

UNIT 22—Living Sacrifices/Romans 12:1-8



TEXT

Living Sacrifices

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³For 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. ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We 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. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if 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.

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

Which is the best title for this passage?

☐ Getting Practical ☐ A Call for Change ☐ How to Live Together ☐ Knowing God's Will

Second Reading/Big Idea

What is different about this passage from what you have been reading in the past chapters?

SEARCH

1. After Paul's conclusion in 11:30-32, in what new direction is he going here? (v. 1)

2. How do Romans 6:13 and 8:13 illustrate what Paul means to be "a living sacrifice"?

3. From verses 1-3, how might a "transformed" life differ from a "conformed" one in terms of:

motivation? (v. 1)

sense of purpose? (v. 1)

decision-making? (v. 2)

self-image? (v. 3)

attitude toward others? (v. 3)

4. What words reveal the attitudes with which we are to use our gifts? (vv. 4-8)

APPLY

What is one practical way you will offer yourself as a "living sacrifice" to God this week?

Affirmation. Here is a totally different approach to Application. Instead of taking inventory on your own gifts, think of the others in your group and jot down their names next to the particular gifts that you see strongest in their lives. Then, at the group experience, share your insights. It is called affirmation. The gifts are taken from verses 6-8.

- ☐ **THE PROPHET:** Forthright, outspoken, uncompromising. Open to "inspired messages" from God, often directed to concrete situations now or in the future. Desperately needed and potentially dangerous.
- ☐ **THE SERVANT:** Practical. Needs-oriented. Hardworking, conscientious and faithful. Gets satisfaction in seeing things done, regardless of who gets the credit.
- ☐ **THE TEACHER:** Concept-oriented. Systematic, logical and theoretical. Good at insight into Scripture and making things clear to others.
- ☐ **THE ENCOURAGER/EXHORTER:** Success-oriented. Disciplined, single-minded and completely dedicated. Good at setting goals and exhorting others. Can get a little demanding. Hard on self . . . hard on others.
- ☐ **THE STEWARD/GIVER:** Cause-oriented. Strategist. Investment analyst. Able to see "big picture," assess resources, accumulate wealth and use it wisely. Impatient with others who misuse time, money.
- ☐ **THE ADMINISTRATOR (LEADER):** Task-oriented. Organized, authoritative, decisive and thrives under pressure. Good at delegating responsibility and getting things done through others. Can be pushy.
- ☐ **THE SYMPATHIZER (MERCY):** Feeling-oriented. Highly sensitive to others in need; compassionate and affirming. Good at listening, caring, and "being present" when someone is hurting. Can get drained.

GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN—10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ As a teenager, how did peer pressure effect the way you dressed? Acted? Where you went? ☐ Besides your faith and family, what is one thing you are very dedicated to—like tennis? ☐ What caused you to get interested in this thing? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ What is the connection between being a "living sacrifice" . . . "to test and approve what God's will is" . . . and understanding your spiritual "gift"? ☐ What does 12:1 add to your understanding of true worship? ☐ What person in your church comes to mind as someone who is really using his/her gift? ☐ Case History: Bill has changed his major in college three times now and he still isn't sure. He wants to do God's will. How can he find it?

TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you jot down under APPLY as the gift(s) for each person in your group? Have one person sit in silence while the others explain what they jotted down for this person. Then, move on to the next person, etc. ☐ What do you feel is your own strongest spiritual gift? ☐ On a scale from 1 to 10, (10 being high usage, 1 being low usage), how much are you using your spiritual gift? ☐ Do you think a person is acting humble when they say they have no special gift? Explain. ☐ What influences of the "world" feel especially strong on you now?

NOTES ON ROMANS 12:1-8

Summary/Romans 12:1-8. From *doctrine* Paul now turns almost by reflex to *duty*: how one lives flows quite naturally out of what one believes. *Exposition* has become *exhortation*. This issue of Christian lifestyle has never been far from Paul's mind. It is there in his description of the pervasiveness of sin (1:18—3:20, especially in 3:8). It surfaces explicitly in chapter 6: How can you go on sinning if you have been baptized into Christ's death? A person serves one master or another—God or sin. In chapter 7 and 8 the difficulty (even anguish) of overturning sin's tyranny is Paul's focus. Now in the next three chapters, Paul spells out in concrete and particular terms what he has previously expressed abstractly and generally.

vv. 1-2 Here Paul defines the theme of 12:1-15:13.

v. 1 **Therefore** . . . Christian ethics emerge out of Christian theology; Christian obedience is a response to Christian truth.

I urge you . . . with full apostolic authority, Paul exhorts Christians to live out what they believe.

in view of God's mercy . . . a Christian's motivation to obedience is overwhelming gratitude for God's mercy.

bodies . . . "By *bodies* he means not only our skin and bones but the totality of which we are composed . . ." (Calvin) The idea of "bodies" is also used, of course, since Paul is developing the metaphor of sacrifice and one puts carcasses (not "souls") on the altar.

sacrifice . . . in the Old Testament sacrificial system the victim of the **sacrifice** becomes wholly the property of God. **Sacrifice** becomes *holy*, i.e., set apart for God only.

living . . . holy . . . pleasing to God . . . in Greek these three phrases are attached with equivalent weight as qualifiers to *sacrifices*. The idea is not that God counts living sacrifices the same as the dead animals in the old system, but rather that He wants Christians to live in fullness of life, in accord with his principles (i.e., sanctification), and hence to be the kind of sacrifice desired by God.

spiritual worship . . . Paul may mean by this an inner movement on the part of a person towards God (in contrast to external rites). But since the word translated **spiritual** can also be rendered "rational," the idea may be that believers render intelligent worship. The second meaning is given credence by the emphasis in verse 2.

v. 2 **Do not conform** . . . literally, "stop allowing yourself to be conformed," i.e., believers are no longer helpless victims of natural and supernatural forces which would shape them into a distorted pattern; rather they now have the ability to *resist* such powers.

be transformed . . . the force of the verb is: "continue to let yourself be transformed," i.e., a continuous action by the Holy Spirit which goes on for a lifetime. A Christian's responsibility is to stay open to this sanctification process.

renewing of your mind . . . i.e., develop a spiritual sensitivity and perception—learn to look at life on the basis of God's view of reality. Paul emphasizes the need to develop *understanding* of God's ways.

test and approve . . . Christians are called to a responsible freedom of choice and action based on the inner renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

vv. 3-8 Paul now turns to the Christian community as a whole—understanding it to be composed of believers with different gifts.

v. 3 **every one of you** . . . the truth about spiritual gifts applies to each believer.

sober judgment . . . the command is to know oneself (especially one's gifts) accurately rather than to have too high an opinion of oneself in comparison to others. This attitude enables a body of believers to blend their gifts together in harmonious ministry.

measure of faith . . . believers are not to measure themselves against others but against the standard God has given them in their faith. Thus they can achieve a true estimate of themselves.

v. 4-5 By means of a word picture that could be understood in all cultures—the body—Paul defines the nature of the Christian community: diverse gifts but all part of one body, the body of Christ.

v. 6 **gifts** . . . those endowments given by God to every believer by grace (**grace** and **gifts** come from the same root word) to be used in God's service. (See 1 Corinthians

COMMENTS

12-14.) The gifts listed here or in 1 Corinthians 12 or in Ephesians 4:11-12 are not meant to be either exhaustive or absolute since no gift list overlaps completely.

prophesying . . . inspired utterances, distinguished from teaching by their immediacy and unpremeditated nature, the source of which is direct revelation by God; often directed to concrete situations, at times about the future (Acts 11:27f), at other times about what God wants done (Acts 13:11f); given by both men and women (Acts 21:9) and in words readily understood (as opposed to ecstatic speech—tongues). Prophesying was highly valued in the New Testament church (1 Corinthians 14:1).

in proportion to his faith . . . this could mean that prophets are to resist adding their own words to the prophecy, or it could mean that they must measure their utterances in accord with "the faith," i.e., Christian doctrine.

v. 7 **serving** . . . the special capacity for rendering practical service to the needy.

teaching . . . in contrast to the prophet whose utterances had as their source the direct revelation of God, the first-century teacher relied on the Old Testament scriptures and the teachings of Jesus to instruct others.

v. 8 **encouraging** . . . the aim of exhortation is the encouragement of Christians to live a life of obedience to God.

contributing . . . the person who takes special delight in giving away one's own possessions.

TV as Purveyor of Patterns

The Phillips translation of Romans 12:1 is: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold." Here are some facts that may be worth your consideration.

TV Is Pervasive:

- ☐ 98% of American homes have television . . . more homes than have indoor plumbing.
- ☐ Over 50% of the homes have two or more television sets.
- ☐ The average television set is switched on over six hours each day.
- ☐ The average adult watches television three or four hours daily.
- ☐ In contrast to the 1400 hours per year devoted to tv viewing is an average of 200 hours spent reading magazines, 200 hours spent reading newspapers, and 10 hours per year (this is not a misprint) spent reading books.
- ☐ By the time the average teenager graduates from high school, he/she will have spent more time watching tv than in classrooms.

TV Teaches Consumerism

- ☐ The prime aim of network television is not to educate, inform, or entertain. It is to sell

leadership . . . those with special ability to guide a congregation are called upon to do so with zeal.

mercy . . . "the person whose special function is, on behalf of the congregation, to tend the sick, relieve the pain, or care for the aged or disabled" (Cranfield). Note that four of the seven gifts involve practical assistance to the needy.

products. Shows are funded by corporations who want to sell something.

- ☐ The average high school graduate will have seen over 350,000 ads.
- ☐ On children's programs there are often 20 ads per hour, most of which are for toys or sweetened foods.
- ☐ Securing a particular product is often linked with enhancing one's image and self-worth or with solving one's personal problems.

TV Teaches Violence

- ☐ The average high school graduate will have witnessed 16,000 murders on tv.
- ☐ The most violent hours on television occur on Saturday mornings during children's cartoons when it is not uncommon for there to be 20 aggressive acts per one half hour.
- ☐ Some 50% of the conflicts on tv are resolved by violence of one sort or another.

TV Teaches Stereotyped Views of People (i.e., they portray people in unrealistic ways)

- ☐ 75% of the characters on tv are men. (the real world has 50% men/50% women!)
- ☐ Only 20% of the women on tv have jobs vs. 40% nationwide.
- ☐ Women are pictured as far more vulnerable than men. 70% of medical interventions on tv are successful for men but only 23% are successful for women.
- ☐ 40% of tv males are over 40 years old while only 15% of tv women are over 40.
- ☐ How we think about others is influenced by how frequently they appear on tv (native Americans are seldom seen) and by how they are presented (blacks are often in comic roles, orientals are frequently villains).