

Somebody Else's Child: As an Individual, What Would You Give Up For...

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All right, so this morning we're going to be looking at Romans, chapter 12, verses 1-8. But before we get there, Pat, I really don't think you have to worry about not being good at announcements! Thank you, Choir. But that being what it is, I want to point out I brought up my certificate because I want everybody to know that you are now stuck with me and I am stuck with you! Would you please stand with me as we read from God's Word?

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of the faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we though many are one, one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophesy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

This is the word of God, and we are grateful for it. Please be seated

Now Paul, in the book of Romans from chapter 1 to chapter 11, leading up to where we find ourselves in chapter 12, has explained that the gospel is God's power for all people, because in it the righteousness of God is revealed. He shows how God's wrath is revealed against unrighteousness, whether you are Jew or Gentile. Whether you are aware of God's law or unaware of God's law, the very nature of the created order condemns you, and in that condemnation, there is no excuse and no defense. Paul explains how righteousness was declared through the death and resurrection of Christ, and how you can obtain that righteousness through faith. He explains how Jesus's sacrifice is what set you free. He describes the hope and life that comes in the Spirit because Jesus has triumphed over your sin, and the freedom that comes from God's faithfulness to His promises. This is the source of every Christian's gratefulness and hope. This is why we are here this morning, because we have accepted the truth of all these things. In our passage today, Paul is transitioning from that theological magnum opus to instruction. He is answering the question, "How now shall we live?" And the answer is: We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices. We are to worship our God in sacrifice. So, I want to look at three facets of this worship, this sacrifice. First, I want to look at how our sacrifice needs to be born out of gratefulness. Secondly, our sacrifice is obligatory, but we should not worship out of obligation. And finally, I want to talk a little bit about how our sacrifice, though individual, is also community. So, Paul starts, "I appeal to you, therefore..." What he is arguing then comes from everything that came before it.

Now, as I was getting ready for my first deployment, I was responsible for all of the security clearances in our organization. The government had decided in its wisdom that

before we submit somebody for a security clearance, we probably ought to determine whether or not they actually have a chance at getting a security clearance. And so we were looking at those things that could be exploited by our enemy. I knew everybody that had been divorced and the messiness of those divorces. I knew everybody who was struggling financially. I knew everybody who had gone to court, to jail, and even to prison. And I had to evaluate whether or not they would have a security clearance. Now every battalion has a sergeant major and our sergeant major was no different. He actually came before me, and I got to lay out his life and look at it and determine whether or not he could get a security clearance. And in the process of that I discovered that he had one significant problem that is actually not that different than the problem every one of us face today, some of us more than others: We are old. This sergeant major was old, and because of his age, he was having to fight to be able to go on this deployment. He had four significant medical issues, and he had to go before a medical review board for each one of them and argue why he should be let forward into a combat theater of operations. And so now he's in front of me. He's very clearly stressed out.

Our sergeant major, you need to know, is the stereotypical sergeant major. If you have seen "We Were Soldiers" with Sam Elliot, that's our Sergeant Major. One time we were doing a simple training. When we got out of our vehicle all we had to do was prove to the big army that we could, in fact, look for explosives by looking first close by and then looking far away. This is a test we had to pass. So, I get out of my vehicle. I didn't realize that the sergeant major was sitting in the seat behind me, and he got out of the vehicle at the same time. As I looked to the left for the explosives, and then I looked to the right, I actually flagged the sergeant major. I pointed my rifle at the sergeant major! Do you know how I know this? I know this because I ended up flat on my behind up against the Humvee with him in my face saying, "Don't ever do that again, Lieutenant!" That's your stereotypical sergeant major.

And here he is before me and I just asked the question, "Why are you doing this?" This man had fought in Vietnam as an infantryman in the Marine Corps. When he started a story with, "There we were, knee deep in hand grenade pins..." it was a good possibility that he needed enough hand grenades in that situation for there to be a pile of pins at his feet, for real. And so I said, "Sergeant Major, nobody would hold it against you if you sat this one out. You have done your bit for king and country." And I will never forget his answer. He said, "Lieutenant, when I was young, I went to Vietnam. And I suspected that there were dark days ahead of us, but I had no idea what those dark days were. What I found in those dark days was that it was the old guys that got us through it. And now that I'm an old guy, I couldn't stand myself if I didn't fight to be able to go."

Paul is telling us that here that our worship and our willingness to sacrifice is born out of our gratefulness for the sacrifice that has gone before us. The sacrifice of God is significant enough that we should be grateful enough to make a sacrifice. But think back over your life to all of the people who have made sacrifices on behalf of your salvation, those people, that if it was not for them, you would not be sitting here today discussing what Paul is telling us in chapter 12. Our worship and our willingness to sacrifice is born out of gratefulness.

So now let's look at our obligation. "Brothers, by the mercies of God present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." If this sounds suspiciously like the Old Testament, it's because Paul is alluding to the Old

Testament sacrificial system. One of the challenges that I have faced theologically is the difference between the New and the Old Testament. First, the New Testament is written in Greek and the Old Testament is written in Hebrew. So, it's really hard to say, "Here's an idea in the Greek. Where do I find it in the Old Testament?" Here is an example of a New Testament writer alluding specifically to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The good news is that almost 300 years before the birth of Christ, 72 Hebrew scholars got together and wrote a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. You can look at the New Testament Greek for Greek. (I wish I'd have known that before I went into seminary! If I had an English copy of that, that would have saved me like 79 credits!)

When we compare the Greek for Greek, what we find is that Paul is saying that just as the sacrificial system was the prescribed form of worship for the Old Testament faithful, sacrifice is the prescribed form of worship for the New Testament faithful. And we find that in the Greek word "latreia," which is translated "worship" in verse one of your English translation. Four times in the Greek Old Testament we find that same word. Twice the sacrificial system is prescribed as worship, and twice the sacrificial system is described as bearing witness of God through the Israelites to the outside world. In Exodus, chapter 12, verses 21-25, God, through Moses, establishes the Passover. The Israelites are to select a lamb for sacrifice and the Israelites are to "observe this right as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you as He has promised, you shall keep this service." Now that word "service," translated out of the Greek, comes from the same word that you find as "worship" in the New Testament. And so we could read this as: "He has promised you shall keep this worship." The sacrificial system, and specifically the Passover lamb, is the prescribed form of worship. Continuing, "And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service or worship?', you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for He passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" So even in the Old Testament, when people say, "Why do you do this?", it's to point to the deliverance. And that specific sacrifice points to the deliverance that we have received through Jesus's sacrifice. It's a very strong connection to the Old Testament. Then again, in Exodus 13, when God instituted the Feast of Unleavened Bread, "When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service, this worship, in this month." This feast followed Passover. It was to commemorate Israel's deliverance from bondage, and points to our actual deliverance through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that your life should be a sacrifice of worship because of what you have received from Jesus. The Old Testament was saying, "This worship of sacrifice will point to Jesus." It's astonishing!

Now, before you guys go too far and say, "Aaron, you're putting way too much Old Testament into this New Testament passage," I'm going to give you the fourth one and I'm going to give you some homework. Because finally in Joshua we read in chapter 22, verses 26-27, "Let us now build an altar not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the worship/service of the Lord in His presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, 'You have no portion in the Lord.'" Now, this is a very different passage. The context is very different. We have two portions of the Israelite nation, and one is accusing the other of being separate, and they're saying, "No, we're not separate. In fact, we have built this altar not to sacrifice but just to show that we are one of you." And

I think Paul is pointing specifically to this passage as well, because did you know that you have been built as an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for actual sacrifice, but you as an altar are to be a living sacrifice? It's getting kind of heavy in here! The sacrifices of the Old Testament were the required form of worship and bore witness to the Gentile nations. They told the Gentile nations to look for redemption. They told the Israelites to look for redemption. Our sacrifice today is to bear witness that we believe the truth of all these things that Paul laid out in Chapters 1 through 11. But more specifically, our sacrifices bear witness that we have been delivered. And that's what we are grateful for.

And we do have to be careful, because we have an obligation to sacrifice, but our sacrifice must come out of gratefulness, not that obligation. And did you know that the best way to ensure that we are sacrificing out of gratefulness is to sacrifice through our gifting? Every person sitting in here, everybody watching me online or listening to my voice, has been gifted by God to be the living sacrifice that He requires. That is huge! "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophesy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." If your gifting is acts of mercy, you can do it cheerfully, because (surprise, surprise) you're going to discover that you're good at it.

I got the opportunity to work with a really good Christian brother in a very non-Christian context. It was in an office in the army, and we would get together at lunch and we would talk about the Bible and Bigfoot. (I have to admit we talked about Bigfoot from time to time.) But it was neat to be in a working environment with a fellow believer and to have those conversations. And we talked about the people who had an impact on our lives, and we talked about gifting, and we talked about calling. And, lo and behold, one of our favorite commenters was going to be in the Spokane area. And so we both put in for time off. It was awesome because we had a boss who was very clearly not Christian. And so, when my friend went in and said, "I need some time off," our boss said, "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm going to a Bible conference." And then shortly after that, I went in and said, "I need some time off." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "We're going to a Bible conference. He said, "You're going to the same Bible Conference?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, to each his own, I guess!"

And I was so excited! This commenter, I couldn't wait to hear what he had to say. But I had heard that his wife was dying and he was in the hospital with her, and the rumor was that he wasn't going to show up. But I noticed that nobody was being scheduled into his time slot, and so I stuck around and I hoped and I hoped. And my friend kept saying, "It's not going to happen, Aaron." And then, there he was at the back of the sanctuary of this little church in Spokane, in a wheelchair. They wheeled him up to the podium, and four of his friends stood him up out of his wheelchair and put him in a little chair behind the podium. And I watched as the years melted off as he got into the teaching that he was going to teach. And the gifting became evermore present as he taught and taught and taught. And then the four friends came up, put him in the wheelchair, and wheeled him out. And I thought to myself, "Self, that's it. I just got to find that thing that I'm passionate about and gifted about and do that until I die. And have four friends to wheel me to it!" You could not have kept him from that engagement. He was gifted to do it. He didn't know my name. He didn't know the impact that he had. And yet, I would argue very strongly that if it wasn't for his faithfulness behind that podium, I would not be standing behind this podium. When we are serving according to our gifting

it is both joyful because we are good at it and God is using it, and productive in ways that we may never even see.

There are those in our congregation who I suspect are serving out of obligation. And there are those who I suspect are serving out of gratefulness. You're going to find them in every congregation. It's a problem that every church faces. But those who are serving out of obligation, and I want you to hear me now, I wish you would stop. When we are serving out of obligation, often we're miserable. And we make everyone around us miserable, from the associate pastor all the way down to the very people that we are trying to welcome into our doors. We have to sacrifice from a position of grateful joy. And if you are not experiencing that grateful joy, I would encourage you to pour into Romans, chapters 1 through 11. Paul lays it out. (It used to be what was taught at law school, because of the strength of that argument.) I've also seen those who are serving out of their gifting and it's amazing. They cannot be stopped. You know who you are! Recently, I received an email from a trained and experienced librarian asking if she could organize our library and our archives. Now, I haven't shown her the archives yet; I don't want to discourage her! But she has made me set aside time every Monday so that we can talk about the library, and honestly, I don't know what I'm going to contribute to that conversation. But hey, I'll show up if she's wanting to talk about it. This is service. And dare I say it, she has been gifted in this specific service. I wish you could have seen the joy on her face when I explained that that counts. It counts as a spiritual gifting, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and spiritual worship. For all of us who are not musically gifted, this should be great news! Did you know that there's also a coffee expert who has been coming to our services? Roasts, grinds, and brews, and loves it! I wonder what it would take to keep this person from roasting, grinding, and brewing. Do you know what our Central Perk needs? A person that is passionate about coffee.

What are you passionate about? What would you sacrifice as a holy and acceptable form of worship? If you could do anything for God, and you even suspect that you might be good at it, what would it be? Our sacrificial worship is obligatory. You have to do it. But we cannot worship out of obligation. We should be so grateful for what God has done that we just have to worship, and we should be allowed to worship in the direction that God is leading us.

So, the last thing, the communal aspect of your individual sacrifice, your individual worship: "For as in one body we have many members and the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another." Now in talking about gratefulness and obligation, I brought up two individuals, and please, what I'm about to say, they have not brought to my attention. This is just Pastor Aaron speculating. Every church and every congregation has its sacred cows. You can't walk around here without bumping into one! (That came out a little more serious than I wanted it to be!) But specifically, do you know in the library you'll find a giant green velvet "chrismons" display? What if this lady, who is gifted as a librarian, wants to change our library? Would we be willing to sacrifice that sacred cow? And this is hard, because this church has been your church for so long. And yet everybody in here has told me over and over and over again, we need younger people. And the truth is, we need younger people. The church needs younger people. What would we sacrifice to allow them to feel as if this is their church? Last week Pastor John talked about what would we, as a congregation, give up. And there's a connection to what would you, as an individual, sacrifice, because we live together and we sacrifice

together. In our coffee area, (and please, I do not mean any disrespect. Again, I'm speculating and just posing the question. Nobody's even brought this to my attention.) In our coffee area, you'll find a giant coffee bean map and a picture of Donovan McVicker. I want this person who's passionate about coffee to come forward. I want to connect them with our youth group and say, "Serve every Sunday at Central Perk. That space is yours!" And yet, if I don't allow them to make that space theirs, it's just a matter of time and they will go somewhere else. What would we be willing to sacrifice so that those of us, who have identified our passion and our willingness to sacrifice out of gratefulness for what God is doing, will not be stopped.

Our sacrifice is worship and our worship is sacrifice. There's no way around that. Gratefulness for the sacrifice of God and for the sacrifice of His followers that led to our belief, that's where our willingness to sacrifice comes from. Just like that sergeant major who was grateful for the old ones.

Our sacrifices are obligatory, but we should not sacrifice out of obligation. That's the difference between the law and the law of liberty. (And if you want to know more about that, you need to come to my Bible Study at 8:30 to 9:30 on Sunday mornings. We're going to go through the book of James.)

And finally, our sacrifice, though individual, is communal. We, as a congregation, need to make sure that we are not preventing the gospel from reaching people because we are so committed to our own space.

So, I leave you with these two questions. What would you sacrifice for another person's child? Not for your family, not for this family, but for the people outside that don't even know us yet. And what would we sacrifice in here so that those sacrifices will be fruitful?