

ECCLESIOLOGY 101

How the Local Church Lives and Breathes

Part 8: Everyone a Living Sacrifice — Everyone Gifted and Giving

This is our 8th installment in a series that is taking a street level, organic look at what the Bible has to say about the way the local church lives and breathes.

I don't know about you, but I have been so blown away by what an amazing thing the local church is — and how stunning a community of believers is when the way it lives and breathes is the expression of the heart and mind of Christ.

I pray that when people walk into our church home that they will not only see *what we do* when we're together — but they will also see how powerful the Gospel is when they see *how we are* with each other when we're gathered. I pray that when we're scattered outside of these walls, and people see *how we are* with each other in everyday life, that they will find Biblical community to be truly stunning — to be truly compelling witness to how real Jesus is.

Let's turn in our Bibles to the [book of Romans, chapter 12](#)

As we listen to these verses we want remember that this is a letter — a letter written to the community of believers in mid-1st century Rome.

Romans 1:7 NLT I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

Romans 12:1–8

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

The great apostle — evangelist, church planter, pastor and author of Scripture says

I APPEAL to you

NKJV — beseech you

F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — I now make this plea

By way of Paul — the Holy Spirit doesn't impose legal language — doesn't use an imperative. The Holy Spirit appeals to their will. He desires the 1st century believers (and 21st century believers) to make a *choice* about the way that we live for Him

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore,

We live in a church culture that is obsessed with talking about “how to do life successfully” — “how to live out Christian principles better in the home or at work.” But it is presented as stand-alone truth. Here's the truth about Christian living: Christian living can't stand alone — it is always rooted in the truth about God and all that He has done to save us in the sending of His Son (=doctrine). **The Christian life is the living, breathing expression of doctrine.**

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by

Here's the basis of the Holy Spirit's appeal
By the mercies of God,

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,

F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — So then, my brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea.

If you really understand the gospel — you'll choose to live like this.

Everything Paul has to say in Romans 12 speaks to each of us as individuals. The Gospel is the power of God to save (Romans 1:18) the individual man or woman who believes. The saving power of the Gospel that saves us individually transforms us individually. But as we have seen time and again in this series — our salvation moves from alone to together. We've been saved to *ekklesia*. Our lives individually are the expression of the power of the Gospel to save. But the

community of believers is also the living, breathing expression of the saving power of the Gospel.

Paul is appealing to the community of believers.

F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — *So then, my brothers*

brothers = ἀδελφός *adelphós*; *a* (1), denoting unity, and *delphús* (n.f.), a womb. ¹

Spiritual siblings!

Romans 12:1 NIV *Therefore, I urge you (plural), brothers and sisters*

Paul appeals — pleads with them — as a community of spiritual siblings — to make a life choice. That choice is not merely some stand-alone life principle — it is a choice rooted in the mercies of God. **Here's the choice**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice

F.F. Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase — *So then, my brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea. Present your bodies to God, present them as a sacrifice—a living one, not a lifeless one; a holy one (because it is offered to a holy God), and one in which He will take pleasure. For, when you consider your indebtedness to God, the consecration of your lives to His service is your logical act of worship.*²

sacrifice = to sacrifice, slaughter, kill, celebrate; θυσία³

¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

² Bruce, F. F. (2017). *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Ro 12:1–2). Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books.

³ Thiele, F., & Brown, C. (1986). Sacrifice, First Fruits, Altar, Offering. L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard (Eds.), *New international dictionary of New Testament theology* (Vol. 3, p. 417). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

The phrase *living sacrifice* is literally: a living killing. In the sacrificial offerings of the Old Testament the animal was not a willing participant and the animal was slaughtered and offered to God. Done!

The Christian does not offer himself or herself to God like that. It's not one time and it's over. To be a *living sacrifice* means every day, every hour, every moment, I deliberately, consciously, willingly, offer myself to God. It's constant. It's never over. For me to present myself as a living sacrifice means *I'm putting to death the idea that I have a right to live as I choose — I'm putting to death the idea that life is all about "me"*. It feels like a death to do that.

In the Old Testament the sacrifice never crawled off the altar — because it was dead. The problem with a *living sacrifice* is that it has the ability to crawl off the altar. To be a living sacrifice is counter intuitive to everything our flesh desires — everything fallen culture has taught us: self-preservation at all costs; we belong to ourselves; our way is better than God's way.

The Gospel is so powerful — the love of God is so transforming — that we are moved to put to death the desire to live for ourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:14–15 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Because of God's mercy it is actually the reasonable thing for us to say: *God, I'm not going to be the one who decides what what's right or wrong for me. Here's what You say in your Word about who I am and how I should live. I choose You! I'm willing to do it.*

God doesn't intend us to be a living sacrifice on a desert island. We don't fully know what it means to be a living sacrifice apart from being a community of believers. Remember that Eugene Peterson quote: *We're never fully ourselves by ourselves*. Being a part of a community of believers is always a matter of "Jesus above all" and "others before me" — and THAT is what it means to be a living sacrifice. Living out our faith in Jesus with our brothers and sisters in Jesus

involves shared space (letting others into our lives) and shared resources (emotional, physical and material). Apart from the local church — apart from community — I really don't have a way to know if I really have presented myself as a living sacrifice. I can actually prop up a Christian version of my old kingdom of one.

The local church should be the place where the reality and power of the Gospel is put on display for the world to see because the local church is a collection of men and women who understand in the deepest part of their being what God has done to save them — and they live along side each other as those whose hearts are so gripped by the love of Jesus that they no longer want to live for self — they want to love and serve Jesus who died for them by loving and serving those who love Him.

Here's the tricky bit: Time has told the same story over and over. Men and women dedicate themselves to living like that and one day they find themselves empty-handed, alone and bitter — angry at God!

I committed my whole life to you. I took my hands off my life. I gave my life to you, and I'm hurt and alone. How can you do this to me?"

But here's why we end up like that: We were kidding ourselves. We're not miserable because we presented ourselves as a living sacrifice — we're miserable because we never really did that. We weren't really worshipping God in response to the great debt He paid for us — we thought we were putting God in our debt by sharing our space and sharing our resources.

For us to be a community of believers that is stunningly like Jesus begins with each of us being so stunned by the grace and mercy of God that we present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice. We live and breathe with our spiritual siblings as men and women gladly directed by the love of Jesus and the Word of God.

Let's jump down to verse 4

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and

individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

For the average church-goer, church is where you go to get. They approach church like consumers! Like people comparing Best Buy with Fry's or Amazon. Whose got the best for me at the least cost to me. Church is where they go to be served.

The local church is not that. THAT is not how Jesus shines in a way that is stunning! Jesus shines in a way that is absolutely stunning when everyone in that community surrenders their idea of what church is and who it's for and instead sees the local church and who they are within it — as God sees it (living sacrifice). When we are living sacrifices we will live and breathe as those who know that ¹. We are deeply and intimately related to one another — **individually members one of another** ². We each have a function — (implied in the words they **do not all have the same function**) and ³. We each **have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them**: Put another way: to live and breathe as a community that displays the Gospel means that we don't live as consumers — merely receiving from the gifts of others — instead we see ourselves as gifted and as givers for glory of Jesus and the good of our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

In Biblical community there should be no unemployed Christians. There should be no passive Christians. There should be nobody who comes to church just to recharge your batteries in order to be able to walk out the door and live life the way they want.

In Biblical community men and women don't come just to *be* served but to serve because Jesus didn't come to *be* served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45.) YES — Biblical community involves *receiving* ministry — but it is intended to move us to *giving* ministry.

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who

contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

If you come and don't serve, you're resisting the will of the Holy Spirit for you because the Bible tells us that he gives His gifts to EACH of us. His gifts couple with your life experiences are crucial to the other believers God has placed in your life.

If the mercy of God has moved you to present yourself as a living sacrifice you will not see the community of believers you belong to as existing to take care of you (and there are times when that needs to happen) — instead you will step out and say: *"Show me what I can do."*