

Romans 12:1

“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.”

In this passage, the apostle Paul is beseeching us. To beseech, according to Webster’s New World College Dictionary, is to ask earnestly; to entreat or implore almost in a begging manner. Paul is calling us to present our bodies a living sacrifice. The reason we must present our bodies as a living sacrifice is because the condition of our spiritual heart is shown outwardly in the whole of our lives, mainly through the use of our bodies. You might ask how somebody could be a living sacrifice. God showed Adam and Eve how sacrifices were to be made when he killed the animal that clothed them after their fall into sin (Genesis 3:21). In the very next chapter, we read that Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground was not acceptable unto God, as Abel’s offering of the firstlings of his flock was pleasing. In Exodus 12, the Passover was instituted. Verse five tells us that the sacrifice had to be a one-year-old male lamb without blemish. When Aaron was ordained as priest, the LORD said that the firstlings of a cow or sheep or goat were to be sacrifices of a sweet savor to the LORD. Many passages in Scripture tell us that this lamb without blemish or spot was a picture of Christ’s sacrifice of himself on the cross in our stead. John 1:29, 36 call Jesus the Lamb of God. I Peter 1:18-19 tells us that we are redeemed by his blood, and Hebrews 9-10 assure us that he is the one sufficient sacrifice. The sacrifice of many animals is not needed anymore since Christ has come as our one complete sacrifice and savior. Revelation 5:12-13 worships the Lamb that was slain, as described in Isaiah 53:7. However, if the saints have overcome deceitful Satan by the blood of the Lamb, as Revelation 12:9ff tells us, to what purpose would the multitude of sacrifices be unto God (Isaiah 1:11)? He doesn’t delight in these. So why would Paul be imploring, almost commanding, us to be living sacrifices?

Surely we cannot all become ordained to work in the house of the Lord, as Samuel was “sacrificed” by Hannah to God in this manner (I Samuel 1-2). Surely we will not be tested as Abraham was in Genesis 22 to offer up our children as a sacrifice. And certainly to be a living sacrifice we do not need to be literal burnt offerings to the Lord, as Jephthah’s daughter was (Judges 11:29-46).

No; to present yourselves a living sacrifice is to be washed, made clean, to put away the evil doings from before the eyes of the Lord, to cease to do evil, to learn to do well, to seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless and plead for the widow. In being willing and obedient, we are living sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11-20). In I Samuel 15:22, Samuel asks, “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These sacrifices of righteousness please the LORD (Psalm 51:16-19). Proverbs 21:3 and Mark 12:33 show us that to do justice and judgement, as well as to love God with all our heart, understanding, soul, and strength, along with loving our neighbors, are more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. The Lord desires mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

To present ourselves a living sacrifice then is to follow God, as his dear children, walking in love as Christ has loved us (Ephesians 5:1-2). Christ has “given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.” Becoming living sacrifices is part of bearing the name Christian (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 12, Question and Answer 32).

But what does it mean to be a holy living sacrifice? To be holy is to be pure and separate. This is our reasonable service, our whole life devoted to serving him. Not because he is a tyrant and we are his slaves, but because we love and praise him in thankfulness for sending his only begotten Son to pay the price for our sins in his love for us (I John 4:10). We are his children, and we love him, so we must show in our lives that we belong to him. Yet we are able to do this only by the mercies of God, as the apostle Paul tells us. It is through God’s gifts to us that we are able to give back an offering or sacrifice to the Lord. Through the gift of faith we are able to offer up the sweet savor of our prayers to him. Through our various talents we are able to praise him. Through the commandments we obey him. Through covenant ministers, parents, teachers, and friends we can learn of his truths and continue to grow in the body of the Church. We can present our selves living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God through the blessings which he has bestowed upon us, for “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things” (Romans 11:36). In obeying the law and taking joy in him, we carry out the calling God has given to each of us. Psalter number 109 sings of this wondrous fact: “The offering on the altar burned Gives no delight to Thee; The hearing ear, the willing heart, Thou givest unto me. Then, O my God, I come, I come, Thy purpose to fulfill; Thy law is written in my heart, ‘Tis joy to do Thy will.”

Being a living sacrifice is to hear him, to love him, and to obey him by heeding his will for us in every aspect of our lives, which we do only by his grace and Spirit.