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The Living Sacrifice

Romans 12.1

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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- I. What's the "therefore" there for?
 - A. I suppose everybody's known for something
 1. And what we're known for isn't always profound or significant
 2. Now, I've been here about 13 years
 - a. I've been teaching from this pulpit for that entire time
 3. I would hope that in the time that I've been here – or the time that you've been here while I've been here – you would have learned at least something from me
 4. And if somebody pressed you, and asked you, "Ok, out of all those sermons, what's one thing that you remember that Hawkins emphasized that you'll probably never forget?"
 - a. Your answer, for most of you anyway, will likely come down to one word
 - b. It starts with "P"
 - c. It would be "Propitiation"
 - B. Now, "propitiation" is a significant theological word
 1. A word that we should all value
 - a. Because without "propitiation" we would all be toast
 - b. We would all be lost
 2. Why?
 - a. Because, as we have seen in our study of Romans, we are all under the wrath of God
 - b. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - c. We are all by nature, truth suppressors – constantly denying the eternal power and divine nature of the God who made us
 3. But Christ offered Himself on the cross, taking upon Himself the just punishment for the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him, who would ever trust in Him
 - a. And on the cross in our place He took upon Himself the wrath of God that we justly deserve
 - b. And that is propitiation – the wrath-removing sacrifice of Jesus Christ for all who believe in Him
 4. So, if you have learned that much from me over these years, it will have been worth it

- C. I have to say, that is not the word that people remember about me from my prior church experience
1. My prior church was the Alliance Church in Morgantown, WV where I was the Pastor of Adult Ministries for more than two decades
 2. During that time my primary ministry was leading and teaching in a study center call The Alliance Bible Study Center
 - a. The study center was somewhere between adult Sunday School and seminary
 - b. It was for lay people who were serious about Bible study
 3. My teaching in that center used what is called inductive Bible study methods
 - a. Methods in which we take the scriptures and let the Word of God speak for itself
 - b. We observe the text itself
 - c. Then we interpret the text – using things like word studies and cross references
 - d. And then apply the text – asking how this verse, or this chapter, or this book should impact my life
 4. Over the course of those two plus decades I taught through most of the books of the Old and New Testaments
- D. Now, out of all those years, and all of those courses, what one thing did most of those dear people take away from my teaching?
1. First of all – it was not “propitiation”
 - a. I’m sure we got into propitiation in the courses that I taught
 - b. But that was not the word that people would use when asked what they learned from Hawkins out of all those years
- E. Sometime during those years one of the groups from that church had an annual retreat in Canaan Valley, WV – one of my favorite places
1. And one year I was asked to be the speaker for that retreat
 2. And at the conclusion of the retreat that group gave me a gift
 - a. I still have it
 - b. It’s on a shelf in my office here at the church
 - c. It’s a framed artwork of counted cross stitch
 - d. They all signed the back of it
 - e. And the front of it simply has one word
 3. Here’s the word: **“Therefore”**
- F. There you have it!
1. The one word I was known for in my teaching for over two decades in my prior ministry
 2. Now, it’s possible that the class might have used “propitiation” – but it might have had too many letters
 - a. But no, I really think they meant “Therefore”
 3. That’s because in our inductive Bible study methods we learned – over and over again, it seems – that “therefore” is a term of conclusion

- a. And as a term of conclusion, it makes connections between what the author has said before with the main point he wants to make at this point in the text
 - 4. And whenever we encountered the word “therefore” I would always ask,
 - a. “What’s the ‘therefore’ there for?”
- G. Now the word “therefore” shows up lots in the Bible
 - 1. So I’m sure, over the course of two decades of teaching, I said dozens, maybe even hundreds of times, “What’s the ‘therefore’ there for?”
 - 2. So, that’s why that group associated that word with me
- H. But the interesting thing is that if there were any particular “therefore” that the group had in mind when they decided to produce that piece of art it is the “therefore” that we find in our text this morning – in Romans 12.1
- I. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
 - 1. **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.**
- J. Now, back in those days, before the days of the ESV which I usually use in my preaching, we used to use the NASB
 - 1. And that verse in the NASB translation has “therefore” as the very first word in the sentence
 - 2. So for our classes studying Romans, the “Therefore” in Romans 12.1 jumps out at you
 - a. And it was easy to make much of that word
 - 3. But wherever the “therefore” shows up in whatever translation, it is a significant word
 - a. And is probably the most significant “therefore” in all of the Bible!
- K. We find ourselves in our series entitled **The Pure Gospel** – our study of Romans – at a major intersection – arguably the main intersection of the whole book
 - 1. A change in sections – from the primarily doctrinal section of the book in Romans 1-11 to the practical application section in Romans 12-16
 - 2. Now some of you may have different reactions to this change in sections of the book
 - a. You may say, “Finally! We’re done with all that doctrinal stuff. We finally get to the practical stuff – the stuff that will really make a difference in my life”
 - 3. If that’s your take-away from this change in subject matter, you will do yourself a grave disservice
 - a. And you will have missed the main point of Romans
 - 4. What? Why do you say that?
 - a. Because of one word: **“Therefore”**
 - 5. Again, what’s the “therefore” there for?
 - 6. The word “therefore” is a conjunction, a connecting word
 - a. It’s meant to tie two sections together
 - b. Two sections that are related to each other

7. So, when Paul uses the word “therefore” he’s saying that because of this that came before, this is how we should then live
 8. And if you think the doctrine is irrelevant, then the practical material that follows has no meaning!
 9. And on the contrary, if it’s the doctrine that floats your boat, and you care little about the material that follows, than your Christianity is hollow, impotent, and useless
 - a. Because what follows is what doctrine looks like when it’s lived out!
 10. So, if you leave out the doctrine, or leave out the application, you’re like a cartoon caricature of a Christian
 - a. But if you want to be a real, full-bodied Christian, you embrace 1-11 just as much as 12-16
- L. Now, there are questions about the “therefore” in Romans 12.1
1. What’s being tied together?
 2. Well, it could be that the “therefore” ties together what came immediately before it – the glorious doxology in **Romans 11.33-36**
 - a. The doxology that ends with “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.”
 3. That would make some sense – it would be easy to move from that glorious benediction to the application section of the book
 - a. But I doubt if that goes far enough
 4. Some scholars would tie the “therefore” to the previous section – Romans 9-11
 - a. The section in which Paul lays out God sovereign plan for including Gentiles as well as Jews in His redemptive plan
 - b. Again, that’s possible
 - c. But I don’t think that makes a lot of sense
 - d. Romans 12-16 covers way too much ground to simply be an application of God’s plan for bringing Jews and Gentiles together
 5. Still others would add Romans 6-8, the section on union with Christ and sanctification, with the practical application
 - a. That makes sense too – for Romans 12-16 really does illustrate the sanctified Christian life
 - b. But even that, in my estimation, doesn’t go far enough
 - c. Because without the first section of Romans, Romans 1-5, the section of the sinfulness of humanity and justification by faith alone, sanctification is not even possible
- M. So, I’m of the view – which I believe is the majority view of evangelical scholars – that the “therefore” ties the practical application section with everything that Paul has said up to this point – from Chapter 1 all the way through Chapter 11
1. Because we are sinners by nature, separated from God, subject to the wrath of God

- a. Because God has in Christ provided the righteousness we so desperately need by believing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- b. Because in believing, God has united us with Christ by the Holy Spirit, and given us the capacity to live a life pleasing to God, freed from the penalty and power of sin
- c. Because God has orchestrated His plan of redemption in order to break down the barriers between Jew and Gentile so that we might have one body, one people, sovereignly brought together to demonstrate the power of the gospel to a world desperately in need of redemption
- 2. Because all of that is true
 - a. “Therefore” – this is how we must live!
- N. So, this morning we get a start on answering the question, “What’s the ‘therefore’ there for?”
 - 1. By looking at just the first verse of Chapter 12
 - 2. And a rich verse it is!
 - a. Let’s unpack it

II. **The Pastor’s Heart**

- A. First, look at the pastor’s heart behind the exhortations which follow
 - 1. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
 - a. **I appeal to you therefore, brothers...**
- B. Now, maybe that doesn’t strike you all that strongly
 - 1. “I appeal to you”
 - 2. But the word Paul uses is a very strong word
 - 3. **Parakaleo (Gk) – to call along beside**
- C. It’s as if Paul is saying, “Come with me! I’m all in on this, and I’m not asking you to do anything I wouldn’t do, and in fact, am not already doing!”
 - 1. Other translations bring this out
 - a. Some say “I urge you brothers”
 - b. KJV and NKJV say “I beseech you” – knowing that most of us don’t use “beseech” much anymore, kind of archaic, but the sense is stronger than a mere request
 - c. Others say “I plead with you brothers”
- D. You see, Paul is not some dried up, crusty old theologian working in an academic setting writing journal articles that only a small group of other scholars might write
 - 1. Which is pretty much the kind of scholarly articles I used to write in my university days!
 - 2. No! Paul is passionate about his theology
 - a. Not only what it means, but how it must be applied
- E. This is not unusual for Paul, as we have seen in this book – his great treatise on the gospel

1. Remember his “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (**Romans 9.2**) he had in observing that the majority of his Jewish kinsmen have not embraced Christ
 2. How he wished that he himself “were accursed and cut off from Christ” (**Romans 9.3**) for the sake of his kinsmen
 3. Remember how his “heart’s desire and prayer” was that his Jewish kinsmen would be saved
 4. Remember how he exclaims that “we are more than conquerors” through Christ, and that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (**Romans 8.37-39**)
 5. Remember how he concluded Romans 11: “Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (**Romans 11.33**)
 6. No! This is not your average, run-of-the-mill academic theologian
 - a. This is man who is passionate about what God has given him to teach
 - b. And he’s passionate about you!
 7. That’s right – about you!
 - a. He appeals to you! He urges you! He pleads with you!
- F. Will you not respond to his entreaty?
1. Will you not take seriously what he is about to tell you?
 2. He loves you!
 - a. He cares about you!
 3. He doesn’t want to waste his breath pleading with brick walls
 - a. Are you a brick wall?

III. **The Mercies of God**

- A. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
1. I I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...
- B. If Paul’s personal appeal isn’t enough to get your attention, he appeals to the mercies of God
- C. Now, that’s kind of interesting – what does Paul mean by the mercies of God
1. It actually could mean one of two things
- D. One translation reads, “in view of God’s mercies”; another reads “because of all he’s done for you”
1. In that case, it would mean the mercies of God are the motivating factor behind his appeal to present yourselves as a living sacrifice
 2. And just think of all He’s done for you; just think of all His mercies
 3. You, who were dead in sins and trespasses – He made you alive in Christ and saved you by faith!
 4. You, who by nature suppressed the truth about God in unrighteousness

5. You, lacked any kind of goodness, any kind of righteousness; lacked even an interest in God, who did not seek God
 6. But God pursued you, found you
 7. And by His Spirit gave you new life in Christ Jesus
 8. In fact, He united you with Christ Jesus so that Christ's righteousness would be counted as your own!
 9. And not only that, He has given you His Spirit to indwell you, and give you the desire, the inclination, and the ability to live a life pleasing to God
 10. With all of those mercies, how could you not respond to Paul's appeal?
- E. On the other hand, most translations put it this way: "by the mercies of God"
1. In other words, you may not have the desire or the inclination to make yourself a living sacrifice for Him
 - a. But God Himself, in His mercy, has given you these desires, these abilities
 2. You have the capability, the spiritual resources, to become the person God wants you to become
 - a. You can indeed become a living sacrifice for Him!
 3. Because, through His merciful provisions, He has made it possible
 - a. Indeed, more than possible!
- F. No matter what kind of reading – by the mercies of God, or in view of God's mercies – how could we ignore Paul's exhortation?
1. We have all the motivation we need
 - a. And we have all the spiritual resources we need

IV. **The Sacrifice**

- A. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
1. **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...**
 2. So, what is this exhortation all about?
 - a. What is Paul pleading with us to do?
 3. Well, it has to do with a sacrifice – a living sacrifice
 - a. Which is curious to say the least
 4. Because in those days sacrifices were of dead animals!
 - a. Certainly that was the case with the Jewish Law
 - b. But was also the case with pagan religions
 5. But this is different
 - a. Let's see how!
- B. **Body**
1. First of all, he says, "present your bodies" as a living sacrifice
 2. Now, many commentators have taken that to mean the whole person
 - a. "Present your selves" as a living sacrifice
 - b. Not just your physical self, but your immaterial faculties as well – your mind and emotions
 3. But that's not how Paul usually uses the word "soma" in the Greek
 - a. He usually means the physical body

- b. And we've seen in Romans how important the body is in our Christian life
 - c. And this is echoed in many other texts in Paul's epistles
- 4. Leon Morris: Our bodies may be 'implements of righteousness' (6:13) and 'members of Christ' (1 Cor. 6:15). The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19); Paul can speak of being 'holy both in body and in spirit' (1 Cor. 7:34). He knows that there are possibilities of evil in the body but that in the believer 'the body of sin' has been brought to nothing (6:6)."
- 5. **Romans 6:12-14** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.
- 6. Paul is saying the same thing here in Romans 12.1 that he said in Romans 6
 - a. Remember the "therefore" – Romans 12 and 6 are connected!
- 7. So, how can we offer our bodies as living sacrifices?
- 8. First, we offer our minds
 - a. Now, we might think the mind is immaterial – not part of our bodies
 - b. But that would not be entirely correct – our brains are part of our bodies
 - c. And our brains can be fed with all kinds of things that either enhance our sanctification or contribute to our corrupt thinking!
 - d. What do you watch? What do you read?
 - e. Are you feeding your minds with things that edify?
 - f. How much news do you watch? That's increasingly dangerous, since most of the news outlets are driving a particular ideology – they decide what to tell you and what to leave out
 - g. So even with the news you have to watch and read with great discernment
 - h. And make sure you're watching and reading good, trustworthy Christian material to give you the capacity to tell the truth from the falsehood
- 9. This brings to mind another part of our bodies – our eyes and ears
 - a. For our eyes and ears are the pathways through which our minds are forged
- 10. Then, what about our tongues
 - a. The Bible has much to say about the tongue, and how destructive our speech can be
 - b. We, at our age, need to be especially careful in this area

- c. We tend to lose our filters as we get older, and say things we were careful to avoid when we were younger
- 11. Then there are our hands and feet
 - a. Where we go and what we do with our bodies can either be sanctifying or corrupting
- 12. So our living sacrifice needs to recognize the important of our bodies
 - a. How our bodies can be the source of sinning
 - b. And how we are to present our bodies as instruments of righteousness

C. **Living**

- 1. Then our sacrifices are to be living
 - a. As we observed a moment ago, this is counterintuitive for the culture in which Paul is writing
 - b. For sacrifices in those days usually involved killing an animal, and throwing it upon an altar of burnt offering
 - c. But for the Christian, our sacrifice has already been made
 - d. Christ has died for us, once and for all!
 - e. He did that 2,000 years ago – and He never needs to do it again
 - f. When we observe the Lord’s Supper we “proclaim his death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11.26)
 - g. And this is according to Jesus’ own words: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11.25)
- 2. So we don’t have to die physically for our salvation
 - a. Jesus has been there and done that
- 3. But what kind of sacrifice are we to make
 - a. Some would say that we are to die to sin and self
 - b. That certainly is true, but that’s not what it means here
 - c. We’ve already died to sin
- 4. **Romans 6:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 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.
- 5. No, what we are to offer as a living sacrifice is the very spiritual life God has given to us through the Holy Spirit!
 - a. Our new life in Christ – given to us by grace
 - b. We are to give back to Him for His use and purposes!
- 6. Robert Smith Candlish (Scottish, 19th Century): “What life? Not merely animal life, the life that is common to all sentient and moving creatures; not merely, in addition to that, intelligent life, the life that characterizes all beings capable of thought and voluntary choice; but spiritual life: life in the highest sense; the very life which those on whose behalf the sacrifice of atonement is presented lost, when they fell into that state which makes a sacrifice of atonement necessary.”
- 7. Boice: Other people may give God their money or time or even take up a religious vocation, but only a Christian can give back to God that new

spiritual life in Christ that he has first been given. Indeed, it is only because we have been made alive in Christ that we are able to do this or even want to.

D. **Holy**

1. The next thing Paul says about this living sacrifice is that it is to be holy
2. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
 - a. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...
3. This is something that has become increasingly foreign to evangelicals today
 - a. Very few people are concerned with holiness
 - b. Most believers don't even know what holiness is as it concerns ourselves
4. But in Paul's day, certainly the Jews understood something important about holiness
 - a. Sacrifices were to be holy – they were to be without spot or blemish
 - b. To offer anything else would be an insult to the God who alone is altogether holy
5. Now our history in the Christian & Missionary Alliance is deeply influenced by the holiness movement
 - a. The Fourfold Gospel as proclaimed by our founder, A.B. Simpson, and still central today in our denomination is that Christ is our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King
 - b. Christ as our Sanctifier is the deeply held understanding that the very life of Christ can be lived out in and through Christians through the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, who indwells us
 - c. The pursuit of holiness is not abstract concept
 - d. Nor is it an unrealizable experience reserved for the sweet by-and-by (though the by-and-by will certainly be sweet!)
 - e. No, holiness is what God calls us to today, and He has provided the spiritual resources to enable it
 - f. So our living sacrifice is to be a holy sacrifice
 - g. Giving to God our spiritual life, our best life empowered by the Holy Spirit
6. The biblical witness – from beginning to end – is that the people of God are to be holy, because God is holy
7. **1 Peter 1:15–16** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
 - b. 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
8. Holiness is the grand trajectory of our lives as Christians
 - a. It is the goal that Romans relentlessly leads us toward

- b. As we continue to work through these remaining chapters, we'll find out more and more about what holiness entails
 - 9. As we've seen recently in our communion series in 1 John:
 - a. **1 John 3:3** (ESV) — 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.
 - 10. This is certainly one of the most challenging dimensions of my life
 - a. When I'm honest enough to examine my own life, I find my own motivations often involving a mixture of holy aspirations along with selfish interests
 - b. I find I'm not pure, in even the best of my offerings
 - 11. But that's the goal of every believer – to offer the best we can offer with the purest of motives
 - a. Indeed, that's what we've been predestined for!
 - 12. **Romans 8:29** (ESV) —
 - a. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...
 - b. To be conformed to the image of the Son of God is to be holy
- E. **Acceptable**
 - 1. Finally, the fourth aspect of this living sacrifice is to be “acceptable”
 - a. In other words, pleasing to God
 - 2. Turns out, this is so important that the notion occurs twice in these first verses
 - a. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...”
 - b. Then in v. 2: “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”
 - 3. Really, that's astonishing that anything we could do by way of offering to God would be pleasing to God!
 - a. After all, He's altogether righteous and holy; we are not
 - b. And even our best is, as Isaiah puts it, are as filthy rags
 - 4. But here it is!
 - 5. **Luke 17:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’ ”
 - b. Unworthy servants – that's who we are; even our best is simply doing what is expected
 - 6. But: **Matthew 25:21** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’
 - 7. The idea that we can make our Master happy! Genuinely pleased with us, is remarkable
 - a. But there it is!

8. When we truly offer our bodies as living sacrifices, by the mercies of God, holy, set apart for God and for His glory...
 - a. He is delighted with us, His children!
9. Much as we parents are thrilled with our toddler who takes his first steps
 - a. Waddling back and forth, unsteady, unpredictable
 - b. But who makes it from holding onto the coffee table all the way to Mommy's arms
 - c. We are thrilled!
10. And God is pleased with His children
 - a. When we offer ourselves willingly
 - b. Giving Him the best we have to offer
 - c. Through the merciful gifts God has given us!

V. **Spiritual Worship**

- A. One final observation
- B. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
 1. 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.**
- C. So, our living sacrifice is said to be our spiritual worship
 1. Now that's an interest turn of phrase if there ever was one!
- D. When we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, that is the way we worship
 1. The way we worship spiritually
- E. You might think that worship is what we do on Sunday morning
 1. And it is!
 - a. You know, with all the singing and praying and preaching
 2. But that's only a limited kind of worship
 - a. Paul says you are worshiping when you offer yourself in whatever you do for God and His glory
 3. **1 Corinthians 10:31** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- F. The word for "worship" is **latreia (Gk)**
 1. It's the same word for service
 2. So serving is worshiping! And worshiping is serving!
- G. Even more interesting is the word for "spiritual"
 1. **Logikos (Gk)**
 2. That's right – the same Greek word which is the root of our word logic or logical
 - a. That's why some translations use, instead of "spiritual worship", **"reasonable service"**
- H. When we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, we are doing the only logical, reasonable thing in order to worship and serve the living God
 1. Our worship, our service is logical because

- a. Of what He has done for us in saving us from our sin
 - b. Of what He has given us in Christ
 - c. Of what He provides for us by the indwelling Spirit
 - d. Of what He promises us for all of eternity in His presence
2. What could be more reasonable, more logical than that?
 3. And yet, worship and service of God is the furthest thing from the minds of most people
- I. But not for the Christian
1. That's why Paul's appeal is so strongly presented
 2. So dear friends,
- J. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
1. I I appeal to you therefore, brothers,
 2. by the mercies of God,
 3. to present your bodies
 4. as a living sacrifice,
 5. holy
 6. and acceptable to God,
 7. which is your spiritual worship.