

ROMANS 12.1-8: SACRIFICING AND RESOURCING

[Chelmsford 8/2/09]

SACRIFICIAL LIVING

In today's post-modern world one of the key questions is 'What's in it for me?'

Life revolves around self and the satisfaction of self.

By contrast the Christian life is the very antithesis of all that.

There the question is rather: 'What can I do for God?'

Life no longer revolves around self – but rather around the sacrifice of self.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die".

For as we heard in our reading from Luke, Christ calls us to take up our cross – to go the way of death – if we would follow him (Lk 14.27).

To live for Jesus is to live a life of sacrifice. Or as Paul wrote to the church at Rome: **"Brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us, I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice"** (Rom 12.1)

Do notice the motivating factor of such a life. It is because God in Christ offered his life for us, that we in turn offer our lives to him. David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary explorer, hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "*People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege*".

Another pioneer Africa missionary, CT Studd, said something similar: "*No sacrifice can be too great for him who gave his life for me*".

"So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us, I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice".

In the first 11 chapters of Romans Paul has spelt out what God has done for us.

E.g. he writes in Romans 5: **"For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time that God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It may even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us!"** (5.6-8).

God's love for us in Jesus is truly amazing – it defies all rational understanding.

There was no good reason why Jesus should die for us at Calvary. But die he did – because God for reasons known only to himself decided to take mercy upon people you and me.

Here is the motivating factor in Christian living: It is precisely because God sacrificed his Son for us, that we in turn offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.

In seeking to live life for God, we are responding to his love, his grace, his mercy.

Some years ago Oswald Sanders wrote a book entitled: *The Best I Can Be*. There he defined sacrifice as "*the ecstasy of giving the best we have to the One we love the most*" [quoted by Oswald Sanders 24]. In the light of what God has done for us, nothing is too much for us to give to God.

The Christian life is a life of sacrificial living.

Actually, from a traditional perspective, such a statement might seem a contradictory. For the sacrifices offered on pagan and Jewish altars were always dead sacrifices. The person who was offering up the sacrifice killed and burned something of value, and presented it then as a sacrifice to God.

But the sacrifice of which Paul was speaking was a “**living sacrifice**” – living in the sense of being an ongoing sacrifice. I am reminded of the text from Rom 14.8 that I was given at my baptism: “**If we live it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So that whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord**”. The life we are called to live is no longer ours – we have died to Christ and now are seeking to live life for Christ and for Christ alone.

“So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God”.

It is within the context of Romans 12 that I want to draw your attention this morning to the set of values which we have adopted as a church.

People around us need to see that we are genuinely committed to Jesus. We (therefore) want to be a community which is:

- *Warm and welcoming*
- *Risk-taking and God-trusting*
- *Transforming lives and changing culture*
- **AND: *Sacrificing and resourcing***

Last week we were looking at what it means to be risk-taking and God-trusting. This morning I want us to look at what it means to be sacrificing and resourcing.

I want to do so under two heads: sacrificial giving and sacrificial serving.

Let me say straight away that there is more to sacrificial living than giving and serving – sacrificial praying is also another way in which we can resource the church.

But this morning we shall just focus on giving and serving.

1. SACRIFICIAL GIVING

In the first place, we are called to engage in sacrificial giving, so that we can resource the mission and ministry of this church and indeed of the wider church.

Here in Rom 12.8 Paul highlights the need for giving to be “**generous**” – a better translation is that we are to be “*whole-hearted*”.

A little later in Rom 15 Paul talks of his collection for the poor of Jerusalem being an “**obligation**”, and not just a free-will offering. The Gentile Christians, he says, “**ought to use their material blessings**” to help the church in Jerusalem.

Incidentally, Paul was quite unashamed to appeal for money.

He happily challenged the churches in his care to give, and to give sacrificially.

What’s more, he challenged them to give in the light of God’s giving to us. It was, e.g., in the context of giving that he made his famous statement concerning the incarnation: “**You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty**” (2 Cor 8.9). So, give.

For Paul giving was a test of a person's love for God (2 Cor 8.8).

This morning I want to follow the example of Paul and appeal to you to be generous in your giving – indeed, in the light of all that God has done for us, I want to encourage you to be sacrificial in your giving.

The fact is that we need a substantial increase in our giving, if we are to meet all the opportunities before us. To be precise: we need at least an extra £15,000 this coming year.

We don't have any membership dues. Instead, in line with the teaching of the Bible, we encourage our members to give "*a realistic proportion of their income to the work of God carried on in and through our church*". As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "**Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned**" (1 Cor 16.2).

I.e. Christian giving is always proportionate giving.

Our giving depends on how much we earn. A flat subscription would not be fair on those who earn little – nor would it be fair for those who earn well.

What proportion should we give? The Old Testament speaks of giving to God a tithe, a tenth. So, e.g., God through the prophet Malachi said to the people of Israel: "**Is it right for a person to cheat God? Of course not, yet you are cheating me. 'How?' you ask. In the matter of tithes and offerings. A curse is on all of you because the whole nation is cheating me. Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple... Put me to the test, and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things**" (Mal 3.8-10).

Incidentally, do notice that here in Malachi a tithe is not seen as the maximum one gives to God – but the minimum. Malachi speaks of tithes AND offerings.

Rick Warren, e.g., made so much money from his book *The Purpose Driven Life* that he decided to reverse-tithe: i.e. instead of giving 10% to God & keeping the other 90%, he now gives 90% to God and lives on 10%.

For most of us that would not be possible. However, the fact is that in this period of credit-crunch we shall only meet the budget as people give not just generously, but sacrificially.

It may be that some of you have yet to begin giving regularly & systematically to God's work carried on in and through this church.

Perhaps you are relatively new to the church and have yet to sort out your giving.

May I suggest that with a new financial year about to begin in just over a month's time, now is a good time to sort out your financial priorities in the light of what God has done for you.

There are various ways of giving regularly to God's work.

- Some people like to give directly into the offering bag: if that is the method you would prefer, then we would be happy to supply you with envelopes for that purpose.
- Many of us, however, prefer to give by standing order: if that is the method you would prefer, then we have standing order forms for you to fill in and to give to your bank.

Whichever way you give, if you pay tax, then we would strongly encourage you to gift-aid – for this allows us to reclaim significant amounts of money from the tax-man: with this in mind we have forms for people wanting to gift-aid.

To those of you who already giving systematically to God's work carried on in and through this church, may I suggest that now might be a time to review your giving.

I said that we need at least another £15,000. That's a lot of money – and yet it is not an impossible sum of money. It is an extra £300 a week.

We spent a long time at our Leadership Team meeting last Thursday asking ourselves whether it was right to ask the church to give more money in this period of credit crunch: We recognize that already some of our older members with savings have already lost out substantially because of the drop in the interest-rate

We know of people who are being asked to take a cut in salary – indeed, there may eventually be those who lose their jobs.

On the other hand, it is not all gloom & doom: food costs have come down, motoring costs have come down, and interest rates on mortgages have come down.

After much discussion we felt that we had no option but to ask members of our church and congregation to consider increasing their giving. The fact is that if we do not, then we will have to reduce substantially the church's ministry: indeed, one scenario that was put before us was that we might not even be able to replace David Marson when he leaves us this summer; another scenario put before us was that we would have to reduce our outside giving from the current level of 12.5% to 7%; we certainly could not afford a part-time minister to care for older people if the giving does not increase substantially.

What kind of increase do we have in mind? The fact is that if every member were to give an extra £1 per week, we would meet our target. But we felt a challenge for every member to increase their giving by £1 a week was too simplistic – for those without a job, that might be too much. I was therefore asked to challenge those of us who are at work to consider giving an extra £5 per week.

For those who are already giving generously, this might be a big ask.

However, the theme of my sermon is that God is calling us to be a sacrificing & resourcing people. Let me remind you again of my text: **“So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us, I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice”** (Rom 12.1). God calls us to be sacrificial in our giving.

Let me stop there for a moment, to give you an opportunity to reflect on what your response might be – you might care to look at the response card and ask yourself: ‘What is God calling me to do?’

2. SACRIFICIAL SERVING

Secondly, we are called to engage in sacrificial serving.

In the words of the Paul to the Romans: **“We are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us”** (12.6).

Do notice that our use of our gifts is in response to the grace of God.

Our service is grounded in God’s undeserved love. It is **“because of God’s great mercy to us”** that we are called to serve sacrificially.

The service Paul has in mind is service in the church.

Perhaps at this point I need to acknowledge that we can also serve God through voluntary organizations in the community; and, of course, for those of you who are at work, your primary service to God is in the work-place.

However, the Bible suggests that each one of us should also serve God in his church, however limited that service may be.

With that in mind let’s look at Paul’s selection of seven gifts.

1. Some have the **“gift to speak God’s message”** (12.6). I.e. if God has gifted you to preach, then preach says Paul.
2. Some are gifted to **“serve”** (12.7a). I find it fascinating that Paul lists serving immediately after preaching. Paul doesn’t make the kind of false distinction between spiritual and practical gifts that you find in some churches. For Paul cleaning the church, serving in the Oasis café, cooking for Alpha or Victoria Club, counting the money, or even just helping with moving the chairs on a Sunday, would have been just as important in God’s sight as any other form of Christian service.
3. Some are gifted to **“teach”** (12.7b). We certainly need teachers in our church – we need people to teach in Light Factory, and in particular at this moment we need men; we also need people willing to teach in the context of post-Alpha groups.
4. Some are gifted to **“encourage others”** (12.8a). Literally, this is the gift of being able to come alongside people. It’s the kind of gift that people helping with care groups need – that people helping with Monday Club and Victoria Club need. If God has given you that gift, then use it.
5. Some are gifted to **“share with others”** (12.8). It is possible that Paul was not here referring to people who are blessed with mega bucks, but rather to those within the church whose task it is to distribute church funds. If that is so, then Paul has in mind people who have been gifted to serve on the finance team. Yes, we certainly need people to help with the stewardship of the church’s financial resources.
6. Some are gifted to lead – or as GNB puts it, to have **“authority”** (12.8). We need more leaders – we need, for instance, people willing to lead at Ozone on a Tuesday night; we need an overall leader for Oasis; we need people willing to lead small groups.

7. Finally, some are gifted to “**show kindness**” (12.8). In one sense we are all called to be kind to one another. However, almost certainly Paul has a particular role in mind. According to one distinguished commentator (Cranfield), the probable reference is to "*the person whose special function is, on behalf of the congregation, to tend the sick, relieve the poor, or care for the aged and disabled*". In our context, perhaps this would be a person with a heart for social action

What a breadth of gifts then we have here – preaching, practical serving, teaching, caring, handling finance, leading, meeting the needs of the vulnerable in the community.

But the key point, however, is that Paul is saying: in one way or another God has gifted you. Use your gifts. Yes, it takes time and energy to serve God.

It's not easy to hold down a full-time job and be involve in serving God through his church. It's tempting to say, 'I'm too busy'.

But let me remind you again of the words of Paul: “**So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us, I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice**” (Rom 12.1). The fact is that God calls us to be sacrificial in our living

Let's have a moment of quiet reflection – and then let me encourage you to take your response leaflet and see if there is anything there which God may be calling you to do.

Don't be worried if there is nothing appropriate – this is not an all-encompassing list.

It is simply a list of some key opportunities to serve God.

Incidentally, in the light of last week's sermon, I have also included the opportunity of serving God through an internship

RESPONSE SHEET

‘Sacrifice – the ecstasy of giving the best we have to the One we love the most’ (Sanders).

NAME:.....

Please put a ‘tick’ against the relevant bullet point

Sacrificial giving

I wish to resource the ministry of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, through my giving

- Please supply me with offertory envelopes
- Please give me a standing order form
- Please give me a gift-aid form

I wish to review my giving to Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford

- Please give me a new standing order form

Sacrificial serving

I wish to resource the ministry of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, through my serving.
I would like to know more about:

- Cleaning the church
- Serving in the Oasis Café once a week or once a fortnight
- Cooking for Alpha on a Monday
- Cooking lunches for seniors on a Tuesday
- Cooking lunches for Victoria Club on a Wednesday
- Counting the money on a Monday morning
- Teaching in Light Factory on a Sunday morning
- Teaching in Light Factory on a Sunday evening
- Teaching a post-Alpha group
- Helping with a care group
- Helping with Monday Club on a Monday afternoon
- Helping with Victoria Club on a Wednesday
- Helping with the finance team
- Sharing in the leadership of Ozone
- Leading the Oasis Café
- Leading a small group

- I would like to talk with someone about how I might identify/develop my gifts

- I would like to explore with one of the ministers the possibility of my serving God through an internship (part- or full-time) at Central Baptist Church