

Romans 12:1-8

This week we are beginning what I would call the last portion of the book of Romans as Paul is going to be giving practical living instructions beginning here in chapter 12 and reaching all the way through Romans 16.

I want to do something a little different today when it comes to an introduction in that I just want to read with you the first verse of chapter 12 which says the following **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.**

I want to point out to you that when we see the word therefore when reading the Bible that we should always ask “Why is it there for?” In other words what is the context of what we have been learning and in this case I believe Paul is really referencing the whole of the letter to this point...Specifically I believe Paul is speaking of the multitude of mercies that we have found in the Father as we have come to Jesus Christ by faith.

So let's review for a minute as we begin today and I won't be comprehensive in this but will instead just bring out a few highlights from the letter to this point.

If you remember Paul made it clear in the first 3 chapters that you and I and all of humanity whether Jew or Gentile

have all fallen into sin and therefore all of us are deserving of death and damnation for all of eternity.

The Father however was not willing to allow us to perish but instead sent His Son Jesus Christ who is God in the flesh to this world to die for the sins of humanity. Jesus took our place and paid the price for our sins that you and I might be ransomed and made right with the Father.

If you remember when we come to Jesus by faith we are then seen as sanctified, justified and free from guilt. When we come to Jesus our eternal destination is changed from deserving hell and damnation to being given the gift of eternal life.

Paul then spoke of how you and I as we are found in Jesus now have a new master in life. Before Christ we were dominated by our fleshly desires, we were slaves to sin living for self and what would please us. After Christ though we discussed how we are set free from the reign of sin and instead we become slaves (in a good way) to righteousness.

We then saw that once we came to Jesus that there is a battle that takes place as the flesh and the Spirit are constantly in war against each other. Paul said in chapter 7 that he knew what to do and he knew what he wanted to do and yet he found himself doing the wrong thing in his life.

He even came to the place that he said “Wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death?” And then the response at the end of chapter 7 was “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ”.

And then in chapter 8 we talked all about the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts and lives and how He gives us the victory as we simply live our lives connected to His power. We even spoke of how those who are in Christ will never be separated from His love but instead we are to remember that in Christ we are loved and we are more than conquerors.

Then when we came to chapters 9-11 of Romans which we just finished last week as Paul spoke of God’s sovereign choice of Israel and His sovereign hand over humanity...Paul finished with these words in Romans 11:33-36 when he said **this ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

**³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has become His counselor?”**

**³⁵ “Or who has first given to Him
And it shall be repaid to him?”**

³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

I believe very firmly that really the only response left for you and I as we looked at chapters 1-11 of Romans is really to be undone by the glory and the grace and the mercy and the forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ...and so then the question becomes what now?...or how should I respond to all the truths that we have seen thus far.

Paul here in verse 1 says therefore or you could say “Because of all these things” so let’s look again here at verse 1 of Romans 12 and we’ll develop this. **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.**

I think the first thing I want to point out this morning is that Paul here is beseeching the brethren that they should live their lives in this manner.

That word beseech can mean to beg or to plead or even to ask someone urgently to do something. Paul as he says this is exhorting the believers with an intensity that in light of all God has done on their behalf that they would live this way.

Notice Paul as he does this speaks of the motivation that he does this from when he says that he does so by the mercies of God...Paul isn’t doing this from selfish ambition, or any great desire to lord things over the people but instead from a

simple position of knowing God is incredibly awesome and has done so much on our behalf.

Sometimes I think you and I can in a way lose our focus in life...we can forget all the Lord has done for us, we can take for granted the blessings of simply knowing Jesus, we can begin to live for things that are pleasing in this world rather than the things that are pleasing to our Father in heaven.

As we look at these verses I am reminded of something we recently studied in the Gospel of Mark on Thursdays and is found in Mark 12:30 which says this as Jesus responded to the question of a scribe. ³⁰ **And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.** *This is the first commandment.*

I believe Paul as he speaks to those in Rome is saying that they need to be fully set apart for the Lord, that they need to truly live out their faith, that they need to be willing to surrender their lives and their desires that they might honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul even says in verse 1 that presenting yourself as a living sacrifice is considered reasonable service. In light of all Jesus has done it only makes sense that you and I would reverently say that we will no longer live for ourselves.

I believe there are times in life that we lose sight of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that was made on our behalf. I would remind us today of what the scriptures say in 1 Peter 1:18-19 which says this ¹⁸**knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers,** ¹⁹**but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.**

The simple reality is that Jesus gave it all...In light of this Paul beseeches the believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice.

When we think about presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice I want to just define what it means to present yourself to something. To present yourself means to yield to something, to give yourself for a cause, or to place a person or thing at the disposal of another.

Previously Paul spoke in Romans 6 about our need to present ourselves as instruments of righteousness rather than sin. Here we are exhorted to live life not for self but rather unto the Lord.

That means you and I should have a yes sir attitude when the Lord asks us to do something. It means we should regularly consider our own lives and desires as dead that we might be given to the service of our Lord and Savior.

I am reminded when you think about a living sacrifice that the idea is that you still have a will...Meaning you can choose whether you will be a sacrifice unto the Lord or not. Jesus said this over in Luke 9:23-24 when the Word says ²³Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

I believe this conveys the same idea that every day, that every minute really you and I must make a choice whom we shall serve...Joshua had that same question for the Israelites in Joshua 24:15 when he said ¹⁵And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Each of us must choose what we will do with our time, our efforts, and our thoughts...Paul beseeched the believers, he begged them, he pleaded with them to make the choice to be a living sacrifice unto God and he said that doing so was only reasonable in light of the great mercies of God.

Verse 2 says ²And 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.

As we live as living sacrifices unto the Lord, Paul then goes on to give two additional commands. The first thing he says is not to be conformed to this world.

To define the word conform it can mean to comply with rules, standards or laws...it can also mean to behave according to socially acceptable standards or to be similar in form or type, to agree to something. Thayer's Greek lexicon defines it as to allow one's mind and character to be conformed to another's pattern...I guess I prefer to make things simple and would just say Paul is saying "Don't be smashed into the patterns of this world" "Don't let the world dictate who you are going to be"

I wanted to ask you today as we are studying this have you ever noticed how crafty and how manipulative the ways of this world are? The world wants us to compromise, to accept everyone for who they are...the world wants us to be conformed to their thinking and their ways rather than the ways God has clearly revealed in His Word.

It's a hard thing when we go through life and all around us the ways of the world are chased after with great energy and strength by those who don't follow Jesus. It can become very easy to love the systems of this world and even to

embrace them. John the apostle had the following to say in 1 John 2:15-17 which says ¹⁵ **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** ¹⁶ **For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

The scriptures teach us that the world and its ways are not to dominate us. I think we must be very careful that the greatest influence of our lives is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word which has been given to us.

Not only does Paul beseech us to not be conformed to this world but he then gives us something to work towards and focus on when he says that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

That word for transformed is the same as metamorphosis the word used to describe how a butterfly changes from a caterpillar into something beautiful.

When we come to Jesus the reality is that we need to be transformed in our minds, we need to have the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit come in and change the way we think.

Before Christ we were slaves in our minds, the world pressed us and conformed us and we just went right along with it without any ability to say no or go a different way.

That's not how it is to be anymore if we are in Jesus? The Lord has given us a sound mind, in Him we can take our thoughts captive, in the Lord as we study His Word we can have minds that are totally changed...I can think of no better way to have a renewed mind than to allow the Holy Spirit to change us and to allow God's Word to change us.

The Word of God we must remember is described the following way in Hebrews 4:12 which says ¹²For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. If you want your mind to be washed, if you want to see the heart of God then read the Word, study it, commit it to your heart and the Lord will transform your mind.

It has been said that in life that you will either be a thermometer or a thermostat...A thermometer only reacts to the environment that it is measuring **while a thermostat can change the environment, it sets the tone, it calls the shots.**

I would ask you today does the world tell you how to live? Does it demand you conform to it and you just go right along with it? Or do you by the Spirit effect the world around you as you are transformed in your mind by Christ?

Moving along here, I want to ask you all a question today as we look at this. Have you ever wanted to know what the good, acceptable and perfect will of God was for your life? I think if you are a believer in Jesus then your heart should certainly say on a regular basis that yes this is your desire and what you want for your life.

Well Paul here has just given us 3 keys to discovering the will of God for our lives. First you must be willing to lay down your life as a living sacrifice. Second you must be a person that refuses to be conformed to this world...And third you must allow God to transform your mind on a regular basis...As you walk through those three things in your life I am quite confident that you are going to be discovering God's will for you.

Now, the rest of the book of Romans will really focus on the results of a life that is lived in this manner and how we ought to live as we look to minister to each other and pass through this world. He begins in verses 3-8 by talking about how believers are a part of the body of Christ and that as we live

together in unity that there will be different gifts and abilities that we are each given.

We might ask why does Paul begin by speaking of the body of Christ... I mean why not focus on some of the other things he will talk about in the remaining chapters? I think it's because Paul knew the incredible value of being a part of a local church body or group of believers.

I believe very firmly that it's only natural that Christians will want to hang out with other Christians. If you think about it the Christian mindset and values as given in the Bible are very different from the way the world lives. When Christ begins to transform our minds we start to realize that we really have nothing in common with the world.

I want to challenge us today to think about who we spend time with. Do the people we spend time with have a desperate love for Jesus? Do they worship Him? Are they involved in the body of Christ? What do they talk about? What are their values?

And then compare that with what Paul has been saying when he says we should live a life that is constantly given as a living sacrifice and that we are not to be conformed to the world but instead be transformed by our minds.

I would encourage you today if you are thinking about this and you know that you aren't really all that connected to the

body of Christ that the Lord's heart for you is to be intimately connected with those that love Him...Yes, we live in the world and represent the world but we are no longer of the world...Instead we should have the kingdom of God and His people as the main focal point of our lives.

So let's look at this here if you look at verse 3 of Romans 12 it says 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.** It's interesting as this develops that Paul is going to be speaking about spiritual gifts that God gives His people and he is going to be speaking about the body of Christ and how we work together and as Paul is being led by the Holy Spirit to write these things he first begins to speak of the danger of pride.

Now if you have been around this church for a while then you know that pride is something that I speak about often.

The scriptures are clear that pride will only lead to the downfall of those who proclaim the name of Jesus. In the book of James we are told that God gives grace to those who are humble but He resists those who are proud. In Proverbs 16:18 the Word says **Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.**

And Proverbs 11:2 says When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.

I would briefly remind us that the enemy of our souls Satan himself fell when he chose to attempt to place himself above God being like the most high.

When it comes to practical Christian living, I think this is a key as we go through life. To be humble, to not think more highly of ourselves than we should.

Over in the book of 1 Corinthians 3:5-7 Paul said this ⁵Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

You and I matter very little, any good thing that comes from our lives or any ministry by the saints or to the saints is all because of His great grace in our lives.

We should remember that none of us does anything for any kind of self glory...instead the glory should be to the Master who chooses to use us to accomplish His purposes.

One commentator spoke of a surgeon and how the surgeon uses all kinds of utensils and instruments as he conducts surgery...Once that surgery is complete who does

the patient thank if the surgery is a success? Does he thank the scalpel? Or the clamps that held things open, or the stitches that keep a wound closed afterwards? Certainly Not! Instead the patient thanks the surgeon, the one that skillfully used the tools at his disposal. So it should be in the kingdom of God. Jesus should get the glory as He uses us.

We might even notice in verse 3 that Paul says these things through the grace given to me...Paul didn't approach his exhortations for this church from a place of greatness or lording it over them but instead knew he was where he was because of the grace of God. Over in 1 Timothy 1:12-13 Paul said this of God's call on his life when he said ¹²**And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, ¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.**

May we be like Paul remaining in a place of humility and may God grant us that we might be humble.

Paul even says here we should think soberly about ourselves and that means to have a right mind when it comes to who we are or to put a moderate estimation upon ourselves.

Look with me at verses 4-5 of Romans 12 which say this 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.

For homework today you might go and read 1 Corinthians 12 as it will speak of the body of Christ and how we need each other and how we all have different parts to play in the local church body.

In the human body we also are made up of multiple parts. We have hands and eyes and mouths and feet...These parts are very different one from another and have a totally different role to play as we go through life.

So it is with the body of Christ. We must remember that none of us is more important than another. Instead we should be looking to discover the gifts that God has given us and then faithfully use those gifts to bless and minister to others that God has placed in our lives.

There are a variety of gifts in the body of Christ. I can't do what others can and others can't do what I can. You certainly don't want me to come up and lead worship or attempt to fix a broken water heater. There are those in the body of Christ though that have those gifts and they should use those to build up and care for the body of Christ.

In verses 6-8 of our text in Romans 12 we have 7 gifts that God gives and an exhortation from Paul that if we have those

gifts we should use them in proportion to our faith. Let's look at those.

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.

If you are a note taker let me list the 7 gifts that we have before us and we'll talk about each one a little bit here this morning. We have the gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and showing mercy listed here.

I do want you to know this is not a comprehensive list of spiritual gifts before us. For further study again you might again look at 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and also at Ephesians 4.

Notice in verse 6 that each have different gifts and that they are given according to the grace that has been given to us. Paul wants us to know again that this is not about us, our abilities or our talents.

I will say when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit that some gifts are just natural talents God has given us and others are supernatural I would say in that we would never have the

ability in ourselves...Just as an example when it comes to teaching or speaking publicly when I was in high school I nearly failed my speech class for the huge nerves I would have and yet here the Lord has me...it could only be Him that would cause me to come in front of people. Naturally speaking I would rather hide in a corner somewhere.

So gifts of God can come about naturally in our lives or they can come about as the Spirit of God empowers us to minister to others.

The first gift we have here is prophecy and prophecy can show up in a few ways. In a New Testament sense I like what 1 Corinthians 14:3 says when it says ³**But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.**

I believe a word of prophecy is often times an individual simply reminding the people of God of what the Word says and what the heart of God is. The prophets of old would constantly remind the people of Israel about what God had said.

A gift of prophecy can also include a future event that might take place and you might look up a person by the name of Agabus in the New Testament in the book of Acts as he prophesied of the future a few times.

Over all as one prophesies those they speak to will be edified, exhorted and comforted in the faith.

Paul also said as he spoke about prophecy and all of these gifts that if you have a particular gift that you should use it. Don't neglect the gifts that you have as you go through life, instead we should use them.

Paul had to correct Timothy in his 2nd letter to him when he said this in 2 Timothy 1:6-7 ⁶**Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.** ⁷**For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.** Make sure you use the gifts you have been given so the body of Christ can be ministered to.

A healthy church walks out the gifts of the Spirit regularly...Multiple people serve in all kinds of capacities.

The second gift we have here is the gift of ministry and really this can be said to be the gift of helps or the gift of service. Some of you who are here today you have a heart to just help out wherever there is a need. Whether its helping someone move, taking chairs off of trucks when they arrive, cleaning the church, helping clean the church property or even shovel drives when it snows...Some of us are just gifted to be helpers, we don't feel the need to have to lead things, we can

come alongside others as they look to fill practical needs in the body of Christ.

We have lots of people with this gift here at CCJC...Multiple people serve in all kinds of capacities using the gift of ministry God has given them.

The third gift we have here is the gift of teaching and that can come out in all kinds of ways...Whether it be teaching adults, high schoolers, middle schoolers, elementary students or even the little ones in the nursery and toddler room.

The fourth gift we have here is the gift of exhortation and that is a gift to be able to come along side others and encourage them and remind them of the truths of the scriptures.

Exhorting someone is not you constantly rebuking that brother or sister but instead its done in a way that truly builds them up and helps them. An exhortation will often motivate an individual to move forward in Christ.

The fifth gift we have here is the gift of giving...I do believe this is referring to those that have a great desire to just bless others not only with monetary gifts but also of time and effort. I believe we are all called to give financially to the kingdom of God but I also believe God has just given some the ability to give with an extra happy heart and they love to give and they want no recognition for it. These individuals give with no expectations and just have a heart for God's

kingdom to be advanced. They may even willingly give individual gifts to those who are struggling.

The sixth gift we have here is the gift to lead and if you have that gift you should do so with diligence and remember if you have that gift to do so with a humble heart.

And then the final gift here is the gift of mercy...some of you just have a huge compassion for those who are struggling or those who make mistakes. When someone fails in some way or another your desire is to run to them and bless them and speak to them and give them a shoulder to cry on if needed. Those with this gift have a huge empathy for the trials and difficulties that others are going through.

In the body of Christ we all have different gifts and different abilities and these gifts come out in all kinds of different ways.

How many of you have heard of Sandy Adams before? He pastors at Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain in the Atlanta, GA area and he had the following to say about this passage of scripture and how the gifts of the Spirit are worked out in our lives.

He said this...Of course people ask, “How do I discover my gift?” Here’s a helpful exercise... Let's say a little girl came running down the center aisle carrying a potted plant she made for me in Sunday School. But half-way down she slips

and drops the plant and dirt and pottery spill all over the floor. **How would you react?** If you'd jump up and start looking for a broom you have the gift of ministry. If you'd pull out your wallet to pay for the broken pot yours is giving. If you say to the girl, "Young woman let this be a warning. Thus saith the Lord, there'll be many opportunities to stumble in life!" That's prophecy. If your reaction is to show the little gal a clever foot maneuver she can use to right herself the next time she slips then your gift is the gift of teaching. If you think, "let's rearrange chairs so this isn't repeated," that's leading. Or you'd give a pep talk, "You'll do better next time!" That's exhortation. Or perhaps you'd run up to hug and cuddle the child, well, obviously you have the gift of mercy.

But understand there would be seven diverse reactions among the people in this room - and all are valid, God-ordained reactions. **This is why we need each other.** We need all the gifts. A healthy church appreciates its diversity

Perhaps you are here today and you honestly just don't know what gifts God has given you or how you fit into the body of Christ...**I firmly believe that if you would take some time** and sit before the Lord and simply ask "Lord what gifts have you given me and how can I be used in the body of Christ" **that the Lord in time would reveal those to you. I would also**

strongly encourage you to apply verses 1-2 to your life, to meditate on those verses and as you do so you will be able to prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

Well we will stop there for today in our study through Romans...If today you need to be forgiven of your sins and you need to see Jesus forgive you and you know you need to get right with God Almighty I encourage you to just come forward during our closing time of worship and I know as you come to Jesus that His arms are going to be wide open to you.

Let's pray.