

Intro

I wonder what's your favourite oxymoron. We talk about old news, or a deafening silence or say an event was bittersweet.

Maybe you can think yourself of an Oxymoronic phrase, so a phrase made up of two words that seem to be opposite to each other, or actually are opposite, but somehow they go together.

Today we're going to be looking at a Biblical oxymoron, which are the words living sacrifice. I think at the time that Paul paired these words together in the first century their meaning was even more opposite than it is today.

Today we talk about sacrificing aspects of things. In the business world, profit might be sacrificed for better customer service. In our house last week, we watched a film that included the theme of sacrificing a queen in a chess game, so as to be able to get a checkmate. But in the first century, they were much more familiar with sacrifice involving a termination of actual life.

Either way, it seems very hard for life to be retained when it's been sacrificed, or for a sacrificed thing to be living a life in all its fullness

So perhaps let's look at three phrases around this living sacrifice to try and explore what the writer Paul was driving at and what it maybe could mean to us today.

Here's the first phrase. **In view of God's mercy.**

Can you get a view of God's mercy, so vast and boundless, so beautiful. . One way to do that is to take a look at the chapters before this verse, which is like the crest of a wave. So this letter as it is written builds and builds going through our complete inability to save ourselves, and through God's salvation plan for the whole world and not just the Jews and then it exclaims, oh the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, to him be Glory for ever and ever. We've just sung Jesus's death and resurrection is by far the greatest and most significant event in history, way ahead of any birth, or creation or discovery, that's precisely what we needed

and then the wave breaks into this chapter where all of the theory becomes practical

And I remember a very wise man once describing God's mercy as being God saving us from receiving what we deserve. And then the second paragraph begins for by the Grace given me, and Grace can be described as God giving us so many awesome things that we don't deserve

Either way, if we're to have any chance of grasping, and absorbing and applying this living sacrifice to ourselves, then we can only begin to do that by gazing at God's wonder, God's beauty and God's great salvation

Then the second and third phrases are Do not conform, and be transformed Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind

Paul uses the words conform and transform shows we have choices

Here's the second phrase. Do not conform to the pattern of this world

The world has a pattern.

Despite the many outstanding and wonderful things achieved by men and women, the pattern of the world is still in many ways a diseased pattern, a corrupt pattern it's a poisonous pattern that this world follows

Paul is saying stay well away from these wrong ways, turn away from them

It is so easy to swim that way isn't it, because everybody else is swimming that way. It's not so easy is it to turn and swim in a different way to others. And it could be something major that you need to do, or perhaps think about something more minor. We're in a world that naturally doesn't make space for God and it's only by turning to look to him that we can be enlightened. I believe that as we look to God and specifically ask him to help us to make a change and seriously seek the answer, then God will enable us to swim towards his grace.

I was thinking about some of the patterns that I fall foul and maybe some of these apply to you too

- **Work less**

For me I probably need to work less. I need to be less dominated by earning a living and trying to satisfy a company that naturally wants to make more money, and save more money. For you it might be something completely different

- **Worry less**

For others of you this whole thing of "do not conform" might mean we need to worry less. On the face of it there is so much to worry about isn't there, and while God gives us responsibility to care for ourselves and each other, and to some he gives bigger responsibilities to work to solve community problems, or political problem, or pandemic problems, God is ultimately sovereign over these big things and also understands the littlest concerns in our lives.

- **Waste less**

Maybe working less or worrying less doesn't apply to you, Some of us need to waste less, waste less of our precious resources. Make some space in our lives in this world of information overload, constant interactions and other pressures. For some of us, unless we do that, we're maxed out, there's no space for us to.....

Be transformed

Paul says be transformed by renewing our minds. and this is a journey that we must set out on not a physical one, but one that concerns our minds, our thoughts and our attitudes.

Some of us have real entrenched views on certain things, while others can change our minds just by reading an article on something and absorbing the authors perspective. God asks us to be open to His ideas,. To be prepared to allow God's mind to permeate our minds, for his attitude to become our attitude.

In verse 3 He gives a great example of this, arguing that living well is rooted in humility – do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but according to the measure of faith, so according to the gifts given to us

Don't start thinking that that good thing that you have done is purely a result of your own abilities, it's not, it's God who gives us all of our abilities

It is these gifts and abilities that enable us to fit rightly into a community. Find your gifts, use them, appreciate the gifts of others, encourage them to use their gifts, then the church can function in the way it is meant to.

The reason why the church doesn't function as it should do is that we don't get this

If your gift is talking to people, do that

If your gift is organising, do that.

We've had more than our fair share of discussions about exam results this last 10 days

gifts that the Spirit brings to the gathering – speaking, caring, encouraging, showing mercy and compassion – that have nothing to do with education or social status, but are about openness to being the Spirit's instrument.

How do we know what we are to do?

The passage says to feast our eyes on God's mercy

Remember the parable that Jesus told about the servant who had the vast debt written off – he had been shown mercy, but just didn't accept that he had received it. Didn't understand the enormity of what had been done for him. Sometimes we think deep down we're pretty good, maybe we don't need God's mercy

It says not to conform

Remember the parable of the rich fool, who said I'm just going to take life easy. Eat drink and be merry. That's what those around us might be doing, but it's in the end a distorted pattern of life

It says to be transformed

Be transformed into the person that God made you to be such that you can do the things that God has prepared for you to do, the things that are God's will just for you

As I finish, I want to focus on God's will, We often wonder if God's will is going to be something that is bad for us. DO you think if you're going to have to do God's will, it's going to be something unpleasant

That we're not going to like it

That it is just not going to work out right

Actually, this passage counters that by making some statements about God's will,

God's will is not unpleasant, it's Good

God's will is not something we'll dislike, actually it is pleasing.

God's will is not something that won't work, actually we'll see that it will have been perfectly planned

God's will is described here as good and pleasing and perfect. As we walk life's journey, there will be many forks in the path

I wonder as we reach them, will we find that we'll conform, or will we find that our minds have been sufficiently renewed to be able to override the patterns of the world so our actions can be transformational, our words can be transformational and our relationships can be transformational.

My prayer is that we'll sacrifice ourselves in a way that is living and that we'll empty ourselves in a way that overflows God's mercy to those around us.

Amen