to one another.

Just as the members and organs of our body, our physical body, are interconnected and interdependent on one another, this too is true of us as Christians.

that means here at KEC, you belong not just to yourselves, but to one another. Kenny belongs to Libat, Sharon belongs to Jeanette, and so on.

And if so, then one big way we sacrifice for God is to use all the gifts we have to love the church. That's what verses 6 to 8 are all about.

We are all blessed with different gifts. They are a product of God's grace to us. And God says, whatever gift you've been given, use it in a sacrificial way to serve others.

[ 31 : 41 ] That's how you have to be a living sacrifice. Whatever you can do, go do it. are you able to provide a listening ear?

And are you good at saying the right thing at the right time? Then go. Encourage others. Are you good at playing a certain instrument?

Or you know your way around technical equipment? Then go. Serve others. The point seems to be, by being a Christian, you definitely have a ministry, whatever that might be.

And in fact, if you are not serving in any way, the implication seems to be your worship hasn't quite attained its true and proper form.

And so that is a challenge to us. If today you are not serving in any way, what is stopping you? What is keeping you from responding to the mercies of God?

[ 32 : 50 ] And in fact, this morning, we want to give you every chance to start cultivating this habit of grace, rather than forget what God said to you as soon as this service is over. And so that's why this morning, in the courtyard, after the service, many of our various ministries will be setting up tables, booths, where you can go and chat to them, get more information about what you're doing, and also to express your interest in serving.

And so if the Lord is speaking to you this morning, don't resist him. Don't hold back your worship. But perhaps in your mind you have some nagging thoughts, thoughts that might prevent you from serving.

if so, then Paul reminds you, verse 2, do not conform to the pattern of this world. Don't think the way the world thinks. Now, how might the world think regarding serving?

There are several ways. The world's way of thinking could be, oh, I'm too good and too important for some of these ministries.

In which case, here is how Paul answers verse 3. Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought. But, I suspect that is not how many or most of us actually think.

[ 34 : 20 ] Rather, I think the problem lies in the opposite direction. We could think instead, oh, I'm no good at anything. I'm useless at everything.

So, oh yeah, oh well, too bad. Cannot serve. But, that can also be a kind of pride too. Masquerading as false humility.

And, Paul says that is not what he is getting at. Look at verse 3 again. How are we to think in a way that doesn't conform to the pattern of this world? It is to think of yourself with sober judgment.

So, notice he doesn't say think lowly of yourself. He doesn't say, oh, make sure to think of yourself in the worst possible way. No, he says the best way is to judge yourself accurately.

It is to be honest about yourself. You see, when you study yourself, you might know that you are actually good at a particular thing. It's not that you are boasting about it.

[ 35 : 28 ] It's just true. Maybe you are pretty good with helping kids to understand something. or maybe you are good with figures. You have so far proven yourself to be at work, to be a person who can handle money, who can be trusted with money, with integrity.

So, if that is you, don't think of yourselves too highly, but don't think you have nothing to offer either. The body of Christ needs you.

And remember, if we are all members of the same body, that means you need them too. We are interconnected and interdependent.

Remember? And so that is one really big way to apply today's habit. We sacrifice for God because of the sacrifice of God by mutually sacrificing for one another.

Now, that doesn't exhaust what it means to be a living sacrifice. Because of time, we won't have a chance to look at other examples, but let me encourage you not just to read Romans 12-16, but also read through the book of Philippians and keep asking yourself as you do so.

[ 36 : 50 ] In what way does either Paul or members of the Philippian church keep sacrificing for God and for one another?

In what ways is Paul or members of the Philippian church sacrificing for God and for one another? I think you will find numerous examples in the way they sacrifice to make sure that the gospel is heard by non-believers, for instance, or in the way that they give financially.

but let me end by just reading one little section of Philippians to you. Let's turn to Philippians chapter 3 verse 7-14.

It's on the screen. I'm going to read this all out. verse 7-14. But whatever would gain to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is true faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

[ 38 : 09 ] I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the

dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of this, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

And I just want you to notice just one thing. Paul says ultimately when it comes to knowing Jesus more and more, he's willing to give up everything.

And that is what I want to encourage all of us to keep striving for. Use every opportunity to know Jesus more, because really it is the only way to keep on being a living sacrifice, to cultivate this habit of grace.

Keep going to Jesus in confession and meditation so that you might keep sacrificing. And as Tim Keller says, if you go to Jesus, he may ask of you far more than you originally planned to give, but he can give you infinitely more than you dared ask or think.

[ 39 : 53 ] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you now, and we come first of all thanking you for the sacrifice of Jesus, thanking you for the atonement that he has made, for the mercy that we have found in him, for the relationship we can have with you, our gracious and generous God.

Father, in view of God's mercy, of your mercy, I pray that you help us to respond in the only way possible, which is to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, to offer it as our true and proper and rational worship.

help us today to consider how we might do that, especially in the way we serve one another, in the ministries that we could possibly get involved in.

Please help us not to resist what you're saying to us. Help us to be willing to give that up to you, knowing that that is the best thing that we could possibly do.

Help us not to think too lowly or too highly of ourselves, but with sober judgment, so that we can discern what gifts we have that can be used for your glory.

[ 41 : 23 ] All this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.