

**THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part thirty-five**

Sunday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2148

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**PRESENTING YOUR BODY IN WORSHIP TO MAKE THE BEAUTY OF JESUS VISIBLE IN THIS WORLD (and how there are drastic physical consequences to our physical bodies when we forget their ultimate purpose)**

**Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] 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."**

There have been three previous teachings in this series covering three foundational truths. First, we saw that renewed minds come from *somewhere* not from *nowhere*. The word "*therefore*" links up the *practical* instruction of chapters 12 through 16 with the *doctrinal* teaching of chapters 1 through 11. This is Paul's way (and the Holy Spirit's way) of reminding us that if the church ignores doctrinal instruction and relies on self-help and therapeutic instruction she will miss the roots and source of her future life and strength.

Second, we saw that the nature of spiritual renewal and transformation can't just be *external* and *mechanical*, but must be *internal* and *organic*. Renewed spiritual life can't be attached from the outside, like the ornaments on a Christmas tree. It must grow from the inside out, like tomatoes on the vine. This is so important. Spiritual life can't just be *copied* from Paul, or Jesus, or anybody else. Do you remember how we talked about the need for a *comprehensive* change on the inside of the heart? The Christian life can't be adapted as the answer to some specific problem in life. It is like the flu. Once you have it you have it in every part of your being.

And finally, the renewed spiritual life is fueled by the *mercies of God* - "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God....(12:1)*. Apart from the mercies of God we are driven by nothing more than *duty* and *obligation* in our Christian walk. It's grasping and savoring and contemplating the mercies of God that makes godliness a *delight* rather than a *chore*.

Do you remember the account of the wicked woman and the Pharisee with Jesus? Recall how the Pharisee didn't do any of the things for Jesus that the wicked woman did. Then Jesus explains why. This woman had a sense of how vast and blessed was the grace of Jesus. The Pharisee was driven by his religious duties. The wicked woman's devotion flowed out of a burning awareness of divine mercy. "*I urge you....by the mercies of God to present your bodies....*"

That's where we are in our study of this rich passage. Today we pick up the next idea. Paul says, in view of God's mercies, we are to do something very specific. We are to present our *bodies as living sacrifices*. Why and how are the topics of this teaching:

1) **BIBLICAL TRUTH ISN'T UNDERSTOOD AND DEVOTION TO CHRIST ISN'T REAL UNTIL THE ACTIONS OF THE BODY ARE TRANSFORMED**

True enough, the *root* of transformation is a renewed *mind*, and the *motive* of transformation is the *mercies of God*, but the *effect* of all this is fleshed out in the *actions of the physical body* - "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice....*"(12:1). It is in the offering of the physical body to the Lord in sacrifice and service that one moves from *pretend* Christianity to *authentic* Christianity.

Paul picks an image that, while almost totally removed from our senses, would be very potent and meaningful to these Christians at Rome, both Jews and Gentiles. Everyone had seen people coming to the priest to offer their worship to God. They brought animals when they came.

The priest did something that would be against the law in North American society today. Animal rights people would be up in arms. The priest would take that perfect, usually young, innocent animal and wring its neck and slit its throat. Blood would flow all over the sacrifice. The priest, on behalf of the one approaching God, would *offer the sacrifice of the body of this animal*. The priest *presented* the body of the animal as a sacrifice.

Of course, those sacrifices pictured something that was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross. All of those animal sacrifices were offered as a covering and atonement for sin and were given their meaning and substance through the Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away the sin of the world.

So when Paul talks about offering our bodies today as living sacrifices he doesn't mean we can, in any way, **earn** the favor of God through anything we do. We don't offer ourselves in **that** sense. But there were **other** kinds of sacrifice offered in the Old Testament as well. There were sacrifices offered in **thanks** for the mercies of God received, sacrifices that celebrated harvest and deliverance and mercy.

**These** are the sacrifices Paul is thinking of. We offer our bodies as sacrifices **because of mercies already accomplished and received through Christ Jesus** - "***I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice....***"(12:1).

We talk so much about being forgiven. We talk so much - and rightly so - about the "amazing grace" of God in Christ toward us. We look back in fondness on that day or moment when we were "***saved,***" or when "***Jesus came into our heart.***"

Paul wants to press a little **beyond** that. He writes to these people - these **Christians** - at Rome and says, "Well and good. You're saved. I want to urge you to test those claims. Has this all reached your physical bodies? See those people coming to the temple to worship? ***Do you see the animals going in with them but not coming out?*** That's how much your body belongs to me."

True, we're not laying down our lives in the sense of experiencing physical death. But we must, **considering all the mercies of God received in Christ Jesus**, come to an end of ***life lived for ourselves, on our own terms. I know you've given your heart to Jesus. Now the rest of your body must come along with it.***

Remember it. What you do with your body counts. If you belong to God at all, your body is His too. You are not your own, says Paul. And he's talking about your physical body. We wrestle with this because there are always theological misfits who think whenever we preach about what we do with our bodies - specifically, sins committed with the body - that we're somehow falling into legalism.

This just isn't so. Just because New Testament sanctification constantly presses into specific details of our behavior doesn't make it legalistic. Remember, Paul calls us to present our bodies in holiness as a response to God's **mercies** - "***I urge you....by the mercies of God that you present your bodies....***"

This is holiness as a heart-felt response to **mercy**, not law.

## 2) **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A PHYSICAL BODY?**

God created many other creatures without them. Angels are real beings - actual entities - but without physical bodies. God Himself is a spiritual being, not possessing a physical body. He could have made you and me in any fashion He chose, but He gave us physical, material bodies. Why?

We - you and I - as physical, personal beings - beings made in the image of God - have the greatest capacity to glorify God for His mercy in Jesus Christ. Angels can't because they have never experienced redemption. The rest of the physical creation can't because, not sharing God's image, it can't possibly **relate** to God as we persons can. So we have the most stunning opportunity to glorify God with **physical bodies** for the greatness of His mercy in Christ Jesus.

Do you get it? We are God's **first choice** to advertize His greatness. We are God's **first choice** to advertize His boundless grace and mercy. God gave you a body to use as **an instrument** to visibly - externally - magnify and demonstrate how great He is and how worthy of devotion and service and sacrifice He is. Only we can, with the outward acts of our bodies, show how **praiseworthy** and **prizeworthy** our God is.

**None** of this is accomplished with merely an **inward** salvation. None of this is accomplished merely by agreeing with certain **doctrinal truths**. You were redeemed, and God desires to transform your life continually, in order to manifest His greatness through the choices and actions of the body you've placed at His disposal - not because you **had** to but because you were **delighted** to in view of His marvelous mercies. Through the actions of your body people can see how **lovable** and **desirable** God is.

Now, take just a minute and turn back the clock before we press forward. Think of how, in our very first teaching in this series, I stressed the importance of the first word in our text - "***Therefore....***" I pointed out why, many times, "***practical teaching***" may not solve specific problems - and that before Paul makes his practical appeal to the Roman Christians he takes the time to give 11 chapters of doctrinal teaching.

Now we're in a better position to test Paul's approach. What does all this talk about sacrifice and history and why we have physical bodies really have to do with daily life? In other words, what difference does it make if we **forget** why God created us with physical bodies? What difference does it make that God created us with physical bodies in order to manifest His mercy and beauty through them?

I think you can see the difference it makes - more and more as you watch the news and read the papers. What difference does it make when young men and women come to believe that their bodies exist to **look good to the opposite sex** rather than **display God's redeeming, Christ-exalting mercy**?

What happens is you end up with a world crowded with **eating disorders** and **plastic surgeons** because young women especially have fallen for the lie that they were made with bodies for the cover of Glamour magazine rather than being vehicles of God's mercy. You end up with a world full of mixed up, pathetic people who work more on their **abs** than their **souls**.

How we need to pray that God is going to raise up bright young people and young adults who aren't that stupid and who have a strong Biblical sense about why they're here and why God has made them with the bodies He has given them. This is the only road to wholeness and sanity in this mixed up world.

Let every act of your body - your physical body - Monday through Sunday - show that Christ is your **treasure**. Let every act of your body - your physical body - reveal the **death** of all that dishonors Christ. That's what Paul is talking about. And he says we're to be **"living sacrifices."** That means this demonstration isn't something done **once and for all** in the moment of your conversion, but is **continuously** being lived out, every moment of every day.

### 3) DEDICATING OUR BODY AS A PART OF OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP PATTERNS

Perhaps now we've framed an idea with enough theological background to make it crisp and clear. We can start to see why, throughout the Scriptures, as the people of God worship Him, they are called to specifically involve their physical bodies - raised hands, lifted heads, bended knees, voices lifted in audible praise. None of these is reserved as the worship territory of Pentecostals as opposed to Baptists. This is how **all** God's people are to come and approach God.

Why? Because worship, at its heart, teaches us about our relationship to God **in our physical bodies**. It's the focal point of how we **meet** God. And everything in the Bible tells me that my relationship with God doesn't just limit itself to my **mind** or my **heart**. He calls for the offering of my **body**.

But I'm prone to not want to do this. I want to honor God **devotionally** more than I want to eat and play and date and talk and work in honor of Him. So God has a plan. Every time He calls me specifically to deal with Him He makes it more physical than I'm comfortable with. When I'm baptized I get wet. When I remember Christ's death I actually eat and drink.

So we're called to worship in ways that **reinforce physicality** - the offering of our bodies. Of course people can lift their hands in church and not honor God on the way home. And that's a very common criticism against visible forms of worship. But it really misses the point. Rather than be upset about hypocrites who demonstrate a pattern of worship they don't live out, I'll make sure, as much as I possibly can, that I'll present my body in the sanctuary in **preparation** for the offering I'll make all week long. God can worry about the hypocrites. I'll offer my whole life - body and all - to His transforming power and grace.