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SERMON TOPIC:

ARE YOU WILLING TO BE SACRIFICED

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE:

ROMANS 12, 12  
EPHESIANS 4, 22-24

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### ***ARE YOU WILLING TO BE SACRIFICED***

#### **PRAYER**

Gracious and eternal **God** we have come now to hear a word from you. And we ask as always oh, **God** that you would speak to us and speak through us. Teach us to love you more that we may learn to love each other and **Lord** help us to serve you better that we may be willing to serve each other. For it is in thy son's name that we pray, amen.

#### **SERMON**

For just a few moments this morning I want to direct your attention to the scripture that was read from Romans, chapter 12 and I want to just read those first two verses of Romans, chapter 12.

Paul writes "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of **God's** mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to **God**-this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what **God's** will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will."

I want to talk about or rather raise a question are you willing to be sacrificed, are you willing to be sacrificed. One of the things that we discover in reading Romans is that in the beginning or at least up until chapter 11 Paul's concern is primarily doctrinal. He wants to spell out what it is that the church believes, what it is that we who are in **Christ** understand to be fundamental to our faith.

But as Paul often does, he puts right beside the doctrinal the practical. Paul wants us to see now how this works itself out. Once we understand what **God** has done in **Christ** and we understand in terms of our theology and our Christology, our doctrinal understanding, how do we apply that to the way in which we live.

And Paul begins in this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter by saying I urge you in view of **God's** mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. We could break this down, if you will, these first two verses and begin by first of all looking at what we are to offer. The second thing we would look at is what we are to avoid and the third thing would be what we are to achieve.

When it comes to what we are to offer in verse 1, he makes it plain, we are to offer ourselves. That is bodily dedication not just lip service but a willingness to put ourselves on the line. Someone once said that the main problem with the living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. Y'all think about that one.

We come to the **Lord** and we talk about what we want to do for the **Lord** and how we want to be used by **God** and when **God** needs to use us, He can't find us because we've

gone in a different direction or we've decided well **God** didn't answer me soon enough or if we decided that what **God** is asking we're not quite ready for.

As I often say, **God** is not interested in your ability. He's interested in your availability. So we are to offer ourselves. We are to offer everything we are, our whole being must be offered to **God** all the way down to our DNA, if you will. Everything we are, body, mind and soul offered and dedicated to **God** as a living sacrifice.

See that's the difference between sacrifice today and sacrifice in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it had to be slain and killed and then placed on the altar. But today we come as living sacrifices saying like the prophet Isaiah **Lord** here am I, send me.

Christian discipleship involves complete consecration to **Christ** and to His cause. Paul based his appeal to sacrificial service on the mercy of **God**, which every Christian has experienced. If you are a child of **God** then you have experienced what **God** can do and has done through the blood that was shed on the cross. And in view of what **God** has done for you, you ought to be willing to offer yourself and say **Lord** if you were willing to give it all, here am I. We are to offer bodily dedication.

The reason is because we have experienced **God's** mercy, the result of that will be that **God** will be pleased with what we are, a living bodily sacrifice. But Paul also warns us about being conformed to the pattern of this world. It's often very subtle and very easy for us to slip into doing things the way the world does things.

What causes us to conform? Well first of all, we believe that the world is more likely to allow us pleasure than **God** is. It causes us to conform. We get the idea that Christianity is simply a set of rules that say don't, can't do this and I can't do that and I don't do this and I don't do that. But **Jesus** said I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly. He wants us to enjoy abundant life only after we have presented ourselves to him as living sacrifices.

My brothers and sisters, we also conform because many of us find a certain thrill in going along with everybody else. It sounds like our teenagers or like when we were in our teenage years. As soon as we wanted something done mom, dad, can we, well everybody else is doing it. So and so is letting her son do it and she's letting her daughter do it and we just go on down the line of our friends who are doing it so it must be all right.

And many of us still bargain with **God** like that. We talk to **God** and I guess that's why He's still calls us His children because that's just how we act like children. We come to **God** and we want to negotiate terms and we want to see if we can bargain our way in and we want to do something simply because or we deem something acceptable simply because everybody else is doing it.

You know I never thought I'd hear myself say what my mother used to always say well if everybody jumped off the cliff would you jump too. I said oh that just bothered me and I'm not going to say that. And then I hear myself saying it now. All I do is look up to heaven and say mom, you were right.

My brothers and sisters, many of us find a certain thrill simply in going along with everybody else. And then another reason we conform is because we are afraid of what might happen if we really think about life and change, if we really sit down to think about the direction of our lives. You ought to do this sometimes, sit down and take stock of self and look at where you're going and what you're doing and how you do what you

do and what is it that forms the basis of your action. You need to ponder that in your own mind.

See the only time most of us do that is when we come to a funeral because a funeral when we see that body laying there makes us painfully and suddenly aware of the limitations of our own mortality, that we're not going to be here forever. But any other time we're just happy go lucky, skipping along you know just doing our thing our way and as long as everybody else is going along with my program, it's all right.

But we need to take inventory of our lives and ask ourselves are we doing what **God** would have us to do. You know everybody was walking around with the bracelet WWJD, what would **Jesus** do based on the book by Charles Sheldon called In His Steps, that's where that came from. And it's a good thing to ask yourself we've almost elevated it to the level of cliché now and people have played around with it in different ways. But the basic question still remains what would **Jesus** do.

When you find yourself facing a situation and it's not just for young people, see that's the thing we think oh that's cute, I'm going to buy my daughter that or that's cute, I'm going to get one for my son, I'm going to get him a T-shirt. But you know some grown ups need to ask ourselves what would **Jesus** do, what would **Jesus** do. How would **Jesus** address this situation, how would **Jesus** speak to this person or this person that I know has said something about me that's untrue or this person that's not meaning me good, how would **Jesus** address that? Or if I know I'm in the wrong and I'm too ashamed to even admit it to myself, what would **Jesus** do, what would **Jesus** have me do might be a better question?

And so my brothers and sisters, we are afraid of what might happen if we really think about life and change because we are afraid to change because we don't want folk pointing at us. We don't want people looking at that, oh there's that holy roller, you know the kind of names people throw out on you when they see you carrying your bible or they hear you praying or we're afraid that you know once we get a reputation established as a good Christian then we're afraid that if we slip somebody might point that out and we don't want people pointing out our inconsistencies.

So therefore we are afraid to walk as **God's** children, we're afraid to hold our heads up high and say yes, I'm a child of the king. And if somebody sees me make a mistake, we are afraid to simply say you're right, I made a mistake, I'm sorry. That's why I like that bumper sticker that says you know Christians aren't perfect just forgiven. That's all.

We're no better than anybody else. Just because you belong to Mt. Zion or somebody belongs to Mt. Tabor or somebody goes to Grace or Enon or Canaan or Corinthian or whatever it doesn't mean we're any better than anybody else. It just means we are forgiven in **Christ**. We are all sinners who are in need of His saving grace. So that's why Paul goes on to say we ought not to think more highly of ourselves than we are.

Somebody asked me now that you got your degree is that going to change you. I said I hope not. Then yesterday when we were sitting at the table Reverend James Moore, the pastor of Second Mt. Zion was sitting with us and he looked at the person and said don't worry, we won't let him. I said now I like that, that's a good response. Don't let it change me for the negative at least. If there is to be change, let it be positive change.

If you reach some goal in life, if you've made some accomplishment, something that you are proud of, then let the change in you be a positive change, something that you can share with everybody. Not something that makes you feel like you've arrived now and so therefore you don't have to associate with certain folk anymore because they don't act the way you think you're supposed to act right now because they don't quite talk on the level that you think you're supposed to talk right now.

And so my brothers and sisters, once again many of us are afraid of what might happen if we really think about life and change. These are the things that cause us to conform. And one final thing that causes us to conform is that many of us are crippled by pride or on the flip side we are crippled by a negative self-image and therefore we believe that there really isn't any alternative other than to just conform and do what everybody else is doing.

That's especially true or at least our young people are seeming to be more vulnerable to that one because they're doing what everybody else is doing and yet they think they're maintaining their individuality when they do it. But when you look at them, they all look alike.

You know it's like the brothers who wear their pants like that and they're walking around I guess they're expressing themselves. Well how, you're just like everybody else, you know you ain't no different, there is no you ness to them. Maybe because you got your initial on it or something you think it's different.

The point again, many are crippled by pride. Either they're too lifted up or they've got a negative self-image and they have no confidence in themselves and therefore they just find it so much easier to conform and therefore are unwilling to try it *God's* way. They think that there's no other alternative but to just do what everybody else is doing, go along and get along and everything will be all right.

But my brothers and sisters, I believe that what Paul is saying here is that we should not live by the standard that the world has dictated, that Christians don't follow standards, we set them. So even if I've got to walk by myself at least among those who associate with me, I will be by myself because I know that ultimately I'm not really alone to begin with because *God* is my all in all because *Jesus* has promised to never leave me nor forsake me. So even when it looks like I'm the only one, I've got *God* on my side. I've got *God* leading me.

Now that's making sure I'm in conformity with His will. That's not an excuse for some of us to just think okay that means I can just go off and I'm it, I got it all figured out. No, no. Because see far from being that way it makes me humble. If I am walking with *God* then it makes me humble so that I don't try to exalt myself over anybody else. But rather I want to see who else I can help lift up so that we can all walk together in the sunshine of *God's* love.

Be not conformed to this world but be transformed. That word transformed in the Greek is the root word for metamorphosis. There ought to be a complete change just like you start out as a caterpillar, you go into the cocoon. But you don't come out a caterpillar, you come out a butterfly. That's a metamorphosis. That's a change. I'm not what I used to be. Now I may not be all that I ought to be but thank *God* that I've come from where I was and I'm on my way to where He wants me to be.

And so again, what we are to offer is ourselves. What we are to avoid is worldly contamination, worldly contamination, worldly contamination. JB Phillips did a

translation of the bible of the New Testament and the way he translates Romans, chapter 12, verse 2 is very interesting because he translates it don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold. But let **God** remold your minds from within so that you may prove in practice that the plan of **God** for you is good, meets all His demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity.

Think about that, think about that. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold. You ought not fit. It ought to be like trying to put something square into something round or vice versa. You ought not fit. And the reason you don't fit is because you don't think like the world thinks, you've got the mind of **Christ** in you.

Paul said in Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 22 and 24 be transformed. He said "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by sinful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like **God** in true righteousness and holiness."

Oh, my **God**. My brothers and sisters, if I had a can of baked beans and a can of string beans and I took the labels off and switched them. Just because there now has on the baked bean can string beans, doesn't make what's inside string beans. It's still baked beans. And just because the string beans now have a baked bean label on it, doesn't mean that it becomes baked beans inside. So whatever labels you may want to put on yourself preacher, deacon, trustee, deaconess, trustee aide, usher, choir member, pew member, which is an oxymoron to me, but which ever label you want to put on yourself, it doesn't change the content inside if the content was not there to begin with. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. But let **God** remold your mind from within so that you may prove in practice. See if it's in here, it's going to show itself out there. But if it's not in there, it's not going to be able to come out.

My brothers and sisters, indeed we are to avoid worldly contamination. We must make sure that we are indeed living sacrifices. What is sacrificial living? Sacrificial living means I'm willing to offer my body both inner and outer self to **God's** control. You see divers and gymnasts understand that, that where the head goes the body is going to follow. Oh, you better believe it because now if something gets out of whack, if the head is going the wrong way, the body is going to go the wrong way or if something tilts, they're going to fall all over the place.

But you see He says by the renewing of the mind the key to living a transformed life is cultivating a renewed mind. The Christian who is too lazy mentally to drink deeply from **God's** revealed word or to think courageously about the meaning of personal faith will tend to be shaped by institutionalized values and socially accepted molds of thought.

In other words, if you're too lazy to think deeply about **God's** word then you're just going to be shaped by what you think has been going on around you all along. And you're going to think it's right because we've been doing it that way all along so it's all right, it's okay.

But if you take the time to dig in the word of **God** and let's see what **God's** got to say about this thing. Like Christine said the flower fades, the grass withers but the word of our **God** shall stand forever. So if **God's** word is forever let's dig into the book and see what **God** has to say. And let's have the courageousness to think deep thoughts so that even if we have to admit we were wrong about some things, we can do it.

The renewing of the mind. There must be a renewing of the mind because that is where our thoughts and actions originate that become actions, the things we do. The things that we do start in the mind. Now they're also influenced by the heart because you see the mind may tell you something but if the heart isn't right, it won't try to weigh or shift or judge or determine if what the mind is saying is right or not.

See that's why somebody said common sense is in spite of and not the result of education. It's not to put down education but at some point there ought to be some other internal mechanism because you see we've got some educated devils walking around all right. Just because you've got an education does not mean that somehow you're any closer to **God**. In fact that's even more the reason why you need to bring your whole mind in subjection to the will of **God** because some of us go away to school and think we've got it all now, don't need **God** anymore, that was for mommy and daddy's time, this is a new day, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this is the scientific age, we don't need it anymore.

They made that mistake and World War I hit. And then they thought well that was the war to end all wars and then here comes World War II and then next thing you know you've got the Korean conflict and then all the other things that took place after that. And we're still talking about arms and build up. Why do you think they're so afraid in Los Alamos (ph.), New Mexico? Because these educated folk messed up, messed up.

But if the heart is right with **God** then even those things that my mind tells me to do, if it's not right with **God**, I will not act on it because I want to bring my heart, mind and everything that I am into conformity with His will.

What is sacrificial living? It means I offer my body, my inner, my outer self to **God**. It also means I'm willing to be a non-conformist. It means I'm willing to resist the pressure to change and conform to what everybody else is doing. Some of us are swayed so easily even in terms of clothes. If you don't believe me look at what we wear sometimes, look at what we wear. What is it that determines our sense of fashion? Now you know every now and then you'll see somebody who's got their own unique style and that's all right.

You know I've come to appreciate that even in my teenagers, I've come to appreciate that because there's that spark of individuality that says this is what I chose to be for right now and if everybody else doesn't like it, that all right, I'm wearing it and I like it.

Now just think if we could put on **Christ** in the same way. If we could put on **Christ** in such a way that we could walk daily and no matter what anybody else has to say about our walk with **God**, it's all right because I'm His, He's in my heart, I'll walk and I'll talk with him everyday. And if you don't like it, that's your problem not mine because I'm all right with it because He sustains me in my midnight hour, He helps me to bare my burdens in the heat of the day, He wipes the tears from my eyes, He puts food on my table, clothes on my back and so I will now disown my **God**. But some of us find it so easy.

My brothers and sisters, I challenge you to be a non-conformist. Don't surrender, don't give up, don't abandon **Christ** because did He not say whoever denies me before men I will deny you before my father which is in heaven? Be a non-conformist. Young people don't be afraid to stand on your witness for **Christ**. Oh, I know it's pressure out here. It's a lot of pressure out here. That's the devil's way and he's going to attack you

when he thinks you're at your weakest moment. So that's why the **Lord** said pray always without ceasing. Pray.

When you get up in the morning, pray. Thank **God** for allowing you to see another day. When you go down to eat your breakfast, pray. If you skip breakfast, pray anyway make it a fast and fast and pray. And when you get to work, to school, where ever you go, pray and thank **God** you've got some place to go to. And when you get back from there even if you got to catch the bus, thank **God** for the bus. If you got to walk, thank **God** you can walk. If you got an old beat up piece of car that you thought you ought to got rid of 10 years ago, thank **God** for the old beat up piece of car. But just thank **God**. Pray.

Talk to **God**. Talk to him. Talk to him. He's not that far away that He won't hear because **God** is closer than your next heart beat. And if you're talking to him, He may help it from skipping a beat. But talk to him before you lay down at night. Thank your **Lord**. The day may not have gone as well as you would have liked it to have gone but you thank him anyway. **Lord** you brought me through another day and I don't know what tomorrow holds but father I know you hold tomorrow so I'm asking you to hold my hand and I know I'll be all right.

Be a non-conformist. Don't submit to the pressure that the world puts on you to bow down to its standards. But be willing to stand on your own. But then finally my brothers and sisters, we need to renew our minds. I've been talking about it, I'm going to keep saying it, we need to renew our minds. Ask **God** to teach us to think as He thinks. That's what my prayer ought to be, I want to ask **God** to teach me to think as He thinks.

And since this is father's day, I've got some homework or some housework that fathers I want to challenge you all to do. But this is for everybody. Monday, ought to be washday. Pastor what you telling me, I've got to go home and do the laundry now. Well I mean I'm sure your wife would appreciate it. But wash day and your prayer should be on wash day **Lord**, help me to wash away all my selfishness and vanity so that I may serve you with perfect humility through the week ahead.

Tuesday, should be ironing day. And your prayer on Tuesday should be dear **Lord**, help me to iron out all the wrinkles of prejudice that I have collected through the years so that I may see the beauty in others.

Wednesday, should be mending day. Oh, **God** help me to mend my ways so I will not set a bad example for others. Thursday, should be cleaning day. **Lord, Jesus** help me to dust out all the many faults I have been hiding in the secret corners of my own heart.

Friday, is shopping day. Now don't get too excited. Oh, **God** give me the grace to shop wisely so that I may purchase eternal happiness for myself and all others in need of love and help me to understand that the bill has been already paid for the things for which I shop. You see **Jesus** paid it all.

Saturday, is cooking day. Help me my savior to brew a big kettle of brotherly love and serve it with clean, sweet bread of human kindness. Sunday, is the **Lord's** Day. Oh, **God** I have prepared my house for you. Please come into my heart as my honored guest so that I may spend the day and the rest of my life in your presence.

My brothers and sisters, I don't know about you but I'm pressing on the upward way. New heights I'm gaining every day. Still praying as I'm onward bound. **Lord**, plant my feet on higher ground. The songwriter went on to say that my heart has no desire to stay when doubts arise and fears dismay. Though some made well where these about.

My prayer, my aim is higher ground. I want to scale the utmost height and catch a gleam of glory bright. But still I'll pray until heaven I've found. **Lord**, plant my feet on higher ground. **Lord**, lift me up and let me stand. By faith on heaven's table land. A higher plane that I have found. **Lord**, plant my feet on higher ground. Are you a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto **God**?

The doors of the church are open. The invitation for Christian discipleship is now extended.