

# “...your reasonable service” –Part 1

- Romans 12

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## 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. 2 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. 3 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. 9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

***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.***

As he has been doing all along, Paul begins this chapter by addressing his “brethren.” While much of what he has been saying is certainly directed at his **Jewish** brethren, he is also clarifying throughout just where the Gentiles...*the church*...stands in the light of Christ’s redemption. For 11 chapters Paul has delved into the ‘deep end’ of theological truth about the free gift of our salvation and now in our chapter 12...and for several following chapters, he begins to express the practical application of all that he has expressed. Paul has spoken in length concerning how we cannot earn our standing with God. How Jesus has taken care of all of that Himself. Now he speaks of our response. Our living in light of our standing in Christ. The manifest truth of whether the first 11 chapters of Romans is a reality in one’s life. The text says that He *beseeches them*. He “earnestly exhorts,” and he “passionately calls them” *in light of the mercy God has shown toward them all* and the facts that he has so carefully presented, to:

1) **...present their bodies as a “living sacrifice.”** For many of us, the service unto our king, God’s service, is the stuff of *life*. And although we are in truth His slaves, He doesn’t force us! To be a “bond slave” is a life that one chooses. We are still able to exercise our free-will. We are *asked* to present ourselves as a sacrifice to Him! Our answer to Him on this matter...*and the heart with which we answer*, is the greatest litmus test of our true standing with Him. Our reply says whether or not we love Him and moreover just **how much** we love Him! Please note that He is asking for not just our *minds* and our *spirits*, but our *bodies*. There is no way to dance around the fact that God is seeking us to serve Him physically! Such a reality is far from a nuance, but in fact it is an issue that divides believers, churches, and whole denominations!



2) **...present our bodies “holy.”** Holiness is the overwhelming attribute of Jehovah God. In other words, we are called, *in our bodies*, to manifest purity and separation from the world. We are...in the flesh, to seek to be *like God*.

3) **...present our bodies a living sacrifice acceptable to God.** A sacrifice is something that we give up...give away...to honor, bless, and show our love to another. But what does it mean to be “acceptable to God?” Such a simple phrase while encompassing such a profoundly deep concept. If we are indeed being herein asked for such a sacrifice, it is clear then that we can clearly live our lives in a way that is *not* acceptable. We can even *give* in an “unacceptable manner.” Please note that to live in such a manner...to give ourselves in such a way, is a personal sacrifice. And it’s more than just something we symbolically set before God, but something that we live out. It is literally an act of worship. Something that we choose to do every day of our life...*or we do not*. Such a sacrifice requires ongoing daily action on our part. It is also apparent that we can on some level offer ourselves to God, but yet still not be an “acceptable” sacrifice. Cain, in the book of Genesis, found out this fact the hard way when he attempted to make a sacrifice to God that was *not* acceptable.

Paul states that such an offering ...such a service, is simply *reasonable*, in light of the “mercies” that He has bestowed upon us, the blessings He has given us. Paul is saying God is in no way asking too much of us. It is not extreme or excessive, but simply fair in light of what we are given. How often we struggle to find time or heart to serve God. Such a state merely shows that we fail to grasp the magnitude of His blessings and care! We fail to appreciate what God has done for us! Many of us also err in our thinking, believing that Paul is speaking merely of the time that we have set aside each week in which we *do* something religiously based. Like serving at church...working in the coffeehouse or cleaning ministry. But Paul is not inferring that we need to give up a few hours of watching TV in order to do something, *albeit that is a good start*, but Paul is speaking of *being* something. A life that has been surrendered to God wherein we have died to self and to this world, and now our living is wholly directed toward God and kingdom pursuits...towards glorifying Christ and blessing others. If this is a fact, then many many of us today stand in a grave light. Our recent world situation is suddenly causing our true lives to ‘go public.’ Many of us have been found wanting, in the respect that we have discovered...no doubt to our personal surprise, that we don’t love Christ first and we don’t love others more than ourselves. Many of us have found that our love of God and His community stops at the door of personal inconvenience and fleshly wants, and this despite the possible deadly ramifications. C. T. Studd once said “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.” Isaac Watts’ great hymn says the same thing: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my heart, my life, my all.”

***2 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.***

Paul continues in his instruction and calls us to not “*be conformed*” to this world. Now Jesus knew that men must live here and exist in a world that is not our own. John 17:14-16 “*I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They are not part of this world any more than I am.*”

But Satan seeks, through the constant draw of the world, to “conform” us into the image of this fallen culture around us. He does so individually as believers and corporately as the church today is looking more like the world and less like Christ all the time. As a church I believe we thought ourselves to be the embodiment of fellowship and community love for each other. I know I did! I, in my hubris, thought we were the example to all the rest. And yet it took just an inconvenient ‘breeze’ in many cases to bring that to an end. Individually, as more and more individuals who confess a faith in Christ, we are abandoning His explicit directions and

adopting a compromising lifestyle that looks far more like the unredeemed world than the crucified Savior. The truth lies in the old saying “...we become like our God...whoever or whatever that might be.”

We are being called instead to be “transformed” into the likeness of Christ. Such direction enlightens us to a truth concerning the Christian walk. And that is, that while we are *positionally* placed in the “complete and finished” category according to God’s “books,” we know in fact that our lives as children of God is a *journey* in which we *become* like Him.

**1Pe 5:10** “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”

**Ro 8:29** “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

How does this occur? Such “transformation” or literally “*metamorphosis*” occurs by the “renewing” or the changing and renovation of our minds.

**Titus 3:5** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

According to verse 2, one of the goals of such a transformation is to “prove we are genuine.” To prove through our living what is the “good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Prove to whom? To ourselves firstly, and then to the lost world around us. Ask yourself this: through these difficult days that we are currently living, is your choices, your priorities, your living *albeit strange*, any different than anyone else outside of the family of God? The question is therefore, *what are we doing to pursue and accomplish such a transformation?* ARE we renewing our minds? How is our minds changed? Much has to do with what we are seeing and what we are hearing.

**Matthew 6:22** - “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light...”

**Romans 10:17** – “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

**Galatians 3:2** – “Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by **hearing with faith?**”

What are you allowing into you? Because just like a diet of sweets and fats, what we put into us will transform us. This is why I am so troubled by our children attending public school...often 8 hours a day they are filled with a secular world view and an anti-God message, and then they come home and often allowed hours more of free access to TV and the internet to fill up some more.

**3** 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.

Paul goes to the “root” what is preventing such a righteous transformation, and that is *pride*. Our tendency is to bristle when we are confronted by the things we are reading here. We stiffen our necks and take the position that we know what’s best for us. In the medical world, high blood pressure is often called “the **silent killer**” because it typically has no symptoms until after it has done significant damage to the heart and arteries. In the spiritual world, our “silent killer” is pride. As we have recently covered here in our study of Romans, pride is a

double killer because it works like a cancer, slowly consuming us from the inside, and at the same time causing us blindness so we don't see it. The spiritual gravestones of many I have loved and ministered to are carried about in my heart, those who have spiritually 'died' to this spiritual 'pandemic.' We are called to think of ourselves "soberly": meaning *"moderation with self-control."* The first step, the first *proof* of the renewing of our minds, is *self observation*. An understanding and real introspective grasp of who and what we really are individually and personally. Knowing oneself honestly and critically. Living in true humility. Listening and acting upon the council of those around us who are trying to speak truth into our lives.

***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.***

According to verse 3, God has dealt each individual a "measure of faith" and now we hear that such was given to us for the purposes of serving the body of believers.

We are told that such gifts are not earned or deserved! They are simply a gift for the blessing of the individual and for the benefit of the whole body, *the church*. No one will stand alone. There is no such thing as a "church of one," no matter how we might try. And the fact is, one cannot live out a true Christian life outside of a local body. There are simply too many directives in scripture that can only be obeyed, only lived out, in a church body! We cannot operate as an island. That being said, we also then must realize that whatever we do singularly as we participate in a local body, we effect the whole. Whether that be loving "other-centered" service and blessing, or gossip, division, and a bad spirit. Whether I move, and act, and live in light of others and their welfare, or whether I will simply do as I want and expect everyone to live with my decisions.

The issue of the "body of Christ" is one of Paul's favorite subjects. He spent his life building the early church, and literally risked his life numerous times to see it survive and moreover thrive! Therefore he often preached for its purity and holiness, as well as its abundance and bold advance. He preached on its importance and its priority. He also spoke of our responsibility to it and our intrinsic participation in it as believers.

***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.***

God's gifts are "according to His grace." Meaning they are not something you can force or choose. I as a pastor can train you to exercise your gifts, but I can't give them to you. I can't make a preacher out of a man who isn't destined by God to be one. These are gifts enabled by the *Holy Spirit*. And, surprise surprise, God actually expects us to *use* them! If we simply 'bury them' away out of fear or dislike, we are sure to be judged harshly when we get to the end of the race. Matthew 25, in the story Christ gave concerning the use of such gifting, He exercises some serious wrath upon the one who does not use what God has given them: "*Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*" (Matthew 25:28-30)

**Prophecy** (verse 6) speaks of more than just *for-telling*. It is even more so an act of *forth-telling*. This is the one that can announce the Christian message with authority. If you are called to do it, ...then *do it*. If you are not, I would highly suggest you do not. Because if you look in scripture you will find that saying God said something

that He didn't generally brought the hammer down on you. This is a gift which is exercised both within and without the local church.

**Ministry:** This can be manifested in numerous ways. From children's work to the, coffeehouse, to the deacons. Ministry too is exercised inside and outside of the church. We are to "occupy ourselves" with such a calling.

**Teaching:** It is the gift of *explanation*. The one with such a gift is called to exercise his or her gift with genuine other-centered focus. Be aware with this one. Because teaching verbally counts for nothing if you do not live out that teaching in your life. I have known a lot of teachers in my life that spoke the right words and ideas...sometimes for years, to those around them, only to flush it all when they eventually went and did the opposite of what they had taught! The result was essentially a 'scorched-earth' exercise. They "burned down the village" and then walked away believing they were God's gift to humanity and that God would now use them for His kingdom pursuits. No, *He won't*.

**Exhortation:** A "spurring on to the practical duties" of our faith. This gift is practiced with gentle persuasion, and a leading example in the life of the beholder. This is a gifting I would expect to see in especially the older men and women of the church, and exercised toward the younger disciples as we read in Titus 2.

**Giving:** This is a gift many claim to have but few actually manifest. For the one who has been given such a gift, he or she lives it out in quiet regularity and God supplies the "ammo." Please note, this is not speaking of tithing...that is not a gift but the practice of every true Christian. This gifting speaks of the one who serves in such a manner "above and beyond the call of duty." This giving can of course be much more than money. I know some guys who should be and maybe are technically "retired," that are seemingly serving and working harder than they have in their whole life in the secular jobs. Because now they work full time for Jesus. To exercise this gift one need not have attended seminary. One just needs some tenacity! I told one guy that this so describes, that he works so hard for Christ that he is going to be three steps into heaven before he even knows he's dead! One mention on this gift: I have experienced a lot of guys who want to give as long as they get some credit. They try to put a check into my hands instead of just dropping it in the offering box. This is not for God, but rather for the individual. And for the record, *I never take those checks*.

**Leading:** Such a gift is not contrived or forced. It is a "born leader" situation, and such a gift is exercised with faithfulness, consistency, and humility. Lots of guys want their name plaque on the door...but they don't really want to lead. They want to be the pastor, but their lives are frankly shamefully full of pride and selfish pursuits. True leading can only be done through example.

**Mercy:** This is the encourager, the heart of gentle direction. Not just the supporter of the underdog, but a truth teller and lover with a true biblical love. These have ministries as care-givers and mentors.

The only way we will know these gifts and others actualized in our lives, is that we must die to ourselves. We must let go of our lives. We must be a "living sacrifice." There is no deal making involved. It is just a clear understanding of the magnitude of what Christ has done and is doing as your king. For those, it all is just our "reasonable service..."