



Galatians 6:1-5
This Is Us
“Our Mutual Spurring”

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September 20th, 2026

Last week we began a series looking at the four stated values of our denomination, and therefore of our church. We started with the value of “The Complete Local” and looked at Jesus’ address of seven different churches in Revelation with seven individual messages tailored to each local church and their local context. In this value, we see that our denomination, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), desire to help local churches like ours to flourish for Jesus, and do the hard work of supporting each church in its local context.

Today we look at the value of “A Livable Theology.” And some of you, as soon as you hear that, you’re like, “Isn’t ‘Livable Theology’ a contradiction in terms?” Right? I mean: **When we hear “Theology” many of us think, “head knowledge” not “livable.”** Seminary, theology degrees, and hard to understand books written centuries ago. We think of the Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew, Biblical history, and seeking to fit into our finite brains the knowledge and understanding of an infinite God. And it’s like, our heads hurt just *listening* to those last two sentences, let alone actually engaging in theological discourse.

But here’s the thing: Christian theology was never meant to be that way. Theology, at its root, is the study of God. That’s literally what the word means: “theo” is Greek for God, and “ology” comes from “logos,” which means word, or reason, or study. So, theology is words or studies about God – just like biology is the study of life, and musicology the study of music.

Now, Biblical theology *does* engage the mind, and it can be deeply intellectual. But it was never meant to be only an intellectual or academic exercise. It was meant to be lived. Deuteronomy, one of the oldest books in the Bible, says this in 6:6-7, **“These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you**

lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). There is nothing about academic settings. It’s on our hearts, and lived in the everyday places.

Today’s passage is from Romans. Romans is probably the book in the Bible that people associate the most with “theology” in the “difficult to understand and it’s all head knowledge” kind of way. And it’s true, you do have to put your thinking cap on when you read Romans, especially the first 11 chapters. Paul makes the case that whether you are Jewish, Gentile, religious, or non-religious, all people are in the same condition – that sin separates us from God and we have no recourse on our own to get right with him. And then he points us to Jesus: the forgiveness we have in him, his fulfillment of the Old Covenant, that Jesus gives us peace with God, that we’re adopted into God’s family through faith in Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit so as live for him, and on it goes.

Then at the end of chapter 11, Paul has no further case to make, so he sings. Literally, it’s a doxology – doxa, Greek for “praise/glory” plus the familiar “ology.” These are words of praise and glory for everything that comes before. So, let me read those last few verses of chapter 11 to start with **(Romans 11:33-36).**

So, in light of everything he’s written – all of it grounded in Old Testament history – Paul is completely Christo-centric in Romans. Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected is the pinnacle of it all. And what we just read is his gut-level response. It’s one of praise and wonder and awe at the majesty of God, at his depth of knowledge and understanding that far exceeds ours, try as we might. We cannot fully comprehend God: our theology, our words about him, will always fall short.

And then there’s the rhetorical question of verse 35: “Who has ever given to God that God should repay?” God doesn’t owe any of us anything. Who are we, in light of who he is and all he’s done? Nothing! We’ve got nothing on God! And Paul affirms it in the last verse: “For from him and through him and to him are all things.” We’ve contributed nothing to any of it – not physically, not spiritually. So, Paul concludes: “To him be the glory forever

and ever! Amen!” That’s how he ends eleven chapters of theology: with praise. So, that praise is our response to who God is – Amen?

Then we move right into the next chapter – and remember, when Paul wrote, the chapter and verse numbers weren’t there, so there was no sense of a break or a shift as they read it, and here’s what he writes in **Romans 12:1-2**.

Paul writes a lot of “therefores” throughout his letters, but perhaps none bear as much weight as this one. This “therefore” is in light of everything he’s written up until now – the culmination of all that heady theology. And with this therefore, he now transitions to the practical application of it all. How it impacts our living. This is what it’s all been leading to, and Paul is urging us toward it. So, in view of God’s mercy – which he named just a moment ago in 11:32, and which has been building since chapter 9 – we owe God everything. **Thus, we offer ourselves as “living sacrifices.”**

It’s an oxymoron. Every sacrifice in their time ended up dead. That’s what a sacrifice is – used up, done. It’s not a donation – it’s a sacrifice. And there’s a difference between the two. When you have bacon and eggs for breakfast, the chicken made a donation, but the pig made a sacrifice. 😊 Paul doesn’t say to offer ourselves as a donation. We’re called to offer ourselves as a sacrifice – but a living one, to which every one of us should say, “Praise God!” It’s like we’re part pig and part chicken. And the word for “offer” is the standard Biblical Greek word for bringing an offering to the altar. We’re placing ourselves at God’s disposal.

So: **What is it that we offer? Our bodies.** The Greek word is “somata.” This is not “flesh” in the metaphorical way Paul uses the Greek word “sarx” elsewhere to speak of our sin nature. This somata is literal: offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. In other words, offer all of yourself – your hands, your feet, your head, your heart...and more, because your body moves through time, so offer also your daily calendar, your phone, your tv, your relationships, your financial resources, the places where you live, work, and play. All of who you are is offered to God.

This is “holy and pleasing to God,” and is our “true and proper worship.” Worship is not confined to 75 minutes on a Sunday. Many people nowadays even confine worship to just music. That’s a very narrow view and isn’t supported by Scripture, including this passage. For Christians, when we live as God calls us and commands us to, all of life is worship (and all of a worship service, therefore), and it is holy and pleasing to God.

The problem is, the world tempts us, and we often let ourselves get conformed. **Paul’s phrase at the start of verse 2 literally reads, “Don’t let yourselves be shaped by this world.”** The word for “world” here is “age.” The word is “aeon” and it’s a time word, not a word about culture. Culture is neutral. Whether you wear a toga, a shirt and tie, or a hoodie sweatshirt, it doesn’t really matter. Gregorian chant, organ music, or worship band – doesn’t matter. This word “age” is deeper. It’s the spiritual and moral values around us. We don’t want to let ourselves be shaped by them. And in the rest of chapter 12, Paul names some of these things that are not to shape us, such as pride, status-seeking, retaliation, indifference to others. See, these are not cultural – they were problems then, and they’re problems still today. Paul is saying: Don’t be shaped by these things; instead, be shaped by Jesus.

How do we do this? Paul writes that we are to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds.” This is one verse a lot of people point to saying that theology is all about head-knowledge. But this isn’t just an intellectual renewal – it’s about how we perceive, judge, and make decisions in life. It’s re-orienting our minds, and our mindset, because sin impacts our thinking, which impacts our living. It’s knowledge applied to life. It’s essentially the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Like knowing that tomatoes are a fruit but having the wisdom not to put them in a fruit salad. Or knowing that onions are a vegetable but having the wisdom not to eat them. 😊

And then verse 2 ends with this phrase about how we will be able to “test and approve God’s good and perfect will.” Paul is not saying God’s will is subject to our approval. God is *not* subject to us. We are the ones who offer ourselves in response to him. We are subject to him. So, our wills, our desires, our selfishness, our pride...all of it is sacrificed. But it’s a living sacrifice: We

keep living, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we close things out, I want to come back to the parts about our bodies offered as a living sacrifice and our minds being renewed, because these two really go together. Paul is not describing two steps, as if you do one first and then the other. It's looking at ourselves from two angles, to give us a more complete picture of what it means to follow Jesus.

A mind that hasn't been transformed by God will offer its body to something else – whatever your mind is convinced is worth it. Could be your job, your hobbies, your phone, alcohol, pornography, politics, sports, music...whatever it is that your mind is fixated on is what you will offer yourself to – and it could be several different things.

A renewed mind connected to a body that isn't offered as a living sacrifice to God is just "ivory tower theology" that is never lived out. Both extremes are exactly what our denomination, and therefore our church, wants to help us avoid with this value of "a livable theology." We want our minds renewed by the Spirit, by God's word, by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus...and then lived out as we offer to God our bodies, our everyday lives, as a living sacrifice.

ECO describes "A Livable Theology" this way: "The strength of our faith is how we live out our Reformed beliefs in a relentlessly contextual way – renewed minds lead people to embody their faith in Jesus every day."¹ Notice the "renewed minds" and the idea that we "embody" our faith in Jesus every day. We see this flowing right out of today's passage where we are commanded to offer our bodies as living sacrifices and have our minds renewed and transformed. This is core to who we are. And the theology that we live out is a branch of Christian theology called "Reformed." (See screen.)

Reformed theology is often associated with theologians such as Saint Augustine in the early 400's A.D, the 16th Century French lawyer turned pastor and theologian John Calvin, the also 16th Century Scottish pastor and

theologian John Knox, and the 20th Century German pastor theologian, Karl Barth. There are others, but those are some of the key players who have helped shape our Reformed theology heritage.

And much of Reformed theology leans into the first 11 chapters of Romans, including such convictions as:

- All people are stained by sin, separated from God;
- God is the one who saves us – by his initiative, through Jesus’ death on the cross;
- God’s grace comes first, and faith is our response to it;
- God is sovereign over all of history;
- God is a God of covenant – not just contracts or pinky promises. He covenants with his people, and in Jesus he has fulfilled our side of that covenant.
- And everything, in all of life, is for the glory of God – and God alone.

And so what we see is that this livable theology isn’t about living in order to get right with God or earn our place or peace with him. Rather, it is all about God’s initiative – *his* unmerited grace, *his* undeserved mercy, *his* unearned love. **The commands in Scripture about how we live are always in response to what God has already done – such as his work on the cross, where Jesus literally says, “It is finished.”** That’s the ultimate thing that is “finished” by God that we respond to! Jesus has done the work, and it is finished! Our response is our living sacrifice and renewed minds and our true and proper worship that we offer to God.

Much like the value last week of “the complete local,” this “livable theology” value drives our church’s vision of leading people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play. It’s giving true and proper worship as we offer ourselves with renewed minds wherever we are. It’s truly an everyday vision built on everyday theology, that is rooted in Scripture. We’re all about discipling people to follow Jesus, who worshiped, prayed, taught, preached, healed, and disciplined people while he walked, talked, listened, sailed, ate, drank, laughed,

cried, and engaged in all the rest of life. Jesus had no ivory tower theology and never offered his body to worldly causes.

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, he shows us what it means to live each day to the glory of God. He exemplifies “livable theology.” And the good news is that though he died on the cross for us, he still lives – raised from the dead on the third day. Jesus is the first living sacrifice. And he calls you, and he calls me, to follow him, living out our theology each day, growing closer to him in our own discipleship, inviting others in, and bringing glory to God in all things. And *that* my friends, is the pattern of a livable theology that we are called to, as well. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ <https://eco-pres.org/vision/>