

## ROMANS XLVI: A LIVING SACRIFICE

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### INTRODUCTION:

As we have worked through this epistle we have seen certain characteristics of Paul's turn of mind. We now come to another one, very much in evidence throughout his letters. His pattern of teaching is this—doctrine precedes ethics, and is foundational to it. He teaches us what we must believe (credenda, things to be believed), and then he goes on to teach us how we are to live in the light of that doctrine. He moves from what must be believed to what must be done (agenda). But it is not possible to faithfully go straight to the agenda. Whatever we do, we must “therefore do.” Although there have been ethical exhortations before this in Romans, we come to the place in the letter where Paul pivots, and moves to exhortation.

### THE TEXT:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:1-3).

### SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

So Paul moves from teaching to exhortation. In the light of what has been taught thus far (therefore), he beseeches them “by the mercies of God,” so evident in the first eleven chapters, to do something. He asks them to present their bodies a living sacrifice (v. 1), holy and acceptable to God, which is their reasonable worship (v. 1). In doing this, he wants them to be conformed to the gospel as he has laid it out, and to not be conformed to “this world” (v. 2). The alternative to being conformed is to be transformed in the mind, in order that they might prove what God actually wants (v. 2)—which is, that which is good, acceptable, and perfect. He goes on to spell out what this transformation will look like, as distinguished from what the world does to your head—which is to say, swell it. Our task is not only to look to Christ in faith, but also to see ourselves and our abilities by faith (v. 3). This demeanor will be of central importance in the upcoming discussion of spiritual gifts and church government.

### LIFE ON THE ALTAR:

The word translated as service here is worship, which is not a problem because service is what worship is. Paul tells the Romans here that their bodies are to be presented to God—this is what He requires of believers in our worship. Our bodies are living sacrifices, meaning that the sacrifice is on-going and doesn't stop. You present your body here in the formal worship service as you kneel with it, listen with it, sing with it, eat and drink with it, and lift hands with it. But the benediction is not where that sacrifice stops—the sacrifice encompasses all of life. The car you drive in is an altar. The bed you sleep in is an altar. The dinner table you sit down to is an altar. The sidewalk you stand on is an altar. And when sin intrudes it is like trying to offer up pig meat.

### ONE WAY OR THE OTHER:

Notice that Paul says that we are not to be conformed, but rather that we are to be transformed. You are hot, right out of the microwave, and the world is a jello mold. As much as we like to pretend that we are all “one off” individuals, living the Bohemian dream of autonomy, we actually are conformists to the bone. The only question concerns what we will conform to, not whether we will conform. We will either conform to the world or to Christ, and there are no other possibilities. Joining up with that sector of the world that pretends to be non-conformist doesn't really do the trick. Young people want to become writers and film-makers by growing their hair long and smoking cigarettes, and nobody notices the sheer conformity until there are over a million of them doing it. So it is not whether we will conform, but rather which pattern we will conform to—the pattern of the old man, or the pattern of the new. Christ came to bring us a new humanity, a new heaven and earth. He did not come to us in order to fob off a battered repaint.

### A NEW WAY OF BEING:

So we have to be very careful here. What does Paul give us in v. 3 that shows we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds? The way that he sets forth here is marked by an accurate humility about yourself. The new way of being human is not determined primarily by the landscape, but rather by what the people are doing there. Paul says that every man is to think of himself soberly, and not more highly of himself than he ought to. Now, can people have a faulty understanding of themselves in a pirate den or a thieves kitchen? Of course. But how about a prayer meeting? How about in a seminary classroom? An elders meeting? An assembly at a classical Christian school? Yes, also of course. This is why—if we neglect Paul’s astonishing teaching here—many spiritual activities that would never be censured by your Aunt Millie are nevertheless every bit as worldly as a tattoo parlor.

### PRESENT YOUR BODIES:

When we present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, this is an acceptable worship. And when we follow through on our formal worship here by presenting our bodies to Him late Wednesday afternoon, this is what validates and proves what is the acceptable will of God. When we present our bodies to God, we are refusing to allow the world to press us into its mold. This is not because it is bad to be pressed into a mold—it is bad to be pressed into the wrong one. When we are transformed, it is because we have been placed in the Christ-mold. We are being grown up into a perfect man.

But this is not a gospel self-help manual. The issue is not really what you see—we are all different and will see different things, different abilities, different gifts, different limitations. The issue is the way we see—soberly and not more highly than we ought. Conceited pride sees a lot more than is actually there. A faux-humility—which is just conceited pride doing a crab walk—pretends to see a lot less than is there, and takes enormous credit for it. True humility provides a peculiar clarity, and is the only demeanor that imitates and grows up into the new man.



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