

## **MAKE YOUR BODY A LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD**

**Today's Text: Romans 12: 1- 21**

### **Extracts:**

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* [Rom. 12: 1-2]**

*On 15 April 1912, RMS Titanic, a British passenger liner with 2,224 passengers and crew on board collided with an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean during her maiden voyage from Southampton in the UK to New York in USA.<sup>1</sup> Two-thirds of those on board died, making it one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in modern history. The movie version of the tragedy was released in December 1997, based on the recollections of an old survivor as told to her family. In the movie, a 17-year- old aristocrat, Rose Dewitt Bukater (played by Kate Winslet), was expecting to get married to a rich claimant by her mother, but she fell in love with a kind but poor artist, Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio) that she met by chance on the ill-fated Titanic. Her suitor did not like it at all. So, he used his influence to get Jack locked away. However, Rose sought him out. By the time she found him, the collision had occurred and the ship was breaking up. They soon found themselves inside the cold ocean water. They stumbled on a broken piece of wood that could not carry both of them. So, Jack volunteered to stay in the icy water as Rose got on it alone. As he was freezing to death, he took her hand and made her promise that she would survive and “never let go.” She swore to hold on but by the time help came, Jack had died, a victim of hypothermia.*

*Jack gave himself as a living sacrifice for the one he loved. In this week's Bible verses, Paul enjoins believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God as their reasonable service. That is a big challenge! Can you take that challenge? Do you love God enough to accept it? Let us find out from this week's study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: “RMS Titanic,” From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS\\_Titanic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Titanic) ; “Titanic (1997),” 19 December 1997 (USA), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120338/> ; and “Titanic (1997),” [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120338/synopsis?ref =tt\\_stry\\_pl](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120338/synopsis?ref =tt_stry_plhttp://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120338/synopsis?ref =tt_stry_pl)

## 1. Background: What it takes to be a living sacrifice to God

A person who is interested only in himself/herself is said to be selfish or self-centred. A person who places the welfare of others above his/her own is said to be selfless. But what would you call *a person who places the interest of God above everything else*? A selfless person may be a mere humanist who does not know God or is merely “investing” in others for own selfish ends. Therefore, *a living sacrifice to God can be seen as the person that has placed the interest of God above his/her personal comfort or convenience.*

When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to Him as a burnt offering, we are told, “Abraham built an altar ... and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and *took the knife to slay his son*” before the Angel of the LORD stopped him [Gen. 22: 9-11]. That is still not a living sacrifice! But imagine an animal that is about to be prepared for your family dinner. It is alive and well. Its four legs are tied up. Without first killing it, the butcher throws it like that into a burning furnace. Can you imagine the agony that that animal will be passing through that moment? It will struggle; it will “shout”; but there is no relief except some animal lovers among you protest the “inhuman” treatment. That animal is a living sacrifice!

In this week’s Bible verses, Paul writes [Rom. 12:1]:

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

Unlike the animal in our illustration above, nobody will tie you up but yourself! It will be *your own voluntary decision to give your body to God as a living sacrifice, as your reasonable service to Him*. It is your decision to forego worldly pleasures and bear all the pains and deprivations so as to make your body acceptable to God. Here is what that will entail, according to Paul:

### a) *You must be holy*

You are expected to keep your body holy [v. 1]. *To be holy is to be set apart; to be sanctified*. Soon after bringing the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, God said to Moses and Aaron, “I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” [Lev. 11: 44]. The holiness of God was revealed to them with respect to *what to eat* [vv. 44-45], *keeping the Ten Commandments* [Lev. 19: 11-14], *seeking only the LORD, not mediums* [Lev. 20: 6-8], and *keeping your body as a holy vessel* [1 Cor. 6: 13-18]. Peter summarises it well where he wrote, “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you

also *be holy in all your conduct*, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” [1 Pet. 1: 14-16].

b) *You must be acceptable to God*

For your body to be a living sacrifice, it must also be acceptable to God [Rom. 12: 1]. In other words, it is not what people see or say of you that matters but what God sees in you. We can deceive others. We can pretend. We can indeed be hypocritical but *God looks at the heart, not the outward of a person* [1 Sam. 16: 7]. For example, when God sent King Saul to go and destroy the Amalekites and all that they had, he spared their king and the best of their sheep and oxen. He claimed that he wanted to use them to sacrifice to God. The king even said with elation to the prophet Samuel, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” But God who sees more than we can ever do said to Samuel, “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments” [1 Sam. 15: 1-15].

Clearly, *for your body to be a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to Him, you must have a close and continual<sup>2</sup> relationship with Him “for you are the temple of the living God*, as He has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be My people’” [2 Cor. 6: 16]. How can you put yourself in such an enviable position? Paul has also provided the answers.

## 2. How to prepare your body as a living sacrifice

According to a popular saying, “If you don’t like the smoke, get out of the kitchen!” Nothing good comes easy or cheap. Even the salvation that most of us take for granted because it is free cost Jesus His life on the cross. So, if you want to be a living sacrifice acceptable to God, Paul said [Rom. 12: 2]:

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Let us examine each aspect of that weighty statement:

a) *Be not conformed to this world*

The word of God says, “We know that we are of God, and *the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” [1 Jn 5: 19]. It adds, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of

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<sup>2</sup> Continual suggests that you always strive to return to Him (by true confession) each time you sin.

the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” [2 Cor. 4: 3-4]. Clearly ***the world is dominated by the devil and his wicked forces who use the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*** [1 Jn 2: 16] ***to tempt us to fall and miss the glory of God*** [Gen. 3: 1-6; Lk 4: 1-13]. Therefore, it is futile for believers to try to conform to a devil-controlled world.

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul said [1 Cor. 5: 9-13]:

*I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who [behaves in like manner]-not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also on the outside? Do you not judge those on the inside? But those on the outside God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves the evil person.*

The Joneses that you use as your role models or idols may themselves have missed the way! ***That you are going in the same direction with others does not mean that you are going to the same destination.*** For example, John, the Lord’s beloved disciple, was well known to the high priest and he was the one who spoke to the gatekeeper to allow Peter to come into the hall where Jesus was being tried. Yet, it was Peter that the servant girl questioned, not John! In the end, it was Peter who denied Jesus thrice. They did not ask John any questions [Jn 18: 15-17]. Therefore, be careful.

b) *But be transformed by the renewing of your mind*

It may be tempting for you to conform to the world because of pecuniary gains or fear of sanctions or the desire to be politically correct. Therefore, the only way to beat that is to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. What does that mean?

***The mind is the battle ground in the war between the flesh and the spirit.*** We are to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, as Jesus once told a scribe who asked Him about the first commandment of all [Mk 12: 30]. What defiles a person comes from the heart “for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness [and] blasphemies” [Matt. 15: 18-19]; but ***when wisdom is in the mind, the heart receives understanding*** [Job 38: 36]. God will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind is stayed on Him because he trusts in Him [Is. 26: 3]. The word of God also says, “Beloved, I pray that you may

prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” [3 Jn 2]. ***Therefore, when your mind is renewed, your body submits to the Spirit of God within you.***

For your mind to be amenable to renewal, you must be open-minded. But to what should you be open-minded?<sup>3</sup> Here comes an interesting point. When you hold on strongly to traditional or religious views, people call you conservative. But when you modify your views to conform to popular or currently correct positions, you are said to be “progressive” or “liberal.” Yet, we know that “the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ’ depart from iniquity” [2 Tim. 2: 19]. What then does being open-minded here imply?

To renew your mind as used in Paul’s passage under consideration can mean the following:

- ***Stop being a rolling stone***, that is, following after every popular church leader because it is Christ that died on the cross;
- ***Do not get stuck like a dinosaur*** in the traditions and doctrines of your denomination which have no scriptural foundations and yet cannot help you when you face demonic attacks;
- ***Stand firmly on the word of God at all times***, no matter the (economic, political or social) wind that is currently blowing around you; and
- ***Be a true convert*** by obeying *everything* that God commands you to do rather than only or mainly what is convenient for you.

Once your mind is thus renewed, then you will be in a position to know “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” [Rom. 12: 2]. Your body becomes “the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are [no longer] your own” [1 Cor. 6: 19].

c) *And then behave like a true Christian*

***From that point on, you no longer own yourself.*** You have become a living sacrifice to God and these are some of the things you will now be required to exhibit in God’s service:

- ***Think less highly of yourself*** than you are wont to do, realizing that you are now an integral member of the body of Christ who should now use your measure of faith, spiritual gifts and talents to serve God [Rom. 12: 3-8];

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<sup>3</sup> “Are you open-minded or empty-minded?” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 7 No. 29: 8 Oct. 2006; [http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/volume\\_7/PDFs/29\\_Areyouopenmindedoreptyminded.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/volume_7/PDFs/29_Areyouopenmindedoreptyminded.pdf)

- ***Love without hypocrisy***, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation and continue steadfastly in prayer [vv. 9-13];
- ***Bless those who persecute or curse you***, and rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep [vv. 14-15];
- ***Behave wisely at all times*** by not setting your mind on high things but by associating with the humble; and above all,
- ***Avenge not***. If possible, live peaceably with everybody. Do not avenge yourself but rather give place to wrath, because it has been written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Feed your enemy if he is hungry, and give him a drink if he is thirsty. That way, you are heaping coals of fire on his head. Overcome evil with good [vv. 17-21].

Any believer who can meet the above test is certainly a living sacrifice to God! If God says you can do it, only you can stop yourself. So, over to you!

### 3. Conclusion: Christ was a living sacrifice for you!

Christ Jesus was without sin but for our sakes, He bore the curse of the law by being a curse for us for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” [Gal. 3: 13; Deut. 21: 23]. On that cross at Calvary over two thousand years ago, Jesus was a man of sorrows. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was stricken and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. By His stripes, we have been healed. Even when His Father laid the iniquity of us all on Him, He did not open His mouth. ***He was led as a lamb to the slaughter but He opened not His mouth [Is. 53: 1-7]***. What a living sacrifice He is to God for us all!

Always remember, your sojourn on earth is a unique opportunity for you to gain eternal life with Christ in His Father’s house in heaven. Can you afford to squander it on petty issues, such as greed, sexual immorality or lying? Christ was a living sacrifice for you. Don’t blow it.

Make your body a living sacrifice to God.