

“Put Yourself in the Offering Plate”

Romans 12:1-2

- INTRO. - ILL. – In a church service one Sunday, the offering plate came to a little girl at the end of a row. She took the plate, put it down on the floor and stood in it. When the usher asked her what she was doing, she responded, “In Sunday School I learned that I was supposed to give myself to God.”
- We see that very admonition in Rom. 12:1-2. Here Paul talks about “presenting yourself to God as a living sacrifice.” That idea comes from the practice of offering a sacrifice in the Temple, and (in that day and time) would have been something very similar to what we do today when we pass the offering plate.
- When we pass the offering plate today, we expect that genuine believers in Jesus Christ, are going to joyfully honor God with tithes and offerings, as a way of saying that everything we have belongs to God.
- But what Paul is saying (here), is that (in light of all God has done for us) our response should really be, to put ourselves in the offering plate. We are to offer ourselves completely to Him in every area of our lives – and this is nothing but our reasonable service to Him.

- ILL. – Years ago, William Booth walked among the poor, hungry, sick and lonely people of London, England. The people were crammed into crumbling buildings that were full of rats. They had no jobs. There was no one to help them.

Worst of all, there was no one to tell them about the love of Jesus Christ. They did *not* know that Jesus died to be their Savior – and lives again to be their Lord. Booth told his wife, “I have given myself to work for God among those sick souls.” The work that was begun that day has become known as “the Salvation Army.”

Years later, when someone asked General Booth the secret of his success, he said, “God has had all there was of me to have! From the day I got the poor of London on my heart, and a vision of what Jesus Christ would do for them, I made up my mind that God would have all there was of William Booth. God has all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life.”

- Listen, there is a big difference between *involvement* and *commitment*! A wise old saint once said, “When you look at a plate of ham and eggs, you know the chicken was *involved*, but the pig was *committed*.” The mercies of God do *not* inspire *involvement* – they inspire *commitment*!

- And this morning we are going to talk about that commitment. But before we get to that, let's back up and remember where we are in our study of Romans.

- In the first three chapters, Paul makes the case that everyone in the world is a sinner, and stand guilty before a holy God. Then (in the next two chapters) he declares that God has offered salvation to all who will put their faith and trust in Christ alone for eternal life.

- In chapters 6-8 he deals with the issues of sanctification and glorification. Then there are those three chapters (9-11) that answer the question, "What about the Jew, God's chosen people? Will God keep His promises to them?"

- And what we need to recognize, is that chapters 9-11 are a parentheses, so as we begin chapter 12 we are right back where we left off at the end of chapter 8.

- So the message is, that in light of our justification through faith in Jesus Christ, and the fact that He now wants to conform us into His own image, and He wants to sanctify us so that what we have become in Christ matches our outward behavior, in practical terms, what does this look like?

- This is what Paul is going to be dealing with from this point to the end of the letter. He is moving (now) from *doctrine* to *practice* – and that is the pattern of most of Paul's letters. He gives the truth of biblical doctrine, and then he moves into what that looks like in real life.

- If we have (in fact) become justified (as a once for all act of pardon by God in response to our faith in Jesus Christ), and *now* God wants to sanctify us (and conform us to the image of Christ), then we need to know what that looks like in actual practice.

- And this is what Paul is giving us here. We are moving from doctrine to practice – from theology to action. And Paul is going to say, "Here is what your new life in Christ is supposed to look like."

- By the way, there are a lot of people (today) who would like to (just) skip the doctrine altogether, and go straight to the application. They say, "Pastor, I'm tired of doctrine – can't we get to something more practical for everyday living?"

- Oh, but we *must* understand – it is *critical* to begin with doctrine before moving on to application. You can't apply what you don't know. We first have to understand the principles

of God wisdom before we can think about applying those principles to our lives.

- And any church that is *not* grounded in the truth of biblical doctrine, will end up following every fad, every whim, every extreme that comes down the pike, and will lack the stability and consistency to be effective for God.

- This is why we have spent a year and a half going through these first 11 chapters. We must understand the doctrine first. We must be grounded in the divine principles of His Word.

- But we can't stop there. We also need to understand how these things apply to our lives. We can't just stop with Bible knowledge. If we don't apply that knowledge to our lives, it does us no good.

- Listen my friend, you and I can know every doctrine that the Bible teaches, but if we are not applying them to our daily lives, then it is absolutely useless for us to know them. In fact, it can (actually) be harmful to us, because it can produce in us a pride that puffs us up.

- So we *do* need to go on to the practical section of this letter – and we need to see how all this doctrine should be worked out in our everyday lives.

- The word “therefore” (in 12:1) is the hinge that connects the doctrinal half to the practical half. And what Paul is saying in chapters 12-16 is, “In light of what you *now believe*, this is how you should *live*.”

- And what we will see, is that much of this section is in the imperative form. In other words, these are commands. In most of the issues Paul is going to deal with (here), he is going to say, “Just do it!”

- ILL. – Long before Michael Jordan was hawking sneakers that cost more than bicycles, God was saying, “Just do it.” Before there ever was a Nike company in Seattle, (indeed long before there ever was a Seattle), God's Word was saying, “Just do it!”

- From the time that Paul wrote these words, God was saying, “Here is my will for you. You don't have to pray about this. You don't have to contemplate it. You don't have to meditate on it. Just do it!”

- ILL. – John MacArthur gives this story in his commentary on Romans: (He says), “Some years ago, a tearful and obviously distraught young woman approached me at a conference where I

was speaking. She told me a story I have heard many times.”

“I just can’t seem to live the Christian life the way I should,’ she said, ‘I’m frustrated. I don’t have spiritual victory or a sense of accomplishment. I struggle with the simplest forms of obedience, and I’m constantly defeated. Can you help me?’”

“I said, ‘What has been your approach to solving the problems yourself?’ She replied, ‘I’ve tried everything. I’ve attended churches where they speak in tongues, have healings, and have all kinds of extraordinary spiritual experiences.’”

“I’ve spoken in tongues myself, had ecstatic experiences, been prophesied over, and experienced several supposed miracles. I’ve been “slain in the spirit.” But despite all of that, I’m *not* pleased with my life and I know God isn’t pleased. I’ve tried to get everything from Him that I can, but I’m *not* satisfied. I’m still miserable and want more.”

“(Dr. MacArthur told her) I think you have just put your finger on the problem. The key to spiritual victory (and true happiness) is not in trying to get all we can *from* God, but in giving all that we are (and have) *to* Him.”

- Countless people today, including many genuine Christians, flock to various churches, seminars, and conferences in search of personal benefits they hope to receive – and the truth of the matter is, they are doing the exact *opposite* of what Paul says we are to do (in Rom. 12:1-2).

- In this forceful (but compassionate) exhortation, the Apostle Paul does *not* focus on what we are receive *from* God, but on what we are to give *to* God.

- And the truth of the matter is, that the key to a productive and satisfying Christian life, is *not* in getting more *from* God, but in giving all *to* Him!

- The Bible makes it clear that we have all we need to live the victorious Christian life. Eph. 1:3 says, “...the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ...” Col. 2 says that we already have “all the treasures of [His] wisdom and knowledge” and that “in Him [we] have been made complete.” (Col. 2:3, 10)

- 2 Peter 1:3 says, “...that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness...” The key is *not* that we need more *from* God – the key is that God needs more of us! The secret is *not* in obtaining more than we have – it is in yielding more of ourselves to Him.

- So with that in mind, let's move into these first two verses of this chapter – and they are two of the most powerful verses in all the Word of God! Here Paul gives us 4 steps that are required if we are going to live the transformed life. The first step is a:

I. SUBMISSION OF YOUR SOUL (v. 1a)

- Look with me at v. 1, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...” (Stop right there.) The key word I want you to notice (here) is the word “brethren.”

- You see, this command is one that is given *only* to those who have already submitted their souls to God. They have already been born into the family of God through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

- The basis of the appeal (here) is that those who have first experienced the mercy of God show toward them in salvation, are the ones who are going to be willing to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God.

- Having experienced the mercies of God through justification is the first necessary step. You can't go any further until you have first taken this step.

You can't go on to sanctification if you have *not* first experienced justification.

- And because he has no saving relationship with God, the Bible says, “a natural man [a lost man] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

- Only those who are born again through faith in Christ can present themselves as living sacrifices to God, because they are the only ones who have true spiritual life.

- Another way to say this, is to say that only those who are genuine believers are priests who can come before God with an acceptable sacrifice.

- Earlier in this letter Paul had made it clear that “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). No matter what his personal feelings might be, the unredeemed person cannot truly worship God, cannot make an acceptable offering to God, cannot please God in any way with any offering.

- Why? Because he has no spiritual life. He is still dead in his trespasses and sins. Therefore there is nothing that he can offer to God that will

be acceptable in His sight. You cannot go any further in this passage if you are *not* born again. That's where it must start.

- (Make appeal for salvation)

- But now, once you have been born again through faith in Christ, God wants you to go on to the next step. Interestingly, the word “urge” (or “beseech”) there in v. 1 really means to “call someone up higher.”

- Paul is saying, “Come on up to the higher standard. Don't be content to stay at first base. Go on to second base – that is, go on in sanctification to become like Christ.” But there is another step here as well, which is:

II. SUBMISSION OF YOUR BODY (v. 1b)

- *Not only* your soul, but also your body. Look at v. 1 again, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.”

- Now, the term “present” was used for a priest that was placing a sacrifice on the altar. It carries the general idea of yielding (or giving up). It is in the imperative form, meaning it is a command. It

is *not* a suggestion or a recommendation – it is a command!

- It is in the aorist tense, which means that it is a “once for all” action. We are to consider ourselves as a *continuous* living sacrifice offered up to God. But what is the problem with living sacrifices? They tend to want to crawl off the altar! And that is the challenge.

- But notice *what* it is that we are to “present” – our bodies. Why our bodies? Well, first of all, we are talking about those who have already submitted their souls to God. Because our souls belong to God (through justification), He already has our *inner* man. But He also want the *outer* man (in which the *inner* man dwells).

- Our “bodies” (however) are more than just physical shells that house our souls. They are also where our old, unredeemed humanness resides. In fact, our humanness is a *part* of our bodies – whereas our souls are *not*. Our “bodies” incorporate our humanness, our humanness incorporates our flesh, and our flesh incorporates our sin (as Romans 6 & 7 so clearly explain).

- Our “bodies” therefore encompass *not only* our physical being, but *also* the evil longings of our mind, will, and emotions. In other words, the redeemed soul must reside in a body of flesh that

is still bent toward sin – a place that can readily give in to unholy thoughts and longings.

- And it is that powerful force within our “mortal bodies” that tempts (and lures) us to do evil. And when our “bodies” succumb to the impulses of the fleshly mind, they can (again) become instruments of unrighteousness.

- That’s why Paul said, “I (continually) buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

- So here’s the bottom line – the presented body becomes the key to victorious Christian living. It is because our “bodies” are yet unredeemed, that they must be continually yielded to Christ. That is exactly why Paul admonished (in Rom. 6:12) “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts...”

- Now, it is *possible* for us (as believers) to live on one of three different levels. We can live lives that are sensual, soulish, or spiritual. To live on the *sensual* level simply means that we are being ruled by our senses. It does *not* (necessarily) mean that we are indulging in what (we would consider) the worst forms of carnality.

- It *may* (just) mean that we are unwilling to go to the evening worship service because we want to stay home and watch TV, or we are unwilling to give our tithes and offerings because we are spending it on ourselves, etc., etc. It just means that we are ruled by our senses, and the decisions we make are governed by what makes us *feel* good.

- Your entire Christian life may be a continual search for one emotional experience after another, but that is *not* what makes for a spiritual Christian. You might be moved to tears at the thought of Korean orphans, and empty your wallet when the missions offering is taken – but think about it – even a lost person can do that. Having certain feelings is *not* what makes you a spiritual Christian.

- But there is a *second* level we can live on, and that is the *soulish* level. *Here* we are ruled by our intellect or will. This is a far more subtle trap. A life lived on *this* level can appear so close to true spirituality that we can easily be fooled.

- For example, you can get so focused on the intellectual aspects of the Christian life that you virtually become a walking Bible Encyclopedia. You have studied the Bible to the point where you are a great theologian. People look to you for Bible knowledge. But did you know that you can

have tremendous Bible knowledge and still *not* be spiritual?

- Or perhaps you are a believer with an iron will. As soon as you get saved, you immediately give up smoking and drinking. You are exerting your will to the point where you are so disciplined that everyone observing you thinks you have it all together. But my friend, you can have all the discipline in the world and still *not* be a spiritual Christian.

- Or even worse, perhaps you are a combination of all these things. You have great emotional zeal, tremendous Bible knowledge, and a strong will. Most people think you are an outstanding Christian. But that still doesn't mean you are a spiritual Christian.

- All these things are important, but being a spiritual Christian means that the HS has complete control of my life. It means that I *not only* have *knowledge* of spiritual things, but that I am obeying the Lord in all aspects of my life.

- It means that I *not only* **feel** strongly about the things of the Lord, but I am also committed to His **truth** and to the conviction of His Spirit. It means that I am *not only* doing the right things, but I am doing the right things with the right motive.

- Now, Paul says that our presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices is our “spiritual service of worship.” That word “spiritual” can also mean “reasonable.” In other words, this kind of submission is *reasonable* in light of all the glorious mercies of God.

- ILL. – “When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.” (Pause) “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine; demands my heart, my life, my all.”

- The only acceptable worship under the New Covenant is the offering of oneself to God. From the very beginning, God's first and most important requirement for acceptable worship has been a faithful and obedient heart.

- “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams.” (1 Sam. 15:22) “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” (Ps. 51:17)

- "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19)

- You and I cannot prevent the remnants of sin from persisting in our mortal bodies. But we *are* able, (with the Lord's power), to keep that sin from *ruling* our bodies. Since we are given a new, Spirit-indwelt nature (through Christ), sin cannot reign in our souls. And it should *not* reign in our bodies.

- Listen folks, true worship does *not* consist of elaborate and impressive prayers, intricate liturgy, stained-glass windows, lighted candles, flowing robes, incense, and classical sacred music.

- It does *not* require great talent, skill, or leadership ability. The only "spiritual service of worship" that honors and pleases God is the sincere, loving, thoughtful, and heartfelt devotion and praise of His children. (Pause) Well, we must move quickly to the third step, which is a:

III. SUBMISSION OF YOUR MIND (v. 2a)

- Look at v. 2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." Here we have a negative and a

positive. Both are in the Greek present tense, which means that they are to be continual throughout our lifetimes. This will be a constant part of the process of sanctification until the day that we are glorified.

- Both of these verbs are also in the passive voice, which means that something else (outside of us) is at work. In the case of *not* being conformed to this world, that means, "Don't let this world system squeeze you into its mold."

- And folks, the truth of the matter is, that many of us are being conformed to this world, even though we are redeemed children of God. We often allow this world's values, (and opinions, and fashions), shape us into something that looks just like everybody else.

- We adopt the world's music, and the world's form of entertainment, and the world's political correctness. And too many of us, if we are honest, would have to look at our agendas and our check books and our moral standards, and admit that we have to a certain degree been conformed to the ways of this world.

- But Paul says, "Don't be conformed to this world, but be (what?) transformed... How do we do that? "By the renewing of our minds." And there is only one thing that is going to renew our

minds into that of the mind of Christ – and that is the Word of God.

- You renew your mind when you feed on God's Word. You renew your mind when you come to Bible Study and Worship faithfully. You renew your mind when you read the Bible every day. You renew your mind when you hide God's Word in your heart.

- The word for "transformed" comes from a word where we get our word "metamorphosis." It is the same word that is used to describe a caterpillar being transformed into a butterfly. It means to make such a radical change that the former self cannot even be distinguished.

- As one author put it, "The transformed and renewed mind is the mind saturated with (and controlled by) the Word of God. It is the mind that spends as little time as possible with the necessary things of earthly living, and as much time as possible with the things of God. It is the mind that is set 'on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth' (Col. 3:2)."

- Only the mind that is constantly being renewed by God's Spirit working through God's Word is pleasing to God. Only such a mind is able to make our lives "a living and holy sacrifice,

acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual service of worship."

- Well, there is one more thing that must be submitted to God, and that is a:

IV. SUBMISSION OF YOUR WILL (v. 2b)

- Look at the last part of v. 2, "...that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." This simply means that we are allowing the HS of God to conform our wills to the will of God.

- The Greek construction makes "that you may prove" a purpose/result phrase. That means, when a believer's mind is transformed, his thinking ability, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding are able to properly assess everything, and to accept only what conforms to "the will of God."

- It carries the idea of discerning what the will of God is, and then lining up our lives to match it. Our wills should desire only what God desires, and *all that* is revealed to us in His Word.

- So what Paul is saying (here) is that a transformed *mind* produces a transformed *will*.

God changes our “want to’s” – and that enables us to put ourselves into the offering plate!

- What about you this morning? (MAKE APPEAL)

- PRAYER