

## Romans: The Practice of Righteousness (part 2 of 13)

### Spiritual Gifts: How Living Sacrifices Serve

Romans 12:3-8

Mark Vroegop

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<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3–8 (ESV)

For a Christian, a “living sacrifice” mindset works regardless of your age, the circumstances of your life, or how long you have been a follower of Jesus. Last week we learned that Romans 12:1-2 gives us a mindset that involves three key statements:

**“I’m Yours”**

**“Change Me”**

**“Lead Me”**

A nine-year old girl in our church heard that message on Sunday and was able to apply it in her life more quickly than she would have liked. Sunday night she cut her knee wide open and had to go to the ER to get six stitches. While she was in the ER, she was reminding herself about the notes that she had taken in the service, especially the statement “I’m Yours.” When she arrived home, she found the note and put it by her bedside because she wanted to remember to say “I’m Yours” when she woke up the next morning.

That’s a Christian mindset! Romans 12:1-2 was meant to work. It was designed to be a paradigm or a pattern for how we live. The first two verses are introductory and the rest of Romans 12-16 is very practical.

### How Do Living Sacrifices Serve?

Our text today is the first of a series of applications of the first two verses. Verses 3-8 help us to see how people with a Christian mindset serve in the context of the church. If you look ahead in Romans 12 and 13, you will also see Paul apply this paradigm to other areas:

- 12:9-16 – Christian character and a life that is marked by love
- 12:17-21 – How to respond to opposition with the attitude of Christ

- 13:1-7 – How to be a model citizen and relate to civic government
- 13:8-14 – What Christian maturity looks like in dark days

Paul is very interested in helping people understand the practical ramifications of being a living sacrifice. And the first place he starts is the church, with the issue of spiritual gifts. Before talking about challenging issues outside of the body of Christ, Paul starts with some instructions regarding how Christians are to conduct themselves inside the church.

The first application of being a living sacrifice is directed toward how we think about ourselves, how we live in community, and how we serve. Thinking, living, and serving are all different because of a Christian mindset.

### **Think with Humility (v. 3)**

Paul begins by talking about the mind again. Having a Christian mindset means thinking correctly about a myriad of issues, but especially about yourself and your gifts. He will eventually talk about specific gifts, but he starts another pastoral admonition by addressing the importance of humility as we think about ourselves.

Last week I said that the problem with many believers is that they do not think about thinking. We could add another caution here: *The problem with our thinking is that we think too highly of ourselves.* I can hardly imagine two issues any more dangerous than not thinking about your thinking or not realizing how self-centered our thinking can be. A Christian mind comes from humble heart.

Paul begins verse 3 with the word “For,” which tells you that what follows is an implication of the previous verses. This is an important application. What’s more, Paul sets us up for another pastoral admonition that is authoritative, humble and sweeping. It is authoritative (“I say”) in the same way that verse 1 said, “I appeal.” It is humble because Paul acknowledges that that what he is about to say is “by the grace given . . .” Paul is trying to model an attitude even before he talks about having this kind of attitude. From the beginning of his words, Paul is acknowledging that the foundation of everything he is going to say is the grace of God. Finally, these words are sweeping: “I say to everyone among you . . .” The intended application here is meant to be heard by everyone.

I hope that you understand how important that last point really is. The call for thinking with humility is not just the responsibility of people in church leadership, or those with obvious gifts, or for some class of “super-Christians.” As we will see in a moment, part of the power of Paul’s message is its focus on the “whole,” not just the “part.” And humility in our thinking is what every Christian needs to embrace because pride is a foe that we all have to fight. To be human is to be proud. Therefore, no matter how long you’ve been a follower of Jesus, no matter how old you are, and no matter how outstanding or mundane you think your abilities are, all of us need to embrace humility in our thinking.

No one should “check-out” when it comes to this instruction from the apostle Paul. And if there is any sense in you that sounds like, “I got this . . . I’m good here,” you need to ask the Lord to open your heart to something here because pride so easily convinces us that we need to listen less than others.

There are three things that Paul says here about our thinking. They are interconnected and important.

First, he tells us what we ought not to do: we are not to be thinking too highly of ourselves. Now this is a very interesting thing to say because Paul could have said, “don’t think about yourselves” or “think humbly about yourself.” But instead he says, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (NIV). There is an assumption in that sentence. Do you know what it is? The assumption is that we think highly of ourselves. So mark it down somewhere in your mind (or maybe in your Bible) that the problem with humanity, even after conversion, is not that we think too lowly of ourselves. Our problem is that we naturally think highly of ourselves. Pride is the air humans breathe. Our natural bent is to think highly of ourselves.

Second, instead of thinking about ourselves more highly than is appropriate, we are to think “with sober judgment.” What does that mean? Paul is pulling out a term that would have been a familiar contrast to pride in the Greco-Roman culture. This virtue focused on a balanced, sensible and realistic view of oneself. That is why the New Living Translation renders this as “be honest in your evaluation of yourselves.” Isn’t this what “drives you nuts” when you are around proud people? They seem to have no clue as to what is real! Sober judgment means a healthy dose of reality.

Third, verse 3 provides further clarity on the context for sober judgment. Paul says, “each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” So the sober judgment is rooted in and is based upon the sovereign grace of God. The believer needs to look at himself or herself through the lens of understanding that everything is “from him, through him and to him” (Rom. 11:36). Sober judgment comes from having a biblical understanding of who God is and of the source of all blessings. The big views of God in Romans 9-11 shape a Christian mindset that is marked by humility. Theology leads to doxology and humility.

Later on in the text we will learn about spiritual gifts, and this section on humble thinking is directly related to that discussion. Paul wants believers to understand that spiritual gifts are possessed by individuals because of the will of God. Any kind of giftedness is owing to God’s kindness. Pride is kept in check by recognizing that whatever “measure of faith” you possess, it is there because God assigned it or gave it to you. To understand and use your gifts correctly, you need to have the right mindset. You need to think with humility about yourself and your gifts.

There are a number of important applications for us to consider here:

- If you are not a believer, I hope this text helps you understand that the special talents and abilities you have point to a gracious Creator. I would imagine that somewhere in your heart you know that the “natural gifts” in yourself and others come from somewhere. And the Bible says that they come from God.
- This verse cautions believers about the real and ongoing dangers of pride in our lives. We ought to constantly be on guard against this insidious and sneaky sin issue. It can emerge in any season of life.

- Understanding that God is the source of any giftedness helps us to avoid applauding ourselves when we succeed and to avoid berating ourselves when we under-perform. Pride can surface in both self-praise and self-loathing.
- There is also a stewardship issue here. When your gifts are seen through the lens of God's grace, it creates motivation to maximize them, to grow in them, and to be the very best steward of what God has entrusted to you. Humility does not create passivity or neglect of the gifts. It liberates you to work very hard, to be the person who God made you to be, and to use your gifts in the most effective ways. Humility frees you to use your gifts for worship without worshipping your gifts for you.
- This passage also calls us to not set aside our gifts through inactivity. We can be self-centered by taking credit for our gifts, but we can also be self-centered in not using our gifts. God did not give you gifts so that you can store them. He gifted you because He has a purpose for your life. Humility embraces the fact that giftedness is not about the person who is gifted.

The first application of being a living sacrifice relates to how we use our gifts, and the first instruction about giftedness starts with a focus on thinking humbly. Without this kind of mindset, nothing else matters. Pride poisons everything. But humility opens us up to beautiful freedom. It is the starting point for what comes next.

### **Live in Unity (vv. 4-5)**

The second application of a Christian mindset is connected to the context of where we live and serve. Gifts always have an environment, and it is important to think correctly about where those gifts are expressed. After identifying that God assigns gifts to individuals, Paul wanted to make sure that the broader framework is understood.

Verses 4-5 use a familiar metaphor to make this point clear. Paul talks about a body and its members or individual parts. The point of the analogy is unity in diversity. A human body is comprised of individual parts that contribute to the whole. In 1 Corinthians 12 he uses the same concept as it relates to spiritual gifts, but he goes even further saying, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" (1 Cor. 12:21) Each part of the body is important to the whole. There is great diversity in the body as well as a very important unity.

Verse 4 introduces the picture by establishing two important points: 1) a body has many members, and 2) each member has different functions. Paul is trying to get the focus off the individual by highlighting that a body works because of the collective expression of many different functions.

This is a very important concept to understand, especially in our culture. The American culture prizes individualism and personal expression. As I've said before, our hero narrative is to discover who you are and to not let anyone or any system stand in your way. Other cultures place a very high value on your place in society or in serving the group. But we are culturally conditioned to think individualistically. What's more, our culture attaches value to function. In other words, we tend to think that the more important the function a person performs, the more inherently valuable he or she is. At its worst, this is the fundamental assumption underneath euthanasia and abortion. But it

appears in other ways when we compare ourselves to others and evaluate ourselves by this standard of “function = value.”

A Biblical mindset balances this out wonderfully. The Bible identifies the inherent value and grace that is given to the individual but sets the framework for the benefit of the whole. So the Bible is not overly individualistic or communal. And the Bible elevates the importance of function without equating function with ultimate value. Every member of the body is valuable but not ultimate. Every member has value but not every member has the same function.

This distinction is not only important as it relates to gifts but also to any Christian relationship. A Christian mindset looks at many relationships through this lens. Employer-employee, government-citizen, husband-wife, and church leadership-church body need to be viewed through this lens. Differing function does not mean differing value. Both leaders and followers need to remember this.

In the context of spiritual gifts, this is crucial because there are some gifts that are more noticeable, public and “up-front.” But those gifts are not necessarily more valuable. Bright lights, many eyes, and notoriety do not make something inherently better than gifts that are behind-the-scenes, quiet, and unassuming. But there is not something inherently self-serving or proud with up-front and obvious gifts either. We must avoid the “pride-divide” of resentment on one hand and condescension on the other. We need a Christian mindset – with unity in diversity.

Verse 5 takes this one step further, as Paul applies the metaphor very specifically to Christians as it relates to “belonging.” The reason that we can value unity in diversity is because 1) we belong to Christ and 2) we belong to each other.

Paul establishes the ultimate aim or reality. The Christian mindset and the spiritual gifts are a part of what it means to be the body of Christ. So the unifying factor and the thing that binds us together is the fact that every believer is part of the body of Christ or His church. This was and is a revolutionary concept – that people from very different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences have a commonality that gives them new meaning. Here is how Paul said it in Galatians 3:26-29:

*<sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26–28 (ESV)*

Paul is not saying here that there are no categories. Some have used this text to suggest that ethnic, racial, social, or sexual categories really do not matter. Paul is not suggesting that you deny your race, your status, or your God-given gender. Rather, he’s saying that there is something more basic, more unifying, and more foundational than even those things. Race, status, and gender are not good categories for identity, despite what our culture would tell you. Christianity provides a framework for a unity that is much deeper – an oneness that is found in Christ.

But there is more here. The second half of verse 5 says something important. Christians are not only motivated to have unity in diversity because of their oneness in Christ but also because we belong to one another. Notice the phrase “individually members of one another.” Paul could have said,

“individually members of Christ,” but he chose wording here to emphasize our relationship to one another. Why did he do that? I think he did so because the way that we express our oneness in Christ is through the tangible and practical connection that we have to one another. In other words, to be part of the body of Christ is not merely a spiritual reality; there is something personal, relational, and tangible which speaks to how we relate to one another.

A Christian mindset sees the church, relationships with other Christians, and the use of our gifts in this framework. When you leave the sanctuary today, go into the atrium and read the six Core Values on the band that wraps around this room. One of those values is Unity in Diversity. And that means that there is something really special and really tangible about how we treat and serve one another. It means that relationships with this group of people really matter. It means that loving one another, caring for one another, and serving one another, no matter what the role, is THE way that we participate in the body of Christ. It is how we affirm that we are part of the same team. It is how we affirm that we are part of something greater than ourselves. It is how we affirm that we have a Christian mindset.

The body of Christ was designed by God to be diverse and unified. And when that happens, it is beautiful to those inside and those outside the church.

### **Serve Actively (vv. 6-8)**

The final section of our text relates to specific spiritual gifts. Now I am probably going to spend less time here than you would like, but I think if you get the mindset and the context right, the list of gifts, their definitions, and how to discover them follows rather easily. In other words, I think that the greatest hindrance to using your gifts is not discovering them, but having a wrong attitude about yourself or the church.

Verse 6 provides a very helpful summary statement when it comes to spiritual gifts. Notice the following phrases:

- **Having gifts** – Paul assumes that everyone has gifts. But what is a gift? I think the most helpful definition is “any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”<sup>1</sup> Some spiritual gifts are natural abilities and others are abilities that would not be possible or present apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Some gifts are natural, some are supernatural, but all spiritual gifts are empowered by the Spirit.
- **Differ according to the grace given to use** – This is a restatement of what we observed in verse three. Gifts are given by God, and they are supplied differently to each person through grace.
- **Let use them** – The point of the gifts is for them to be used. God has supplied the gifts for the purpose of mutual benefit and usefulness. Spiritual gifts are tools, not decorations. They were meant to be put to use.

So there is a bias for action here. A Christian mindset is marked by humility, unity, and service. And we see this further identified in the list of seven gifts that follows. As we look at these seven gifts, do

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 1016.

not miss that the way that the gift is to be used is as important as the gift itself. Paul is not giving an exhaustive list;<sup>2</sup> he is showing how the gifts are to be used.

Paul begins with the gift of prophesy, which is listed first probably because of its prominence in the early church<sup>3</sup> (see 1 Cor. 12:28 and 1 Cor. 14). This gift, according to 1 Cor. 14:29-33, was the receiving of spontaneous revelations for guidance in practical situations.<sup>4</sup> Paul encourages those with the gift in the early church to use it in proportion to their faith (the faith/trust that God has provided).

The next gifts are in two sets of three. The first three – serving, teaching, and exhortation – are listed and then set in their context. Grammatically, Paul is establishing the sphere in which these gifts are to be used. The point is less about the gift and more about the environment that the gifts should be used in. In other words, when you think about your gifts, your primary focus should be on how to use the gift where God has placed you. Servants serve, teachers teach, and encouragers encourage, regardless of where they are. A Christian mindset sees the gifts as ready to be used in any and every setting.

The final set of three is tied more to the manner in which the particular gifts are to be used. Those with the gift of giving should give sacrificially, not with regret or stinginess. Leaders should lead with diligence and passion, not with laziness or half-heartedness. Those with the gift of mercy should serve others with cheerfulness, not with a begrudging spirit.

The point of the listing of these seven gifts is simply that a Christian mindset or being a living sacrifice translates into tangible actions of service. A humble attitude and understanding the context of unity establish the context, but this text has a bias for action. In other words, spiritual gifts are from God, for the body of Christ, and they should be used.

A Christian mindset was meant to work. And it works through the use of spiritual gifts. So let's be a church marked by humble people who serve the Lord and one another through Spirit-empowered gifts.

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<sup>2</sup> For other lists of spiritual gifts see 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30 and Eph 4:11.

<sup>3</sup> I say "in the early church" because it is my position (although not shared by all of our Elders or pastors) that the miraculous sign gifts (e.g., prophesy, tongues, and miracles) are not the normative historical or biblical pattern for spiritual gifts and were unique in the establishment of the church. For an excellent explanation of this view see: <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist>

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

## HOW DO I SERVE IN THE CHURCH?

### Gifts

What are some of my spiritual gifts? What are some natural gifts, aptitudes, life experiences, or skills God has given me that might be used to serve others?

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### Passion

What are ministries I'm interested in or care about? What are things in life, inside and outside the church that I'm passionate about? In what areas of ministry or roles within the church do I have a desire to serve?

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### Opportunity (give this the greatest weight of the three)

What are the current needs within the church? What are opportunities for me to serve in and/or doors God has opened up for me to get involved? Who are people God has brought into my life that I can serve?

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## OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE AT COLLEGE PARK INDY

### Nursery (care giving Sunday/weekdays, teach, clean)

Becky Brooking - bbrooking@yourchurch.com

### Children (teaching, snacks, check-in, Awana)

Kristin Gilbert - kgilbert@yourchurch.com

### Student Ministry (small groups)

Melissa Crowe - mcrowe@yourchurch.com

### Community Life (small group leading/coaching)

Emily Weller - eweller@yourchurch.com

### Compassion (meals, respite care, home visits)

Lora Baughey - lbaughey@yourchurch.com

### Disability Ministry (special needs, transportation)

Lora Baughey - lbaughey@yourchurch.com

### Global Outreach (pray, Vision Trip leadership, host students)

Ron Page - rpage@yourchurch.com

### Local Outreach (volunteer with local partners)

Dan Weller - dweller@yourchurch.com

### Soul Care / Counseling & Prayer

Kelly Alexander - kalexander@yourchurch.com

### First Hand Ministry, (greet & serve our guests)

Jenny Brake - jbrake@yourchurch.com

### Room Set-up, Traffic & Medical Team

Todd Fenoglio - tfenoglio@yourchurch.com

### Large Event Volunteering

Chana Sweeney - csweeney@yourchurch.com

### Sunday Worship Services, Choir, Worship Arts, Communion

Tracie Regnier - tregnier@yourchurch.com

### Communications (design, writing, photography)

Katie Schulenburg - kschulenburg@yourchurch.com

### TechServ (audio, video, lighting, camera operator)

Scott McColgin - smccolgin@yourchurch.com

### Office Help & Administration

Tim Davis - tdavis@yourchurch.com

### Counting Team (Sunday offerings)

Marcia Vaillancourt - mvaillancourt@yourchurch.com

### Information Technology (network & data needs)

Stephanie Johnson - sjohnson@yourchurch.com

### Church Grounds & Building

### Maintenance (landscaping, snow removal, trash pick-up)

Tyler Ritz - tritz@yourchurch.com

For more opportunities to serve visit the Serving Hub online:  
[yourchurch.com/servinghub](http://yourchurch.com/servinghub)