

# On the Altar (1): On the Altar

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(Romans 12:1-2)

## I. Introduction

- A. It's possible to make a RIGHT statement and still be completely WRONG!
1. I've had people say to me, "*But we're saved by grace and not works!*"
    - a. That is RIGHT, but they quoted to make a totally WRONG point.
    - b. Their point was, "*So the sinful practice I don't want to stop isn't so bad!*"
      - 1) That's the same point they make with, "*Hey, nobody's perfect!*"
      - 2) That is a RIGHT statement, but they are using it totally WRONG
  2. Randy Harris suggests that people today have a new favorite verse
    - a. It used to be that the one Bible verse that everyone knew was Golden Rule
    - b. That is no longer true; people have a new favorite verse—**Matthew 7:1**
      - 1) What does that say? "*Judge not that you be not judged?*" Of course
      - 2) In our postmodern, multicultural world, nobody is ever really wrong.
      - 3) *Saved by grace! Nobody's perfect! Judge not and be not judged!*
    - c. Those are all perfectly correct statements that may mask a wrong point
  3. The wrong point— "*Moral behavior doesn't really matter that much!*"
- B. The fullest discussion on "*salvation by grace*" in the Bible is in **Romans**
1. All of Paul's letters were written to deal with church problems or issues
    - a. The issue at Rome was how to integrate Jew and Gentile in the church
    - b. Jews were a bit smug (*heritage*); Romans were a bit anti-Semitic
      - 1) A riot had caused all the Jews to be expelled from Rome (**Acts 18:2**)
      - 2) Claudius died and Jews returned— causing a great deal of tension.
    - c. The problem that prompts writing of Romans—disharmony in church.
  2. Paul does that by first laying the theological framework of God's grace
    - a. Jews and Gentiles were on equal footing in their need for salvation
      - 1) Pagan Roman world rejected God and result was sin (**Rom 1:18ff**)
      - 2) The Jews knew better, but they didn't really obey better (**Rom 2:1ff**)
    - b. So Jew and Gentile are really on pretty equal footing (**Rom 2:12-13**)
    - c. The Law that the Jews loved so much only condemned Jew and Gentile

3. Paul's solution is we are saved by grace, not law (**Reading: Rom 3:20-26**)
    - a. We're not saved by a heritage— Jew or Roman. *We are saved by grace*
      - 1) Not saved by law because we can't keep it. *Jesus did; that's grace!*
      - 2) So what Paul says in effect is “*Nobody's perfect*” and “*Judge not...*”
    - b. So what's the point? Well, it's not obedience is *unimportant* or *optional!*
  4. In fact, the point of “*saved by grace through faith*” is exactly the opposite.
  5. Paul's application of grace is really a detailed discussion on how to live!
- C. **Old Saying:** “*If the Bible says ‘Therefore,’ find out what it is there for*”
1. There are several transition “therefore's” in Romans that point to grace
    - a. **Romans 5:1** tells us that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ
    - b. **Romans 8:1** tells us that there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ
  2. Another transition takes place at **Romans 12:1**, “*Therefore, I urge you...*”
    - a. So what is this “*therefore*” really there for? *What is Paul's point?*
    - b. The implication of his earlier discussion of grace is OBEDEDIENCE
      - 1) Because of God's mercy, we are to lay ourselves on God's altar
      - 2) Because of God's grace, we are called to lives of obedience
  3. This whole last section of Romans is about what it means to live grace
- D. Paul told the Ephesians that they were saved for good works (**Eph 2:8-10**)
1. We are saved BY grace THROUGH faith, but FOR good works.
    - a. We might want to stop with verse 9, but Paul is clear that we cannot/
    - b. The **implication** and **application** of grace is doing good works for God
    - c. That is what Paul will flesh out for us in this last section of Romans.
  2. Over several weeks, we'll explore what Paul says in **Romans 12-16**
    - a. We will call this study of living our grace— “*On the Altar...*”
    - b. In **Romans 12:1**, Paul tells us that we are to be “*living sacrifices*”
    - c. *What does that mean?* How are we to offer ourselves on the altar?
  3. We just going to look at the first two verses—**Romans 12:1-2**
    - a. What follows in Romans 12-16 are specific ways we are to obey
    - b. This morning, let Paul introduce this stress on obedience 3 ways—

## II. On the Altar: Emphasis on Obedience (Romans 12:1-2)

A. **First**, there is this language of offering ourselves as “*living sacrifices*”

1. The characteristic of worship in the OT was animal sacrifice
  - a. That was true from the very beginning (*Abel*) to the very end (*Malachi*)
  - b. That brutal and bloody ritual showed price of sin and value of holiness
2. The death of Jesus on the cross was our once and for all time sacrifice
  - a. The offering that God now desires is a hearts and live offered to him
  - b. Word “*offer*” (NIV) or “*present*” (NAS) is literally “*yield or hand over*”
    - 1) It’s used when Paul was handed over to authorities ([Acts 23:33](#))
    - 2) We are to yield or hand-over ourselves as sacrifices to God

B. **Second**, this offering of ourselves is our “*spiritual act of worship*”

1. What does that mean? This sounds like a great excuse for a word study!
  - a. The word “*spiritual*” (NIV) or “*rational*” (NAS note) is Greek λογικός
    - 1) Where we get “*logical*.” It means “*genuine or true to real nature*.”
    - 2) *True nature* of worship isn’t external sacrifice but *genuine* service
  - b. The word “*worship*” (NIV) or “*service of worship*” (NASB) is λατρεία.
    - 1) The usual word for worship is προσκυνέω, which is “*bow down*”
    - 2) But this is “*service*” as in the priestly service at Temple ([Heb 9:6](#))  
*the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.*
  - c. Our worship isn’t a ritual sacrifice, but the logical service of obedience
2. Face it—mankind has always wanted worship more religious ritual
  - a. That’s simple-- offer a sacrifice, sing a song or light a candle. Poof!
  - b. Paul says this isn’t LOGICAL—logical (spiritual) worship is obedience
3. Lives lived in obedience to is not optional or extra—nature of real worship

C. **Third**, were are not to be conformed to the world but transformed by God

1. Paul against fitting in too well, “*Do not be shaped by this world*” (NLT)
  - a. Peterson’s “*The Message*” has Paul warn us against being well-adjusted  
*Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.*
  - b. This sounds much similar to Peter’s warning in [1 Peter 1:13-14](#).
  - c. The values and standards of the world are not to shape us—God is

2. Rather than being conformed, we re to be transformed with a new mind
  - a. The word “*transformed*” is μεταμορφόω, where we get “*metamorphosis*”
    - 1) The caterpillar comes out of the cocoon completely transformed
    - 2) We call that transformation of caterpillar to butterfly *metamorphosis*.
  - b. This is the same word in [Matthew 17:2](#) when Jesus was transfigured.
    - 1) One minute, Jesus was with the apostles in flesh and blood
    - 2) The next minute Jesus is in a spiritual state with Moses and Elijah.
  - c. That same transfiguration is to happen little by little in us ([2 Cor 3:17-18](#))
    - 1) Here the metamorphosis comes as the result of freedom in Christ
    - 2) But like grace, our freedom demands obedience and discipleship

### III. Conclusion

- A. There was a guy I went to school with that you would probably call “goofy”
  1. He was happy-go-lucky, a little bit silly and totally in love with Jesus,
    - a. One night as he was coming back to campus, three guys jumped him,
    - b. You tell he was a little ruffed up the next day and had a little limp.
    - c. As he told the story, he smiled, “*First fight I’ve had since prison.*”
  2. Found out later that in a previous life, this had been one seriously bad dude
    - a. But you would have never known it, because he had been transformed
    - b. That is what God is called us to this morning—transformation.
- B. To be sure, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone
  1. But we are not saved to be left alone—God demands that we change
  2. He fills us with His Spirit and wants to begin our total, extreme makeover
  3. But we have to decide whether we are going to lay ourselves on the altar.