

Distinction in Salvation

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[0 : 00] The letter to the Romans and chapter 12. Romans chapter 12 and we're going to read from the beginning of the chapter.

I want us to concentrate on the first two verses of that chapter. You'll find it on page 1141. 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.

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 are three thoughts in these two verses that I'd like us to think about very carefully this morning, particularly in the light of it being the Sunday after we have remembered the Lord's death.

[1 : 36] The pattern in the New Testament was always to ground everything on the death of Jesus. But then upon that foundation, a life had to be lived.

And the question today is this, how do we live that life? And you see the same pattern appearing in these two verses by the mercies of God.

Paul has just been talking throughout the whole of the letter of the Romans about the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and the atonement and the death of Jesus for his people.

Now, he says, having spoken about what Christ has done, the question is now, how do we then live as God's people for him?

How does God expect us to live? What kind of lives does he want us to live? Where do we begin?

Well, says Paul, there are three thoughts I want to bring before you in these two verses.

[2 : 42] First of all, living sacrifices. A living sacrifice. Paul says, I appeal to you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

So we're going to ask the question, what does he mean by when he asks us to present our bodies as living sacrifices? But that's the first thought. The second thought is outward pressures.

Outward pressures. Verse two, he says, do not be conformed to this world. And that's what he's talking about. The pressure to change shape.

We'll talk about that in a few moments time. And how Paul, he exhorts the church and exhorts you and I not to go along with the world and its thinking the way that the world thinks.

But then thirdly, there's another thought, which is an inward transformation. But he says, by the renewal of your mind.

[3 : 51] By testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable. And three thoughts then. First of all, a living sacrifice. Secondly, an outward pressure.

And thirdly, an inward transformation. What does he mean then by a living sacrifice? We have a high view of communion.

It's a very important occasion to us, I believe quite rightly so. It's more like a conference in which the subject is always the same. There are different preachers, but the subject of the conference is always the same.

And that is the cross. And everything is related to the cross, to the centrality of the cross, to the importance of the cross, to the fact that our salvation depends completely and uniquely upon the death of Jesus.

We are saved by the sacrifice of Christ alone. And we naturally think, therefore, of sacrifice as being death, as being Jesus. Jesus is our sacrifice.

[4 : 59] And by that we mean that he was willing to lay down his life as a sacrifice. The sacrifice in order to take the punishment for our sins so that by his death we could be set free.

And, of course, we're absolutely right in thinking that that is the meaning of sacrifice. But there was another sense in which Paul spoke about sacrifice.

And that is in relation to ourselves. Here is where the way he puts it. I appeal to you, therefore, present your bodies as living sacrifices.

We are to be living sacrifices. And I would suggest that the very first step to answering the question, how do we live as God's people, is to remember the image of living sacrifice, to understand what it is to be a living sacrifice.

But before we do so, I want us to be absolutely certain about what Paul means when he says to present your body as a living sacrifice. Is he suggesting that there's some kind of distinction between our bodies and our souls?

[6 : 12] The Bible teaches that we are composed of a body, a physical outward body, and a soul, an inward spirit, the person you are.

But yet we have to be very careful not to make that distinction too clear. Because the Bible, although the Bible says we are body and soul, God has joined the two together.

And we're not to play around with the idea of somehow that they can be separated except when God wants them to be in death. So what then does Paul mean?

Well, the fact remains that whatever we do in our lives, we do with our bodies. You think of your brain, we'll see that in a few moments' time when we're talking about being transformed.

If you think about your brain, you think with your brain. You might say, well, I think with my soul. But in actual fact, you don't. You have to use your brain cells to think. When you speak, when you say something, you use your vocal cords.

[7 : 12] You open your mouth. You use. The brain tells the mouth when to open. When you do something, you make a decision with your brain, with your mind. And then you do it with your body. In other words, whatever we do, we do with our bodies.

And what Paul is saying here is this. He's saying you, in this life, present yourselves. Present what you are in this life to God as a living sacrifice.

It's not as if he's dividing out body and soul. He's not as if he's saying that we can do one thing with our bodies and another thing with our souls. That's not what he's saying at all. He's saying that whatever we are and whatever we do with ourselves in this life, we are presenting ourselves in the very first instance as a living sacrifice to God.

What then does he mean by a living sacrifice? Well, I think the book of Leviticus is very helpful. And that's why it's good to take time to try and to understand some of the things which are said to us and described for us in the book of Leviticus.

Anyone who reads the first chapter of Leviticus, and we did it a fortnight ago in the Wednesday prayer meeting, we'll notice that there is a vast difference between the first chapter and the second chapter.

[8 : 35] The first chapter describes the burnt offering and how an animal was put to death as the substitute for sin, and the life of the animal was given up, and the body of the animal was burnt up as a whole to God.

Now, it's important for us to see that when a person took an animal to the door of the tabernacle, he laid his hands on the head of the animal.

And by so doing, as we saw a fortnight ago, there was a connection between the person and the animal, and God accepted the death of the animal on behalf of the person.

There was a connection between the person and the animal. In other words, when you brought your animal as a sacrifice to God, you were actually bringing yourself to God, and you were devoting yourself to God.

You were confessing your own sins, but you were actually rededicating in the payment of your sins, the death of the animal, you were actually rededicating your life to God.

[9 : 44] Now, this is amplified in the second chapter in Leviticus, where instead of an animal, instead of a living being, there is grain. And the grain offering said something that was slightly different.

When you brought your grain offering to God, you were bringing your first fruits. Of course, they were all farmers in those days.

They grew crops in their field. And that way, that meant that they were very conscious that their lives depended upon the goodness of God and the provision that God would make for them in making their crops and giving the right kind of weather and agricultural conditions to make their crops grow.

If there was a famine, they were in big trouble. So, their dependence on God was such that they watched their crops every year. And as they saw their crops grow, they recognized the goodness and the blessing of God, and they thanked Him for it.

But not only, they took the first fruits of their crops, the very best. God deserves the best. And that's the very first thing that we need to understand when it comes to being a living sacrifice.

[11 : 03] They had to take not the leftovers, not the stuff that was left over on the ground, but they had to gather the very first and the best without any corruption or rottenness within that food.

And they had to give it to the Lord. And by so doing, they were saying to the Lord, My life is utterly and completely dependent upon you, and my life is utterly and completely devoted to you.

Whenever a person took a grain offering, and when they poured it out before the Lord, and when they gave it to the Lord, they were dedicating, they were consecrating their lives to God, and they were recognizing, My life is not my own.

I have been bought with a price. Now, you see the connection between dedication and the death of Jesus, the death of the sacrifice? On the basis of Jesus' death, He has purchased us for Himself. He didn't just set us free from sin in order to live to please ourselves, to carry on going as we've been doing, just doing what we want, living the kind of lives that we want to live, just pleasing ourselves all the time.

[12 : 19] He bought us for Himself. And the grain offering was a vivid, stark reminder that their lives depended on God and were devoted to God.

And that's the very first thing I would like us to bring before us this morning, and I believe that this is where Paul is beginning. He's saying that your life is an offering to God.

How many of us today wake up on a Monday morning or Tuesday morning and we remember first thing, everything that happens to be today, it belongs to God.

Every decision I make today is a decision that belongs to God. And that's a decision that I must bring Him into and involve Him in. God must come first.

I must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in everything I do. My first question must not be, what do I want to do, but what God wants me to do.

[13 : 19] How many of us think, and I'm talking to myself by the way as well, how many times do I think like that every day? How much does God figure in every decision I make? And how, to what extent do I remember that my life is a sacrifice?

It's an offering. It's a dedication to the Lord. Paul puts it this way, you are not your own, he says. You are bought with a price.

Now, to say that in today's world is to say a very strange thing because in the kind of world we live in, we're encouraged to be independent thinkers. We're encouraged to be free.

You only live once. You have to do, you have to make the most of life. Well, I'll tell you how to make the most of life. You don't make the most of life by doing what you want to do. You make the most of life by doing, by living for God, living to please God, living for the glory of God.

That's how to find fulfillment in life. It may bring conflict and it may bring tension in so many different ways, but when you seek first the kingdom of God, says Jesus, and his righteousness, you'll discover this.

[14 : 29] All these things, everything that we need, everything that we thought we need in this life, everything that we thought that God is going to deprive us of. You know how, I wonder if I'm speaking to anybody today, when I say to you, the reason that you're not Christian this morning is because you think that if you, you think that once you start following Jesus, you're going to be deprived of something that you've got.

What is it you have today that you wouldn't have if you followed Jesus? Let me tell you something, nothing. God is able to give you the kind of fulfillment that you never can find anywhere in this world.

And I don't know how long you've been trying, but the quicker you stop trying, the better. And the quicker you start listening to God, the better, because it's God that knows what's best for us. But there is always this tension, isn't there, between the voice within you that says, I can only find real, true happiness and fulfillment in this life when I try to seek my own pleasure.

That's the kind of world we live in. And the voice within you of God that says, you'll never find it unless you come to me and unless you devote your life completely.

And it's got to be 100%. You know, the Bible has absolutely no time for the kind of person that divides his life out between God's time and my time.

[15 : 52] And I know that we would never confess to being the kind of people that would say this, but that's very often the way that we live our lives, isn't it? We give this time to God and we give that time to ourselves.

We say, right, well, Sunday, of course, of course, Sunday's always God's, that's fine. Monday evening, that's mine. Saturday the whole day, that's mine. That's not the way the Bible thinks at all. Every day, there's a sense in which every day is God's day.

And I'm not trying to use that argument to undermine the value of the Sunday. I'm not trying that at all. Some people will do that. But there is a sense, a real sense in which every day, first and foremost, is God's day in which every day belongs to God.

And because I belong to God, I have been bought with a price. I must never, ever divide out my time. And one of the most, one of the worst criticisms that's ever leveled against Christians, and it's an awful one, is when people say, ah, he's a Christian on Sunday, okay, but you should see him during the week.

Nobody should ever be able to say that about you. What you are on Sunday, you've got to be on a Monday, and a Tuesday, and a Wednesday, and be consistent, and what people see, if somebody sees you walking up the pathway here in Kenneth Street to church on a Sunday, they ought to say, I'm not surprised.

[17 : 14] He's like that every day. I'm not surprised at all. And that's because our lives need to be oriented towards God. And the very first, very first motive that we need to have in everything we do is what does God want me to do.

So this great sacrifice in Leviticus chapter 2, it teaches us, first of all, that the grain offering was taken from the, it was taken from the grain to remind us that our lives depend upon God and are devoted to God.

It was, it was the very best of what they had. Do you give the Lord your very utmost? Do you give him your utmost?

God has given us gifts and abilities and talents in this world. He's given some of us a good brain. He's given some of us skill to use with our hands. He's given some of us skill to be able to be people persons, to be able to relate well with people and on and so on and so forth.

[18 : 25] When you come to, when you come to think of who you are and what kind of gifts and qualities and skills you have, do you remember that these have been given to you by God and that God expects you to use them for his glory?

I'm thinking, for example, of hires. Not a good subject for a Sunday. You probably came here to get away from hires and standards and advanced hires.

But do we remember, those of you who are just about to set hires and standards and advanced or whatever, whatever you're doing, that if you're a follower of Jesus, God has given you these skills not to despise them.

And I'm saying, I'm confessing, that when I was that age, I wouldn't have said what I'm saying today. Wisdom's a great thing.

It sometimes comes with older age. But I'm thinking of the incredible opportunities that there are for young Christians in the world today to make a real difference in this world.

[19 : 36] And you do that by dedicating your life to God and doing your best and using what God has given you in this world for his glory and doing your best in it.

That's what this was all about. Give him the best. Don't give him what's left over. Give him the very best of everything that you've got. God deserves the best in everything.

Doesn't he? After all, he gave you the best. He did what was necessary for you in order to be saved.

The next thing that Paul tells us is he tells us about an outward pressure. In verse 2, he tells us this. Verse 1, present your bodies to living sacrifices, holy and acceptable God.

Then he tells us, do not be conformed to this world. Do not be conformed to this world. What he's talking about is what we described before as an outward pressure.

[20 : 38] What he means is this. what we see and what we hear around us always has an effect upon us.

No matter how independent you think you are, we're all part and parcel of the world in which we live. And we're all part of the culture in which we live, whatever that culture is.

If you're in the Far East, you live in a Far Eastern culture. If you're an Indian, you live in an Indian culture. If you're in Britain, you live in a British culture or in a Western culture.

But there's no getting away from this fact that what we see and what we experience around us always has an effect upon the way in which we live.

And Paul's talking about a danger with that for the Christian. And he uses the language of something being molded. You know how when you're making jelly, you get the jelly and you make it into a liquid and then you put it into a mold so that when it sets, you turn the mold upside down, you take the mold away and the jelly has conformed, that's what the word means, it has conformed to the shape of the mold.

[21 : 55] Some of you are artists and you'll know what I mean in art. You take some clay and you press the clay into a mold with a certain shape. You take the mold away and the clay has become, has taken on the shape of the mold outside.

It looks like the mold. That's what Paul is talking about. It's being shaped by the mold. Every one of us, from the time we were tiny, we take on the shape of the world around us and it happens to all of us and it's as natural as anything that we have, that we can think of, happens in the most, in various ways.

Paul says, as a Christian, you can't let that just happen. The problem is beforehand, before you start talking to, before you start following Jesus, you tend to just drift along with the way everybody else, the way everybody else talks and what they all do and where they all go and it's very hard to be different, isn't it?

Especially when you've got a set of friends and they all decide to do the one thing. It's very hard to be the person. Even if you feel that you're not very comfortable with it, you go along with it. But as a Christian, says Paul, you can't do that anymore.

As a Christian, you've got to be prepared to say no. You've got to not be conformed to this world. The way it thinks, the way it behaves, the way it speaks.

[23 : 30] And we're all shaped by it. We've all been shaped by it to some degree or another. And we have to say, no, I've got to stop now and I've got to ask myself, well, what does God think of this?

And how does God want me to live? Well, Paul goes on and he tells us how we are to live. We are to be changed, but not on the outside. You see, in these three verses, in these two verses, he's talking about two different types of change.

There's an outward change which we mustn't let happen. We are conformed to the world around us. But he talks about an inward change which we must let happen, which takes place not on the outside, but on the inside in chapter, in verse two.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. Now, let me ask the question, what's the difference between being transformed and conformed? Well, to be conformed is to be shaped like the jelly mold.

But to be transformed is another type of shape, but it happens on the inside. It happens in my heart and in my mind. That's why Paul says, specifically, by the renewal of your mind.

[24 : 40] In other words, God has started to change us. I don't know when he started. It doesn't matter when he started, but the Christian is a person who's changing every day as God works within him.

What do we know about that change? Well, it takes place by the Holy Spirit. Jesus says that when a person begins to follow him, the Holy Spirit comes in and starts to dwell within a person who's following Jesus.

That means that if you're following Jesus today, you have indwelling within you no less than the Holy Spirit himself. God the Holy Spirit. even that thought alone is life-changing.

But the Holy Spirit communicates with us. Now, here we get into some problems because some people believe that in hearing voices and all that.

I don't believe in that at all. Do you know how I believe the Holy Spirit communicates with us? I believe that as we read our Bibles and as we read a chapter like we're reading just now, when I read this chapter, chapter 12 of Romans, it's not to me some dry history but it's not some dry piece of philosophy.

[26 : 00] This is the living Word of God and as I read this chapter, I take it on board. What is it within me that brings God's Word into my heart in such a powerful way and opens my heart in which I say, yes, I want to do this.

When I read these words and where Paul says, you present your bodies as a living sacrifice and first thing I think of is, I wish I want to do that. That wasn't a very good sentence.

I wish I could do it and I want to do it and I long to do it and I know that this is my first priority. Why is it? Why is it that I read these words with a positive response?

Because the Holy Spirit dwells within me and He creates within me what I was talking about before, a thirst and a hunger that can only be satisfied by God's Word. I know that my, that my, I'm not the living sacrifice that I should be.

As I look at my own life I can see flaw after flaw, failure after failure and yet I still come back and I still know that this is God's Word and He speaks to me in love and in covenant faithfulness and He draws me to Him again and again.

[27 : 18] that's the Holy Spirit creating within us that longing after Him and that's me and He changes me day by day as He creates that longing within me and as He speaks to me and as He testifies and verifies and confirms to me this is the truth and that means it's tragic whenever a Christian stops reading the Word of God.

You know there are times in your life when reading the Bible is more difficult than others. I know that. I go through that. You think I'm a minister and you think somehow it's always you know I wonder how many people in the picture a minister and he's studying in the morning and he's devouring God's Word he can't wait to get into the Bible that's not the way it is at all.

I find it just as difficult to read my Bible as you do. You're probably shocked to hear that aren't you? I'm telling you I'm only a human being like everyone else. So what I'm saying to you I'm saying from my own experience it is so difficult to maintain a steadfast Christian life day after day in which I open my Bible and sometimes the words don't jump out at you.

Sometimes you have to just know that this is God's Word. Sometimes you have a spirit of heaviness and the easiest thing in the world is just to close your Bible go and do something else.

It's the same with coming to church same with coming to a prayer meeting.

The last thing you ever want to do is to worship with God's people. The last people you want to maybe you've had a hard day and you're tired and you have a spirit there's a spirit of heaviness.

[28 : 55] And the last thing you want to do is to meet with God's people and hear God's Word. And yet you know that that's the place that you need to be because the Holy Spirit is prodding you and reminding you and creating within you that discomfort that hunger that thirst that can only be satisfied in fellowship and in hearing God's Word and in meeting with other Christians and in praying with and for other Christians.

sometimes it's only afterwards that we feel the benefit. You know I've seen myself going through a chapter for example of the Bible and I'm reading it very mechanically but it's only afterwards I think yes I'm glad I read that chapter.

It didn't mean a whole lot to me at the time but I'm glad I read it because you feel the benefit and the nourishment that it gives. Sometimes you're not even able to explain the nourishment that it gives.

We don't need to explain. We need to hear God's Word and we need to come to Him time and time again as the God who knows the kind of lives that we live.

How are we how are we transformed by the renewing of our minds? You know it's fatal for any Christian to think that because the Holy Spirit dwells within us that somehow or other we've got no involvement with our Christian life.

[30 : 36] We don't need to worry. All that all we need to know is that God is going to do everything but that's not what the Bible tells us at all. The Bible tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

That's our part. God's part is next for it is God who works within you to will and to do of His good pleasure. So there's two things happening. We have to work out our own salvation but then as we do so God works according to His own good pleasure.

And that means as I said before that we start the day knowing who we are and who we serve and who we belong to. Knowing that God has planned the day and that God is coming into the day with us.

Knowing that God has put you where you are for a reason. And God is able to work all things together for good to those who love God and are according to His purpose.

It means that you don't look at your other Christian friend or your brother or your sister and you say oh well look how successful that person is or look how strong that Christian is I wish I was him or her.

[31 : 48] Don't ever wish that you are someone else. God has made you for who you are to glorify Him in the way that He has made you to glorify Him in your way as you obey Him.

And what we need to do is we need to wake up on a Monday morning or through the week and we need to set God put God in the very first place and to know that each day is God's day and we have to serve Him and glorify Him and obey Him.

It means that God has prepared everything that is going to happen during that day. It means that we live consistent lives as we interact with others whereas one day before I became a Christian I would if there was somebody at the office that I didn't like I would make sure I showed Him that. I would make sure I behaved in such a way that He knew I didn't like Him I had no time for Him. You can't do that if you're glorifying God. You can't talk the way other people talk.

I remember when I used to work in industry there were people who weren't liked people who others despised and the easiest thing you know you go into a conversation over dinner and this person would come up in conversation and they would all start slanging off this person.

[33 : 21] You can't do that as a Christian you can't join in because as a Christian we're told we're commanded to love those around us in such a way that we want them to hear and to see the gospel in the way that we live our lives we've got to be different as Christians the kind of language that our colleagues use you can't join in the kind of language especially if it's dirty and if it's full of swearing and all kinds of you can't do that as a Christian we've got to be absolutely we've got to begin differently and we've got to end differently so that people will say well there is something different about that person that person has something that person really means what they say it means being honest it means being truthful it means being humble it means putting others before yourself and it means putting God first seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness

God promises that all these things will be added to us time has passed let's pray Father in heaven we thank you for the way in which you've promised to accompany your people as they make their way through our lives in this world and we thank you that you've promised never to leave us and that as we face the difficulties of the world around us the practical difficulties of what it means to be God's people we ask Lord that your word will teach us and challenge us and that as we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit that you will make us feel uncomfortable with things that we shouldn't be doing and that you will encourage us in the things that we should be doing and saying and thinking and Lord wash our minds and our hearts and prepare us for even the days that lie ahead for we ask in Jesus name Amen