

As a pastor who likes to get out and meet people, I run into people, who have certain pre-conceived notions about the church, and what it means to be a Christian. Recently, a woman shared this information with me. “When I walked out of my parent’s church, I never thought I’d walk back in. For me church was all about rules, uncomfortable clothes, and trying to stay awake. It was watching my parents act like saints on Sunday and sinners the other six days. If that was church, you could have it. I had moved on in my life – I didn’t need church.”

What does it mean to be a Christian? Does it mean coming to church every Sunday? Is it just a “going through the motions”, saying the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostle’s Creed, singing some inspiring hymns and then trying to stay awake during the sermon? Is that what being a Christian means to you? Is it just a one day a week commitment? Well, this morning, the Apostle Paul is going to encourage us to be Christians 24/7: twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

From Adam and Eve to the coming of Jesus Christ, God’s people made sacrifices. All sorts of things from a typical household could be offered: cattle, sheep, goats, pigeons, doves, produce, wine, oil, even salt. By placing those things on God’s altar—usually to be burned—God’s people made a bold statement of belief: God has given me everything I have, from my place among his people to the food on my table to the flocks in my field to the forgiveness of my sins. I show my thanks, my love, and my trust in him—in short, I worship him—by giving it back. And God said when the smoke of that sacrifice floated up to heaven it was a pleasing aroma. That worship smelled good to God.

From the coming of Jesus Christ to now and on to the end of the world, God’s people still make sacrifices. They make the same bold statement of belief: God has given me everything I have, from my place among his people to the food on my table to my money in the bank to the forgiveness of my sins. I show my thanks, my love, and my trust in him—in short, I worship him—by giving it back. But the rules have changed a bit since Jesus came. God says, I don’t want cattle and sheep and goats anymore. I want you. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. And when God bends his nose to this worship, it smells good to him too.

When God tells us to offer our bodies to him, He does not want a “partial sacrifice or a partial commitment.” It is impossible to be “sort of committed.” You are either committed or you are not committed. It is not possible to offer a partial sacrifice. “There is a story told about a pig and a chicken walking down the road together. As they walked along they read a sign advertising a breakfast to benefit the poor. The chicken said to the pig, “You and I should donate a ham and egg breakfast.” The pig replied, “Not so fast, for you it would just be a contribution, but for me it would be a total commitment.” The pig at least understood that it is not possible to offer a partial sacrifice, neither is it possible to offer a partial commitment. To commit ourselves to God means that we are to yield ourselves to him, surrender to him, abandon ourselves to him, entrust ourselves to him and place ourselves at his disposal. True commitment is not something that you can take back.

What motivates us to want to offer our bodies as Living sacrifices to God? Our text says, “In view of God’s mercies.” Take a look at God’s mercies, if you want to see why you want to offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices. View God’s mercy, see him choose you by name to be his child, before the creation of the world, before you

could do one thing to deserve it. View God's mercy, see your brother Jesus offer his whole life as a living sacrifice, always doing the right thing for the right reason. View God's mercy, see that same Jesus finally offer his life as a sacrifice that did not live but died, one that died not because of his sin but because he took ours from us. View God's mercy, see that same Jesus, your brother Jesus, interceding before God in your behalf saying again and again to the Father, Don't count that sin against them. I paid for that one. I paid for them all. View God's mercy, See that same Jesus who made an imperfect person like you perfect in God's sight. View God's mercy, See him even make your imperfect worship perfect in God's sight. And then in view of God's mercy and confident that because of it your worship is a pleasing aroma in God's nostrils, get down on your knees and give thanks to God.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God's mercies, his compassion for undeserving sinners is new every morning. Every day, 24/7, God grants us clothing and food, house and home... cable TV and the internet. Every day, 24/7, God covers us with the warm blanket of forgiveness and salvation.

We don't deserve it. We are the ones who on Sunday sing his praises and confess his name, but then suddenly change our tune during the week. We are the ones who speak harshly to those around us. We are the ones who watch things we shouldn't on TV and the internet. We are the ones who pray for our poor neighbors on Sunday and then on Monday we trash those same neighbors with our gossip. We are the ones that trust God whole-heartedly on Sunday morning, but then are unable to sleep that night due to our doubts and worries. We are sinners 24/7. But that is why God's mercies are so comforting. When Jesus died on the cross, he suffered the punishment for all the sins that we were to commit. God's forgiveness covers us completely, like a warm blanket on a cold night. Every day we see his mercies, his love, his protection in our lives. And most importantly he gives us an eternal home in the perfection of heaven, where we will be with him enjoying the bliss of heaven – 24/7 – forever.

Our reaction to these mercies is twofold. First of all, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The word conform, here means to fashion yourself. It reminds me of camouflage clothing. Why do our deer hunters wear camouflage? They do it to blend in with the surroundings, they do not want to be seen, they want to go unnoticed, they don't want to draw attention to themselves. Obviously, this has an advantage for deer hunters and military soldiers, but for a Christian it is a disaster. A Christian is someone who does not conform. Think about the man, woman relationship. 30 years ago if you lived together with a person of the opposite sex, you would receive strong negative comments from family members and friends. You lived under a roof with a person of the opposite sex if you were married. Today, we have retirees, who just want a companion around, or don't want to lose their ex-spouses retirement funds if they get married, so they live together. In Ephesians, it speaks about not giving the world a hint of sexual immorality. Setting a proper example in relationships. Christians will be ones who don't conform to what the world is saying is just fine. A Christian has a different mind set than others in the world. We have a compassionate mind. We are more concerned about the needs of others than our own needs. The mind-set of the world is about me, myself and I. However, our life on earth is not what we can "stack up" or "pack up", rather our lives are lived in service to our Lord and others, not ourselves. In addition, we have a careful mind. We are careful what we

subject our mind to. We try to make sure our mind is filled with good thoughts. In Romans 13:12-14 it says, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. As Christians we live lives which respect the commandments of God. In addition, we tend to hang around other Christian companions. Ones who will ENCOURAGE us, not ENTANGLE us. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. Our conversation is not overly materialistic, avoids crude words, and conveys Godly values. When we do a task, we give it our best shot, since we do everything to glorify our God. Finally, our purpose for living is to tell others about Jesus so that many more might be in heaven with us oneday. A 24/7 Christian is someone that does stick out from the crowd. We do not fashion ourselves to be like everyone else.

. A second way that we display that we are Christians 24/7 is by discovering and by using our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are special abilities given to Christians by God the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of Christ’s church. What Spiritual gift or gifts do you have? Are you using them, in some capacity in this church? Let’s take a quick look at the ones mentioned here in Romans. The gift of Prophecy, the ability to understand and make God’s will known from the Bible. The gift of serving: Seeing that a task that needs to be done in the church is carried out. The gift of teaching: relating God’s truths in a Small Group Bible study, in a Sunday School. The gift of Encouraging: Giving good advice and support to troubled members of Open Bible. The gift of contributing to the needs of others: Giving generously of your financial blessings to help the ministries of your church. The gift leadership: Heading a committee or board, and giving direction to others so that tasks are carried out. Showing mercy. Doing deeds of kindness to help others who are in need. Sending cards, running errands, helping to ease the load of someone who is suffering. No two of us are exactly the same. God has given each of us different positions, different situations, different responsibilities, different gifts. We’re a lot like a body—countless parts each with its special function—but still one body. We’re all different, but we belong to together. We’re all different, but no one is better or more important than another. We’re all different, and we use our differences to serve each other. We’re all different, but we all have one head, one Savior, who is Christ.

Whatever gifts God has given you by his grace and in whatever position he has placed you, use them to humbly serve God’s people. When you do so, that’s offering your body as a living sacrifice to God. God looks at you and me with a smile. Not because your labors are noble in and of themselves, not because they come from a heart sinless and pure. Don’t be mistaken, even our best works are tainted with sin. God looks on you and smiles because Jesus has taken away the sin. He’s filtered out the bad, only the good floats up to God. We no longer offer animals and produce; we give God ourselves. In view of God’s mercy...offer your bodies as living sacrifices. And by God’s mercy, it’s holy and pleasing to God. Lord, help us all to be more 24/7 Christians for you! Amen.