

Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Dear fellow Christians worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth:

In our fiercely independent society, we often say things like, “*I don’t belong to anybody. I’m my own person.*” While I understand the appeal of rugged individuality, the truth is, deep down, we do appreciate our human associations. For example, what an honor it is for me that Karen calls me “*her husband,*” not just “*a or the husband.*” It doesn’t feel bad at all to know that I *belong* to her! And we all say, “This is *my* family,” not “*a* family,” -- and the Lord is “*my* God,” not just “*a* God.”

Does the theme of this sermon offend you when I say, “**You Belong to God**”? Do you feel boxed in? I don’t think so.

Let’s change gears here a moment to take a little quiz. We don’t have many kings in our world anymore. There are a few in Europe and the Middle East. I’ve picked 3 going from north to south (for you trivia buffs):

(1) Who is the king of Sweden? **Carl 16th** (Gustaf)

(2) Who is the king of Spain? **Felipe 6th**

(3) Who is the king of Jordan? **Abdullah 2nd**

It’s like, “Who cares? They’re not my kings!” So let’s finish the quiz: In the realm of your life, who is *your* king? Spiritually speaking, we have 2 choices. Either I am king, or Jesus is King. Either I rule or Jesus rules. Either the center of my universe is me, or it is Jesus -- and my whole world revolves around him.

Paul tells us today in Romans 12 that **We Belong to God**. And he explains that this truth affects everything about us. (1) ***He set you apart for himself***, and (2) ***Let your life confirm it***.

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Paul begins, “***I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.***” In Old Testament times, God directed his people to bring sacrifices of various kinds. There were sacrifices on festival days and there were daily sacrifices. The Temple Mount would have smelled, day in and day out, like all the neighbors grilling out at the same time. These animals of sacrifice symbolically became God’s property. They were dedicated to God. Using this picture, Paul says in Rom. 12 that we are to “***offer ourselves as living sacrifices.***” We have become God’s property.

Paul says that, as his property, we are “***holy and pleasing to God.***” We look at our lives and realize that description doesn’t fit us. My life is one daily train wreck after another. My mind, my mouth, my manner of living, they are far, far from God-pleasing far, far too often!

So how are we holy? The key is Jesus! Paul wrote, “***We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins***” (Eph. 1:7). He wiped us clean with his sanitizing blood. Not a spot, not a viral speck of sin remains! Jesus makes us “***holy and pleasing to God.***”

“***Holy***” means literally “to set apart.” God chose you and me living in this filthy world, the moral muck and mess, and through Jesus set us apart for himself. What a gift! What a privileged position! Who would protest against that saying, “*Nobody owns me!*” No, just the opposite is true. We are so glad that Jesus is our King and that we belong to him for eternity.

God's gracious declaration that we are holy through Jesus' blood evokes a response. ***"In view of God's mercy"*** (to cleanse and save us), Paul says, here's the proper response: ***"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices."*** In other words, dedicate your life to the Lord who saved it. Paul once put it another way: ***"We no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died for us"*** (2 Cor. 5:15).

Living for Jesus instead of living for ourselves makes our whole life an ***"act of spiritual worship."*** Worship isn't just an hour a week at church or a few minutes a day with our devotion booklet. Those are wonderful! But Paul says worship also takes place each moment we live as each breath we take, word we speak, and action we perform is set apart and dedicated to our loving Savior God. It means we're "all in" all the time.

The Battle of the Alamo took place in Texas in 1836. 232 American soldiers faced a force of 5,000 Mexican soldiers. So the story goes, American Col. William Travis drew a line in the dirt with his sword and told his men they were free to go. Those who wanted to stay and fight should cross the line. They all crossed the line, including Davie Crockett and Jim Bowie, who had to be carried across the line because he was too ill to walk. Once they crossed that line, they were committed. There was no turning back. They willingly gave everything, even their lives, to the cause.

By God's grace, you and I have crossed the line from death to life, from damnation to salvation, from hell to heaven. Now the Lord wants us to be totally committed to the battle while we are still on this earth. We just sang together, ***"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee; take my hands...take my feet...take my voice...take my silver and my gold...take my love...take myself and I will be, ever, only all for thee."*** That sounds a lot like Jesus is our King, right?

As God's holy subjects, cleansed by Jesus' blood, Paul gives us negative and positive choices. He says, ***"Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."***

The negative? ***"Don't conform!"*** Don't go along with everything the world says or does. The world's pattern is one of selfishness and self-gratification. It's about me being king and me sitting in the palace and having people kowtow to me to make me feel good. As long as I can always be right and I can get my way, I'm happy. And don't you forget it!

The positive? ***"Be transformed."*** The change in our *hearts* brought about by Jesus will show itself by the change in our *lives*. Paul said, ***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"*** (2 Cor. 5:17). This is hard work. Living like Jesus in a world that often despises Jesus is challenging! There is a lot of push back. But you have crossed the line and are totally committed! You are "all in." ***"In view of God's mercy,"*** in light of how much Jesus loves you and me, how can we do otherwise? Jesus is our glorious King, and we belong to him!

Amen.