

Romans 12:1

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/rom/rom-12/romans-121/>

Paul is giving believers a picture of what it looks like to pursue God's righteousness by faith. Righteousness means harmonious living or right living; the first ingredient for this harmony is sacrificial living.

In chapters 1–11, Paul is telling his audience of Roman believers how God's righteousness is attained. He explains that it is not through the Law, as some competing Jewish "authorities" were arguing, but that it is through faith. Chapters 1-11 provided an extended explanation of the theme verse in Romans 1:16-17 that asserted that the righteousness of God is experienced through a walk of faith. Romans 1:16-17 quotes from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:4).

So it could be viewed that Romans 1-11 is a New Testament explanation of an Old Testament principle that righteousness is experienced through faith in God's word and by following His ways rather than through pride and following our own ways. This therefore provides a link to Genesis, to the original sin, from the original choice given to Adam and Eve. The choice was whether to trust that God's ways were for their best, or to seek out their own knowledge and decide that for themselves (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:6).

By "righteousness," Paul means behavior that lines up with God's (good) design. In Greek thought, the word translated "righteousness" or "justice" means "lining up with" or "creating harmony with" what creates human flourishing.

Now, Paul is telling his audience what a life of righteousness through faith looks like; this is noted by Paul's use of *Therefore*, saying that, because of what he had already made clear in chapters 1–11 (that righteousness is attained by a walk of faith) now Paul begins to describe how believers ought to live. He begins with a strong call: *I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God* (v 1) to live righteously.

First, Paul talks about sacrifice. He tells his audience *to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God* (v 1), to live sacrificially, doing what God asks of us, which is a way of giving worship, praise, and honor to God. Paul calls this sacrifice a *spiritual service of worship*.

The word translated *spiritual* is the Greek word "logikos," which can also be translated *logical*. It seems the idea is that—in light of what Paul has demonstrated about a life of righteousness—the only logical conclusion is for us to live life as a *living sacrifice*.

Why does this make sense, to live as a sacrifice? Without the preceding 11 chapters it would be difficult to understand the notion that it is "logical" to empty ourselves for the benefit of others. But reflecting on chapters 1–11, life under the law is a life in slavery to sin. And although believers are justified in the presence of God solely on the basis of faith in Jesus, irrespective of our behavior, if we do not live a sacrificial life that follows Jesus's example, we miss out on the

great benefits of righteousness. And inevitably we slide back into sin, which is walking apart from God's (good) design for us.

If we walk in sin, we therefore will suffer adverse consequences. This is sad, because we have been delivered (or saved) from having to experience such adverse consequences by Jesus's resurrection power. This was discussed in detail in Chapter 6. This is akin to someone being set free from prison but choosing to remain in his cell.

Instead of living in freedom, serving the purpose for which Jesus created us, we instead revert to slavery to sin. Slavery to sin leads to earthly condemnation; we suffer the effects of sin and death (or disconnection) as a consequence of refusing to live a spiritual life of sacrifice to Jesus. That is why living sacrificially is so "logical," because it is living freely in Jesus, and it avoids slavery to sin and its consequence of death.

When we present our bodies as a living and holy (set apart) sacrifice for God to use, we are living a life of service to God, which is what we were created to do. So again, it is logical for creations to do what they were created to do. The word *worship* (Greek, "latreian," "λατρείαν") is found in the original text and is certainly fitting, so long as the reader understands *worship* the way the scripture uses it. The scriptural use differs from the very limited way it tends to be used among church-goers to refer only to scheduled church services. For a Jew, like Paul, worship would include sacrifice.

Here, believers are pictured as being on the altar, sacrificed to God. That means our whole person is devoted to God. This is not just a church-service-attendance level of commitment. In Scripture, the word *worship* is very broad, and applies to any aspect of living where we are acknowledging God. One example is from Matthew 8:1–2:

"When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'"

In this verse, the leper worships simply by acknowledging Jesus's power. By living a sacrificial life where Jesus's power flows out of us in service to the commands of Jesus, we are indeed worshipping with our lives each moment of each day.

A sacrifice is that which gives up its life in order to please another. The animals sacrificed in Hebrew worship created an aroma that ascended to heaven and pleased God (Leviticus 4:30-31; Numbers 28:26-27). Most offerings were then cooked and eaten by those joining in the festival and celebration. Jesus references being a living sacrifice that tastes good when He instructed His disciples on how to be great.

In Mark 9, the disciples had been arguing about who among them was the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). Jesus gave them an object lesson that ended with this admonition:

"For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

(Mark 9:49-50)

When Jesus says “Have salt in yourselves” He is likely painting a picture for the disciples of each of them being a sacrifice. A sacrifice that is cooked and salted is one that is pleasant to eat. The picture seems to be for the disciples to yield their lives over to God to do His bidding. In doing so they will have peace with one another rather than arguing about who is the greatest. Their focus will not be on one-upping others, but rather it will be on serving one another. It is in laying down our lives in service that we can achieve true greatness.

Biblical Text

¹ Therefore I urge you, 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.