

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles, please to Romans 12. I’ve been preaching through the book of Romans, verse after verse, for a year and a half. In May, we took a four-week break to talk about families, and now we are back in Romans. We will go verse by verse through the rest of the book. It will take us pretty much the rest of 1999. As we are coming to this section, it begins the third of the three major sections of Romans. Let’s review where we have been.

Romans 1-8 talks about God’s righteousness declared. God is a righteous God. Because we are sinful men and women, we must receive the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ. Romans 1-8 is all about that process, how we are justified by faith, how we are being sanctified by the Spirit of Jesus, and how one day in the future, we will be glorified. That is God’s righteousness declared.

Then we came to chapters 9-11, and suddenly we ask the question, “Well, if God is a righteous God and He keeps His word, what about the Jews today?” And that is God’s righteousness defended. We talked about how God is still holding out His hands all day long to the nation of Israel, and how He still has a plan for them.

Then we come now to the third of three sections, and we begin the section, God’s righteousness displayed through me and through you. This is the very practical part of the book. It is, “What do you do now once you understand who you are in Christ Jesus?” So we begin that today with a very practical section of chapter 12:1-2.

He says, “Therefore” I told you before, never start with a verse that says therefore. You always see what is it there for, so you go back and read the words before it. Glance back up in Chapter 11, the last verse. “For from him (that’s Jesus) and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever and ever amen. (And because God is such a great and mighty and awesome God,) therefore, (Paul writes) I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, (that’s what we’re going to be talking about today, offering your bodies as a living sacrifice) holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” The title of the message today is “Your supreme act of worship.” That is one side of the coin. Here is the other side of the transaction, verse 2. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern (the word is “schemata,” schematic) of this world, but be transformed (it is the word metamorphosis) by the renewing of your mind. Then you’ll be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Now, the problem with a lot of Christians (and maybe some of you who are in this room) is that you are only involved in a Christian religion or you are merely participating in church work. It is like the conversation that took place in the barnyard between a hen and a pig. The hen and the pig were talking to each other, discussing the problem of human hunger around the world. They decided they would do something about it. So the hen said to the pig, “All right, this is what we’ll do. Because people are hungry, this is what I propose. I propose that every morning, we provide a ham and egg breakfast to hungry people.” The pig looked at the hen, and said, “For you that only requires involvement; for me it requires total commitment.”

Some of us are like that hen; we are just sort of involved. We give a little bit here; give a little bit there. This passage of scripture is talking about a pig kind of commitment, total commitment. We are giving all that we have and all that we are to Jesus.

I. MAKE A SACRIFICE TO GOD

There are two sides to this transaction. Verse 1 is the positive side, something to do. Verse 2 is the negative, what not to do. Let’s talk about both of them. Number one, if you want to make a total commitment to Jesus, you make a sacrifice to God. I know we have thrown this word “sacrifice” around a lot, especially last year when we were in our Discover the Joy campaign. When you hear the word “sacrifice,” you may be thinking, “What is it going to cost me? Is it going to hurt my pocketbook?” We are not talking about giving some *thing*; we are talking about giving *yourself*. I want you to notice four things about the living sacrifice we are to make to God.

1. It is a permanent sacrifice

Would you look, please, at chapter 12:1. “...in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies...” Look at that word “offer.” It is the same word that was used in the Old Testament of the priest who would go up to the altar in front of the temple. He would take a living animal, whether it was a lamb, a goat or an ox and he would lay that animal down and take a very sharp knife, and point it to the throat of that animal and sever its jugular vein. The blood would pour out and he would even collect the blood. That was part of the sacrificial system. What would they do with that animal? They would cook it, barbecue it, or roast it. That was part of the Jewish sacrificial system. The same word for a priest who offered an animal as a sacrifice is the word that is here. Offer yourself.

Now, I want you to pay close attention for a moment, because this is why preachers learn Greek, so we can read it in the original language. You know it would make more sense to me if I told you that offering yourself is something you should do all the time – you do it Monday, you do it Tuesday, you do it Wednesday, you do it four or five times a day. But, that is not what the text says. The word “offer” is the word *paristasis*, which is in the “aorist,” meaning it is a once-for-all transaction. I would be misleading you as your pastor and preacher if I told you it is something you do all the time. Those words “offer your body” mean one time you do it; a one-time transaction.

It is like a friend of mine, Rick Ellison, who was Minister of Education in my former church. His wife, Sheila, developed a kidney disease and needed a transplant. Do you know what Rick did? Rick offered one of his kidneys to his wife for a kidney transplant. What an unselfish thing to do. They both went into the hospital, they removed one of Rick’s kidneys, gave it to Sheila, and they are both doing well right now. Where am I going with that? Rick did not say, “Here, you can have my kidney today, you can have it tomorrow and the next day.” No, it was a one-time deal, only one time that he gave his kidney to his wife, and now she is living because of that.

The Bible says that you offer yourself to God and it is something you do one time. This is the point I want to make, that a lot of people are confused about.

Total surrender is better than repeated re-dedications

I think one of the problems we have today in the church is that people think that all you have to do is keep on rededicating, keep on rededicating. If you are the kind of person who must continually rededicate yourself, friend, you don't know the true nature of dedication.

Sometimes people ask me, “Pastor, I notice in our church when you give the invitation, you don't ask for people to come down and rededicate their lives. Why don't you do that, because sometimes I want to rededicate my life?” I have a deep feeling that we do a disservice to people by telling them that all they have to do is rededicate.

In one of my churches in Alabama, every time I gave the invitation, a lady came down the aisle, boom, she was the first one out, running down to the front to shake my hand. “I just want to rededicate my life to Jesus.” I said, “Bless you darling.” She would go back every single Sunday. I know some people who have worn their own little private pathway in the carpet of the aisle of the church going down to rededicate. If you are dedicated, you don't have to keep rededicating.

That is kind of like that marriage renewal ceremony we did a couple of weeks ago. People said, “That was so great.” But do you know what made it special, friend? It is not something you do often. If we did that every month at Green Acres Baptist Church, would it be special? If you and your spouse did it every week, would it be special? No. The fact that we only do it about every five years or so makes it special. There are times that you reaffirm your commitment to Jesus Christ, but this idea about continually rededicating, rededicating, rededicating, goes exactly against what this verse is saying. “Once and for all, God, here I am. Here it is God.” Surrender.

I like the music of Ray Stephens, because it makes me laugh. A lot of times when I'm speaking to the senior adults, I'll take my guitar and do this Ray Stevens song, entitled the “Mississippi Squirrel Song.” It is about a kid who captures a squirrel, and the song goes like this:

I was sitting way back on the very back pew,
And I was showing him to my good buddy, Hugh,
When that squirrel got loose and went totally berserk.
What happened next was hard to tell.
Some thought it was heaven and some thought it was hell.
But the fact that something was among us was plain to see.
As the choir sang, “I Surrender All,”
That squirrel crawled up Harv Newman's coveralls.
Harv leaped to his feet and said,
“Something's got a hold on me!”
As he fell to his knees to plead and beg,
The squirrel ran out of his britches leg,
Unobserved to the other side of the room.

CHORUS:

The day the squirrel went berserk
In the First Self-Righteous Church,

In that sleepy little town of Pascagoula.
It was a fight for survival
That broke out in revival.
They was jumping pews
And shouting "Hallelujah."
I love the last stanza:
Well, seven deacons and the pastor got saved,
And \$25,000 dollars got raised,
And 50 volunteered for missions
In the Congo on the spot.
And even without an invitation,
There was at least 500 re-dedications.
We all got re-baptized,
Whether we needed it or not.

That reminds me of some services, just 500 re-dedications. "I'm going to rededicate, I'm going to rededicate." This verse is not talking about rededication. This verse is talking about a one-time total surrender of your life to God. I'm here to ask you today, "Have you done that?" Don't you get tired of rededication? Try dedication. Try commitment. It is a permanent sacrifice.

2. It is a personal sacrifice

He says, "Offer your bodies." He is talking to people individually. You see, this group of believers called Green Acres Baptist Church, is a body of believers. And of course, we offer ourselves to God, but that is not what it is talking about. It is talking about your individual bodies, one-on-one, something that you do.

What God wants from you is you

He doesn't want your money; He doesn't want your time; He doesn't want your talents. He wants you. If you give Him you, all those other things come along. I heard about a young man who was in a worship service and felt God was calling him. The offering plate was being passed and he had absolutely no money to give that night. When the offering plate came to him, he picked it up, excused himself, walked out of the pew, stood in the aisle, put the offering plate down on the floor, and then stepped into the plate. "Here I am, Lord, I'm yours." Sometimes the reason we don't like the idea about sacrifice is because that anytime we sacrifice, we give up something.

One of the biggest problems we have in churches today is that people are still coming, trying to receive something, rather than to give something. I still have people tell me, "I didn't receive much from that worship service. I didn't like that music" (as if it was intended for your consumption), "I didn't like that sermon. I didn't get anything out of it." Well, friend, the whole point of coming to worship is not to get something; it is to offer something, to sacrifice something. That is what it is all about. There are people who don't go to church anymore because they say, "I don't get anything out of it." Friend, don't come to receive something. You come to give something. If you give something, you will generally receive something out of it.

I heard about a family who visited a church. As they were leaving the church parking lot, the daddy says, “That was the worst sermon I ever heard. It was long, it was boring; it was awful.” The wife in the passenger seat chimed in, “Yeah, the music was awful too. It was off-key, too loud, and I didn’t like those songs.” The teenage girl said, “Yeah, the people weren’t very friendly either.” The little kid who had watched his dad when the offering plate was passed, said, “Dad, you’ve got to admit it was a pretty good show for a quarter, wasn’t it?” You usually get out of something what you put into it.

3. It is a physical sacrifice

He said, “Offer your bodies.” I don’t know about you, but wouldn’t it make more sense if God had said, “Offer your spirit to God. Offer your soul to God?” That is not what it says. It says, “Offer your bodies.” We can either offer our bodies to sin or we can offer our bodies to God. Look at Romans 6:13, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”

When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome, Greek philosophy was prevalent. If you know about Greek philosophy, you know they made a deep division or dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, between the body and the soul. For instance, they believed back in the time this book was written that it didn’t matter what you did with your body. You could do anything with your body you wanted to, as long as you were noble and honest in your soul. That is why there were members of the Roman Senate who could conduct political business, and that same very night go to some terrible orgy and commit sexual immorality with prostitutes, and be totally drunk out of their minds. The next day they would go back, put on their clean fresh togas and conduct business. They said that what you did with your body didn’t matter as long as your mind was right. Sounds like Washington, D.C., doesn’t it?

That is why the Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, said, “What? Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but you are not your own; you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are God’s.” That is why Paul said, “Listen, guys, when you connect your body with the prostitute, you are part of that prostitute.” That is what this whole passage is about. God wants your body. He wants every part of your body.

I love Bud Robinson, who was a great Nazarene preacher. One reason I love him is because, like me, he always saw the funny things in life and the funny things in the Christian life. He was leading a service one time and when he gave the invitation, and a lady came down the aisle. She was known as one of the most notorious gossips in town. Everybody knew it. She came to the front and she said to Bro. Bud, “Oh, Bro. Bud, God has convicted me, and I came tonight to lay my tongue on the altar.” Bud said, “Our altar’s only twelve feet long, but do the best you can.” God wants us to do that. He wants us to give Him our tongues. Some of you may cuss and claim to be Christians. You say, “I can say what I want to, it’s my tongue.” Excuse me, not if you have offered it to God, it is not your tongue. Or “I can consume whatever I want to, it’s my body.” Excuse me, not if you have offered it to God, it is not your body. Does God really want my

body? That is what it says. My body is fat; I have B.O., halitosis and bad hair days. It gets tired and it aches. You are saying God wants this body? Yes, He wants this body.

Well, I had better clean it up then. I need to fix it up before I offer it to Him. No, friend, we will never fix it up good enough. The whole point is we offer it to Him just as it is, just as we are. Then he starts working on it; He starts fixing it.

4. It is a practical sacrifice

It is a living sacrifice. Remember I told you the priest would put an animal on the altar and kill it? That was it; the animal was dead. That is what makes our sacrifice a different kind of sacrifice. We are still alive, and God wants us to be a sacrifice but to keep on living for Jesus. Let me ask you a couple of questions here.

Would you die for Jesus?

Just think about that for a moment.

Will you live for Jesus?

This week when I was at youth camp, I talked to our kids about Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two shooters at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. At 11:16 on April 20, they entered the school property, whipping out automatic rifles and shotguns from under their black trench coats, went into the cafeteria and started shooting, while screaming, “All jocks must die.” Then after awhile, they went upstairs to the library, which is on the second floor of Columbine High School, and started shooting up there.

As many of you know by now, they approached a young 17-year-old girl by the name of Cassie Bernall. Cassie was a beautiful girl who had long blond hair all the way down to her waist. A couple of years earlier, she had been really confused and messed up. She had gotten into witchcraft, demonology, horoscopes and the occult, but at youth camp when she was 15 years old, she met Jesus and was born again. She was totally transformed. Two days before she was killed, she taped a video for her youth group where she was looking to the camera, smiling, and saying, “I just couldn’t live without Jesus.” This beautiful little 17-year-old girl, whose favorite movie was “Braveheart,” was so unselfish she had decided just that week she was going to cut her beautiful long hair off and give it to an organization that made wigs for children with cancer and had lost their hair.

Cassie was approached by one of the gunman, and he pointed a shotgun at her and asks, “Do you believe?” Freeze-frame there for a minute. Ask yourself, what would you do if somebody did that? Knowing that if you said, “No, I don’t believe,” you could probably continue on living physically. But suspecting if you said, “Yeah, I believe in God,” it is going to end your physical life. We may think that will never happen to us. I’ll bet that morning, Cassie thought it would never happen to her either. Cassie Bernall looked at that shooter and said, “Yes, I believe.” In a split second, she is in the arms of Jesus, and He is welcoming her home, His servant. She died for Jesus. She really is a modern-day martyr. I honor her today.

But, do you know what I think? I think in a lot of ways, it is easier to die for Jesus than it is to live for Jesus. I honestly believe that for many of us, if somebody pointed a gun at our head and said, “Either renounce Christ or die,” we would say, “I will not renounce Christ” and, boom, we would go on to glory. That’s one thing but it is another thing when we go to work tomorrow or go to school, and somebody points a temptation or points a challenge at us, sometimes it is even harder to live for Jesus than it is to die for Jesus.

This is a sacrifice that is so practical we live it out day by day by day; that is what makes it unusual, it is a living sacrifice. So on one side of the transaction you say, “God, here I am, I offer my body to you as your sacrifice.” The other side of the coin is verse 2, “Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” How do you do that?

II. MAINTAIN SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

You maintain separation from the world.

1. The world wants to shape you into its own pattern

The world is trying to pressure us to act like everybody else, to look like everybody else, to dress like everybody else. That is why everybody is so interested in designer labels. We must listen to a certain kind of music or use a certain product. The world is trying to make everybody exactly the same. When we talk about “the world,” whom are we talking about? Not the world of people, because John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son.” We are not talking about the world of nature, because the Bible says, “the heavens declare the glories of God.”

The Biblical definition of “the world” is “mankind without God”

It is the mindset, the philosophy, the thinking that says, “I don’t need God.”

This verse says, “Don’t be forced into the pattern of the world.” That word “pattern” is the word “schemata.” What is the scheme of the world? Here is what the world tries to teach you.

Look out for number one!

The world or the devil doesn’t want us to disbelieve in God. The devil is not trying to get us to renounce God. The devil and the world are trying to get us to live for ourselves, to make “self” God. I better watch out for myself, because if I don’t watch out for myself, nobody else is. I’ve got to promote myself, protect myself, I’ve got to get myself up where I need to be. If I don’t do it, nobody else will.

That is just the opposite of what the Bible teaches the Christian life is. The Christian life is one of surrender, a life of service, where you give yourself away to God, give yourself away to others. You don’t think first, “How is it going to affect me?” You think first, “How is it going to

honor God?” You and I are supposed to be different from the world. That is where the word “holy” comes into being, holy and acceptable to God.

A lot of people don't understand what holiness is. Some people think you don't wear makeup, you don't wear pants if you're a lady, or you don't play cards, or you don't smoke or drink or chew or date boys that do. And if you are really holy, you don't go to movies. If you are really, really holy, you sell your television. That is what we think holiness is, something you do or don't do.

Do you know what the word “holy” means? It means that you are different, set apart. You do not think like the world, you do not act like the world. I heard about a parade one time, and there was a marching band participating in this parade. Everybody was marching in sequence, in step, except for one band member and he was totally out of step with the rest of the band. When you looked closer at that guy that was out of step, you could notice that he had on a set of headphones, and he was listening to a totally different song. It really is true that when it comes to me and you and the world, we march out of step from the world. The world is goose-stepping in a certain pattern. And you and I, because we are in Christ Jesus, we are listening to a different song; a different tune and we have a different pace of life. The world points a finger at us and says, “You guys are weird. You are strange. You are peculiar.” We say, “Thank you very much.” Notice what the Bible says about the world, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” Here is the other side of it.

2. God wants to change you to think differently

It says in verse 2, “...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It does not mean that you change yourself. It means God changes you, and then you start thinking differently. In fact, it says in 1 Corinthians 13:11, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” Paul is saying, “Before I came to Christ, there was one way I thought, one way I acted, and it was like everybody else, like the world. Now that I became a man in Christ, everything is different. I think about things differently.”

Just as a caterpillar metamorphoses into a butterfly, and just as a tadpole metamorphoses into a frog, God wants to take every one of us and he wants to metamorphose us into a different kind of person who thinks differently and acts differently. Our job is to repent. What does it mean to repent? In the Bible,

To repent means a change of mind that leads to changed conduct

We start looking at things differently, and the things we used to like, we don't like anymore.

When I was in the first grade, I was an outstanding kickball player. Do you remember kickball? The pitcher would roll that big old soft rubber ball, and the person at bat (or at kick) would take a running start and, boom, would kick that ball and run around the bases. I want you to know, I got a home run nearly every time I kicked that thing. I was the best one in my grade and I was

always picked first in kickball. I decided in the first grade I was going to be a professional kickball player. I was going to be a star in the National Kickball League one day when I grew up.

Something kind of strange happened between my first and second grade year. I was watching television, and saw this fellow by the name of Mickey Mantle. He had this bat in his hand, and somebody threw a ball at him, and he hit that over the fence. When I saw that, I said, “I don’t want to play kickball anymore.” I forgot all about kickball when I discovered baseball, because it was just something better. That is the story of the Christian life. Once you discover the life that Jesus has for you, you are going to say about your past, about the way the world does it, “Forget about that. I want to be the person Jesus wants me to be.”

I told you earlier that this idea of dedicating your body to God is a one-time transaction. There may be some of you in this room, who say, “I’ve never done that.” I want to give you a chance to do that right now. I would like for you to bow your heads, but I don’t really want you to close your eyes. I would like you to glance down at this little contract I have prepared, because it may express what you want to do right now. I’m not going to force you to do this. We are not even going to check this; you are not going to turn it in. It is just between you and God. Maybe you want to enter into a contract with God right now.

Contract between God and (your name)

Just put your name there. Here is your part of the transaction. “I hereby surrender, once for all, my body (that means my mouth, my feet, my eyes, my hands, my arms), my soul and my spirit to God. I am totally available to God.” _____

If that expresses your desire right now, maybe you just want to sign that and consider it between you and God. If you do your part, God says, “I hereby promise to transform you into a totally different (and much better) person. I further promise to meet all your needs and to supply all the resources necessary to accomplish my will.”

For some of you today, that is what you need to do, to be the person God always intended you to be. Let’s pray.

Lord, I do pray in these moments there will be some people who won’t rededicate their lives, but instead would dedicate, would surrender to you totally, once and for all, I am yours, Lord, everything I am, everything I have, I’m yours. And I pray, Lord, that you would take them and change them. Change the way they think, change them into the kind of person you’ve always wanted them to be. I pray that you’ll let them know that their life is now different. I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

OUTLINE

I. MAKE A SACRIFICE TO GOD (12:1)

1. A permanent sacrifice – “offer”

Total surrender is better than repeated rededications

2. A personal sacrifice – “your”

What God wants from you is you

3. A physical sacrifice – “body”

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. *Romans 6:13*

4. A practical sacrifice – “living”

Would you die for Jesus?

Will you live for Jesus?

II. MAINTAIN SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD (12:2)

1. The world wants to shape you into its pattern

“The world” = mankind without God

“pattern” = Look out for #1!

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. *1 John 2:17*

2. God wants to change you to think differently

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. *1 Corinthians 13:11*

“Repent” = A change of mind that leads to changed conduct

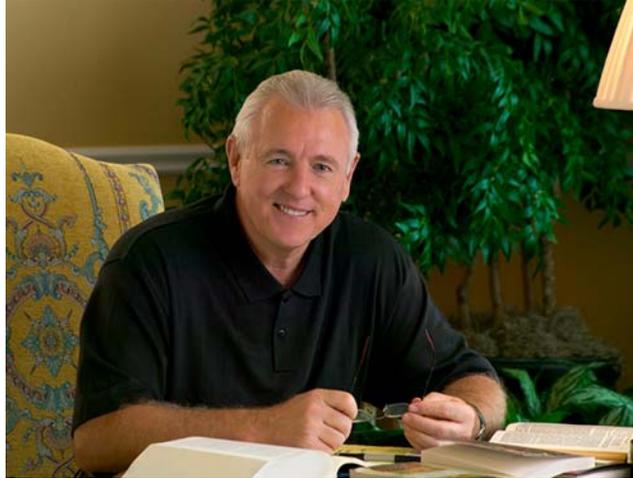
Contract between God and (your name)

I hereby surrender once-for-all my body, soul, and spirit to God. I am totally available to God.

(Your signature)

I hereby promise to transform you into a totally different (and much better) person. I further promise to meet all your needs and to supply all the resources necessary to accomplish my will.

The Lord God Jehovah



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes