

## “Worship: A Living Sacrifice” (Romans 12:1-2)

Seven Rhythms • April 21, 2024 • [www.isonrise.com](http://www.isonrise.com)

---

Do you ever have one of those moments when you’re reading the Bible and feel VERY far away from what you’re reading? Every morning, I get up and read a few chapters of the Bible, and in a year, I make my way from Genesis to Revelation. It’s not a chore for me; I absolutely love it. Making daily Bible *reading* and *reflection* a part of life has changed me over the years. I highly recommend it!

However, sometimes I sit there, read a passage, sip my coffee, and think: “*How do I relate to this? How can I connect this to my life?*” Do you know what I mean? I have no problem believing God created the world in six days, caused a worldwide flood, spoke to people and prophets, came to the earth in a human body, died, rose again, and commissioned each of us to make disciples of Jesus. That’s not where I have my problem. I’m a simple thinker, and after all, if God existed, He could do all that and more without breaking a sweat! But do you ever read something and think, “*I just don’t get it. How does that work? Why does it work that way?*”

My struggle often relates to *how* people worshipped God in the Old Testament. I would have loved taking a trip out to the wilderness to the Tabernacle and seeing the pillar of cloud and fire hover above the place where the Ark of Covenant rested. I would have loved taking a trip up to Jerusalem to the Temple Mount and seeing all of the worship of God consume every part of the largest Temple in the world devoted to only one God! That would have been amazing to see and participate in.

My struggle rests in *how* I would have had to worship—by taking an innocent animal and offering it as a sacrifice. You know what I mean, the kind of sacrifice where the Priests examines the animal, makes sure it is my absolute best, slits its throat, bleeds it dry, throws it up on the altar, and burns it in worship to God. Pastor Aaron, thank you SO much for not having that as part of our worship today. Brent could never have gotten that much blood off the carpet! *Do you know what I mean?*

Today, we’re going to look at a passage of Scripture that addresses how our worship today is similar—but different from the days of old. They still require a sacrifice, but today, our sacrifice doesn’t require the blood of innocent animals—that was taken care of by Jesus’ death on the cross. But, our worship does still requires a sacrifice for it to be true worship.

Since we’re in this series about the **Seven Rhythms** of a Disciple, and since we are thinking about the topic of **Worship**, I am excited to talk through Paul’s words in Romans 12:1-2. Let me read them to you, and then we’ll take our time breaking down how it instructs us today. “*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.*” Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) The Apostle Paul has spent eleven chapters writing about what followers of Jesus should **believe**, and now he transitions to how we should **behave**. This is a common pattern for Paul. As you read Paul’s letters in the New Testament, one thing becomes clear: Paul always begins by teaching **Truth** and then moves to **Application**. For the follower of Jesus, **Doctrine** and **Duty** go hand in hand. What we **Believe** helps to determine how we **Behave**. It’s not enough for us to read God’s Word and accept it as fact; we must let our **Learning** move into **Living** and show that transformation in our daily lives.

In these two little verses, Paul shows us how to do just that. For Paul, giving ourselves to God involves the entire person: Our **body**, our **mind**, and our **will**.

Paul begins with an **appeal**, an urging. That word is the same word used to describe the Holy Spirit. It pictures someone standing alongside another in order to provide *counsel, courage, comfort, hope, and a positive perspective*. That’s what a good encourager does! They make an appeal without criticizing or condemning. Paul is writing these words to urge these believers to do something. What? **Consecrate themselves to God**. Consecrate is an old word, but it has a powerful meaning: “*The devoting or setting apart of anything to the worship or service of God.*” It shows up all over the Bible when people dedicate themselves to God.

This word is important when we consider what God has called us to do as we follow Him. But friends, **We cannot expect to worship effectively if we live our lives defectively**. Because of God’s great compassion in offering His salvation to you, decide to put God first in your daily life. The world around us is full of temptation and sin, but Paul wants to show us how to live for God fully.

Since *We cannot expect to worship effectively if we live our lives defectively*, how do we consecrate ourselves to God? Paul gives us three ways to do this:

**First, we consecrate to God our BODIES.** Verse 1 says, *“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.”* Romans 12:1 (ESV)

Before we trusted in God, we used our bodies for sinful pleasures and purposes. Now that we belong to God, we are to use our bodies for His glory. A believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God now lives in us, no longer in temples made by human hands. We read this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV) Since our bodies are God’s temple, and because God’s Spirit lives within us, it is our duty and our honor to use our bodies to glorify God and no longer glorify our sinful desires. Earlier, in Romans 6, Paul taught us that we are to do this by *“yielding our bodies”* as *“instruments of righteousness.”* We yield the right to our bodies to God so that He can continue His work in and through us. Our bodies are all we have to offer to God. Our body represents the total person—and it belongs to God: He bought it! So, in order to live for God, we must offer Him all that we are—which is represented by our body. When we dedicate our bodies to God, He will be in charge of our *emotions*, our *thoughts*, and our *passions*. Every day is a worship experience when your body is yielded to the Lord.

What is a *living sacrifice*? It’s a strange concept because, by definition, a sacrifice is dead! Therefore, what it’s saying is this, *“Make your life a living killing,”* and that’s a deliberate paradox. Anyone in the ancient world would easily understand that a sacrifice involves death, and that’s still true. But we find new life by choosing to die to our old lives and the patterns of the world around us. That makes our death an actual new life. We live as dead people to the culture and customs of this world but now live for God. We are dead people walking in new life. It’s Paul’s way of saying that the life of Christ is like those old sacrifices, but not like them. They’re similar but different! Think about it: those old sacrifices involved the shedding of blood because they were a covering for sin. Sin needs punishment, and the sacrifices represent the fact that punishment is required. That was the only way to be right with God. And so, Jesus did what we could never do. He shed his blood to cover over our sinfulness and pay the price our sin demanded. He died so we could live. Now we live because He died. Our sacrifice is not to die but to live. Our very lives should be lived in a grateful response to what God has already done for us.

Our living sacrifice is also different from the sacrifices of old because back then, you had to offer an animal to be killed every time you sinned. The blood of sheep and other animals was a constant reminder that our sin was never fully taken care of but had to be repeated over and over again. Not so for us! Yes, Jesus died for our sins once and for all, but now we get to live day after day, offering ourselves to God.

A living sacrifice means *deliberately, consciously, continually, and perpetually* offering yourself to him every *moment, every hour, and every day*. It means to live a life where you choose to *“put to death the right to live life as you choose.”* You die to the idea that you belong to yourself. You die to the idea that you know best for your life. You die to your ways and give them to God. ***That’s why it’s a living sacrifice, a living killing!***

**Second, we consecrate to God our MINDS.** Verse 2 begins with these words, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”* Romans 12:2a (ESV) Paul gives us a negative and then a positive. The Negative? *Do not be conformed to this world.* The Positive? *Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.* The word **Conformed** means *“to shape, form, or mold your behavior in accordance with a particular pattern or set of standards.”* The Greek word shows up in our English *schematic* and implies a conforming to an outward formula. That’s our culture’s desire for every person—conform to their standard formula. But Paul commanded that we *be transformed*. This is a *present passive imperative* that means *“keep on being transformed.”* It’s not a one-time thing; it’s an everyday thing.

The Greek word for **transformed** shows up in our English word *metamorphosis* and means a total change from the inside out. The key to this change is the *mind*, the control center of our *attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions*.

The world wants to *control* your mind, but God wants to *transform* your mind. The world wants to change your mind, so it exerts pressure from the outside. But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. If the world controls your thinking, you are a *conformer*; if God controls your thinking, you are a *transformer*.

**Renewal** refers to “a new way of thinking, a mind desiring to be conformed to God rather than to the world.” We will never be truly **transformed** without this **renewing** of our minds. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to willingly let God transform us so that our minds are made more like Jesus. The more we do this, the more we grow to seek God’s will for our lives, and the more we learn that God’s will is not just good for us but the best for us. In the end, this pleases God because we are cooperating with Him in our spiritual transformation.

When we offer our entire selves to God, our relationship with the world changes. We have been called to a different lifestyle than what the world offers us. An expanded translation would be, “*Stop being molded by the external and fleeting customs of this age, but undergo a deep inner change by the renewing of your mind.*”

**Finally, we consecrate to God our WILL.** Verse 2 ends with, “...*that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” Romans 12:2b (ESV) When we have our minds **transformed**, we more and more willingly submit to **the will of God**. Those three words: **good**, **acceptable**, and **perfect** are not just the goal, but also the description of how we will see God’s will for our lives. When we are transformed daily by the renewing of our minds, we begin to see **God’s will** as the best for us. In doing so, we can then clearly see that the cultures and customs of the world are not what our heart truly desires.

I love how the J.B. Phillips version translates Romans 12:1-2: “*With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*” Romans 12:1-2 (JBP) **REPEAT**

Paul gives us an outline for breaking the world’s mold. But, friends, to put these directions in motion means going against the flow of our culture. **Will your life follow the pattern of this world or God’s pattern? Someone once said that the main problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.**

Friends, give yourself completely to Him. Why? Because of all He has done for you! In light of God laying down his life for you, you can reasonably result in kind. He gave Himself for us, so why wouldn’t we give ourselves completely to Him?

Like J.B. Phillips, make a choice to say, “*I don’t care what the world is doing. I’m not going to let it squeeze me into its mold.*” So, are you a conformer or a transformer? Daily, choose to say, “*I am now a different person and choose to live a different life than I used to live. I am deciding not to live for today but choosing to live for eternity. I don’t want to be like everyone else but to act different.*”

When Paul writes, **which is your spiritual worship**, the word **worship** means service, and every one of us serves something or someone. Every one of us lays our life down for something or someone. We’re sacrificing; we’re worshipping something or someone. Even those who say, “*I choose to reject God and live in my freedom. I will do whatever I want to do. I, alone, know what’s best for me!*” Even those people (especially those people) are living as slaves to an idea they will never fully achieve. It could be living for the achievements of your career, the identity of your sexuality, the pleasures of your fleshly desires, or the smug knowledge that you know better than anyone else. All of those are a master you are serving. You are not free!

As Bob Dylan so clearly sang, “*You’re gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.*” Since you are going to have to be a sacrifice for something or someone, why not be a sacrifice for God? Why not give yourself for something greater than your own self? Only God is **infinitely wise** and **infinitely loving**. Choose to make your life a **living sacrifice** to Him.

**So, what do you have to put to death so you can live a fully consecrated life for God?** In view of all that God has done for you, how can you respond in a way that is pleasing to him? Remember that **We cannot expect to worship effectively if we live our lives defectively.**

Let me close with Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage. “*So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*” Romans 12:1-2 (MSG)

---

## Life Level Application

---

- 1) Head:** Read Romans 12:1-2. Consecration is the “devoting or setting apart of anything to the worship or service of God.” When we consecrate our whole self: our bodies (v.1), our minds (v.2a), and our will (v.2b) entirely to the Lord, what is the result? Why is this so difficult for us to do?
- 2) Heart:** Are you living as a *conformer* or *transformer*? What parts of your whole self do you struggle to give over entirely to the Lord? How are you looking more like the world or more like your Savior?
- 3) Hands:** What would a living sacrifice (Living Killing) require of you this week? Will you take that step?
- 4) Habits:** Write out the J.B. Philips translation of Romans 12:1-2 and put it in a prominent place so you can see it every day this week. Then, make it a prayer for living it out in all areas of your life.

*“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”* Romans 12:1-2 (JBP)