

Romans
Your Only Reasonable Response to the Gospel – Part 1
Romans 12:1-2
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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me for the first time, in our study of the book of Romans, to the 12th chapter. We have finished, now over the last several years, our journey through the first 11 chapters, and we come to a pivot point, a real turning point in this great letter of Paul's to the churches in Rome. Now before we dive into the trees again, let me back up and remind you of the forest, remind you of what we're dealing with in this letter.

The theme of this letter is, "The Gospel of God," and at the center of God's gospel is justification by faith alone. Let me remind you of an outline of this letter; he begins in the first 17 verses with a "Simple Introduction and Greeting" of the people to whom he wrote, and then he gets into the heart of his epistle. The first major section of the letter to the Romans I've entitled, "The Gospel Explained: Justification by Faith Alone." It begins in chapter 1, verse 18, runs all the way through the end of chapter 4, as he lays out the truth that we can be declared right before God, based solely on the work of Jesus Christ received by faith alone.

The second section of this letter I've entitled, "The Gospel Experienced." Chapters 5 through 8 describe for us the effects of justification. He begins in the early verses of chapter 5 with the immediate effects of justification, "We now have peace with God, we stand in grace, we have a hope of seeing and sharing God's glory," and so forth. And the end of chapter 5, he lays out how this can be true, how can a righteous God declare unrighteous sinners to be righteous? That seems to contradict everything God has said about what a righteous judge should do. And he explains in the end of chapter 5, that's because He appointed Christ as our representative; and having appointed Him as our legal representative, we get the credit for everything that Jesus has done.

He goes on in chapter 6 to explain our relationship to sin; in chapter 7, our relationship to the law. And then in chapter 8, he ends the section by reminding us of the eternal certainty of our faith in Jesus Christ, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The third section of Paul's letter is in chapters 9 through 11. I've entitled it, "The Gospel Defended," because it raises the question, "If this is the true gospel, Paul, then why is it that so few Jewish people have believed in their Messiah and His gospel?" And he explains in these three chapters that we've just finished our study of, "The Realities of Election," how that relates to Israel and God's promises that are still yet unfulfilled.

That brings us, this morning, to the fourth section of Paul's letter, "The Gospel Applied." Here we learn of the transforming power of the gospel of grace. It begins in chapter 12, verse 1; runs through chapter 15, verse 13. And then the last part of the letter I've just entitled, "Conclusion," where Paul describes his intention in writing, his purposes in visiting them, and he greets a number of folks there in chapter 16.

What I want you to see is here in Romans, as Paul so often does in his letters, he ends this letter in chapters 12 through 15, the heart of the letter anyway, by applying the truth very practically. He wants us to understand this, if you have come to truly understand the message of the gospel, if you have repented and believed in Jesus Christ, if you have experienced the effects of the gospel, then you will personally and practically apply the gospel to life. If you have been justified, you will live in obedience and be increasingly sanctified by the work of the Spirit.

The passage we come to this morning, just the first two verses of chapter 12, are in reality the kind of hinge on which this letter swings. Like Ephesians, the first half of Romans is about what God has done; the second half is about what we are to do in response. Romans 1 through 11 contains only a handful of imperatives or commands. In fact, the very first command in the book of Romans doesn't come until chapter 6, verse 13. These eleven chapters are primarily instruction; Paul explains why we need the gospel; he explains exactly what the gospel is, and then he explains why we can have confidence in that gospel that we have come to believe. Chapters 1 through 11, lay out the "Indicatives of the Gospel;" chapters 12 through 15 lay out "The Imperatives of the Gospel." Here's how the great Puritan commentator Matthew Henry described it. He said:

The apostle, having confirmed the prime fundamental doctrines of Christianity, comes to press the principal duties. We mistake our religion if we look upon it only as a system of notions and a guide to speculation. No, it is a practical religion that tends to the right ordering of the life. It is designed not only to inform our judgments, but to reform our hearts and lives. (He goes on to say.) Paul has been discoursing on justification by faith and the riches of free grace and the pledges and assurances we have of the glory that is to be revealed. Hence, carnal libertines (He means those people who want to believe the gospel or say they do but who want to live the way they want. He says carnal libertines.) would be apt to infer, 'Therefore we may live as we please and walk in the way of our hearts and the sight of our eyes.' (Henry says.) Now this does not follow. The faith that justifies is a faith that works by love, and there is no other way to heaven but the way of holiness and obedience. Therefore, what God has joined together, justification and sanctification, let no man put asunder.

That's really where chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, come in. These two verses introduce us to the last major section of Paul's letter, and they serve as the foundation or the ground of all of the practical commands that will follow. They provide the primary and fundamental way that we can apply the gospel to every day Christian discipleship. This is one of the most familiar and most often quoted passages in all of the New Testament and, as we will discover, for very good reason. Let's read it together for the first time, Romans, chapter 12, you follow along in your copy of the Scripture, verses 1 and 2; Romans 12, verses 1 and 2:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and (a) holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

In these two verses, we are accosted by this very simple theme, "The only reasonable response to the salvation that you have received in and through the gospel, the only reasonable response is to give yourself body and soul, to God." Let me say that again, "The only reasonable response to the gospel, if you're a Christian, if you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the

only reasonable response to that claim, to that profession is to give yourself body and soul to God.” It’s a call for radical, total commitment to God. Now in these verses, Paul provides us with two insights into exactly how it is that we should respond to what God has done in saving us through the gospel. Let’s consider these two insights together.

Paul begins by pointing out **what** I would call, “The Grounds for a Life of Total Commitment to God,” the grounds for a life of total commitment to God. In other words, he begins by explaining to us the motivation, what should drive us to do what he admonishes us here to do.

Great leaders have always been concerned with what motivates people to action, and they try to seize on those motivations as levers to cause people to begin to act. Even the secular leaders of the world understand that.

Napoleon Bonaparte said, “A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon.” He understood what motivated his soldiers; he understood that his soldiers would fight and even give their lives for the recognition and honor that came with the metals that they would earn and receive as a result of their valor.

Winston Churchill, one of my favorite characters from history, motivated the British people during World War II with a similar call to duty and honor. In one of his most famous speeches, Churchill said this:

If we fail (meaning in our struggle against Hitler and Nazi Germany,) if we fail, then the whole world, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister and perhaps more protracted by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say, “This was their finest hour.”

McCauley, in his work, “The Lays of Ancient Rome,” puts this call to duty and honor in the mouth **of a** captain named, Horatius:

Then out spake brave Horatius, the captain of the gate, to every man upon this earth
death cometh soon or late, and how can man die better than facing fearful odds for the
ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods.

Motivating people to action, your motive to spiritual action matters; Paul understood that and so that is how he begins this call to apply the gospel, and that is with our motives, with our motivations. He provides the grounds for why we should act. And this is important because people, who claim to be connected to the Christian faith, try to live righteous lives for all the wrong reasons, on the basis of all the wrong motivations.

For example, test your own motivations; there are people who want to live out some form of the Christian life and if you ask them, “Why?” They’ll say something like this, “Because in so doing, I will earn my own salvation, or I will earn God’s grace, His favor on my life.”

Maybe that’s part of your thinking as to why you’re here this morning. Others are motivated in a way that they would say, “You know, I do what I do, I try to live a good life and live a righteous life because I like living that way.” In the end, it’s still all about them. Others would say, “You know, I do it because **it** makes me enjoy a happier, more fulfilled life;” again, all about me. “Because (And if I hear this one more time, I think I’m going to get sick.) because it makes me proud of myself.” Others are driven by fear, “**I** live the way I do because, if I don’t, I don’t know exactly what God’s going to do to me.”

But what should be our motive in living for God, in offering ourselves as we’re admonished here in this first verse? You see, your motives matter to God. Two people can do exactly the same thing; one of them be acceptable to God and the other not, based solely on their motives. That’s happening right here, right now as I’m teaching. Why should you respond to Paul’s extraordinary exhortation in these verses?

Well, in the first part of verse 1, we discover three compelling grounds for action, three compelling grounds. Notice them together. First of all, there is, “The Exhortation of Scripture.” “Therefore, I urge you, brethren.” The Greek word that’s translated ‘urge’ here has a wide

range of meaning throughout Greek literature. In the New Testament, it can mean one of three things. It can mean ‘to plead or to beg;’ it can mean ‘to exhort;’ or it can mean ‘to comfort or encourage.’

Here, in this passage, it's the second of those meanings. It means ‘to exhort, to urge strongly.’ This urging, this exhortation is somewhere between a request and a command; it's an exhortation that comes with the authority of an apostle. In other words, with the authority of God's Word. Paul is here claiming an obedience that we are obligated to give. He is not demanding, but he is exhorting with authority. This exhortation is the hinge, as I've said, between “The Gospel Indicatives,” in the first 11 chapters, and “The Gospel Imperatives,” in the chapters to come. Paul appeals to us; he exhorts us with the authority of Scripture to obey and follow what he writes here. Paul wasn't saying, “You know what? This would be a good idea if you did this;” that's not what ‘urge’ means. It is with **the** same authority as the rest of Scripture; this is within the commands of Scripture; it's not a command technically, but it is practically. It is an exhortation we cannot refuse.

There's a second grounds for responding to Paul's appeal here and it's, “Our Relationship to God.” Notice again verse 1, “Therefore I urge you, (Notice the word.) brethren.” You see, this command to present your body and all of the commands in the chapters to come are only for those who can call fellow Christians “their brothers and sisters,” and therefore, can rightly call God their Father. These passages, and this command in specific, is for those who are already Christians. Obeying God's commands is not how you earn salvation. You know everywhere Christianity has gone, there are people who like the ethics of Jesus; who like the ethics of the Christian life, and they try to live out those ethics without having first experienced the radical transformation that Jesus calls “being born again,” **experiencing** regeneration. It's impossible, it's impossible to present yourself to God in this way unless you have first become one of His children by the regenerating power the Holy Spirit. And how does that happen? It happens by your repentance and faith in the work of Jesus Christ. You see, the simple fact that you can legitimately call God your Father is one of the compelling grounds for obeying this exhortation. This ultimately comes from your Father as it comes to the rest of His children.

The third grounds, and this is really the primary focus here in verse 1, is the “mercies of God.” Notice how verse 1, begins, “Therefore.” Paul wants us to know that all of the commands he’s about to give us, beginning in chapter 12, verse 1, running all the way to chapter 15, verse 13, are built on the theology of chapters 1 through 11. And in case you’re not sure of that, Paul goes on to make that even clearer. Notice how he puts it, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God.” Ultimately, all that God has done to accomplish our salvation can be placed under that heading, “the mercies of God.” Paul’s already done that. In fact, this is the primary way he refers to our salvation in chapters 9 through 11.

Go back to some verses that have become very familiar to us. Romans, chapter 9, verse 15:

He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” So then it (that is election and ultimately salvation.) does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

So everything God does in saving us is ultimately brought under that head, God having mercy.

Look at chapter 11, verse 30, this is how Paul finishes the first 11 chapters. He says in verse 30:

For just as you (Gentiles) once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of... (Jewish) disobedience, so these (That is the Jewish people.) also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

And then he finishes with this summary comprehensive statement, “For God has shut up all (Jew and Gentile.) in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all; (that is to both Jews and Gentiles,) but notice again, he takes everything that includes our salvation and puts it under the heading of ‘mercy.’ So the exhortation then, “To present your body to God, by the mercies of God,” means that he is looking back to the massive argument that has already been unfolded in this letter.

‘Mercies’ is in the plural because that’s a Hebraism, it’s used that way in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, but it’s also used because it points to the many different manifestations of God’s mercy. His mercies, we sing about. Paul says, “As the practical application of all the mercies

of God that I have written about in the gospel, I urge you, I exhort you with the authority of Scripture itself.”

Now I can't just leave this without giving you some idea what's involved here because I think we read that expression the ‘mercies of God,’ and if we’re not careful, it just kind of becomes everyday pedestrian, almost spiritual mumble to us. What are the ‘mercies of God?’ Now let me just tell you, I'm **going** to give you a list; let me urge you not to try to write down these lists; you’re not going to be able to do that. They'll be available **on the** website with these slides, so you can go back and capture them if you want. But this week, I wanted to understand what the “mercies of God” are that we have already seen unfolded in the book of Romans. I’m **going** to give you, this isn’t a comprehensive list, this is just a representative list of the “mercies of God” that Paul unfolded in the first 11 chapters.

First of all, God revealed Himself in creation, chapter 1, verses 20 to 21; He made Himself known, His eternal power, His divine nature through the creation. He spared our lives in spite of our sin, chapter 1, verse 32. He filled our lives with goodness to call us to repentance, chapter 2, verse 4. He wrote the work of His Law on our hearts so that our consciences would show us our need of the gospel, chapter 2. He gave us His written Word as well, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. He made a way to save us through the gospel, chapter 3, verse 21, and following, as he unfolds the gospel of Jesus Christ. He made that gospel available to both Jews and Gentiles, and He justified us as a gift by His grace, chapter 3, verse 24. He declared us right with Him, solely as a gift by His grace. He sacrificed His own Son to propitiate, that is to satisfy His justice against our sins, chapter 3, verse 25. He justifies everyone who has faith in Jesus; He justifies us not by works of ours, but by faith alone, that's the message of the entire 4th chapter. He has given us, chapter 5, verse 1, peace with Him; the war is over.

He has made us to stand in a position of His grace; He has given us hope of both seeing the glory of God and of sharing the glory of God. He loves us and demonstrated that love undeniably at the cross. He will rescue us from future wrath. He has fully reconciled us to Himself. He graciously appointed Christ as our representative so that we can get the credit for all that He has done. He freed us from slavery to sin, chapter 6. He freed us from slavery to the

law, chapter 7. He is gracious to us in the ongoing struggle with our sin, the end of chapter 7. He has guaranteed our ultimate security and salvation, chapter 8. He has promised that nothing will ever separate us from His love, the end of chapter 8. He chose us in unconditional election to receive His mercy, chapters 9 through 11.

“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God.” That's what the appeal is, because of all of those things that God is done. How could we not, how could we not respond to God?

“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God.” This is the ground of Paul's exhortation in these two verses. He is appealing to us on the basis of all of the expressions of God's mercy that he explained to us in the first 11 chapters. Let me put it to you this way, the theocentric center of all moral duty is the saving mercy of God in Jesus Christ; the theocentric center of all moral duty is the saving mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

Now don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here in verse 1, when he appeals to the mercies of God. He is not calling us to pay God back in some puny way for all of His mercies; we can never do that in a million lifetimes! But His mercy compels us to obey and serve Him out of love and gratitude.

In fact, **let me** say something that I think is absolutely vital for your Christian life and experience; it's something that, through the years, I have learned from the Scripture and from others and I would urge you to think about this. It is only as you come to grasp the depth of God's mercy in saving you that you will be compelled to present your body as a sacrifice. It's absolutely crucial to your Christian growth and holiness.

John Stott writes in his commentary on this passage:

There is no greater incentive to holy living than the contemplation of the mercies of God. God's grace, far from encouraging or condoning sin, is the spring and foundation of righteous conduct.

No one less than John Calvin in his commentary on this passage writes this:

This exhortation teaches us that until men really comprehend how much they owe to the mercy of God, they will never with the right feeling worship Him, nor be effectually stimulated to fear and obey Him. Paul, that he might bind us to God, not by servile fear, but by the voluntary and cheerful love of righteousness, allures us by the sweetness of that flavor by which our salvation is affected. And at the same time, He reproaches us with ingratitude unless we, having found the Father so kind, do strive in our turn to dedicate ourselves holy to Him.

He says, "Not only does what God has done in His mercy compel us, but if we fail to respond to that mercy, shame on us."

Horatius Bonar, in an excellent book, by the way, by Jerry Bridges entitled, The Gospel for Real Life, writes this:

The love of God to us and our love to Him work together in producing holiness. Terror (That is of God.) accomplishes no real obedience. Suspense (That is wondering whether or not we truly belong to God.) brings forth no fruit unto holiness. No gloomy uncertainty as to God's favor can subdue one lust or correct our crookedness of will; but the free pardon of the cross (That is understanding what Christ has done.) uproots sin and withers all its branches. Only the certainty of love, forgiving love, can do this free and warm reception into the divine favor is the strongest of all motives in leading a person to seek conformity to Him who has thus freely forgiven him all his trespasses.

You see, a Christian life of holiness and obedience is ultimately grounded in an understanding of, a grasp of, and a gratitude for the mercies of God. And if that's not what drives you, then your growth in holiness is going to be very weak indeed. But in fact, if you are a believer, you are going to grow in these ways; if you have experienced justification, if you've been declared right with God through the work of Jesus Christ, received as a gift by His grace, then you will not be content to have justification without sanctification. If you have experienced total atonement for your sins, you will not be content to live without the total commitment of your life to Jesus Christ.

Leon Morris writes, “It is fundamental to Paul that the justified man does not live in the same way as the unrepentant sinner.” This is the great motive, this ought to be the great motive of your life, “the mercies of God.”

So how are we to respond to the exhortation of Scripture to the fact of our relationship to God and to God's mercies to us in salvation? Where is that to lead us, what is that to motivate us to? Well secondly, we discover, “The Demonstration of a Life of Total Commitment to God,” the demonstration of a life of total commitment to God. This begins in the middle of verse 1 and runs through verse 2.

Paul here makes his appeal for us to show a total, radical dedication to God, and he uses the language of Old Testament sacrifice. In fact, look at verse 1; notice the word ‘present.’ Every word in verse 1, starting with the word ‘present’ and on through the rest of verse 1, every word is part of the Old Testament language of the sacrificial system. Since Christ our Lord has fulfilled the sacrificial system of the Old Testament by the sacrifice of Himself, He was the Lamb of God, He was our Passover; we no longer offer literal sacrifices. Instead, we offer what I Peter 2 and Hebrews 13 call, “spiritual sacrifices.” But Paul here explains that our spiritual sacrifices are no less real for being spiritual.

In fact, he calls on us in response to the mercies of God, in response to all that we have come to enjoy, to do two things. Number one, to sacrifice our bodies; that's the message of verse 1. And secondly, to sacrifice our minds; that's the message of verse 2. To sacrifice our bodies and to sacrifice our minds.

Let's look at the first. Notice we are told, you are told as I am, “Present your body to God, present your body to God.” Notice how Paul puts it, “Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a...sacrifice.” Here Paul uses the image of the Old Testament worshipper offering a sacrifice to God, and those he wrote to would've been very familiar in an intimate personal way with this reality. In fact, the Jewish people, that were both Gentiles and Jews in the churches in Rome, and the Jewish people in the churches in Rome would've been extremely familiar with this. They would have actually participated because

even if they lived on the other side of the planet, the other side of the Mediterranean world from Jerusalem, if you were Jewish in the first century before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., you would have found your way at some point in your life to the temple to offer sacrifice.

And this is what it would have been like; you would have selected an animal, and you would've either traveled with that animal from a distant location, or you would've purchased it there in Jerusalem. And when it came time, you would've gone to the temple; you would've walked up those massive steps, leading up into the temple compound, and then you would've gone to the area of the priests; and there at the court of the priests, you would've said, "I'm here to offer this animal to God as a sacrifice." You would have laid your hands on the head of that animal, and you would've recited your sins, confessing your sins over the head of that animal. This was a symbolic act to transfer the guilt of your sins to that innocent substitute.

And then the priest, and this'll gross some of you out, would have handed you the knife, and you would've slit the throat of an animal; and as its blood poured out of its throat, the priest would've been there to collect, in a bowl, a portion of that blood. He would've walked over to the altar of sacrifice, and he would have slung that blood across the altar. Then he would've come back to you and taken the now lifeless body of that animal; he would've ascended the steps up to that massive altar, and he would have heaved the body of that animal on to the burning fire, and you would've watched as its body and its corpse was consumed by the fire. That's what sacrifice was.

So, get some of the shock that Paul intends for you to get here. He says, "Look, no longer, since Christ has died, do we offer animal sacrifices; but the sacrifice I call on you to make is no less real; rather than an animal, I want you to sacrifice your body as a living sacrifice."

Our sacrifice, by the way, is not like that of Jesus Christ; don't be confused. His was a sacrifice of atonement, the only one. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, neither can yours. Ours is a sacrifice, not of atonement, but of dedication. Christ's sacrifices were like the Old Testament offerings to atone for sin; our sacrifices **are** like that pictured by the offering that showed the worshipers dedication to God.

There's also another crucial difference between ~~Christ's sacrifice and ours; or I should say, not Christ's, but~~ an Old Testament sacrifice and ours. And that is in the Old Testament, you would have brought your sacrifice, you would've killed it, but then you would have given it to the priest to offer; he's the one who would've walked up and presented it on the altar. But Paul tells us here that you are the priest offering the sacrifice, "present," and you are the sacrifice, your bodies as a sacrifice. Literally, the Greek text reads, "Therefore, I am urging you, brothers, through the mercies of God to present your bodies a sacrifice." That's exactly how it reads, there are no intervening words. We will get to those words; they actually come afterwards in Greek. "I am urging you, through the mercies of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice.

Now to 'present,' that Greek word, in secular Greek, was used specifically of offering a sacrifice, and that's how Paul uses it here, clearly. But notice, you are called to present. That means that you have to make a voluntary act of your will to accomplish this, 'present.'

Then notice he says, "Present your body." Why does Paul say to offer your body as a sacrifice and not yourself? Have you ever answered that question in your own mind? I mean, we would expect him to say, "Offer yourselves as a sacrifice," but he doesn't say that. He says your bodies. Why does he do that? I think there are a couple of reasons. First of all, because in verse 2, he adds "our minds," so when you have the body in verse 1 and the mind in verse 2, he is saying, "Offer yourselves." He's just doing it in two parts.

But I think he also includes the body here because of something that was constantly present in first century thought. In Greek thinking, in Platonic thinking, the body **was** a problem, the body was something you were eager to get rid of; it had nothing spiritual about it, and the way they would then extrapolate from that is that that meant, "Well if the body doesn't matter, then it's only what you do in your soul that matters, so the body can do whatever it wants, don't worry about that. Paul says that's not how Christianity works.

He here mentions the body to challenge those whose Christian profession doesn't change how they live in their bodies. It's not enough to say you believe in Jesus and follow Him if it doesn't

change what you do with your body. It's with the members of your body that you carry out your desires and plans and purposes.

In fact, back in chapter 3 you remember, as we studied human depravity, we learned that depravity affects the body, how you use your tongue and your throat and your hands and your feet. Well, so does saving faith. Don't deceive yourself that you're a disciple of Jesus Christ if it doesn't show up in what you do with your body.

Notice, by the way, that this word 'sacrifice' is not how we use the word 'sacrifice.' When we talk about sacrifice, because we're so far removed the sacrificial system, we mean, "I'm going to make some sacrifices for this person, for this cause." Paul is not asking you to make some sacrifices for Jesus--give up something for Lent. Notice it is a call to present your body as a sacrifice.

What does that mean, what does it mean to present your body as a sacrifice? I want to spell that out for us; I don't want to leave us sort of in vagueness, so let me give you some very practical ways that we present our body as a sacrifice. Number one, you must remember that when you came to Christ "You denied yourself, you took up your cross, and began to follow Jesus," and this is just the continuation of that. You remember Mark, chapter 8, verse 34, "(Jesus) summoned the crowd with His disciples, and (He) said (this) to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, (That's an invitation to believe the gospel, to receive the salvation that He had to offer.) if anyone wishes to come after Me, (Here's what he must do. Number one,) he must deny himself." The Greek word for 'deny' means 'to renounce, to refuse to associate with, to have nothing to do with.'

In other words, if you want to come to Jesus for salvation, it starts with renouncing the person you've been. It means coming and saying, "Lord, there's nothing in the person that I have been that I want you to try to salvage, there's nothing **worth** keeping." It's like the beatitude in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the (beggars) in spirit, for (to them belongs) the kingdom of heaven." You come to God as a beggar, renouncing everything that you've become, knowing that it means nothing to God, "Deny yourself."

Secondly, He says, “Take up your cross.” In the first century that wasn't your mother-in-law; it wasn't a trial! No, in the first century, a cross was an implement of execution. When Jesus says, “If you want to follow Me, if you want Me and the salvation that comes with Me, then you must take up your cross.” He was saying, “You must value Me more than you do your own life.”

And then He says, “Follow Me,” which means I want you to follow Me as teacher and Lord, which is exactly how He identifies Himself in John 13, “I am your teacher and Lord.” He says, “Follow Me as teacher and Lord.” That means you have **a**-basically, at its heart, it is an obedience to Jesus’s revealed commands. That's how you came to faith in Jesus Christ, that is faith. If you really became a Christian, that's what your faith looked like and looks like. You denied yourself and you continue to deny yourself; you took up your cross, you valued Jesus more than your own life, and that’s still true, and you are following Him as teacher and Lord! Jesus Christ is Lord and to believe in Him is to confess Him as Lord as we saw back in chapter 10, verses 9 and 10. It is to commit to follow and obey Him.

Notice Romans, chapter 1. This is exactly how Paul begins his letter to the Romans. Romans, chapter 1, verse 5, through Jesus Christ our Lord, “we have received grace and apostleship to bring about (Notice how he describes it.) the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake;” the obedience that is produced by faith. That's how he ends this letter as well. Go to chapter 16, verse 26, middle of the verse, he says, the gospel “has now been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith,” the obedience that faith, genuine faith, produces.

Now don't misunderstand the relationship between faith and obedience; they are not the same. Obedience is to your spiritual life what **your** pulse is to your physical life. Your pulse doesn't cause physical life within your body; it is simply a sign that there is physical life. You put your fingers on your wrist and if you don’t feel something, you need to be concerned. Why? Because that's a sign of the physical life that’s in you. Obedience is the same way with our spiritual lives. It is not the cause of our life; rather it's like our spiritual pulse; it's a sign that there is new life within us.

So understand then what I'm saying in this first point; "Presenting yourself as a sacrifice," is just the next logical step in what began with your salvation. It's just the next logical step. As Douglas Moo puts it, "The imperative of a transformed life is not an optional second step after we embrace the gospel. It is rooted in our initial response to the gospel itself." And so you must remind yourself that presenting yourself to God as a sacrifice is just a further continuance of what began when you first exercised faith.

Number two, here's also what it means to present your body a sacrifice; you must daily live in the awareness that your body is not yours, but belongs to Jesus Christ. Turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, as Paul deals here with sexual sin, he makes an extraordinary comment. 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 18, he says, "Flee immorality," and he's given a number of reasons in this text, but one verse 19 is amazing. He says, "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?" Here is one of the reasons not to get involved in sexual sin with your body, because the Holy Spirit lives in you. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But he goes on to give another reason. He says, "...and that you are not your own? (Your body doesn't belong to you.) For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

He's borrowing this language, of course, from the slave market, and he's saying, "Listen, God the Father was the auctioneer in that slave market; you were a slave to sin and to Satan, and Christ came and He made a bid on you, and the Father brought the gavel down and said, 'Sold to Jesus Christ at the cost of His blood.'" And you are no longer your own. Your body, think about this Christian, your body doesn't belong to you; it belongs to Jesus Christ. He bought it, it's His. "Therefore, glorify God in your body."

Thirdly, if you're going to present your body as a sacrifice, it means that you must commit, from this point forward, to live your life not for yourself, but for Jesus Christ. In the interest of time, I just want to take you one text. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5; 2 Corinthians 5, verse 14, he says: "For the love of Christ (That is Christ's love for us, understanding His love for us.) controls us, (or compels us to act), having concluded this that (He, the) one died for all."

That is for all of those who died; that is all those who died in Him. In other words, he's talking about all of those for whom Jesus died, died with Christ. That's Romans 6, right? We've seen it.

Now watch verse 15. "And He died for them all, (all of those for whom He died) He died for (them) so that (Here was His purpose.) they who live (That's us, Christians.) might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Do you understand that from this point forward, from the moment of salvation, but certainly from the moment you come to really grasp and understand this, you no longer are to live life for yourself? It's not about what you want to do! It's okay to have a little, you know fun little bucket list of things you want to do, but you don't get to make a bucket list in the truest sense. He makes the bucket list; your life belongs to Him and you live for, not for yourself, but for Him.

Philippians 1:20, Paul says, I want Christ to "be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." His love for us demands it as Isaac Watts puts it, "Love so amazing so divine, demands (What?) my life, my soul, my all."

And then number four, if you're **going to** present your body a sacrifice, it means that you must daily present the members of your body as slaves of God and of righteousness. This is what we saw back in Romans, chapter 6. The very first command Paul gives in this book, Romans, chapter 6, beginning in verse 11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." **If** you're in Christ, when you were saved at that moment, it's like you died with Christ and you were raised to new life. Therefore, verse 12, "...do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on (Here's our word.) presenting. . ." This is the same Greek word. In fact, that Greek word 'present' occurs in its verb and noun forms five times in this Roman 6 passage. This is where he explains what it means to present your body. He says verse 13:

Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and (present) your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

What does that mean? Well, again let me let the great commentator, Matthew Henry, explain. He explains that:

To present the members of your body as slaves to God and righteousness means this. First of all, it means you will engage your body in worship. (I mean really engage your body in worship; you won't just show up.) Secondly, you will use your body to help your soul in the service of God. Thirdly, you will use your body to diligently carry out your calling, using the skills God has given you to benefit others even in your daily work. You will avoid the sins committed with the body or against your body, and you will be willing to suffer for God with your body if called to do so, and you will intentionally present the individual members of your body to God as instruments of righteousness.

You say, "What does that look like?" Well, it's the exact opposite of what you used to do before you knew Christ. You present the members of your body to God to use for His purposes. I can't put it any better than one author put it. He said:

Our feet will walk in His path. Our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel. Our tongues will bring healing. Our hands will lift up those who have fallen and perform many mundane tasks as well, like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending. Our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved. Our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.

Present the members of your body in obedience to God's Word. Use them for righteousness. "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a...sacrifice." Paul has a lot more to say, and Lord willing, we'll continue to look at it next week.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your Word, we thank you for its clarity, for its power to speak to our souls. Lord, these words were written two-thousand years ago; but because they were ultimately written by your Spirit, they are living words that speak to us today through your Spirit just as they did then.

Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning who came in perhaps professing to know Jesus Christ, but whose profession has never affected how they live; it's never changed what they do with their bodies. Lord, let them see the bankruptcy of that position and bring them today to truly repent, to truly believe in your Son, to deny themselves, to take up their cross and follow Jesus as Teacher and Lord. Lord, only you can accomplish that by your Spirit. And I pray you would, by the word that they have heard, you would bring life where there is now only death.

Lord, for the rest of us, many of us who are already in Christ, help us to truly grasp your mercies, and may a rich and deep grasp of your mercies compel us to present ourselves, body and soul, to you. Father, thank you for the reminders that that's how our Christian life began; that **our** bodies are not our own, they belong to Christ who bought them, that we're now to live our lives no longer for ourselves but for Him **who** died for us, who loved us and gave Himself for us, and we are to daily present the members of our body, not to sin like we used to you, but to you and to be instruments of righteousness, tools to accomplish righteousness.

Oh, God, I pray that you would help everyone here who is truly in Christ to understand the compelling nature of this exhortation and to respond in obedience. I pray in Jesus's name, Amen.