

## **“Building Your Life on the Mercies of God”**

Romans 12:1-8, Proper 16-A

Aug. 24, 2014

**There is a New Testament theologian named Thomas Lea who writes:** “St. Paul’s personality was as varied and sparkling as a multifaceted diamond. When it came to matters of doctrine that compromised the Gospel, he could be as unbending as hardened steel. In debatable issues he was as pliable as rubber. His relationships with his churches alternated between supportive love and strong but compassionate rebuke.” **Nevertheless, St. Paul’s love for his fellow believers shines forth very brilliantly in each of his 13 letters that are preserved for us in the New Testament.** In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul compares his “gentleness” to that of a mother caring for her children (1 Thess. 2:7), and then three verses later he compares his “firmness” to that of a father (1 Thess. 2:11).

**But it really is important for us to understand that even though St. Paul is writing each of these 13 letters under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he is also always writing these believers out of his own personal experience.** This is why he could say to the Philippians: *“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us!”* (Phil. 3:17)

St. Paul’s letter to the church at Rome is a letter that he wrote to them from the city of Corinth, where he had spent some time during the course his second missionary journey. It is probably the most **theologically-complex of any of Paul’s letters**, but now after the beloved apostle has spent **11 chapters sharing with these “saints”** (Romans 1:7) **so many of the great doctrines and teachings of the Christian faith**, he now wants to speak with them about how they might **best apply these great Christian truths to their own lives.**

**St. Paul is encouraging the Christians at Rome to continue always to build their lives on the MERCIES OF GOD, even as he was continuing to build his own life on the mercies of God.**

We all are aware that there is a **great difference between knowledge and wisdom!** Knowledge is the **accumulation of information**, while wisdom is the **application of that information in a way that genuinely enhances** one’s own life and the lives of others around them.

**Well, let me speak now, if you will, a few moments, especially to those parents who still have very young children with them at home. I know that you love your toddler.** She’s pretty spectacular just the way she is; not that you are blind to her faults; you know, such things as how she sometimes hurls her food to the floor while be stubborn, or the hysterics she can sometimes go into at bedtime and the love-hate relationship with “pull-up” diapers. You can easily forgive all this drama, because you are committed to helping her grow out of it.

**Well, brothers and sisters, God has adopted us into his family, and he loves us even more than those young parents here love their toddlers.** While parents love their toddlers, they are also hoping they will someday grow out of that particular phase of life they are in. And God wants the same for you and me, spiritually speaking!

**Our epistle lesson this morning begins with two commands that the Apostle Paul is issuing to the believers, who collectively make up the church of God is Rome; a church which was mostly made up of Gentile converts to the Christian faith.** Paul’s first command to the believers in Rome is: *“To present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”* And Paul’s second command to them is: *“To no longer be conformed to this world!”*

When Paul says to these believers *“I appeal to you...”* the Greek verb here is *parakleto* which signifies something much stronger and more urgent than a simple request. Paul says, *“I am pleading with you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. I am pleading with you to no longer be conformed to this world!”*

### **First, Paul says: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice!” (v. 1).**

Remembering that most of these Christians were Greek converts to the Christian faith, there really is no greater challenge which Paul could now be setting before them, for this is something that a person of a Greek heritage and culture would never say. To the Greek person what mattered most was the spirit of a man or a woman; the body was only a prison-house, something actually to be despised and maybe even to be ashamed of, while no real Christian would ever believe this to be true. The Christian believes that one’s body belongs to God just as much as one’s soul does, and that God call upon us as Christian to serve him with our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:20, *“You are not your own, you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body!”* Here, Paul also tells us that the human body, for a Christian, is also the temple of the Holy Spirit and the instrument through which the Holy Spirit works. Why this is one reason that the whole doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was so completely radical and foreign to those in Paul’s first century world. But Paul is saying, *“Take your body, take all the tasks that you have to perform as part of your vocation every day, and offer all of that as an act of worship towards God.*

**MARTIN LUTHER RECORDS A LITTLE DITTY ABOUT A PRIEST IN HIS DAY** who stood there looking at the “Putzfrau,” the lady who was scrubbing floors, who dared to ask her, “And you, you dear lady! What work do you do for the Lord?” and she answered: *“All of it sir! I do it all for the Lord!”*

Here Paul is reminding us similarly that our daily lives are to be lived out as worship services to the LORD God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit! True worship is the offering of one’s body, and all that one does every day with it. Yes, we customarily say, “I am going to the church to worship God,” but it is also appropriate to say, “I am going to my workplace to worship God!”

### **1. Secondly, Paul knows that this can only happen for us as believer when we are no longer willing to conform our lives to the ways of the world! (v. 2)**

The Greek verb here means that we should not allow our lives to be “molded” or “shaped” by the ways of the world. There was a time when a gelatin dessert while it was still being made was often poured into a mold—maybe in celebration of Valentine’s day, that hot Jell-O liquid would be poured into the mold of a heart, so that when it was set—you could see that it was shaped that way on purpose for a very specific event.

Paul is saying that we **SHOULDN’T BE LIKE A CHAMELEON** which most of us South Carolinians know takes its color from its surroundings! While our physical may look much different when we are 70 than they did when we were 17, our inner attitudes, our thoughts, our belief systems, those things which we value as Christians—should be conformed to the molds offered us in this world, but our lives should be transformed by the renewing of our minds, Paul says.

**2. Thirdly, Paul says that we can only present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to God through the renewal of our minds—something which, to a large degree, is a benefit we derive from being an active part of a Christian church—a local Christian congregation!**

**FRIENDS, REAL SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS BEGIN TO TAKE PLACE FOR US IN OUR LIVES WHEN GOD CHANGES US FROM BEING SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE, TO GENUINELY BEING CHRIST-CENTERED PEOPLE.** Again Paul writes in **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17**, *“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation! Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God!”*

To be “holy” means to be “set apart” and reserved especially for God’s purposes.

To be an “acceptable” sacrifice means to be “without sin,” because God washes our sins away for us through the blood of the Lamb of God that now cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7)

Every year when the Hebrew people were getting ready to celebrate the Passover, they had to find a lamb that was without spot or blemish, as a prototype of Christ who would come to be the sinless Son of God; without sin, without spot or blemish too. Through his perfect life, death and resurrection, God takes away our sins so that we are not acceptable to him too!

**3. Fourthly, to build our lives on the mercies of God, we need to admit that no matter how old we become, God always has more to teach us!**

The ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION is one of the most respected newspapers in the southeastern United States. When I lived in Atlanta, years ago in the early 1980s, I especially loved the gardening section in the Atlanta Journal every Sunday. The other day I was looking through some copies of some old sermons I had written and preached on this text from Romans 12 years ago, and I found a true story that was reported in the November 24<sup>th</sup> issue of the Atlanta Journal Constitution in 1997. The title of the article is: **“PLANE WITH MIND OF ITS OWN CRASHES!”**

The story that followed not only was very funny, but illustrated a great truth. Here is the story: “Paul Sirks owned a Vintage Single-Engine Plane, a 1946 Aeronca Champ. He had landed the plane at Grimes Field Airport in Urbana, Ohio, because of mechanical problems. The plane’s engine had stalled on the runway and Sirks got out to restart it by hand-turning the propeller. That is when the fun began.

**Once the engine started, he could only watch helplessly as the plane, on its own taxied away from him and took off by itself.** The plane was also trimmed for landing, which means the nose was trimmed up, so it just started climbing. For two hours that plane flew itself. It climbed to about 2000 feet, circled the area for about five minutes, and then finally headed northeast. Another pilot and the State Highway Patrol traced the plane, which reached about 12,000 feet near the end of its flight. It finally crashed 90 miles away from where it took off, and was totally destroyed. The obvious truth of that story is without a pilot a plane will inevitably crash. **But there is a greater truth for all of us. Our lives are like that plane, and without God**

**piloting our lives, and without our flying according to his will, the plane of our life will also eventually crash. The Apostle Paul writes in **EPHESIANS 5:17**, "Do not be unwise, but wise and understand what the will of the Lord is!"**

The wisest thing you and I will ever be able to do is to discern the will of God for each of us in our lives; to know it, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to perform it, or do it! Unfortunately, there are many people who think that trying to discern God's will for your life is like playing hide-and-seek; it's like trying to hunt for small Easter eggs in the tall grass. So please let me wrap up things for you this morning, fellow believers, by sharing an important message today about any ability you might ever have to discern the will of God for yourself in your life!

**You don't really find out what the will of God is for you in your life by seeking that discernment as an end in itself, but you will discern the will of God...as you heed Paul's words here...and present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to him. You will find it as you no longer conform yourselves to this world, but instead are now transformed through the renewing of your minds!**

I like the story I read, years ago, about an **OLD ANGLICAN BISHOP** living in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, who would wake up every morning, look up to heaven and say, "**Lord, this bed is my altar, this body is my sacrifice. As I arrive to face this day, until the moment I return I offer my life as a living sacrifice to you.**"

**Brothers and sisters, this is the way that we ought to start out every day! Amen**