

Hallmarks of the Transformed Life
“Present your bodies a living sacrifice”
(Rom. 12:1)

Intro: 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. (Romans 12:1)

Stop and think for a moment about this verse. Doesn't it seem unusual that God would ask us to offer our bodies as a sacrifice? Are not sacrifices offered for forgiveness? And did Jesus not give His body on the cross for us? So how can we present our bodies as a sacrifice? Can we by good works actually atone for our own sins?

Clearly NT teachings about sacrifice rely upon our knowledge of the practice in the OT. So it may first be helpful in understanding Paul's words to review:

Sacrifices in the OT

The book of Leviticus identifies five distinct offerings commanded by God—the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. It is interesting to think of the nuances of each offering and what it communicated about the worshipper; but for our purposes we may broadly categorize the offerings as being given for two fundamental purposes:

Sacrifices for atonement (to obtain forgiveness of sins.) In the case of some offering we hear language that suggests that they were offered for the “atonement” or the “covering” of sin.

And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.”
(Leviticus 1:4, NASB)

Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed. ‘And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. ‘And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. ‘Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.’” (Leviticus 4:27–31, NASB)

Sacrifices after atonement (after forgiveness). They were not designed to seek God's pardon but to show gratitude for what God had done and to thank Him.

For example the peace offering was an offering in which the worshipper acknowledge “peace” with God. It might be that God had extended a blessing to him and the worshipper wanted to thank God by making an offering which he also shared in the presence of the Lord.

These might be seen as “gifts” to God based on a right relationship with Him.

In the NT places a special emphasis upon the atoning sacrifices of the OT and their inadequacy to take away sin.

The Hebrew writer explains that the sacrifices made, for example, on the Day of Atonement were inadequate to perfect those who drew near to God through them.

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

If these sacrifices cannot make us perfect, then what hope is there for us?

Jesus gave his body as a sin offering for us!

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, But a body Thou hast prepared for Me; In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure. “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) To do Thy will, O God.”” After saying above, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Thy will.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:5–14, NASB)

Observe these points:

Though God had commanded animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, what He really wanted was for man to live a life of obedience to Him. His preference was not sacrifice, but obedience!

What man failed to do, Jesus did. He never offered a single sacrifice for sin because He obeyed God's law without sin. But, having lived without sin, He could offer His sinless life in death as a sacrifice in our behalf.

Jesus' one sacrifice is sufficient for all time to satisfy the demands of justice and make forgiveness possible for all mankind!

When a person becomes a Christian he enters a new covenant with God in which sins are remembered never again!

Jesus did for us what we could not even now do for ourselves.

We could not present our own bodies as a sin offering. No matter how good we are, we sin against God and that sin keeps our bodies from being a perfect sacrifice for sin.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

But Christ, the sinless son of God, offered Himself as a lamb for us!

*The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)*

And He continues to be our atoning sacrifice:

"but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7, NASB)

If then, our bodies can never serve as sin offerings why does Paul say *"present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice."*

Though we cannot present our bodies as a sacrifice of atonement, we can present them as a sacrifice of thanksgiving!

Paul makes this clear in the opening phrase, " I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God..."

We must give our bodies as a thank-offering to God. Just as only Jesus could offer his body for our sin, so only we can offer our body in gratitude for what he has done! We can freely give ourselves to him and acknowledge the peace that we have with Him through Christ! Paul adapts the language of Leviticus in four important ways:

Our body is a living sacrifice!

What is characteristically different about our sacrifices is the fact that they do not involve the death of the sacrifice as in the OT. Thus Paul calls them "living."

Our body is a holy sacrifice!

All throughout the OT we see that what is offered to God becomes “holy” by dint of its presentation to God.

It becomes consecrated for His use.

Our body is an acceptable sacrifice!

To the Jewish worshipper, it was imperative to know that God would “accept” the sacrifice.

In our case, Paul assures us that God accepts our bodies as a sacrifice to him.

The offering of our bodies is our “spiritual service of worship.”

The word “service” is not the common word for “table service” (diakonia), but rather than the common word for priestly, cultic, or religious service (latreia).

“And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4–5, NASB)

And Paul says that this service is “spiritual” or “reasonable.”

The Greek term “logikos.”

In view of God’s acts of mercy it is entirely fitting that we commit ourselves without reservation to him. To teach that accepting the free gift of God’s grace does not necessarily involve a moral obligation on our part is a heresy of gigantic proportions. The popular cliché “He is Lord of all or not Lord at all” is absolutely right.¹

Our sacrifices take the concrete form in the praise of God and the work of doing good to others!

Like Paul, the Hebrew writer also understood that Christians were priests who offered sacrifices of thanksgiving:

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

When Paul thought of his role as a preacher of the gospel in service to the Philippians:

“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.” (Philippians 2:17, NASB)

When the Philippians shared with Paul in preaching the gospel Paul referred to their contribution this way:

“But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have

¹ Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, p. 232). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” (Philippians 4:18, NASB)

Conclusion: And so there is so much in that single verse. It is a reminder that Jesus has made possible what was impossible for us. He made the sacrifice that atones for sin. But it also reminds us that there is a sacrifice that we owe him—the offering of our whole selves in worship to Him and service to others.

What about you? Have you accepted Jesus' sacrifice for you? We accept Jesus' offering by faith (Jn. 3:16); by repentance (by dying to the old man of sin) and by being baptized (Rom. 6:3-5). No other sacrifice can get us to heaven; there is no other way to get God's forgiveness for the alien sinner.

But if you are a Christian, are you giving God the service He deserves?! The hosts of heaven praise Jesus for his sacrifice--Worthy is the Lamb (Rev. 5:12). How about you? Are you giving Him the praise and service he is due?