

Devoting Your Body to God

Romans 12:1

We have reached the end of our sermon series on going deeper with God and learning how to satisfy and nourish our souls in him. If you want to experience a deeper relationship with God, this series has been for you. For the first several weeks we looked at practices we need to do in order to pursue God and experience a deeper relationship with him; we then talked about how to live with an awareness of his presence and work in our lives; and now, as we finish, we're looking at how to live in harmony with his character and will so we open the door to going deeper.

Last week I likened our lives to a dance, and God is our lifelong dance partner. In order to go deeper in our relationship with him we need to keep in step with him in this dance and learn how to live in harmony with his character and will. We looked at Romans 12:1-2 where Paul called his readers to devote themselves to God in two primary ways – with their bodies and their minds. We looked at how to be transformed by the renewal of our minds last week, and today we're going to look at how to devote our bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

What we do with our bodies – our speech, behaviors and lifestyles – has a huge impact on our relationship with God. If the way we live is in harmony with him, the door is open to go deeper, but if it's not, that door is closed. And that may seem obvious to some of us, but I can't tell you how many times I've run into people who go to church and give praise to God, but live lives that are full of sin. They say all kinds of good things about God and their church but then use profanity and slander when they're talking about other people. When they talk about how they live it's clear that their behaviors and lifestyles are full of worldliness, materialism, greed, dishonesty, self-indulgence...

So there can be a disconnect between a person's faith and lifestyle and a faulty assumption that as long as you have the right beliefs and go to the right church and think the right things about God then your lifestyle doesn't really matter. But it does! If you want to go deeper with God, your lifestyle must be in alignment with him. And that's what we're going to look at today.

I want to go back to Romans 12:1-2 to begin. Paul writes: *“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. ² 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.*

We looked at verse 2 last week and our focus for today is going to be verse 1. Paul is making his appeal for how they should live on the basis of God’s mercy which he wrote about in the first 11 chapters. Now, in chapter 12, he calls his readers on the basis of God’s mercy, to present their bodies to him as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is their spiritual worship. As we dig deeper into this you are going to see that this is all about a person’s behaviors and lifestyle.

You don’t necessarily see it here, but there is an assumption Paul is making behind his appeal and that assumption is that people don’t naturally or normally present their bodies to God; they present them to something else. He doesn’t say what that is in this verse, but he writes about it extensively earlier on in the book.

In the middle of Romans 1, he writes about how deeply mankind has been corrupted by sin. Because of the destructive influence of sin, we suppress the truth about God, refuse to honor or worship him and became foolish and darkened in our understanding. And it has a devastating effect on our bodies as well. He writes in Romans 1:24-27: *“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”*

Because of the corruption of sin, people give their bodies over to the lusts of their hearts, to impurity and dishonorable passions, and even exchange

natural sexual relations for unnatural ones, and they feel no shame in doing so. That's how much sin has corrupted the human body. But it's not just in the area of sexual immorality. In Romans 1:29-31 Paul lists several more sinful behaviors that humans give their bodies over to: *"They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless."*

He's describing the problem that exists inside every one of our bodies. It manifests itself in different ways, but we all have the same root problem – because of the corruption of sin, our bodies have dishonorable cravings, desires, and passions of many kinds. In Ephesians 2:1-3 he tells the Christians in Ephesus: *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."*

Our bodies are full of sinful passions and desires and the way Paul looks at it, we are presenting our bodies to those passions instead of to God. In Romans 6:13: he writes: *"Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness..."* He says it again in Romans 6:19: *"you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness..."*

So the underlying problem with our bodies behind Paul's appeal in Romans 12:1 is that we have been presenting our bodies to sinful cravings and passions. And he says that in view of the incredible mercy God has shown us through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ we must no longer live that way. Instead, we are to *"present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

In order to live in harmony with God and go deeper in our relationship with him, this makes a huge difference – our words, behaviors, and lifestyles. We

must no longer present our bodies to sin and sinful cravings, but present them to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him.

How do we do that? I think we all know these cravings and impulses can be very powerful and we've faced the frustration of giving in to the same kinds of temptations over and over. It brings guilt and shame and frustration – how can we do what God is calling us to do?

Well, first I want to look at what God does for us. God has made it possible for us to present our bodies to him through the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul describes these things throughout the book of Romans. In Romans 6, he says that by faith we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection and because of that, he writes in verses 6-11, *“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* Through faith in Christ, God has united us with him and because of that we have died to sin and been made alive to God. Through his death and resurrection we've been set free from the penalty of sin and given a new life to God.

Not only this, but as we've seen in previous weeks, when we are born again, God changes us deep inside. Our spiritually dead heart that was enslaved to sin, God replaces with a new heart that's alive to him. He also sends his Spirit to live in us. Because of that we have new desires to turn away from sin and honor God and live in a way that is pleasing to him.

God has made permanent spiritual changes deep inside us to make it possible for us to present our bodies to him rather than sin. But that doesn't mean it's going to be easy. Even though we've received a new heart and a new Spirit, we still live in these mortal bodies that have been corrupted by sin. That means we still have sinful cravings. Even though we're alive to God in our spirit, we still get tempted in our bodies and desire things that are in conflict with God's character and will. Romans 7 talks about that struggle. It

describes a battle going on inside each of us between the sinful flesh and the Spirit. And that's what we experience. That battle can be frustrating, but it's actually a good sign – it's evidence that the Spirit of God is in you. If he wasn't, there wouldn't be a battle.

Paul reassures his readers (and us) that he is with us in the battle. In Romans 8:10-11 he says: *“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”* So the Spirit of God in you is going to give life to your body and give you what you need to overcome the sinful cravings of the body. God has given us everything we need in Christ to present our bodies to him as a living sacrifice.

But we have a role to play as well. We must cooperate with the work he is doing. And that's what he calls us to do in Romans 12:1 – we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him. That means we are to put the sinful cravings of the body to death and pursue a lifestyle that is pleasing to God.

This call is repeated several times in the book of Romans. In Romans 6:12-13 he says: *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”* In Romans 6:19 he says: *“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”* In Romans 8:12-13 he writes: *“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

God has done everything we need to live in harmony with him, and now we need to cooperate with him by denying our sinful cravings, putting them to death, and presenting ourselves to God and to righteousness. There are

several passages that give specific details of what this looks like in the Christian life. Paul included them in most of the letters he wrote, and I want to read one of my favorites. As I read these verses ask yourself which part sounds more like you. (too long for screen)

Read Colossians 3:5-17.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

This is what it looks like to put off the old self and present your body to God as a living sacrifice. This is the kind of lifestyle in harmony with God's Spirit that opens the door for you to experience a deeper relationship with him.

Is that the way you are living your life? The reality is that until we die and leave these corrupted bodies behind, there's always going to be some kind of temptation and struggle. There will be times we give in to sin or that we sin without even being aware at the time. What do we need to do when that happens? First, the Holy Spirit needs to bring conviction. We cooperate with that by spending time in his word and in prayer.

Then, when you feel convicted about something you're doing, pay attention to that prompting and confess it to God. 1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Confession opens the door to restoration in your relationship with God.

But confession must also lead to repentance. In James 4:8-10, after confronting his readers about the sin of worldliness James called his readers to draw near to God and then he wrote: *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."* We open the door through confession but draw near to God through genuine repentance – turning away from temptation and doing things that are pleasing to God instead.

And if you come to an area of deeply rooted temptation that has such a powerful effect on your body that you just keep giving in – often times this involves sexual sins, substance abuse, gluttony, or anger – you need to be even more aggressive. You're going to have to cut off sources of temptation if possible and take the time to get accountability with someone else.

Confession, repentance and accountability are things we can do to cooperate with God in presenting your body to him and living in harmony with his character and will. And as you do, the door will be opened to greater depth in your relationship with him.