

# Called to Be Transformed

Romans 12:1-8  
SS Lesson for 05/26/2019

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 Cor 12:4-11

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Rom 12:1*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### TRANSFORMED INTO A LIVING SACRIFICE (ROM 12:1-2)

##### *Sacrifice of a holy body (1)*

- A holy body because of being renewed daily (2 Cor 4:16)
- A holy body because of being cleansed by God's purity (Heb 10:22)
- A holy body because of being acceptable to God through Jesus (1 Peter 2:5)
- A holy body because of being a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)
- A holy body because of having a new attitude of the mind (Eph 4:22-24)

##### *Sacrifice of not conforming to the world (2)*

- Not conformed because of the foreknowledge of God (Rom 8:29)
- Not conformed because of being delivered from this evil age (Gal 1:4)
- Not conformed because of not being friends with the world (James 4:4)
- Not conformed because of not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)
- Not conformed because of the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)

##### *Sacrifice using a transformed mind (2)*

- Transformed through reconciliation (Col 1:21-22)
- Transformed into a new self that is being renewed in the knowledge of God (Col 3:10)
- Transformed through rebirth (Titus 3:5)
- Transformed into being a citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20-21)

#### TRANSFORMED FOR HUMBLE SERVICE (ROM 12:3-5)

##### *A service that is humble (3)*

- Humble of spirit (Prov 16:18-19)
- Humble by not being wise in our own eyes (Prov 26:12)
- Humble according to God (Mic 6:8)
- Humble like that of an innocent child (Matt 18:2-4)
- Humble recognizing that all we have has been received from someone else (1 Cor 4:7)

##### *A service that has different functions (4)*

- Differing gifts that are irrevocable (Rom 11:29)
- Differing gifts that are from the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4)
- Differing gifts that are for the common good (1 Cor 12:7)
- Differing gifts that serve others (1 Pet 4:10)

##### *A service that is unified (5)*

- Unity through the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:5-6)
- Unity through being in agreement (1 Cor 1:10)
- Unity through being firm in one spirit (Phil 1:27)
- Unity through being like-mindedness (Phil 2:2)
- Unity through agreement (Matt 18:19-20)
- Unity through love (Col 2:2)

#### TRANSFORMED PROVIDING DIFFERING GIFTS (ROM 12:6-8)

##### *Gifts that are provided through God's grace (6)*

- Grace that is a gift from God through Jesus (Rom 5:15)
- Grace that is sufficient in weakness (2 Cor 12:9)
- Grace that works in us (1 Cor 15:10)
- Grace that is not by works (Rom 11:5-6)
- Grace through pressing on toward God's goal for us (Phil 3:12-14)

##### *Gifts that are edifying (7)*

- Edifying at every opportunity (Rom 14:19)
- Edifying by seeking the good of others (1 Cor 10:23-24)

Edifying because it is one of the Church's duties (Eph 4:10-13)  
Edifying through prayer (Jude 20)  
Edifying through seeking others good (Rom 15:1-2)  
*Gifts used as good stewards (8)*  
Good stewards because it is required (1 Cor 4:2)  
Good stewards so that in all things God may be praised (1 Peter 4:11)  
Good stewards so that we can share in the Master's happiness (Matt 25:20-21)  
Good stewards using whatever gifts God has provided (1 Peter 4:10)  
Good stewards because as we are trusted with little we can be trusted with much (Luke 16:10)

## CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

*The Christian Response to God's Grace (12:1-2)*

*The Christian's Responsibility to Minister the Grace of God to the Body (12:3-8)*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Church leaders often decry the so-called 80/20 rule in church operations: 80 percent of the members account for only 20 percent of the giving and volunteer service. Many areas of business and economics are viewed through the lens of the 80/20 rule, also known as “the Pareto principle.” Businesses, for example, may expect 80 percent of its customers to yield only 20 percent of the company’s sales revenue. Whether the formula is actually more like 85/15, 90/10, etc., is not the primary issue. The bigger picture is that a source of input can be expected to yield results far out of proportion to its size. Church leaders lament this. Many are the preachers and elders who have thought What if we could fully mobilize 100 percent of our membership? We could increase our ministry impact enormously! In turn, these musings lead one to wonder how to know when members were fully mobilized. How much volunteer time should a church expect from each of its members? Or are these even the right questions to be asking? Today’s lesson may surprise us in that regard. Make no mistake: this is a vitally important issue. Acceptance of Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9) must be followed by service to him as Master.

The Lesson Contexts of the previous three lessons apply, so that information need not be repeated here. Even so, a bigger picture needs to be kept in mind: Paul always understood (1) the church had its roots in the synagogue, (2) the gospel had its basis in the Jewish Scriptures, and (3) Jesus was the Messiah the Jews had long awaited. These three facts could not be ignored. The issue Paul confronted was how the Christians of Jewish background could welcome Christians of Gentile background as full-fledged members of the body of Christ. We see the members of the famous council of Jerusalem wrestling with this issue in Acts 15, perhaps around AD 51. Roman history mentions a dispute among the Jews in Rome about this same time. We surmise from comments made by the Roman historian Suetonius (lived about AD 69–122) that this was a nasty fight between Jews who had converted to Christianity and those who had not. The result was that Emperor Claudius (reigned AD 41–54) expelled all Jews from Rome, including a husband and wife by the names Aquila and Priscilla. Paul met these two Christians in Corinth afterward (Acts 18:2). It was likely therefore that Christians of Gentile background, who were not subject to the edict, remained in Rome as leaders of the church in the city. The death of Claudius in AD 54 opened the door for Jews to return to Rome after a few years of absence (including Aquila and Priscilla, per Romans 16:3). With Paul writing to the church in Rome in about AD 58, issues of reintegration there still needed to be sorted out. Paul was aware of these issues, given the content of the letter we now study.

### Key Verse: Rom 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*

## Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

**12:1-2.** The start of this practical section is indicated by Paul's exhortation **I urge** (the first word of v. 1 in the Gr. text). **Therefore** also shows a transition (cf. "therefore" in 3:20; 5:1; 8:1). The basis of Paul's exhortation is **God's mercy** (*oiktirmōn*, rendered "compassion" in 2 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 2:1; Col. 3:12, and "mercy" in Heb. 10:28). God's compassion has been described in detail in the first 11 chapters of Romans. The content of Paul's urging is **to offer your bodies** (cf. Rom. 6:13) **as living sacrifices**. A Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In the KJV "offer" is translated "present" (Rom. 12:1) and "yield" (6:13, 16, 19). The word "bodies," mindful of the Old Testament sacrifices, represents the totality of one's life and activities, of which his body is the vehicle of expression. In contrast with Old Testament sacrifices this is a "living" sacrifice. Such an offering is **holy** (set apart) **and pleasing** (cf. "pleasing" in 12:2) **to God**. Furthermore, it is **spiritual** (*logikēn*; cf. 1 Peter 2:2) **worship** (*latreian*). *Latreian* refers to any ministry performed for God, such as that of the priests and the Levites. Christians are believer-priests, identified with the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 7:23-28; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). A believer's offering of his total life as a sacrifice to God is therefore sacred service. In the light of Paul's closely reasoned and finely argued exposition of the mercies of God (Rom. 1-11), such an offering is obviously a desirable response for believers. Paul then stated general implications of a believer's offering his life to God as a sacrifice. Such an offering represents a complete change in lifestyle, involving both a negative and a positive aspect. First, Paul commanded, **Do not conform** (lit., "Do not be conformed"; this Gr. word occurs elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Peter 1:14) **any longer to the pattern of this world** (*aiōni*, "Age"). Living according to the lifestyle of "the present evil Age" (Gal. 1:4; cf. Eph. 1:21) must now be put aside. Then Paul commanded, **But be transformed** (pres. passive imper., "keep on being transformed") **by the renewing of your mind**. The Greek verb translated "transformed" (*metamorphousthe*) is seen in the English word "metamorphosis," a total change from inside out (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The key to this change is the "mind" (*noos*), the control center of one's attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions (cf. Eph. 4:22-23). As one's mind keeps on being made new by the spiritual input of God's Word, prayer, and Christian fellowship, his lifestyle keeps on being transformed. Paul added, **Then you will be able to test and approve** (*dokimazein*, "prove by testing" [1 Peter 1:7, "proved genuine"], i.e., ascertain) **what God's will is—His good, pleasing** (cf. Rom. 12:1), **and perfect will**. These three qualities are not attributes of God's will as the NIV and some other translations imply. Rather, Paul said that God's will itself is what is good, well-pleasing (to Him), and perfect. "Good," for example, is not an adjective (God's "good" will) but a noun (God's will is what is good—good, i.e., for each believer). 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. But only by being renewed spiritually can a believer ascertain, do, and enjoy the will of God.

**12:3-5.** A believer's consecration to God and his transformed lifestyle is demonstrated in his exercising his spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. As an apostle of Christ (**by the grace given me**; cf. 1:5; 15:15-16) he warned his readers individually (**every one of you**), **Do not think of yourself more highly** (*hyperphronein*, "think higher") **than you ought**. An inflated view of oneself is out of place in the Christian life. Then Paul encouraged them, **But rather think** (*phronein*) **of yourself with sober judgment** (*sōphronein*, "sound thinking"), **in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you**. God has given each believer some faith by which to serve Him. By his involved word play on various forms of the verb *phroneō*, "to think," Paul emphasized that human pride is wrong (cf. 3:27; 11:18, 20) partly because all natural abilities and spiritual gifts are from God. As a result every Christian should have a proper sense of humility and an awareness of his need to be involved with other members of Christ's body. As Paul explained, a parallelism exists between a believer's physical **body** which has parts with differing functions and the community of believers **in Christ** as a spiritual **body** (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:11-12, 15-16). The point is that **each member** functions to serve the body, not the body to serve the members. The diversity of the **many** accompanies the unity of the body. Therefore it is important to think soundly about oneself and to evaluate properly God's gifts and their uses.

**12:6-8.** Paul then applied what he had just said (vv. 3-5) to the exercise of God-given abilities for spiritual service (vv. 6-8). He built on the principle, **We have different gifts** (cf. v. 4, "not all have the same function"; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4). The grace-gifts (*charismata*) are **according to God's grace** (*charis*). He listed seven gifts, none of which—with the possible exception of **prophesying**—is a sign gift. The Greek text is much more abrupt than any English translation; **let him** is supplied for smoother English. One's "prophesying" is to be done **in proportion to his faith**; a better translation would be "in agreement to the (not 'his') faith." That is, prophesying—communicating God's message, to strengthen, encourage, and

comfort (1 Cor. 14:3)—is to be in right relationship to the body of truth already revealed (cf. “faith” as doctrine in Gal. 1:23; Jude 3, 20). The other six gifts mentioned here are **servicing... teaching... encouraging... contributing... leadership, and showing mercy**. Contributing to people’s needs is to be done with generosity (*en haplotēti*), not skimpily (cf. 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13). Managing, leading, or administering (*proistamenos*, lit., “standing before”; cf. *proistamenous*, “who are over,” 1 Thes. 5:12) is to be done **diligently** (*en spoudē*, “in eagerness, earnestness”), not lazily or halfheartedly. And bestowing mercy is to be done **cheerfully** (*en hilarotēti*, “in gladness”), not with sadness. Three of these seven gifts are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (prophets, teachers, administration); two (prophets and pastor-teachers) are included in Ephesians 4:11; and two (administering and serving) are listed in 1 Peter 4:10-11. Whatever one’s gift, he should exercise it faithfully as a stewardship from God.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Transformed Into a Living Sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2)**

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.

#### **Sacrifice of a holy body (1)**

*A holy body because of being renewed daily (2 Cor 4:16)*

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

*A holy body because of being cleansed by God's purity (Heb 10:22)*

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

*A holy body because of being acceptable to God through Jesus (1 Peter 2:5)*

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

*A holy body because of being a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)*

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

*A holy body because of having a new attitude of the mind (Eph 4:22-24)*

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

#### **Sacrifice of not conforming to the world (2)**

*Not conformed because of the foreknowledge of God (Rom 8:29)*

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

*Not conformed because of being delivered from this evil age (Gal 1:4)*

4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

*Not conformed because of not being friends with the world (James 4:4)*

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

*Not conformed because of not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)*

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

*Not conformed because of the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)*

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

## **Sacrifice using a transformed mind (2)**

*Transformed through reconciliation (Col 1:21-22)*

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

*Transformed into a new self that is being renewed in the knowledge of God (Col 3:10)*

10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

*Transformed through rebirth (Titus 3:5)*

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

*Transformed into being a citizens of Heaven (Phil 3:20-21)*

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

## **Transformed For Humble Service (Rom 12:3-5)**

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.

## **A service that is humble (3)**

*Humble of spirit (Prov 16:18-19)*

18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

*Humble by not being wise in our own eyes (Prov 26:12)*

12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

*Humble according to God (Mic 6:8)*

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

*Humble like that of an innocent child (Matt 18:2-4)*

2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

*Humble recognizing that all we have has been received from someone else (1 Cor 4:7)*

7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

#### **A service that has different functions (4)**

*Differing gifts that are irrevocable (Rom 11:29)*

29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

*Differing gifts that are from the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4)*

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

*Differing gifts that are for the common good (1 Cor 12:7)*

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

*Differing gifts that serve others (1 Pet 4:10)*

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

#### **A service that is unified (5)**

*Unity through the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:5-6)*

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Unity through being in agreement (1 Cor 1:10)*

10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

*Unity through being firm in one spirit (Phil 1:27)*

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

*Unity through being like-mindedness (Phil 2:2)*

2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

*Unity through agreement (Matt 18:19-20)*

19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

*Unity through love (Col 2:2)*

2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

## **Transformed Providing Differing Gifts (Rom 12:6-8)**

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.

### **Gifts that are provided through God's grace (6)**

*Grace that is a gift from God through Jesus (Rom 5:15)*

15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

*Grace that is sufficient in weakness (2 Cor 12:9)*

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

*Grace that works in us (1 Cor 15:10)*

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

*Grace that is not by works (Rom 11:5-6)*

5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

*Grace through pressing on toward God's goal for us (Phil 3:12-14)*

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

### **Gifts that are edifying (7)**

*Edifying at every opportunity (Rom 14:19)*

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

*Edifying by seeking the good of others (1 Cor 10:23-24)*

23 "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

*Edifying because it is one of the Church's duties (Eph 4:10-13)*

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

*Edifying through prayer (Jude 20)*

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

*Edifying through seeking others good (Rom 15:1-2)*

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

## Gifts used as good stewards (8)

*Good stewards because it is required (1 Cor 4:2)*

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

*Good stewards so that in all things God may be praised (1 Peter 4:11)*

11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

*Good stewards so that we can share in the Master's happiness (Matt 25:20-21)*

20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

*Good stewards using whatever gifts God has provided (1 Peter 4:10)*

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

*Good stewards because as we are trusted with little we can be trusted with much (Luke 16:10)*

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

#### **The Christian Response to God's Grace (12:1-2)**

Chapter 11 ends with a paean of praise to the wisdom and mercy of our God. But words alone are inadequate for the worship of such a God. Our response to the grace of God must extend to the worship of God by our works as well as our words. In verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12, Paul summarizes the acts of worship which the grace of God should inspire in the life of the Christian, the presentation of our physical bodies to God as instruments of righteousness and the transformation of our minds from a mind-set dictated by the world, to that declared by the Word.

Verses 3-8 focus our attention to the use of this renewed mind with respect to our spiritual gifts. The grace of God bestowed to us is also a grace to be bestowed through us by the use of God's gifts. Verses 9-21 broaden the focus to the renewed mind as it relates to our response to people and life's circumstances. Here the grace of God is to be reflected in our human relationships.

To return to the big picture for a moment, chapters 1-3a inform us that a God-kind of righteousness is required for salvation. Chapters 3b-5 instruct us that a God-kind of righteousness has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Chapters 6-8 tell us that a God-kind of righteousness can be realized in the Christian life through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's righteousness is vindicated in chapters 9-11, and in chapters 12-15 the righteousness of God is to be practically reflected in the life of the Christian.

**Primary Features of Paul's Call to Commitment in Romans 12:1-2.** Familiarity often breeds contempt and since we have heard the words of Romans 12:1 and 2 so often, we might think we will learn nothing new from them. Because we have time to merely survey the major features of chapter 12 let me draw your attention to several dimensions of Paul's call to dedication and service.

**(1) This call is for dedication and service in response to divine grace.** Paul has consistently taught that the distinguishing features of Christianity are grace and faith. The dedication of the Christian is urged 'because of the mercies of God described in previous chapters. It is not 'in order to' win God's favor, but to express our

deep gratitude for this grace and submission to His sovereignty. The terms ‘urge,’ ‘therefore’ and ‘mercies’ suggest that here is no demand of the Law, but a beseeching of grace.

**(2) Paul’s exhortation encompasses both an initial commitment and subsequent follow-up.** Generally speaking, we hear these verses used as an appeal to re-dedicate our lives to Christ. Often, because the appeal is emotional and without a proper doctrinal foundation, the individual is urged to periodically re-dedicate his life to Christ again. The tense of the infinitive ‘to present’ is such that it should be a final and decisive decision, something like the marriage commitment.

While verse one lays stress upon an initial and life-long commitment, verse two emphasizes the continuing obligation of the Christian in the service of worship which we owe God. Just as the marriage commitment needs to be consistently carried out, so our consecration to God must be manifested moment by moment.

**(3) The presentation of our minds and bodies to God is preliminary to specific divine guidance.** “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). All too often we desire God to submit His plan for our life as a proposal to us, and then we determine whether or not to ratify it. Such cannot be the case, for we see in these verses the principle of dedication before direction. Divine guidance comes as a result of dedication. God does not ‘cast His pearls before swine,’ nor does He reveal His directive will to the uncommitted.

**(4) Dedication and service to God are an act of worship.** Our Lord told the Samaritan woman that God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Paul concluded his defense of the righteousness of God in His dealings with both Jews and Gentiles with a paean of praise and worship. But worship extends beyond praise and adoration to service. I heard of a husband who told his wife that he loved her so much he would die for her. “That won’t be necessary,” she replied, “just pick up that dish towel and help me dry these dishes.” So, also, the service of the Christian is viewed as an act of worship: “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1).

**(5) The presentation of ourselves to God is a sacrificial act.** In the Old Testament dispensation, men expressed worship and devotion to God by means of sacrifice. So the presentation of our bodies is couched in sacrificial terminology. The nature of our sacrifice is different from that in the past in that it is a ‘living sacrifice’ (verse 1). Although the commitment of our lives to God can be identified with a point in time, our sacrifice is continual. And service to God is truly sacrificial. That is, saying no to our own desires, preferences, and tendencies is a sacrifice. Serving others in preference to ourselves is a sacrifice. The dedication and service Paul pleads for is that which subordinates our own interests to God’s and to others. As someone has put it: God first, others second; and self last.

**(6) Our dedication involves both mind and body.** In the Greek world as in our own, there was a very real need for emphasis upon the need to present our bodies as living and holy instruments to God. There was a prevalent view that the body was evil and that the mind was good. Consequently, there was little concern given to the deeds performed in the flesh. But it is not our physical bodies that are totally depraved; it is all our old nature. The new life of the Christian should be manifested through the body.

Thomas Manton, the Puritan minister, who at one time was Oliver Cromwell’s chaplain, likened a disobedient Christian to a child suffering from rickets: “Rickets cause great heads and weak feet. We are not only to dispute of the word, and talk of it, but to keep it. We must neither be all ear, nor all head, nor all tongue, but the feet must be exercised!

There was in Paul’s day (and is in ours as well) the opposite extreme of mere externalism and ritual where the body was employed without the mind. Paul calls for the dedication of both mind and body to divine service. Our dedication to God is based upon doctrine, rationally comprehended and responded to. As the NASV marginal note to verse 1 indicates, our dedication is a rational act of worship.

The late Dr. Rufus M. Jones used to tell the story of the man who protested, “Whenever I go to church, I feel like unscrewing my head and placing it under the seat, because in a religious meeting I never have any use for anything above my collar button!”

As we can see from this text, Christian dedication is not only based upon a mental apprehension of doctrine (eleven chapters of it!), but it is a life-long process of reshaping our entire outlook on life. We are to stop being squeezed into the mold of the world (to use J. B. Phillip’s terminology), and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Salvation commences the dawn of a new age to come. We have our citizenship changed from an

earthly kingdom to a heavenly one. We are now strangers and pilgrims (Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11; cf. Hebrews 11:13).

This calls for a change of allegiance, a new system of values. As we shall learn from chapter 13, it is no license to cast off the restrictions and regulations of civil government, but it does subject us to a higher law, the law of love.

The dedicated Christian is not one whose actions are shaped by his personal whims and desires, nor does he conform to the values and goals of the world about him. The Christian is one whose life is conformed to the Word of God and whose whole thought process is being re-shaped. Just as at the fall, man's intellectual faculties were corrupted, so the Christian experience should be a life-long process of restructuring our thinking in conformity to God's Word and God's will.

### **The Christian's Responsibility to Minister the Grace of God to the Body (12:3-8)**

Some commentators have found the connection between verses 1 and 2 and the rest of this chapter rather obscure. I understand the first two verses to be both an introduction and a summary of the final section of the epistle. Verses 1 and 2 are a call to dedication and service, while the remaining verses are a description of that service. These two verses are a general exhortation to the saint, while the remaining verses are pointedly and painfully specific.

But the connection between verses 1 and 2 and 3-8 is even more evident. We are exhorted to stop allowing the world to 'squeeze us into its mold' and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Verses 3-8 give us the first exercise of this new mind. It is no accident that the Greek root for 'think' is found four times in verse 3: "For I say to everyone among you by means of the grace given me not to **overthink** beyond what is proper to **think**, but to **think** so as to **think** soberly and sanely, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to each of you" (Romans 12:3, my translation).

How does one find his life reshaped by a renewed mind? By using that mind and obeying its dictates. The first thing we are to do with our new mind is to think about the gifts God has given us for serving the body of Christ, the church. Let me make several observations about verses 3-8.

**(1) The doctrine of spiritual gifts is both basic and crucial to our Christian experience.** It cannot be without significance that the first topic Paul brings up for the Christian to apply in his life is that of spiritual gifts. The emphasis on spiritual gifts in the epistle of First Corinthians also informs us that it is a basic, foundational truth for immature Christians to grasp and apply.

**(2) Spiritual gifts must be approached with a new mind.** In approaching spiritual gifts, there are two extremes to avoid, one is wishful thinking and the other is false humility or unbelief. Some think of this matter of spiritual gifts in terms of what they would like to be—a Billy Graham or the like. That is not realistic thinking. Others are falsely humble or just plain unbelieving. "I don't think I have any gift," they would say. We must take an honest, biblical look at ourselves, keeping several things in mind.

**(a) We must think in terms of reality.** If we have no ability to communicate verbally, it is doubtful that we are gifted to preach. If we are completely repulsed by suffering and tragedy, it is unrealistic to think we have the gift of mercy.

**(b) We must think in terms of grace.** Spiritual gifts are a manifestation of God's grace poured through us. Paul speaks through the grace (of apostleship) given to him (verse 3). He says in verse 6 that we "have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." Even the word '*charismata*' (verse 6) is a derivative of the word *charis*, grace. This means it does not come from us, but from God, not deserved, but freely bestowed. As we have freely received our gifts, so we should freely give of them to others.

**(c) We must think in terms of service.** It is obvious that gifts imply service to others. They are not given for our individual benefit primarily, but for the good of the body (verses 4-5). Our area of service is that sphere of activity for which our gifts equip us. We should not pattern our ministry after that of others, for each has his unique contribution to the body (verse 4).

**(d) We must think in terms of faith.** The Christian life is a life of faith. Grace is never appropriated by feverish activity, but by faith. So the grace of God manifested in terms of spiritual gifts is appropriated by faith. Although we dare not 'over-think' ourselves concerning gifts, neither should we underestimate what God can accomplish through us. Surely we would all agree that it takes much faith for us to conclude that God will use us to achieve His purposes.

I understand the expression ‘as God has allotted to each a measure of faith’ (verse 3) to refer to the serving faith which God bestows on every Christian. Just as God gives the unbeliever saving faith to believe (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29), so He gives each Christian a measure of serving faith to trust Him to work through his life to bless others. Divinely speaking, our effectiveness is determined by God the Father (1 Corinthians 12:6), but humanly speaking, it depends on our faith (a faith which comes ultimately from God, verse 4).

**(3) The list of spiritual gifts Paul gives is a partial one.** Paul does not claim that the gifts enumerated in verses 6-8 are the only gifts available. A comparison with 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4 informs us that this listing is not complete. Indeed, all the gifts mentioned in the New Testament may not be a complete listing either. It is significant that the so-called charismatic gifts are not mentioned.

Before we press on, let us briefly define the gifts which are listed here.

Prophecy	The God-given ability to speak directly and infallibly for God, concerning present or future realities.
Service	The God-given ability to minister to the spiritual needs of the saints through ministering to their physical and material needs.
Teaching	The God-given ability to communicate the truths of the Word of God.
Exhortation	The God-given ability to encourage and comfort.
Giving	The God-given ability to minister to others by meeting their material (or monetary) needs.
Leading	The God-given ability to motivate and mobilize the people of God.
Mercy	The God-given ability to minister to the miserable.

**(4) Spiritual gifts should determine our priorities.** Look with me at verses 7 and 8a: “if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation” (Romans 12:7, 8a). The emphasis in these verses is that we are to devote ourselves to doing what we are gifted to do. If your gift is teaching, then teach. When there are too many things to do and too little time to do them, devote yourself to do what God has especially equipped you to do.

**(5) Each spiritual gift has its own peculiar pitfalls.** In these verses concerning spiritual gifts, we are instructed by inference that each gift has its own peculiar pitfalls. I would gather that the danger of the prophet was to abuse his prophetic gift by going beyond that which God had revealed and passing off his own ideas as God-inspired, a danger not entirely foreign to the preacher.

**The one who gives is to do so with simplicity.** Simplicity in the New Testament refers to both sincerity of motive and generosity. The giver is in danger of being miserly with his gifts or in giving for ulterior purposes, such as the recognition and praise he might gain.

**The one who leads is to lead with diligence** (verse 8). Especially in the Lord’s work there is the mentality that since it is the Lord’s work, any feeble effort is sufficient. It appears to be volunteer work, and whatever is voluntary need not be first-class. I have often heard the expression, “It’s good enough for a government job.” Such seems to be the danger for the Christian leader, especially when those who are to follow lack commitment.

**Finally, the one who is gifted with mercy is in danger of developing a vinegar personality.** Nothing is more neglected and more unnoticed than work among the unlovely. Often the work is unrewarding in terms of dramatic successes or grateful words of thanks. It is at times like this that we can do a work for God but with a begrudging attitude. Such work will not achieve its desired end.

With respect to spiritual gifts we should understand that they are a manifestation of divine grace, appropriated by faith, given to every saint for the growth and maintenance of the body of Christ. We are to discover our gifts through the exercise of our renewed minds and to put our gifts to use, noting the dangers which attend each gift. In this way, the grace of God is ministered through the Christian to the body and the world.

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/14-new-mind-romans-12>)*

## ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

Two principles seem to present themselves in today's lesson. First, all the gifts Paul has listed call for sacrifice. How do we become a "living sacrifice"? Paul implies that it happens by the exercise of our spiritual gifts. As we do, we will find ourselves transformed. But let us not fool ourselves into thinking that we are transformed by our own efforts. We are transformed into a living sacrifice through the work of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that gives us the passion and skills for a specific gift or gifts within the church. This leads to a second great principle: spiritual gifts are all for the unity and benefit of the church. We are not called to prophesy to ourselves, give to ourselves, or show mercy to ourselves. The gifts Paul lists are necessary for the church to be all that Christ intended her to be.

## ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

Live for the Lord - Paul earnestly pleaded with the New Testament Christians: since God has shown great favor and love toward you, won't you please live for Him? He longs for everyone to offer Him their minds, hearts, hands, and feet, so everything is available to Him.

A Living Sacrifice - During Paul's day, the Jewish people understood dead, animal sacrifices being offered on the altar, but this idea of being a living sacrifice was a new concept. It is not just a onetime offering, but continually allowing God to take every aspect of your life to build up His kingdom. Paul specifically described the kind of sacrifice—it's when God alone purifies the heart and mind, slowly burning away the self-centeredness and the flesh. He grows within the person a desire for worship, praising God for all of His goodness, longing to offer service to the Father with an attitude of thanksgiving.

Ignore the World, Crucify the Flesh - The world and one's flesh constantly beckon God's children to go against His truth and His desires. The deceitful neon signs flash brightly, but the real truth is found in drawing close to Christ and allowing Him to change you to look more like Him.

Use Your Spiritual Gift - Paul also taught about spiritual gifts, but he first offered a warning about haughty, prideful thinking. Each person in the Body is given a special gift to use for God's kingdom. In order for God to be properly represented as the Body of Christ, each person needs to be exercising his or her gift. God's Holy Spirit distributes the gifts according to the Father's grace, not our merit.

Be Transformed - A transformed Christian is Christ-minded, thinking from a divine perspective. That's what God wants for each of His children. As the Father's children are changed by the Lord, increasingly living according to His will, outsiders will observe and desire the same.