

# Dying to Live

## Offering Ourselves as Living Sacrifices

January 23, 2022

*Today we're talking about laying down our lives as true and proper worship.*

After all, Jesus said, "whoever loses their life for *Me* will find it." (Mt 16:25) So answer *me* this: **Are you alive? Are you sure?** How can we *know*? Well, *actually* ...

We *know* that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not *love* remains in death. [So, are you alive?] Anyone who *hates* a brother or sister [i.e. fellow believer] is a *murderer*, [because Jesus said that *unresolved anger* with a fellow believer is murder-in-the-heart (Mt 5:21-22)] and you know that *no murderer* [literally or emotionally] has eternal *life* residing in him. [Because hate and love don't room together. So – yikes! – how do we know if we *actually* love each other *enough*? *Well*] *This* is how we *know* what love *is*: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. – 1 John 3:14-16 NIV



So we gotta decide if we're gonna be **life takers or life givers**. The choice is between *taking theirs* (by refusing to try and resolve any animosity between us), or *giving ours*, by **dying to self**, and **laying aside our pride**, and **going all-in** for the *cause* of Christ – as opposed to simply making a *contribution* to the *cause* and telling ourselves we've *paid* our *dues*.

What's the difference? Well after Jesus declared all foods clean, (Mk 7:19) a hen and a pig decided to pool their resources and offer the King of Kings a breakfast of bacon and eggs. The chicken made a very nice contribution, but that pig was *all in*. Thing is, it's much *easier* to just *die* – or as John says, "remain in death" – than to die-to-self! That's why Paul says:

I *urge* you, brothers and sisters, in *view* of God's mercy, [on display on the cross] to offer *your* bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—*this* is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, [Jesus said, "If you love *only* those who *love* you, what reward is there for *that*?" (Mt 5:46)] but be *transformed* [into loving others, by showing mercy, like the *One* who *had* – and continues to *have* – mercy on you] by the *renewing* [by God's Word wherein we *view* God's mercy] of your *mind*. [Wherein most of *our murders* take place] – Romans 12:1-2 NIV

So, **what's the very first thing you have to do to become a living sacrifice? Live.** How? **Love.** How? **Die.** To self. Live-love-die. Because, *that's* how ...

We *know* that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not *love* remains in *death*. [And therefore *can't* offer themselves as a living sacrifice] ... *This* is how we *know* what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. – 1 John 3:14-16 NIV

So, are you making a nice contribution, or you *all in*? The word “living” tells us it’s an **ongoing commitment**, and “sacrifice” tells us it’s **complete surrender**. So a *living sacrifice* is an ongoing commitment of complete surrender **to live and love as the Lord loves us**, rather than doing as the world does and trying to save your bacon! **We’re simply putting His mercy on display**, by duplicating in our own small way to others, the incredible thing He did for *us*. So, are you all in?

We can deceive ourselves when our heart is moved to make something right, by settling for *talking* about how we feel rather than *acting* on our conviction. **Love is an action in response to a feeling**. Self-delusion is deriving self-satisfaction from compassionate feelings *alone*.

*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. – 1 John 3:18-20 NIV*

Because by *one sacrifice* He has made perfect forever [POOF!] those who are being made holy. [BUMP. BUMP. BUMP.] – Hebrews 10:14 NIV

This one little Scripture reminds us that we *better be* walking the talk, while it removes the *guilt* and *shame* and *self-condemnation* that comes from *failing* in our attempts. However, this is a *dangerously* comforting verse, because it’s easy to ignore our part in the “being made” process.

Therefore be *imitators* of God as *dear children*. – Ephesians 5:1 NKJ



We *know* and *rely on* the love God has for *us*. God *is* love. Whoever lives in *love* lives in *God*, and *God* in *him*. In *this way*, *love* is *made complete* among *us* so that we will have *confidence* on the day of judgment, *because* in this world we are like Him. – 1 John 4:16-17 NIV



Not *perfectly* by any stretch, but *considered* perfect while *being made* holy, by **committing to applying what we currently can**, and **practicing to strengthen** (to eventually *achieve*), **what we currently can’t**. The secret is to never *settle* for whatever level of *renewal* we currently have. And to make every effort to become a *genuine imitation*.

Paul’s Greco-Roman audience would’ve been stunned that he says to “offer our bodies”. They regarded the body as something God *didn’t* want. It’s aging, blotchy, achy ... wrinkled ... I can never remember all seven dwarves! That’s the reason for their obsession with idealizing the human form to “godlike” perfection. But then, *didn’t* God demand *spotless, flawless*, sacrifices? Yes, but that was for *sin*, and that was *accomplished* in *Christ*. **Ours isn’t a sacrifice for sin, but for righteousness**. Paul made this quite clear, six chapters earlier, saying to:

Offer *yourselves* to God, as those who have been *brought* from death to life; and *offer* the parts of your *body* to Him as instruments of *righteousness*. – Romans 6:13 NIV

We’re not *earning forgiveness*. We’re *confirming* our *faith*, as “true and proper worship”. That’s why Paul says our life must be, “holy” (which simply means *set apart*) to please our Father. And what pleases *Him* is to be *all in* when it comes to being *set apart*. **A lot of people want to serve God, but only as advisors!** Know why? They’re *chicken*. But, look how Paul *begins* Romans.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, [A bond-servant is a *slave* who so *loves* their *lord* that they *choose a lifetime commitment* of service *after* being set *free*] called as an apostle, [and] set apart for the Gospel [literally: the Good News] of God, which He *promised* beforehand *through* His prophets in the holy Scriptures, [wherein we *renew our minds*] concerning His Son, – Romans 1:1-3 NAS



Notice that Paul doesn't say he was "set apart" *from* something, but "for" something (for the Good News of God's Son). When I married Shar, 39 years ago, I wasn't thinking about all the women I was being separated *from*; the only thing on my mind was the one I was willingly, eagerly, gratefully, joyfully being separated *for*, and *joined*, through the *bond* of matrimony, *to*.



Last Sunday I said that *you* are the joy that was set before Jesus, for which reason He *endured* the *cross*. (Heb 12:2) And He must *be* the *joy* set before *you*, for which reason *you* will endure *hardship* as *discipline* (i.e. *training*) as His children. (Heb 12:7) And by far, **the biggest ongoing disciplinary hardship of the Christian life is dying to self**. And I ended the message asking you to imagine a firefighter unwilling to enter a burning building. That's *not* a firefighter. And then imagine a child of God, who claims to *follow* Jesus, but is unwilling to lay down their life, as a living sacrifice, to bring the light of Christ to a dark world. What's *that*? Well, if you find yourself continually looking back and returning to your former, worldly ways, I would respectfully suggest that **you see yourself as having been set apart from rather than for**. And that's a recipe for remaining in the darkness of death in spite of the Light of life around you.



[Jesus] said, "I am the Light of the world. Whoever *follows* Me will *never* walk in *darkness* [i.e. *hard hearted hatred*], but will have the *Light of life*." – John 8:12 NIV

[So] If we *claim* to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the *darkness* [of death], we lie and do not *live* by the *truth*. – 1 John 1:6 NIV

Anyone who *claims* to be in the *light* but *hates* a brother or sister is *still* in the *darkness* ... and walks around in the *darkness* ... darkness has *blinded* them. – 1 John 2:9-11 NIV

Woe to those ... who put darkness for light and light for darkness, – Isaiah 5:20 NIV

If then the *light* within you is *darkness*, how *great* is *that* darkness! – Matthew 6:23 NIV



Ever heat a TV dinner in the microwave, sit down to enjoy it, and then bite in only to find that, though nice and *hot* on the *outside*, it's still *frozen* on the inside? I *hate* that. So does the *Lord*, in a sense. **Our Father hates half-baked faith**.



That's when we're nice and warm and "Christiany" on the *outside*, while a part of our heart, hiding inside, remains frozen. A murderous *heart* is *dangerous*, because **it's easy to justify and ignore a frozen core under a top layer of warmth**.

Here's a great little riddle that Jesus poses to the religious posers concerning *sacrifices*.



Which is greater, the *gift* or the *altar* that *sanctifies* the *gift*? – Matthew 23:19 NKJ

For by one *offering* [or, “*sacrifice*” (NIV)] He has *perfected forever* those who are *being sanctified*. [or, “*being made holy*” (NIV)] – Hebrews 10:14 NKJ

[You see] We have an *altar* from which those who minister at the *tabernacle* have *no right* ... [Jesus] suffered [on a *cross*] *outside* the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to *Him outside* the camp, bearing the *disgrace* [of the *cross*] He bore. ... Through *Jesus*, therefore, let us [as a kingdom of *priests* (Rev 5:10) continually offer to God a [living] *sacrifice* of praise—the *fruit* [the *produce*, the *result*, the *actions*] of lips that openly profess His name. And do not *forget to do good* and to *share* with *others*, for with such [loving, thus living] *sacrifices* [of true and proper worship] God is *pleased* ... and may He *work in us* what is *pleasing to Him*, through *Jesus Christ*, – Hebrews 13:10-15 NIV

[Jesus said] “You are the *light* of the *world*. ... let your *light* [of love] *shine* before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. ... [You have heard that] anyone who *murders* will be subject to *judgment*. But I tell you that anyone who is *angry* with a *brother* or *sister* will be subject to *judgment*. ... And anyone who says, ‘You *fool!*’ will be in danger of the fire of *hell*. Therefore, if you are *offering* your *gift* [i.e. *sacrifice*] at the *altar* and there *remember* that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your [half-baked] gift [of love for God] there in front of the altar. [God doesn't want a sacrifice that “remains in death”] First go and be reconciled to them; [as much as possible on your part; because, it's not enough to just love the Lord; we must also love others as He loves us] then come and offer your [loving, thus living, thus true and proper, thus pleasing] gift. ... Love your enemies and *pray* for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your *Father in heaven*.” – Matthew 5:14-16, 21-24, 44-45 NIV

[Just before the cross, Jesus said] “As I have loved you, so you *must* love one another. By this everyone will know that you are *My* disciples,” – John 13:34-35 NIV

“This is to my Father's *glory*, that you bear much *fruit*, showing yourselves to be *My* disciples. ... My *command* is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” – John 15:8, 12 NIV

Our Father isn't pleased with half-hearted efforts. But **He sure gets a kick out of whole-hearted attempts that fall flat on their face!** Bump. Bump. Bump. Practice! Practice! Practice!

My little children, I write this to you so that you will *not* sin. But *if* anybody *does* sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ... Whoever says, “I know Him,” but does not do what He *commands* is a liar, ... This is how we *know* we are *in* Him: Whoever claims to *live in* Him must *live as* Jesus *did*. ... because the darkness is passing and the true light [of life and love] is already shining. – 1 John 2:1-10 NIV

You *in*? All *in*? **OT sacrifices died for man's sin.** But us? **We're called to live for God's glory,** as visible *proof* of His great *mercy!* So *look alive* and put it on *display!* You *are* alive ... *right?*