

Romans 12:1-8

Tom Constable in his notes on Romans writes: *In contrasting chapters 1—11 with chapters 12—16 of Romans, perhaps the most important distinction is that the first part deals primarily with God's actions for humanity, and the last part deals with people's actions in response to God's. This is an oversimplification of the book, but the distinction is a valid one...The first part is more information for belief whereas the last part is more exhortation for action. The first part stresses right relations with God and the last part right relations with other people.*

W. H. Griffith-Thomas explains the importance of Romans 12-16 this way: *After doctrine comes duty; after revelation, responsibility; after principles, practice* (Romans, p. 318). This morning we will examine 12:1-8 which I have outlined around 3 ideas which are connected to each other: Commitment, Thinking and Service.

I. Total Commitment is Urged Romans 12:1-2

A. The Basis of Commitment 12:1a

Simply stated the basis of making the commitment is “*the mercies of God*”. This phrase “*the mercies*” is a Hebraism for the many and varied manifestations of his mercy. For eleven chapters Paul has been unfolding the mercies of God. Indeed, the gospel is precisely God's mercy to undeserving sinners, in giving his Son to die for us, in justifying us freely by faith, in sending us his life-giving Spirit, and in making us his children. In particular, the key-word of Roman 9–11 is ‘*mercy*’. For salvation depends ‘not ... on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy’ (9:16), and his purpose is ‘*to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy*’ (9:23). Further, as the disobedient Gentiles ‘*have now received mercy*’, so too disobedient Israel will ‘*now receive mercy*’ (11:30f.). ‘*For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all*’ (11:32).

B. The Call to Commitment 12:1a

‘*Urge*’ is the Greek word *parakaleo* used over 50 times in the epistles. Literally it is ‘*to call to one's side*’ and is translated as admonish, comfort, console, beseech, encourage, exhort and here as urge. It is a mixture of entreaty and authority.

Tom Constable in his notes: *it lies between commanding and beseeching and is one of the tenderest expressions in the Bible*. Paul did not want to command because the attitude or motivation to present ourselves as living sacrifices should not be one of duty only but of honor, love, respect and awe at what God has done for us – his mercies.

The call is to *brethren* (adelphoi) the same word used in 1:13 as he shares his desire to come to them. All believers, irrespective of their ethnic origin, Jew or Gentile, are brothers and sisters in the one international family of God, and so all have precisely the same urging to present themselves to God as a living sacrifice.

C. The Content of the Commitment 12:1b

Present your bodies as living sacrifices. ‘*To present*’ – is written in the Greek aorist tense which in most cases indicates a one time act in the past as opposed to ongoing acts in the present. That raises the question: is this a one time decision or presentation to God or ongoing presentations to God in which one recommitts him or herself to God?

Personally I think this is a one time decisive presentation of our body to Jesus in which we live out the rest of our lives based on that presentation. There are 2 reasons I think this is a one time decision, the first of which is the aorist tense of the verb ‘*present*’ and the second is the context of sacrifice. Both the Jewish and Gentile audience would understand the significance of sacrifice. The Jews offered sacrifices almost daily to cover their sins; the Gentiles offered sacrifices to gain the favor of the gods. In both cases the sacrifices were total – they

were not simply slightly burned and survived but rather they were totally consumed. They were only used once. There were no second sacrifices of the same animal.

NASB translates '*your spiritual service*' but it is the Greek word *logikos* from which we get '*logic*'. Total commitment is the only logical, rational, reasonable decision to make. Halfway commitment is illogical and irrational.

The word translated '*body*' (*soma*) literally means your physical body. Present your body to the Lord as a living sacrifice. Someone may ask, "*Why would God want my body?*" Because if he's got your body, he's got you. But it is more than that. Think with me for a few minutes about the use of '*physical body*' in the New Testament.

According to 1 Cor. 6:19, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The very next verse states that we glorify God with our bodies. Between now and the day of your resurrection, God intends that the life of Jesus be manifested in your body (2 Cor. 4:10). When we stand before the Lord, we will answer for the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10). Therefore, we must keep our bodies pure from the defilement of sin (2 Cor. 7:1) by putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Rom. 8:13). This means offering the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness to the Lord (Rom. 6:12-13). If you do not discipline your body and keep it under control, you can be disqualified from ministry (1 Cor. 9:27). True sanctification means controlling your own body in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:4). We have the assurance that God intends that your body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23). One day your body will be raised immortal and incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:53) and your earthly body will be transformed to become like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

Your body matters to God! Your salvation is being worked out, not just in your soul or your spirit, but also in your physical body. You might call this Practical Christianity 101.

D. The Effect of Commitment 12:2

There are 2 commands in this verse – one negative '*do not be*' and one positive '*be*'. Both verbs are present passive imperatives. Passive indicates that you are being acted upon and present indicates it is continual. J. B. Phillips paraphrase catches the alternative: '*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.*'

First the negative effect – '*do not be conformed to this world*'. Conformed is the Greek word *suschematizo* from which we get the word '*scheme*' or '*pattern*'. The word '*world*' is better translated as '*age*' (*aion*). Do not allow yourself to be conformed to the schemes of this passing evil age. What is the spirit of this age? Simply stated it's the advancement of self. What will I get out of this? What's in it for me? What makes me happy? The scheme or pattern or way of thinking of the world in which we live is my happiness. That pattern affects believers as well as unbelievers.

Don't allow yourself to be controlled by that kind of thinking but instead be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is the positive command and again it is in the passive present – allow yourself to be transformed. How? By the renewing of your mind. This transformation must be done by someone other than ourselves (passive voice) and that person is the Holy Spirit. We are to submit to the Holy Spirit who brings about '*the renewing of your mind.*' As well as the authority of the Word of God. We also understand from the present tense of the verb that this is a process, a gradual transformation. The Christian is to allow himself to be changed continually over time so that his life conforms more and more to that of Christ.

Change the way you think and you will change the way you live.

The word '*transformation*' is Greek *metamorpho* or metamorphosis. It's the word used when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Interestingly enough in Scripture it is the same word used for the description of the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:2 and Mk. 9:2). Think of it this way. *When Jesus was transfigured, he did not*

cease to be Jesus. He was still who he had been moments before, but for a brief time, the curtain was pulled back, so to speak, and James, Peter and John saw as much of the true divinity of Christ as any man can see and still live. In that moment they saw the *'real Jesus,'* the true Son of God from heaven. He did not cease to be a man, but his true identity was revealed to them as *'true God of true God.'*

When the apostle John said that ***"now we are the children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known"*** (1 John 3:2), he was talking about our future when we are with the Lord in heaven. But it is also true in this life. God is in the transformation business, and you can't tell who will end where or what plans God has for you and me tomorrow. God is determined that we will all be like Jesus in the end. Romans 8:29 says that we are ***"predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."***

As this transformation takes place we know the will of God. That influences how we think about ourselves, others, and service with our gifts. Ultimately if you follow this line of thinking it embraces all our relationships - to each other (12:9–16), to evildoers and enemies (12:17–21), to the state (13:1–7), to the law (13:8–10), to the day of Christ's return (13:11–14) and to the *'weaker'* members of the Christian community (14:1–15:13).

II. Thinking Rightly is Commanded Romans 12:3-5

Three times in v. 3 Paul uses the word *'think'* (*phroneo*). In thinking about ourselves we must avoid both too high an estimate of ourselves but instead, and positively, we are to develop a sober judgment. How? First by reference to our faith, and secondly by reference to the body of Christ.

A. Thinking Rightly About Ourselves 12:3

The question to answer in v. 3 is the meaning of the word *'measure'* (*metron*). Is it an instrument for measuring or a measured quantity of something. Does it refer to the cup itself which is the standard for measuring or the quantity in the cup – half or full cup?

If the latter is correct, as many think, the thought would be that God gives a varying amount of faith to different Christians, and, being a divine apportionment, this will keep us humble. If it is the former, *'measure'* should really be translated *'standard.'* The idea is that God has allotted to each believer a standard of faith by which to measure himself—and that standard is Christ. I think measure is standard.

When one sees that Christ is the standard of measurement, he will not think of himself more highly than he ought, but rather think of himself with sober judgment.

B. Thinking Rightly About Others 12:4-5

This body idea underscores three characteristics of the Body of Christ: its unity, diversity, and mutuality. First, we will view its unity. Both verses 4 and 5 stress the one Body of which we are all members. All of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ belong to the same body – what the Scriptures call the Body of Christ.

Peter states it this way in 2 Pet. 1:4 *"He has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature."* Each of us derives our spiritual life from the same source – his divine nature. Therefore we are one body.

Second, while there exists a profound, real unity, there is also a corresponding real diversity: *"... these members do not all have the same function,"* (the same mode of acting) and as he will further illustrate the same gift. We function differently with different gifts. 1 Cor. 12:4-6.

Thirdly, we must not stress this truth of diversity without grasping the balancing truth of our mutuality: *'each member belongs to all the others'* (v. 5b). Literally *individually we are members of one another*. 1 Cor. 12:21-26.

We are not meant to be *'rugged individualists'*; rather we are intended to think of ourselves as part of one body.

Vertically, we are '*not our own*' but belong to Christ (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Horizontally, we belong to each other. (1 Cor. 12:21-26). Each of us has a critical part to play in the oneness that is the church; we need each other.

III. Serving With our Gifts is Necessary Romans 12:6-8

These verses are 1 of 4 sections in Scripture that mention spiritual gifts. 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4, 1 Pet. 4. Before we look at vv. 6-8 let me make a few comments about spiritual gifts. **First**, we all have gifts. No one is excluded. **Second**, our gifts differ in expression and effect. **Third**, all gifts are sourced in the Holy Spirit. He is the giver of the gifts as God wills. **Fourth**, the purpose of gifts is for the common good – the edification of others in the body of Christ. **Fifth**, the use of your gifts is a delight and not a duty. You find joy in using your gift. **Sixth**, none of the lists are exhaustive and if you combine all the lists that may not be exhaustive either. **Finally**, there is often a challenge in seeing the difference between a gift and a talent as both can be developed.

In vv. 5-8 Paul gives us a sample of 7 gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy. Prophecy while it can be predictive can also be the communication of revealed truth delivered in a manner that convicts and builds up the hearers. Oftentimes, I think the one who has this gift will have penetrating things to say about specific problems in society or life.

In any case the one with this gift has a restriction and unfortunately most translations say '*according to his faith*' but I suggest that since there is a definite article before faith it would be better to translate '*in agreement with the faith*'. That is, '*the prophet is to make sure that his message does not in any way contradict the Christian faith*' – the revealed truth of Scripture.

Serving is *diakonia*, (we get deacon) which is a generic word for a wide variety of ministries. For example, in Jerusalem the ministry of the Word by the apostles and the ministry of tables by the seven are both called *diakonia*; e.g. Acts 6:2-4 where wait on tables and ministry are *diakonia*. So whatever service gift you have, concentrate on using it.

Teaching is instruction of information for the mind and is concerned with knowledge.

Exhortation is *paraklesis* (v.1 translates it as '*urge*') and has the meaning to spur one onto good deeds as an appeal to the will.

Giving is capable of broad application within the body. We should practice giving with *haplotes* – simplicity, singleness of heart, not self-seeking or freedom from mixed motives. The idea is not so much giving lavishly as giving single-mindedly, with one motive to please the Lord.

Leading with diligence (same word is used in v. 11). Leadership in whatever capacity is to be exercised '*with diligence*' or '*eagerness*'. The leader must not be slack, but do his work well. If he does not, then all the followers are affected. Leaders should not become casual and careless; don't "wing it" but prepare and be ready.

Mercy is what God has shown to us and we are to show it to others – it could be to those who are struggling, those who are ill, challenged in some way – mentally or physically but whatever the case it is to be done with cheerfulness. It comes from the Greek *hilaron* from which we get '*hilarious*'. Same word used in 2 Cor. 9:7 in reference to giving – God loves a cheerful giver. It indicates great delight in doing it. God delights to show mercy and so should we.

Conclusion

If I can sum all this up I would say that these verses are God's altar call to true humility. If we grasp anything of the mercy of God we recognize how unworthy we are and how magnificent is God's mercy to not only save us and call us to himself but to give us a community of faith and opportunity to serve with the gifts he bestows.

So make the decision to present yourself to God or renew that commitment much like you would marriage vows. Think biblically about life, values, people, finances, and so forth as you place them into a biblical context – what does the Scripture say? Then serve with your gift. Get involved in the community and for the community of faith.