

I want to tell you about an experience I had a long time ago. Julie and I were newly married, and we were a part of a summer mission project in Eastern Europe. Our purpose was to share our faith with young people who gathered in the larger cities of the then socialist/communist countries. We spent most of our time in communist Czechoslovakia sharing our faith in the city of Prague.

You could tell that Prague was communist because the biggest buildings had Soviet red stars on them. And I remember seeing travel posters. Through a translator, the posters said, Take a Vacation! Enjoy Beautiful Vietnam! Visit Cuba. Their Beaches are the Best!

Another strange thing was the color and taste of the country. Every building was gray. All of them needed repair and paint. And then there was the food. We stayed in what I'm sure was a nice hotel that only westerners could afford. And we would eat breakfast and dinner there. And the thing that got me was the bland taste of the food. It all looked good when we put it on our plate. And the desserts: I remember seeing beautiful cakes on display trays, but when I sat down to enjoy it and put the fork to my mouth, my brain was thinking one thing and my taste buds experienced something else. The cake was made without sugar. The chocolate looked appetizing, but the taste was bitter. It was terrible. It was a good place to lose weight.

And at the end of our mission trip, we crossed the border from East Germany into West Germany, and it went from dull gray to vivid color. It seemed like everything had a fresh coat of paint. There were flowers in cute flower boxes, the cars were new, the clothing was modern, and then there was the McDonalds. A Big Mac never tasted so good, and it hasn't since.

History has shown that the Soviet system of government was flawed. The socialist system was hollow. It looked good from a distance, but as you got closer, as you touched it, lived in it, tasted it, it was like the bitter chocolate cake I tasted in Prague. The system made promises it couldn't keep. It was proven to be a hollow shell when less than a year later, the wall separating the east from west collapsed and communism fell apart in Eastern Europe.

This message will finish up our 40 days of Worship Series. I was told that hundreds of us have been reading our worship devotions on the CPC app every day. We heard sermons and engaged in discussions in our community groups that were designed to

help all of us grow in our understanding, appreciation, and participation in worship.

But you and I know, that we can gain valuable knowledge about worship, and we can participate in wonderful worship practices, but if we don't have the right foundation, our worship becomes a hollow activity, bland instead of sweet, religion instead of a relationship, and dull and gray instead of vibrant and colorful.

Throughout these 40 days, we have reflected on our definition of worship: Worship is our God-given response to who God is and what God has done for us. If our worship doesn't well up as a God-given response to who he is and what he has done, it isn't sweet, it won't change us, and it isn't pleasing to God. It feels hollow.

Our text is from Romans. The first 11 chapters of Romans is one of the best places in the Bible to look in order to understand who God is and what he has done for us. In short, Romans chapters 1-11 explain the gospel, or "God's Good News for Us." And then at the beginning of chapter 12, Paul says this:

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy,**

Therefore, Paul is saying, because of this wonderful gospel I just explained to you, which saves you that I laid out in chapters 1-11, I urge you... The idea is that Paul stands beside us, encouraging us, counseling us, and helping us. He says it to us in strong words, meant not to be a suggestion, but to be obeyed by the young church in Rome.

In view of God's mercy... It's plural and should literally say, "In view of God's mercies." All that helps us understand who God is and what he has done for us, that these mercies well up in us. Let's look closer at these mercies God has shown us. For me, Romans chapters 1-11 breaks out like this.

**Therefore, Because of What God has done for us**

**Romans, chapter 1, tells us that God has a problem with us.**

Paul starts out his brilliant writing detailing that God has a problem with us. What is His problem? We are sinners. Deep inside. It's at our core, we were born under the curse of sin, and so our human nature is bent toward sin. We were born broken, and there is nothing we can do to fix our brokenness. Not only that, we actually are guilty of sin. This is hard for some of us. We see criminals, murderers, and abusers as sinners, and that's easy to accept. We can see that God would have a problem with

them. But Paul is saying wait a minute; I have a problem with you too. You religious people, you sin too. In Romans 3:9, Paul writes, "What shall we conclude then? Do we have an advantage? Not at all! All are under the power of sin." Our human nature leads us to sin. And we sin. And we deserve all the forces of God's wrath against our sin, against us. That's the bad news. Here is the good news.

### **God has an answer for us.**

It's the sacrificial death of Jesus. Romans 3:25 says, "God offered His son Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith." In other words, Jesus being a sacrifice of atonement means that Jesus paid the ultimate price of his life in order to pay the price for our sin. Justice was rendered. We are justified through the sacrifice of Christ. We are pronounced not guilty by God because Christ died as our substitute and paid for our sin through his death on the cross. So if we want to see the justice of God, we look to the cross.

And if we want to see the love of God, we look to the cross. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And as we read earlier, we can't earn it. We can only receive it by faith. What God does for us is offer us a gift that we receive by faith. In Romans chapter 4, we read that Abraham learned he was not justified by God through his works because if so, he would have had something to boast about. Romans 4:3 says, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." And verse 7 says, "Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven, whose sins are covered."

So first, Paul tells us what God has done for us. Then, Paul tells what God has done in us.

### **Therefore, because of What God has done in us**

The gospel is the gift of forgiveness sin and the gift of eternal life. But there is more. As if forgiveness and eternal life are not enough already, the gospel is also the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have been given the power to live a new life because the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. Romans 8 tells us that the Spirit of Christ is in us, and we have been given the capacity through the power of Christ in us to put to death the flesh. How do we know this? Because Paul says, in Chapter 8, verse 2, that "through Jesus Christ, the Spirit who gives life has set us free from the law of sin and death." Before the Spirit of Christ, we could not please God, and now because the Spirit of Christ lives in us, we can live to please God. We no longer have to live to please the flesh.

So, we let what God has done for us well up in us. And we let what God has done in us well up in us. And if that's not enough, Chapters 9 through 11 tell us what God wants to do through us. That we, as an extension of Abraham and ancient Israel in the Old Testament, have a new purpose, which is to bring the

blessing of the gospel to the world. We have been grafted like a new branch into an old tree, grafted into the great purpose God gave Abraham and then the Israelites to bless all nations. We have been given that same purpose to bless all nations. And it means that we are to take our worship outside the doors of our church and out into the world. That through us, the gospel will go out into the world. Through us, the gospel will go outside the doors of the church, up and down the peninsula. We let the mercies of God well up in us, because of what God has done for us, in us, and wants to do through us.

What is our response? In other words, how then shall worshippers live?

### **How Then Shall Worshippers Live?**

**"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice..." Romans 12:1a**

#### **Worshippers offer themselves as living sacrifices**

The first point is an obvious one. The sacrifice is to be a living sacrifice rather than a dead one. This was a new idea in Paul's day. Sacrifices brought to priests in the temple were always killed. The animal died in place of the worshipper.

Paul tells us that we are a new kind of sacrifice. We are to offer our lives to God to live for Him so that as a result, we might no longer live for ourselves, but being moved by God's mercies, we live for God. Because we have been made alive in Christ, His spirit can empower us to lay ourselves on the altar of God and be fully at his disposal. Living means a deliberate, ongoing sacrifice given again and again over a lifetime. The word sacrifice means "to kill." It means we are to continually deny ourselves, kill our desires for self-gratification, and live to gratify God for who he is and what he has done.

Offer our bodies: It tells us that God doesn't want a purely inward or abstract worship. He also wants a practical worship. He wants all of us. We sing about and talk about giving God our hearts, but Paul makes it clear God wants us to give not just our hearts but our entire bodies as a living sacrifice.

You might be asking, "Why would God be interested in my body?" It's overweight. It's tired. It's near-sighted? It's got aches and pains. It's wrinkled or blotchy, achy, diseased, impulsive, nervous, unattractive, lazy, awkward, disabled, near-sighted, hard-of-hearing, stiff, and brittle. What kind of sacrifice is that? The Old Testament tells us that worshippers sacrificed the best sheep of their flock to atone for their sins. I'm no best sheep.

As John Piper says, "The sacrifice of our bodies to God is not a sacrifice for sin. That is done already in the sacrifice of Christ."

Piper adds,

**"The offering of our bodies is not the offering of our bodily looks, but our bodily behavior. In the**

**Bible, the body is not significant because of the way it looks, but because of the way it acts. The body is given to us to make visible not our own beauty, but the beauty of Christ."**

We are acceptable to God as living sacrifices through Jesus Christ, through his perfection, not our perfection. What does it look like to offer our bodies? What about our eyes and ears? We receive impressions through our eyes and ears. So, this passage tells us that we are to offer our eyes and ears to God as instruments of righteousness. We are bombarded with messages that never speak of godliness as a virtue. We are bombarded with images that never show godliness as a virtue. Being a worshipper means that we are to counter our culture by filling our eyes and ears with Scripture, worship, and prayer. And being a worshipper means to remember our purpose of being a blessing to the nations and our neighbors. To see and hear what is going on around us, and thoughtfully and graciously engage in compassionate ways.

Let this idea of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice fill our imaginations. For you, what does it look like to present your tongue, your feet, your brain, your skill set, to God? For you, what is an area of your life, a part of your body that you have held back from the altar of sacrifice? What part of your body is being used as an instrument of sin rather than an instrument of righteousness? God certainly wants our time and our money, but he doesn't want our time and money without the rest of us. C.S. Lewis, in *The Weight of Glory*, wrote,

He cannot bless us unless he has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims all. There's no bargaining with Him.

God is worthy of us giving every part of ourselves to him.

**"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God..."**

### **Worshippers pursue holiness as a quality of life**

We speak of holy as an attribute of God. He is God, set apart, everything about him and what he touches is holy. Literally, the word means, "to be set apart for a special purpose." In the Old Testament, holy sacrifices were to be the best, not the second best of the flock, near perfect lambs without blemish or flaw. But in the New Testament, the term took the meaning of godliness. A worshipper was to come to God, desiring a clean heart and clean hands. Recognizing that only God can truly cleanse us and make us more holy.

Why does Paul include the word holy in this verse? Because even though we stumble over the call for personal holiness and like to avoid the topic of holiness completely if we are talking about ourselves, we see here that our personal holiness matters to God. It's what God wants to do in us.

Our body is holy because of what we do with it, not because of what it looks like. Paul is saying, offer the members of your body, such as your eyes, your mouth, your feet, and your hands to God. Commit all your body parts as instruments of righteousness, not as instruments of sin.

My personal prayer this past week was, Lord, "make this specific part and every part of my physical body an instrument that hungers for righteousness." Lord, make every part of my body an instrument of mercy, of peace and service.

The writer of Hebrews wrote,

**"Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." Hebrews 13:15**

When the lips join the heart in praise to God, the body becomes a holy, living sacrifice.

The writer continues,

**"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." v. 16**

When we do good for our neighbor, in Jesus's name, with our mouth, hands, or our presence, our body becomes a holy, living sacrifice of worship.

**"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God..."**

### **Worshippers are motivated to please God**

I love this. To God, sacrificing our body is seen as holy. It is seen as pleasing to God. When we lay ourselves down on the altar of God to be living sacrifices, it pleases God. It's the idea of the aroma that a burning sacrifice is a pleasing aroma to God. We are, as living sacrifices, a sweet aroma. And isn't that our entire purpose as worshippers, to glorify God and please him with our lives?

The purpose of our bodies is so God can be made more visible to others through the mercy we show others because of the mercy he has shown us.

**"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1)**

This last phrase true and proper worship. The noun translated as worship in the original language is *latreia* and can mean both worship and service. The word for proper in the original language is *logikos*, which could mean spiritual worship or service. It most likely means logical or reasonable acts of service. For followers of Christ standing on the foundation of the gospel, the idea of presenting our bodies to sin doesn't make logical sense. Why would freed slaves continue to serve their old master? Presenting our bodies to our new master is completely logical.

**Worshippers view their worship as reasonable acts of service**

As we approach the end of our series on worship, we have learned that our worship response can well up in us as a private response to God because of the presence and the willingness of the Holy Spirit to work inside us.

And we have learned that our worship response can well up in us as a corporate response to God as we gather together regularly in a worshipping community. In this message, we learned that our worship wells up in us as a response to the gospel, the foundation of our faith. And that a reasonable worship response is to fulfill our purpose by giving our bodies as living sacrifices to be the hands and feet of Jesus for our neighbors up and down this peninsula. Our high calling as living sacrifices is to show them Jesus through our words and actions.

Isaac Watts said it so well in his great hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

**Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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