November 8, 2026

Notes:
This Lesson was created using:
- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

SACRIFICE: ROMANS 12:1-13

Introductory Activity

Ask: What do you like to do alone and what do you like to do with others?

Explain: (Teacher's note: If you have a younger group, you can tell the story of the *Green Hornet,* the great-nephew of the Lone Ranger, or of Bruce Wayne, aka Batman. Both can introduce the following point about Lone Ranger Christianity.) In 1933, George Trendle, owner of Detroit's radio station WXYZ, and writer Fran Striker created the *Lone Ranger*. By the end of the 1930's the radio program was broadcast on over 400 stations nationwide. In 1949, a TV adaptation debuted on ABC.

Those of a certain generation will remember that the Lone Ranger was named John Reid. Reid, a Texas Ranger, was the sole survivor of an ambush by a criminal gang. After recovering, he became a vigilante. While working outside the law to pursue justice, the Lone Ranger had a strict moral code. He worked hard not to take a life, always aiming for the hands of the gunmen threatening him.

What is interesting about the Lone Ranger is that he lived a life of sacrifice and *community*. He gave up a lot to don the black mask and help maintain peace in the West. But he was a not-so-alone Lone Ranger. We should not forget that he was accompanied by his trusty ally Tonto. As the Lone Ranger, John Reid did much good. As a radio and TV character, he might have been a role model for justice seekers. However, Lone Ranger Christianity is different.

Lone Ranger Christianity is not a life marked by sacrifice *or* community. Instead of asking "how can I help the community (of faith)?", they ask "what's in it for me?" Now, a Christian who eschews community would never say such things or even know they feel this way, but by separating themselves from the God-given institution of the church, their actions reveal the feelings of their heart. We can see this same mentality when the church member or church attender refuses to sacrifice their preferences for the good of the Kingdom or when they refuse to maintain a Christlike spirit. Not only are they manifesting a non-sacrificial attitude, but they are not practicing the humility commanded by Paul in relation to the local body.

Summarize and Transition: Today we are going to be in Romans 12. In this passage, Paul is going to move from the theological to the practical. Overall, we are going to learn that "the life of a believer is one of sacrifice and community." (ETB LG, 109)

1. LIVING SACRIFICE (ROM. 12:1-2)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 12:1-2.

Explain: Paul begins this passage with "therefore… in view of the mercies of God." This signals a transition in the book from the theological to the practical. Chapters 1-11 "tell us what we should believe," and chapter 12 picks up and "tells us how we should live." (ETBC, 101) In this transition, we see that we should be **Living Theology**. "We must translate our *learning* into *living* and show by our daily lives that we trust God's word." (Be, 136) We live out the theology that we have learned as walking, talking recipients of God's mercies.

This truth should have ramifications for our participants in the educational ministry of the church. As we listen to the Sunday morning sermon and participate in small groups and other discipleship opportunities, we should make a point of not just learning the content of the Bible but applying it to our lives. In our small groups, we

want to teach for transformation, not just information. Likewise, as group members, we need to listen for application points gleaned from the content of the passage. If we leave on Sundays with a head of knowledge and no change to our heart and will, we have not experienced Sunday morning as we should have. We need to leave living out the theology we learned.

Discuss: What are some practices we can put in place to help us leave on Sundays ready to live out the theology we learned.

Explain: One practice for some might be note-taking. This might not work for everyone, but it could help some glean the application points from the sermon or lesson more easily. A second practice, related to small groups, is to prepare beforehand. You could take the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* home and read the material during the week. You could also prepare by simply reading the Scripture passage beforehand. Other tools like the online Bible study, podcast, or printable lesson plans are available to help prepare for the lesson. One final suggestion is to actively participate in the small group discussion. Ask questions. Raise application points. Suggest ways your group can apply the lesson each week. These are active decisions you can make to be living theology. However, there is another important aspect to living in light of the mercies of God. Paul next says we need to make an active decision to be a **Living Sacrifice**.

Explain: This is a well-known verse that harkens back to Old Testament practices. In the time before Christ, Israel was required to present sacrifices to God. These sacrifices were various and had various purposes. Regardless of the purpose, each of the sacrifices had a few things in common. One, the faithful had to "present" them to the priests. In other words, they had to decide to actually do something. As Mounce says, "Holiness of life rarely progresses apart from deliberative acts of the will." (NAC, 231) Sometimes as believers we might think "it would be nice to do X" or "I really should do Y." It is not enough to desire or wish to be a living sacrifice. It is something we must follow through on. The second factor Paul's admonition to be a living sacrifice has in common with the OT practice is that a sacrifice is, by definition, a sacrifice—a giving up of something. In the OT, the faithful Jew would give up an animal, some grain, or some oil. The faithful follower of Jesus desiring to be a living sacrifice must give up his or her life to Christ. The word "present" in verse 1 is the same word used in 6:13 and 6:19. We might consider the idea to be "yield" or "offer up." (cf. TNTC, 213) We are to yield our bodies, our entire mortal self, to God for His service.

Discuss: What does it mean to yield ourselves to God as a sacrifice that is holy?

Explain: We generally hear the word holy and equate it with righteousness or sinlessness. That *is* a correct way of understanding the word, and we should be righteous and avoidant of sin. However, there is another way of understanding the word holy. An animal brought to the altar in the OT was holy in that it was dedicated to the service of the Lord. Likewise, the furniture in the temple was holy, in that it was dedicated to the service of the Lord. The king of Israel was not allowed to go into the temple and pull out the candlesticks to help light the courtyard of the palace for a big party.

In a similar manner, the Christian who lives as a holy, living sacrifice is committed completely, like the bull, to the service of the Lord. Moreover, like the offering of the bull or lamb in the OT was an act of worship, the offering, presenting, yielding of ourselves to the Lord is our means of worship. "He is calling for a life of worship every day." (Exalting, 197) If we are living as a holy, living sacrifice, worship will not be relegated to Sunday morning only. "Every day is a worship experience when your body is yielded to the Lord." (BE, 138)

The act of living as a sacrifice is similar to the holy nature of the candlestick in the temple as well. The Christian who is a holy, living sacrifice cannot use his body, mind, or heart for any other purpose than that of pleasing God. We will talk more about how we live as a holy, living sacrifice in the following passages. But it's important

that we learn how to become a holy, living sacrifice first. In verse 2, Paul will reveal the means of becoming and the result of what it means to be a **Living Transformation**.

Reread Verse 2 ("Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.")

Explain: We could spend all day on this verse, but we need to be cognizant of the time. The first thing we see is that Paul tells the believer not to be conformed to the pattern of this world. J.B. Phillips translates this phrase as, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold." The process of being conformed is a passive process that is enacted upon us by the world. To be molded into the pattern of this world requires nothing of us but inaction. Instead, Paul tells us to be transformed by the Lord. While the verb in the previous sentence is passive (*be* transformed) and implies that God does the transforming, the act of being transformed is not a passive act on our part. Instead, we must make ourselves available to the transforming work of God and participate in the practices that lead to the renewal of our mind. Just to be plain, some actions lead to the renewal of the mind that transforms us from the inside out, which then enables us to live as holy, living sacrifices.

Discuss: What are the means by which our minds are renewed? What can you do to renew your mind?

Explain: We should first note that proper renewal of the mind, in the Christian sense, is an act of the Spirit. If I attempt and experience a renewal of the mind without the work of the Spirit, I am simply participating in self-help. However, a believer filled by and led by the Spirit knows there are a few things they can do to experience the renewal of their mind. The *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* says, "The Holy Spirit uses God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and worship as tools in renewing our minds." (ETB LG, 113)

Optional Activity: If you have time, read or have group members read the following passages and discuss what they say about the renewal of our minds (If you want to do this activity but are stressed for time, you could divide the group into smaller groups and ask each group to discuss the passages.)

- Romans 7:6; 8:2 (Renewed by the power of the Spirit)
- Philippians 4:8 (Guide your mind to godly things)
- Psalm 119:37; Ephesians 6:17; Colossians 3:16 (Fill your mind with Scripture)
- 2 Corinthians 3:17 (Dwell on the glory of Christ.)

So, the means of being transformed is the renewal of our mind through the Spiritual Disciplines.[1] What is the result? The result is "that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." In other words, you will know how to live as a holy sacrifice to the Lord.

Summarize Transition: As Paul makes the transition from the theological to the practical, he tells us that we are to be living sacrifices that have been transformed by the Spirit through the renewing of our minds by way of the spiritual disciplines so that we can know the will of God, which will instruct us on what it means to be a living sacrifice.

In the following verses, he is going to give us the practical instructions, but first he had to remind us that "As believers, our lives are to be shaped by God, not by worldly influences." (ETB LG, 113)

2. IN THE CHURCH (ROM. 12:3-8)

[1] Learn more about the Spiritual Disciples
Read Richard Fosters *Celebration of Discipline*
Listen to Don Whitney's interview https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-are-spiritual-disciplines

Sacrifice: Romans 12:1-13

Read (or have someone read) Romans 12:3-8

Explain: As we move into the practical aspects of the Christian life, we do not leave theology behind. Instead, we begin to practice "relational theology." (Be, 136) Paul is going to show us how to do so in the local church. He does so by reminding his readers of the “grace given to” him as an apostle. As a leader chosen by Christ Himself, the first thing Paul instructs the Roman church member to do is **Know Your Position**. At this point, Paul is not talking about your role in the ministry of the church. Instead, he is saying know your place: don’t think too highly of yourself. Sometimes church members (and church leaders) can develop an elevated evaluation of their place in the church.

Discuss: What are some reasons a person might develop an elevated appraisal of themselves in the life of the church?

Explain: The reasons for getting a big head are myriad. A person might become arrogant because they were given a leadership position. A person might also think their wealth or place in the community gives them the right to elevate themselves in the church. Another reason, and more apropos to Paul’s point in this context, is gifting. Sometimes we get the idea that we are God’s gift to the church. And *we might actually bring* valuable skills, personal resources, or service to the church because of our God-given gifts, but we are instructed "not to think too highly of ourselves when it comes to these gifts; rather, we should be humble and faithful stewards of them." (Exalting, 200) Paul says know your place because “God has distributed a measure of grace to each one” in the local church.

To understand what “measure of grace” means here, we must consider the context of this passage. The “measure of grace” is a spiritual giftedness. Paul will speak of spiritual gifts in several other passages (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11). Every believer in the local church has been gifted by the Spirit in a way to help the church fulfill God’s mission for the church. No one gift is more important than the other. They are all necessary. Therefore, we must know our position and maintain an attitude of humility. However, that does not mean we should think lowly of ourselves because we should also **Take our Position.**

In verses 4-6a, we see that we all have a unique position in the diverse ministry of the local church. If you consider creation, you know that God has a penchant for diversity. If you travel the globe or even your own region, you will notice changes in the landscape. If you go to Africa on safari or even your local zoo, you will see that God has created many different kinds of animals and difference even among the same type of animals. God’s creation shows that God loves diversity. On the other hand, if you examine the topography of a landscape and the plants that grow (or don’t grow) on that landscape, you will see that God *designed* the diversity. The same is true of animals: the diversity, even differentiations within a species, all serve a purpose.

The same is true of God’s church. The global church is the most diverse anthropological institution ever created, and it was created by God. If you go to church in Far East Asia, Northern Siberia, Southern Europe, or Patagonia, the diverse nature of Christ’s church will be evident alongside worship and the truth of the same One God. However, each of those churches will be *doing church* a little differently because of their cultural context. The global church is a case study in diversity and design. Your local body of believers is the same. While the amount and type of diversity will differ based on location, a healthy church will be diverse in the makeup of its congregants. Nevertheless, that diversity is by design. Each person brings a different history and, more importantly to Paul’s discussion, a different gifting. Every church member is important to the ministry of the church. Let me just put it plainly and return to our metaphor: in God’s design for the local body, there are to be no fans in the audience and no players on the bench. Every church member is necessary if the church is going to effectively contribute to the advancement of the Kingdom. Therefore, every church member must

humbly know their position (you're no more important than anyone else) and take their position (be active in the local body). Lastly, this passage shows us that you must **Play *Your* Position**.

In verses 6b-8a, Paul helps us see that we should be a productive team player. First, he tells us to **Know and Utilize Your Specialty**. As we saw above, the church is diverse, but every person has a unique role to play. If your gift is prophecy or service or teaching or exhorting, then put that gift to work. We do not have time here to define each of those gifts or explore all that Paul has to say about giftedness. That is a lesson for another day, and it is not really what Paul wants to discuss here. Instead, the point is to learn what God has made you good at and then get active.

Activity: Ask the group if anyone knows their spiritual giftedness and, if they are willing, how they utilize that gift to enhance the ministry of the church or God's Kingdom. You might get a bunch of blank stares. That is ok. Encourage your group to write down this web address or go ahead and enter it into your phones so they can learn more about their spiritual gifts later: gifts.churchgrowth.org. This is a gifts survey that I have used, and it seems to be pretty accurate in my experience.

After you discover your giftedness and get active using it, you should then, Paul tells us, **Hone Your Specialty**. That is what he is getting at in the second half of verse 8. Let's look at his examples quickly. He says if you are gifted with generosity, then get better at giving generously, not begrudgingly. If you are gifted with leadership, then *lead* and lead with diligence. A side note on this one: many of you are picturing your pastor or church staff at this point. They *are* leaders; however, there are other leaders in your congregation. Sometimes these lay leaders take a backseat and do not practice or sharpen their skills as leaders. Conversely, sometimes they overstep and cause problems. Part of honing your skills as a leader is knowing how to lead as a follower. Good, healthy lay leaders are *necessary* if the local church is going to be successful. You might not lead out front, but you might need to lead quietly and supportively of your out-front, pastoral leadership. Now, back to Paul: if you are gifted with mercy, then learn to do so with cheerfulness. Let's be honest, it is not also easy to be the person people come to when they are down or need guidance. And sometimes God gifts us with mercy because of our other roles, and it can be hard or tiring at times. THAT IS OK, but we need to strengthen the skill of mercy and cheerfully welcome those who need us.

The honing of our skills applies to all giftedness, not just these three examples at the end of verse 8. It applies to the gifts Paul previously mentioned as well as the ones he lists in other places. If you are a prophet (either hearing a special word from God and delivering it or preaching the Word of God), then work to become better at it. If you are gifted in service, then serve and seek to hone your skill as a servant. This means looking for ways to serve others and the local church and, when necessary, recruiting others to help you serve. If you are gifted with teaching, then teach and teach well. Sorry, another side note: The local church has been gifted with everything and every person it needs to accomplish the work God has for it. (Now, stay with me here.) One of the tasks of the Great Commission (Matth 28:18ff) is "teaching [disciples of Jesus] to observe everything [He has] commanded" (v. 20). We traditionally do this through the small group ministry of the church (and other ways). Moreover, we know that after about 18 months, a new small group finds it difficult to welcome new people. We also know that if a new person at church does not get plugged into a small group, they are not likely to continue attending the church. Therefore, a growing church needs new groups regularly. If new groups are going to start, then a few things need to happen. (1) People gifted with teaching need to recognize their giftedness and accept the calling of God. (2) Teachers need to train up new teachers from within their groups ***and release them and other members of the group to go start a new group***. (3) Leaders need to offer training to new and existing teachers. (4) Teachers need to be willing to sharpen their skills as a teacher.

Now all of this might sound counterintuitive. You might ask, if I am gifted in an area, shouldn't I automatically be good at doing whatever it is? Not necessarily. Honing our giftedness, getting better at what God gifted us to

do, is part of the sanctification process. Becoming more generous or more diligent or more cheerful as a generous or leading or encouraging person means you are becoming more Christlike. Becoming a better preacher, servant, or teacher means you are becoming more like the person God gifted you to be.

Summarize and Transition: Let's review this passage because we spent a lot of time here. First, we are to be humble church members. Second, we should be active in utilizing our gifts in the church. Third, we should seek ways to utilize our gifts and seek to be more effective in our execution of those gifts. In conclusion, "Believers are to serve alongside each other, exercising their God-given gifts." (ETB LG, 115) But what attitudes or character traits should the church member have? That is where Paul goes next.

3. IN RELATIONSHIP (ROM. 12:9-13)

DO NOT READ THE PASSAGE YET

Explain: In verses 9-13, Paul gives us 13 commands. We could develop a 13-week small group bible study or sermon series based on these commands, but we won't. Instead, we will read the passage and let the Word of God speak to us as He tells us how to relate as members of the local body. Note that. This is how church members are to relate to one another.

Read verse 9

1) **Love Rightly** (9a): Church is no place for fake smiles and halfhearted or hypocritical love. If you have problems with someone that are limiting your ability to love them, then find a way to address that either with them, yourself, or the Lord. God is blunt here, so I am too.
2) **Hate Rightly** (9b): Paul uses a very strong word here: "detest" evil. The redeemed of God should hate evil. Note: he says hate evil, not people.
3) **Stick to What is Right** (9c): Next, God says cling to what is good. The word cling means to glue yourself to something. Stay ten feet away from evil but glue yourself to what is good.

Read verse 10

4) **Practice Familial Love** (10a): God returns to the topic of love. Healthy families love one another. Healthy churches love like a family. Take note of that. Are we, as church members, *really* loving to the other members of our church? Not just your friends, but others in the church.
5) **Practice the Habit of Honoring Others** (10b): God says to take the lead in honoring others. Be the first to find reasons to honor or bless others with your words. Honor also means to show deference when it is due.

Read verse 11

6) **Be Zealous** (11a): Dictionary.com defines zealous as "full of, characterized by, or showing intense enthusiasm, fervor, or ardent devotion to a cause, belief, or goal." Be zealous for God, God's people, and God's purposes. Can you truly say you show intense enthusiasm for the work of the local church?
7) **Be Fervent** (11b): Being fervent is similar to being zealous. God adds: Be fervent in the Spirit. The same description is used for Apollos in Acts 18:25; do you know what he was doing? He was utilizing his gifts for the church.
8) **Be Servants** (11c): Next we are instructed to serve the Lord. Remember, God is instructing us in relation to the local church. When it comes to the church, are you serving yourself or the Lord, your agenda or His?

Read verse 12. Each of these relates to the afflictions that come with truly being the church in a sinful world.

9) **Hope in the End** (12a): The local church should never lose hope. God's Kingdom will advance until He returns to establish it for good.

10) **Be Patient until the End** (12b): The local church should be persistently patient as it does the work even if God's Kingdom appears to advance slowly.
11) **Be Prayerful to the End** (12c): Prayer is the essential element to remaining faithful to the end. Pray for help in times of weakness or trouble in the church. Pray for the community. Pray for strength and courage to do the work of ministry.

Read verse 13

12) **Share with the Saved** (13a): Two quotes about this command: "Persistent and enthusiastic service in the Lord, loving others, valuing others, and doing good (vv. 9-12) sometimes means helping others in their time of need." (ETBC, 109) "Christian fellowship is much more than a pat on the back and a handshake. It means sharing the burdens and the blessings of others so that we all grow together and glorify the Lord." (Be, 142)
13) **Seek to Share with All** (13b): Hospitality literally means "love for the stranger." In our personal lives, we should show hospitality—show love to those you do not know. In church we should show hospitality—love those who we don't know when they come to church. Love them how? Rightly, truly (v. 9a) **and like family** (v. 9c).

Summarize and Transition: Stop for a moment and review those 13 mini sermons. Imagine a church that looks like that. A church that excels in those 13 areas would be attractive and truly epitomize what the Gospel does to a person and a church. "As believers practice sacrificial love in their relationships, their lives give evidence of God's grace." (ETB LG, 117)

CONCLUDE

There was a lot in this lesson. Let's review and challenge ourselves.

1) "As believers, our lives are to be shaped by God, not by worldly influences." (ETB LG, 113) Are you being conformed by the world or transformed by the Lord? What is one spiritual discipline you can implement this week that will make you more ready to be shaped by the Lord?
2) "Believers are to serve alongside each other, exercising their God-given gifts." (ETB LG, 115) Do you know your gifts or your role in the church? Are you living out your giftedness at the church, and are you seeking to grow in your giftedness or role at the church?
3) "As believers practice sacrificial love in their relationships, their lives give evidence of God's grace." (ETB LG, 117)—How can you do your part to better help the church look like the Church of Christ? What is one lesson you can take from the 13 mini sermons?