

XXVII. A Living Sacrifice

January 17/18/19, 2017

Romans 12:1-8

Aim: To apply Paul's doctrinal teaching on the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lifestyle consistent with our calling: inner transformation leading to outward service.

In this final main section of the body of the letter (12:1-15:13), Paul shifts his focus from instruction to exhortation: from 'indicative' to 'imperative.' Paul knows that it is vital to flesh out general principles about the transforming power of the gospel. This he does in 12:1-15:13, as he urges Christians to manifest the power of the gospel in specific areas of day-to-day life. Romans 12:1-15:13 is therefore integral to the letter and to its purposes. It is not an appendix, a last-minute 'add-on' relatively unrelated to the real – theological – heart of the letter. Romans, while thoroughly theological and carefully argue, is not a doctrinal thesis. It is Paul's grandest exposition of the gospel. The gospel unleashes God's power so that people, by embracing it, can be rescued from the disastrous effects of sin, being pronounced 'righteous' in God's sight, and having a secure hope for salvation from wrath in the last day. But, as Paul has made clear in Romans 6, deliverance from the power of sin is inseparable from deliverance from its penalty. Union with Christ in His death and resurrection provides both. For Jesus Christ is the Lord; and thus to believe in Him means at the same time a commitment to obey Him. The 'imperative' of a transformed life is therefore not an optional 'second step' after we embrace the gospel; it is rooted in our initial response to the gospel itself. To eliminate this part of Romans would be therefore to omit an indispensable dimension of the gospel.

The transition from Romans 11 to Romans 12 is not, therefore, a transition from 'theology' to 'practice,' but from a focus more on the 'indicative' side of the gospel to a focus more on the 'imperative' side of the gospel. 'What God has given to us' in Romans 1-11 gives way to 'what we are to give to God.' 'Indicative' and 'imperative' do not succeed each other as two distinct stages in Christian experience, but are two sides of the same coin. Paul's exhortation falls into two parts: injunctions relating to Christian conduct generally in chapters 12-13 and guidelines for a specific problem affecting the Roman community in 14:1-15:13.

The 'ethical' section of Romans now begins, as signaled by the opening words, 'I appeal to you, therefore....' So what does Paul 'appeal' to the Roman Christians to do? For the most part, he encourages them in their relationships towards one another. The core element of the ethical 'appeal' is the unity, love, and mutual service of the people of God, who through the gospel are the people of the Messiah, composed of Jews and Gentiles.

A. Individual Transformation (Romans 12:1-2)

Romans 12:1-2 is one of the best-known passages in the NT. Its fame is justified: here Paul succinctly and with vivid imagery summarizes what the Christian response to God's grace in Christ should be. This passage can nourish us wherever we are in our spiritual pilgrimage. For those further along, it can serve as an affirmation and deepening of matters long settled. For those just beginning to seriously interact with the demands of Christ, it can be a spiritual benchmark.

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1. The Body (12:1)

a) Appeal (12:1a)

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers...

The ‘therefore’ is intended to follow the entire unfolding of Paul’s argument for the gospel that began in chapter 1. At the beginning of Romans 12, Paul makes a clear transition from the doctrinal portion of the epistle to the application portion. In light of all he has unfolded about the things of God, there is a practical conclusion that Paul wants his readers to reach. He is not simply making a logical argument, although he is certainly doing that; he is making an apostolic plea. Now that his readers have been shown the true gospel—justification, sanctification, the doctrines of grace in election, perseverance, and the sweetness of God’s providential care—Paul wants his readers to consider its implications and applications.

‘Therefore’ must be given its full weight. Paul wants to show that the exhortations of 12:1-15:13 are built firmly on the theology of chapters 1-11. The English word ‘exhort’ (*παρακαλεω*, *parakaleō*) captures well the nuance of the Greek in contexts such as this. It’s semantic range lies somewhere between ‘request’ and ‘command’: an exhortation comes with authority, but the authority of a preacher who is the mediator of God’s truth rather than the authority of a superior issuing a command.

Urge is from *parakaleō*, which has the basic meaning of calling alongside in order to help or give aid. It later came to connote exhortation, admonishing, or encouraging. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the *Paraklētos*, our divine Helper (also translated Comforter, Counselor, Advocate). Paul is speaking as a human helper or counselor to his Christian brethren in Rome. His admonition is a command that carries the full weight of his apostleship. It is not optional. Yet he also wanted to come alongside those ‘brethren’ as a fellow believer, to lovingly encourage them to fulfill what already was the true inner desire and bent of their new hearts—to dedicate themselves without reservation to the Lord who had redeemed them.

This is the first occasion the word *parakalō* (‘I encourage, appeal to’) appears in Romans, signaling the beginning of a passage devoted to ‘encouragement.’ This ‘appeal’ clearly springs from all he has taught to this point. God’s ‘mercies’ are the many examples of His kindness and patience already mentioned. We must note very carefully that Paul’s ‘appeal’ is not to reinstate the Law or its ‘works’ or any form of legalism as a ground for salvation. Rather, he is appealing to those already saved to ‘live out’ that salvation as people being transformed by the Word and the Spirit.

b) Mercies (12:1b)

...by the mercies of God...

‘Through the mercies of God’ underscores the connection between what Paul now asks his readers to do and what he has told them earlier in the letter that God has done for them. All that Paul has written in the letter thus far may be summed up under the heading of the mercy of God in action. Paul has just summarized that universal mercy of God (11:30-32) and expressed praise to God for it (11:33-36). Now he calls Christians to respond. What Paul calls for in v. 1 – and by extension, all of 12:2-15:13 – is no more (and no less!) than the appropriate and expected response to God’s mercy as we have experienced it. For God’s mercy is not a matter of past benefits only, but it continues to exercise its power in and through us. That God’s mercy does not automatically produce the obedience God expects is clear from the imperatives in this

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passage. But God’s mercy manifested in His Spirit’s work of inward renewal (see v. 2) does impel us toward the obedience that the gospel demands.

Paul makes his plea in light of God’s tender mercies, which he has just finished expounding in chapter 11, and those mercies are these: 1) we are justified by faith; 2) our sins are forgiven through the atonement of Christ; 3) God works all things together for our good; and 4) God calls people to Himself. Everything Paul has expounded throughout the doctrinal section of the epistle, chapters 1-11, points to God’s mercy. The mercies of God lead us to the ‘therefore.’

The basis of commitment is the mercies of God, as Paul so clearly states in the opening phrase of v. 1. Specifically, Paul is talking about the mercy of God as spelled out in the eleven preceding chapters—God’s mercy to the terribly fallen human race through the provision of His Son. Radically sinful man was radically lost. But God provided a radical righteousness through the radical person of His Son, which made a radical new life and view of history possible. In view of this mercy God calls us to commitment. The greater our comprehension of what God has done for us, the greater our commitment should be. Practically applied, Christ’s gift, meditated on, accepted, taken to heart, is a magnet drawing us to deepest commitment to Him. Immense vision will bring immense commitment. Paul does not ask for a favor when he says, ‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God...’ but rather is stating an obligation. It is our obligation to think about what Christ has done and to make our commitment accordingly. There is scarcely anything more important for building our commitment than an increasing understanding of the greatness of God and His mercies to us.

c) Present (12:1c)

...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...

The *character* of the commitment is given in v. 1b. This commitment has two prominent characteristics: it is *total* and it is *reasonable*. The totality of the commitment comes dramatically to us through the language of sacrifice. The Greek translated ‘to present’ is a technical term used for the ritual presentation of a sacrifice. ‘Your bodies,’ referring to more than skin and bones, signifies everything we are—our totality. ‘Sacrifice’ refers to the holocaust in which the offering is totally consumed. Old Testament sacrifices pervade the picture—total sacrifice.

In the LXX, *paristēmi* (‘to present’) was often used as a technical term for a priest’s placing an offering on the altar. It therefore carried the general idea of surrendering or yielding up. As members of God’s present ‘holy priesthood’ (1 Pe. 2:5), Christians are here exhorted to perform what is essentially a priestly act of worship. Because the verb is in the imperative, the exhortation carries the weight of a command. The first thing we are commanded ‘to present’ to God is our ‘bodies.’ Our bodies are more than physical shells that house our souls. They are also where our old, unredeemed humanness resides. In fact, our humanness is a *part* of our bodies, whereas our souls are not. Our bodies incorporate our humanness, our humanness incorporates our flesh, and our flesh incorporates our sin, as Romans 6 and 7 so clearly explain. Our ‘bodies’ therefore encompass not only our physical being but also the evil longings of our mind, emotions, and will.

We experience God’s mercy as a power that exerts a total and all-encompassing claim upon us: grace now ‘reigns’ over us (5:21). It is therefore entirely fitting that our response is to be one that is equally total and all-encompassing: the presentation of our entire persons as a sacrifice to God. Paul’s use of sacrificial imagery here fits a pattern found throughout the NT. Christians no

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longer offer literal sacrifices; for Christ has fulfilled and thus brought to an end the OT sacrificial system. But the centrality of sacrifice in ancient religion made it a natural and inevitable vehicle for the early Christians to express their own religious convictions. At the same time, the NT use of cultic language has an important salvation-historical and polemical function, claiming for Christianity the fulfillment of those institutions so central to the OT and to Judaism. Christians offer no bloody sacrifice on an altar; but they offer ‘spiritual sacrifices’ (1 Pe. 2:5), such as the ‘sacrifice of praise to God, which is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name’ (Heb. 13:15).

In Romans 12:1, however, the sacrifice we offer is not some specific form of praise or service, but our ‘bodies’ themselves. It is not only what we can give that God demands; He demands the giver. ‘Body’ can, of course, refer to the physical body as such, and the metaphorical associations with sacrifice make it an appropriate choice here. But Paul probably intends to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person’s interaction with the world. Paul is making a special point to emphasize that the sacrifice we are called on to make requires a dedication to the service of God in the harsh and often ambiguous life of this world.

The bloody sacrifices of animals by *bona fide* priests in the Old Testament are now superseded by the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah, the true ‘Lamb of God.’ Matching His ‘once-for-all’ sacrifice is the ongoing ‘sacrifice’ of His people. It is the bloodless ‘sacrifice’ of believers in the self-offering of their ‘bodies’ (their total beings) in grateful service to their merciful God.

We think of *sacrifice* as the giving away of something of extreme value. There is an element of that in biblical sacrifice, but the primary point is not that we should lose something but that we should express something. The whole principle of giving to God is an expression of worship. In the Old Testament, the animal sacrifices had to be killed before they could be offered. In stark contrast to that, in light of the gospel, we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices—not our animals, vegetables, or cereal, but our bodies. We tend to think of worship as spiritual rather than physical, so we might wonder why Paul asks us to present our bodies rather than our souls. Actually, Paul is writing about the entire person. God wants us to give ourselves. Christ, in the ultimate sense, gave *Himself*, not His *self*. He gave Himself for us, and we are to respond by giving ourselves to Him.

d) Sacrifice (12:1d)

...living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God...

Paul qualifies the sacrifice that we offer with our bodies with three adjectives. Each of the three continues the sacrificial metaphor. ‘Living’ refers to the nature of the sacrifice itself; one that does not die as it is offered but goes on living and therefore continues in its efficacy until the person who is offered dies. ‘Holy’ is a regular description of sacrifices; it implies here that the offering of ourselves to God involves a being ‘set apart’ from the profane and a dedication to the service of the Lord. Such a sacrifice is ‘well pleasing to God.’

Moreover, this sacrifice is described as ‘living...holy...acceptable.’ The believer isn’t killed as the Old Testament sacrifices were but remains alive. We are to be living sacrifices in the deep theological sense of ‘newness of life’ (cp. 6:4). We are also to be ‘holy’ in that we have renounced sin and are set apart to God. Finally, we are to be ‘acceptable’ sacrifices not because we deserve to be accepted, but because the offerings are true to God’s specifications.

This ‘sacrifice’ of themselves is to have a threefold character: 1) it is to be a ‘living sacrifice,’ that is, self-giving, vital, and alive, not passive and half-hearted with anything held back; 2) it is

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to be a ‘holy sacrifice,’ that is, with bodies given in serving God in moral purity; and 3) it is to be a ‘sacrifice pleasing to God,’ not in the Levitical sense of the exact attention to ritual detail, but in the sense of their utter sincerity and integrity before God.

Sacrifices of dead animals are no longer acceptable to God. Because the Lamb of God was sacrificed in their place, the redeemed of the Lord are now to offer themselves, all that they are and have, as ‘living sacrifices.’ The only acceptable worship under the New Covenant is the offering of oneself to God. Our living sacrifice also is to be ‘holy.’ *Hagios* (‘holy’) has the literal sense of being set apart for a special purpose. Christianity used the term to describe God, godly people, and godly things. Under the Old Covenant, a sacrificed animal was to be without spot or blemish. That physical purity symbolized the spiritual and moral purity that God required of the offerer himself. Like that worship who was to come to God with ‘clean hands and a pure heart’ (Ps. 24:4), the offering of a Christian’s body not only should be ‘a living’ but also a ‘holy sacrifice.’ Only ‘a living and holy sacrifice,’ the giving of ourselves and the giving of our best, is ‘acceptable to God.’

When are we to give ourselves to God as living sacrifices? We are to do so the minute we come to Christ. The sacrifice is not something offered on the Day of Atonement or on Sunday morning; it is an offering of our whole self for our whole life. It is easy to see but hard to do. Our spiritual growth is weak, so we hold back. Our sacrifice is to be living, and it is to be holy. The animals offered to God in the Old Testament economy were required to be the firstfruits of the flock, the animals without blemish, but Christ has already taken our sin. Therefore, when we give ourselves as living sacrifices to God, He wants that sacrifice sanctified or consecrated. We are to give the most sanctified portion of our lives as an act of praise to God. We often overlook the type of sacrifice God requires of us. We think any act of religion or spiritual sacrifice will necessarily be delightful to God. It will not. God requires that we offer ourselves in a way that is acceptable to Him. We are to offer ourselves in humility and repentance so that the sacrifice of our praise will provide a sweet aroma.

This is as bold a call to total commitment as there is anywhere in the sacred writings. It applies equally to all—to the professor, to the preacher, to the pianist, to high schoolers—to everyone! It is for the entire Church. We must put away the medieval thinking that makes a distinction between clergy and laity—the idea that ministers and missionaries should have 100 percent commitment, but the laity is permitted 75 percent, or 30, or.... The truth is, *all believers* are called to be totally committed to Christ.

e) Logical (12:1e)

...which is your spiritual worship.

At the end of v. 1, Paul adds an appositional phrase that qualifies the whole exhortation that Paul has just given: offering ourselves as a sacrifice is our ‘*logikēn* worship.’ The meaning of the word *logikēn* is notoriously difficult to pin down. The word *logikos* does not occur in the LXX and only once elsewhere in the NT, where its meaning is also debated (1 Pe. 2:2). The word does, however, have a rich background in Greek and Hellenistic Jewish philosophy and religion. Arguing that God and human beings had *logos* (reason) in common, some of the Greek philosophers of the Stoic school emphasized that only *logikos* worship could be truly appropriate worship. They contrasted this ‘rational’ worship with what they considered to be the superstitions that were so typical of Greek religion. Hellenistic Jews took over this use of the

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term, applying it sometimes to the mental and spiritual attitude that was necessary for a sacrifice to have any merit before God.

Considering this background and the context, we arrive at four main possibilities for the connotation of *logikos* here: 1) ‘spiritual,’ in the sense of ‘inner’: a worship that involves the mind and the heart as opposed to a worship that simply ‘goes through the motions’; 2) ‘spiritual’ or ‘rational,’ in the sense of ‘appropriate for human beings as rational and spiritual creatures of God’: a worship that honors God by giving Him what He truly wants as opposed to the depraved worship offered by human beings under the power of sin (see 1:23-25); 3) ‘rational,’ in the sense of ‘acceptable to human reason’: a worship that ‘makes sense,’ as opposed to the ‘irrational’ worship of God through the offering of animals; and 4) ‘reasonable’ or ‘logical,’ in the sense of ‘fitting the circumstances’; a worship that is appropriate to those who have truly understood the truth revealed in Christ. This last connotation does not go far enough, and the third is also a questionable explanation. Choosing before the first two alternatives is difficult and perhaps not necessary. The inner attitude is basic to acceptable worship, as Paul makes clear in v. 2 by stressing the ‘renewing of your mind.’ And it is just this involvement of the mind, renewed so that it can again understand God aright, that makes this worship the only finally appropriate and true worship. In light of this, and recognizing that each of the usual translations ‘spiritual’ (NIV; NASB; NRSV) and ‘reasonable’ (KJV) misses an important part of the meaning, it would be best to follow TEV and translate ‘true worship.’

Logikos (‘spiritual’) is the term from which we get *logic* and *logical*. Our offerings to God are certainly to be ‘spiritual,’ but that is not what Paul is speaking about at this point. *Logikos* also can be translated *reasonable*, as in the KJV. The apostle is saying that in light of His immeasurable ‘mercies’ that we have already received (v. 1a), our only *reasonable*—and by implication, ‘spiritual’—‘service of worship’ is to present God with all that we are and all that we have.

Not only is commitment to be total, it is also *logical*. The root idea of the word *logikos* is ‘logical.’ For Paul, true worship in offering ourselves to God is reasonable or logical because it is consistent with a proper understanding of the truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Total commitment is the only rational course to take when you really see who God is. Nothing else makes any sense. Halfway commitment is irrational. To decide to give part of your life to God and keep other parts for yourself—to say, ‘Everything is yours, Lord, but this relationship, this deal, this pleasure’—is beyond spiritual logic!

Paul grounds his appeal for living, holy sacrifices: it is our ‘reasonable service.’ Other translations read, ‘...which is your spiritual worship.’ The apostle actually says ‘logical worship.’ What could be more logical or reasonable than offering our whole selves to God in thanksgiving, praise, worship, and adoration with the saints behind the altar?

Paul describes this ‘sacrifice’ as ‘logical worship.’ It is ‘logical’ in the sense of its consistency. What can ‘saved’ men and women offer to God, except their very own selves, that is, their bodies? God does not look for ‘silver or gold,’ least of all animals slain on an altar. God expects only one thing from us, that is, ourselves. But this is not to secure our salvation but to express thankfulness for His gift of salvation.

f) *Logical (12:1e)*

...which is your spiritual worship.

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The word ‘worship’ (*latreia*) continues the cultic imagery of the verse. Paul probably chooses the term deliberately to create a contrast between the Jewish and Christian form of worship. For Christians, there is no more ‘cult’ or ‘sacrifice’ in any literal sense. While the Jew looked to the Jerusalem temple and its cult as the center of worship, the Christian looks back to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Christians are all priests (1 Pe. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), forming together the temple where God now reveals Himself in a special way (1 Cor. 3:9, 16-17; 6:19; 2 or. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pe. 2:5). But Paul does not ‘spiritualize’ the cult; rather, he extends the sphere of the cultic into every dimension of life. Thus the Christian is called to a worship that is not confined to one place or to one time, but which involves all places and all times.

‘Service of worship’ translates the single Greek word *latreia*, which refers to ‘service’ of any kind, the context giving it the added meaning of ‘worship.’ Like *paristēmi* (‘to present’) and *hagios* (‘holy’), *latreia* was used in the LXX to speak of worshiping God according to the prescribed Levitical ceremonies. The writer of Hebrews uses *latreia* to describe the ‘divine worship’ (Heb. 9:6 NASB) or ‘service of God’ (KJV), performed by the Old Testament priests.

True worship does not consist of elaborate and impressive prayers, intricate liturgy, stained-glass windows, lighted candles, flowing robes, incense, and classical sacred music. It does not require great talent, skill, or leadership ability. Many of those things can be a part of the outward forms of genuine worship, but they are acceptable to God only if the heart and mind of the worshiper is focused on Him. The only ‘spiritual service of worship’ that honors and pleases God is the sincere, loving, thoughtful, and heartfelt devotion and praise of His children.

This ‘sacrifice’ is also our ‘worship.’ Gone now are times when special people (priests) offered sacrifices (animals) in a special place (the Temple) at special times (e.g., the Day of Atonement). Christ’s sacrifice was for all people at all times in all places. Because Christ ‘sanctified’ all times and places it follows that now all times and places are alike ‘holy’ to God and to us. In other words, wherever and whenever ordinary people offer themselves as ‘sacrifices to God’ is to be considered ‘worship,’ whether in the family, at work, or in leisure. Of course, this does not exclude gathering together to pray and to hear the Word of God. This too is worship.

2. The Mind (12:2)

Paul leaves open the exact relationship between vv. 1 and 2. The two verses could be coordinate, issuing two parallel but separate exhortations. But v. 2 is probably subordinate to v. 1, giving the means by which we can carry out the sweeping exhortation of v. 1. Notice that in v. 2 there are two commands. The first is negative, while the second is positive. We can present our bodies to the Lord as genuinely holy and acceptable sacrifices only if we ‘do not conform to this world’ but ‘are transformed by the renewing of the mind.’ These are the two sides of commitment.

a) *Do Not Be Conformed (12:2a)*

²*Do not be conformed to this world...*

The single greatest social pressure a teenager faces is conformity. Those who march to the beat of a different drummer are considered dorks or nerds or fools. Similarly, what saps the strength of Christian witness in our day is the Christian community’s conformity to the world. We do not want to be seen as foolish any more than a teenager does. Yet that is exactly what we are called to be—fools for Christ. The things we cherish and follow are the things the world considers foolish and rubbish. Paul says a Christian is to be a nonconformist.

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‘Be conformed’ is from *suschēmatisō*, which refers to an outward expression that does not reflect what is within. It is used of masquerading, or putting on an act, specifically by following a prescribed pattern or scheme (*schema*). It also carries the idea of being transitory, impermanent, and unstable. The negative *mē* (‘not’) makes the verb prohibitive. The verb itself is passive and imperative, the passive indicating that conformation is something we all to be done *to us*, the imperative indicating a command, not a suggestion. Paul’s gentle but firm command is that we are ‘not’ to allow ourselves to ‘be conformed to this world.’ We are not to masquerade as a worldly person, for whatever the reason.

What does this *negative command*, ‘Do not be conformed to this world,’ mean? ‘Conformed’ comes from the root word *schema*, from which we derive ‘scheme,’ and ‘world’ should translate ‘age,’ referring to the passing age (cp. 1 Cor. 7:31; Gal. 1:4; 1 Jn. 2:17), which is dominated by Satan. Thus Paul’s words can be paraphrased, ‘Don’t be conformed to the schemes of this passing evil age.’

‘World’ translates *aiōn*, which is better rendered ‘age,’ referring to the present sinful age, the world system now dominated by Satan, ‘the god of this world (*aiōn*)’ (2 Cor. 4:4). ‘World’ here represents the sum of the demonic-human philosophy of life. It corresponds to the German *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age).

‘This world,’ literally ‘this age (*αιων, aion*),’ is the sin-dominated, death-producing realm in which all people, included in Adam’s fall, naturally belong. But it is ‘to deliver us from the present evil age’ that Christ gave Himself (Gal. 1:4); and those who belong to Christ have been transferred from the old realm of sin and death into the new realm of righteousness and life. But this transfer, while decisive and final, does not isolate us from the influence of the old realm. For while belonging to the new realm, we continue to live, as people still in the ‘body,’ in the old realm. Paul’s command that we ‘not conform to this world,’ then, builds on the theology of Romans 5-8 (and of Rom. 6 especially) and calls on us to resist the pressure to ‘be squeezed into the mold’ of this world and the ‘pattern’ of behavior that typifies it (see 1 Cor. 7:31).

This is Paul’s second ‘appeal.’ Paul’s appeal is ‘do not be “shaped” by this “age”.’ By ‘this age,’ Paul means that period of time begun with the fall of Adam and ended with the ‘revelation of the sons of God’ (8:19). In short, ‘this age’ is the ‘age of Adam,’ the rebel against God, the age where ‘Sin rules in Death’ (5:21). This ‘age’ does, indeed, ‘shape’ its people. It does not matter which culture or whether the time is ancient, medieval, or modern, the Sin of Adam reigns supreme, shaping people after the likeness of Adam’s rejection of the kindly Creator.

The painful truth is, such conformity is common to many of us to a greater extent than we like to acknowledge. Sometimes it is difficult to know when we are conforming because there are many good things in the world. Moreover, we are not to write off our culture entirely. Yet we must think critically. We must be careful what we read and watch. We must not fear to challenge others’ presuppositions. Above all, we must not be afraid to be different.

b) Be Transformed (12:2b)

...but be transformed...

Then comes the *positive command*: ‘...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.’ Again the language is graphic. ‘Transformed’ sounds like ‘metamorphosed’ in the original and is the word from which we get *metamorphosis*, the change from one form to another, as in the transformation of the tadpole to the frog or the caterpillar to the butterfly. But the full meaning

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is even richer, as the other three uses of the word in the New Testament indicate. In Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 it is used to describe the transfiguration of Christ—when the Lord’s glorious inner essence was allowed to show through His body so that His face radiated like the sun and His clothing was white with light. We experience such transfiguration in Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

The Greek word Paul uses in verse 2 for ‘transformed’ is *metamorphosis*. We use that word to describe the transition a caterpillar undergoes in order to become a butterfly. The word indicates a radical change of form. Therefore, the goal of the Christian life is not merely nonconformity, which is the easy part, but transformation. The prefix *trans-* added to the word *formed* means ‘above and beyond the forms of this world.’ Living as Christians means we do not live by the drumbeat of this world but by a higher calling—the calling of God—and when we do that, the form of our life changes. We are not conformed to this dying age, but our lives are transformed by the power of God.

Instead, Paul goes on to say, you should rather ‘be transformed.’ The Greek verb (*metamorphoō*) connotes change in outward appearance and is the term from which we get the English *metamorphosis*. Like the preceding verb (‘be conformed’), ‘be transformed’ is a passive imperative. Positively, we are commanded to allow ourselves to be changed outwardly into conformity to our redeemed inner natures (cp. 2 Cor. 3:18). Although we are to aspire to this outward change, it can be accomplished only by the Holy Spirit working in us, by our being ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18).

The second, positive, imperative in the verse, however, has a clearly passive meaning: ‘be transformed.’ The tense of the verb is present; and in this case the fact that the renewing of the mind is a continuing process justifies us in thinking that Paul uses this tense to stress the need for us to work constantly at our transformation.

c) Mind Renewal (12:2c)

...by the renewal of your mind...

‘The renewing of your mind’ is the means by which this transformation takes place. ‘Mind’ translates a word that Paul uses especially to connote a person’s ‘practical reason,’ or ‘moral consciousness’ (*νοῦς, nous*). Christians are to adjust their way of thinking about everything in accordance with the ‘newness’ of their life in the Spirit (cp. 7:6).

How does this happen? Our text says we are to ‘*be transformed*’ (passive imperative). This must be done by someone or something else, which is of course the Holy Spirit. We are to submit to the Holy Spirit who brings about ‘the renewal of your mind.’ We also understand from the present tense of the verb that this is a *process*, a gradual transformation. The Christian is to allow himself to be changed continually so that his life conforms more and more to that of Christ. Ultimately, as Romans 8:29 says, there will be the supreme metamorphosis when we will be transformed (*summorphos*) to the image of Christ in eternity.

The Holy Spirit achieves this transformation ‘by the renewing of’ the ‘mind,’ an essential and repeated New Testament theme. The outward transformation is effected by an inner change in the mind, and the Spirit’s means of transforming our minds is the Word. The transformed and renewed mind is the mind that is saturated and controlled by the Word of God. It is the mind that spends as little time as possible even with the necessary things of earthly living and as much

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time as possible with the things of God. It is the mind that is set ‘on the things above, not on the things that are on earth’ (Col. 3:2).

This transformation happens through mind renewal. If we want a transformed life, the most important thing is to get a new mind. The beginning of the Christian life is rooted in repentance. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means ‘a change of mind.’ Prior to our initial repentance, we thought according to the precepts of this world. We thought just like our secular neighbors, who do everything in their power to bury their sin in their subconscious, but when the Holy Spirit awakened us to our absolute need for a Savior and we rushed to the cross, our minds and the direction of our lives were changed. The mind is central, because transformation comes from a renewed mind.

While a changed mind is a *necessary* condition for transformation, however, it is not a *sufficient* condition. No one is transformed apart from heart change. God has designed us in such a way that the avenue to the heart is through the mind. The book of Romans was given for our understanding, so that we would begin to think as Jesus thinks and begin to approve what He approves and despise what He despises. That is how our lives are changed. When we begin to think as Christians, we get a new mind. From that new mind our heart is changed, and when the heart is changed, our life is changed. That is how we become transformed people.

By His Word and Spirit God has renewed your mind and made you a ‘new creation’ in Christ. He continues to renew your mind as you continue to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. That continuing renewal will mean continuing transformation of life expressed in loving service of others. The onset of the new age will mean the final transformation in which the children of Adam will be glorified as the children of God. But that ‘new age’ has begun already, dragged back into ‘this age’ by the preaching and hearing of the gospel and by God’s gift of His Spirit to the children of Adam, making them ‘new’ and beginning in them the process of ‘transformation.’

As we answer the call to commitment, we are called to voice a monumental ‘no’ to the schemes of this fleeting evil age and a determined ‘yes’ to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in renewing our minds. The ‘no’ without the ‘yes’ will lead to a life a futile negation. The ‘yes’ without the ‘n’ will lead to frustration because Christ will not dwell in Satan’s house. These are not suggestions, but are rather imperial commands to be obeyed by all.

d) Discern God’s Will (12:2d)

...that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

‘How can I know the will of God for my life?’ The answer is not found from a Ouija board or from signs or from fleeces—it is found by the renewing of the mind through feeding on the Word of God. A renewed mind begins to think God’s thoughts after Him. When our minds are informed by the Word of God, we are able to certify, prove, and recognize what is that good, acceptable, and complete will of God. The Bible says this: ‘This is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Th. 4:3). It doesn’t matter what our job is or whom we marry or what city we live in. If we are not growing in sanctification, seeking God’s will about such things is worthless. God’s will for each of us is that we grow in spiritual maturity, that our lives become more fully set apart and consecrated by the Holy Spirit, and that our minds are changed. After that we will be able to tell what is pleasing to God. Then we will be able to know what He wants us to do—that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

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This ‘re-programming’ of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think. In 1:28 Paul has pointed out that people’s rejection of God has result in God’s giving them over to a ‘worthless’ mind: one that is ‘unqualified’ (*adokimos*) in assessing the truth about God and the world He has made. Now, Paul asserts, the purpose of our being transformed by the renewing of the mind is that this state might be reversed; that we might be able to ‘approve’ (*dokimazō*) the will of God. ‘Approving’ the will of God means to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view to putting it into practice. That Paul means here by ‘the will of God’ His moral direction is clear from the way Paul describes it: this will is that which is ‘good,’ ‘acceptable [to God],’ and ‘perfect.’

The Greek construction makes ‘that you may prove’ a purpose/result phrase. That is to say, when a believer’s mind is transformed, his thinking ability, moral reasoning, and spiritual understanding are able to properly assess everything, and to accept only what conforms to ‘the will of God.’ By using *eurestos* (‘acceptable’), Paul again borrows from Old Testament sacrificial language to describe the kind of holy living that God approves, a ‘living sacrifice’ that is morally and spiritually spotless and without blemish. ‘Perfect’ carries the idea of being complete, of something’s being everything it should be. Our wills should desire only what God desires and lead us to do only what He wants us to do in the way He wants us to do it—according to His will and by His power. Our imperfect wills must always be subject to His ‘perfect’ will.

Paul describes the ‘will of God’ as ‘good, pleasing, and perfect.’ His word ‘perfect’ is the clue to the meaning. By ‘perfect’ (*teleion*) Paul is thinking of the ‘perfection’ of the new age of the kingdom of God (cp. 1 Cor. 13:10). In other words, Paul is thinking of the ‘will of God’ as behavior fit for the future kingdom of God, which, however, the children of God are to exemplify and express *now*. This ‘transformed living’ with discernible outcomes Paul expects to see in the lives of his readers then and now – and in a united church and in the members’ relationships with one another and the wider community.

The final phrase of verse 2 reveals the effects of genuine commitment in our lives. A committed life has the power to perceive what God’s will is. The one who is committed to God sees life with a sure eye. While the careless and uncommitted are in confusion, he knows God’s will. And he finds God’s will to be ‘good and acceptable and perfect.’

A transformed mind produces a transformed will, by which we become eager and able, with the Spirit’s help, to lay aside our own plans and to trustingly accept God’s no matter what the cost. This continued yielding involves the strong desire to know God better and to comprehend and follow His purpose for our lives.

B. Mutual Service (Romans 12:3-8)

The main point of this paragraph is the command in v. 3: Christians are ‘to regard themselves with sober judgment.’ The discussion of the diversity of gifts and their uses within the one body of Christ in vv. 4-8 provides the basis for this command. Although no specific relationship with vv. 1-2 is evident, this call to Christian humility and unity is certainly one important manifestation of the transformation in thinking that should characterize the believer. Perhaps Paul is especially concerned that believers not take too individualistic an approach to

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transformation. Thus he wants us to recognize that the transformation of character is seen especially in our relationships with one another.

1. Thinking Rightly about Ourselves (12:3)

a) Sovereign Grace (12:3a)

³*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you...*

By connecting this new paragraph to vv. 1-2 with a ‘for,’ Paul suggests that the exhortations he now gives are concrete instances of the transformed way of life to which the believer is called. ‘The grace given to me’ refers to Paul’s apostolic calling (as also in 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:7-8) rather than to the grace Paul has received in common with others. Paul addresses this admonition not to any specific group or kind of person in the Roman community, but to ‘every person’ among them.

‘For’ indicates a transition from what the apostle has just commanded, tying spiritual service to spiritual dedication, the bridge between them being a spiritual attitude. The Christian’s proper attitude is humility, ‘not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think’ (v. 3b). Lack of that foundational virtue causes many believers to stumble. No matter how well grounded we may be in God’s Word, how theologically sound we may be, or how vigorously we may seek to serve Him, our gifts will not operate so that our lives can be spiritually productive until self is set aside. No believer is exempt from this call to humility, because Paul is speaking ‘to every man among you’—a universal command to all who are Christ’s.

The basis of everything worthwhile that a Christian has and does, from salvation to service is ‘the grace given to’ him by God. Just as we are saved only by God’s grace, so we can serve Him only by that same grace. But the specific divine grace of which Paul speaks here is that from which he was ordained as God’s apostle and authorized to reveal God’s Word (1:1-5; cp. 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9).

Paul is writing to them as one gifted and called by God, through no merit of his own, to the position of apostle.

a) Sober Judgment (12:3b)

...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment...

Paul’s admonition is built on a wordplay that is difficult to bring out in English. The key term, which Paul uses in both its simple (‘think’) and in two compound forms (‘think beyond,’ ‘sober thinking’) is *phroneō* (φρονεῖν...φρονεῖν...φρονεῖν...σωφρονεῖν). This verb, which is a favorite of Paul’s and which we have met before in Romans (8:5; 11:20), connotes not so much the act of thinking in itself (the intellectual process) but the direction of one’s thinking, the way in which a person views something. In this verse, it is clear that Paul is using the verb to denote the way in which a person views him- or herself. In contrast to the overestimation of ourselves to which we are so prone, Paul insists that we are to view ourselves in a ‘sober’ manner – in accordance with a true and objective estimate, the product of the ‘renewed mind’ (12:2).

To emphasize the necessity of meekness, Paul uses a form of *phroneō* (‘to think’) four times in verse 3. A Christian is not to overestimate himself, to ‘think more highly (*hyperphroneō*) of himself than he ought to think,’ but is to think of himself as he really is. He is not to overvalue his abilities, his gifts, or his worth but make an accurate estimate of himself. ‘To have sound judgment’ translates a compound (*sōphroneō*) of that verb and has the basic meaning of ‘to think

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with a sound mind, to think soberly.’ ‘To think’ of ourselves with ‘sound judgment’ leads us to recognize that, in ourselves, we are nothing at all, but that, in Christ, we can be used to the glory of God through the gift of the Spirit bestowed on us. We must realize that from ourselves, from our fleshly humanness, nothing eternal can be produced, but that in the power of the Spirit we can be used to build the kingdom and honor the King.

The play on words present in the Greek cannot be translated into English. The Greek term for ‘to think soberly’ is the same term used for ‘to think’ but with a different prefix added to it. Therefore, Paul is not talking about an intellectual enterprise or analysis of our skills or ability or status; he is connecting the cognitive aspect, thinking, to the aspect of affection. He is not writing about estimation so much as about esteem. Simply, Paul is saying that we should not esteem ourselves too highly but rather to think soberly and carefully about ourselves. When the apostle calls us to a sober self-evaluation, particularly with respect to our abilities, he puts on us a tremendous responsibility.

How are we to think about ourselves? In verse 3 Paul again advises us negatively and positively. First the negative: ‘I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.’ The language here is alive. If we were very literal, we could render the phrase, ‘I say to everyone, do not super-think of yourself,’ or perhaps, ‘Do not get hyper about yourself!’ Perhaps Paul knew of some individuals in Rome who thought they were better than others. The opening verses of chapter 14 give a hint of this. Whatever the case, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is a universal tendency of the human race. Our Adamic nature loves to overthink about itself. How then are we to think about ourselves? Paul gives us positive advice: ‘think [of yourself] with sober judgment.’ Instead of super-thought there is to be sober thought.

b) Measure of Faith (12:3c)

...each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

But a true and objective estimate of ourselves requires that we have an accurate and objective standard against which to measure ourselves. And this, Paul says, we have, for God has ‘measured to each one a measure of faith.’ The meaning of the phrase is uncertain, with two possibilities deserving consideration. 1) In light of the discussion of the spiritual gifts that follows, the phrase might refer to the differing ‘measures’ of faith God has assigned each believer. But this interpretation of ‘faith’ is strained. This faith might refer, as it has throughout Romans thus far, to the basic Christian response to the gospel. But it is difficult to think that Paul would consider this faith as given by God in different measures to Christians. Recognizing this, many supporters of this interpretation think that the faith Paul refers to is, or relates especially to, the differing capacities God gives to people for their service of the community. But this interpretation of the word ‘faith’ is questionable; and, in any case, Paul has not prepared us for the use of this word in Romans.

2) If faith is, then, basic Christian faith as given equally by God to all, then the ‘measure of faith’ could refer to this shared faith as the standard by which Christians are to regard themselves. Our faith *is* the measure. On this view God has not given a different measure to each Christian but has given to each Christian the same measure. Critics of this interpretation say it does not recognize the distributive implications of the verb *merizō*, ‘measure’ or ‘apportion.’ But this second interpretation faces fewer difficulties than the first and should be accepted. ‘Measure of faith,’ then, should be compared in this paragraph not to the many different ‘gifts’ that God

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distributes to believers, but to the one common grace from which they stem (v. 6). It is that faith which believers have in common as fellow members of the body of Christ that Paul here highlights as the standard against which each of us is to estimate himself.

Paul continues, ‘according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.’ This most important phrase has often been given the misleading interpretation that sound judgment comes in proportion to the degree of *our* faith—if we have strong faith we will think rightly of ourselves. However, ‘measure’ should really be translated ‘standard.’ The idea is that God has allotted to each believer a standard of faith by which to measure himself—and *that standard is Christ*. Paul is not asking the believer to estimate himself according to changing subjective feelings, but to estimate himself according to his relationship to Christ. When one sees that Christ is the standard of measurement, he will not think of himself more highly than he ought, but will rather think of himself with sober judgment. It is impossible to think more highly of ourselves than we ought if we are sound on this point. If we truly make Christ our standard, the tendency to exalt ourselves by comparing ourselves with others will be curbed. Those who pride themselves because they are more gifted than another believer will cease their foolishness when they make Christ the standard of measurement. A clear focus on Christ, then, is the key to thinking rightly about ourselves and should be the goal of our spiritual practice. All of this is a call to profound humility.

In this context, ‘a measure of faith’ seems to refer to the correct measure of the spiritual gift and its operating features that God sovereignly bestows on every believer. Every believer receives the exact gift and resources best suited to fulfill his role in the body of Christ. Paul is not here referring to *saving faith*, which believers already have exercised. He is speaking of faithful stewardship, the kind and quantity of faith required to exercise our own particular gift. It is the faith through which the Lord uses His measured gift in us to the fullest. It encompasses all the sensitivity, capacity, and understanding we need to rightly and fully use our uniquely bestowed gift.

Paul connects this ‘grace given’ with that ‘measure of faith’ which does not come from us, but comes only by the gift of God. He is not thinking here of basic ‘saving faith’ that we direct towards Christ upon hearing the gospel. Rather, there are degrees of ‘faith,’ to be understood as ‘prophetic discernment’ of the will and the ways of God. Paul as apostle has received this but he is humble about it as he exhorts the Romans (and us) to be. There can be no unity in the church without humility!

2. Thinking Rightly about Our Fellow Believers (12:4-5)

a) *The Body of Christ (12:4-5)*

⁴*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,*
⁵*so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

From thinking rightly about ourselves, we move in verses 4-5 to thinking rightly about fellow believers. Here Paul, a master illustrator, gives us a wonderfully mystical conception based on the human anatomy. The word ‘as’ at the beginning of verse 4 links it closely with verse 3 because when we think rightly about ourselves, with Christ as the standard, we will be able to think accurately about others—the *Body* of Christ.

Now he uses the figure of the body to represent the church, the Body of Christ, of which every believer is a member. He focuses on its unity in diversity—‘one body’ representing its unity,

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and ‘many members’ that ‘do not have the same function,’ representing the diversity. Just as it is in nature, unified diversity in the church is a mark of God’s sovereign and marvelous handiwork. Paul now focuses specifically on the diverse uniqueness and importance of each member to the body’s proper performance. ‘Function’ translates *praxis*, which has the basic meaning of a doing of something, that is, a deed. It later came to connote something that was ordinarily done or practiced, a normal ‘function.’ Spiritual gifts do not always correspond to what we commonly refer to as church offices. Most church members do not have a specific office or title. But every believer, from the youngest to the oldest and from the newest to the most mature, has a Spirit-given ability to minister to the body of Christ through some spiritual gift. It is the use of the gift that is his God-ordained ‘function’ in the kingdom. It is diversity working in unity and in harmony that enables Christ’s Body to be and to do what He directs it to be and to do.

In these verses Paul uses the imagery of the human body to bring out both the diversity and the unity of the Christian community. Paul’s comparison of the church to a body is familiar from his other letters. He first uses the comparison in 1 Corinthians 12, and it is found in its most developed form in Ephesians and Colossians. Paul’s use of the metaphor in this text has most in common with 1 Cor. 12:12-31. In both these passages Paul compares individual Christians to ‘members’ of the human body. And it is not only the basic metaphor that 1 Cor. 12 and this text have in common; Paul also applies the metaphor to the same basic issue. As in 1 Cor. 12, where Paul uses the body metaphor to (among other things) rebuke the arrogance of some members of the body who prided themselves on possessing more important gifts (vv. 22-26), so here in Rom. 12 Paul uses the metaphor to back up his exhortation that believers not think more highly of themselves than they should. Paul, working from the assumption of the unity of the body, argues for the need to recognize a healthy diversity within that one body. It seems that, as in 1 Cor. 12, it is the diversity of gifts and the temptation to comparison and false pride that comes with the diversity that is his chief concern. Our oneness in Christ, Paul reminds us, extends beyond those with whom we meet weekly for worship, embracing all who call on the name of the Lord.

This illustration underscores three characteristics of the Body of Christ: its unity, diversity, and mutuality. First, we will view its *unity*. Both verses 4 and 5 stress the one Body of which we are all members. We must emphasize that while this unity is mysterious, it is real! We share the same nature (2 Pe. 1:4) and derive our spiritual life from the same source (Jn. 15:5). Second, while there exists a profound, real unity, there is also a corresponding real *diversity*. Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God’s handiwork. It is so in nature; it is so in grace, too, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community. God’s glory is revealed in the diversity of His people. This means that as we measure ourselves by Christ’s standard we will be *ourselves*. Being in Christ’s Body will maximize our uniqueness if we allow such. Of course, we must also be careful to allow others to be themselves. *When the Spirit of God is free to work in a church, there is diversity*. Finally, we must not stress this truth of diversity without grasping the balancing truth of our *mutuality*: we are ‘members one of another.’ First Corinthians 12 beautifully emphasizes this mutuality by pointing out that when one member rejoices, the others rejoice, and when one member hurts, the others hurt.

The Christian congregation is to be like the body in two ways. First, like the human body, the ‘many members’ who individually belong to Christ are to become ‘one body,’ united in their common praise of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. The present situation in Rome where there are numerous diverse and unconnected groups who are kept apart by high-mindedness and misunderstanding is inappropriate. Second, Paul reminds them that each

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belongs to the other. As in a biological body, where the members and organs are inter-connected and inter-dependent, so too the individual believers are to see themselves connect to and belonging to one another. Spiritual pride is the enemy of true unity in Christ.

How beautiful all this is. Those who think rightly about themselves, measuring themselves by the standard that God has given them in their faith, discern the one body and recognize that they do not exist for themselves. As a result, they are free to develop and use their gifts.

3. Thinking Rightly about Our Gifts (12:6-8)

Paul continues to echo his teaching in 1 Cor. 12 as he turns next to discuss the way in which gifts exemplify diversity in unity. As he proceeds, Paul is not just listing gifts; he is exhorting each member of the community to use his or her own gift diligently and faithfully to strengthen the body's unity and help it to flourish.

a) *A Variety of Gifts (12:6a)*

⁶*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...*

Before turning to exhortation, Paul reminds us of the wonderful blessing of the varied gifts that He has given the church. 'We have different gifts,' Paul asserts, and his assumption that these gifts are operative in the Roman church, which Paul has neither founded nor visited, shows that the operation of gifts was widespread, if not universal, in the early church. Believers possess different *charismata* ('gifts'); but each one is the product of God's *charis* ('grace'), which all believers have in common. Again Paul stresses the combination of diversity within unity that makes the church so rich and strong. But if the gifts are to bring these positive benefits, they must be used rightly – not for self-aggrandizement (cp. v. 3) but in accordance with their true nature. It is this that Paul focuses attention on in the series of exhortations in vv. 6b-8.

Paul introduces this list of gifts by referring back to the unity in diversity he has just pointed out in verses 4-5. 'Differ' relates to the diversity, and 'grace' to the unity. Under God's sovereign grace, which all believers share, 'we have gifts that differ according to' the specific ways in which He individually endows us. Just as verse 3 does not refer to saving faith, verse 6 does not refer to saving grace. Paul is speaking to those who have already trusted in Christ and become children of God. To His children, the apostle explains, 'God has allotted to each a measure of faith' (v. 3) and has bestowed on them 'gifts that differ according to the grace given' to each one. Grace is God's favor, unmerited kindness on His part, which is the only source of all spiritual enablements. They are not earned or deserved, or they would not be by grace. And the grace is sovereign, in that God alone makes the choice as to what gift each of His children receives. Each believer, therefore, is to exercise his gifts accordingly.

In thinking rightly about our gifts, we must consider a few simple truths: 1) *We all have gifts.* No Christian is left out. You may not have one of those specifically mentioned here (though you probably do), but you do have at least one spiritual gift. 2) *This list is not exhaustive.* First Corinthians 12:27-28 lists several others. Some tabulate fifteen gifts listed in Scripture, others nineteen. The Scriptural lists do not purport to be exhaustive. 3) *Gifts are not to be utilized as a 'Christian zodiac.'* Such pigeon-holing can be spiritual stifling, especially when matched with an inaccurate understanding of the gifts. Many who have fallen to this type of thinking stumble by the wayside when they fail to measure up to false expectations. Instead, we must understand that the spiritual 'gifts' as verse 6 calls them, are personally administered by the Holy Spirit in

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varying degrees and styles and should be simply, soberly, and unostentatiously exercised by the Spirit.

b) A Catalogue of Gifts (12:6b-8)

It is important to note that none of the sign gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:9-10—namely, the gifts of healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues—is found in Romans 12. They are also not found in the other two New Testament passages that mention spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:7, 11; 1 Pe. 4:10-11). It seems evident, therefore, that Paul did not mention the sign gifts in Romans because their place in the church was already coming to an end. They belonged to a unique era in the church's life and would have no permanent place in its ongoing ministry. It is significant, therefore, that the seven gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 are all within the categories of speaking and serving. It is also important to note that in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the term *pneumatikos* (v. 1, lit., 'spirituals') to describe the specific divinely-bestowed gifts mentioned in verses 8-10. But in Romans 12, the apostle uses the term *charisma* ('gifts'), which is from *charis* ('grace'). In First Corinthians, Paul emphasizes the nature and authority of the gifts—spiritual endowments empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Romans he simply emphasizes their source—the grace of God.

Two of the gifts Paul mentions in these verses – prophecy and teaching – are also found in other lists of gifts in Paul (prophecy in 1 Cor. 12:7-10, 28 and Eph. 4:11; teaching in 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11). The gifts in verse 8, however, have no linguistic equivalent in the other lists, although the ministries they denote could well correspond to, or overlap with, some of the gifts listed elsewhere. These texts suggest that Paul, and presumably the early church generally, recognized a small number of well-defined and widely occurring gifts along with an indefinite number of other less-defined gifts, some of which may not have been manifest everywhere and some of which may have overlapped with others.

It is noticeable that Paul is silent here about 'church order.' The words 'presbyter' or 'deacon' do not appear in this list of activities. Paul is saying that in a united 'body' the members will 'just get on with it,' sharing what they have in recognition that it is from the Lord, and so serving others. Paul is merely giving some examples, so the list is not to be regarded as comprehensive.

(1) Prophecy (12:6b)

...if prophecy, in proportion to our faith...

It may be significant that the first example is that of the gift of prophecy. As 1 Cor. 14 especially reveals, Paul prized this gift very highly. NT prophecy could include predictions of the future (cp. Acts 11:28; 21:10-12), but this was not its essence. More broadly, rather, NT prophecy involved proclaiming to the community information that God had revealed to the prophet for the church's edification (see esp. 1 Cor. 14:3, 24-25, 30). But Paul suggests in this verse the need for each prophet to use the gift rightly: each is to prophesy 'in accordance with the *analogia* of faith.' *Analogia* is a term drawn from the world of mathematics and logic, where it denotes the correct proportion or right relationship. Prophesying, Paul is saying, is to be in 'right proportion' to faith. As in the similar phrase in v. 3b, the question here is what 'faith' means. The majority of interpreters think that faith here is not our act of believing but that which we believe: Christian teaching. It would certainly make good sense for Paul to insist that prophets assess what they are saying against the standard of Christian truth. And 'faith' can have this objective sense in Paul. On the whole, it is better to hold that faith refers, as usual, to basic Christian faith and that 'the

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analogia of faith’ is essentially the same as the ‘measure of faith’ in v. 3; the standard implied in one’s own belief in Christ. Prophets, Paul is saying, are to make sure that their utterances are in right proportion to their faith in Christ.

The first spiritual gift in this list is ‘prophecy.’ Some interpreters believe this was a special revelatory gift that belonged only to the apostles, and, like the sign gifts, ceased after those men died. While it certainly had a revelatory aspect during Old Testament and apostolic times, it was not limited to revelation. It was exercised when there was public proclamation of divine truth, old or new. The gift of prophecy does not pertain to the content but rather to the means of proclamation. In our day, it is active enablement to proclaim God’s Word already written in Scripture. *Prophētia* (‘prophecy’) has the literal meaning of speaking forth, with no connotation of prediction or other supernatural or mystical significance. The gift of ‘prophecy’ is simply the gift of preaching, of proclaiming the Word of God. The gift of prophecy is the gift of being God’s public spokesman, primarily to God’s own people—to instruct, admonish, warn, rebuke, correct, challenge, comfort, and encourage. God also uses His prophets to reach unbelievers.

Some believe the gift of prophecy refers to the immediate, supernatural, Spirit-given ability to interpret tongues and to make predictions for the future, just as prophets in the Old Testament did, and this is a struggle for those who did believe that the supernatural gifts of the apostolic age ceased with the death of the last apostle. The gift of apostleship was intended for the first century only and did not pass on to the next generation. In one sense the gift of prophecy Paul is describing here applies only to the immediate time of the apostolic age, but there are other problems involved. In the Old Testament the supreme agents of revelation were the prophets. The New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophet is not the New Testament prophet; it is the New Testament apostle. There is parity between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament apostle—both are authoritative agents of revelation—but here Paul distinguishes between the gift of prophecy and the gift of apostleship.

In the New Testament the prophet functioned as an interpreter of the Word of God. We like to think of the Old Testament prophets as those who predicted the future, what we call foretelling, yet their primary task was not predicting the future; it was forthtelling, communicating the word of God to the people. Old Testament prophets were God’s prosecuting attorneys against a covenant community that had broken its vows. The Old Testament prophets were called upon to interpret God’s word to the people. In like manner, the New Testament prophet was one gifted in interpreting or expositing the word of God. In contemporary terms, such a prophet is a preacher. Today it is the preacher who fulfills the task of interpreting and expositing the Word of God. What continues to this day from the role of the first-century prophets is interpreting the Word of God and expounding it to the people. Those are the primary tasks of the preacher. Therefore, anyone whose vocation is that of preacher must start preaching. Preachers are not to enter the pulpit on Sunday morning with the latest analysis of the culture or with an agenda for entertainment, trying to turn the church into an ecclesiastical Starbucks. Preachers are to interpret the Word of God and expound it to the people. Paul’s last injunction to Timothy was this: ‘Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season’ (2 Tim. 4:2). Preachers have the awesome responsibility of preaching the Word of God.

The gift of prophecy is sometimes predictive, but not necessarily or primarily. This gift is normally the communication of revealed truth in a manner that convicts and builds up its hearers. Oftentimes one who has this gift will have penetrating things to say about specific problems in

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society or life. One is to do this ‘in proportion to our faith,’ looking, as we saw in verse 3, to Christ as his standard or measure.

Whatever the form his message make take, the prophet is to minister it ‘according to the proportion of his faith.’ Because the Greek includes the definite article, ‘faith’ may here refer to *the* faith, that is, the full gospel message. In that case, ‘according to the proportion of his faith’ would relate objectively to the prophet’s being careful to preach in accordance with the gospel revealed through the apostles—‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3). It could also relate subjectively to the believer’s personal understanding and insight concerning the gospel—to his speaking ‘according to’ the individual ‘proportion of...faith’ that God has sovereignly assigned to him for the operation of his gift. Whether it relates to revelation, prediction, declaration, instruction, encouragement, or anything else, ‘prophecy’ was always to proclaim the Word of God and exalt the Son of God, because ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10).

(2) Service (12:7a)

...⁷*if service, in our serving...*

The second gift is that of ‘serving’ or ‘ministering.’ Words from the root *diak-* were originally used to denote ‘waiting at table,’ a connotation that was preserved into the NT period (see Lk. 17:8). The words refer to service to others of a personal nature and often carried, in both the Greek and Jewish worlds, nuances of subservience and lack of status. ‘Service’ became a standard way describing the work that Christians do on behalf of others and to the glory of God; the translation ‘minister’ brings out this religious connotation. Paul uses ‘service’ words to denote Christian ministry in general, the ministry of Christ, his own specific ministry and that of others, the specific ministry of collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem, and a special office or function within the church (the *diakonos*, ‘deacon’). Paul never elsewhere mentions ‘service’ as a distinct gift, and some commentators think therefore that he uses it very generally here, of any kind of ministry that a Christian might have. But the other gifts in these verses involve specific functions. Probably, then, Paul thinks of a specific gift of service that qualifies a person to fill the office of ‘deacon,’ a ministry that apparently involved especially organizing and providing for the material needs of the church. In urging Christians who have this gift of ‘service’ to use it ‘in service,’ Paul is emphasizing the importance of recognizing the gift and using it in accordance with its true nature. The gift of ‘service’ should not become an occasion of pride (v. 3) but should be the foundation for heartfelt and sacrificial ‘serving’ of others.

The second spiritual gift is that of service, a general term for ministry. Service translates *diakonia*, from which we also get *deacon*. ‘Service’ is a simple, straightforward gift that is broad in its application. It seems to carry a meaning similar to that of the gift of helps mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:28, although a different Greek term (*antilēpsis*) is used there. This gift certainly applies beyond the office of deacon and is the idea in Paul’s charge to the Ephesian elders to ‘help the weak’ (Acts 20:35). The gift of service is manifested in every sort of practical help that Christians can give one another in Jesus’ name.

‘Service’ is the same word from which we derive the word *deacon*, and it refers to the variety of services that deacons perform in the Church. The one who serves is to exercise his gift to the fullest—giving himself wholeheartedly to the work, just as Philip and his friends did in Acts 6.

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In view here principally is the ministry of the deacons, those who serve by taking care of the orphans, the widows, and the poor. Certain people with a servant's heart have been gifted by God to be deacons. It is a marvelous gift for the church. No church can be a healthy one without a heavy commitment to service—taking care of the oppressed, the poor, and the lonely. Ministry is not just preaching the Word of God. Deacons were appointed to serve the needs of the people so that the apostles could preach without being encumbered with other tasks.

(3) Teaching (12:7b)

...the one who teaches, in his teaching...

Paul mentions the gift of 'teaching' in two of his other lists of gifts (1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4:11), and in both places it is listed immediately after 'prophecy.' Here Paul refers to 'the teacher' rather than to the gift of teaching. Why he changes from abstract nouns in describing the first two gifts – 'prophecy,' 'service' – to personal designations for the last four is not clear. While both prophecy and teaching are speaking gifts that are intended to exhort the church, they are distinguishable. 'Prophecy,' as we have seen, has a revelatory basis: the prophet speaks the words that God 'puts in his mouth.' Teaching, on the other hand, involves the passing on of the truth of the gospel as it has been preserved in the church. Again, Paul is concerned that those who have the gift of teaching faithfully exercise that gift.

Teaching differs from prophecy in that it instructs the mind, whereas prophecy is addressed more to the heart and will. Teaching is more concerned with knowledge, prophecy with revelation. The teacher is to apply his all to the task.

The third spiritual gift is that of 'teaching.' Again, the meaning is simple and straightforward. *Didaskōn* ('teaches') refers to the act of teaching, and *didaskalia* ('teaching') can refer to what is taught as well as to the act of teaching it. Both of those meanings are appropriate to this gift. The Christian 'who teaches' is divinely gifted with special ability to interpret and present God's truth understandably. The primary difference between teaching and prophesying is not in content but in the distinction between the ability to proclaim and the ability to give systematic and regular instruction in God's Word. The gift of 'teaching' could apply to a teacher in seminary, Christian college, Sunday school, or any other place, elementary or advanced, where God's truth is taught.

(4) Exhortation (12:8a)

...⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation...

The word translated 'exhorter' (*παρκαλων, parakalōn*) could also be translated 'comforter' or 'encourager.' But coming immediately after 'teacher' the word probably denotes the activity of urging Christians to live out the truth of the gospel.

The root idea of exhortation is 'to come alongside and encourage.' Exhortation can take many forms—warning, advice, counsel, and encouragement. It is a wonderful gift, and we are to place it at Christ's feet and be willing to be worn out in its use.

As with the previous three gifts, the connotation of 'exhortation' is broad.' Both the verb *parakaleō* ('exhorts') and the noun *paraklēsis* ('exhortation') are compounds of the same two Greek words (*para* and *kaleō*) and have the literal meaning of calling someone to one's side. They are closely related to *paraklētos* (advocate, comforter, helper), a title Jesus used both of

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Himself (Jn. 14:16) and of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). In 1 John 2:1, this word is translated ‘Advocate,’ referring to Jesus Christ.

The gift of ‘exhortation’ therefore, encompasses the ideas of advising, pleading, encouraging, warning, strengthening, and comforting. At one time the gift may be used to persuade a believer to turn from a sin or bad habit and at a later time to encourage that same person to maintain his corrected behavior. The gift may be used to admonish the church as a whole to obedience to the Word. Like the gift of showing mercy, ‘exhortation’ may be exercised in comforting a brother or sister in the Lord who is facing trouble or is suffering physically or emotionally. One ‘who exhorts’ may also be used of God to encourage and undergird a weak believer who is facing a difficult trial or persistent temptation. Just as prophecy proclaims the truth and teaching systematizes and explains the truth, ‘exhortation’ calls believers to obey and follow the truth, to live as Christians are supposed to live—consistent with God’s revealed will. In many servants of Christ, all of these abilities are uniquely and beautifully blended.

(5) Giving (12:8b)

...the one who contributes, in generosity...

‘The one who shares’ could denote one who distributes the resources of the church as a whole or one who shares his or her own resources with those less fortunate. ‘Simplicity’ translates *haplotēs*, a word that means ‘singleness’ (of purpose; hence ‘simplicity’; cp. 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22). However, when used of giving, the meaning of the word shades over into ‘generosity,’ that is, a giving that displays a singleness of heart and intent (2 Cor. 8:2; 8:11, 13). Paul is encouraging the one who gives to others to do straightforwardly and without ulterior motives.

The fifth category of giftedness is that of giving. The usual Greek verb for giving is *didōmi*, but the word here is the intensified *metadidōmi*, which carries the additional meanings of sharing and imparting that which is one’s own. The one who exercises this gift ‘gives’ sacrificially of himself. ‘Liberality’ translates *haplotēs*, which has the root meaning of singleness and came to connote simplicity, single-mindedness, openheartedness, and then generosity. It carries the idea of sincere, heartfelt giving that is untainted by affection or ulterior motive. The Christian ‘who gives with liberality’ gives *of* himself, not *for* himself. He does not give for thanks or recognition, but for the sake of the one who receives his help and for the glory of the Lord.

Everybody has an obligation to give, but some really have the gift for it, and if so, this is how they must use it. There are people who not only give but do so generously. They give beyond what is required. Paul said elsewhere that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). Nobody wants to get a gift from a sourpuss who cannot stand to be separated from his money. God does not want such gifts.

Next is the grace of giving. ‘Generosity’ should be translated ‘with simplicity.’ This refers to our motive in giving. Those who have this gift are to exercise it without ulterior motives or hidden purposes, simply out of love. This is where Ananias and Sapphira failed. When we give it is to be simply to the glory of God and to meet the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ in the world.

(6) Leadership (12:8c)

...the one who leads, with zeal...

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The fifth kind of gifted person Paul exhorts is *ho proistamenos*. The word may denote a person who presides over something or a person who comes to the aid of others. But the meaning ‘give aid’ is not well attested for this verb, and Paul does not appear to use the verb with this meaning elsewhere. Probably, then, we should translate ‘one who presides.’ But presides over what? Paul does not say, but he twice elsewhere uses this verb (once absolutely) to denote the ‘leaders’ of the local church (1 Th. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17). It is probably this ministry, usually associated with the elders/overseers (see 1 Tim. 5:17) that Paul has in mind here. Paul exhorts the leaders in the community to pursue their calling with ‘eagerness’ or ‘diligence’ (*σπουδῆ, spoudē*).

‘Leads’ is from *proistēmi*, which has the basic meaning of ‘standing before’ others and, hence, the idea of leadership. In the New Testament it is never used of governmental rulers but of headship in the family (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12) and in the church (1 Tim. 5:17). In Corinthians 12:28, Paul refers to the same gift by a different name, ‘administrations’ (*kubernēsis*), which means to ‘guide.’ Although it is not limited to those offices, the gift of church leadership clearly belongs to elders and deacons. Effective leadership must be done ‘with diligence,’ with earnestness and zeal. *Spoudē* (‘diligence’) can also carry the idea of haste (see Mark 6:25; Luke 1:39). Proper leadership therefore precludes procrastination and idleness. The gift of leadership is to be exercised with carefulness, constancy, and consistency.

Then there is the grace of leadership. Those who exercise spiritual leadership in the church, whether pastors or elders or deacons or committee leaders, are not to ‘wing it.’ Leaders should not become casual and careless but should see their abilities as divinely granted gifts and their charges as from God.

(7) Mercy (12:8d)

...*the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Paul turns finally to the one with the gift of ‘showing mercy (*ο ελεων, ο eleōn*).’ Pinning down the exact nature of this ministry is not easy. Noting that the word ‘mercy’ is used in the NT to describe the very important Jewish pious activity of almsgiving – providing materially for the poor (cp. Mt. 6:3 – Paul might be thinking specifically of this ministry here. But the connection of the word ‘mercy’ with Jewish almsgiving is not widespread enough to justify this restriction of the reference. Probably, then, we are to understand the ministry very generally and include within it any act of mercy toward others, such as visiting the sick, caring for the elderly or disabled, and providing for the poor. Those who are active in such ministries of mercy should be especially careful, Paul advises, to avoid a grudging or downcast attitude, but they should strive to minister with ‘cheerfulness (*ιλαροτητι, ilarotēti*).’

Lastly, there is the grace of showing mercy. This gift takes many forms—aiding the poor, working with the mentally handicapped, tending the ill. But whatever the function, it must be done with cheer. The English word *hilarious* originated from the Greek word translated ‘cheerfulness.’ There is no room for a hangdog expression in the Church.

The seventh and last spiritual category mentioned here is that of showing ‘mercy.’ *Eleēō* (‘shows mercy’) carries the joint idea of actively demonstrating sympathy for someone else and of having the necessary resources to successfully comfort and strengthen that person. The gifted Christian ‘who shows mercy’ is divinely endowed with special sensitivity to suffering and sorrow, with the ability to notice misery and distress that may go unnoticed by others, and with the desire and means to help alleviate such afflictions. This gift involves much more than

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sympathetic feeling. It is feeling put into action. The Christian with this gift always finds a way to express his feelings of concern in practical help. He shows his mercy by what he says to and what he does for the one in need. The believer ‘who shows mercy’ may exercise his gift in hospital visitation, jail ministry, or in service to the homeless, the poor, the handicapped, the suffering, and the sorrowing. This gift is closely related to that of exhortation, and it is not uncommon for believers to have a measure of both. This enablement is not to be ministered grudgingly or merely out of a sense of duty, but ‘with cheerfulness.’ As everyone knows who has had a time of suffering or special need, the attitude of a fellow believer can make the difference between his being a help or a hindrance. The counsel of Job’s friends only drove him into deeper despair. The genuine helper always serves with gracious ‘cheerfulness,’ and is never condescending or patronizing.

How is our thinking today? Are we thinking rightly about *ourselves* according to the standard we have learned in knowing Christ? Or are we thinking too highly of ourselves—comparing ourselves with others so we look good? If so we need to look to Christ (cp. Mt. 5:3). Are we thinking rightly about *other believers*? Is the Body a reality to us? Its unity? Its diversity? Its mutuality? Finally, how is our thinking about the *gifts* the Holy Spirit has given to us? Are we using them? If not, why not?

For next time: Read Romans 12:9-21.