

Improve Your Serve

Offering Ourselves

Frankton – 5/3/15

Scripture: Romans 12.1-8 body as sacrifice, Spiritual gifts

Proposition: Because of God's love for us, we should offer ourselves to God's work.

During experiments aboard one of the flights of the space shuttle "Columbia," scientists discovered that there are twenty-six lakes deep underneath the Sahara desert. It's heartbreaking to think of the people who are dying of thirst and starving because these hidden resources are out of our reach. In a similar way, there are a number of spiritual resources that lie untapped in our church and in our individual lives because we've simply not gone deep enough. My fear is that we're missing out on what the Christian life is all about. Some of us are settling for something far less than what God intended. During this series called, [SLIDE] Improving Your Serve, we've been looking at some ways that we can ramp up our servanthood quotient. Last week we focused on four ways to become a servant: [SLIDE] Check our motives, Expect difficulty, Put others first, and Follow the example of Christ. This morning we're going to see that in order to effectively serve we must make sure that we've surrendered to Christ and that we have a proper estimate of self. In other words, we must first go deep into ourselves before we can go long for Christ.

Before God wants your service he wants a guarantee that he really has you. Paul starts by making this plea: *because of all he has done for you*. John Calvin, who founded what is now the Presbyterian Church, once said that we will never worship God with a sincere heart or serve God with unbridled zeal until we properly understand how much God has done for us. So we must [SLIDE] fully express our surrender to God. God has demonstrated so much mercy to us that we can't help but respond by fully surrendering our lives to Him. That reminds me of the man who stormed into a photo studio complaining about the quality of his photographs. He smashed his fist on the counter and fumed, "Sir, these pictures do not do my looks justice." To which the photographer responded, "Sir, with a face like yours, you don't want justice, you want mercy!" Be careful about asking for justice, because you might just get it! If I got what I deserved, I'd end up in Hell, and so would you. It's not God's justice that we want, it's God's mercies that we want.

Paul then gives us three ways to fully express our surrender to God. The first is [SLIDE] Offer your body. Paul pleads for us to: *give your bodies to God as living and holy sacrifices*. [2] The Greek word used here for our word "give" is a technical term that was used to describe the bringing and presenting of an animal for sacrifice on an altar, meaning "to present once and for all." In the Old Testament, worship included sacrifice. A live animal was brought to the priest and the owner would lay hands on the beast to symbolically say, "This animal takes my place." The animal was then killed and the blood was sprinkled upon the altar. Once you make a sacrifice you couldn't take it back.

This idea of a "living sacrifice" must have been a novel idea to the Jews of Paul's day. This was something they had not heard of before, except perhaps in the case of Abraham offering Isaac upon the altar. As someone has said, the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar! God is looking for bodies of believers who will be sold out to him and not crawl off the altar when it gets a little warm. He wants us to be living sacrifices, not dead offerings.

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A young boy came to church one cold winter day to get out of the blowing snow. He had been trying to sell newspapers but not a single customer had passed by because of the weather. He slipped into the back of the church, just hoping to get warm and catch up on his sleep. Though the Sunday crowd was slim, the boy really paid attention to the sermon and was greatly moved by it. When the pastor was done, he called for the offering. The ushers went from row to row, and when the offering plate came to the boy, he stared at it for a while and then put it on the floor. He then did something very strange and very beautiful. He stood up and stepped right into the offering plate. By then, all the people had turned around and were staring at the boy. When he looked up, he had big tears running down his face as he said, "Pastor, I don't have any money because I haven't sold any newspapers today. But, if Jesus gave his life for me, then I will gladly give my life to him." The person who has nothing to give but himself is able to give the greatest gift of all.

Verse 1 calls for a decisive commitment to fully surrender. Verse 2 tells us how we can maintain that commitment by renewing our mind and not following the pattern of the world. So, number two is to **[SLIDE]** offer your mind. Paul writes: *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world.* [2] The world's way of doing things is built on selfishness, not selflessness. The tense of this verse indicates that we must stop copying the world, implying that this is something that we are already doing. If we're serious about surrendering fully to Christ, we must focus on being transformed, not copying those things the world values. He who controls the mind, owns the person.

Some of you are facing some incredible temptations right now. You feel yourself being pulled to conform, to go along with the way your friends are leading you. Don't give in! Unfortunately, some of us have already internalized the world's values and fashions so much that we don't even recognize it anymore. It's like walking into a dark theater in the middle of the day. When you first go in, everything is really dark. But after a while, you can see normally, that is, until you walk back outside. Some of you are in a similar situation today. If you spend enough time conforming to the world, you become so accustomed to the darkness that you think it's now normal. Rather, we are to let God transform us, referring to an inner change. We get the word "metamorphosis" from this Greek word. A metamorphosis is not something we can do on our own. If we present ourselves as living sacrifices and reflect upon the mercies of God as evidenced in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will transform our minds.

There is a story told of a very ugly man with a hideous face. He was good and kind, but people were terrified of him and would not stay in his presence. As you can imagine, he was very lonely. He started wearing a mask to hide his hideousness so people might not be afraid to be around him. He kept this mask on 24/7/365 for years. One day, near the end of his life he decided he had worn the mask long enough. So he took it off and looked into the mirror. He realized that the years of wearing the disguise had transformed his face into the handsome features of the mask. When we put on Christ and wear his face, we find our lives transformed into his likeness.

[SLIDE] Finally, you are to offer your will. From the last part of verse 2: *Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.* Isn't it great that God allows us to test and approve his will for us? God will not force us into anything. He does not dominate our wills, but allows us to choose his will. But it's no use sitting around waiting to have the will of God revealed to us. This is an active verb. We learn his will by doing. When you wonder what God's will is for your life, the first place to start is by living out Romans 12:1-2. Until you offer

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him your body, your mind, and your will, you won't understand his good, pleasing, and perfect will. We tend to focus God's will on the what - our occupation, or the where - our location, but God is more interested in our transformation – which is really his will for us. Have you presented yourself to Him in complete surrender? The answer to this question will determine your ability to tap into God's limitless resources.

The way to knowing God's will also involves [SLIDE] having a proper estimate of ourselves. Look at verse 3: [SLIDE] *Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest....* Thinking ourselves better than we are is one of the greatest problems in serving God. It's kind of like the man who was driving down the expressway in rush hour traffic when he received a call from his wife on his cell phone, "Honey, you need to be careful driving home because I just heard on the news that there's a nutcase driving in the wrong direction on the same road you're on." To which the husband responded, "It's not just one; there are hundreds of them!" Have you ever been around an individual who always thinks they're right? How does it feel to be around someone who boasts and brags about his or her abilities? It's not a good feeling, is it? Never forget this truth: God uses us simply because he wants to. We're to avoid thinking too highly of ourselves and we're to avoid thinking too low of ourselves. We do that by focusing on God's grace. Everything we are and everything we have is by grace.

We must also remember that just as the different parts of our bodies have different functions, so too, in the body of Christ, each of us have been given different gifts and roles. We can't do it all alone. If God's purposes are to be accomplished and his church is to grow, everyone of us is important. Nobody is a nobody in the Body of Christ. While no one can do everything, everyone can do something. There are so many ways that we are different from each other. That's how God designed us. A fully devoted follower of Christ understands and celebrates this variety in the Body of Christ. Let me use the acrostic [SLIDE] S-H-A-P-E in order to demonstrate this diversity. Spiritual Gifts (what you do), Heart (where you do it), Abilities (talents), Personality (how you do it), Experiences (our spiritual resume). I'm shaped differently than you, and you're put together differently than I am. And that's a good thing.

We must remember that while we're uniquely designed, we've been made to function in community with one another. I might be strong in the area of my gift, but I am weak in the areas where others have been gifted. So, I minister to others out of my strength, and depend upon the ministry of the rest of the body in my areas of weakness. In order to understand our shape for ministry, we must decrease our thinking individualistically and increase our thinking corporately. We cannot look at ourselves as an island, independent of all others. We must see ourselves as fully functioning members of the body of Christ, with certain gifts that are necessary to the equipping and ministry of the entire church. There is individuality within the body, because there are many members, all with a different role to play. But there is no room for individualism, for we are inter-dependent. We must rely on other members of the body just as they must rely on us.

We need to fully express our surrender to God. Then we must cultivate a proper estimate of ourselves. Finally, we're to [SLIDE] completely engage in service. We see this in verses 6-8. Paul lists seven gifts that that the Church calls spiritual gifts: [SLIDE] prophesying (speaking for God), service, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy. This list is only a partial list. There are many others that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4. We'll talk more about these specific Spiritual Gifts next week. Suffice it to say this morning that a

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spiritual gift is an ability given by the Holy Spirit to express our faith effectively for the strengthening of someone else's faith.

Commit to personal growth through fully expressing your surrender to God. Commit to this local body through a proper estimate of yourself. Commit to ministry by completely engaging in service. When we do, we'll tap into the rich reservoir of God's blessings.