

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity, August 29, 2021**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 175, 413:1, 241, 398, 412.

Lessons: Joshua 24:11-24, Philippians 2:1-8, Matthew 11:28-30.

Sermon Text: Romans 12:1-2.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What does God want from you? Before you can really answer that question, you must first be clear about what it is that God wants for you. God our Savior wants ***“all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”*** 1 Timothy 2:4 (KJV) God sent Jesus Christ into the world so ***“that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*** John 3:16-18 (NIV)

Every day we receive from the Lord gifts of his mercy. In appreciation for these gifts, a reasonable service is acceptable to God and proper.

Paul does not write: I command you, but: I beseech, call upon, ask, admonish, beg you. This is evangelical exhortation, not the demanding of the Law. He is writing as a brother, not as some kind of master or superior whose commands must be obeyed. Of course, we still have the law of God, as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

What he had written until now in his letter to the Romans has been proclamation, praise of the many evidences of the mercy of God, of his grace in Christ Jesus. This unmerited grace of God is the proper motive and incentive for Christian living. It is God's mercy that is given to us which St. Paul wants to motivate us. Some have even called the last four chapters of Romans a “guide for Christian living”.

At the time in which Paul wrote this letter, people knew exactly what “sacrifices” meant. It means first of all slaughtering an animal to honor a supreme being. Whether they were pagans or Jews, they were familiar with the ritual killing of animals, not for food, but to appease some pagan god or in the case of the Jews, to give honor, praise, and glory to the true God. For Jews this was all pointing forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to atone for, to wash their sins away with blood,

Those were sacrifices to the true God. And now Paul exhorts believers to

**“OFFER YOUR BODIES AS LIVING SACRIFICES”**

- 1. Do not conform to the world,**
- 2. But be transformed,**
- 3. So that you will know God's will.**

Christ made a sacrifice of atonement, and that is the sacrifice we need to leave this sinful world and be received into heaven. He paid for all sins with his death, for your sins and the sins of everyone, the person sitting next to you, and every human who has ever lived. We need only to believe this to receive its benefit. ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark 16:16 (NIV) But we are also admonished here to serve God in every way we can.

In our sermon text, Paul is writing about sacrifices after we have been reconciled and brought to faith, not to pay for our sins. Jesus Christ made the only sacrifice necessary to pay for our sins. He is encouraging us ***“to be made new in the attitude of your minds.”*** Ephesians 4:23 (NIV) Paul wrote to us in First Corinthians: ***“Do***

*you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) Peter wrote: *“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* 1 Peter 2:5 (NIV)

The Word of God here admonishes Christians, first of all, to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. Six chapters earlier, Paul wrote: *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”* Romans 6:12-14 (NIV)

The bodies – and entire lives of all believers, including us – are to be devoted to the service of God. Christians offer their bodies as a sacrifice to God when they do not look upon them as their own property to use or abuse as they see fit, but always consider them as instruments of God’s holy will. In this way the bodies of the Christians are living sacrifices. Their whole life is spent in the service of the Lord, and all the acts of all their members are to be good works, not to earn salvation, but as fruits of faith. Paul wrote in Ephesians: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Such sacrifices are also holy, devoted to God, praising God and are acceptable and well-pleasing to God, who takes a great delight in them. They are a reasonable service, logical and expected by God, as a way to praise him. They seek only his honor. And so the service which a Christian offers to God in sacrificing his body, that is, in yielding all of his body to do the holy will of God is not a dead and formal ritualism, but is always being active in planning and thinking how the body with all its members may live for the honor of God.

He writes *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.”* You know that word “conform”. You may think of a ‘beanbag chair’ which takes your shape, which conforms to your body when you sit in it. Do not let your life be shaped by, do not let your life go along with the ways of the sinful world!

The Christian’s habits, behavior and his entire way of life, must not agree with the present world. They must not go along with and follow the behavior of people who live only for this world.

Believers will not want to go along with the evil customs, habits and practices that are so common in the world. Scripture says *“the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NIV),

Believers won’t want to have one foot in the wickedness of the world – perhaps thinking it is all OK and the other foot trying to follow God. To show the foolishness of this, try stepping into a small boat and keeping one foot on the dock. You may end up falling into the water, or to carry this picture further, drowning in the wickedness of the world and losing eternal life!

Because the new man, the inner being of the Christian is not of the world, though still living in the world, Christians will have a different character and appearance in the world. This happens through the change in their hearts, through the renewal of their minds, which begins in conversion and continues through their whole life, since the battle between flesh and the new man must be fought every day. The change in the external character and way of life of a man is the result of the inner change. And so the Christian’s everyday concern is to examine carefully, to try to find out always what the will of God is, that is, what is good and well-pleasing and perfect in his eyes.

To accomplish this, Paul writes *“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

Conversion and sanctification are the renewing of the mind. This is a change of the qualities of the soul and it shows itself in the life of the Christian. It is the sacrifice of our entire being.

The progress of sanctification, of dying to sin more and more, and living to righteousness more and more, is the carrying on of this renewing work, till it is perfected in glory on judgment day. The great enemy to this renewal is conformity to this world. Be careful – Beware! – of making plans for happiness, as though it is really found in the things of this world, which soon pass away. Do not fall in with the customs of those who walk in the lusts of the flesh, and are led by earthly things. The work of the Holy Ghost first begins in the heart, and is carried

on through the entire way of life, till there is a change of the whole man into the likeness of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Thus, to be Godly, is to give up ourselves to God.

And how will you know the will of God? Certainly not by listening to people of this world or by listening to false teachers claiming to be Christians who do not proclaim the whole truth of God's Word. We struggle to proclaim the whole truth of God's Word right here in meeting after meeting in all our words and worship.

When we know the will of God from Scripture, we do not conform, do not follow, do not try to do the things of this world, but instead we are changed by the Word of God and it shows in our lives.

Is an hour a week enough to accomplish that when you spend 167 hours a week doing other things? How do you spend your time? Is it turning again and again to the Word of God? Paul says that ***"Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."*** Daily we struggle with sin – our own sins and the sin that is urged upon us by the devil, the world, and the flesh.

In this struggle ***"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."*** 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV)

Our sacrifices are sacrifices to the honor of God and to serve him. The burden, the yoke that Christ asks us to carry in service to him is easy and the burden we bear for him is light.

May our confession and our rejoicing be ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*** Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

May God help us daily as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices! Amen.