

**Romans 12:1-9**  
**July 12, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: When you hear the word “checklists,” does that produce a positive or negative feeling? Why?

Q: Why are checklists important?

As I was preparing the lesson for Chapter 12, it appears that Paul has put together a checklist of how our lives should be lived as children of God. There are multiple areas that he covers. It’s much like a performance review at the office. When your boss evaluates your work, you are being evaluated in different areas, e.g. skill level, people skills, the ability to problem-solve, identify strengths or weaknesses, etc.

**Transition:** If I were to go through a “performance evaluation” regarding my spiritual walk with the Lord, what you would find is that I love to play to my strengths, and I tend to avoid or resist working at the many other areas I can improve in my own walk with Christ – and there are many! You may find yourself having the same experience. But I want to give you a word of encouragement: We could easily read this chapter and choose to be discouraged because of the areas we need to improve. However, I don’t want this lesson to be all about our shortfalls because there are things we are doing right. I would prefer that we read this text and determine what our “next step” would be to help us become *well-rounded* as Christians. So let’s choose to read this as a way to be inspired and motivated. I want us to see what’s truly possible if we yielded every area of our life to Christ. We would be rocking this world if we were firing on all cylinders!! **All of us CAN strengthen our spiritual walk with the Lord BY honestly evaluating ourselves in each of the AREAS of our walk Paul identifies for us.** Ready?!

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 12:1-2]**

V.1:

- Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

V.2:

- Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.1-2: Paul describes to his Gentile readers an overall picture of Christian dedication. What are the three things we should be dedicating to God on a daily basis? [Our bodies, our mind, and our wills] Let’s see if we can break this down.

Observation v.1: The verb “offer/present” in this verse means “present once and for all.” It commands a definite commitment of the body to the Lord, just as a bride and groom in their wedding service commit themselves to each other. It is this once-for-all commitment that determines what they do with their bodies.

Q v.1: What do you think Paul means when he tells us to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices?” [There are two “living sacrifices” in the Bible and they help us understand what this really means.

- The first is Isaac (Gen. 22); Isaac willingly put himself on the altar and would have died in obedience to God’s will, but the Lord sent a ram to take his place. Isaac “died” just the same—he died to self and willingly yielded himself to the will of God. When he got off that altar, Isaac was a “living sacrifice” to the glory of God.
- Of course, the second is our Lord Jesus Christ who is the perfect illustration of a “living sacrifice,” because He actually died as a sacrifice, in obedience to His Father’s will. But He arose again. And today He is in heaven as a “living sacrifice,” bearing in His body the wounds of Calvary. He is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14–16) and our Advocate (1 John 2:1) before the throne of God.]

Q v.1: What does Paul mean when he says “this is your spiritual act of worship?” [Before we trusted Christ, we used our body for sinful pleasures and purposes, but now that we belong to Him, we want to use our body for His glory. The Christian’s body is God’s temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20) because the Spirit of God dwells within him (Rom. 8:9). It is our privilege to glorify Christ in our body and magnify Christ in our body (Phil. 1:20–21). This means that every day is a worship experience when our bodies are yielded to the Lord.]

Rhetorical Q: How willing are we to lay down our life as a “living sacrifice” for Christ? If we were “bought at a great price, and our life is not our own,” have we really given our whole life to Him to use however He pleases? We all like to “think” we have, but in reality, we probably haven’t. When Isaac got on the altar, he couldn’t compartmentalize which part of his body was being sacrificed! It was all or nothing!!

Q v.2: What are examples of conforming to the pattern of this world? [Agreeing with secular thinking that is contrary to God’s Word. We have certainly seen this in the media lately!]

Observation: The world wants to control your mind, but God wants to transform your mind (X-REF Eph. 4:17–24; Col. 3:1–4). This word *transform* is the same as *transfigure* in Matthew 17:2. It has come into our English language as the word “metamorphosis.” It describes a change from within. The world wants to change your mind, so it exerts pressure from without. But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. If the world controls your thinking, you are a *conformer*; if God controls your thinking, you are a *transformer*.

Q: So how do we go about “renewing the mind?” [Spend time meditating on God’s Word, memorizing it, and making it a part of your inner self. God will gradually make your mind more spiritually-minded (X-REF 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Q v.3: If we are willing to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, and we are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, then what should be the result according to Paul? [We will be able to test and approve what God’s will is]

Q: How do we surrender our wills? [We surrender our wills to God through disciplined prayer. As we spend time in prayer, we surrender our will to God and pray, with the Lord, “Not my will, but Thy will be done.” We must pray about everything, and let God have His way in everything.]

**Application Rhetorical Q: I have proposed today that All of us CAN strengthen our spiritual walk with the Lord BY honestly evaluating ourselves in each of the AREAS of our walk Paul identifies for us. What would be one baby step you could take based on these two verses that would strengthen your walk with the Lord?**

**Transition:** As we read the next section of Scripture, keep in mind that Paul was writing to Christians who were members of local churches in Rome. He described their relationship to each other in terms of the members of a body, which will inform our relationship with one another in the context of the local church.

**[Read Romans 12:3-8]**

V.3:

- For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

V.4:

- Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

V.5:

- so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

V.6:

- We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

V.7:

- If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;

V.8:

- if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.3: What attitude should we have about ourselves at all times? [humility, sober, not prideful]

Q: Why do you think Paul is establishing this mindset upfront? What’s the impact to the church if we’re too high on ourselves?! [Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and tries to perform a ministry that he cannot do. (Sometimes the opposite is true, and people undervalue themselves. Both attitudes are wrong.)]

Q: What do you think Paul means by “the measure of faith given you?” That’s an interesting phrase! [The gifts that we have came because of God’s grace. They must be accepted and exercised by faith. We were saved “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8–9), and we must live and serve “by grace through faith.” Since our gifts are from God, we cannot take the credit for them.]

All we can do is accept them and use them to honor His name. The overarching idea is to have an **honest evaluation/realistic evaluation of your spiritual gifts.**]

**Transition:** Paul now gives us a beautiful picture of the church that should function like our own bodies. Just as our body functions efficiently because each part of our body does their part, the church should be no different. Let's look at some of the spiritual gifts that God gives His children:

- Q v.6 – Prophecy: What does this look like? [The idea is “hearing the voice of God.” Some theologians have said, “Something that God spontaneously brings to mind.”]
- X-Ref: **I Cor 13:9** We know *in part and prophesy in part*. Therefore, anyone who has the gift of prophesy should have the attitude of “I have the corner on God’s truth.” A person with the gift of prophesy should have an attitude of humility and recognize that he/she has been given a “piece of the puzzle.”
- X-Ref: **I Cor 14:3-4** Why does the Holy Spirit give someone the gift of prophesy? What is its purpose? [Strengthen, encourage, and comfort others. Whoever has the gift of prophesy should be *edifying the church body*. The flipside: BEWARE of false prophesy that would tear down, create fear or anxiety, or weaken the church body. That is NOT from the Lord!]
- X-Ref: **I Thess 5:19-21** Q: Who is behind the prophesy?[The Holy Spirit]
- Q: How are we to treat the prophesy? [Without contempt – do not dismiss or treat with disregard]
- Point of Interest: Share Brad Brinson’s approach in his church and how the gift of prophesy is allowed to surface. God is still speaking to His church!
- Review the rest of the gifts. They should be self-explanatory.

**Summarize:** Each believer has a different gift, and God has bestowed these gifts so the local body can grow in a balanced way. But each Christian must exercise his or her gift by faith. We may not see the result of our ministry, but the Lord sees it and He blesses. Note that “exhortation” (encouragement) is just as much a spiritual ministry as preaching or teaching. Giving and showing mercy are also important gifts. To some people, God has given the ability to rule, or to administer the various functions of the church. Whatever gift we have must be dedicated to God and used for the good of the whole church.

Q: How many feel they know what their spiritual gift(s) are? [For those who don’t, point them to spiritual gift inventories, or provide some to the class.]

**Application Rhetorical Q: I have proposed today that All of us CAN strengthen our spiritual walk with the Lord BY honestly evaluating ourselves in each of the AREAS of our walk Paul identifies for us.** Since the point of spiritual gifts is to edify and to be used for the good of the church, pray about how you can be an active member of this local body at Riverbend to be involved in ministries that fit your gift. We need to be good stewards of these gifts for His glory. What would be one baby step you could take based on this section of verses that would strengthen your walk with the Lord?

**Transition:** So if at the individual level, we are offering our bodies as living sacrifices, renewing our minds, and testing/approving what God’s will is, then the *natural byproduct* will be desiring

to use His spiritual gifts to build His church, as we just looked at. But another byproduct is how we conduct ourselves in the church. Paul's emphasis is on the *attitudes of those who exercise the spiritual gifts*.

**LOOK:**

We need to hear this because it's time to do an assessment on how we are living out our calling as God's children. Paul provided multiple scales to be measured by, but the goal is to do an act on the information you learn from it. Since our spiritual growth is a process, we need to think in terms of baby steps in areas we need to improve. If you haven't been faithful in prayer, then figure out a small baby step that works for you to sharpen your prayer life. If it's practicing hospitality, then figure out a baby step that works for you to sharpen your hospitality efforts. Let the Holy Spirit use this chapter to illumine the baby step(s) HE wants you to take and be open to it. You can't lose!

**See if someone wants to share:**

Q: If you improved area "x," what would that look like?

Q: What is the one small baby step you can take this week that helps you strengthen your walk with the Lord?

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 554–555). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **Our Relationship to God (Rom. 12:1–2)**

This is the fourth “therefore” in the letter. Romans 3:20 is the “therefore” of condemnation, declaring that the whole world is guilty before God. Romans 5:1 is the “therefore” of justification, and Romans 8:1 the “therefore” of assurance. In Romans 12:1, we have the “therefore” of dedication, and it is this dedication that is the basis for the other relationships that Paul discussed in this section.

What is true dedication? As Paul described it here, Christian dedication involves three steps.

***You give God your body (v. 1).*** Before we trusted Christ, we used our body for sinful pleasures and purposes, but now that we belong to Him, we want to use our body for His glory. The Christian’s body is God’s temple (1 Cor. 6:19–20) because the Spirit of God dwells within him (Rom. 8:9). It is our privilege to glorify Christ in our body and magnify Christ in our body (Phil. 1:20–21).

Just as Jesus Christ had to take on Himself a body in order to accomplish God’s will on earth, so we must yield our bodies to Christ that He might continue God’s work through us. We must yield the members of the body as “instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13) for the Holy Spirit to use in the doing of God’s work. The Old Testament sacrifices were dead sacrifices, but we are to be living sacrifices.

There are two “living sacrifices” in the Bible and they help us understand what this really means. The first is Isaac (Gen. 22); the second is our Lord Jesus Christ. Isaac willingly put himself on the altar and would have died in obedience to God’s will, but the Lord sent a ram to take his place. Isaac “died” just the same—he died to self and willingly yielded himself to the will of God. When he got off that altar, Isaac was a “living sacrifice” to the glory of God.

Of course, our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect illustration of a “living sacrifice,” because He actually died as a sacrifice, in obedience to His Father’s will. But He arose again. And today He is in heaven as a “living sacrifice,” bearing in His body the wounds of Calvary. He is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14–16) and our Advocate (1 John 2:1) before the throne of God.

The verb “present” in this verse means “present once and for all.” It commands a definite commitment of the body to the Lord, just as a bride and groom in their wedding service commit themselves to each other. It is this once-for-all commitment that determines what they do with their bodies. Paul gives us two reasons for this commitment: (1) it is the right response to all that God has done for us—“I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, *by the mercies of God*” (italics mine); and (2) this commitment is “our reasonable service” or “our spiritual worship.” This means that every day is a worship experience when your body is yielded to the Lord.

***You give Him your mind (v. 2a).*** The world wants to control your mind, but God wants to transform your mind (see Eph. 4:17–24; Col. 3:1–11). This word *transform* is the same as *transfigure* in Matthew 17:2. It has come into our English language as the word “metamorphosis.” It describes a change from within. The world wants to change your mind, so it exerts pressure from without. But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. If the world controls your thinking, you are a *conformer*; if God controls your thinking, you are a *transformer*.

God transforms our minds and makes us spiritually minded by using His Word. As you spend time meditating on God's Word, memorizing it, and making it a part of your inner man, God will gradually make your mind more spiritual (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

***You give Him your will (v. 2b).*** Your mind controls your body, and your will controls your mind. Many people think they can control their will by "willpower," but usually they fail. (This was Paul's experience as recorded in Rom. 7:15–21). It is only when we yield the will to God that His power can take over and give us the willpower (and the won't power!) that we need to be victorious Christians.

We surrender our wills to God through disciplined prayer. As we spend time in prayer, we surrender our will to God and pray, with the Lord, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." We must pray about everything, and let God have His way in everything.

For many years I have tried to begin each day by surrendering my body to the Lord. Then I spend time with His Word and let Him transform my mind and prepare my thinking for that new day. Then I pray, and I yield the plans of the day to Him and let Him work as He sees best. I especially pray about those tasks that upset or worry me—and He always sees me through. To have a right relationship with God, we must start the day by yielding to Him our bodies, minds, and wills.

### **Relationship to Other Believers (Rom. 12:3–16)**

Paul was writing to Christians who were members of local churches in Rome. He described their relationship to each other in terms of the members of a body. (He used this same picture in 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7–16.) The basic idea is that each believer is a living part of Christ's body, and each one has a spiritual function to perform. Each believer has a gift (or gifts) to be used for the building up of the body and the perfecting of the other members of the body. In short, we belong to each other, we minister to each other, and we need each other. What are the essentials for spiritual ministry and growth in the body of Christ?

***Honest evaluation (v. 3).*** Each Christian must know what his spiritual gifts are and what ministry (or ministries) he is to have in the local church. It is not wrong for a Christian to recognize gifts in his own life and in the lives of others. What *is* wrong is the tendency to have a false evaluation of ourselves. Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and tries to perform a ministry that he cannot do. (Sometimes the opposite is true, and people undervalue themselves. Both attitudes are wrong.)

The gifts that we have came because of God's grace. They must be accepted and exercised by faith. We were saved "by grace, through faith" (Eph. 2:8–9), and we must live and serve "by grace through faith." Since our gifts are from God, we cannot take the credit for them. All we can do is accept them and use them to honor His name. (See 1 Cor. 15:10 for Paul's personal testimony about gifts.)

I once ministered with two men who had opposite attitudes toward their gifts: the one man constantly belittled his gifts and would not use them, and the other man constantly boasted about gifts that he did not possess. Actually, both of them were guilty of pride, because both of them refused to acknowledge God's grace and let Him have the glory. Moses made a similar mistake when God called him (Ex. 4:1–13). When the individual believers in a church know their gifts, accept them by faith, and use them for God's glory, then God can bless in a wonderful way.

***Faithful cooperation (vv. 4–8).*** Each believer has a different gift, and God has bestowed these gifts so the local body can grow in a balanced way. But each Christian must exercise his or her gift by faith. We may not see the result of our ministry, but the Lord sees it and He blesses.

Note that “exhortation” (encouragement) is just as much a spiritual ministry as preaching or teaching. Giving and showing mercy are also important gifts. To some people, God has given the ability to rule, or to administer the various functions of the church. Whatever gift we have must be dedicated to God and used for the good of the whole church.

It is tragic when any one gift is emphasized in a local church beyond all the other gifts. “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:29–30) The answer to all these questions is no! And for a Christian to minimize the other gifts while he emphasizes his own gift is to deny the very purpose for which gifts are given: the benefit of the whole body of Christ. “Now to each man the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7, NIV).

Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with. In the church at Corinth, the believers were tearing down the ministry because they were abusing spiritual gifts. They were using their gifts as ends in themselves and not as a means toward the end of building up the church. They so emphasized their spiritual gifts that they lost their spiritual graces! They had the gifts of the Spirit but were lacking in the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal. 5:22–23).

**Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 487–488). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

A. *The basic consecration (12:1–2).*

12:1–2. The start of this practical section is indicated by Paul’s exhortation **I urge** (the first word of v. 1 in the Gr. text). **Therefore** also shows a transition (cf. “therefore” in 3:20; 5:1; 8:1). The basis of Paul’s exhortation is **God’s mercy** (*oiktirmōn*, rendered “compassion” in 2 Cor. 1:3; Phil. 2:1; Col. 3:12, and “mercy” in Heb. 10:28). God’s compassion has been described in detail in the first 11 chapters of Romans. The content of Paul’s urging is **to offer your bodies** (cf. Rom. 6:13) **as living sacrifices**. A Christian’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). In the KJV “offer” is translated “present” (Rom. 12:1) and “yield” (6:13, 16, 19). The word “bodies,” mindful of the Old Testament sacrifices, represents the totality of one’s life and activities, of which his body is the vehicle of expression. In contrast with Old Testament sacrifices this is a “living” sacrifice. Such an offering is **holy** (set apart) **and pleasing** (cf. “pleasing” in 12:2) **to God**. Furthermore, it is **spiritual** (*logikēn*; cf. 1 Peter 2:2) **worship** (*latreian*). *Latreian* refers to any ministry performed for God, such as that of the priests and the Levites. Christians are believer-priests, identified with the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 7:23–28; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). A believer’s offering of his total life as a sacrifice to God is therefore sacred service. In the light of Paul’s closely reasoned and finely argued exposition of the mercies of God (Rom. 1–11), such an offering is obviously a desirable response for believers.

Paul then stated general implications of a believer’s offering his life to God as a sacrifice. Such an offering represents a complete change in lifestyle, involving both a negative and a positive aspect. First, Paul commanded, **Do not conform** (lit., “Do not be conformed”; this Gr. word occurs elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Peter 1:14) **any longer to the pattern of this world** (*aiōni*, “Age”). Living according to the lifestyle of “the present evil Age” (Gal. 1:4; cf. Eph. 1:21) must now be put aside. Then Paul commanded, **But be transformed** (pres. passive imper.,



“keep on being transformed”) **by the renewing of your mind**. The Greek verb translated “transformed” (*metamorphousthe*) is seen in the English word “metamorphosis,” a total change from inside out (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The key to this change is the “mind” (*noos*), the control center of one’s attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions (cf. Eph. 4:22–23). As one’s mind keeps on being made new by the spiritual input of God’s Word, prayer, and Christian fellowship, his lifestyle keeps on being transformed.

Paul added, **Then you will be able to test and approve** (*dokimazein*, “prove by testing” [1 Peter 1:7, “proved genuine”], i.e., ascertain) **what God’s will is—His good, pleasing** (cf. Rom. 12:1), **and perfect will**. These three qualities are not attributes of God’s will as the NIV and some other translations imply. Rather, Paul said that God’s will itself is what is good, well-pleasing (to Him), and perfect. “Good,” for example, is not an adjective (God’s “good” will) but a noun (God’s will is what is good—good, i.e., for each believer).

As a Christian is transformed in his mind and is made more like Christ, he comes to approve and desire God’s will, not his own will for his life. Then he discovers that God’s will is what is good for him, and that it pleases God, and is complete in every way. It is all he needs. But only by being renewed spiritually can a believer ascertain, do, and enjoy the will of God.

#### *B. In Christian ministry (12:3–8).*

12:3–5. A believer’s consecration to God and his transformed lifestyle is demonstrated in his exercising his spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. As an apostle of Christ (**by the grace given me**; cf. 1:5; 15:15–16) he warned his readers individually (**every one of you**), **Do not think of yourself more highly** (*hyperphronein*, “think higher”) **than you ought**. An inflated view of oneself is out of place in the Christian life. Then Paul encouraged them, **But rather think** (*phronein*) **of yourself with sober judgment** (*sōphronein*, “sound thinking”), **in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you**. God has given each believer some faith by which to serve Him. By his involved word play on various forms of the verb *phroneō*, “to think,” Paul emphasized that human pride is wrong (cf. 3:27; 11:18, 20) partly because all natural abilities and spiritual gifts are from God. As a result every Christian should have a proper sense of humility and an awareness of his need to be involved with other members of Christ’s body. As Paul explained, a parallelism exists between a believer’s physical **body** which has parts with differing functions and the community of believers **in Christ** as a spiritual **body** (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 4:11–12, 15–16). The point is that **each member** functions to serve the body, not the body to serve the members. The diversity of the **many** accompanies the unity of the body. Therefore it is important to think soundly about oneself and to evaluate properly God’s gifts and their uses.

12:6–8. Paul then applied what he had just said (vv. 3–5) to the exercise of God-given abilities for spiritual service (vv. 6–8). He built on the principle, **We have different gifts** (cf. v. 4, “not all have the same function”; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4). The grace-gifts (*charismata*) are **according to God’s grace** (*charis*). He listed seven gifts, none of which—with the possible exception of **prophesying**—is a sign gift. The Greek text is much more abrupt than any English translation; **let him** is supplied for smoother English. One’s “prophesying” is to be done **in proportion to his faith**; a better translation would be “in agreement to the (not ‘his’) faith.” That is, prophesying—communicating God’s message, to strengthen, encourage, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3)—is to be in right relationship to the body of truth already revealed (cf. “faith” as doctrine in Gal. 1:23; Jude 3, 20). The other six gifts mentioned here are **serving ... teaching ... encouraging ... contributing ... leadership**, and **showing mercy**. Contributing to people’s

**needs** is to be done with generosity (*en haplotēti*), not skimpily (cf. 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13). Managing, leading, or administering (*proistamenos*, lit., “standing before”; cf. *proistamenous*, “who are over,” 1 Thes. 5:12) is to be done **diligently** (*en spoudē*, “in eagerness, earnestness”), not lazily or halfheartedly. And bestowing mercy is to be done **cheerfully** (*en hilarotēti*, “in gladness”), not with sadness. Three of these seven gifts are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (prophets, teachers, administration); two (prophets and pastor-teachers) are included in Ephesians 4:11; and two (administering and serving) are listed in 1 Peter 4:10–11. Whatever one’s gift, he should exercise it faithfully as a stewardship from God.

© 2015 Lee Ann Penick