

## *Gospel-Centered Sacrifice*

*Various Texts*

*Series: Sacrifice Worth Making*

Congregational Prayer:

**Introduction:** Take your Bibles and join me in Romans 12, Romans chapter 12.

I am no farmer, but I do know that one of the keys to success in farming is providing fertile soil for the root system of the plant. The roots are the organ of the plant. When a farmer puts a seed, or millions of seeds as the case may be, into the fertile Kansas soil, the seed will begin the germination process by sending the radicle root further down into the soil. The radicle, or main root, is of first importance to the little seed. Without this root finding moisture and nutrients the plant will not grow. And it is only after the radicle root shoots down and finds these things that now the stem of the plant shoots up above the surface of the ground and begins to look for light from the sun. Eventually the plant will grow to maturity and will produce fruit after its kind, but this will only happen if the root health is maintained. If the roots dry up because of lack of water, or if the nutrients in the soil prove inefficient, or if too much rain washes the soil away and drowns the root – then there will be no fruit. What we see and enjoy above ground is but a display of the roots below ground.

This is a wonderfully accurate picture of the Christian man and Christian woman. Given the right soil, right moisture, and the right environment, the Christian will grow into maturity in Christ. There are many elements to this mature believer, but one thing that we saw in 1 Peter 2 last week is that they will be known by sacrifice for their Lord. In other words, given the right soil, moisture, and climate, the plant will mature and produce fruit and part of that fruit will be sacrifice. So the question before us this morning is – what is the soil in which our radicle root needs to drive itself down into so that we will grow into a mature plant which will produce sacrifice which will be pleasing fruit in the sight of our heavenly Father. This is just another way of asking the question which is dominating our little mini-series on sacrifice – and that is – what kind of sacrifice is worth making in the Christian life? None of us want to give our lives to something that is worthless or vain. There is no joy in making sacrifice which is not pleasing to our Lord. And thankfully the New Testament has a lot to say to guide us in knowing what kind of sacrifices are worth making. The two answers I want to point your attention to this morning are that Sacrifice worth making is Gospel-rooted and Gospel-shaped. In other words, our radicle root of the plant of our spiritual man needs to go down deep into the life-giving soil of the Gospel. Sacrifice worth making grows out of the nutrient rich soil of the Gospel.

- I. Sacrifice Worth Making is Gospel-Rooted
  - a. Romans 12:1

- i. You are in Romans chapter 12, and we are just going to look at one verse – Romans 12:1. The book of Romans is all about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The first 11 chapters trace the Gospel from our sinfulness in all of its darkness and depravity to the forgiveness of sin offered in Christ alone through faith alone. The last 4 chapters take that theologically deep teaching of the first 11 chapters and it fleshes that gospel out into the context of everyday life. So, to say it another way – the first 11 chapters are generally theological and doctrinal, and the last 4 chapters are generally practical and directive. The lynch pin between them is this verse.
- ii. Imagine that you owned a truck and you were going to pull a trailer with that truck. As you attach the hitch into the receiver on the back of the truck it is not enough to simply place the hitch there and then hook up the trailer. There is a small, but very important piece of metal which must be used to ensure that the hitch stays in the receiver. This lynch pin connects the truck to the trailer. That is what verse 1 is. Chapter 1-11 are the truck of Gospel truth which is ready to pull the trailer of Gospel living which is found in chapters 12-16. The little lynch pin which connects them both is verse 1. Gospel truth is made for towing this Gospel living just like a truck is made for towing a trailer. And Gospel living is made for being pulled behind the drive power of Gospel truth, just like a trailer is made to follow a truck. The lynch pin between the two is this truth found in verse one – Gospel truth compels complete sacrifice. Paul says it this way. *Read 12:1.*
- iii. Rooted in Mercy
  1. Paul is appealing to these believers to make themselves a sacrifice to God, and he roots this appeal in the mercy of God. These mercies of God which are the basis of the appeal here, are the mercies known by us in the Gospel. This mercy has taken us from the depraved worship exchangers of chapter 1 to the men and women of faith of chapter 4. From the haughty, self-righteous religious hypocrites of chapter 2 to the humble recipients of justification by faith in Jesus by the end of chapter 3. From being under sin through one man – Adam – to being freed from sin and being given eternal life through the second Adam – Jesus Christ. From being dead in sin in chapter 6 and under its complete authority as slaves to being dead, buried, and risen again in Christ so that we are now dead to sin and alive to God. From being wretched and without hope of deliverance at the end of chapter 7, to being delivered by Christ so that there is therefore now no condemnation upon us. This is the mercy of God – the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  2. Only after exploring, explaining, and expositing this Gospel for 11 chapters is Paul now ready to tell us that we must sacrifice our lives for God. He does not start the book with this idea. He does

not command this idea of sacrifice to us earlier, but rather he waits until the last 3<sup>rd</sup> of the letter and he says to us – I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. In other words – Gospel truth compels Gospel sacrifice, and Gospel sacrifice is rooted in Gospel truth. The redeemed life is made for sacrifice because of and through the mercies of God. Just like a seed that is placed in ideal soil, with perfect moisture and climate conditions and nutrient levels – the seed can't help but grow – that's what it was made for. Just like that – this is what God has redeemed you for – sacrifice for Him. The transformation of the mind by God's mercy, and the re-birth of the soul by God's mercy, and the redemption of the will by God's mercy – all of it combines to compel sacrifice. You were made for this. The mercy of the Gospel is the fertile soil out of which the mature plant of Christian maturity grows to produce the ripe fruit of sacrifice.

3. So, if you desire to grow in your sacrifice to our Lord then you must send down your radicle root into the rich soil of Gospel mercy. If you want to give your life more completely and more sacrificially to our Lord as an act of worship, then run constantly to the act of sacrifice which He has accomplished for you. The way to more sacrifice is not a re-dedication service or a walking of an aisle at a camp or retreat or revival service. The way to more sacrifice is not to have your heart commanded to great sacrifice. The way to more sacrifice is to root yourself in the Gospel mercy of God. If you live there you will not be able to stop your plant from growing and budding the fruit of sacrifice.

iv. Fleshed out in Worship

1. This sacrifice that is rooted in mercy is then fleshed out in worship. So, the two parts of this verse are mercy and worship. Mercy is the fertile soil, and the sacrifice of worship which is offered to God is the fruit of the healthy plant growing in Gospel soil. This worship is a sacrificial kind of worship. So Paul uses the language of the Temple and calls us to present our offerings to God. We are to bring them to His place of worship and we are to place them on the altar there. Notice that the content of the sacrificial worship is our very selves, represented by our bodies. By using the term “bodies” the text is referring to all of us. So, we don't simply present our wills, or our affections, or our minds, but we bring it all as represented in our bodies and we present that to God as our act of sacrificial worship. We are also told that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices which are also holy and acceptable. These three qualifiers are themselves acts of God's mercy. We are

only alive in that we have been made alive in Christ. We are only holy in that we have been bought with the precious blood of Christ and our spots of dark sin have been washed clean in the cleansing flow of His priceless blood. We are only acceptable to God in that we have been justified by our sin being placed on Jesus upon His Cross, and His righteousness being wrapped around us through faith. So, we are only sacrificial in that we are rooted in the Gospel of mercy, and our sacrifice itself is dripping in this same mercy in that we can be living, holy, and acceptable.

2. Notice the language of sacrificial worship which saturates the verse. It starts with the very first words – I appeal to you. We are not commanded to present our lives as a living sacrifice. God doesn't simply command us to conform to some outward standard of sacrifice which has attainable markers to let us know if we have sacrificed enough. No, God changes our hearts by his mercy, and wins our affections through his love, and transforms our minds with His truth, and redeems our wills with his grace so that we can simply be beckoned and appealed to give ourselves as a sacrificial act of worship. Sacrificial worship is not sacrificial or worship if it has to be commanded. That is why we are appealed to here. Notice also that the presentation of our bodies as a sacrifice is summed up in the last phrase by saying, “which is your spiritual worship.” This can also be translated as “which is your reasonable service.” But with the other sacrificial and worship ideas already present in the verse this phrase is best understood as referring to logical worship from your spirit.
  3. It is what Christ was referring to when he was conversing with the woman at the well in John 4. He told her in verses 23-24 “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” This is what true worship of God looks like – it is spiritual worship, compelled by truth.
  4. So, in our verse – it is the truth of the mercy of God compelling our spirits to present our bodies as a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice is compelled and not commanded, therefore it is an act of worship, not simply a duty done. This will only be true of your sacrifice if you are rooting yourself down deep into Gospel soil.
- b. Hebrews 13:15a
- i. Let me show you this truth from one more text – Hebrews 13 – Hebrews chapter 13. I am going to start reading in verse 11. *Read 13:11-15.*
  - ii. Just like those animals who were sacrificed under the Old Covenant were shamefully burned outside the camp, so too Jesus was filled with shame

on our behalf and died outside the camp on our behalf. Therefore, we should expect the same. He has taken our shame of sin, and now, if we are to be one with Him, we will bear the shame of identification with His death. We can endure this light and momentary affliction, even if it means that we are put to death like Jesus was because we don't have a lasting residence here in this present day earthly realm, but we have a city that is still coming – the city of God.

- iii. This foundation leads logically then to the command of verse 15. Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Before we examine the contents of the sacrifice, look at what the sacrifice is rooted in. “Through him.” Through Christ – we are to root our sacrificial worship of God in Christ. This is the parallel thought to “I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God.” Through Christ then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. The reality of the work of Christ once again produces the fruit of sacrifice flowing out of our hearts as an act of worship.
- iv. This is God's path to sacrifice that is worth making. He is well-pleased with sacrifice that is rooted in the Gospel. So, brother, sister – take a look at your sacrifice for a moment. As I mentioned last week, I sense that many of you are carrying heavy loads of responsibility and pressure and stress and unique busyness, and all of those combined demand sacrifice from you. But is the sacrifice you are making rooted in the Gospel? Are you sacrificing as unto the Lord and not unto men? Are you running often to examine the mercy given so as to be compelled to show that merciful sacrifice to others? How often do you preach the Gospel to your own heart? How often do you remind yourself of the depth of your depravity, of the greatness of God's mercy, and of the vastness of God's sacrifice to save your soul? This is God's path to sacrifice worth making.

## II. Sacrifice Worth Making is Gospel-Shaped

- a. Being Gospel rooted will give way to being Gospel shaped. Like the seed is dependent upon the soil in which it is planted, so your soul is designed to be planted in Gospel truth which will then produce Gospel-shaped fruit. That is what the rest of the book of Romans is full of. After that lynch pin verse in 12:1, the rest of the book goes on to describe a life of sacrificial worship which springs forth and buds out of the rich Gospel soil of God's mercy. The same is true here in Hebrews 13. So, through Christ, we are to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.
- b. Hebrews 13:15b-16
  - i. Continuous sacrifice
    - 1. Notice that this Gospel-shaped sacrifice is continuous. Literally in the original it says – on account of all things. In other words – in every circumstance, at every moment, in every way we are to continuously offer up to God this sacrifice of praise. The sacrifice of Jesus which bore our shame and our guilt and caused him to be

slaughtered outside the camp, is worthy of our continuous sacrifice of praise to God. The Gospel is not just mostly good news which is deserving of a moment of elation – like our sports team winning their rivalry game. No, the Gospel is the Good News which is so good that it is worthy of constant, continuous, unending joy-filled praise of God. In all circumstances and at all times there is no greater news than the Gospel of Christ. In all circumstances and at all times, there is nothing so bad as to prevent us from rejoicing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, even in the face of the most horrific tragedy in your life, the Gospel is still the most wonderful news, worthy of confident trust and humble rejoicing in God. If your sacrifice to God is truly rooted in the fertile soil of the mercies of God shown you in salvation, then you will grow more and more into continuous sacrifice.

2. This continuous nature of Gospel-shaped sacrifice is not just unique to Hebrews 13 by the way. So, Hebrews 13 is the third New Testament text we have looked at in this series on sacrifice, and we are three for three in the continuous category. So, in 1 Peter 2 we were called living stones which are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. That is all in the present and on-going state. You are redeemed in Christ so as to be a continuous offering of praise to God. Then in Romans 12:1 we are to present ourselves as a living sacrifice – not a dead one. This is not a one and done deal – this is a sacrifice which lives each moment as a sacrifice of praise to the God who has saved us in Christ. We will see this in verse 16 too. We must not neglect to do good or to share what we have. Those are both present commands with ongoing authority. Our Gospel-shaped sacrifice is an ongoing, continuous, never-ending, always pertinent and appropriate kind of thing.
3. This is not how we often think about sacrifice in our lives. Because we don't root it in Gospel soil we tend to think of it as temporary and occasional. We tend to limit our sacrifice – taking it in bite-sized portions so as to not take off more than we can chew. We like to manage it and make sure that God doesn't overspend that which we are giving. We are okay with occasional sacrifice, but continuous?
4. *Illustration:* It's like the difference between two coats that I gave to my girlfriend in High School. We tend to give our bodies to God like I gave my soccer coat to my girlfriend. We will loan it out for a while, but we are always thinking about when we will get it back into our own possession.

ii. God-exalting sacrifice

1. This Gospel-shaped sacrifice must also be a God-exalting sacrifice. So, verse 15 describes it as a sacrifice of praise to God – the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. In other words, this continuous sacrifice is given to God in light of what He has done. It is the only logical response you can have to the glorious truth of the Gospel. God who gave His only Son as a sacrifice for me now deserves my whole life as a constant offering of praise to Him. The word behind the phrase, acknowledge his name, is “homologeō” – or literally to say the same thing about, or to say something which accords to the thing being spoken about. In other words, your sacrifice should accord with the God who has rescued and redeemed you. Sacrifice is not about you. It is not an avenue to self-promotion or self-exaltation. It is rather the path to God-exaltation. It is in response to the work of God in the Gospel, and therefore it is to accord with the praiseworthiness of this God.
2. This will look like lips which are ready in every circumstance to look to and rejoice in the God of your salvation. Like Habakkuk – Gospel-shaped sacrifice can say:
  - a. “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” (Hab. 3:17-18)

### iii. Christ-like sacrifice

1. This Gospel-shaped sacrifice is God-exalting in what it says, and it is Christ-like in what it does. So, if we are rooted in the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, our lives will start producing sacrifice which is like His sacrifice. This is described in verse 16. We are commanded – based on the Gospel – to not neglect to do good and to share what we have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. So the sacrifice of words in verse 15 is coupled with the sacrifice of actions in verse 16. The Gospel is worthy of our words of praise and of our actions of good to others. These commands are full-orbed, life-shaping commands. This is to be our continuous response to the Gospel which has saved us. We are to not neglect doing good to other, and we are to not neglect sharing what we have with others.
2. Don't miss the fact that these are not universal commands, but corrective warnings. So, the text doesn't say – do all good to all people at all times and share everything you have with everyone at all times. It doesn't say that because that would be impossible. Only God is capable of such infinite sacrifice for our eternal good. You and I are limited in what we can offer. But these commands are corrective warnings. Our natural tendency is to protect

ourselves against doing good, and especially against sharing what we have with others. Our natural tendency is to neglect to do good and to share what we have because frankly, it is too costly to do this.

3. But beloved –this is not Gospel-shaped sacrifice. Gospel-shaped sacrifice doesn't get to choose its terms and its times and its level of trouble. No, we are to not neglect to do good and to share what we have. This is Jesus – by the way. This is what we see in Him. When Peter was preaching the Gospel to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 Peter described Jesus as going about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We also know from 2 Corinthians 8:9 that our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. In other words, he did not neglect to share what He had, but rather, he gave everything He had so that we could be redeemed.
4. My brother, my sister – you were made for this. You were redeemed for the very purpose of doing good to others and sharing with others that which you have. Do these things define your life? When God examines your life does he see this oozing through the cracks? When he looks over the church like a farmer looks over his field, is he disappointed with the crop of sacrifice in His field? Gospel-rooted sacrifice will produce the crop of Gospel-shaped sacrifice. That sacrifice will be continuous, and God-exalting, and Christ-like. And notice the result of this kind of sacrifice – it is pleasing and acceptable to God. This is the kind of sacrifice that is worth making.

c. Ephesians 5:1-2

- i. Let's go to one last text this morning – Ephesians 5 – Ephesians 5. One last point this morning about sacrifice that is worth making. You will find many of the elements we have seen in other texts here in Ephesians 5 as well. So Paul says – *read 5:1-2*.
- ii. Notice that it is rooted in the Gospel truth of the first 3 chapters of the book. We are called to imitate God – to follow His pattern, which is the only logical result from rooting ourselves in Gospel soil. And it is continuous – we are to walk in love. This walking is an ongoing, ever-present reality. And this continuous sacrifice is to be just like Jesus' sacrifice for us – one of love. Jesus sacrificed himself on our behalf. He loved us and this meant that He gave himself up for us. Gave himself up is the word for “betrayed” or “handed over.” It is the word used in the Gospels to talk about Judas betraying Jesus and handing him over to His accusers. Sacrifice which is rooted in Gospel soil will be sacrificial of self for the sake of others. It will look for ways to betray one's self for the benefit of others. It will find itself often in circumstances which are

uncomfortable for one's self-protective flesh because it will require the giving up of self for the sake of others.

- iii. So, sacrifice worth making is constantly seeking to love others. This means that it will be constantly sacrificing itself for the sake of others. If love for others does not have sacrifice of self as one of its main and principal parts, then it is not love at all. Love without sacrifice is simply just warm emotional feelings. But sacrifice without love is also not pleasing to God. Just read 1 Corinthians 13 sometime to get a picture of how you might be able to sacrifice for the sake of others, but not do it out of love, and find out how useless that is – like clanging gong or a noisy cymbal. It makes noise, but it does nothing of lasting value.
- iv. This is not true of sacrifice made in love. These sacrifices are worth making because these sacrifices are a fragrant offering to God. God is pleased with Gospel-rooted and Gospel-shaped sacrifice.

Conclusion: Beloved, do these things define your sacrifice? Are you looking to Jesus for the model and the motivation for sacrifice? Are you continually giving yourself in sacrificial service to others? Are you in every circumstance ready to offer the sacrifice of praise to God – the fruit of lips which acknowledge His name? Are you seeking to not neglect doing good and sharing what you have at all times? God is worthy of this kind of worship!