

Living Sacrifices

Romans 11:33—12:8

Introduction

When I say the word “sacrifice”, what do you think of? Someone might think of a bunt in baseball, where, instead of trying to get a hit, you’re trying to make an out, an out that will advance the runner or runners. In essence, you’re giving up your time at bat for the good of the team. One may think of the Old Testament sacrifices, where a bull, lamb, or dove is killed and burned on the altar. You’re giving up an animal for forgiveness of sins. One may think of home life, where a parent goes without or gives up something for the good of the family. Notice the common thread. In all these cases, a sacrifice involves *giving up* something. What then is a living sacrifice?

Why? (Romans 11:33—36)

A good rule of thumb when reading Scripture is that if it begins with a *therefore* you want to ask what it’s *there for*. *Therefore* means “based on what I just said.” So, normally, we would have to look back before the reading to see what Paul had just said. Well, the Lectionary includes those verses in our reading for us. The whole notion of *living sacrifices* is based on **verses 33—36** of **chapter 11** (Read **Romans 11:33—36**). God is the beginning, sustenance, and end of all things. His ways and judgments are unsearchable, and His mind is unknowable. The majesty of God is the very reason we are to be living sacrifices. It is our *spiritual act of worship* (**Romans 12:1**) of God Almighty.

What’s Given Up (Romans 12:2a)

We said that one thing common to all sacrifices is that they involve giving up something. Is there something we give up as living sacrifices? Yes. We must no longer *conform to the ways of this world* (**Romans 12:2a**). As Ambrosiaster says: *It is no longer the case that bodies are sacrificed for bodies, because instead of bodies, it is the sins of the body which must be put to death* (**Commentary on Paul’s Epistles**). In other words, in our Baptism, we died with Christ to sin. As living sacrifices, we live in that death. We don’t go chasing after the ways of the world. That can get dangerous today where more laws are being enacted every day to enforce wokeism. We can find the weight of the government coming down upon us if we don’t conform to their way of thinking. But this also speaks to materialism and independence, acting on our own best interests. For that is also the way of the world. Being a living sacrifice means putting others first, sacrificing our ego.

How We Become Living Sacrifices (Romans 12:2b)

Now, we can’t make ourselves living sacrifices. We become living sacrifices when we are *transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]* (**Romans 12:2b**). Our minds are renewed by God’s Word. Origin says: *Our mind is renewed by the practice of wisdom and reflection on the Word of God and the spiritual understanding of His Law* (**Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans**). He goes on to say that he doubts that a mind that is lazy toward the Bible can be renewed. God renews our mind when we sturdy and meditate on His Word.

What We Gain (Romans 12:2c)

Something is always gained in a sacrifice. This is what we gain by being living sacrifices: *that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2c)*. This is so we can know what's good for us. God's plan for Israel was to be a theocracy, that is, they were to be ruled by Him through judges. This was His good, acceptable, and perfect will for His people. But, in **1 Samuel 8**, Israel said they wanted to be like every other nation and have a king. Samuel warned them (Read **1 Samuel 8:11—18**). Even with that warning, Israel still demanded a king. So, God gave them a king. It wasn't His good and acceptable and perfect will. It was His second-best will for His people. But we want what's best for us. We want His good and acceptable and perfect will. Where then do we find God's good, acceptable, and perfect will for our lives? You guessed it, the Bible. That's where God's revealed will is, all we need to know for this life and the next.

What a Living Sacrifice Looks Like (Romans 12:3—8)

Now, what does a living sacrifice look like? In **verses 3—8**, we see that a perfect living sacrifice has a *sober judgment* about himself and is to walk *by the faith that God has given him (v. 3)*. Next, we see this is a communal activity. Paul lists these spiritual gifts to show that we are different from each other. But we are all part of the same body, so we are dependent upon each other for our very survival. Each part of the body contributes its particular portion, or the whole body suffers.

United in One Body

It is God who unites us into this one body. As Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10**: *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:17)*. In Holy Communion, not only do we confess our unity of faith, but God also unites us into this one body, a body of **LIVING SACRIFICES**. So, our prayer is, "Make my life a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to You."

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
