

Title: How do we respond to the sacrifice of Christ?

We have come once again Brethren and Sisters to remember our Heavenly Father's faithfulness as exhibited in the emblems before us upon the table. The question I wish to consider is *how does this sacrifice we have come to remember move each of us to personally respond?*

In Romans Chapter 12 and at verse 1

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Brethren and sisters, there must be a response and that response must be ongoing. Our baptism was a suitable initial response to this tremendous act of love, while we were yet sinners. The word "*present*", they're in this verse indicates a once only action, that is to be renewed each day. We understand this in the same as one's marriage vows.

Our bodies are to be given as "*living*" sacrifices. This word "*living*" importantly speaks of a principle of life, true life, life being an energising quality that wells up in us and flows out from us in actions that are morally life giving. This word "*living*" also carries the ideas of being powerful and efficacious.

1st John Chapter 3 and verse 16

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service in the light of his faithful example. Thus in response to this greater love, we have come to remember. The love of Christ ought to constrain us to so serve one another by love in this reciprocal way imitating him.

So then brethren and sisters, since we last met around the emblems, how have you personally served another brother or sister during the last week? What personally did you lay down or aside in terms of your own desires and resources, time, effort, money or possessions to fulfil that simple act of service? Can you think of an occasion during the last week?

Brethren and sisters we cannot let our official service of the ecclesia be the fullness of all of our personal voluntary service for one another. Surely it's the minimum not the maximum of what we are prepared and willing to do in response to his sacrifice?

Now although the Master's sacrifice we have come to remember was once for all, in terms of it being efficacious for sin. His service on our behalf did not finish there.

Brethren and sisters the Apostle Paul declared in Galatians "*the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith (or faithfulness) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*"

Now in the Greek those two actions at the end of that quotation, of the Master "loving" and "giving" himself are ongoing principles. In other words the Lord Jesus Christ is even now at the right hand of our Heavenly Father still loving and giving himself for us, as our High Priest and mediator.

Hebrews Chapter 7 and verse 25

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Those two powerful and efficacious actions of loving & giving will never be complete until these vile bodies we possess are changed like unto his glorious body. When we too in the mercy of our Heavenly Father are partakers with him of divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

So as the one we have come to remember continually serves us by love, as the captain of our salvation and our High Priest, so we too are to be imitating him continually by serving one another. The life of the Master becomes the pattern we must lay down in our own lives day by day and you cannot do this if all the contact we have with one another is for three hours on a Sunday and another two on a Thursday night.

Returning for a moment to Romans twelve, this point is clearly implied in the Greek for the word "*living*" for it is a (*present active participle*) simply meaning that it is an ongoing principle that the saints are to continually and daily live by, why?

Because in doing so we imitate the Father who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, that we might manifest, declare and publish the praises, the virtue, even the moral goodness of our God.

Personal sacrifices even the smallest of them can be tremendously powerful and efficacious, because they *touch* people, they *move* people and they *impact* people. Often leaving a deep impression upon the individual concerned, which can last for years. Sacrifices brighten dreary days, they give hope and more importantly they change lives. In the case of each one of us here today brethren and sisters our lives were turned around by the supreme sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are shortly to remember.

The Master once said the following *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* We tend to commit this concept of an abundant or extraordinary fullness of life to the age to come. Now although that is undoubtedly true brethren and sisters, it is not what the Lord Jesus Christ meant here. For in the Greek both uses of the word *“have”* in this verse are in the present tense, so they are present possibilities now!

Our Heavenly Father is the Living God; He is the originator of life in all of its fullness and abundance, which is evident from the whole of creation, which surrounds us. Likewise He desires his children to likewise possess and creatively impart life to those with whom they have to do.

Let us remember this principle of true life the Master desires to see in our sacrificing is to be an energising power that wells up in us and compels us to act on behalf of another.

In John Chapter 13 and verses 34 – 35

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Notice the point *“by this shall all men know”* that we are followers of the Master. Is this true of our lives brethren and sisters? Can it be seen day by day? Or is it only seen on meeting days?

When you or I interact with another person be they in the truth or without, we are not to know whether our actions might be providentially used by our Heavenly Father to further his purpose with that individual in some way?

Each of us brethren and sisters are a vessel, which our Heavenly Father is filling with his spirit word, even this word of life. Each and every one of us is a truly unique vessel. A combination of natural characteristics and talents not found anywhere nor in anyone else in exactly the same measure.

Subtly blended together with the spirit word, so that we as individuals might pour forth our lives in service one for another. That we each might fulfil the unique role we have to play within ecclesial life, so the Excellency of the power and the glory may be of God, and not of us.

Brethren and sisters we talk about ecclesial life, but it is not really life, is it? The ecclesia is meant to be a dynamic organic life-imparting organism constantly bearing fruit in its season. Yet to me, there often seems little evidence of this principle of life, present when we meet together.

Now partially this is due to our reserve of culture and other worldly influences upon us, so that we function, more like an organisation than a living organism. In main the Pareto principle applies 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people involved. So that we have what is known as the football problem in our ecclesia's, we have 22 members exhausted in need of a rest due to the work and 20,000 plus sitting in the stands in dire need of spiritual exercise.

This actually fellows the worlds method of instruction, in what is known as the Greek method, which was more classroom like, academic, passive and theoretical in it's approach. Think about it brethren and sisters most of the addresses we listen too are information based. In that they impart some more bible-based knowledge, but do not impart to us the very means of applying it to our lives, which is exactly what we need help with.

Whereas the Hebrew or biblical model of learning was more like coaching, because it's relational, based upon life experience, so its experiential and was basically on the job training.

John Chapter 8 and verse 28 & Philippians Chapter 4 verse 9

“I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”

The goal here is of life change or transformation that ought to be the goal of every address, we give brethren. But how many talks have we each heard that truly changed the way you personally lived? How many talks have you heard that really fired you up, motivated and inspired you to change some aspect of your life?

Our meetings have become in many ways too passive and as a result seem lifeless not only to any outsider who may come through those doors, but sadly also to many of us. I have no doubt that individual brethren and sisters come here week by week and are desperately in need of having this principle of life imparted to them. Either through the exhortation or through the words or actions of another and yet sadly how often do they go from here not having received that necessary life giving injection they need?

There is not one of us brethren and sisters who has not gone home from a meeting at some point and said apart from the fulfilling of the command, what was the point in me being there? No one really spoke to me, beyond hello & goodbye; every interaction was only surface level and casual. Nor did I really speak to anyone beyond those same pleasantries of life. *Why do we waste these God given life-giving opportunities to really connect and help one another?*

Have you ever felt as a stranger in your own meeting, by this I mean if you do not make the effort to speak to someone then no one comes to speak to you. So that even in a room full of people, you feel very much alone and isolated?

Now all of the above being part and parcel of our common experience, sometimes there actually is genuine ecclesial life. For equally there is not one of us brethren and sisters who have struggled to come to the meeting in such need and have indeed received that injection of life through some kindness from another brother and sisters.

Ecclesial life, brethren and sisters implies that we actually do “*life together*”. That this principle of life, which is after all meant to be dynamic, powerful, efficacious and energising, is both seen and felt, when we come together. For that to be the case brethren and sisters we will all have to come prepared to sacrifice one for the other, through lovingly giving of ourselves to each other. For as we read elsewhere “*love seeketh not her own*”, but “*those things which are Jesus Christ’s*”.

Our meetings should have a buzz of excitement and expectation about them that is sadly lacking. We ought to come prepared and desiring, each one of us to impart this principle of life one to another and to have it likewise imparted unto us. *Ecclesial life is meant to be a relational experience where one person empowers another by sharing their God-given resources and experiences.* This is one of the key purposes of an ecclesia.

Ecclesial meetings are not just a place where our individual vessels might be filled with the spirit word, but also the chief place within which we might outpour the contents of our vessels. Where we can learn in a safe environment learn just how to impart life by our words and deeds, so we will be better able to shine as lights in this evil age.

So we could ask the following question – *into whose life have you personally come today prepared to pour this principle, this energy of life into?*

Think about the Master for a moment, brethren and sisters when you read the gospels, whenever the Lord Jesus Christ interacted with an individual it had an impact upon that persons life. Now not all of those impacts were positive, but an impact was present nonetheless, that is what you and I ought to strive for in our interactions.

The Lord Jesus Christ worked with many disciples; we read in Luke that He instructed seventy disciples whom He then sent out. Then there was the twelve his constant companions throughout his tribulations into them He poured his life. Finally from within that band of twelve, He chose three Peter, James and John to have a much closer/deeper relationship with.

In this interaction of the Master we see a model brethren and sisters in how we can indeed deal with one another in ecclesial life, so that we too might give ourselves as living sacrifices one for another. This meeting is not seventy strong, so it is possible to interact with everyone as the Master did with that large group of seventy disciples.

We could all surely find twelve people in the meeting, we could become much closer to and because of our natural diversity they would not all be the same people.

Likewise we could all personally work to touch, move and impact three people in a much more intimate relationship.

The question you want to ask yourself is not who do I most like and get on with here? But rather *whom can I give the most benefit and whom can I gain the greatest benefit from?*

When we speak of the Lord Jesus Christ laying down his life, we generally do so in a couple of ways:

- 1) Upon that cruel Roman stake
- 2) In his three and a half year ministry

We come to remember the first, because of all that it accomplished in the purpose of our Heavenly Father; thus we do show the Lord's death until he come. Secondly we see him in the days of his flesh laying down his life in service to his Father and in that we see him leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. We see his complete singleness of focus, his determination and his endurance under trial to fulfil our Heavenly Father's will.

Yet there is another sense in which our Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life:

- 3) In pouring his life into his close disciples that they might later be Apostles

He laid his life literally down into the lives of those men, so that their enemies later remarked of the Apostles *"they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."*

We too brethren and sisters need to lay down our lives in a similar way, pouring forth our lives into one another. *How different would our ecclesia's be if we were all prepared to really invest in one another? How soon would the divisions present between young and old, between long time members and so called newbies, between those with different ideological positions to the truth disappear or be at least greatly reduced?*

After all we all have so much to give one another, since our experience of life, our backgrounds, even our current circumstances and our understanding and application of the truth are all different.

There are people in this room who have gone through great suffering; health related illnesses, even long term and chronic pain, the loss of loved ones through death and other means. Also financial suffering, loss of a job, being made redundant, career

change, others dealing with isolation and loneliness, or age and infirmity. These are all common human experiences we could help one another through, if we were prepared to make the time and effort to share ecclesial life together.

Also there are people in the room who have brought up children, who have had their children come into the truth, there are those who have run businesses, who have done much in the work of the truth, who know how to manage money. The more you think about it the longer the list becomes of experiences that are worthwhile to share. Those individuals have successfully navigated the trials and problems of life both within the truth and in terms of everyday life. These things are not necessary age dependent, because common trials affect us at different stages in life, so there is no one here who does not have something to impart.

Who could you impart some of life's wisdom too today brethren and sisters? Who do you see has a need brethren and sisters that you could help fill?

Equally there is no one here who does not need some help with regards to the stage of life they currently find themselves in and its particular challenges. This is true of both our normal everyday lives, as well as ecclesial life. The question is though *are you willing to let someone else concern them selves with you to invest, enthuse and influence your life?*

Let me give just one example from my own short life in the truth. Before I came into the truth, about eighteen months before I was baptised a brother and sister in the ecclesia where I was attending the lectures took an interest in me. I have no idea why, but they did, I came into the truth from the outside. Well this couple that befriended me invited me one evening after the lecture back to their home for a chat and some supper. That action became a regular occurrence, which lasted right up until I left the meeting to go to university, some four and a half years after I came into the truth.

So this couple invested six years into my life, after I came into the truth we also did a midweek evening usually listening to a tape I provided (*around 5 hours a week*). That interaction, which was both spiritual fellowship and social in nature, was crucially important to my development in the truth.

Although today some 300 miles separate us, I try to speak to that brother at least once every ten days, if not every week. There is an example of doing ecclesial life together.

Neither of us knew back then that our interactions with one another would form a relationship that was so life changing and equally neither of us would give up the enormous blessing we have gained as a result. You see the beauty of it is this that when you invest and pour out your life into someone else there is an equal benefit, blessing in return. This couple who I supposed mentored me during my early years in the truth acted like the one we have come to remember in laying down their life in part for me. Pouring into my life their life experience of the truth.

Think again of the disciples, the Master prayed and found these men to invest in, they did not find him and the same is true of each one of us.

John Chapter 15 and verses 13 – 17

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. **Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:** that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.”*

So this couple took the **initiative** and invited me back to their home. Through those six years of friendship in close proximity they deeply penetrated my life like salt and light. Our time together was where life lessons were caught by example, from being shown, rather than just being taught. Studies show brethren and sisters that when we **show and tell** another person something using this biblical model of teaching. The recall over time in the lives of the people impacted is over 60%, as compared to just telling them, which has only a 10% recall later.

The Master befriended these twelve and especially the three of his inner circle, He taught them by example and He took responsibility for them and made a commitment to them, for nearly three years. As a result the disciples gained in experiential knowledge, developed trust and faith and were empowered to continue his work. That same Master through the living word and through providential care is trying to do the same with each one of us. He is also asking that we aid one another in the same way.

John Chapter 13 and verses 12 – 17

*“So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. **For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.** Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, **happy are ye if ye do them.**”*

Take a moment brethren and sisters to think about the brethren and sisters that have impacted your life in a similar way to how this couple and indeed a number of other brethren and sisters have done to me. How could you use their examples to enable you to flesh out this principle of imparting life one to another here in West Bromwich?

Now as we finally come to remember once more the Master in these simple emblems of bread and wine. Let us see in this symbol of the bread, the instruction of the word of life enlightening our minds and enabling each one of us to understand. How the life of Christ ought to be manifested in our daily lives, as we do life together.

Likewise let us see in this simple cup of wine not only the price that was paid, but also more importantly the choices that the Master made. His faithful service of his Father in a life of pouring forth, ministering to others, as a living sacrifice. Where every breath he took was used to fulfil the Fathers will, even to the laying down of his life, as the acceptable sacrifice for sin.

Since ecclesial life is meant to be a relational experience where one person empowers another by sharing their God-given resources and experiences. *Who are your twelve and especially the three you will benefit from doing life together?*

Brethren and sisters, just how will our remembering of this supreme sacrifice impel each one of us to lay down our lives as living sacrifices? Which is holy, acceptable unto God and is our reasonable worship in the light of the one we remember now.

Wayne Marshall