

Hillcrest Adult Education (Fall 2022): Faith in Action
Walk¹ 1: Listening to God – Living Sacrifices
Romans 12:1-2

Walk Objectives (in the order of importance):

1. Practice listening to God through Scripture reading and meditation.
2. Recognize the relationship between worship and lifestyle in the Bible.
3. Practice offering a living and holy sacrifice to God by doing a good deed each day.
4. Recognize that Romans 12-15 are the reason why Paul wrote the letter (Faith in action).

Romans 12:1-2 (Voice Version)

Brothers and sisters, in light of *all I have shared with you about* God's mercies, I urge you to offer your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice *to God*, a sacred offering that brings Him pleasure; this is your reasonable, essential worship. Do not allow this world to mold you in its own image. Instead, be transformed *from the inside out* by renewing your mind. As a result, you will be able to discern what God wills and whatever God finds good, pleasing, and complete.

1. Romans 1-11 discusses how God's righteousness works in humanity.
2. Romans 12-15 focuses on what Romans 1-11 implies in everyday life.

Section for Review and Study by the Teacher in Preparation

Other Bible Verses about Living Sacrifices

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."

Ephesians 5:1-2 "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

James 2:14 "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?"

Romans 12 in the Context of Romans and the Bible

1. Romans follows the Greco-Roman letter style, but it is not a typical letter. The length of typical letters was about 100 words, while philosophers' letters averaged 300 words. Romans is much longer in about 7,000 words!
2. Paul's typical greeting, "grace and peace" (Romans 1:7; also, in all other Pauline letters), is a mixture of the Jewish (peace/shalom) and Greco-Roman (grace) greetings.
3. Romans 1-11 highlight what God has done in and through Jesus Christ, like Haggadah in the OT (what God has done, i.e., God's salvific act based on His grace).
4. Romans 12 begins **the body (climax)** part of Greco-Roman letter writing, which **urges** what the recipient should do. This again aligns well with the Jewish practice of Halakah

¹ *Halak* literally means "to walk" in Hebrew, and *Halakah* law. *Halak* implies obedience to God's law. Since our annual theme is "faith in action," we've decided to use the term "walk" in place of the typical "lesson."

(law). Paul sees ethical lifestyle in Romans 12-15 as spiritual worship, responding to God's salvific act. Structurally, this part is *the* reason why Paul wrote the letter.

5. When compared to ANE law codes, the law material in the Bible is embedded in narratives. Haggadah (what God has done) appears first, then Halakah (what His people ought to do in light of what God's salvific act). The best example of this is Exodus. Exodus 1-18 depicts God's salvific action. Then the law section follows in Exodus 20-24, prefaced with the statement, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery" (Ex 20:2). This statement is the 1st commandment for Jews. Structurally, Exodus shows the nation's salvation came first in Exodus 1-18 (Haggadah), then the law section (Halakah) follows. Deuteronomy 27:9-10 reiterates it clearly: "Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the Lord your God. Obey the Lord your God and follow his commandments and decrees that I give you today." Jews in general did not/don't think they had/have to keep God's law to save themselves. The Judaizers in the NT times seemed to think differently, but not all Jews were/are legalistic. We make a stereotypical mistake of thinking as if all Jews were/are legalistic. That is to be anti-Semitic² because Judaism at any given time in its history was diverse.³
6. Being a devout Jew himself, Paul was clearly aware of the idea of "salvation first and obedience later," and Ephesians and Romans are purposefully structured so. Ephesians 1-3, for example, highlights what God has done in and through Christ. As such, these chapters focus on who we are in Christ. Ephesians 4-6, on the other hand, emphasizes what we Christians ought to do in light of what God has done in Christ as Paul starts the section with the phrase, "I urge you to live a life worthy of calling" (4:1).

Questions to Think about:

1. Why did Paul write Romans? The Roman Church was not a church Paul planted, but he still wrote this letter to them. What does that imply?
2. What does it mean that we should offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God?
3. What is the relationship between worship and lifestyle?
 - a. Worship is not just what we do on Sundays but is our lifestyle itself. Worship authenticates our good deeds. Faith and action cannot be separated.
 - b. Leviticus 1-16 highlights right worship, and Leviticus 17-27 right living. The Hebrew root word for holy/holiness is used more often (85 times) in the last 11 chapters, as opposed to 65 times in the first 16 chapters. This shows how God values the right living from the beginning!
 - c. Pagan worship had no relationship to one's daily lifestyle.
4. How do we discern God's will?
 - a. By not allowing this world to mold us into its own image
 - i. How does the world mold us into its own image?
 - b. By renewing our minds by means of listening to God/reading God's Word

Guidelines for Teachers

1. These first two pages are for teachers, and page 3 is a handout for class.
2. The first two pages can be introduced briefly before reviewing our experiences.

² Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," chapter in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (WJK Press, 1993).

³ Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah* (Cengage Learning, 2003).

Walk 1: Living Sacrifices

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Preparation

Spend a few moments in silence, allowing ourselves to be still and be thankful for what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. And become aware of his presence.

Review of Our Experiences with Gratitude

1. What experiences have you had recently that made you feel grateful for what God has done for you? In other words, what mercies of God have you experienced recently?
2. What did that experience lead you to do?
3. What opens you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice in daily life?
4. How does this relate to using your gifts?

Reflection on Our Practices

1. What distracts you from offering your bodies as a living sacrifice to God? What can you do to rectify that?
2. How does the world mold you into its image? What pressure seems strongest to you?
3. How can you disallow this world to mold you into its own image this week?
4. What is one practical way you will offer yourself as a "living sacrifice" to God this week? In other words, what would do to ensure that you listen to God?

Prayer (Class may pray together these verses from Psalm 40:6-8)

⁶ Sacrifices and offerings are not what You want, but You've opened my ears, *and now I understand*. Burnt offerings and sin offerings are not what please You. ⁷ So I said, "See, I have come *to do Your will*, as it is inscribed of me in the scroll."⁸ I am pleased to live how You want, my God. Your law is etched into my heart *and my soul*." In Christ, amen. (The Voice Version)