

Every Day is Sunday

Romans 12:1

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This past week was Groundhog Day. It's one of the weirder traditions in Americana in which a furry groundhog makes his prediction regarding how much longer till spring arrives based on whether he sees his shadow. It's doubtful an animal only five inches off the ground has ever seen his shadow, but this adds to the intrigue. The fame of Groundhog Day soared to new heights when a 1993 movie was made about it in which actor Bill Murray is caught in a cycle of reliving Groundhog Day over and over again. Every day he wakes up, and it is Groundhog Day again.

Here's my message today in a nutshell: for a Christian, every day is Sunday. I'm making a certain assumption in that statement that most of us associate Sunday with worship. No, the Bible doesn't mandate Sunday only and we did Saturday services for many years. But for my point today, as Sunday is a day of worship, because of the grace and mercy of God, every day the Christian wakes up, it is Sunday; a day lived unto God. And this is one of the greatest joys of being a Christian. Every day is Sunday.

The reason for this is celebrated in what is surely among the most famous two verses in Romans and in all the Bible. We are taking three weeks of teaching on these two verses.

"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. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

And if you look forward from here in chapter 12 it is filled with practical exhortations about Christian living. Chapter 13 is about the Christian's relationship to government. Chapter 14 is how Christians are to get along when they have differing convictions on non-essential lifestyle choices, and so on.

In other words, chapters 12-16 are very different from what we have learned for two years in chapters 1-11. They are critically linked by 12:1 and perhaps the most famous *"therefore"* in the Bible. *"I appeal to you therefore."* Based on all I have said so far, *therefore such and such.* *"Therefore"* is a word of logical resolution. It is a word that pulls together the loose strings. It doesn't mean he's almost done as five more chapters prove. But it does mean that he is changing direction.

Romans 1-11 is all about doctrine, deep and wonderful teaching on the gospel, justification, etc. Then chapters 12-16 are still doctrinal, but practically so. Chapters 1-11 are *how does God make sinners righteous?* Chapters 12-16 are *so what does this mean for our lives?* If you read Paul's other letters, except for Galatians and Philemon, they follow this basic format. Doctrine. *Therefore.* Application of Doctrine. Romans. Gospel explained. *Therefore.* Gospel applied.

Now that should sound familiar as most of my sermons do the same. Exposition of the text. Application of what it says. I remember years ago I had someone urging me to change my messages. They said to me, *Why don't you skip all the time in the verses and just go right*

to the application? That's the good stuff anyway. Why is that NOT a good idea? Why didn't Paul just skip over chapters 1-11 and start with Romans with chapter 12?

What we call application, scholars call ethics. Ethics is the study of moral principles that inform and guide a person's lifestyle choices. Ethics is the realm in which we live our lives. In Romans, ethics is everything from paying your taxes to restraining your Christian liberty in love to doing good to your enemy. Day-to-day life stuff.

Think with me about what this person was urging me to do. What happens when the church does ethics without doctrine? Ethics become merely suggestions or good advice. Sermons have all the authority of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Why? It's not based on anything about God or Scripture or the gospel. It's just advice and there is plenty of this sort of teaching happening in the church today, most of it on television. Why? People like it. It's practical. *Oh, Pastor So and So, his messages are so practical.* That isn't necessarily a compliment.

Similarly, what if the diet of a church is deeply doctrinal teaching with little if any application? That is merely intellectualism. Heady, but not much heart. The brain, but not the life.

No, the most helpful diet of teaching for God's people is neither doctrine with no application nor application with no doctrine. It must be both deeply doctrinal and applicable. The good news is that all doctrine is practical, it is always relevant to life, and faithful pastors will appeal to both the head and the heart; the mind and the life. We see this basic paradigm in the Apostle Paul's example here in Romans. "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers.*"

"*By the mercies of God.*" This is Paul's summary of the 11 chapters thus far. What has he been explaining? How God makes sinners righteous. If you could pick one word that summarizes all that God has done for us, what word would you pick? You say, we haven't been in Romans since December, can you remind us?

Romans 1, the wrath of God is against us for all our sin. We all far short of God's glory and are justly condemned forever. Yet, God purposed to make things right between God and man by justifying the unrighteous through Jesus' death on the cross (chapter 3). Jesus died as our propitiation, satisfying God's wrath. Nobody is saved by their own merit, not even Abraham (chapter 4). If Abraham needed justification, then certainly we do too. Faith in Jesus is the means by which God declares us righteous. The result, chapter 5, is that we have peace with God through Jesus. This is God's grace which frees us from the bondage of sin and frees us NOT to sin. How? Union with Jesus breaks the ongoing power of sin. Such love, sovereign love (chapter 8), such grace, sovereign grace (chapter 9)! Grace that continues to have a plan and purpose for Israel even as the gospel opens wide the door for all humanity to believe and be saved (chapters 10-11)!

What word would you use as a summary for all that? How about mercy? The mercy of God. Or in this case, plural, the mercies of God. "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers,*" based on the breathtaking mercies of God to us through the gospel to make us righteous, what? "*to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*" (Romans 12:1).

Paul moves to his application by drawing from the Old Testament Levitical sacrificial system in the tabernacle and temple. The center of worship in the Jewish temple was the altar. There on that altar the priests would place animal sacrifices and burn the body parts. These were offerings given by the people to God according to the laws God established through Moses (see picture below).



An animal would be brought as an offering. The priest or Levite would kill the animal and place it on the altar as an offering to God. It was burned and disposed of according to strict rules.

Over and over and over, thousands upon thousands of animals would be sacrificed, year after year. We know now, as the book of Hebrews explains, that God was using this as a kind of parable or pre-picture of death as an atonement for sin which Jesus' death was once for all. The animals were sacrifices. Jesus was a

sacrifice. Here Paul says, "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice.*" What's he talking about? Are we reviving the old sacrificial system?

Living Sacrifice: My Life as My Offering to God

What a huge contrast between Romans 12 and where we started in Romans 1 and Paul's description of us in our natural sinful state.

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (Romans 1:24-25 emphasis added)

From this flows a long list of sinful expressions of rebellion against God, further dishonoring God with our bodies. In a sense, all sin is a sin of the body because our bodies are the realms within which all our thoughts and actions occur. We never sin outside of our bodies.

Romans 1 describes the sinful use of our bodies as our fractured spiritual inner self expressing itself in physical rebellion against God. Sin goes against our created purpose. We do it anyway, but it's not what we were made for. You can hammer a nail with fine china, but the broken shards are reminders that that's not what fine china was made for.

The shattering of our lives is the sad reality all around us. As C.S. Lewis points out, "*We are...like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased.*"¹

Humans playing in the mud are all around us, from Hooters restaurants to online porn to a recent halftime show; all of these degrade and empty us of meaning and dignity. Then Romans 12:1. It's a celebration and an appeal for us to live as God made us to be. In

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p. 26.

salvation, God puts Humpty Dumpty back together again. He restores us to our created purpose and joy. How? Through the power of the gospel and God's work of salvation to make us new. To give us a spiritually alive heart with desires to live my whole life FOR the glory of God.

And that is what Romans 12:1 is urging. I appeal to you brothers and sisters! Offer yourselves to God!

Living Sacrifice

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice." (Romans 12:1 emphasis added)

"Living" is what stands out here. Why? Because there were hundreds of thousands of Old Testament sacrifices. What was true of all of them? They were all dead. To be a sacrifice required that you die. This is why in the history of sacrifices—all the lambs and all the goats and all the cattle—there was only one sacrifice that was made willingly: Jesus.

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:18)

Jesus willingly gave his life for us. He was a willing sacrifice, but not a living sacrifice. ***It is Jesus' dying sacrifice that allows us to be living sacrifices.*** The image here is powerful. Imagine an altar on which you, Christian, willingly crawl up onto and pray to God, *God, here I am on this altar today. All that I am in this day of living I want to be an offering of worship to you.* What does that look like? Paul describes a living sacrifice as holy and acceptable.

Holy

Don't confuse this with justification. That is the once-for-all legal declaration by God that the sinner is righteous in God's eyes. Legally holy forever. That is wonderful, but that's not Romans 12:1. This is not justification, this is sanctification. This is not once-for-all, this is daily, hourly, living sacrifice. All the time. All the time what?

Holy. Holiness is obedience to God's will. Holiness is striving to conform my thoughts and life to the example of Jesus. Essentially Christlikeness. The next verse goes into detail: a mind conformed to God's will is a life transformed and lived by God's will—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. What is a living sacrifice? Holy. What else?

Acceptable/Pleasing

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." (Romans 12:1)

The Greek word translated *acceptable* means "to bring pleasure; that which brings pleasure." "Acceptable" brings God's approval, but more than that, it brings God pleasure. Holy and pleasing to God.

Again, haven't we come a long way from Romans 1? Prior to salvation, our lives incurred God's wrath; his displeasure. But not in Romans 12. Having been justified by God, and having peace with God, and now as children of God, our lives can actually bring joy to God.

- "Now may the God of peace...equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:21)
- "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Think of this in terms of parenting. When I sense from my girls that they are choosing to act or talk in a way that they know I would like, I delight in it. The other night I had an alone night with Kiralee. We played UNO," their current favorite game. Then I said, "Would you like to play ping-pong?" She said "Yes." We played ping pong. After that, I said, "Would you like to play basketball?" She said, "Yes," and so we played horse in the basement. Jennifer got home and I said, "I had the best time with Kiralee!" It's even better when I see her treat her sister well and respect Mommy. When she willingly chooses to please me, I love it.

Somehow in a greater way, Almighty God observes our hearts and lives and knows when we make choices and live in ways with the motive in our hearts to please him. After all, this is the same God who thundered from heaven at Jesus' baptism, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17) We have the opportunity for our lives to elicit the same divine pleasure.

This verse offers guardrails for our lives. To look in the mirror and honestly ask, *what in my life isn't holy? What in my life do I know doesn't please him?* That cuts through the fog of daily habits and hidden sins, doesn't it? What are you thinking about right now? Is something coming to your mind? You're not sure? Ask that question, *does this please God?* If not, die to it. Ask God to help your life be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Every Day is Sunday

"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." (Romans 12:1)

"*Spiritual worship,*" or some translations use, "*reasonable worship.*" The Greek word comes from our word *logic*. What does that mean? $A + B = C$.

In light of the mercies of God, I urge you to daily place your life on the altar of God by striving to obey and please God. This is logical; reasonable. Spiritual. Worship.

This one verse captures the key to integrating our faith and our life into daily life worship. Before Christ, we were fractured, but now God has made us whole and unites our lives around the singular purpose of pleasing him in everything.

There are lots of ways to say it. *Soli Deo Gloria*. To God be the glory. It's All About Him. How about this? *Every day is Sunday*. What do I mean? For most Christians, Sunday is a day set apart to God. Worship. Sabbath. Godwardness. Renewal.

But what about Mondays? What about Thursdays? What about Friday nights? Is Sunday sacred and the rest secular? Is Sunday our day of worship, but not all the rest? Romans 12:1 urges us to crawl back on the altar on Monday. To pray to God, *today, not my will, but yours be done. Whether I eat or drink today or do anything else, help me do it for your glory. God, I'm making it my aim to please you today.*

Here's reality...I don't wake up in the morning on the altar to God. I wake up on the altar to me. Tuesday worship is all about what is happening in my heart as I walk to the shower, walk to the bus, walk to the job. As D.L. Moody pointed out, "*The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.*"² The dead ones never did. But the living ones, we tend to jump off the altar on a regular basis.

Perhaps bring that image to your mind as you pray tomorrow morning, *Today God, I'm on the altar. My life, my job, my relationships, my everything today I place before you as my offering.* When we do that, every day is Sunday. Every day with all its joys and sorrows, wins and losses, all of it is part and parcel of my life lived as an offering to Him.

I appeal to you therefore, Bethel Church, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

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² D.L. Moody, Source Unknown.