



A Living Sacrifice

Lesson 16 | Romans 12

One of the truly incredible things about the gospel is the way it covers both deep, spiritual, transcendent theology while also connecting that theology to the rough and tough realities of everyday life. Some people love to study theology, but unfortunately their lives don't reflect the glorious truths they study. Others like to keep things practical and want to know exactly what it is they are supposed to do, but they don't have much time for theology and are vulnerable to false teaching. The book of Romans avoids both extremes. Romans is intensely theological and stands as perhaps the most studied book of the Bible throughout the history of the church. But Romans is also intensely practical, with a lot of hard-hitting instructions for how to live life the way God wants it lived.

Why do you think people tend to separate theology from behavior? How can we push back against this wrong thinking?

After finishing his presentation of what the gospel is, Paul moves on to how the gospel changes us. He begins with a general call to consecrate ourselves to God, and then shows what that looks like practically. It's important to remember as we go through this section that all these commands are connected to everything that has gone before. The glorious gospel is the foundation upon which all the coming commands rest. Paul isn't calling on Christians to just "do better" or "try harder." Instead, he is challenging those who have put their faith in Christ and been declared righteous on account of His death. He wants them to know that their freedom from sin and their Spirit-given ability to live righteously should result in a changed life. They are not doing right so that they can be righteous. They are seeking to do right because they have already been made righteous.

Why does it matter that we realize our behavior is not about becoming righteous, but rather should be seen as an attempt to live out the righteousness that Christ has already purchased for us?

The Call of Consecration (1-2)

Paul calls on believers to respond to God's mercy in two primary ways – by presenting their bodies as a sacrifice and by renewing their mind. Our obedience to God in light of the gospel should include both what we do and how we think.

Present Your Body (1)

Paul's opening charge as he finishes discussing what God has done is that we should willingly present our bodies as a sacrifice to God. These sacrifices are described as living, holy, and acceptable to Him. We are living in that through Christ we have been given new spiritual life. We are holy in that Christ's blood has cleansed us of our sin and we now stand before God without blemish. And we are acceptable to God

because through the gospel we can now live pleasing lives before Him. These descriptions remind us that everything God has done in our lives is ultimately for His glory. His purpose is that we might be the kind of sacrifices that He deserves.

What happens if we forget that all God has done in our lives is first and foremost about His glory, and not about us and what we get out of it?

The basis for this sacrifice is “the mercies of God.” Everything that God has done for us in Romans 1-11 could be summed up quite well with the word “mercy.” Paul will say that to give yourself totally to God is your “reasonable service,” in other words, it just makes sense.¹ God’s incredible love and goodness which He lavished on those who are in Christ should motivate them to live for Him.

Why do believers hesitate to give their lives as a sacrifice to God, even after all He has done for them?

Renew Your Mind (2)

But it’s not just what we do with our bodies that matters to the Holy Spirit. Because what we do with our bodies will ultimately reflect what we think with our minds. Our actions are always the result of our thinking, and so if we want to change our actions we need to first change our thinking.

How are the things we do and the way we think related?

Paul warns that we not be conformed to the world, but instead be transformed in the way we think. He is here warning about worldliness, but not the kind of worldliness we often think of. Often we associate worldliness with certain types of behaviors. Worldly people drink, or smoke, or have tattoos, or do drugs, or swear, or any other number of things. But here the contrast Paul makes is between worldliness and wrong *thinking* rather than wrong *behavior*. There are many faithful members of church who don’t swear, drink, or go to movie theaters but the way they think is more influenced by the world than it is by Scripture.

Why do we often think of worldliness as being about the things we do?

In what ways does the world seek to shape the way we think?

Ultimately, the wrong kind of thinking will lead to the wrong kind of behavior. Christians should be concerned about worldly living, but the solution to worldly living is to fix our thinking. Worldly thinking will lead to worldly living, and consecrated thinking will lead to holy living.

Can you give examples of ways the world thinks and how such wrong thinking has the potential to impact our behavior?

The solution to such wrong thinking is to renew our mind so that we know what God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will is. This may involve God’s specific will for our lives, but it also includes His moral will. In other

¹ Some modern translations (ESV, NASB) translate the Greek word *logikos* as “spiritual” rather than “rational.” This is because the words for “rational” (*logikos*) and “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) were often paired. But to conclude on this basis that the two mean the same thing is probably taking things too far. “The close association of the adjective λογικός (“rational”) and the adjective πνευματικός (“spiritual”) in Philo’s writings (and perhaps also in 1 Pet 2:2 and 2:5) seems to provide rather clear evidence that the two terms were closely aligned in Hellenistic Jewish thought. It goes, however, far beyond the evidence to claim that they were understood in Paul’s day as being synonymous terms.” Richard Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New International Greek Testament Commentary), page 921.

words, when we allow our minds to be renewed by God's Word we will think like God and understand the world from His perspective and know how He wants us to live.

So what does a consecrated life actually look like? If our bodies are dedicated to the worship of God and our minds are being renewed so that we think like God, how will that change our lives? In the following verses Paul will show us two ways in which a consecrated life shows itself: how we use our gifts in the church (3-8) and how we interact with other people (9-21).

Consecration in the Life of the Church (3-8)

Paul begins explaining the consecrated life by talking about the importance of service in the church. The order here is interesting, especially since it's backwards from what many of us might think. He places the immediate priority on individuals using their gifts in the church, before talking about the attitudes we should have in our relationships with others. Many believers today think of spiritual growth as starting with their relationships with others, and maybe after they've grown in that way then they can think about serving in the church. Paul emphasizes the importance of using our gifts in the body of the church, and then talks about the kinds of relationships we should have.

Why do people tend to overlook the importance of using their spiritual gift when they think of what it means to grow in the Lord?

The Importance of the Gifts (3-5)

There are two dangers that we as Christians need to be aware of. The first danger is that we begin to think too highly of ourselves. All of us have the tendency to overestimate how skilled and talented and gifted we really are. This is a challenge because people who think too highly of themselves don't think they are thinking too highly of themselves – they think their self-estimation is correct!

If people thinking too highly of themselves tend to not think they are wrong, what are some ways we can know if we are thinking too highly of ourselves?

But there is an opposite danger we must beware of. Paul is not here telling the Christians to think that they are worthless! While overestimating what gifts we have been given is a real possibility, so is ignoring the gift that God has given us. Paul said to think soberly about ourselves, not to ignore what we have. Scripture is clear that when God gives gifts, He expects them to be used well and will hold us accountable if they are not (cf Matthew 25:14-30).

Why don't people take more seriously the seriousness God puts on how and if we use our gifts?

But you are not the only one who stands to lose. We are all members of one body, and bodies need all of their body parts to work together to function. If you as a believer are not using your gift for the good of the body, the body is missing out and won't function as God intended it to.

The List of the Gifts (6-8)

But what kind of gifts are we talking about? Paul gives a list of the kinds of gifts that he has in mind when he talks about spiritual gifts. They include prophesy, which is a verbal proclamation of the truth; ministry or service, which involves seeking to meet the needs of others; teaching, which involves explaining the truth of God's Word; exhorting, which can include both giving comfort and challenging to do right; giving, which involves contributing financially to God's work and those in need; leading, which involves providing

oversight to the various workings of the church; and finally mercy, which involves helping those who are downcast and in need of help.

How can a person know which spiritual gift they have?

There are several things to note about these gifts. First, this list is not exhaustive. There are at least three places in Scripture where the gifts are listed (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 4:10-11), and no two lists are the same. This means that these lists are representative, not exhaustive. The point seems to be, "Whatever you do well, do it for the Lord!" Second, while having a spiritual gift means that we may be better at some things than others, many of these are things that should be true for all of us on some level. "I don't have to serve others or give because those aren't my spiritual gift" is not what Paul had in mind. Finally, the gifts listed here focus on our relationships with one another. As believers, we need to be meeting and interacting regularly with other believers if we are going to have the opportunity to exercise the gifts God has given us.

What would happen if a Christian did not seek to use the gifts the Lord has given them?

How would you help a believer who felt like they didn't have anything to offer the church?

Consecration in the Life of the Believer (9-21)

After talking about the importance of presenting our bodies and renewing our minds, and after showing what a consecrated life looks like in service to the church, Paul talks about the importance of right relationships. These relationships can generally be broken down into our relationships with other believers (12:9-16) and our relationships with those who treat us wrongly (12:17-21).

Relationships with Believers (9-16)

Paul hits the Roman believers with a quick, rapid-fire list of the ways they should be interacting with one another. These admonitions can be broken down into several general themes:

- **Believers should have the right kind of love for one another (9-10).**
- **Believers should have the right kind of diligence in their responsibilities (11).**
- **Believers should have the right kind of response to trials (12).**
- **Believers should have the right kind of giving and serving (13).**
- **Believers should have the right kind of reactions to others (14-15).**
- **Believers should have the right kind of unity (16).**

Much could be said about each of these themes. This passage is worthy of a whole series of lessons on what it looks like to live out the gospel in community with others. Taken as a whole, this passage summarizes much of the instruction we find elsewhere in the New Testament about how we should love and live with one another.

As you look at this list, what is one area you feel that you personally could improve on as a believer to help the church be what Christ intends it to be?

Relationships with Enemies (17-21)

After discussing the love that believers ought to have, especially for other believers, Paul now turns to the way we should respond to those who hate us. The discussion of how to treat enemies might involve Christians, but it likely is focusing primarily on those who are not Christians. Here the command is to live

peaceably and to do good to all. If we're going to be honest, this is hard. Treating others well who treat me wrongly feels like a great injustice.

Is it wrong to desire that justice be done when a true wrong has been committed?

As creatures made in the image of God, it bothers us when we feel like someone is "getting away with it." When someone hurts us, we are tempted to "get even" or "to make them pay." Yet it is important to notice what Paul says here. He is not saying that when people wrong us it's no big deal, or they shouldn't have to face the consequences of their actions. What he is saying is that it is not our place to even the score, that's God's job. The point is not that they get off free, but that we trust that God will take care of the problem. When we trust God to take care of the injustice, we can truly do good and even hope and pray for the repentance and conversion of those who hate us and mistreat us.

How does seeing God as one who will bring vengeance differ from "not worrying about it"?