

Most of us know that before building any kind of structure you have to lay a firm foundation if that structure's going to withstand the test of time without collapsing.

In fact, in Matthews Gospel Jesus says:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

In other words, the house had a firm foundation.

Well in the first 11 chapters Romans the Apostle Paul's been laying the foundations of Christian doctrine.

So, for example a helpful summery of those chapters might put it something like this:

Because sinful people have broken God's law the world is under divine judgement; but because of his great mercy God sent his son Jesus to rescue everyone who put who put's their trust him.

As a result, the people God chooses, receive forgiveness, peace with God and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We're even told that of and all things work together for their good.

And so, Paul lays a firm foundation in the first 11 chapters of Romans and highlights how God graciously deals with undeserving sinners.

But all that raises a bit of a problem.

You see Paul also says that as a way of saying thank you to God, people in the Old Testament would take their best bulls, goats, and sheep to the temple, for the priest to offer as a sacrifice.

So, for example Psalm 116 says:

To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.

Now of course that was fine for then, but expressing our thanks to God like that in the 21st Century would be a bit weird wouldn't it?

And anyway, all those Old Testament practices are now obsolete, because Jesus died as the one true sacrifice for sin.

As a result, I don't have to bring a sheep to church with me every week to show how grateful I am for what God's done for me in Christ.

So, what should I do?

Well Paul tells us in Chapter 12 doesn't he.

Verse 1 says:

"I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice."

In other words, Paul says instead of *giving* a sacrifice be one!

Now that might sound strange to modern ears, because when we read about the sacrificial system it's all bit a gory isn't it.

So, what does Paul mean?

Well listen to this:

Just like those animals were laid down without reserve; put the whole of yourself at God's disposal. Let the bodies that once served sin, serve him. Don't let your response be a life laid down, but a life lived for God. This is your act of spiritual worship.

Or as J I Packer once put it:

A Christian's motto shouldn't be let go and let God, but trust God and get going.

And if God's done so much for us by giving his Son to die; then it's not unreasonable to give our lives back to God as an act of worship is it.

Now often when we hear the word sacrifice, we think of giving something up that's extremely valuable to us.

So, for example someone might sacrifice an amazing career to look after an elderly parent because there's no other choice.

But the point of biblical sacrifice isn't about giving something up, it's about expressing something.

In other words, Paul says our whole life should be an expression of gratitude, worship, and thanksgiving to God.

So, for instance if you think about how we support the church financially, we don't just put money in the collection out of a sense of duty do we; we give financially as an act of worship.

But it's not just money that God wants us to offer, it's our time, our ambitions, possessions, words, thoughts attitudes and emotions as well.

Or as *The Message translates it*, 'Take your every day, ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life, and place it before God as an offering'

Which is echoed in 1 Corinthians 10 where Paul says:

So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God

You see Paul's wants to remind us that God wants every area of our life to be a spiritual act of worship.

Then in verse 2, Paul continues by saying:

“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....”

Now the world here isn't the geographical space we live in.

It refers to a whole set of values, ideas and beliefs that have no room for God, and the life he offers.

So, RC Sproul writes this:

Contemporary secularism asserts that the time on this planet is the only time there is there is only the here and now and nothing else. There's no eternity. There's no life beyond the grave, which explains the phrase you only live once, and grab all you can while you can.

But Christians aren't secularists, they live in the sphere of the world, but they don't live according to its principles and values. They live their lives in the light of eternity and the truth that comes from above.

You see the world in this context thinks and acts in complete opposition God; and the life he offers.

As result Paul says Christians should be different to other people in way they think and act, and not give in to the worlds pressure.

Instead they're to concentrate on what pleases God.

And from verse 9 Paul tells us what that looks like practically as the Holy Spirit works to transform us from the inside out.

So, for example Paul says pray for people who mistreat you.

When others are happy, share their joy, when they're sad share their sorrow.
Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

He then says don't be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good.

You see that's what it looks like to be a living sacrifice; and if we made a list it'd sound something like this:

Love others.

Love truth

Hate evil.

Be kind.

Put others first.

Show hospitality

Work hard.

Serve the Lord.

Be joyful

Have patience.

Pray.

Give,

And love those who aren't nice to you.

I wonder how well you match up to that list?

If you're anything like me, you won't; but don't despair because God's promised to transform our lives from the inside out.

Thirdly Paul says be careful not to compare yourself to other people or think that you're better than them.

Verse 3 says:

“I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith God has assigned.”

“For as in one body we have many members and the members don’t all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.”

In other words, Paul says to make the church complete we all have a part to play using the gifts that God's given us.

So just think for a second about the people who make up St. Mary and All Saints.

We’re a pretty motley crew aren’t we; but has it ever occurred to you that we’re all gifts from God to each other, with different abilities, experiences, and roles within the life of the Church.

Isn’t that great!

Has it also ever occurred to you that although we’re individuals we’re also a part of each another?

And so, we shouldn’t think we’re more important than someone else; or that my gift is better or worse than yours; because we all have a part to play.

Now sadly there are some Christians who go to church with the attitude of what can church offer me, instead of what can I offer the church.

Or they want to know how the church is going to meet their needs, instead of how they can help to meet the needs of the church.

But you know that kind of attitude is the antithesis of being a living sacrifice isn’t it.

And so, we shouldn't come to church for what we can get out of it.

We should come offering our gifts to God so that he can use us to serve him and each other.

And you know when we to return church in a couple of weeks there's going to be a lot of work to do, and so if you've never thought about getting involved maybe you could pray and ask God how he can use you to serve him and others.

Because you see everyone's gift is important and useful in the life of a church.

As a result, I can't really say there's nothing for me to do, because every gift is needed.

And it directly contradicts what Paul says about every member of the church having a job to do.

You see verse six says:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

Or as someone's written:

If you have the gift of serving a congregation then get on with it

If you're gifted in teaching God's people, then do it.

If giving is your strong point, do it liberally and without fuss.

Or if your ministry is helping those in distress, do it with a cheerful spirit.

And if you want to know what your particular gift is, think about what makes you passionate.

So, for example I spoke to someone once who loves admin, as a result they became a PCC secretary.

I then spoke to someone else who's passion is people, and so they want to help with pastoral care.

And so, if you're not already serving in some way, I wonder what makes *you* passionate.... What is that you're really good at and often talk about or find yourself thinking about

Well, it could be that gift that you use bring to the life of the church.

Paul says:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them.