

## **Sacrifice and Service**

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

Beginning with 12:1, Paul turns from theology to practice. He spent eleven chapters setting out what we are to believe. In the last five chapters he describes how we should live.

#### ***Day One: Romans 12:1 The Indicative and the Imperative***

In grammar, ‘indicative mood’ is the proper term for statements of fact; ‘imperative mood’ is the label for commands. Biblical scholars use the two to describe the structure of Paul’s theology: “The indicative precedes the imperative.” More simply, Paul generally begins his letters with theology, describing what Christ has done for us, before segueing into matters of practice, commanding what we should do in response to what Christ has done for us.

We see that in Romans 12, in two phrases: “*therefore*” references all that has gone before in Romans 1-11; “*in view of God’s mercy*” references what God did to save us, from the death of Christ for our sins (Romans 1-5), to the gift of the Spirit for our holiness (Romans 6-8), to the inclusion of gentiles within the people of God (Romans 9-11).

This is an important order to keep right in our own minds: the Christian life depends first and foremost on what Christ did for us, in his death for our sins and in his resurrection – and our resurrection with him – to new life. Whatever we do does not earn salvation, but responds to God’s grace in granting us salvation. In subsequent days, we’ll look at what God calls us to do. Today, take time to thank God for what he has done for you and in you.

#### ***Day Two: Romans 12:1***

*“Present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God.”*

This week’s sermon focused on this one clause, and its two ideas: (1) through what Christ did for us and in us, we are now alive from the dead, holy, and pleasing to God: this is an extraordinary and

surprising turn of events, for sinners to be rehabilitated, for us to be qualified for relationship with God; (2) in response, Paul urges us to present ourselves (‘bodies’ in this context is equivalent to ‘yourselves’) as an offering to God: not that we atone for anyone’s sins, or that we suffer death, but simply that we dedicate ourselves to God, as his own possession, for his use, at his own discretion.

Offer yourself to God, this morning, and each morning, for his pleasure, and for his use.

#### ***Day Three: Romans 12:1***

*“Present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God, which is your appropriate worship.”*

Here Paul takes a word used to describe what transpires in a formal sanctuary. ‘worship’, to describe the conduct of our daily lives.

In response to God’s work for us and in us, there is only one fitting act of worship. Attending church, singing praise songs, making offerings, serving in ministry, these are all legitimate acts of worship, as far as they go.

But that is precisely the point: they do not go far enough. The worship which honors God as he deserves is that we offer him our lives, for his glory, and for whatever purpose he would have for us.

In what ways do you worship God? Are these attempts to buy him off, to remove his claim on your life with something less than full self-renunciation? Or are they acts of worship, and part of your self-renunciation, and devotion to God?

#### ***Day Four: Romans 12:2 Be transformed, not conformed.***

*“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may approve the will of God, that which is good, and pleasing and perfect.”*

Paul reaches back to the downward spiral he described at the

beginning of this book, in Romans 1:18-32. There, those who knew God through creation and conscience did not *approve* him as God, so God gave them over to *unapproved minds*. They degraded their *bodies* with *shameful lusts*. Now Paul calls them to reverse that negative spiral, to offer their *bodies* to God, as *an act of worship*, with *mind renewed*, *approving* God's will, all that is *good, pleasing, and perfect*.

Disregard of God led to all manner of negative consequences. Now God is reversing that degradation, as we honor him, he rehabilitates our minds, our values, and our conduct. Thank God for a renewed mind that respects him, for renewed values that embrace him, and for renewed behavior that honors him. This is all his initiative, and our response.

**Day Five: Romans 12:4-5**

*"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*

As Paul sets out the foundations of Christian ethics and living, he calls us not only to worship God, but also to serve one another. Like a human body, the various limbs and organs of the church have differing functions, but each working effectively and harmoniously is essential to the overall health and welfare of the body. We may have different functions, but we are all part of the one body.

Think of three people in the church who serve in a capacity that impacts you, and give thanks for them today. Additionally, what do you do to serve the body: if you are currently serving, pray for those who benefit from your ministry. If you are not currently serving – and have no formidable and temporary reason why not – give

thought to what you could do, and take your rightful place in the body. Any human body with emaciated or paralyzed limbs suffers from the effect. So does any church body.

**Day Six: Romans 12:6-8**

*"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."*

Paul is concerned not only about what we do to serve the church, but also about the attitude with which we serve. Our ministry abilities come to us from God, by his grace. So we should not only use them (12:7), but we should use them with the generously, diligently, and cheerfully (12:8). Ministry is not something we do simply to help the church run effectively; it's something we do to honor God. And a definite bonus is to see him work through us in others' lives.

**Day Seven: Romans 12:3**

*<sup>3</sup>For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

This passage captures the core of Paul's concern when he speaks of ministry, not only here, but also in 1 Corinthians 12. As in our days, so in theirs, some ministries are more public than others; some are more dramatic than others. So almost inevitably, those who more public or dramatic gifts get swelled heads, and those with less public or dramatic gifts feel inferior.

So Paul reminds them – and us – that all ministry abilities are given by God, and graciously; they are not earned, nor do they mark out the performers as special or as inferior. All gifts come by grace; all gifts are necessary; no one is more special – or less necessary – than anyone else. If your ministry is public and dramatic, embrace this truth: you are no more special than anyone else. If your ministry is inconspicuous, embrace this truth: it is no less God-given, and God-honoring.