



Present Your Body a Living Sacrifice Romans 12

Introduction

For eleven chapters, Paul has been presenting Christian doctrine. He has shown that all are sinners and stand condemned before God. There is *none righteous, no, not one* (Romans 3:10). Men and women, in and of themselves, are powerless to save themselves: *by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight* (Romans 3:20). Therefore, there is nothing to look forward to but death: the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). However, because of His inestimable love, God has provided the remedy for our predicament. God sent His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to redeem us and set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). With His precious blood, Jesus propitiated the wrath of God against us (Romans 3:25). He reconciled us to God so that we who were helpless sinners, enemies of God (Romans 5:6-10), might become His children and heirs by faith. We are justified by faith alone by the grace of God (Romans 3:24-26).

Furthermore, those who are justified are sanctified by the Holy Spirit who indwells us and empowers us to live as God's true children (Romans 8:9-12). We are no longer slaves to sin. We are dead to sin and alive in Christ (Romans 6:2-4). We do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4). We are God's children and heirs, destined for glory (Romans 8:17)! But none of this is of ourselves. God has done it all by His grace and mercy according to His purpose, not of works but of Him who calls (Romans 9:11).

Paul ended his doctrinal teaching with a doxology of praise to God. *Oh, the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever. Amen* (Romans 11:33 and 36).

In chapters 12 through 16, Paul explains what Christian doctrine means in practical terms. He shows how Christians should respond in our hearts, our thoughts, our actions, our relationships, and our daily walk. He shows that those who know the truth and are of the truth must live the truth! Doctrine must be worked out by application. Paul's applications are based upon what he has taught about justification by faith. Those who are justified do not live in the same way as unbelievers. Believers demonstrate obedience which flows from faith. We are obedient in response to all that God has done for us. Our lives are theocentric, meaning that all we do is centered in God and His

grace toward us. "The legalist says 'Do these things and you will live,' but Paul is saying 'live and you will do these things.' Only when the power of sin is broken by what God did in Christ can ethical admonitions be effective (and not simply increase sin)" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

Outline of Romans 12

- I. Be a Living Sacrifice - Romans 12:1-2
- II. Be a Humble Servant - Romans 12:3-8
- III. Be Loving in All Relationships - Romans 12:9-21

I. Be a Living Sacrifice - Romans 12:1-2

God has redeemed His children through the Lord Jesus Christ to be set apart as living sacrifices for Him. Paul has already alluded to this in Romans 6:13: *And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead*. Christians have a new life (Romans 6:4) and we are to live it as a sacrifice, presenting ourselves as a gift to God. Paul urges us to do so.

- A. *By the mercies of God...present your bodies* - Romans 12:1

Mercy is favor shown to those who don't deserve it. God's mercies have been described in Romans 1-11. All are sinners by nature and under condemnation, deserving nothing but God's wrath. By His mercy, He gave His own Son to die and pardon our sins. *God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:4-7). God's mercies are so great, they give us strong motive and ability for obedience and sacrifice.

- 1. *Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice* - 12:1 (NASB)

The word *present* pictures the Old Testament action of bringing a sacrificial animal to the altar. Just as in the Old Testament, where the whole animal was presented as a sacrifice to God, so we are to present our *bodies*, our entire self.

The Old Testament sacrifices, although brought as living animals, were presented dead. They were burned on the altar and could not be presented again. The Christian's sacrifice is to be a *living*, continual sacrifice to God "presented voluntarily, with all one's energies, from day to day, until life shall close, so that it may be said that one has lived and died an offering made freely unto God" (Barnes Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

Our living sacrifice is *holy* because we are set apart to God. We no longer belong to ourselves, but to God who is holy. Redeemed sinners are dedicated to God.

2. Acceptable to God - 12:1

The offering of our bodies as living sacrifices is acceptable (or pleasing) to God. We should therefore be careful to do what is acceptable in His sight and not merely what pleases ourselves.

B. It is *your reasonable service* - Romans 12:1

If you are a Christian, presenting your body as a living sacrifice is the *reasonable* thing to do. It is the kind of service which is both possible and essential for one who has come to true knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Are you trusting Him for your salvation? Has the Holy Spirit made you alive in Jesus Christ? If He has, what can be more reasonable than to give yourself to Him? What is more logical than to serve God wholeheartedly in this way?" (Romans, Volume 4, James Montgomery Boice).

C. *And do not be conformed to this world* - Romans 12:2

The Greek word translated *world* is literally "age", a period of time. It refers to the spiritual and moral characteristics of the time in which we live. The J.B. Phillips translation of the New Testament reads, *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.* God has predestined believers *to be conformed to the image of His Son* (Romans 8:29), not to the image of the age (world) in which we live. *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is...Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3:1-2).

R.C. Sproul writes, "We are conformists from the time we are born until the time we die. We always feel peer pressure, the tug and struggle to be in line with contemporary tastes and standards. That's why watching contemporary culture and its customs is a very dangerous way for a Christian to educate his or her own conscience, because something that may be part of the acceptable standard of life in a given community may be radically alien to the kingdom of

God" (The Gospel of God, Romans). Christians are not to conform to the sinful ways of the world but rather be salt and light. We are to stand for God and demonstrate a more excellent way.

D. *Be transformed by the renewing of your mind* - Romans 12:2

Transformed in the Greek is "metamorphousthe", from which our English "metamorphosis" comes. It means a complete change from the inside out. The perfect tense of the verb denotes a continuing transformation — keep on being transformed. Rather than continuing on in worldly ways, Christians are to be committed to continually glorifying God in our lives.

The means by which we are transformed is the renewing of our minds. It is not just our behavior that changes; but our minds, our thinking, our perspectives, our values. As stated previously, *Set your mind on things above* (Colossians 3:2). *Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things* (Philippians 3:8).

E. *Prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* - Romans 12:2

The natural mind is totally opposed to God and His will. Paul made this clear in Romans 1. Only a renewed mind can know and surrender to God's will. "As a Christian is transformed in his mind and is made more like Christ, he comes to approve and desire God's will, not his own will for his life. Then he discovers that God's will is what is good for him, and that it pleases God, and is complete in every way. It is all he needs" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck).

II. Be a Humble Servant - Romans 12:3-8

Paul was an apostle by God's grace (12:3). From his position of authority, he humbly exhorts his readers, *every single one of you* (12:3, KJV), to have a realistic opinion of themselves as part of the body of Christ and to serve with the gifts they are given. This is what living sacrifices do.

A. Be realistic in judging yourself - Romans 12:3

Christians are not to think more highly of themselves than they should. We are not to pridefully overestimate our own importance. We are not to judge ourselves by worldly standards such as wealth, position, talents, titles, or personal accomplishments. Nor are we to judge ourselves in relation to other people. We are to judge *soberly*, with Jesus Christ as our standard, being wise

and modest in our opinions of ourselves. Each believer has been given a measure of faith. God is the one who has given it as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8), so there is no reason for pride, only gratitude. All that we are and all that we do is by the grace of God.

B. Be aware that you are a member of the body of Christ - Romans 12:4-5

Paul draws an analogy between the body of Christ and the human body. The human body has many parts and each part has a vital function. All parts work together for the good of the body. In a similar way, in the church, all members are *one body in Christ* and each member has an important function. We are all interrelated and interdependent. Christianity is made up of many individuals united as one spiritual body, joined together with Christ as the head (Ephesians 1:22-23). See also 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 and Ephesians 2:11-16.

C. Be diligent in exercising your gift - Romans 12:6-8

God gives each believer a gift (or gifts). These gifts differ with each person, but every gift is given according to God's grace. Each one is to use his or her gift faithfully and with the right attitude to help build up the body of Christ. Paul lists some different classes of gifts, but does not give an exhaustive list. 1 Corinthians 12-14 also deals with spiritual gifts.

1. *Prophecy* - 12:6

The Greek word translated *prophecy* means to "speak forth". In the first century, prophecy sometimes included prediction of the future or new revelation (Acts 11:27-28 and 21:10-11). Prophecy also included speaking forth the truth of God to encourage and strengthen believers (Acts 15:32). This is the sense in which it should be taken today, now that the canon of Scripture is complete. When Paul says that prophecy is to be *in proportion to our faith*, or literally *in agreement with the faith*, he means that it is always to agree with the standard of faith proclaimed in the gospel. Prophecy is never to contradict, add to, or take away from Scripture.

2. *Ministry* - 12:7

Ministry refers to Christian service. Paul is most likely referring to what we would think of as the duties of a deacon in caring for the external needs of the church. Those gifted in ministry are to use their gift in ministering. They are to be committed to what God has gifted them to do.

3. *Teaching* - 12:7

In Paul's day, there were few books and the canon

of Scripture was not complete. There was no New Testament, only letters to various churches written by the apostles. Teachers were a vital part of the body of Christ because Christians relied upon them for learning. It is important for Christians to learn the basic doctrines of the faith and it is the duty of the teacher to instruct.

4. *Exhortation* - 12:8

Martin Luther made a clear distinction between teachers and those who exhort. "The teacher transmits knowledge; the exhorter stimulates." The exhorter adds personal application and encouragement to instruction.

5. *Giving* - 12:8

Those who have the gift of giving are to give with *liberality*. The Greek word means "simplicity", referring to honesty and integrity. Those who give should have no ulterior motive. They should give single-mindedly, intent upon meeting the needs of others with no thoughts of thanks or drawing attention to themselves.

6. *Leading* - 12:8

He who leads may refer to one with the gift of administration (1 Corinthians 12:28). The word *lead* means literally "to stand before," and is translated as *ruler* in the King James Version. Leaders are to lead with *diligence*. They are to be serious about their work and determined in carrying it out.

7. *Showing mercy* - 12:8

Those with the gift of *mercy* are called to help care for the sick, poor, aged, and disabled. They are to do this with *cheerfulness*, with a pleasant and joyful heart and demeanor.

III. Be Loving in All Relationships - 12:9-21

Those who are living sacrifices, being transformed by the renewing of their minds, show love in all they do. Paul gives a lengthy list of exhortations to this effect.

A. Be loving in your relationships with believers - Romans 12:9-16

Jesus said, *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35). Paul explains what it means to love one another.

1. *Let love be without hypocrisy* - 12:9

The apostle Peter wrote on this subject, *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another*

fervently with a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22). The apostle John also considered it important, *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:18).

2. *Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good* - 12:9

"The Christian is to be utterly committed in his opposition to what is morally wrong and in his support of what is morally good" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield). To *abhor what is evil* is to hate it and turn away from it. Those who hate evil will not do evil.

The word *cling* means literally "to glue together". Are you a Christian? Glue yourself to what is good.

3. *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love* - 12:10

Christians are to be devoted to one another as to members of their own family. We are to treat one another as what we are, brothers and sisters in Christ.

4. *In honor giving preference to one another* - 12:10

Christians are to have mutual respect for each other. We are not to push for first place for ourselves but rather be genuine in courteously yielding to one another. In Ephesians 5:21, Paul wrote that we should be *submitting to one another in the fear of God*.

5. *Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord* - 12:11

Verses 11 and 12 deal with personal attitudes. Those who are being transformed by the renewing of their minds are not lazy but enthusiastic, in both heart and mind. We get excited about what God has given us to do. It is our God-given right to do so because we are servants of the Lord. All we do, we do for His glory!

6. *Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfast in prayer* - 12:12

The believer's hope is in Christ. He is the basis of our rejoicing (Colossians 1:27). *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls* (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Because of our hope, believers endure tribulation. As the world hated Christ, the world will also hate us and cause us troubles. We are not to put up with the world's hostility in a passive way, but steadfastly stand firm in our faith and continually pray. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul writes *pray without ceasing*. You don't have to wait to pray until you are alone in a quiet place. "God looks upon the heart; and the heart may pour forth its secret desires to Him even when in business, when conversing with a friend, when walking, when alone, and when in society. Thus the Christian may live a life of prayer" (Barnes Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

7. *Distributing to the needs of the saints* - 12:13

Christians need to be sensitive to the needs of others, to take an interest in and help those who are needy. This is not to be done in a condescending way, but as coming alongside to share in another's situation.

8. *Given to hospitality* - 12:13

This does not refer to social entertaining. Paul is thinking of opening one's home to those in need or for the purpose of furthering the gospel. This was very important in Paul's day because there were no church buildings and there were not many places for travelers to stay. Inns were expensive and dangerous places. Christians needed to open their homes to others, especially fellow believers. How can you show hospitality to others? Will you open your home for a Bible study, to a visiting preacher, to a foster child, or to missionaries home on furlough?

9. *Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse* - 12:14

Jesus is our example in this. On the cross, He prayed that the Father would forgive those who crucified Him. Similarly, Christians are to forgive and ask God to bless those who cause us trouble. See Matthew 5:43-44.

10. *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who mourn* - 12:15

We are to stand by one another and empathize with one another, not just with other believers but with everyone. When good things happen to others, we should be filled with joy. When bad things happen, we should be genuinely sorrowful and grieve with them. Often a person experiencing sorrow is greatly comforted by someone who will just sit and weep with them.

11. *Be of the same mind...Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble* - 12:16

Paul is speaking of Christian unity. The New International Version reads *live in harmony* with one another. We are to desire the same good things for others that we desire for ourselves, to be humble and teachable, not seeking honor for ourselves or proudly exalting ourselves above others. We are to follow the example of Jesus and associate freely with ordinary, everyday people. See also James 2:1-9. "Such an attitude, so contrary to the nature of the worldly man, comes naturally to those who are being transformed by the renewing of the mind, and it is always a sign of worldliness of the Church when its "leaders" no longer associate as readily and freely with humble people both inside and outside the Church as with those who are socially superior" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield). See also 1 Peter 3:8.

12. *Do not be wise in your own opinion* - 12:16

Paul already warned of this in Romans 11:25. A person who is wise in his own eyes cannot empathize with others and is a hindrance to unity in the church.

- B. Be loving in your relationships with all people
- Romans 12:17-21

Paul has already touched upon how Christians should behave towards unbelievers, but now that becomes his emphasis.

1. *Repay no one evil for evil* - 12:17

Christians are never to do evil to get even. We are obligated to always do what is right. *See to it that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all* (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

2. *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men* - 12:18

Christians are not to initiate conflict. We are to be peacemakers as far as is possible without sacrificing our obligation to the truth of God. We are not to be offensive, yet we are to stand firm in the gospel even when others take offense. People took offense at Jesus and Paul, but neither of them gave in to error or sin.

3. *Never take revenge* - 12:19-20

Vengeance is to be left to God. He is never vindictive. He will see that perfect justice is done. Christians are to return good for evil.

Paul quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22 which tells how to be a blessing to those who persecute you (12:14). *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.* R. C. Sproul (The Gospel of God, Romans) points out, "such actions exercise restraint on our own wickedness and also restrain our enemy's wickedness by heaping *coals of fire on his head*." This may refer to an Egyptian ritual in which a person demonstrated his repentance by carrying a pan of hot coals on his head. Thus, good deeds toward your enemy will affect a change in him and may bring him to repentance.

4. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* - 12:21

We are evil sinners, yet God has been good to us. We are to imitate God. If we respond to evil with evil in return, we will be overcome by evil. Paying back evil for evil causes evil to grow, both in our hearts and in the world. Christians are to overcome evil by doing good, demonstrating the truth of the gospel message, God's love, mercy, and grace toward sinners. "The idea of overcoming evil with good never occurred to men until the gospel was preached. It never has been acted upon except under the influences of the gospel" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

Applications

1. As a Christian you are called to present your body as a living sacrifice to God. Charles Hodge calls that "the first great duty of redeemed sinners" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans). What or whom are you sacrificing yourself to? Are you giving yourself to making money, to pleasure, power, education, material possessions, looking young, another person — or to God?
2. In what ways is your life being squeezed into the mold of the world? The way to transform your thinking is to learn God's way of thinking by reading and studying His word. What worldly activity will you set aside to make more time for reading and studying the Bible?
3. What is your opinion of yourself? Do you usually insist that you are right and that you must have your way? Or are you thoughtful and courteous toward others, desiring them to have what is best and desirable? How can you have a more sober and submissive attitude and actions?
4. How can you serve the body of Christ through use of the gifts God has given you? What service is God calling you to do in His name?
5. How can you show genuine love for other people? What can you do to promote unity in your church? How can you be a peacemaker without sacrificing the truth of the gospel? Who do you need to forgive and become a blessing to?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. Why is a Christian to be a *living sacrifice*?

2. a. ♥ (Heart Question) In what areas do you have the most difficulty not being squeezed into the mold of the world?

- b. What practical steps will you take to be transformed *by the renewing of your mind*?

Day Two: Read Romans 13:1-4.

3. In verse 1, what does Paul call every person to do? Why?

4. a. If you rebel against civil authority, who are you ultimately rebelling against?
- b. What is the result of such rebellion?

5. What is the purpose of governmental authority? Give verse.

6. a. What does Paul say will be the result if you demonstrate good behavior?
- b. What will be the result if you do evil?

Day Three: Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

7. a. From 1 Timothy 2:1-4, what more should Christians do besides simply obey the law?
- b. What reason is given for doing this?

8. What additional instruction does Peter give concerning Christians and governmental authority that Paul does not mention?

9. ? (Thought Question) Can you think of any instance when it would be permissible for a Christian to disobey governmental authority? See Acts 5:29 for help with your answer.

Day Four: Read Romans 13:5-7.

10. What two reasons does Paul give for submitting to government?
11. a. Why are taxes good and necessary?

b. From Numbers 18:21, who else was to be supported by the people and how was this to be done?

c. What work did these men do which necessitated the people supporting them? See Numbers 1:50-53 and 2 Chronicles 35:3.
12. a. What is the conclusion of Paul's argument concerning our obligation to government authorities?

b. How is Paul's conclusion a reflection of Jesus' teaching in Luke 20:21-25?

Day Five: Read Romans 13:8-10.

13. a. What is the one thing every person owes every other person? Why?

b. How do the following Scripture passages help explain this more fully?
John 13:34-35

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 John 4:7-12 and 21
14. a. Which of God's Ten Commandments does Paul mention in verse 9? Compare with Exodus 20:1-17.

b. ? (Thought Question) What do all these commandments have in common?
15. a. With what saying does Paul sum up all the commandments?

b. Use the references in the margin of your Bible to find the source of Paul's quote. Who was He quoting?

c. In Mark 12:30-31, what does Jesus say about the saying Paul quoted?

d. In James 2:8, what does the apostle James call this saying?
16. In what way does Paul say that love is the *fulfillment of the law*?

Day Six: Read Romans 13:11-14.

17. a. What does Paul say it is now time to do?
- b. What reasons does he give?
18. a. How many times do you find the words *let us* in this passage, and what is Paul calling us to do in each instance?
- b. Use the following Scripture passages to explain why Paul would exhort believers to *cast off the works of darkness*.
John 3:19-21
- John 8:12
- Ephesians 5:8
- Colossians 1:12-13
- 1 Peter 2:9
- 1 John 1:5-7
- c. Use Ephesians 6:13-17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8 to help explain what Paul means by putting on the *armor of light*.
19. a. ? (Thought Question) What do you think Paul means by *walk properly as in the day*?
- b. How are believers definitely not to walk?
20. a. What does Paul call us to *put on* in verse 14?
- b. What are we to make no provision for? Why is this important? See Romans 6:12 and 8:4-13.