

Romans 12:3-8 “So You Want to be a Living Sacrifice?”**

[adapted from message 1/11/98]

Main Idea: Romans 12:1-2 exhorts us to be living sacrifices. We are to give God our bodies (1) and minds (2). But what does that mean in practical terms. What does a living sacrifice look like, and how do we become one? We find out in Romans 12:3-8. Two things are true of a person who is a living sacrifice, both involving grace.

I. A living sacrifice lives with the perspective of grace (3-5).

A. Grace affects the way you think about yourself (3).

1. There's a wrong way to think.
2. There's a right way to think.

B. Grace affects the way you think about the church (4-5).

1. Consider your body.
 - It's one body.
 - It has many members.
 - The members differ in function.
2. Consider the Body of Christ.
 - We are one body.
 - We have many members.
 - We belong to each other.

II. A living sacrifice uses the provision of grace (6-8).

A. We have spiritual gifts (6a).

1. They differ.
2. They were given to us.

B. What we have, we must use (6b-8).

1. Your gift may be prophesying.
2. Your gift may be serving.
3. Your gift may be teaching.
4. Your gift may be exhorting.
5. Your gift may be giving.
6. Your gift may be leading.
7. Your gift may be showing mercy.

Implications: Ponder three important questions...

1. How has God gifted you?
2. Are you content with what God gave you?
3. Are you using what God gave you as He intended?

Sometimes we toss around words in church that we really don't understand. We hear the words, give assent to the words, even applaud the words, but really don't understand them. Even though we respond to the words, it's a deficient response because we lack proper understanding.

For instance, take this phrase: “washed in the blood.” How many of you are grateful you've been “washed in the blood?” We might get some ‘amens’ out of that, but what does it really mean?

Another example: “Spirit-filled life.” If you want to succeed as a Christian, you must live a “Spirit filled life.” Again, we ‘amen’ those words and say we want them, but what does it really mean? By the way, join us for our current Wednesday evening Bible study if you're interested in finding out!

Here's another one. Last Sunday I offered a new year's challenge by considering a very familiar passage. We looked carefully at Romans 12:1-2. Romans 12:1-2 exhorts us to be “*living sacrifices*.” To do this we must give God our bodies (1) and minds (2). But

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what does that mean in practical terms? What does a *living sacrifice* look like, and furthermore how do we become one? We need to know the answer if we're going to obey this vital admonition.

We're going to find out this morning. The answer, at least in part, is provided in the very next passage, Romans 12:3-8. We'll also find out what makes it possible to live life as a living sacrifice, namely *grace*. Two things characterize a person who is a living sacrifice, and both characteristics involve grace.

I. A living sacrifice lives with the perspective of grace (3-5).

We all live with a perspective. A spoiled child lives with the perspective that the world revolves around him. A person who went through the depression lives with the perspective that since the future is uncertain we'd better live frugally in the present.

Other e.g.—

What perspective grips the person who is a living sacrifice? It's the perspective of grace. Just what is that? Let's find out.

Romans 12 teaches us about body life. It's full of practical application that flows out of the substance of chapters 1-11. In light of what God has done to make us right with Himself (chapters 1-11), He tells us what He expects of us in chapters 12-16.

He begins in verse 1 by talking about being a living sacrifice. In the verses that follow He paints a picture of a living sacrifice in living color. The picture is drawn on the canvass of grace.

"For by the *grace* given me I say to every one of you," Paul begins in verse 3. When he spoke, Paul didn't just toss his weight around. His appeal wasn't based on his ego. He was compelled by grace. He spoke because he'd received a grace-gift (a reference to his calling and position as an apostle). And his readers needed to listen because they, too, had received a grace-gift, as verse 6 reveals, "We have different gifts according to the *grace* given us."

My friend, we are a blessed people. God has redeemed us (and that by His grace), but that's not all. He's given us something very special—grace gifts, spiritual gifts. It's interesting that the subject of being a living sacrifice leads to the subject of spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are grace in action in the Body. It's sad that a gift from God can be abused, but it can. Spiritual gifts can be a source of controversy. That won't happen, as Paul explains in verses 3-5, if we're living with the perspective of grace. Grace affects us in two ways.

A. Grace affects the way you think about yourself (3). "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."

Notice that God is concerned with how we view ourselves. First we learn there are some thinking patterns that need to go, then some thinking patterns we need to adopt.

1. There's a wrong way to think. What is it? It's to think too "highly" of ourselves. The verb means "to have high thoughts." Our flesh, which we inherited from Adam, loves to think very highly of itself. That's often why we get upset with people-- because they don't share our high opinion about ourselves.

An inflated view of self shows up in two ways. The most obvious is seen in the boaster, the person who loves to tell you how smart he is, how spiritual she is, how successful they are. "This ministry couldn't exist without me!"

But some self-absorbed people are smarter than that. Since they know people don't like to be around braggarts, they do the opposite. They deplore themselves. They put themselves down, but this is merely another form of pride.

"How so?" you ask. Here's how it works. You tell people how bad you are, all the while hoping they will correct you, *expecting* them to say, "Oh, no! You're not like that!" How do I know that's pride? Just agree with the person who does it some time and watch his jaw drop. When he says, "I'm just no good," respond saying, "Well, I'm glad you said it first because I have to agree with you..." and watch his response.

Listen. The American Church needs to give serious attention to verse 3. Frankly, we have been saturated in our culture by voices telling us to have a high view of self. A popular advertisement in a newspaper sponsored by a counseling center illustrates the point. The caption begins, "You May Be Co-Dependent If..." and lists ten items:

1. you think and feel responsible for other people
2. you feel anxious, pity and guilt when others have problems
3. you try to please others instead of yourself
4. you feel safest when giving
5. you feel insecure and guilty when someone gives to you
6. you feel sad because you spend your life giving to others and no body gives to you
8. you feel no one understands your problem
9. you find yourself attracted to needy people
10. you feel sad, empty and worthless if you do not have a crisis in your life, a problem to solve or someone to help.

The advertisement then says, "If you can identify with these statements, you may need help..." Did you catch the thrust of the ad? It says if you think and feel responsible for people, if you try to please others instead of yourself, if you give to others, and if you find yourself attracted to needy people, you may need help. Actually, Paul says the opposite is true. To think too highly of self is the wrong way to think.

2. *There's a right way to think.* What is it? Verse 3 tells us, "But rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." How are we to think about ourselves?

First, "think soberly," as the KJV puts it. That is, think clearly, correctly, with an unclouded and accurate assessment. It doesn't do anyone any good for us to cling to false ideas about ourselves. We need to see ourselves as God's sees us. And how is that? When God sees us, He sees that we are fallen, depraved creatures. As such, we're prone to have distorted, inflated thoughts about ourselves. We're prone to justify our faults, to rationalize our shortcomings.

Thankfully, that's not all God sees. According to the first half of Romans, from God's perspective, we who know Christ are no longer in Adam. We are "in Christ." It's our new identity. Christ's Spirit lives in us. Sin no longer must master us. We who were once enchained wrong views of self now have the power to get rid of those wrong views through the power of Christ. And that's what we'll do, we'll think in those terms, *if we're thinking soberly.*

Our thinking is also to be influenced by something else, according to verse 3. Paul says, "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." What does Paul mean by "the measure of faith?" The term "measure" indicates he's talking about a standard (Gk. term *metros*), a gauge by which we are to assess ourselves. It's the gauge of faith. God accepts us, not on the basis of what we've done, but on what Christ has done for us. We are God's people on the basis of *faith* in Christ. And where did that faith we placed in Christ come from? Paul says it's the "faith *God has given you.*"

Here's why we have no reason to have an inflated view of ourselves. We are right with God because of what *God did* for us in Christ, and we have exercised faith in Christ because *God gave* us that faith. It's all of God and it's all of His grace.

Beloved, we need to view self from *God's* perspective. If we do, that will keep us from two erroneous extremes. One is to think, "I'm the greatest. The church can't get by without me." The other, "I can't do anything. The church doesn't need me." Both extremes will paralyze a church.

Indeed, when grace is in action in our lives, it will influence the way we think about ourselves. Grace affects our minds in a second way.

B. Grace affects the way you think about the church (4-5). To make his point, Paul moves from his exhortation in verse 3 to an illustration in verses 4-5. He says...

1. *Consider your body.* Verse 4, "Just as each of us have one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function." Stop there. What's true of your body? You don't need medical school training to come up with Paul's insights.

- It's one body. It has unity.

- It has many members. It has diversity. You have eyes, teeth, a nose, some toes, hands, a liver, some hair (in differing amounts), and more. You are very complex, and yet you are one body, right? And Paul notes something else about your body.

- The members differ in function. Eyes are great for seeing, but terrible for pounding nails. Your nose works well when it comes to smelling, but not so well if you try to open a door with it. The Creator had different functions in mind when He gave us our body parts. Now...

2. *Consider the Body of Christ.* Verse 5, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." What's true of us who are in Christ?

- We are one body. We are a unit. On the other hand...

- We have many members. The Lord designed us to have unity, but certainly not uniformity. Some people want the church to produce people that look alike, like sausages in a row. Not God. He made us different, and as we'll soon see, He gifted us differently.

- We belong to each other. The KJV of verse 5 puts it this way, "And every one members one of another."

Did you catch that? Yes, we belong to Christ, but we also belong to each other. We need each other. I am yours. You are mine. We belong to the same Body. We have the same calling, the same identity in Christ, the same goal--to contribute to the good of the Body and the glory of the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ.

If we're living with the perspective of grace, we'll think in those terms. Grace affects the way you think about yourself and the church. If you want to be a living sacrifice for God you must live with the perspective of grace.

Are you? Let's take a little pop quiz. True or false:

1. My house and my possessions are God's and are available to Him for His purposes.
2. I consider it a privilege to give to the Lord, including giving Him my time, my talents, and my tithes, for all I have has come from Him and is to be used for Him.
3. I see myself as a servant and find great joy in serving God and others.
4. I do not look at church as a place where I go but a Body of which I am one part. My identity is linked to my local church.
5. I think about my church family continually throughout the week and look for ways to help the other members of the Body.

If your answers to those five statements are “true” you are living with the perspective of grace. If one or more of your answers was “false” it’s an indication that you’re either lacking a grace perspective or that your grace perspective is tainted in part. I challenge you to look at life from the perspective of grace. That’s what is involved, first of all, in being a living sacrifice.

II. A living sacrifice uses the provision of grace (6-8).

Grace starts by influencing how we think, and then how we live. Our minds, then our ministries.

How many ministers are in this church? Do you realize that if you are in Christ *you* have been called to ministry? We all have if we're in the Body.

You say, “But I can’t do ministry. I don’t have what it takes.” You’re right and you’re wrong. You’re right that *you* can’t do ministry, not in your own ability. But you *can* do ministry because you have the provision of grace.

“What provision?” you ask. A very specific one, the one that makes ministry possible.

A. We have spiritual gifts (6a). *Charismata* is the Greek term. *Charis* is the Greek term for grace. Spiritual gifts are literally grace-gifts. Listen to the beginning of verse 6, “We [that’s the “members” of the Body mentioned in verse 5] have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” Here we learn two important truths about spiritual gifts.

1. *They differ.* There are four places in the New Testament that teach us about spiritual gifts--1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, and here. One thing apparent from each passage is that our spiritual gifts differ. They differ by divine design. For #2...

2. *They were given to us.* “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is *given to us.*”

Question: How many Christians have spiritual gifts?

Answer: All Christians do. You have a spiritual gift. But lest we get puffed up, remember this. Your gift was given to you.

You didn't earn it. You didn't deserve it. Just like your salvation, it's yours because of grace. And it's not yours to hoard, but to use for the good of the Body. As Warren Wiersbe observes, "Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with."

Let that sink in. God has given each of us a special endowment. It's more than a natural talent. It's a supernatural, grace gift. But the gifts aren't the same. They're different by design.

May I offer this word of application? A lot of us (that's not an exaggeration) struggle with contentment when it comes to ministry. We may never say it, but we think it. "How come I can't do what he does? All I get to do is visit the sick. He gets to teach Sunday School." Or, "Why do I have to do one-on-one Bible studies? If I could sing, I could really contribute to the church!"

If the members of your physical body thought that way, your doctor would schedule you for surgery. For instance, several years ago the doctor discovered a large tumor growing in my mother's body. Some cells decided to deviate from the body's agenda, and formed their own agenda. Instead of contributing to the body, the tumor sapped the body. Instead of working with the other members, these rebel-cells worked against them.

So the doctor said, "Well, those cells have a right to express themselves as they wish," right? Wrong! He said, "That tumor must be removed." And it was, and mother is fine today.

Beloved, the Lord has given each of us spiritual gifts, the very gifts He wants us to have. These grace-gifts are what makes ministry possible, the very ministries the Lord wants us to fulfill for His glory and the edification of the rest of the Body.

But here's where the rubber meets the road (or in far too many cases, *doesn't*)...

B. What we have, we must use (6b-8). We are to *use* what we've been given—and when we do, great things happen.

In verses 6-8, the apostle mentions seven specific gifts (by examining other NT texts, the list of spiritual gifts grows to around 20). After listing the gift, Paul gives a directive on how the gift is to be used. As we go through the list, think about how God has gifted you. First of all, Paul told the Roman Christians...

1. *Your gift may be prophesying.* Verse 6 states, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." Paul doesn't give us a definition of "prophecy" here, but based on what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:3, 31, this gift wasn't restricted to prediction. In fact, it didn't primarily have to do with telling future events, but rather the communication of revealed truth intended both to convict and build up hearers.

Before the completion of the Bible, this gift apparently involved special revelation from God, which we no longer have nor need. According to 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, this is one of the best gifts of all. It comes from the Greek word meaning "to say" and derives from a root meaning "to cause to shine." As Ray Stedman remarks, "It refers to the ability to take the Word of God and make it shine." John Calvin described prophecy as "the peculiar gift of explaining revelation."

The person who exercises this gift is to do so "according to the proportion of faith." Faith denotes "the faith" or "basic Christian faith," indicating no one in speaking for God should ever deviate from what God has already spoken.

2. *Your gift may be serving.* "If it is serving [KJV "ministry"], let him serve." The Greek term for serving is *diakonian*. We get our word "deacon" from it. If you have this gift, you have what it takes to care for widows, to do benevolent ministries, or serve behind the scenes as a trustee or usher. It may be the same gift which Paul calls the gift of "helps" in 1 Cor. 12.

Again notice that after stating the gift, Paul gives a qualifier. "If it is serving, *let him serve.*" Fellow Christian, if your gift is serving, then serve. Don't feel guilty because you're not teaching. Don't be envious because you're not leading. Serve. Realize that God gifted you to do exactly what He wanted you to do in this church.

By the way, I'm convinced we don't need to guilt-trip people into doing ministry in the church. When we do that, we end up with people working in ministries for which they are not gifted. They'll eventually burn out. Or worse, they'll keep doing that ministry with a grumbling, discontent attitude.

And may I say this to those who lead ministries in this church. Be a team-player. Think about the whole body when you recruit workers for your ministry. Just because a person is a warm body isn't enough reason to coax him into serving in your ministry. Don't "rob Peter to pay Paul" just so you'll have the numbers you need. Encourage people to serve where they're gifted, even if it's not in "your" ministry.

3. *Your gift may be teaching.* Paul says, "If it is teaching, let him teach (7)." You see, the Word of God not only needs to be proclaimed, but *explained*. And God has gifted certain people to be able to do that. When they open their mouths, they make the Word of God clear. If you are gifted in teaching, then teach. You don't necessarily need a class to do this. You can do it after the worship service in casual conversation. You can teach by meeting with a young Christian for a weekly Bible study.

But the point is this. If you have the gift of teaching you need to be teaching. You need to find ways to use your gift for the building up of God's people in the Body. That's also true if your gift is serving. Find ways to use your gift.

What happens if you don't use your gift? Think of your arm. It's a valuable member of your body and has the ability to do a lot of helpful things for your body. But what happens if you immobilize your arm (put it in a sling) for a long period. It loses it's ability to function properly and as far as the body is concerned, it become a liability (dead weight). Can it be restored to usefulness? Often it can. It may need some rehab, but it time it can once again function as a valuable part of the body. So in the Body of Christ.

4. *Your gift may be exhorting.* The Greek term *paraklesis* can mean "to comfort" or "to encourage." It involves getting involved personally and purposefully in another person's life. So Paul begins verse 8, "If it is encouraging, let him encourage."

There's a great need for the ministry of encouragement in the church. By the way, the person with the gift of encouraging isn't the only one God wants to engage in encouraging. But he's to lead the way. She's gifted to show the rest of us how.

5. *Your gift may be giving.* In the Greek text, there's one word which the NIV translates with a phrase, "If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously."

Did you know that "giving" is a gift? It means God will give you something to give as well as a desire to give it (Stedman, p. 116). Not like the man I read about who stood up in church once and said, "I want to give a hundred dollars--anonymously." If you have the gift of giving, you're in tune with needs, and when you give you don't make a big deal about it. Again, all of us are to give, but those with this gift model it for us.

6. *Your gift may be leading.* Verse 8, "If it is leadership [KJV "ruling"], let him govern diligently." The Greek term literally means "to stand up before others." Who do you want to be in leadership positions in this church? People who have business savvy? No. People whom God has gifted with the special grace to direct His church.

Notice again how gifts determine ministries. A person with the gift of teaching should devote his time to serving, right? Wrong. He should teach. If you have the gift of exhorting, then get involved in ministries where you can encourage people. If your gift is leading, then lead.

Many churches struggle with a problem. They have people clinging to ministries and titles and positions for which they are not gifted. But they've "always done it." If you're doing that, you're doing three things. One, you're frustrating yourself. Two, you're preventing the right person from serving where he's gifted. And three, you're hindering the church from functioning as the Lord intended.

It takes great humility to give up a title. That's why Paul began this section, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought."

7. *Your gift may be showing mercy.* Mercy is helping the weak and helpless. It's the ability to get close to people that others cringe away from. This gift enables people to develop ministries with the disabled, with shut-ins, with the outcasts of society whether they be in prisons or gutters.

Notice the qualifier, "If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." Not merely going through the motions. Not say, "Well, at least I visited the Rest Home! You don't expect me to talk to the people, do you?" Do it with cheerfulness, God's Word says.

That, my friend, is what it means to be a living sacrifice. It means to live with the perspective of grace and utilize the provision of grace. It means we allow grace to affect our minds and our ministries.

And that beckons us to ask three important questions.

Implications: Ponder three important questions...

1. *How has God gifted you?* If you are a Christian, He has. Do you know what grace-gift God has given you? Be honest with yourself and others. I challenge you to ask someone, ask several brothers and sisters who know you well what they think the gift is that God has given you. Don't be defensive, either, at their response. Ask them, "How do you think God has equipped me to serve in this church?"

2. *Are you content with what God gave you?* Warren Wiersbe offers this assessment, "Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and tries to do a ministry that he cannot do. (Sometimes the opposite is true, and people undervalue themselves. Both attitudes are wrong.)

E.g.—

How do you think God feels when we ignore His gifts, and refuse to use them in the ministry of the church? How does He feel when we complain about His gifts?

Listen. God gave you exactly what He wanted you to have. Are you content with it? Are you content to serve in the ministry where you are gifted, or are you bitter because you can't do something else?

3. *Are you using what God gave you as He intended?* Be honest. It's possible that some of us are in ministry positions that we shouldn't be in--because God has not gifted us for them. It's even more likely that some of us are gifted for ministries that we are not doing.

Discuss: What are some reasons for this?

Choose today to let grace take action in your life. Choose today to live as a *living sacrifice*. You'll never regret it!