

Session 11

Sacrifices

Believers are to demonstrate Christlike character, living as sacrifices in all they do.

Romans 12:1-2,9-18



When have you sacrificed something important to you for a higher cause? What mental and emotional hurdles did you have to get over to make that sacrifice?

In 1940, a Polish military officer named Witold Pilecki let himself get arrested by the Nazis so he could be sent to Auschwitz. At the time, the world didn't realize the horrors of the concentration camps, but Pilecki's reports eventually revealed it all. He spent nearly three years as a spy in the camp before escaping. People like Pilecki are celebrated because they willingly sacrificed for a greater cause. Paul told the Roman believers that Christians were also called to live as sacrifices.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In the first half of Romans, Paul had taken his readers on a journey through the theology of sin and salvation. He had shown them the historic roots of depravity and emphasized that everyone—regardless of background or ethnicity—stood guilty before God (Rom. 1–4). But the situation was not completely hopeless. God had provided an escape from sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 5). Those who chose to follow Christ could no longer live as they pleased. They had died and been buried with Christ (Rom. 6). God raised them by His power to live for His glory through His Spirit (Rom. 7–8).

In chapters 9–11, Paul took a slight detour to discuss the history and fate of the Jewish nation in particular. Because his Roman audience was likely a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, it was important that both groups understood that God was not finished with His chosen people. Many Jews had denied the Messiah, but their rejection was not complete. Some—like Paul—had accepted Christ. One day the blinders would be lifted, and all would see Jesus as He is—and many more will choose to receive His gift of salvation.

Paul also noted that the Jewish rejection had opened the door for the Gentiles to hear the gospel. Regardless of nationality or ethnic background, Paul emphasized that salvation is the result of faith in Christ. That may have been a sticking point for many Jews committed to the law, but it had always been God's way of bringing people to Himself.

The last few chapters of Romans—including chapter 12—focus on the practical side of salvation. With the theological foundation firmly set, Paul challenged his readers to live out their faith. This would give them the chance to share the gospel with the world around them.

ROMANS 12:1-2,9-18

1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the **mercies of God** **A**, I urge you to present your bodies as a **living sacrifice** **B**, holy and pleasing to God; this is your **true worship** **C**. **2** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind** **D**, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. [...] **9** Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. **10** Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor.

11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. **13** Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes.

18 If possible, **as far as it depends on you** **E**, live at peace with everyone.

Passage Outline

Offer Yourself
(Rom. 12:1-2)

Live Authentically
(Rom. 12:9-13)

Be At Peace
(Rom. 12:14-18)

Keywords

A. In light of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, we ought to live our lives for Him.

B. The idea of a “living sacrifice” is the willingness to serve the One who gave His life for us (2 Cor. 5:15).

C. When we truly worship God, our offerings flow out of lives of obedient service to the Lord.

D. The renewing of our minds is an ongoing experience that requires “changing the way you think” (NLT) by meditating on the Scriptures and depending on the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:23, 5:18; Col. 3:16).

E. While we can't control or change others, we must always strive to do what's right in the Lord's eyes.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul's challenge to his readers—rooted in *the mercies* God had shown them—was to become a living sacrifice. This was similar to his challenge in 6:13 where he had contrasted offering our bodies to sin with dedicating our bodies to God. From a human perspective, our *bodies* represent all we are. Paul was urging the Romans to surrender their entire being to Christ.

BIBLE SKILL: Reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse. – Read Romans 12:1-2 aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading emphasize the word “you” or “your” each time it appears. Then read the verse again, emphasizing all the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

The alternative to becoming a living sacrifice is being *conformed to this age*. The idea is that people take the shape of the culture around them—the way dough is shaped by a cookie cutter. The present age is evil (Gal. 1:4) and tries to squeeze people into its mold. But God expects more of His people.

How does salvation change the way a person thinks? What impact does salvation have on what a person values?

After emphasizing that believers make up a single body (vv. 3-8), Paul returned to explaining how this new life on the inside should change the way believers live on the outside. It begins with genuine *love*. The love we have for God is reflected in the love we have for others.

How does a believer's genuine love for others reveal his or her new identity in Christ? How does this love reflect his or her relationship with the Father?

Paul also challenged the Romans to love those outside the church—including those who would oppose them. While it would be easier for the Romans to *curse* those who caused them pain, Paul commanded his readers to respond with love. Put another way, he encouraged them to respond the way Jesus responded.

What can believers do to foster peace with others? How does the phrase “as far as it depends on you” change the limits believers should go to foster peace?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and Social Order – Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Col. 3:12-17).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Salvation changes how believers think and what they value.
- Salvation changes how we relate to other believers.
- Salvation changes how we relate to all people, including those who seek to harm us.

What would becoming a living sacrifice look like in your life? What would you need to give up? What would you need to add?

Review the commands given in this passage, identifying the actions you do well and the ones you struggle to follow. How can you improve in carrying out each action commanded?

As a group, identify people who suffer for the gospel. How can your Bible study group support those individuals? What can your group learn from their example?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Believers are called to be living sacrifices.

Read Romans 12:1, taking time to consider what it means to be a living sacrifice.

Paul began with a *therefore*. He had done this in 5:1 and 8:1 to identify the connection of what he had been teaching to what he was about to teach. Here, Paul shifted from explaining the theological doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification to encouraging practical application.

He addressed the Romans as *brothers and sisters*, again emphasizing both his affection for them and their connection to one another. That relationship, centered in Christ, surpassed any ethnic or demographic backgrounds. As believers, they were all part of God's family.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices were to be holy and without blemish. Likewise, living sacrifices are set apart to Him and completely dedicated to His purposes. Each day, believers are called to die to their own desires and give themselves to Christ. The ancient animals had no choice. People do. And, in truth, no spiritual growth happens until a believer consciously chooses to become a living sacrifice. He also noted that sacrifices were an act of *true worship*. The Greek wording indicates a moral obligation—something God expects from us because of the mercy He has shown us. Even today, worship is not a place to go on Sundays. It's an active, consistent state of living under God's authority.

What does it look like to be a “living sacrifice”? How can imperfect humans be “holy and pleasing to God”?

Day 2: We should be transformed, not conformed.

Read Romans 12:2, highlighting the phrase be transformed.

God expects His people to be *transformed*. While being conformed starts on the outside and infects the inner person, being transformed begins inside and affects our actions, words, and attitudes. This change happens as the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus each day.

The transformation starts *renewing* our minds since that is where thoughts and actions are born. The Spirit literally changes the way we think, emphasizing God's perspective instead of our natural inclinations. The renewal process produces wisdom, which gives us the discernment to recognize and fulfill God's will for our lives. Our transformation and renewal has a direct impact on how we live. What begins inside us will become apparent to the culture around us, pointing others to our Savior.

How does salvation change the way you think? What impact does salvation have on what you value?

Day 3: Genuine love for others reflects God’s love for us.

Read Romans 12:9-10, identifying the challenge to love deeply.

Paul began with a challenge to love *without hypocrisy*. Love doesn’t wear a mask or have ulterior motives. Just as believers are secure in God’s love (Rom. 8:37-39), they should also be secure in one another’s love.

Like our spiritual transformation, genuine love starts internally. Paul said loving others happens when we learn to *detest evil* and *cling to what is good*. The idea is to see evil as repulsive and horrifying. If our hearts reject what God rejects—and embrace what He embraces—we will walk in true love.

Paul challenged the Romans to *love one another deeply*. Loving deeply means loving like family. Just like most would sacrifice for their siblings or children, believers who love genuinely put the needs of others above their own. One way to live that out in a practical way is to honor one another. Paul encouraged the Romans to *outdo one another* in showing such respect. They were to delight in *showing honor* to others.

How does your genuine love for others reveal your identity in Christ? How does this love reflect your relationship with the Father?

Day 4: We can show love to others through our commitment to God.

Read Romans 12:11-13, listing how you can show love to others.

Paul next challenged his readers to *not lack diligence in zeal*. This indicates a sold out commitment to the glory of God (Col. 3:23). We must never lose our passion for Christ. The apostle also called the Romans to *be fervent in the Spirit*. The Spirit produces a fire inside the heart of Christians and gives them the strength they need each day. From there, the Roman believers needed to *serve the Lord*. Good works do not save anyone, but they demonstrate our salvation to others.

The Christian life is marked by joy, regardless of circumstances. So Paul urged the Romans to *rejoice in hope*. In the New Testament, hope represents confidence in God’s work now and in the future. Hope also allows believers to be *patient in affliction*. When we embrace patience, we can endure any difficulty, convinced that God remains in control. Paul also challenged the Romans to be *persistent in prayer*. Remembering that God answers prayer encourages such persistence. God’s internal work in us leads to external actions. For example, as God works through believers, He challenges them to *share with the saints in their needs*. Realizing that we are stewards and not owners makes it easier to be generous. Along with giving money, we also can give comfort. Paul wanted Romans to *pursue hospitality*.

How does salvation change the way you relate to other believers?

Day 5: Live at peace with everyone.

Read Romans 12:16-18, noting Paul's challenges.

Paul continued to provide bite-sized challenges to his readers. He told them to *live in harmony*. It is possible that fractures were starting to develop among the various demographics in the congregation. Everyone was equally sinful, and everyone equally needed a Savior. So Paul encouraged the Christians to be on the same page and to work together to transform the culture.

Paul urged the Romans to avoid repaying evil for evil. Within a few years, extreme persecution would erupt against the church. Whether the conflict was rooted in the church or in the culture, revenge could not be part of the Christian response.

Finally, Paul urged the Romans, *if possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*. Paul knew that persecution was real—and intensifying. When faced with the choice between obeying the emperor and obeying God, the Roman believers' path was clear. They could live at peace as best as they could, yet they had to stand for the faith even if it caused conflict.

What can you do to foster peace with others?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Romans 12, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

What does it look like to be a “living sacrifice”? How can imperfect humans be “holy and pleasing to God”?

How do believers love “without hypocrisy”?

In our contentious society today, how can believers find peace with everyone?



For additional context, read “Why Paul Wrote Romans” in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.