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OUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

Pledge

As members of this church, we pledge:

To ^a present our ^b bodies as living sacrifices, ^c holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship.

^a Rom. 12:1; ^b 1 Cor. 6:19-20; ^c 1 Peter 1:15-17

Scripture

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. 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.

Romans 12:1-2

Lesson

Everyone Sacrifices

When Hernán Cortés and his men landed on the shores of Mexico in 1509, they discovered, among other wonders of the Aztecs, a gruesome practice. At the pinnacle of stone temples, priests would open the chests of living victims,

and offer their still-pulsating hearts to their gods. In nearly every culture we know about, people have believed that sacrificing people or animals to the gods is necessary to guarantee their blessing. Even the Spaniards, who were shocked by the Aztecs' sacrificing humans, were blind to the way they themselves did the same thing. In the following years, they would kill about 100,000 indigenous peoples, human sacrifices to their own gods of gold and fame.

Why have people all over the world believed that such sacrifices are necessary? It seems that we have a deeply-held idea that their lives are broken and that the repair is costly. It is an idea that is hard to ignore the more you think about it. Parents make sacrifices to give birth to and care for children. Men and women sacrifice their lives in war. Plants and animals that die enrich the soil, allowing new plants to grow. Suffering and death, even in the world of plants and animals, seem to be the way to life.

The Jewish Scriptures explain that this is more than a human hunch. It is true. God does require sacrifices in order for people to enjoy the blessing of his presence. But these Scriptures also teach that dead sacrifices do not really solve anything. What God really wants is the living sacrifice of heart-level obedience. In a psalm, King David put it this way:

You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings.

Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand—
you don't require burnt offerings or sin offerings.

Then I said, "Look, I have come.

As is written about me in the Scriptures:

I take joy in doing your will, my God,

for your instructions are written on my heart." – Psalm 40:6-8, *NLT*

Although these words were written by David, they were fulfilled ultimately by David's descendant, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus came as the perfect sacrifice. *His* suffering and death is the way to life and glory.

This leaves us with an important question. If Jesus is the final sacrifice, why does the Bible tell us that *we* must present *ourselves* as living sacrifices? The answer is this: because of Jesus' sacrifice in our place, we can now present ourselves as sacrifices to God—but sacrifices that *live* instead of die.

Everyone offers themselves as a sacrifice to *something*, whether career, popularity, acceptance, children, or wealth. But these gods are merciless. When we sacrifice to them, they take everything from us and leave us empty. But sacrificing to God is different. Instead of taking *from* us, he gives *to* us, so we are not just dead sacrifices, but a living ones.

What It Means to Present Our Bodies as Living Sacrifices

When we pledge ourselves as living sacrifices to God, we are pledging that everything we are and everything we have is completely God's. We are acknowledging that this is really the only way to live. We are committing to a life of worship in which nothing will take priority over God.

“This world”—that is, the passing age in which we live—has a different idea of what it means to live. But we must not let these values and ambitions shape our thinking.

In contrast to being conformed to this world, Christians are called to think about all values and goals in a fundamentally different way: in view of God's surpassing worth and astounding mercy poured out on us in Christ. This is a brand new way of thinking that transforms us to see God's will as perfectly good, and to do it.

Putting the Pledge to Work

1. In what ways do people (including ourselves!) tend to sacrifice themselves to things other than God?
2. Why does Paul set forth “the mercies of God” as the basis of his appeal to “present your bodies as living sacrifices?”
3. Why is it important for each member of our church as a whole to present our bodies as living sacrifices? What would it look like if our church didn't think this way, or began to drift away from this mindset?