



Living Sacrifice

Gospel Culture, Part 1

Romans 12:1-2

David Sunday

January 14, 2018

Lord, thank You for the privilege of being able to worship You. We desire that Your name is greatly praised among all the nations and we thank You for the word of Habakkuk the prophet, that “*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*” (Habakkuk 2:14). Lord, we look forward to that and pray that as we have missionaries coming in this next weekend that they would be encouraged in their work and that we would be further mobilized as a church to spread the gospel all around the world, starting right here with our neighbors in the Fox Valley, then to all the nations.

Lord, please speak now through Your Word, by Your Spirit, to our hearts. I pray for the empowerment and anointing of Your Spirit upon my preaching and upon our hearing. We open our hearts. We say with Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for Your servants are listening—and we’re ready to obey. We want to be transformed for Your glory.” In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

It is so good to be back after being away for a couple weeks. We’re beginning a new sermon series today on Romans 12-16. We’ll be here for about four months. This is the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome. I’m calling this series, “Gospel Culture,” in which we’ll consider what it looks like when the doctrine of the gospel Paul described in Romans 1-11 overflows into the life of a community of believers. What does it look like for a church to be a “gospelized” culture and how do Christians live in society as a “gospelized” people? How do we spread this gospel message to all the nations? That will be the theme of our Missions Emphasis Weekend.

So let’s read God’s Word beginning with Romans 12:1:

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. 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.

This is God's Word and we thank Him for it.

It was 1719. Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was a 19-year-old nobleman, doing a grand tour through Europe, when he encountered a famous painting by the artist Domenico Feti entitled Ecce Homo, "Here is the Man." These are the famous words of Pontius Pilate in John 19. Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf looked upon the portrait of Jesus, dressed in the royal robe with a crown of thorns on His head, about to go to the cross to die for the sins of those who trust in Him. As he looked at that, his eyes were transfixed by the love of his Savior for him. He scrolled his eyes down the portrait and saw on the canvas a caption which read, "All this I did for you; what are you doing for Me?"

I wonder, as you hear those words, if you think, "Is that really the right way to think about our response to the gospel?" If you're thinking, "Jesus has done so much for me on the cross, somehow now I have to pay Him back for what He's done," that's wrong. None of us can repay the Lord for what He's done for us. But if we have a view of the gospel that it demands nothing from us, that it requires no commitment on our behalf, then you have to ask yourself, "Do I really understand the gospel? Have I been transfixed by the love Jesus has for me?"

There's an old hymn where we sing about the cross of Jesus, saying this in the refrain: "Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all." Today I want to ask you, "Are you responding to God's right to demand your soul, your life, your all? Are you—out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for you on the cross—completely dedicating your whole life to Him?" That's the question.

I heard about a pastor who was asked how his church was doing. Instead of answering with the usual "Okay" or "Great," he said, "My great concern is that I see people who are evidently prepared to settle for less than the best spiritually." That's a pretty searching statement. I hope that won't be true for you and me. I hope you're not prepared to settle for less than the very best spiritually. If you've been a Christian for a while, I can tell you, you're going to have to fight against spiritual stagnation in your life. You're going to go through times of dryness, times when your heart starts to get cold, times when a veneer of spiritual unreality starts to settle over your soul, times when you're prepared to actually settle for less than the very best spiritually.

Your faith can get stale. Your discipleship can get stuck. Your heart can get disengaged. Your life can stop changing. You could stop reaching out in love and service to anyone else. You could think, "There's no way I'm ever going to make a disciple of someone else." You're not on fire anymore. You're lukewarm. You're making compromises in your life that may not be visible to anyone else, but your heart is drifting. You may or may not even realize it, but the Lord knows it.

How do I know that you'll go through times like that in the Christian life? I know that because I know my own heart. I know what a battle it is to stay vibrant, fresh, dedicated and fully committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, I hope you know I am not a paid professional Christian who's doing what I do because you pay me to do it. That's not what this is all about for me. I am a fellow believer with you, fighting the good fight of faith. I know what it's like to fight against this lazy tendency to settle for less than the very best spiritually. I need, as much as you need, to know how to conquer spiritual stagnation in my life. So here's where it starts.

Don't lose sight of God's mercy.

Recognize how kind and merciful God has been and continues to be toward you. Look at Jesus suffering for you, dying for you, taking your sin, clothing you in His righteousness, taking your death so you might live and have life more abundantly. Hear Him ask you, "All this I've done for you; what are you now doing for Me?" How will you respond? Friends, don't lose sight of God's mercy. That's strategy number one for fighting against spiritual stagnation. Paul is appealing to us here. His heart is warm, passionate and urgent. His appeal is based upon the foundation of God's mercies to us in Christ. Do you see that in verse one? *I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God...*" This is really what all of Romans 1-11 has been about. It's about God's mercy to people who do not deserve it, to people who actually deserve the opposite, who deserve judgment and wrath for our sin. Yet God has been so merciful to us.

In chapter 11, Paul brings his great exposition of the gospel to a climax with these marvelous words about God's mercy. Let's look at them again in verses 30-32 of chapter 11: *"Just as you were at one time disobedient to God..."* That's the reality for all of us. At one time we were locked in disobedience. *"...But now [you] have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy."* Do you get the sense that God is eager to show mercy, to have His mercy overflow to people? Then these wonderful words in verse 32: *"For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."* This is what just fires up Paul's heart to go into this wonderful doxology that ends with the words, *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."*

Now he comes to us in Romans 12, moving into the application of the gospel of God's grace and mercy in the lives of God's people, using the word "therefore" in verse one: *"I appeal to you, therefore, brothers..."* because the mercy of God is like the hinge on which the whole door

of the Christian life opens. Here's where we find the fuel that keeps the engine of the Christian life fired up and moving. It's because of all God has done for us in Christ that Paul now appeals to us to offer our lives as a sacrifice in obedience to Him.

We've got to remember this as we go through Romans 12-16 this winter and spring. There will be a lot of commands and a lot of practical exhortations in these chapters—wonderful exhortations. But don't forget that it all flows out of the gospel, out of what God has done for us in Christ. Maybe you've heard these two words: indicative and imperative. An indicative is a statement of reality that is true. It speaks of something that has been done, a reality that is true. An imperative is a command to be obeyed. Every imperative command in the Bible flows out of the indicatives of what God has already done for us by His grace and mercy.

That's true of Romans 12-16. That we now live this life flows out of what God has done for us in Christ. If you're trying to live the Christian life, but you've lost sight of the mercies of God to you in Christ, you're going to run out of gas. If you're trying to live a Christian life because you're afraid of God's wrath and judgment, or if you're thinking that somehow you must do something in order to keep God favorable toward you—in order to stay in His good graces—your obedience will lose momentum over time. We can't keep that up. If you're trying to be a good Christian so that you can be approved and praised by people, you won't be able to keep that going either. Your heart will grow numb. You'll get tired and exhausted, then you'll give up. But if you realize and remember that God has been so full of mercy toward you in Christ, then you will have a sufficient supply of gospel fuel to keep running the race that is set before you with endurance. It won't matter so much what other people say or do. You'll be able to keep on living the life of faith.

So friend, I want to ask, how fresh is God's mercy to you today? How tender is your heart toward God's tender mercies in your life? When you think of God's mercies toward you, what kind of thoughts come into your mind? Do you think about the cross of Jesus? Do you think of Him dying there for you, so that your sins could be forgiven and you could be clothed in His righteousness and live? Do you think about how your throat was an open grave? You used your tongue to deceive. The venom of asps was under your lips. Your mouth was full of curses and bitterness. And then God came into your life in mercy and started changing you. You're a new person.

Do you remember that in your past there was only ruin and misery? That everywhere you went you left relational wreckage? The way of peace you did not know. But then God came into your life with His mercy and relationships started changing. Reconciliation started happening. Do you remember when there was no fear of God before your eyes, and you did whatever you

wanted to do? You did that which was right in your own eyes. Then God came and you started desiring to live a life that was pleasing and obedient to Him. That's His mercy in your life.

Can you remember when you were dreading God's condemnation and wrath? You were really aware of your guilt and shame, then the light of the gospel broke through. It was as if your chains fell off, your heart was free, you rose and went forth and followed Him. Now you can come boldly before the throne of grace, knowing that God is favorable toward you and loves you as His child. That is His mercy toward you in Christ. Can you think of specific sins that used to control you, but now you've been forgiven and set free? Can you think of relationships that have been changed? Friends, keep God's mercy before your eyes.

I was thinking of times I've sinned against Kate, my wife—then I felt very ashamed. She has responded by embracing me, loving me and forgiving me. That's mercy. I was thinking of days in my life—even seasons—when I have been so depressed and anxious and lonely, then God sends a friend who prays for me and reminds me of a promise and assures me of God's love. That's mercy. I can think of unexpected gifts that we've received precisely at the point of need. That's mercy.

I can think of the day when I waited in downtown Chicago for ten hours while my wife's lung was being removed and I wondered if I would see her alive. I'll never forget that night in the ICU. The first words out of Kate's mouth were, "God has been very merciful to us." That's the first thing she said to me. Then I think of how we've had seven and a half years since then to walk this life together and talk with one another and raise our kids together and be in this church together. That's mercy from God! This very week God has been merciful and kind to me. I've been distracted by unkind and impure and wrong thoughts this week. I've had to come before God and ask for His mercy and forgiveness—and He has been merciful to me this week.

You might be going through some very painful trials right now. You might have your hopes dashed in relationships. You might be facing a scary medical diagnosis. You might be feeling your own body deteriorating. You might be looking at friendships that have gone sour and finances that don't seem to measure up. You're feeling very burdened as you come into church today.

Friend, if someone asks you how you are doing, I hope you know that in this church it's okay to not be okay. I hope you know it's okay to say, "I'm struggling," because God may want to show His mercy to you through another human being who will encourage you. But I hope you also believe that through all the disappointments and all the trials and all the burdens you're facing—through it all, this truth remains: God has been kind to you every moment of your life.

He has not turned away from doing good to you. He will never turn away from doing good to you. That is His mercy.

There's only one response that makes sense.

You and I have no right to be indifferent toward God's mercies in our lives. We have no right to be cold, unresponsive, nor unmoved. No, His mercies move us. His mercies demand a response—and there's only one response that makes sense. That's the second thing we're going to talk about today. There's an urgency and a tenderness to Paul's exhortation: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters. We're family here. We love one another. We've been 'mercied' by God together. We are the recipients of unfathomable, innumerable mercies. So I appeal to you, brothers and sisters. I'm pouring out my heart. This isn't going to be held back."

I'm going to try to do just that with you now. This is going to be laid bare. I'm appealing to you, New Covenant Bible Church, by the mercies of God to respond by presenting your bodies as a sacrifice to God. In the Old Testament, the way to worship God was to bring a sacrifice. Under the new covenant, the way to worship God is to be a sacrifice. When you sinned under the old covenant, you would bring a sacrificial animal to demonstrate repentance and faith. You would in effect be saying, "My sin deserves death, but I am trusting in Your mercy to me, so I offer this animal to die in my place." But that is not the kind of sacrifice Paul is talking about here, because Jesus made that sacrifice on the cross once for all. He held nothing back. He was the unblemished holy Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and whoever trusts in Him has had the wrath of God removed. The judgment and condemnation of sin has been absolved and propitiated through the blood of Jesus, so there's no other sacrifice that can or must be made. Jesus paid it all, once for all.

There was another kind of sacrifice in the Old Testament called a "thank offering." It was a way of expressing to the Lord how grateful you were for His mercy, goodness and faithfulness to you. You would bring the very best you had to offer. It was costly; you didn't offer God the leftovers. That's what Paul is talking about here. In view of God's mercies, present your bodies as a sacrifice—a thank offering—to the Lord. When he says this, he's not talking about doing this just once, at a moment in time when you get saved. No, this is a sacrifice that is to be repeated over and over again.

Paul says, "...present your bodies..." Your body signifies all that you have and all that you are. It's your whole life as it gets worked out in the tangible circumstances of your life—in your workplace, in your home. This isn't just a spiritual thing. Worship is not just a spiritual thing

you do for a few minutes on Sunday morning. Worship is tangible, physical, expressed in the daily realities of our lives. It's not just when we sing songs of praise.

What is worship? Worship is giving all that we are and all that we have in total dedication to God to express what He is worth to us. That's worship. If the only time you express God's worth is when you sing some songs on Sunday morning, He's not worth very much to you. Sunday morning should be the crescendo of a whole week that has been lived in total dedication to God, as you have given Him all of yourself in your work, in your home, with your money, with your time. It's all been an expression of worship to Him. And then we come together on Sunday morning and unite our lives and voices, coming before His throne and letting it all out in praise to Him, because He is so worthy. He's been so merciful to us. We give Him all of our self—not just the leftovers. Not just a little part.

I heard about a conversation between a chicken and a pig. They were discussing the contributions they each would have to make to a traditional breakfast of bacon and eggs. The pig said to the chicken, "Well, it's all pretty easy for you. You just make a donation. For me, it's total commitment."

For how many of us is the Christian life too much like the chicken? It doesn't cost us much. It's just a donation here and there. There'll be another egg tomorrow and the next day.

So you make an offering to God on Sunday morning, but practically forget about Him on Saturday night when you're out with your friends. Or on Monday morning, when you're in the board room. You give Him just a sliver of your time. You give Him just part of your life. Maybe you give Him your home life, but not your work life. Or maybe you give Him your church life, but not your home life. You give just enough that it really doesn't cost you much.

Friends, true worship of a Savior Who gave His all demands total commitment. Not just in a few moments of singing, but all of me, all the time. So I wake up in the morning and I need to give God my tongue. What does that look like? It's saying, "Lord, this is Yours." It's not to be used for gossip. It's not to be used for slander. It's not to be used for grumbling and complaining. It's not to be withheld in giving blessing. "My tongue is Yours, Lord. Be praised through the way I speak today. My tongue is Yours, Lord, so that I will bring blessing and encouragement to someone else." I'm telling you, friends, if you wait until you feel like encouraging someone, you probably won't do it very often. When you give your tongue as a sacrifice to the Lord, you're saying, "I'm not going to wait until I feel like it. I'm going to go out of my way to speak words that bring blessing to others."

One of the great battles of our hearts is that we feel jealous, envious and resentful of others, so we withhold blessing from them because we want to think we're more important.

When you give your tongue as a sacrifice to the Lord, you're saying, "No, it's not going to be that way. This tongue is going to be used to bring blessing."

What does it look like to say, "God, take my feet"? It means, "Lord, lead me in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake." "When I drive past that nursing home day after day after day, and I know there's someone in there who maybe hasn't seen a friend for a long time—direct my feet to turn in there to bring blessing and encouragement and comfort." "Lord, let me visit those who are in need. Let me bring the good news of the gospel of peace, so that my feet are the beautiful feet that show people the way to Christ."

What does it look like to say, "Lord, take my eyes"? "O God, guard where they roam and look. My eyes are Yours. Capture my imagination with Your beauty. Capture my imagination, so that when I look at the sunset and see its beauty, I praise You and worship You and say, 'O God, how great You are.'" "God, take these eyes, so that I will not direct them to filth, to things that will capture my imagination with that which would fuel my sinful lusts and my greed. Instead, when I see my fellow human beings, created in Your image, may I see them through the eyes of Jesus." As you look into your Savior's eyes, isn't it beautiful that there's not a tinge of impurity, not a hint of greed or pride or jealousy? They're pure eyes. "Here are my eyes, Lord. I give them to You as a sacrifice."

My ears—what does that mean? It means, "O Lord, help me to know when I'm watching cable news when it's time to shut it off. Help me to know, Lord—when I'm listening to things that are just agitating me and filling me with all kinds of anger and grumbling—to stop listening to that. Instead, fill my ears with the divine truths of Scripture. Help me love listening to Your Word. Also, Lord, prepare my ears so I can be a good listener to a friend in need, to a neighbor who needs to unburden her heart. Here are my ears, Lord—they're Yours."

My hands. A lot of the things we do with our hands are just mundane. This makes me think of Marv Newell who has been at the church the last couple of weeks using his hands to type data onto a screen. I'm sure it wasn't the most exciting work in the world to do, but you're going to see that screen on that wall on Friday night at the mission banquet, and you're going to be able to tap anyplace in the world where one of our gospel servants is serving, and you're going to be able to see a picture and updated information from their newsletters. You're going to be able to send them a note of encouragement right from that screen.

Through that mundane work of his hands that Marv offered up to the Lord, God's gospel is going to go forward, missionaries are going to be encouraged and Jesus is going to be praised. So when I'm doing the dishes, when I'm doing the laundry (which doesn't happen very often, actually), when I'm doing mundane work, it can be used as an offering unto the Lord. Ruth

Graham, Billy Graham's wife, used to have a plaque in front of her kitchen sink where she washed the dishes that said, "Divine worship offered here three times daily." That's a living sacrifice. That's what this is about.

All of me—every part of me, Lord—I present as a sacrifice to You, to be used in Your service as an expression of how much You are worth to me. Just as I once presented my members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now I present my members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification (Romans 6:19).

This sacrifice of ourselves is described with three adjectives, each of them modifying the kind of sacrifice believers offer when we present our whole selves to the Lord. They are living, holy and acceptable, or even better, well-pleasing to God. So let's think about these three adjectives for a minute.

Living. If you're in Christ, you've been brought from death—dead in your trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1)—to life. Jesus is probably not calling you to die for him today. Maybe, but it's much more likely Jesus is calling you to live for Him today. And sometimes living for Jesus is harder than dying for Jesus, because living for Jesus involves dying daily to yourself. Jesus didn't die for us so that we could live for ourselves. He didn't die so that we would live miserable lives. He died so that we could live lives of radiant, joyful devotion to Him. Chuck Swindoll used to say: "The problem with living sacrifices is that they like to crawl off the altar." We need to repeatedly present ourselves as a sacrifice to the Lord, alive unto Him, brought from death to life.

The next adjective is holy. What does that mean? It means dedicated to God. A holy sacrifice is one that belongs to God, not to the one who is presenting the sacrifice. So when you present yourself as a sacrifice to God, living and holy, you are saying that since God is a God of holiness, completely pure and sinless, you want to live your life according to His holiness. The beauty of what Jesus has done for us is that He has made us holy. As we sing here often: "Holiness is Christ in me."

So we present ourselves as living, holy and then the last adjective, acceptable. Living describes the nature of the sacrifice. It's alive and constant. Holy describes the quality of the sacrifice. It's pure and dedicated to God. Pleasing, acceptable, describes the results of this sacrifice. This is our aim, said Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:4. We are not trying to please men, but God, Who tests our hearts. We want to please Him.

I want to debunk a myth that's too prevalent among Evangelicals. I've heard this over and over again: "The prophet Isaiah said all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). How many of you have ever said to another believer, "You can't do anything that pleases God; all your

righteous acts are like filthy rags”? I’m going to tell you, that is very unhelpful. That’s a wrong way of thinking. That’s a misapplication of a true Scripture.

The prophet Isaiah was not speaking those words to believers who were humbly trusting in the Lord and relying on His sacrifice and mercy toward them, therefore offering themselves in gratitude to God. He was speaking those words to people who were offering false worship. They had turned their backs on God. They were making sacrifices and burning incense on strange altars, and Isaiah was saying, “That’s just depravity. That’s not pleasing to the Lord. All those righteous acts are as filthy rags.” If we don’t trust in Jesus, and if don’t offer our works out of a heart that is trusting in Him, that’s true. All we offer is filthy rags.

But when you are moved by God’s mercies, so that you offer yourself as a daily living sacrifice—made alive by the Spirit, holy through your trust in Jesus’ blood and righteousness—then, friend, your sacrifice is well-pleasing to the Lord. It is acceptable. It brings Him pleasure. In fact, our obedience to the commands of Christ, when they’re done out of a heart that’s trusting in Jesus and thankful for what He’s done for us, that is precious in the sight of the Lord. He is pleased when His children—saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus—out of love for Him, say, “O Lord, I want to live a life that pleases You, so I’m giving this cup of cold water in Your name.” He’s pleased, *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10).

God wants His children who trust in Him to make it your aim to please Him in all you do. He wants you to know that even though you will never live a life that is perfectly obedient to Him—and even though you will never do a good deed that is completely pure, without a single bad motive in it—even though all your works are still tainted by sin, He wants you to know that you are covered in the righteousness of Christ. That which you do as a child of God, to bring pleasure to your Heavenly Father, causes Him to look upon you and say, “That makes My heart glad. It makes My heart happy to see My children obeying Me.” It should be a primary motive of our lives to offer ourselves to Him as a fragrant aroma, well-pleasing in His sight.

I don’t know who first said that we can never please everyone, but we can always please God if we live in faith before Him. This, Paul says, is your spiritual worship. The word there for “spiritual” is also translated logical. This is what makes sense. It is logical that you would consciously, intelligently, from the depths of your being, offer your whole self to God. It’s the only logical response to what Jesus has done for you.

I like how Tim Keller puts it:

Once you have a good view of God’s mercy, anything less than a total, complete sacrifice of yourself to God is completely irrational! If

you give yourself partially or half-heartedly, you are simply not thinking; you are not looking at what Jesus did. If what He did does not move you or break the ice over your soul, you must ask yourself if you have ever understood the gospel.

This is your logical worship. This is what makes sense when you keep God's mercies in view. Now, I admit, this is a radical way to live. It's going to require a complete transformation of the way you and I think. This is not the way the world thinks. You're not going to get this mindset from a constant diet of cable news and Netflix. It's going to require an intentional, deliberate renewal of your mind. You're going to have to get used to being different, which brings me to the last point this morning.

Get uncomfortable fast.

Patrick has said that last fall he often heard the cross-country coach at St. Charles North shouting at the runners, "Get uncomfortable fast! Stop pampering yourself. Get out there and run. I don't care if it hurts. Get uncomfortable fast."

I think that's a mindset we need to adopt if we want to live for Christ in this world. We have to be ready to be different; to get comfortable with being uncomfortable in the world. Following Jesus isn't like going on a carnival cruise ship. It's a war and it begins in the mind with how you think. The world wants to squeeze you into its mold and conform your thinking to its thought patterns, but Paul says, "Don't let it happen. Be vigilant about this. Do not be conformed to this world."

What are the thought patterns of this world? Kevin DeYoung describes it well when he says, "Worldliness is whatever makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange." Ooh, is that a good definition.

A video went viral on BuzzFeed back in 2015: "I'm Christian, but I'm not." Maybe some of you have seen it. It featured five young women and one man who said they're Christian, but they're not like all the other men and women who are Christians. They said things like this:

- I'm Christian, but I'm not homophobic.
- I'm Christian, but I'm definitely not perfect.
- I'm Christian, but I'm not close-minded.
- I'm Christian, but I'm not unaccepting.
- I'm not uneducated.
- I'm not judgmental.
- I'm not conservative.

- I'm not ignorant.
- I don't place myself on a pedestal.
- I'm Christian, but I don't have all the answers.

“So who are you?” the video then asks. Their responses were things like:

- I'm Christian, but I'm accepting.
- But I'm queer.
- But I'm gay.
- But I am a feminist. I'm a feminist. Definitely, I'm a feminist. Three times.
- But I do believe in science. In fact, I think science makes God look really cool.
- I'm a Christian, but I'm not afraid to talk about sex.
- I'm a Christian, but I love Beyoncé.
- I'm a Christian, but I love wine.
- I'm a Christian, but I have friends from all walks of life and different religions, and I love them all.

“What do you want people to know about Christianity?” they asked.

- Well, I want people to know we're not all crazy.
- A lot of people think Christianity ruins people, but to me, I think it's people who are ruining Christianity.
- It's all the hypocrites.

I actually agree with quite a few things that the video says. Christians should not be homophobic. Christians should care about equal rights for women. Christians aren't anti-science. Christians shouldn't be judgmental. There's nothing inherently sinful in enjoying wine. Christians don't easily fit into one political party. But here's the problem, besides the hubris and the arrogance that's expressed when you focus on how you're not like all those other loser Christians out there, the problem I have is that in all the statements about what it means to be a Christian, there was not one mention of Jesus Christ. Not one mention of His death and resurrection for our sins. Nothing about how He saves us so that we can live a life of radical obedience and love to our neighbor. Jesus was absent from the video.

It makes me wonder if we are more concerned with fitting in with the present mindset of this world than we are with proclaiming Jesus as our Savior and the Savior of the world. If our Christianity is built around proving what type of Christians we are not—trying to look more respectable in the eyes of the world—we will miss the heart of Christianity. Paul says if you want to live for God in this world, you're going to have to be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

There's going to have to be a metamorphosis, a transformation from the inside out, as God takes the truths of the Scriptures, using them to penetrate your heart and grip you. You see the mercies of God to you in Christ. You hear God's will for you in the Scriptures. And God's mindset starts to become your mindset. You start to think God's thoughts after Him. You don't study the Bible as a way of escaping from the world. You study the Bible so that you can go into the world and engage the world as a believer who's been transformed. Out of all the activities you're going to do this new year, there's virtually nothing more important than making sure you get the Bible into your mind and heart. Come to church as regularly as you possibly can and hear the Word. Read the Bible with other believers. Read the Bible individually. Immerse yourself in Scripture.

This past year I read through the whole Bible, but I did it a little differently. Instead of following a calendar, I just did it in big chunks. There were times when I would sit down—or stand up or walk—and read a whole big book of the Bible. I remember doing that this past summer with Revelation. What an experience that was. It was great.

But this year I'm not going to do that. This year I'm slowing down. I'm going to take one Psalm a month. This month it's Psalm 27. I'm going to read that over and over and over and over again, until it becomes part of me. Plus I'm going to take three sections of Scripture—Romans 9-16, Ecclesiastes and the Sermon on the Mount—and immerse myself in those parts of Scripture this year. I hope by the end of 2018 you'll be able to say, "Hey, David's bleeding Romans 9-16. He's bleeding Ecclesiastes. He's bleeding the Sermon on the Mount. He's being transformed. His mind is being renewed through Scripture."

I don't know what your plan is, but you need to plan to have your mind transformed through God's Word. And when you do that, you'll be able to discern through testing what God's will is for your life. And you'll find that His will is good and acceptable and perfect.

Next week is our Missions Emphasis Weekend. Here's what I'm praying. I want us to see someone raised up from our church to join missionaries in reaching unreached people groups of Southeast Asia. I want to see someone who will come alongside Brian and Becca Farber in the Ayutthaya province of Thailand. I want to see someone who's going to say, "I want to follow Cindy McFarland's example." She left Togo, West Africa, and has now moved to Dearborn, Michigan so she can care for her aging mother, but also to intentionally engage Muslim people in the most highly Muslim population of the United States.

I want to see someone from our church say, "I'm going to get fired up about reaching the unreached people groups who are spread throughout our county— in different pockets where

they're not being reached. I'm going to leave the comfort of this wonderful church and I'm going to ask to be sent there." I want to see a few people do that.

You might think, "No, I've got my life mapped out. I know what I'm doing with my life." No, you don't. God knows what He's doing and He might want to redirect your path. I think we all need to be open. That's part of being a living sacrifice. Most of us aren't going to be called to go somewhere like that. Most of us are going to stay right here. But we need to stay right here with the same mindset as those we send to the furthest parts of the earth. We're no different. We present ourselves as a living sacrifice.

Helen Roseveare did that as medical missionary in the Congo when she was taken captive by rebel soldiers, beaten and treated cruelly. In the darkness and loneliness she wondered, "God, why?" Then He met her in that night of brutality and reminded her of His love for her and what He had done for her in Christ. She came to the conclusion, "Whatever cost there is in presenting myself as a sacrifice to the Lord, cost will become swallowed up in privilege. It's a privilege to offer myself as a sacrifice for Jesus." This is her counsel on how to live the Christian life: "We have no rights but to love and obey Him, to be submissive to His will and utterly loyal to His leadership."

Is there any Christian who disputes that statement, who says, "Actually, I want to hold back part of my life from Jesus; He has no right to demand that I give my all"? I trust that's not how we think. I trust that we've been gripped by God's mercies and we want to consecrate ourselves to Him.

So let's open our hands before the Lord saying, "Lord, I belong to You," and making this our prayer of consecration together.

Lord, I am willing to receive what You give; to lack what You withhold; to relinquish what You take; to suffer what You inflict; to be what You require. Out of gratitude to You, my Lord and Savior, Who though rich, yet for my sake did become poor, I now surrender myself to You to be filled with Your Holy Spirit that I may, from today, live a life of sacrifice.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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