

Therefore...

Romans 11:32-12:2

Romans (no. 33 in the series)

September 18, 2022

Peter Hiett

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/therefore/>

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

So, Father, I pray that you would preach us, that you would save us, sanctify us, and create us with your word. In Jesus' name we ask this, amen.

Message

Romans 11:32-12:1, the moment we've been waiting for. Paul reaches the pinnacle of his eleven chapters of philosophy and theology; he exclaims "Amen," and now the rubber meets the Road—he says "therefore" and for the next four chapters he's going to tell us what to do.

Romans 11:32-12:1:

For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies [*oktirmon*: compassions] of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable [*eurastos*: pleasing] to God, which is your spiritual [*logikos*] worship [*latreia*].

Literally translated: "I call upon you, therefore, to present your bodies a sacrifice—living, sanctified, pleasing to God, which is your logical service [*latreia*—which refers to the thing Priests do in temples].

The logical implications of all that Paul has written in Romans, is that we would all present our bodies a sacrifice. And we think, "Um, that can't be right... must be just a metaphor." But sacrifice wasn't just a metaphor in Rome. In basically every ancient society, if people ate meat, they did it as a sacrifice to something—aware that they had just taken the life of something, and the life wasn't simply their own to take, so they better thank the one that gave it. In America, we just eat cheeseburgers and don't think about it, but that's not the way it's always been. In Israel

they'd bring the living lamb to the temple, the priest would kill it, keep the blood, and give you the meat—not an abstract concept, but dinner.

So maybe the Romans thought, “well Paul didn't actually mean that...” We certainly think, “he didn't actually mean that...” I remember being taught that Jesus died to end the sacrificial system. Modern philosophers like Renee Girard have argued basically the same thing—Jesus was sacrificed to end all sacrifices. Jesus did say “destroy this temple,” and the temple was the location of all the latria—the sacrifices at the hands of the priests. Jesus did say, “destroy this temple,” but then he said, “And I'll rebuild it,” and sacrificing stuff is what folks do in temples.

To the Pharisees, Jesus quoted the prophet Hosea saying, “Go learn what this means, ‘I desire Mercy, *Hesed*, Relentless-Love, and not Sacrifice.’” I have friends who argue, “Well that means God never wanted sacrifice and so, Jesus knew that the Jews kind of just made up the Old Testament.” Well, that's kind of hard to swallow. I think God has always been saying I don't need sheep and goats, but I desire Love, and love is sacrifice.

“I desire mercy and not sacrifice...” And then Jesus presented himself in Jerusalem for sacrifice. Seems to me that that was a sacrifice that God wantedⁱ Ephesians 5:2, “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Do you remember how he was sacrificed? He was crucified. Judas even acted as priest declaring him innocent and spotless in the temple and throwing the blood money at the altar. He was crucified, and yet no one can crucify themselves—that's why I've got the nails and the hammer here in my hands. Suicide won't work; someone has to do it for you. He presented his body a sacrifice—he walked into Jerusalem on purpose; that's what infuriated his disciples and the crowd. He presented his body a sacrifice, and yet, he freely delivered up his Spirit to the Father. He didn't sacrifice to us—never sacrifice to people—but he did sacrifice to his Father and for us.

And so, some people, (particularly wealthy empowered modern American people), say “See?”

- He sacrificed, so I don't have to be sacrificed.
- He died, so I don't have to die.
- He was punished, so I don't have to be punished (a penal substitute).
- He picked up his cross, so I don't have to pick up my cross.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would seek to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life (literally his psyche) for my sake will save it.” You know, for folks in Jesus' day, picking up a cross was not an abstract concept, or a piece of jewelry; it was a cross beam they slapped on your back, like this one that I'm carrying on my back right now. But in Jesus' day, I would've also been, stripped, flogged, and utterly humiliated; crucifixion was designed to utterly violate [obliterate] a man's psyche.

If you saw a man bearing a cross—you knew that his past had been judged and he had no future; he only had that moment. You knew that he had been utterly rejected by the Principalities and Powers of this world. You knew that he had no rights, no legal recourse. And Jesus said to all—“Pick one up if you want to follow me.”

Now folks will object, and say, “Well Jesus said, ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your psyches (your souls), for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’” “So if life isn’t easy,” they say, “Then, I must not be carrying Jesus’ yoke, and so I obviously need a vacation, a massage, and a manicure! But not a cross.” Well, you know, a cross does look an awful lot like a yoke, doesn’t it? And Jesus said that we needed to take it up daily. So don’t you suppose that he took it up daily? That means he was bearing it on Good Friday. But he was also bearing it when he turned the water into wine, and while he was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, and while he bent down and said to the woman in the dust “Where are your accusers?” He not only bore it on Good Friday. I wonder if he bore it on Easter Sunday. Do you suppose that they present their bodies a sacrifice in Heaven?

I’ll take this big old chunk of wood off of my back now. Scripture mentions no wooden yoke on his back, except on Good Friday. And yet I bet he bore his cross every day, don’t you suppose?]

“Present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy, pleasing to God.” I’m just saying that I think Paul actually meant that, and that’s very surprising if, in fact, Romans means what most folks say it means, for this is the exact opposite of what Paul would say if Paul meant what people say he meant.

If you grew up in American Evangelicalism and read one of those Romans Road Brochures, I’m guessing that you learned something like this:

1. God is Just and that means that he has to punish sin.
2. Jesus was punished in your place, so you don’t have to be punished.
3. You don’t have to be punished if you accept the offer.
4. But if you refuse the offer, then you will be punished, forever and without end, for you must pay, and can never actually pay—that’s why it’s forever, without end; it’s eternal dissatisfaction.

See, if Jesus was punished so that you would not be punished, if Jesus died, so that you would never have to die, if Jesus sacrificed, so that you would never have to sacrifice, then the very last thing that Paul would say at this point of the letter, is, “Therefore, present yourself a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God. Which is your logical, spiritual, reasonable, worship service.”

If Jesus died so I don’t have to die, if Jesus was disciplined so I wouldn’t be disciplined, if Jesus was sacrificed so I wouldn’t be sacrificed, then wouldn’t Paul say, “Therefore, congratulations Peter; You made the right choice; you’re a winner and not a loser; you’re first and not last. So of course, you deserve a vacation, a massage and a manicure. Of course, you deserve more things than 99% of the people in this world. Of course, you should demand your rights, and get offended when people don’t respect you, speak well of you, and call you Reverend Hiatt.”

If I’m honest, that is exactly what I want Paul to say, most of the time, because presenting myself a sacrifice seems to be the opposite of fun. It’s what I want Paul to say, it’s what we want Paul to say, and amazingly that’s exactly what the modern church in America has said. We’ve actually

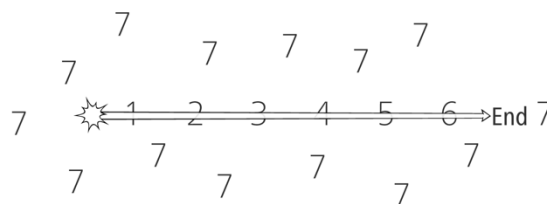
said, or at least strongly implied, that if you find yourself to be rejected by all men, stripped of all you possess, powerless and wracked by pain, then you don't have faith and must not be following Jesus. We've actually taught people to be crusaders—those who crucify, rather than those who are crucified.

Jesus and Paul, certainly testify that there will be signs and wonders—and I've seen some—but that's not what I can simply choose to do. Jesus and Paul just told me what to do: pick up my cross, present my body—this body of sin and death, my physical body and my *psychikos* body—a sacrifice. Why? Well, it's my logical service of worship. But it doesn't seem so logical to me! Why is that?

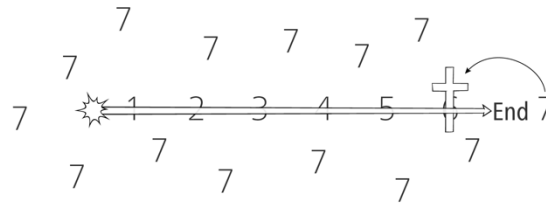
Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mereies [compassions] of God, [as if God and Paul are feeling sorry for us] **I appeal to you... to present your bodies** (plural) **a sacrifice** (singular) [as if these many bodies are actually one sacrifice and one body]—**living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your logical worship service.** ² [*Kai*: And, That is, Indeed] **Do not be conformed to this world** [*aion*: age], **but be transformed** [*metamorphoo*: metamorphosed, transfigured] **by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern** [*dokimazo*: to prove, to discern through testing] **what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable** [*euarestos*: pleasing] **and perfect** [*teleios*: completed, finished, of the End].ⁱⁱ

“Do not be conformed to this age; but be transformed by filling your head with the age to come.”



And that's why I keep showing you this picture. Scripture views space-time something like this: there are ages of chronological time like the six days, or *aions*, of Creation. But there is an *aion* to come, which is an endless seventh day—sometimes described as an eighth day, the Sabbath of God.



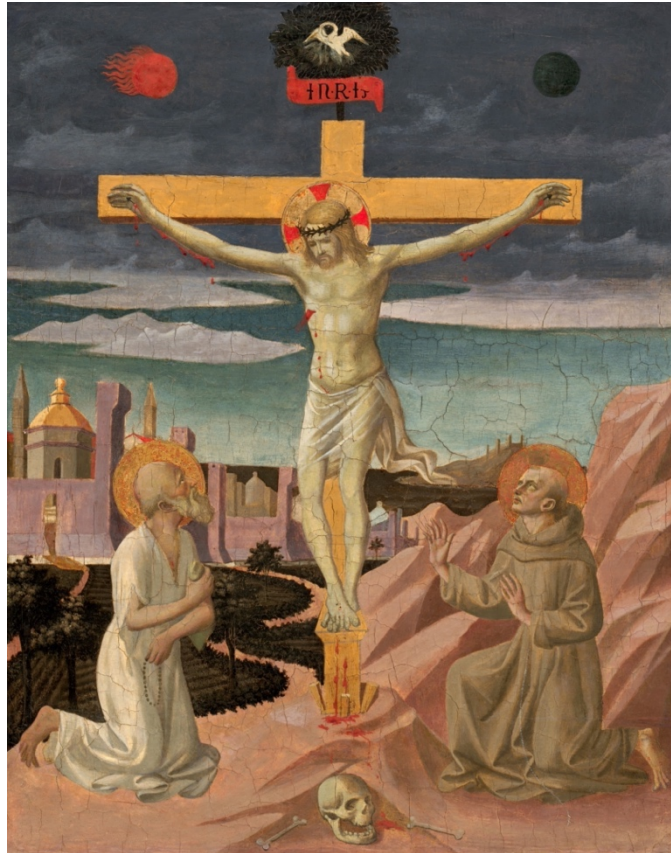
Our bodies exist in the sixth day on the timeline, even though “eternity is in our hearts” according to Solomon. In the New Testament, “Eternity” translated the Greek adjective “*aionios*,” which means something like “of the age,” and usually “of the age to come,” that is God’s Age—the Age of I AM who always IS. On the timeline, we experience “cause and effect,” that is we do something in one moment and see the effect in another moment, and we are subject to entropy—that is chaos, death, and decay. But off the timeline, we’re no longer slaves to time, everything is now and new, “life” is *aionios*, and what I am about to show you has always happened.

Video clip: *The Iron Giant*
Warner Bros. Animation (1999)

Scenes from the movie scroll without audio as Peter talks. A boy (Hogarth) awakens and discovers an empty box next to his bed. He begins to look around for a missing piece of the Iron Giant; it is against his window. He opens the window and the piece flies away, flashing. The scene switches to Iceland, where we see other parts of the Iron Giant making their way back toward his head—a leg, an arm, a rolling gear, as the eyes open on his head.

This is what we talked about last time, Jesus has been implanted in us like a seed, like that piece of the Iron Giant in the box by Hogarth’s bed. When the Word Preached, enlivens the Word dormant in our souls, the Word rises as Faith, Hope, and Love. And in this way, we are all drawn to the Head which is Christ. Ephesians 1:10, The “plan for the fulness of time to unite [*anakephalaioo* (in Greek), recapitulate (in Latin) to bring together under one head] all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.”

So, where’s the head?



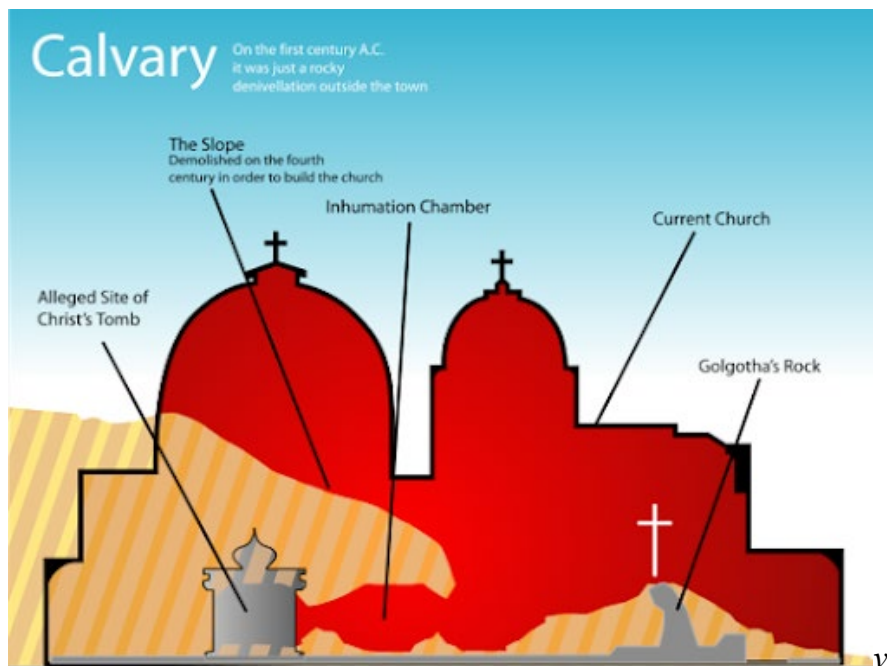
*"The Crucifixion with Saint Jerome and Saint Francis" by Pesellino (artist)
Florence, c. 1422-1457, The National Gallery of Art*

Have you ever noticed how so many ancient depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus picture a skull at the base of the cross?



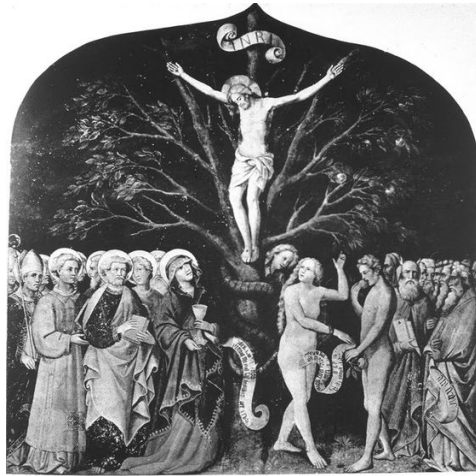
*"The Crucifixion with Saint Jerome and Saint Francis" by Pesellino (artist)
Florence, c. 1422-1457, The National Gallery of Art*

This is artwork from the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. That's the church commissioned by Constantine in 327 AD, to be built on the site of the garden in which Jesus was crucified and entombed.



Directly under the location of the cross, is the chapel of Adam, for according to tradition, Jesus was crucified on a tree directly over Adam's skull. That's why it's called Golgotha; Golgotha

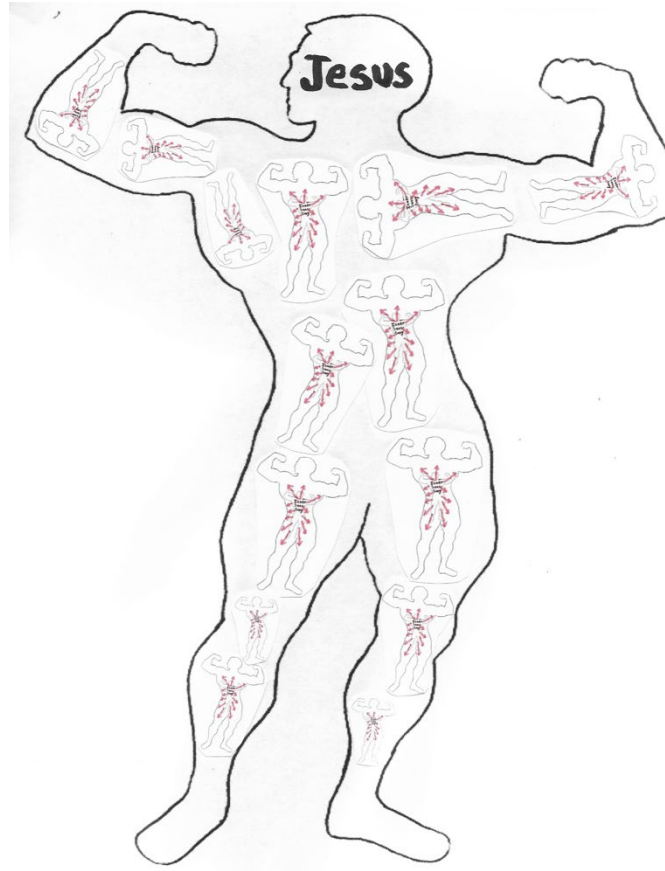
means “Place of the Skull.” Not just anyone’s skull; according to ancient Jewish and Christian legend, Melchizedek buried Adam’s skull in a tomb on Golgotha—Golgotha, that’s Aramaic; translated into Greek, and then, English: Calvary.^{vi} Whether or not any of that is what we would consider to be “historically accurate,” it is an historically accurate depiction of how St. Paul and the Early Church viewed the work of the atonement. Romans 5:18, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” “As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive... the *eschatos* Adam.”^{vii} In his genealogy, Luke even refers to Adam as “the Son of God,”^{viii} just two chapters after the Angel reveals that Jesus will be called “the Son of God.”^{ix}



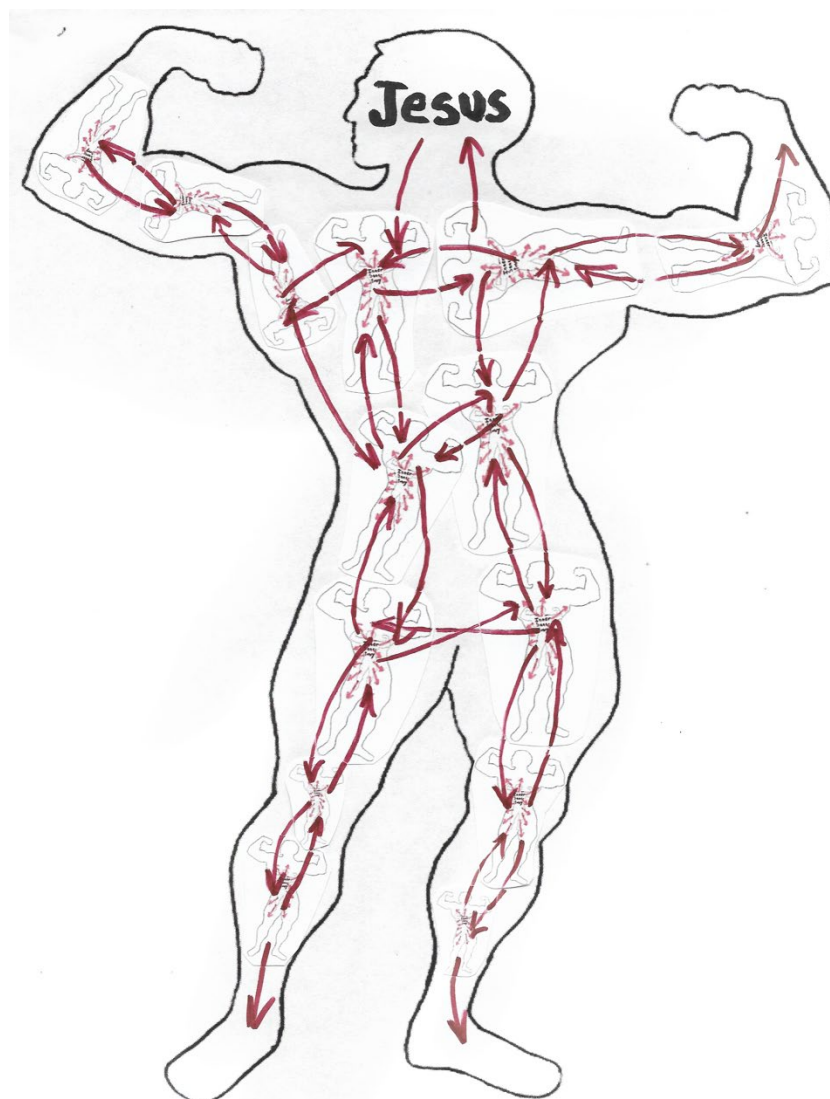
"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

Understand? If you take the Bible seriously, an amazing picture emerges. It’s as if Adam, which means humanity, was literally blown to pieces—at least 10 billion pieces—blown to pieces and died, when we took fruit from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil in the middle of the garden. And yet in the End, Adam will be drawn back together, as a body that is a bride, that is a temple, that is a city, when all the pieces of Adam come back to the tree of Life in the heart of the New Jerusalem—the body of the Super Man, the *Eschatos* Adam. And this decision of God, this judgment of God, to “consign all Adam to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all Adam,” was revealed in space and time in the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is the *Eschatos* Adam and the Head of the body.

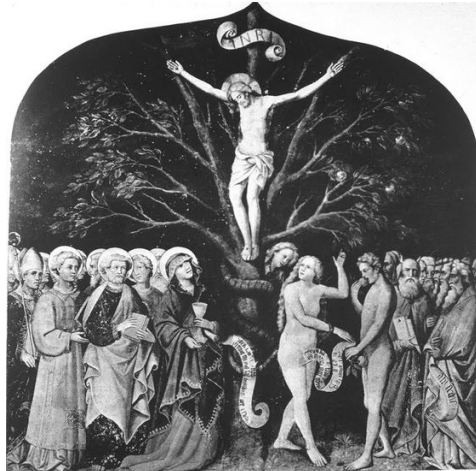
Therefore...



That decision is called Mercy, Relentless Love, or Grace. It's the decision to bleed.



For you see, that's what every member of a body constantly does. Every member loses its life, and finds its life, for the life is in the blood—a river of blood that flows throughout the whole body.



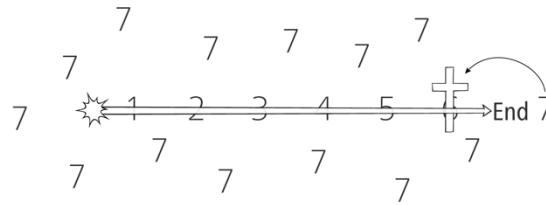
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Original Sin is taking the life of God in order to justify oneself. You can know if you've committed original sin by asking yourself, "Self, do I ever think of this life as "my Life." Scripture is clear that Jesus is "the Life." And to think you have a life, all your own, is to take the life of God and imprison him in a tomb that is your own ego. It's to imprison Jesus in "Me-sus."

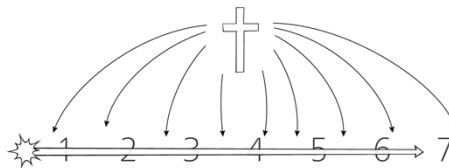
We took his life, but when we see that he fore-gave his life, we come back to the tree, and surrender the life—the life that's in the blood. And the Father gives us more life, as we all rise from the dead—one body. Eternal Life is a communion of constant sacrifice.

I don't think the sacrificial system was ever about paying for sin, and yet it was all about returning blood to the temple. Just like every member of your body constantly returns blood to your heart—literally loses its life and finds it, the life is in the blood; the spirit is life; the breath is life. With every breath you lose your life and find it. Life is respiration; "re-spirit-ation."

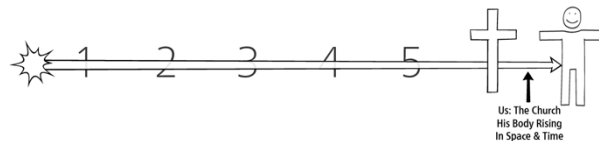
That decision to sacrifice is called Faith and even Faith—especially Faith—is a gift of Grace; It's the judgment of God within you. So, you can't pay for sin, except with the knowledge that you cannot pay, and God always pays. You can't pay for the knowledge of evil except with knowledge of the Good. And the Good is Grace. And Grace in you—is Christ in you. It's living knowledge that you receive through *dokizomai*—testing, trial and error, a pilgrimage through a wilderness. It's not knowledge in a book but living knowledge in your blood and bones. It's Jesus in you that draws you back to the tree, and causes you to say, "Father into your hands I commit my Spirit."



On the tree in the garden, God revealed the Eternal judgment that unites all humanity and even all of creation.



It's a decision that will one day fill all of space and time, for he will be all in all^x; for from him, through him, and to him are all things.



But even now, we can begin to experience the life of the age to come, as his body rises in us and as us—his temple: the body of Christ.

- It's not that some are consigned to disobedience and others receive mercy, because they acknowledge that once upon a time Christ sacrificed himself.
- It's not that some are consigned to disobedience and others receive mercy, but that all are consigned to disobedience, so that all could receive mercy, so that all would bleed mercy, with Christ and in Christ, and so become the Body of Christ.

And so, until you present yourself a sacrifice, you have no part in Christ, and yet Christ is intombed in you in space and time, Jesus in Me-sus—your ego. And that's why Paul is preaching the Word. "Don't be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...And so, present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your logical worship." In the words of Jesus "Pick up your cross and follow."

I get literally nauseous when I think about this, but conformed to this age and longing to draw a crowd, the Church has actually found a way to preach that Jesus was sacrificed so you don't have to sacrifice; Jesus was crucified so you don't need to be crucified; Jesus was punished so your business would thrive, and you could name it and claim it—a boat, a house, a sports car, maybe even a big ego, a “winner” gloating over the “losers.”

In Luke 14, Jesus turns and sees great crowds following him, and this is what he says, v. 27, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” And for those of us living in 21st century America, who may not get his point, because public crucifixion is illegal, he continues, v. 33, “Therefore, anyone of you, who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” And he's already made it clear that all that we have is not only boats, houses, and sportscars it's v. 26 “father, mother, children and yes, even [one's] own life,” in Greek “*psyche*,” it is your very perception of reality, it is our soul.

Sometimes people say, “Ok fine, I get it, ‘God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all, for from him through him and to him are all things.’” But what is that to me? Well, if you “get it,” it is presenting your body a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God, which is your logical worship. For the rest of Romans Paul will be telling us how that may look. But however, it does look, it will be carrying a cross on your back because you want to, you freely choose to. Sometimes people say, “Ok fine, I get it, ‘God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all, for from him, through him, and to him are all things.’” But what do I do now? Well, I think you do everything you thought you should've done before—don't serve idols; Tell the truth; Don't commit adultery; Never covet your neighbor's life or wife; Feed the poor; Build hospitals, Evangelize the world, but only with a cross on your back and following Jesus, otherwise you are just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.^{xi}

Now, this may sound like bad news, but the Old Rabbi Saul, thinks it's the very best of news. He writes, “By the compassions of God, I plead with you, I call to you... because I feel sorrow for you... present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God.”

So, what does Paul see, that, most of the time, I just don't seem to see? For starters, I think he sees that sacrifice is like a door, it's not payment, but it is a door—a door, to love, life, freedom, power, and ecstatic joy. It's like a door, but the door is in your mind, and once you pass through that door, sacrifice goes by another name. John writes, “In this is Love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son—his life, his own psyche—as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Love is sacrifice— “It's willing to will what another person wills.”

Love is sacrifice, and true sacrifice is Love. People ask, “what do I do?” and I bet you do it rather often. Jesus said, “whoever gives a cup of water to a child because he follows me, will not lose his reward”^{xii}—and you see, love is its own reward. On Judgement Day you'll say, “I don't remember giving you a cup of cold water,” and Jesus will say, “Exactly, you weren't trying to be good; you just were good, you had lost your psyche and look, you've found it in me.” But some may say, “I built churches in your name, started food banks in your name” and Jesus may say, “Who are you?” It appears that you think that you are your own creation and so, you've hidden my creation and so, you must sacrifice your old self to liberate your true self, but until your ready

you may remain alone in darkness, until you're ready to sacrifice. Sacrifice: That sounds like a curse, but, coming from God, even a curse is the greatest blessing. Sacrifice is love and love is sacrifice—And you know this.

Forty-one years ago, just about this time of year, I was driving my 67 Mustang through downtown Denver, psyching myself up to the sound of REO Speed Wagon singing, "Don't let her go." I was meeting my mom at Harry's Jewelers on 16th street because I needed support—I was fixing to ask the girl that I'd been dating for four years to Marry me; it terrified me, but the alternative terrified me more. Harry showed us a bunch of stones, described options, and then after a time he'd tell us the cost. I remember at one point, I fantasized about just jumping the counter, grabbing Harry by the collar and yelling, Harry, I don't give a turd about the diamond, just show me the rock that will cost everything I've got—all I've earned and all my student loan money. Harry, it needs to cost everything I've got, because I want to give everything I've got, because I've got this girl that wants to give all she's got—including her very soul—to me.

And you see, that's just what happened. I gave all I got, and I still give all I get—I mean my paycheck literally goes directly to Susan. I have never sacrificed for anyone in all the world, as much as I have sacrificed for that woman. On May 28th, 1983, I was literally stripped naked, and my body was offered to her, as her body was offered to me and I liked it, and still do. I find it to be a rather "fitting and easy yoke." Since then, I have literally lost my psyche: "Peter Hiatt, Peter Hiatt, Peter Hiatt" and found it: "Peter and Susan Hiatt, Susan and Peter Hiatt." Sometimes it's been incredibly painful, but I never thought of it as sacrifice, until I began to preach on Love and ask, "what is love?" and realized that in this is Love, the sacrifice and this sacrifice is Love.

Imagine if Jesus said to me, "Hey Peter, I made you male and female as a sign, to teach you of sacrificial communion is a covenant of Love. Peter, what if you could feel the joy you felt, in sacrificing for Susan, in sacrificing for me, and then discovered that I am in everyone you meet?" You know Jesus is our groom and we are his bride. And Paul has taught us that Jesus the Word, is somehow in, or even imprisoned in everyone you meet. Jesus said, "whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." If I believed that, I might actually give a cup of cold water to a child and think nothing of it, because I actually enjoyed doing it. Sacrifice is Love and Love is Life.

Sometime just before Christmas of 1987, I sacrificed my body to Susan and Susan sacrificed her body to me, and she got pregnant with another life—we named him Jonathan. In this age—the 6th day of creation—we've been taught that Life is the survival of the fittest. But it wasn't Charles Darwin that taught us that, it was a snake in a garden.

Any biologist can tell you; Life is not the Survival of the fittest; life is literally the sacrifice of the fittest.

- It's one molecule surrendered to another molecule.
- It's one cell freely sacrificing its autonomy to another cell.
- It's one member literally bleeding into another member in a body.
- It's the Logic of God revealed on the tree in the garden; it's Jesus.

The survival of the fittest explains death and why creation is eating itself. But the sacrifice of the fittest—when the first chooses to be last, when the exalted chooses to be humbled, when my fingers serve my hand, and my hand serves my fingers—that's life. And what if I'm a member in an even greater life—than just “me”? Sacrifice is Love, and Love is Life, and Life is Freedom.

And now this may be a bit counterintuitive, but no one is as free as the man who has picked up his cross. A man carrying a cross is not bound by the past, it's already been judged. He's not planning for the future, all he has is now—and yet now is the point that eternity touches time. Sacrifice is Love, and Love is Life, and life is Freedom, and Freedom is Power.

A man carrying a cross has surrendered all power. And yet, wasn't it a man carrying a cross that toppled the Roman Empire? And an admirer of that man carrying a different type of cross that conquered the British Empire? (Mahatma Gandhi claimed to have loved Christ, but didn't want to be called a “Christian,” for “Christians” looked so little like Christ.) History doesn't like to document this, but I've witnessed this—it isn't foreign policy, that topples dictators like Nicolai Ceausescu in communist Romania; In Romania, it was literally men and women singing Christmas carols around the home of a pastor who had picked up a cross—men and women, some of whom I met, singing Christmas Carols and refusing to stop even though the police had opened fire and were piling the bodied in big heaps in the central square in Timisoara, Romania.

Sacrifice changes the world, not simply because it topples principalities and powers—in this age there will always be more of those. The Sacrifice of Love changes this age because it is the very presence of the age to come; it's the Kingdom of God. It's where the first are last and the last are first, the humble are exalted and the exalted rejoice in being humbled; it's when and where everything is from him through him and to him—and “him” is Love.^{xiii} When you just testify to that Kingdom, with your actions, and even more, with your words, you go to war with the principalities and powers of this age.

Recently I was talking to a friend, she said “Peter, I don't understand it. I'm sharing this news with my old Christian friends and some of them just get so incredibly angry. Why is that?” And I said, “Well, it's because you're crucifying their idol, their god, their ego.” If we truly preach Jesus, which means “God is Salvation,” we will be crucifying “Me-sus,” the belief that we are our own salvation. We will be crucifying our own ego, and the egos of those around us. So, of course Jesus said, listen up disciples, you will be kicked out of the synagogues (that's what they called “the churches” back then) and you will be hated by all, for my name's sake—“God is Salvation.”^{xiv}

I can't tell you the number of Influential Christians that have confided in me that they are beginning to think, “God consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all... for from him, through him and to him are all things.” But they won't say it very loud, or very clearly, or very publicly, because they know they will be sacrificed, and I have often been one of them. I think I only said what I said, years ago, because God pushed me into it. But you say it, just by attending the Sanctuary, or sharing a link on-line. You say it—and I've come to consider you a miracle. And I'm praying you'll say it louder and louder, no matter how much they threaten, call you a heretic, or even start pounding the nails.

You know there was a time when most of the church believed that God actually “consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all, and so every knee would bow, and every tongue would give praise.” But that was also the time when they not only carried crosses, but the principalities and powers would routinely pound the nails. That was the time (from about 0-400AD), that the church changed the world.

But, of course, it was the spirit in the church—the spirit of Jesus that really changed the world. On the tree, he surrendered his spirit, his breathe, his life, and lo and behold, God just breathed it back into him again and Jesus rose from the dead; that’s power! And it would be wrong to think that God has stopped breathing into the broken Body of Christ; he breathes in us, and with us, and through us. And we breathe his spirit into each other. Faith is breathing—it’s losing your life and finding it.^{xv}

Jesus said “Whoever believes in me”—and we are in his body, correct? “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”^{xvi} (a sacrifice that dies, and yet is living)

You see eternal life is constant sacrifice, and the moment you surrender the life is the moment you receive the life. It’s an infinite river of eternal life. Once you know that, this world loses its grip on you, you become a danger to the world. And you can begin to party even here, even now. Once you know that in your blood and in your bones.

In Luke 14 Jesus says to the great crowds following him, “Whoever does not bear his cross and follow, cannot learn from me... renounce all that you have.” Immediately following, in Luke 15, he tells the story of a wealthy father with two sons, who have all that their father has. But the sons ask that he divide all that he has—that is their inheritance—between them. The younger son journeys to the far country and squanders all that he has in loose living. And this father lets him. If you don’t renounce all that you have, God will arrange for you to lose all that you have, anyway. That’s what happens in the far country. In fact, that’s what’s happening to each one of us right now—we each seek to save our life, but each of us is losing it—we’re dying. When the prodigal returns to the father, who runs out on the road to meet him, he says “I’m not worthy to be called your son.” And suddenly he becomes worthy; the father gives him all that he has, and begins to party saying, “My son was dead and is alive again.” The Older Brother resents the younger brother, and so leaves the party to weep and gnash his teeth in outer darkness. And at that, the father also leaves the party to join his resentful son in the outer darkness—where the boy complains, “You never gave me a thing.” And the father responds, “You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

Do the math: The Father gives all that he has, on three separate occasions, to two different people, as if all that he has is limitless, and it is! We think life is this delicate little thing that we have to keep safe and bottled up inside of us—when beyond this age, in the age to come, which is the age that actually is, there is nothing but infinite and eternal Life.

And so, what is it that keeps the sons from joining their father’s party? Well, you know! It’s just what keeps you from enjoying any party. We’re each worried about ourselves, and so won’t surrender our ego. We’re each trying to save ourselves, and so cannot be saved. But that’s why

we come to our worship service each week: to sacrifice “Me-sus,” and so liberate “Jesus,” to live his life in us, through us, and as us—and I mean all of us. It’s a party.

Sacrifice is Love and Love is Life and Life is Freedom and Freedom is Power—it’s power to party in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy, and pleasing to God

Communion

For on the night that he was betrayed by all of us, he took bread and broke it saying, this is my body given to you. Do his in ‘re-member-ance’ of me. And in the same way, he took the cup saying, this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.

- When one person sacrifices in a world that doesn’t sacrifice, it looks and feels like a man stripped, rejected, beaten, and nailed to a tree.
- When two people sacrifice in a world that doesn’t sacrifice, it looks like a marriage, bound by a covenant, and to them it often feels like a honeymoon.
- When everyone sacrifices and no one refuses to sacrifice, it is the age to come, it is the kingdom of eternal and infinite love, it is our home.

Communion in church in modern America usually drives me a bit nuts. I think it’s because so often we come to the table with such sorrow, as if to say, “Jesus, I’m such a schmuck, I sinned and cannot pay, and so you paid, and now I’ll try to pay by feeling like a low-life schmuck.” I think God in Christ Jesus wants to grab us, slap us, and say “Stop it. I pay for everything; Glad you noticed; But don’t you see? I’m teaching you to party.” From one side of the table, you see a broken body and hanging on a tree. But on the other side, we see the king on the throne and a party that will never stop.^{xvii}

And now if you say, “I’m not strong enough to bear my cross.” Well, Good News: That’s why he came.



“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”^{xviii} He came to bear it with you, in you, and even as you. And that makes the burden light. So, come to the table if you want to lose your life and find it.

Benediction

We’ll talk about this next week, but my wife is weird, she’s different than me. So, she just whispered into my ear, “Hey Peter, I just saw Jesus standing at the foot of the cross like this [with arms outstretched]. And he said, ‘Welcome Home.’”

So therefore, present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy, and perfected, which is your logical worship. But before you go let me just say, do not sacrifice to people. Always sacrifice to God, who is hidden in people. In other words, serve your worship to God, in even the most rundown of temples—That is, be enslaved to no one, and love everyone.”

Endnotes

ⁱ Some will quote Hebrews “he died once and for all...”
That’s true—once and for all what?

ⁱⁱ What are we testing every day as we carry our cross? Aren’t we testing Christ, who is the Good and the Life. Isn’t that what Adam is doing, even though God said, “the day you eat of it you will die?” Didn’t he lead us into temptation, that we would put him to the test and watch him pass the test and never want to put him to the test again? Isn’t that what every day of our journey through the age of the curse all about—learning to hate evil and love the Good, for we’ve witnessed him rising in our hearts?

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.250.html>

^{iv} <https://www.thescottsmithblog.com/2018/03/good-friday-hidden-meanings-of-golgotha.html>.

^v https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre; <https://www.thescottsmithblog.com/2018/03/good-friday-hidden-meanings-of-golgotha.html>.

^{vi} At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre they even have a little window, which supposedly reveals a crack in the rock where Jesus’ blood ran down and filled the skull of Adam.



<https://www.thescottsmithblog.com/2018/03/good-friday-hidden-meanings-of-golgotha.html>.

"And Jesus answered and said: Blessed art thou, Bartholomew, my beloved, because thou sawest this mystery, and now will I tell thee all things whatsoever thou askest me. For when I vanished away from the cross, then went I down into Hades that I might bring up Adam and all them that were with him, according to the supplication of Michael the archangel."

(The Apocryphal Gospel of Bartholomew)

Directly beneath Calvary, the Chapel of Adam is one of the oldest in the church. In the apse can be seen the crack in the rock caused, according to the earliest Christian tradition, by the earthquake which occurred at the moment of Jesus’ death. The crack was said to have allowed Christ’s blood to fall upon, and thereby redeem, Adam who was thought to have been buried here.

For the first Christians this was also the origin of the name Golgotha: the place of the skull. This tradition has inspired the iconography of the Cross, which places a skull and rivulets of blood at the foot of the Cross, and frequently a small cave.

<http://www.sepulchre.custodia.org/default.asp?id=4106>

^{vii} 1 Corinthians 15:22,45

^{viii} Luke 3:38

^{ix} Luke 1:35

^x 1 Corinthians 15:28

^{xi} 1 Corinthians 13

^{xii} Matthew 10:42, my paraphrase.

^{xiii} And this place is reality; every other place is an empty illusion, chaos, and the void.

^{xiv} Matthew 10:16-23, 24:9, Mark 13:9-13, 21:12-17, John 16:1-4

^{xv} This choice of his own being, in the full knowledge of what he did; this active willing to be the Son of the Father, perfect in obedience—is that in Jesus which responds and corresponds to the self-existence of God. Jesus rose at once to the height of his being, set himself down on the throne of his nature, in the act of subjecting himself to the will of the Father as his only good, the only reason of his existence. When he died on the cross, he did that, in the wild weather

of his outlying provinces in the torture of the body of his revelation, which he had done at home in glory and gladness. From the infinite beginning-for here I can speak only by contradictions-he completed and held fast the eternal circle of his existence in saying, 'Thy will, not mine, be done!'

-George MacDonald, sermon on [John 1:3-4](#).

It is in this sense that, as there may be pleasures in hell (God shield us from them), there may be something not all unlike pains in heaven (God grant us soon to taste them).

For in self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being. For the Eternal Word also gives Himself in sacrifice; and that not only on Calvary. For when He was crucified He "did that in the wild weather of His outlying provinces which He had done at home in glory and gladness" [George Macdonald]. From before the foundation of the world He surrenders begotten Deity back to begetting Deity in obedience. And as the Son glorifies the Father, so also the Father glorifies the Son. And, with submission, as becomes a layman, I think it was truly said "God loveth not Himself as Himself but as Goodness; and if there were aught better than God, He would love that and not Himself." From the highest to the lowest, self exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes the more truly self, to be thereupon yet the more abdicated, and so forever. This is not a heavenly law which we can escape by remaining earthly, nor an earthly law which we can escape by being saved. What is outside the system of self-giving is not earth, nor nature, nor "ordinary life," but simply and solely Hell. . . .

The golden apple of selfhood, thrown among the false gods, became an apple of discord because they scrambled for it. They did not know the first rule of the holy game, which is that every player must by all means touch the ball and then immediately pass it on. To be found with it in your hands is a fault: to cling to it, death. But when it flies to and fro among the players too swift for eye to follow, and the great master Himself leads the revelry, giving Himself eternally to His creatures in the generation, and back to Himself in the sacrifice, of the Word, then indeed the eternal dance "makes heaven drowsy with harmony." All pains and pleasures we have known on earth are early initiations in the movements of that dance: but the dance itself is strictly incomparable with the sufferings of this present time. As we draw nearer to its uncreated rhythm, pain and pleasure sink almost out of sight. There is joy in the dance, but it does not exist for the sake of joy. It does not even exist for the sake of good, or of love. It is Love Himself, and Good Himself, and therefore happy.

- C. S. Lewis, [The Problem of Pain](#)

^{xvi} John 11:25-26

^{xvii} ...not just the tree of knowledge in a little garden in the depths of my soul, I see the tree of Life in the Middle of a New Creation.

^{xviii} 1 Corinthians 13:7