

Romans 12:1-8

Intro:

Having finished explaining what God's sovereign plan for His people was throughout redemptive history, he moves back into the present and what that means now for the church, which is the realm and expression of His redemptive rule, as well as the means by which He is bringing His heavenly kingdom on earth.

- This logical progression from chapters 9-11¹ into chapter 12² is missed by so many commentators, unintentionally undercutting much of the foundation and motive for why we as the church are to carry out Paul's commands and exhortations.
 - There is something wonderfully redemptive and evangelistic about living together as God's covenant people.

⇒ Cf. Matt. 5:13-16³; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:12

Faithfulness, Holiness, and Evangelism in and Through Community

Though we certainly are to live out our faith in the context of the world,⁴ we must realize that almost all of Paul's commands for us as individuals are to be seen in the context of doing life together in this world as a church.

- This is something we in the individualized west must be reminded of constantly.

Note, in **v.1**, the plural ("your⁵ bodies") and the singular ("a living sacrifice").

- That is, Paul is not advocating for a whole bunch of individualized, disconnected offerings to be made by each of the believers in Rome; rather, he is picturing that cumulatively their sacrifices form an organic,

¹ I.e., God's redemptive dealings with mankind in the past with Israel.

² I.e., God's redemptive dealings with mankind in the present with the church.

³ Note that the emphatic "you" (ὁμοίως) in verses 13 and 14 are plural, not singular, as is the "your" (ὁμοίων) in v. 16.

⁴ For e.g., Paul's exhortations regarding how we are to relate to government (13:1-7).

⁵ This plural possessive pronoun recalls the plural "you" and "brothers" already mentioned at the beginning of v.1.

singular offering to God as they obediently use their gifts for the glory of God *by* serving their fellow believers in the context of the local church.

Application:

1. Do I see how important my participation in a local church is with regards to God's redemptive purposes for this world?
2. Is being involved in a local church a priority for *me* and my family?

This kind of sacrificial body living is what Paul says is our "spiritual worship," which he later says is "the will of God" in verse 2.

- There are so many opinions of, and sermons about, what Christian "worship" should look like, or what God's "will" for us may be.
 - Unfortunately, **living sacrificially in community** is rarely mentioned, even though for Paul it is **the primary way of worshipping God rightly⁶ and walking in and according to God's will.**

Application:

1. When making important life decisions, how does being an active part of a local church factor into them?
 - For e.g., many Christians are willing to move to another city for school or work, since it seems to be "God's will" for them, yet they are unwilling to make being part of a local church part of their life, tragically missing "God's will" in trying to find it!!
 - How does "church life" affect how you use your treasure, talents, and time?

Every Member Ministry

⁶ The Greek word "spiritual" (v.1) is λογικός (*logikos*), which can also be translated "logical" or "reasonable" (NET, KJV). Cf. NLT = "This is the way we truly worship Him." NIV = "This is your true and proper worship."

In **12:2**, we see that “body life” and “body growth” – which as we have seen has crucial redemptive and evangelistic purposes – is not relegated to the “spiritual” leaders of the church.

- “I say to everyone among you.”
- “Each one according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”
- “And the members do not all have the same function.”
- “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us [all].”

Application:

The question, then, is not, “**Do** I have a spiritual gift from God?” Rather, the question is, “**What** spiritual gift(s) has God given me **to use** in the church and for the church?”

Using our Gift(s) Rightly

Before we look at Paul’s list of church gifts, we need to look *first* at having a **right mindset** (v.3)⁷, as well as a **right heart** (v.9), lest we steward them wrongly.

1. **Right thinking**⁸ is impossible without having a right understanding of God’s sovereign grace and wisdom.
 - Simply put, “right” or “sober” thinking/judgment⁹ is seeing God rightly (as sovereign) as well as our fellow believers rightly (as siblings).
 - His sovereignty and wisdom are exercised not only in His **saving grace** (chs. 9-11), but also in how – and to whom – He dispenses His **servicing grace** (ch. 12).

⁷ See also **12:16**, where the Greek is almost identical to **12:3**.

⁸ σωφρονέω – BDAG = “to be of a sound mind”: (1) *of mental health*, “to be sane, be in one’s right mind, think straight; (2) “be sensible, reasonable”; (3) *of a measured and ordered way of life*: “to be self-controlled, moderate, sober.”

⁹ Paul uses the stem “think” (*phronein*) 4X in this verse to emphasize how important right thinking is to offer a right sacrifice, and how dangerous wrong – i.e., arrogant – thinking is to the church’s offering to God.

If we are conceited¹⁰ in our gifting(s) or think that somehow God or the church is somehow dependent upon us or needs our service, we will not be a blessing to the church or the world.

Moreover, when we understand that God as sovereign and all-wise King has the right and prerogative to give as He pleases, to whom He pleases, it kills the temptation to envy others or their gift(s).¹¹

2. Likewise, **right love** towards our fellow believers in the church/body is impossible apart from a steady gaze and reflection upon God's love for us in Christ.
 - Not surprisingly, in most theologically dense letter, he mentions love more than in any of his other letters! Obviously, if we are to live rightly before God by living rightly in community, we need a large dose of God's great love for us to be deposited into our hearts.

Note how Paul starts the letter by reminding all the believers of their identity:

- **1:7** – “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”
 - We must think soberly and remember that our brothers and sisters in Christ and in this church are loved by God, and likewise called according to His purpose.¹²

¹⁰ Most English versions [rightly] translate the verb (ὑπερφρονέω) as “do not think more highly of yourself.” That the imperative is in the present tense reminds us that the temptation to have an inflated view of ourselves is a constant battle. The best way to combat this conceitedness is by our constant thinking about/meditating upon God's sovereign grace to us in the gospel (vv.1-2). In light of Paul's previous argument, especially in chapters 1-3 that deal with our total depravity, just condemnation, and utter inability to do anything good, we must remind ourselves and ask, where, then, is boasting?

¹¹ Cf. Matthew 20:1-16, esp. v.15: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to Me? Or do you begrudge My generosity?”

¹² Cf. Rom. 8:28 – “And we know that for those who love God – that is, for those who are the called one according to His purpose – all things are working together for good.” I have translated it here this way to emphasize the inseparable link between God's [effectual] call to us, and our [response in] love to Him.

Later, Paul reminds the believers that the Spirit of God has poured out¹³ the love of God¹⁴ in their hearts (5:5).

- When the Holy Spirit sovereignly pours the love of God in our hearts, we not only love God rightly, but we also begin to love what God loves rightly, especially His Son and His people.¹⁵

Again, this is another (!!) reminder to us that before we can live rightly, we must first think and love rightly.¹⁶

- Hence the link not only between verses 1 and 2, but also verses 3-9.

Thinking through the Gifts (vv.4-8)

A couple of things to keep in mind:

1. God assigns them, not the pastors (or other leaders) of the church (v.3).
 - Cf. **1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 11** (ESV) – “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone...All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”
 - **Ephesians 4:16** (LSB) – Each “member” of the “body” has received a gift “according to the properly measured¹⁷ working of each individual part.”
2. The gifts are not to be used selfishly, but for the body (v.4).

¹³ Paul uses a perfect tense here (*ἐκκέχυται*), indicating that this love is once-for-all poured out in our regeneration/conversion, but continues to be poured out throughout the course of our sanctification.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, the ESV translates the Greek as “God’s love.” Though this is true, the phrase means *both* God’s love for us (a subjective genitive), as well as our love for God (an objective genitive).

¹⁵ As an aside, this is also why antisemitism is truly impossible for the true Christian. In 11:28, Paul says that even unregenerate Jews are nevertheless “beloved.” (NLT = “Yet they are still the people he loves because he chose their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”)

¹⁶ The theological “center” of 1 Corinthians 12-14 (and I would argue, the entire letter) is Paul’s extensive treatise on “love.” All of the “spiritual giftedness” of the Corinthian church is (worse than) useless if it is not motivated by, and exercised in, true, Spirit-wrought love. The presence of the Spirit in a congregation is not measured by how many “gifts” there are, but whether or not they are being used in service of others to “build them up.”

¹⁷ Cf. 4:7 (LSB) – “But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” The LSB rightly picks up the repetition of the Greek in verses 7 and 16, highlighting Christ’s sovereign looting of Satan (4:8-10), and Christ’s sovereign dispensing of the booty to His bride (4:11-16) to equip her to live rightly as His body (4:17ff.).

- Cf. **1 Corinthians 12:7** (ESV) – “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
 - **Ephesians 4:12, 16** – Christ-appointed leaders given to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry,¹⁸ for building up the body of Christ...the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”
 - **1 Peter 4:10** (ESV) – “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
3. There are “many” members in the body. That is, all of the gifts in the body are not relegated to a few “super” Christians. As noted already, all members have been gifted by God.¹⁹
- Notice the emphasis on “to each”, etc. in Romans 12:5, 6; 1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7, 16; 1 Peter 4:10, 11, etc.
4. Like muscles, for these gifts to be effective, they must be “used.”
- **Romans 12:6** (NASB) – “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly.*”²⁰
 - According to **Ephesians 4:16**, the body will not build itself up in love, *unless* the parts are working together as a unit in accordance with the design and will of the Head, namely Christ.
5. These gifts “differ” from one another *but* are all equally necessary and important in and for the body.
- According to **1 Corinthians 12**, “balance” is good!
 - A “body” of all mouths, or hands, or ears, is a grotesque picture!
 - The goal, according to **Romans 12:16** (cf. **15:5**), is “harmony.”²¹

¹⁸ LSB = “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

¹⁹ Now, whether or not they exercise and use their gift(s) is another story.

²⁰ The Greek text does not include “each of us is to exercise them accordingly” (hence the italics of the NASB).

However, this “addition” is necessary, as evidenced in almost every English version (e.g., ESV = “let us use them”).

²¹ So ESV, NET, NIV, NLT. Literally, Paul says, “be thinking the same thing” (cf. Phil. 2:2, 5).

- The imagery of a sympathy may be helpful to think of here.

The Seven Gifts in Romans 12

Most scholars agree that Paul is not necessarily exhaustive here (though that could be ascertained from the number of gifts, namely seven, the number of completion). Paul's "lists" in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 differ in number and kind, which seems to support the idea that Paul may simply be listing a "general" or "normal" list of gifts to be exercised in the Roman churches.

1. Prophecy
2. Service
3. Teaching
4. Exhortation
5. Giving
6. Leadership
7. Acts of Mercy

Conclusion:

