

Romans Chapter 12
New American Standard Bible®

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Romans Chapter 12

Chapter 12 begins the second major division of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. For the first eleven chapters, he has addressed what a Christian life is. Beginning with Chapter 12, he addresses how we are to live the life that our Lord wants from those who call themselves "Christians" – How Christians are to live in this world as it is. If Paul has been placing a foundation for Christianity in Chapters 1-11, he will now provide practical (day to day) instructions on how to live, cope and function (Church, Government and Society) in a way that is "Acceptable to God".

¹Therefore I urge you, 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. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

If we are to live as Christians, we need to understand that our lives are now lives (the **spiritual service of worship**) of will that has been surrendered to God. This is in direct compliance with the instruction to Accept Christ as "Lord". To do so requires surrender of our will to his. In surrender to Lordship, we seek and take direction for our life from Him. There can be no "but" in Lordship. Less than surrender to the Lordship of Christ will not be "acceptable to God". Neither will it be "good" or "perfect"

There is a way that is of the world, and that cannot be our way. Evidently it is the natural course for anyone, because Paul writes that this surrender to God's will requires God's mercy and a transformation to a renewed mind if we are to accomplish what God wants from us.

Why do we want this?

Paul reminds us that God's will for us is "good", "acceptable" and "perfect".

Transforming and Renewing

With the words he chooses, Paul reminds us that the Christian life isn't one of improvement. Where we take what we were and where we were and seek to improve on that. In Paul's mind, nothing less than transformation and renewal is required if we are to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice – one that would be acceptable to God. This will not be an easy accomplishment. It requires God's mercy if we are to accomplish our spiritual service of worship.

So, how do we function within the church – Paul's beliefs concerning our ability and willingness to do the tasks that Christ has set aside for His Church

³For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

The Church = Many members in one body with many functions:

By the time he writes this letter to the Church in Rome, Paul has experienced a close relationship with Luke, the man he calls the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), for many years and Luke's influence (the thinking and reasoning of a physician) on Paul's understanding comes to play in Paul's explanation of our function among others in the church is evident.

When we deal with others in the body (church), we need to remember to not take ourselves with too much regard (more highly than we should). As the human body is made up of many parts, with each part very much dependant on the other parts, if the body is to function, so is the church. Luke would have assured Paul, that this is the way the human body is intended to function and Paul would have known it is the same with the church (Christ's body of believers). The church is like a living organism and functions in the same way. All parts are dependent on the other parts.

In the excitement of serving, sometimes people will try to take on all things, and that is not the way that service was intended. No one part of the body does all things and no one part of Christ's body (the church) should be expected or should expect to do all things. Service is a joint endeavor and should be a shared exercise. All members/parts of the body should be exercised as a part of their function within the body.

Here is an interesting example from Peter's life (written by someone else):

Do you remember when Peter learned this? You recall that, after the resurrection, when Peter had denied the Lord and wept bitterly in the streets of Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus met him in Galilee beside the sea on a beautiful morning {see John 21:15-23}. He had spread a breakfast of fish for them -- broiled fish on the coals -- and, after breakfast, he turned to Peter, and said to him, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter, who had been so boastful in the Upper Room, could only hang his head and say, "Lord, thou knowest." And again the question came, "Peter, do you love me?" Three times the Lord asked, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter was driven, at last, to the only recourse, the only ground upon which he had to stand -- not his own energy or ability -- to say, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." And then the Lord gave him his job; he said to him, "Peter, I want you to feed my sheep. Your job is to minister to those who belong to me -- to teach them, to feed them, to nurture their life along. This is your job." But Peter still had some of old Peter in him. He turned to the Lord, and looking at John, he said to the Lord, "Lord, what do you want that man to do?" If you read the Scriptures carefully, you'll notice that there is indication of jealousy between Peter and John before the crucifixion. Peter evidently resented the fact that John was the one who was always leaning on the Lord's breast, and he was jealous. So, he turned to the Lord and asked this question. The Lord's answer was quick and to the point. He said to Peter, "What is that to thee?" That is, "That is none of your business, Peter. You follow me. I'll give him a job to do." There Peter learned that the body has many members, and all do not have the same function, but all of the functions are necessary to the life of the body. All of us will discover this. God gives us gifts, but we do not *all* have the same gifts. We need one another. We are members one with another, not just of this church, but of other churches, other denominations, other groups as well.

⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

As with the body, people have gifts as the Lord wills. There is nothing in scripture that says we should seek out gifts. They are given as the Lord wills. And we are to use our gift(s) to the fullest, and allow others to use their gift(s) in the same way. That is how the Lord intended service to be.

So, what is a spiritual gift?

A spiritual gift is a divinely-given capacity for service.

Spiritual gifts are not abilities. They are a capacity. Ability suggests power and we have no power in our spiritual gifts. The power comes from the Holy Spirit, which works through us according to our capacity to serve. Spiritual gifts are the capacity to receive power to exercise a certain ministry for the Lord. That is what they are and how we are to use them. In a sense, we are like toasters, can openers, food processors, blenders and microwaves. We have the capacity to do certain jobs, but unless we are hooked up to the (same for each of us) source of power, we are useless.

Three points to consider:

- 1 – Toasters toast and blenders blend. Neither open cans very well.
- 2 - A spiritual gift that is not connected to the source of power is useless.
- 3 – If you are not able to exercise your spiritual gifts, are you hooked up to the source of power?

How do we recognize which spiritual gifts God has given to us? First of all, spiritual gifts should always be plural. God does everything he does in abundance (flower species, stars in the sky, beautiful vistas). It seems foolish to think that he would limit any of us to a single spiritual gift, so understanding that we are blessed with an abundance of spiritual gifts, how do we recognize what God has given to us?

Paul says:

“according to the proportion of his faith”

Evidently faith is required and the measure of a gift is our faith. Jesus said the very same thing to his disciples.

"According to your faith be it done unto you," (Matt 9:29)

Perhaps we should ask “What do I believe God can do through me? And start there. In Second Timothy, Paul wrote to his young disciple:

"Stir up the gift that is in you which was given unto you," (2 Tim 1:6)

We will never discover the gifts God has given to us (and begin ministering for Him through the power of his Holy Spirit) until we begin to look for them through faith.

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This is a partial listing of spiritual gifts. More are listed in Ephesians 4 and Corinthians 12. There are likely gifts that Paul did not list.

1 - Here, Paul lists "prophecy", which is not the ability to foretell the future. It is the ability to preach the truth in the Word and the ability to proclaim the truth in a way that impacts lives. Some pastors have this gift as do many laymen. Looking at this, we need to remember that the gift is to be able to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit and not to exercise preaching power in the flesh. The first is a blessing and the second a deadly thing – a curse.

2 - Next, Paul lists "service" 1 Corinthians 12:28 lists this as "the gift of helping" This is the gift of seeing what needs to be done and then doing it. Hundreds (thousands) of Christians exercise this gift silently each and every day, finding power from the Holy Spirit to do what needs to be done, with little regard for credit or accolade. The life of helpers is a continual testimony to the reality of Christ living in them.

3 - Teaching is the ability to share the truth and instruct through analysis and application. There is a difference in teaching and prophesy, but these gifts may be shared gifts in some. The gift of teaching may have nothing in common with the office one holds. There is nothing that says that a Sunday School teacher will necessarily have the gift of teaching.

4 - The gift of exhortation is the capacity to move the will, to warm the heart, to impel to action. It may exist in combination with the gift of teaching and prophesy, but not always.

Food for thought - I have read that one of the most foolish things we can do is to blame or criticize someone for not exercising a gift they do not have.

5 – Next, Paul lists giving (contributing). All Christians are expected to contribute -- this is a sign that you have received:

"Freely you have received," Jesus says, "freely give," (Matt 10:8 KJV).

All Christians, without exception, if they really know the Lord, will give. But there are some who have a special gift of giving, and, by the way, it is not always the rich people either. Sometimes the very poorest people have the gift of giving, and, even out of their poverty, they find ways to give. They give cheerfully and gladly to bless the heart. Gifts can be time, money, effort, help. It seems foolish to limit our thinking about gifts to money.

From someone else (not me):

I think with this gift (giving) there is often given the gift of making money. If God has given you the gift of making money, remember that it is a definite gift and that it is not given in order that you might have a much higher standard of living than anybody else. It isn't given to you in order that you might enjoy luxuries that others don't have, but, rather, that you might employ it in advancing the cause of Christ and ministering to the body of Christ -- that is why it is given. It is the capacity to receive the power of the Holy Spirit to give in such a way as to bless and advance the work of God. It is as much a necessary part of the ministry of the whole body as the ministry of teaching or preaching. Thank God if you have that gift.

6 – The gift of Leadership (Administration) is the capacity to plan or execute and organize, and it is of tremendous value -- not only in the actual organizing of the church, but in planning conferences and meetings, and in setting up special projects, missionary enterprises, and so on. It is usually obvious that not all of us have the gift of leadership and that many of us try to exercise a gift we do not have or try to exercise the gift in the flesh (without the power of the Holy Spirit at work).

7 – The gift of showing mercy is what we might call consolation or encouragement. It is the gift that Isaiah put so beautifully:

The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. (Isaiah 50:4)

This gift is the ability to encourage and bless in time of need. People who have this gift always seem to know exactly the right thing to say and do.

The seven gifts Paul mentions here are not the exclusive property of the Clergy. They exist in all of us based on the gifts God has selected to bless us with. Ministry is the work of the whole body. This is what Paul has already mentioned. All of us together have gifts of the Holy Spirit which we must exercise. The entire body suffers and may fail if we fail to do our part in exercising the gifts that God has given to us.

Paul's intent here is not so much to list gifts as it is to tell us that whatever gifts we have been given, we are to use them:

“exercise them accordingly”

we are to serve wholeheartedly. We without reservation are to use our God given gifts to serve in the ministry.

⁹Let love be without hypocrisy Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

Paul begins the second part of chapter 12 with a simple phrase that he will expound upon for the next 11 verses.

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy (ASV)

⁹ Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. (New Living Translation)

⁹ Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. (The Message)

⁹ Let love be without dissimulation. (KJV)

⁹ Love must be sincere. (NIV)

⁹ Let love be genuine. (RSV)

The quality of genuine love is that it is faithful, without hypocrisy, pretense, not faked, not deceitful, sincere, genuine. Paul says that we should hate what is evil and hold onto what is good with devotion to one another in “brotherly love”. Love must begin with ourselves, (“Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). It begins with hating what is evil and holding onto what is good. Only when we begin from these concepts can we extend it to others.

¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

We are to live with each other in mutual respect for others in the family (as brothers who love each other). We are to be considerate of property and welfare and giving preference (“You first” and “the best for you” consideration) to each other in honor (simple courtesy).

We are to lead lives of service to the Lord with diligence (unfaltering commitment) and always be fervent (faithful - steadfast) in holding to this action. We are to rejoice in our hope and never giving up when in tribulation, always committed to prayer, recognizing and helping meet the needs of other believers and the practice of hospitality.

These are the ways Paul describes the life of a Christian

1 – Devotion – to one another in love

- 2 – Preference – to one another given in honor
- 3 – Diligence – to not lag behind – in action
- 4 – Fervent - in spirit
- 5 – Service – to the Lord
- 6 – Hope – with rejoicing
- 7 – Perseverance – when we experience tribulation
- 8 – Devotion – to prayer – reaching out to God
- 9 – Contribution – to the needs of other believers (saints) - generous
- 10 – Practice - hospitality

This is a high calling for anyone and requires us to seek out our Lord's leadership and power daily if we are to have any hope of success, but these things definitely show love in action.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Attitude is everything – How do we react to those who do wrong toward us? Do we bless them? Or do we seek vengeance? Do we bless or curse them?

¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

How considerate are we to the feelings of others? Do we show empathy to the happiness and sadness of others? Do we align ourselves with brothers and sisters when they are joyful and when they are in pain?

¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Our attitude toward others should be consistent, both with our friends and those we seldom come into contact with. We must live lives that are as selfless as we can be, never looking down on others and treating everyone the way we would want to be treated.

“Do unto others as He has done unto you.”

Attitude now yields to action

¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We must not yield to retaliation. This indicates action, but it includes thought. We are to also seek out and follow what is right (in God's eyes – not necessarily our vision of right and wrong). Understanding that others will not be at peace with us, we are nevertheless to be at peace with them. We are to leave revenge to God. When we treat those who hate us or do evil toward us with respect, love consideration and hospitality, we place all of the outcome of their actions squarely on their heads. When we heap “hot coals of love” on those who are trying to hurt us we are doing what our Lord wants from us. It is in fact, what he did. All of this is the manifestation of the Life of Jesus Christ at work. It is what he expects from us. Although it is nearly impossible for us, it is not difficult at all for him and easier for us as we seek his power and guidance in our lives. Any and all of these things are possible only to the extent that we allow Christ to live within and through us.