

ROMANS 12

Living Sacrifices

TO THE
ROMANS

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

us, called to be
the gospel of God,
beforehand through his
Scriptures,³ concerning his
descended from David² according
and was declared to be the Son of
power according to the Spirit of holiness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is
heaven against all ungodlines
teousness of men, who by their
ness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For
known about God is plain to
God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For
attributes, namely, his eternal po

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For the last three chapters (9-11) we have seen Paul's intense burden for his own countrymen. And we have looked at the history of God's sovereignty in dealing with Israel. Having dealt with the *principles* of the gospel, and the *problems* of the gospel, he now deals with the *practice* of the gospel in the lives of Christians. It is typical of the teaching of the epistles that *belief* is followed by *behavior*, *doctrine*, and *deeds*.

The discussion of the spiritual life of the Christian is in two parts. First, Paul deals with the Christian as a believer (12:1-2), and then with the Christian as a *brother* (12:3-13).

His challenge to the believer has to do with the *believer's* body, which Paul now reveals to be the ultimate key to the practice of the victorious Christian life. It is of little value to know the truths of Romans 6-8 if the body is not surrendered so that the life of Christ can be expressed in the everyday affairs of life.

God beseeches the believer to make a presentation of his body to God. Not by coercion, but because it is the *proper* thing to do:

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

When we see a "therefore" in the Bible, it is always good to look and see what it's *there for*. Therefore indicates that something very important has preceded the current passage. In this case it has a simple explanation. God has saved us from our sin, from its penalty and power. He has saved us from self in all its features and forms. He has overruled the destinies of nations. He has triumphed in His grace and multiplied His mercies. He has, as it were, besieged us with His mercies, and overwhelmed us with unmerited favor.

THEREFORE, he beseeches us by the mercies of God to present our bodies as living sacrifices. It is the proper thing to do in light of all God's goodness.

It is not only the *proper* thing, but also the *practical* thing to do. It makes possible the practice of the principles found in Romans 1-8. God wants us to live a holy life in the home and on the highway, at the counter or the desk. The link between the two is a *presented body*.

As believers we can live our lives out on one of 3 levels: *sensual*, *soulish*, or *spiritual*. For instance, a person who is ruled by the physical is *sensual*. To be sensual doesn't mean we continuously live in the worst forms of physical indulgence. It simply means we are ruled by the senses.

On the other hand, it is possible for us to be *soulish* in our expression of the faith, to be ruled from the *intellect*, the *emotions*, or the *will*. This person may be a walking encyclopedia of Bible knowledge, yet without much spiritual fruit.

Or, they might be totally *emotion* driven. This person is always looking for the next emotional high. He or she gravitates toward emotional experiences, goose bumps, and the latest spiritual fads.

On the other hand, a believer might have an iron will. He or she may be great at making hard decisions like throwing away cigarettes, or breaking some other addiction.

Indeed, a believer may have two or even all three factors—intellect, emotions, and will, so that they appear to be an exemplary Christian. Yet at the same time they may not be spiritual at all. It is a very subtle trap.

To be truly spiritual the Holy Spirit must have complete control of us, and the key to this lies in the surrender of the body. If the Holy Spirit has control of the body, He has control of the whole man. The intellect, will, and emotions shall

all be controlled by Him. Then the person is a *spiritual Christian* expressing in all his ways the beauties of the Lord.

- The presentation of the body results in a transformed life.

We do not *worship* the body like the Greeks, who glorified it in their sculptures and their Olympic games. Nor do we *crucify* the body like the ascetics who considered the body to be evil, starving and mutilating it. We simply *consecrate* the body so that the Holy Spirit, who has made it His temple, might have free access to all its courts and free control over all its activities.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The word “*conformed*” refers to the act of an individual assuming an outward expression that does not accurately represent who he is within himself. J.B. Phillips translates this verse, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.”

The word “*world*” signifies “the condition of humanity, which, since the fall, is in spiritual darkness, with a nature, tendencies, and influences controlled by the powers of darkness in opposition to God, and now under the prince of this world.”

The world has its fads and fashions and they change continuously. Its “mold” exerts pressure on us all in terms of dress and diet, and far more serious areas of life such as morals, ethics, and religious beliefs.

The “world” is the devil’s lair for sinners and lure for saints. It is human life and society with God left out.

The believer whose body has been laid on the altar for God will not be conformed

to this world. He is morally changed. His life is not molded from the outside, but from within.

Romans 12:2

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

The word “transformed” occurs in only three other places in the N.T. It is used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 17:2), and it is used to describe the glorious change wrought in the believer when he steadfastly contemplates the Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is the word from which we get “metamorphosis.” The dictionary definition is “change of form or change of character.” The best example is the caterpillar which undergoes a total change from the time it enters its cocoon to when it emerges a beautiful butterfly, a change so remarkable it cannot be recognized.

It is said that “the face is the index of the soul.” When a believer truly dedicates his or her body to the Lord, then seeks the Lord throughout life, the imprint on their face cannot be matched by Max Factor.

Abraham Lincoln was once asked to appoint a certain man to a high government post. Lincoln said, “I don’t like his face.”

“But surely,” said the petitioner, “the man isn’t responsible for his face.” Lincoln replied, “Every man over forty is responsible for his face.”

The Holy Spirit works within the life of the believer by renewing the mind and transforming the soul.

And then Paul says,

Romans 12:2 (cont)

...that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Every Christian is responsible to discover for himself what God's will is for his life. As we spend time with God in a consecrated life, we will discover that, first, His will for us is *good*. What God plans for us is the best that omniscient wisdom and divine love can conceive.

And we will discover that His will for us is *acceptable*. God will not ask us to do that which we cannot accept. He brings us along life's path, maturing us as we go, so that when we come to Canaan and its giants, we are ready for them.

And we will finally discover that God's will for us is perfect. No plan of ours can improve on the plan of God. We only see bits and pieces; He sees the whole. In the end, we will look back and say, "His way for me was good, acceptable, and *perfect*."

Romans 12:3-8

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Next, Paul deals with spiritual gifts. He begins with a warning on the consequences of pride. They were not to start thinking they were better than others, but rather were all "members of one body" (vs. 4-5).

They were then encouraged to use their individual gifts for the benefit of the entire church (vs. 6-8). Our gifts are not given *to us* *for* us, but are to be used in building up the body of Christ.

They were to think of themselves with “sober judgment.” Paul makes it clear that each member of the church had been given a “measure of faith” (see 1 Cor. 12:11). So who can brag? The body of Christ, says Paul, is like a human body with all its members performing various functions (1 Cor. 12:12).

Unity in diversity is the theme that runs throughout this section. The Christian faith is not for Lone Rangers. It is meant to be a corporate experience where each member is contributing to the whole.

As for the “gifts” Paul mentions, they are as follows:

- **PROPHECY:** Communication of revealed truth that builds up believers.
- **SERVICE:** Practical service to help others.
- **TEACHING:** To provide guidance and moral instruction.
- **GIVING:** Cheerfully contributing to the needs of others.
- **ENCOURAGING:** Encouraging, comforting, and exhorting others.
- **LEADERSHIP:** To lead in the execution of good works.
- **MERCY:** Activities such as feeding the hungry, and caring for the sick and the aging.

Next, in verses 9-13, Paul delves into the realm of personal relationships:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Be genuine.

Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Know what to shun, know what to keep.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another. Message Bible says, “Be good friends who love deeply;

practice playing second fiddle.”

The Message Bible continues:

“Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame.” vs. 11 Keep the oil of the Word in your lamp on a daily basis.

“Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don’t quit in hard times; pray all the harder.” Vs. 12 If you keep your lamp filled with oil, you won’t spoil.

“Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.”—Vs 13 Be accessible.

Next, Paul deals with the issue of personal vengeance:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”—vs. 14

Don’t drop to your enemy’s level. Blessing and praying for them will keep you free.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”—vs. 15 Be happy for the happy. Don’t let jealousy in. And hurt with the hurting.

“Get along with each other; don’t be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don’t be the great somebody.”—vs. 16 Don’t be cliquish. Reach out to the lonely. Don’t consider yourself above others.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil” (vs. 17). For the most part, give the wrongs others commit against you to God.

“Live at peace with everyone.”—vs. 18 As much as you possibly can, make peace with others. The author of Hebrews wrote that we are to “make every effort to live in peace with all men” (Heb. 12:14).

And finally,

“Don’t insist on getting even; that’s not for you to do. ‘I’ll do the judging,’ says God. ‘I’ll take care of it.’”—vs. 19 We are not to take vengeance into our own hands. Instead:

Romans 12:20-21

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he’s thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don’t let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

