

**“THEREFORE.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Romans 12:1-2**

**Therefore.**

Let's begin by dispensing with the pastor's cliché, whenever you see a therefore in Scripture stop and ask what is it there for? But actually this therefore is one of the biggest and most important in all of Scripture. It deserves careful consideration.

Therefore means Paul is not coming out of nowhere to say what he is about to say. Therefore means what Paul is about to say is rooted and grounded in something that was said before.

For 11 chapters Paul deep dived into the doctrines of divine grace, into the fountains of God's wrath and God's mercy. He revealed to us the profound joy of forgiveness and justification by grace through faith in the blood of Jesus. He lifted us up to the status of adopted sons sharing the inheritance of Jesus, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Paul brought to light the mysteries of God's sovereignty over election and His purposes for Jews and Gentiles, making us to consider the severity of God and the kindness of God. All of that led to a crescendo of praise and worship at the end of chapter eleven.

Now in chapter 12 Paul makes a great pivot, a change of direction, an entirely new emphasis.

We are not just saved from wrath on unrighteousness, from sin and Satan and death and hell.

We are not just justified and saved by grace through faith in righteousness of Christ. We are also saved for something. That something is the subject of Romans 12-15.

This is the practical application of all the theology and doctrine. A common criticism of reformed type people, people baptized in the waters of reformed theology and doctrines of grace, is they have lots of head knowledge, but not enough heart response. We are imbalanced.

Romans 12-15 is going to help us get our balance. Paul told us what we must believe and now he will tell us what we must do with what we believe, how we are to live in the light of our faith.

For 65 sermons we have laid the foundation and now having laid a good, solid foundation, Paul begins building on that foundation. We come now to what we must therefore do.

This is where the Spirit starts convicting us. This is where we start hearing specific commands we are to take to heart and do. This is where people start to get uncomfortable, start bristling at having God's Word applied directly to us. If you feel convicted, if you feel a sting, that's not me, that's the Holy Spirit, saying therefore.

As a new Christian I was urged to memorize Scripture and after John 3:16 I think these two verses may have been next. I commend them to you as this month's memory verses.

### **By the mercies of God.**

By the mercies of God. In view of God's mercy and compassion. This is another way of summing up everything we learned in chapters 1-11.

We have just spent eleven chapters being soaked in and immersed in the mercies of God. The depth of the immeasurable riches of God's superabounding grace revealed to us in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. You will never be shown a greater kindness than God handing over His Son to be killed for us.

How can you not be moved to respond and act? This is the basis for offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.

Notice Paul is not motivating us by guilt, shame, fear, duty, though that would not necessarily be bad. Paul is motivating us by the sheer magnitude and beauty of God's mercy and grace. He is calling for a glad hearted, cheerful response. As if to say it would be my sincere pleasure.

Paul doesn't say just do it. He is a better parent than that. Christianity is not just do's and don'ts, not just trying harder to do better and be better. Christianity is not an "*if/then*" relationship with God.

The biblical Christian life is a "*because/therefore*" relationship with God. The biblical order of life is "because" God has loved and blessed us in Christ Jesus "therefore" we happily and freely commit our lives to his honor and praise.

Because God has been merciful to me in Jesus, therefore, this is how I choose to conduct myself at home. Because God has been merciful to me in Jesus, therefore I will live righteously and humbly at work or at school. Because God has been merciful to me in Jesus, therefore I will refrain from using language that might dishonor God or offend others. Because God has been merciful to me in Jesus, therefore I will be generous with my time and money. (Sam Storms).

Parents, help your children see Christian living is not a list of do's and don'ts, it is a way of showing how the mercy and grace of God makes a difference in how we live. The question is not mainly, "What's wrong with this music or this movie or this party or this outfit or these drugs or these friends?" The question is, How can I act and speak and feel so that I help my friends see the worth of Jesus above all music and movies and parties and friends? (John Piper).

When you do this because of the mercies of God, it shows what you have not received God's mercy in vain. When you respond based on the mercies of God, what are you doing? You are glorifying the mercy of God revealed in Christ.

If making this kind of commitment seems hard to you, it may be because you don't have a great enough understanding of what God has done for you. You may not have had that crescendo moment when you say, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the mercy of God shown to me. The greater that crescendo, the easier the commitment will be.

Isaac Watts – "Love so amazing, so divine, demands by soul, my life, my all."

Why is this so important? Because we are coming to a whole bunch of exhortations later in chapter 12 and we are going to need a life built on mercy to do them.

### **I appeal/urge you.**

I appeal to you, I urge you, I beseech you. What kind of tone of voice is that? It's not commanding or demanding, what is it? It isn't just a request, so what is it? It is Paul being a spiritual father to us. He is talking to us as his children whom he dearly loves and wants more than anything the very best for us.

**Philemon 1:8-9** I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you

"I am urging you, pleading with you, with tender affection, with all my heart, dear brothers."

And the word brothers may have just a bit of an edge to it.

Brothers, you men, you who are more inclined to resist, listen up, put aside your pride and hardheadedness. Men, wake up. Brothers, I urge you, please pay attention, for the sake of your soul, for the sake of your family, your church, your community. This will be that far reaching, that life changing, that world changing. Lead the way, set the example.

## **Present your bodies**

Why bodies? Why not hearts? That's what the evangelical church in America emphasizes. Give your hearts to Jesus. Giving your heart to Jesus is not a bad thing. Jesus says the first commandment is to love God with all your heart. The problem comes when loving God with our hearts is affection that is empty of action. A fleshless religion is a dead religion.

Paul is calling us to do something more robust, more engaged. Loving God with flesh and blood, not just with our souls, but with our bodies and souls.

What's the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism? "That I am not my own, but belong - *body and soul*, in life and in death - to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."

You can't have a heart for God without going all in, being personally, physical, bodily engaged.

Bodies is another way of saying ourselves, all that we have and are. It is with our bodies that we interact with and relate to the world. With our bodies we see, hear, touch, speak, walk, and act.

Will you not surrender, will you not deny yourself and take up cross and present yourself, your body as a living sacrifice, to the one who has done so much for you?

## **Living Sacrifice**

A living sacrifice. What does that mean?

When you think of sacrifices, what do you think of? The animal sacrifices in the OT. In the OT the sacrifices started out alive and then died. They could only be a sacrifice once. In the NT our sacrifice starts out dead, and then is brought back from the dead and made alive by Christ. Ours is a continual sacrifice.

Maybe you have heard the old saying about the problem with living sacrifices is they keep crawling off the altar.

Its true. We are fickle that way. We surrender, we commit, we go all in, and then well we forget or we return to our old ways of living for ourselves, being selfish, being hypocritical.

To be a living sacrifice is a daily calling. So our bed is an altar, our dinner table is an altar, our car is an altar, our desk or office or truck or classroom or kitchen or shop is an altar, the sidewalk or trail is an altar. Everywhere we are is an opportunity to die to ourselves and our sin and live as salt and light. All of life is to be lived as an ongoing sacrifice on the altar of our commitment.

It is not so much that we are offering a sacrifice, as we are that sacrifice. That's what God wants, us, heart, soul, mind and body.

What practically/specifically does it mean for us to be living sacrifices? That's the question chapters 12-15 are going to answer, over and over again, in a host of practical ways.

We are going to spend a considerable amount of time in these four chapters unpacking what it means to be living sacrifices and what it means to not be conformed to the world. What it means to be therefore Christians. I hope you will come hungry to change, to shed the world's ways and be conformed to God's ways, to what is life-giving and hope-filling.

But be warned, you need to come to God's Word humble, open to being convicted by the Holy Spirit and willing to change and grow and mature in our faith by the grace and help of God.

## **Holy**

There is that word, holy. It sounds scary to us, it sounds like a word that belongs to great saints, to highly religious people. You know, maybe Billy Graham or Mother Teresa.

To be holy simply means to be set apart from an unholy purpose to a holy purpose. The word holidays means holy days, days set apart for a special or spiritual purpose. The temple had a holy, set apart purpose from other buildings. The Holy of Holies had a more holy, set apart purpose from the rest of the temple.

Holy communion refers to the bread and the cup that are set apart from a secular use to a spiritual or holy use.

To be Christian is to be set apart from a secular purpose to a sacred or spiritual purpose, from a worldly purpose to a God-glorifying purpose.

But there is something more to the meaning of holy here in regard to sacrifices.

In the OT only certain kinds of sacrifices were acceptable to God. They had to be holy, unblemished, spotless.

To present our bodies as a holy living sacrifice means we are not coming to God hanging on to our sins, continuing to live in unrepentant sin, keeping alive our old nature, our old ways. Don't come proud, full of yourself. Come continually dying to ourselves and our sin, continuing to repent and hate our sin. Repentance is the path to holiness.

Are we dying to the power of sin, are we no longer slaves to sin, to unrighteousness, as holy, living sacrifices to God as those who have been bought and brought from death to life?

We are who we are and what we are because of the Lord. For this reason we ought to be holy. What He has sanctified, we must make every effort not to profane or pollute with ungodliness.

This was Paul's desire: "It is my eager expectation and hope that . . . Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

And so he exhorts us from 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Glorify God and show the immeasurable worth of Christ by the way you use your body. In other words, "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."