

## **27. ROMANS SERIES: Living Sacrifices**

### **Romans 12:1-8**

The apostle has completed the doctrinal section of his letter to the Romans, dealing especially with justification by faith and all that that means in its fullness. There has certainly already been application in the epistle, but application is chiefly the concern of Romans 12:1 on. There will still of course be doctrinal content in the remaining section of the letter, but the apostle's thoughts have turned chiefly to the consequences of justification for a person's life. We now begin to see the implications of Romans 1:1-11:36 in the life of the believer in this remaining portion of the epistle.

Please Read Romans 12:1-8

**NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE:** What are the mercies of God appealed to by Paul in Romans 12:1?

**Verse 1:** To understand this verse the book of Romans needs to be understood as a whole. In view of God's mercy to believers how are they to then live? This is the thought of Romans 12:1. It is also the chief concern of this second part of Romans. Here the apostle urges upon the believers in Rome a walk of gratitude toward God for the mercy He has shown to them. The mercy of God shown to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ calls for a life of whole-hearted dedication and obedience, and this as a response of gratitude and thankfulness toward God who has done so much for them in salvation.

The unbeliever is not requested to so live, for the unbeliever will gain nothing by such a life. Indeed the unbeliever is not even able to live such a life. The unbeliever must first become a believer before being able to offer his body as a living sacrifice, and so the unbeliever must first go to Christ by faith.

Christians are to actively and voluntarily yield (the meaning of '*present*' here) their entire being and personality (6:11-14; 1 Cor 6:19-20) as a living sacrifice, separated and acceptable to God. This is a sacrifice in which God delights from his people. It is a sacrifice which in view of all that God has done for believers is completely reasonable,

logical and to be expected as the outcome of Romans 1:1-11:36. This is Biblical worship, the whole-hearted consecration and dedication of the entire believer's being and life to God. It involves a life totally separated unto God, unreservedly committed to the Lord and His ways.

'By bodies he means not only our skin and bones but the totality of which we are composed. He adopted this word that he might more fully designate all that we are, for the members of the body are the instruments by which we carry out our purposes.'

John Calvin

**QUESTIONS:** Explain how a believer would yield his/her body as a living sacrifice?

How does a believer worship God? Where do Sunday worship services fit into all this?

**Verse 2:** Not only are we to be living sacrifices, but obviously we are also not to be conformed to this world. The world in this context is that mass of mankind opposed to God (1 Cor 1:20; 2:6; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4; Eph 2:2; 1 Jn 5:19). We must not let ourselves be moulded into conformity to those separated from God, so that we adopt and follow the world's way of life. To do so is to adopt the philosophy that our lives are our own to do with as we please.

**QUESTION:** How would a Christian demonstrate conformity to the world? Explain using illustrations.

Rather we are to be transformed by an inner change (1:28; 7:22-25) through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18; Philip 2:12,13; 2 Thess 2:13). This transformation is not merely external, for it is a complete transformation, working from the inside out. The word used indicates a passive work being done within the Christian, and refers to that work of the Holy Spirit within a believer through the means that God has provided for that end. It involves the renewing of a believer's mind as it becomes more and more influenced by godly stimuli (2 Cor 10:5), and more and more removed from ungodly influences.

**QUESTION:** What can we do to encourage this transformation process?

The word translated '*prove*,' in this verse is better translated as '*approve*' (Eph 6:10,17; Philip 4:8). The idea is that as we grow in conformity to God's will, and move more and more away from conformity to the world, we grow in our sense of approval for the revealed will of God. When we began our Christian walks it may have been difficult for

us to accept certain areas of God's revealed will, but as we continually offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God and our minds are increasingly renewed, we find ourselves more and more wholeheartedly approving of God's will.

**Verse 3:** This verse begins with an obvious connection to the previous verse. Here Paul gives an example of the process given in verse 2. One of the ways in which a Christian is to worship God in the way described in the previous two verses is in the area of the church.

As an apostle, the gift with which Paul has been invested for serving the church as unto God (1:5; 15:15; Eph 3:2,8), Paul identifies what appears to be an area of worldliness in the church at Rome. A spirit of arrogance and pride is identified by Paul, as is common to the world. Paul calls these believers back to a life of spiritual worship and transformation in full recognition of the grace of God in their Christian lives, for it is God who has made them what they truly are in Christ (1 Cor 4:7).

Believers are not to think of themselves as something they are not, which is to exaggerate their achievements and gifts (or in some cases to under value the gifts they have received from God). They are to exercise a sane mind, or an objective mind; that is to have a realistic and balanced assessment as regards their achievements and gifts, in order to determine how they have been equipped by God in order to serve Him.

The measure of faith that is mentioned in this verse is probably that trust in God whereby a person lays hold of God's promises for the discharge of his special office, and then does not reach beyond that, recognizing that all he is is what God has made him to be for the benefit of the whole church.

**Verses 4,5:** Paul uses the analogy of the human body to show the corporate nature of believers and the believer's need of the entire body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; 12:27; Col 1:24; 2:19). Believers are one in Christ, with each believer gifted in some way, yet in a different way so that the body is perfected together. There is diversity in unity demonstrated here.

The thought here is that the gifts given by Christ to the church are for the benefit of all the others within the body. As each part of a human body has a function or role to play for the benefit of the entire body, so each part of the church body has a function or role to play for the benefit of the others in the body. It is for this reason that each believer has been gifted in a specific and unique role, so that the individual believer is able to fulfil the function that he/she has been given within the body. Clearly each believer is needed in the church and each believer needs the others within the church. No believer is self-sufficient, but stands in need of the entire body of Christ for spiritual well being (1 Cor 12:12-24).

**NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE:** What are the practical implications of Romans 12:4,5?

**QUESTION:** What is a spiritual gift?

**Verse 6:** Each believer has a gift in order to serve the body in some specific and unique way. What is this gift that Paul is speaking about - it is a spiritual gift, a gift given by God to the believer so that he/she may serve the church in order to fulfil a specific function (1 Cor 12:11; 1 Pet 4:10). The Christian may have more than one gift, even as the apostle Paul was so gifted (2 Tim 1:11). Each Christian is gifted in some way in order to fulfil his/her role in the church.

These gifts are to be exercised for the good of the whole, and not for self-exaltation. Whatever the gift may be, everyone is to use their gifts in a manner consistent with the nature and design of their gifts, in order to serve a specific function, and not to reach beyond that role which God has given them.

**QUESTION:** How does a believer discover his/her gifts in order to fulfil his/her function in the church?

If the gift received is that of prophecy, then the believer is to use that in proportion to his faith in God's promises, not going beyond what is personally believed. The gift of prophecy is that of communicating truth directly from the Holy Spirit to men (Ex 7:1; 4:16; Mt 10:41; 13:57; Lk 4:24; 7:26-29) for instruction, exhortation, and consolation (1 Cor 13:2; 14:3,24). With the completion of the Canon of Scripture, this role has now ceased, it no longer being needed. Prophecy was essentially a first century gift needed to fulfil a function in the early church that was needed in the absence of the New Testament.

The gift of prophecy is said to continue by some in the area of preaching. Here the idea is that the Word of God originally delivered through direct revelation is now explained to the church through men gifted to do so.

**Verse 7:** If the gift is that of ministry or practical service (1 Cor 12:5; Eph 4:12), then the believer is to use that gift in serving. The idea expressed in this ministry is that of seeing that practical needs within the church are met.

If the gift is in the area of teaching or the opening up of the Scriptures, then the believer is to use that gift in teaching others. This gift finds expression in various areas of teaching, including preaching, Sunday School, catechism classes, etc.

**Verse 8:** If the gift is that of exhorting or the application of teaching to Christian living, then the believer is to use that gift in exhorting others. It will find expression in pastoral counselling and in day by day encouragement between believers in times of discouragement, joy, troubles, etc.

If the gift is that of giving, then the believer is to use that gift in the area of giving, with

singleness of mind and purity of motive (Eph 6:5; Col 3:22). This function involves a special ability to give self-sacrificially to others in a way that is beyond the norm of Christian experience. It is not a gift that is limited to the especially rich.

If the gift is that of leading or presiding over the church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17), then the believer is to use that gift in leading the church, with due attention and zeal.

If the gift is that of showing mercy or extending sympathy and understanding, as well as practical help to others, then the believer is to use that gift with all cheerfulness. This is a gift that is expressed in a way that is beyond the normal Christian expression of being merciful. It is a gift that enables the Christian gifted in this way to perpetually demonstrate great expressions of mercy to those in need.

‘For as nothing gives more solace to the sick or to anyone otherwise distressed, than to see those cheerful and prompt in assisting them, so to observe sadness in the countenance of those by whom assistance is given makes them feel despised.’

John Calvin

**QUESTIONS:** Have you identified the gifts in which the Lord has entrusted you? If so, in what way do you use them? If not, why not?

## INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

How is Romans 12:14 to be obeyed?

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