

## **Is Our Life On Target? Romans 12:1-8**

### **Introduction:**

I doubt anyone would ever have guessed painted rubber balloons and cleverly disguised piles of canvas, wood, and chicken wire could help win a war. Oddly enough, they did.

Early in WW II, British commanders realized they were out-gunned by the German army. They also determined that a massive, surprise attack would be necessary to defeat the enemy. To help conceal their weakness and achieve the element of surprise, the Allied army created an elaborate system of camouflage and decoys.

Carpenters, artists, and painters built a fleet of ships, aircraft, guns, and airfields all from lumber, canvas, plaster, and chicken wire. They also made scores of life-size inflatable tanks, complete with gun turrets and authentic paint schemes.

Decoy airfields had working lights, ships had working smokestacks, and floating troop carriers even had crew laundry hanging to dry on deck. Once complete, the decoys were placed away from key targets so enemy planes would spot, report, and attack them rather than targets of real value.

While the thought of a battle with chicken wire ships and rubber tanks is comical, decoys proved to be effective. In Britain, decoy airfields were attacked more than real ones and thousands of tons of bombs were wasted on fake targets.

The Germans missed the target. Their resources were wasted on a decoy. How about us? Are the resources God has given us being used as He intended or are they being wasted? Today we will discuss from Romans 12:1-8 how God would have us to use our life and our spiritual gifts. Let's see if we are on target.

Read Romans 12:1

### **We are called to respond to God's mercy by offering our life as a sacrifice to Him (Romans 12:1)**

Paul exhorts us to present our bodies as a sacrifice to God. He calls for a definitive decision in which we hand over our life completely to Him. The totality of the commitment we are called to make comes through dramatically in Paul's use of the language of sacrifice. The word translated "to present" is used in Acts 23:33 where we are told that Paul was handed over or presented to Governor Felix. Paul was delivered into the control of the Governor and was placed in a position of being at his disposal. In a similar way, we are to hand over our bodies to God as a sacrifice to Him. We are to put our bodies in a position of being at God's disposal.

To what is Paul referring when he exhorts us to yield or present our bodies as a sacrifice? He is referring to not only our physical bodies, but to the totality of our life, of which our bodies are the vehicle of expression. God wants all of us. Biblical stewardship requires the total commitment of our life.

Illustration: A farmer fell on hard times and was told by the banker that he would lose his farm unless his bills were paid by a certain date. The farmer's animals were concerned for the farmer and met to consider how they could help. They nominated the chicken and the pig to serve as a committee to come up with an idea and all agreed that they would help to carry out the plan they came up with. The pig and chicken met and immediately came up with an idea. They would host a benefit breakfast. Next, the chicken and pig had to decide on a meal plan. The chicken suggested that they serve ham and eggs. The pig objected, "That's easy for you! For you it's just a contribution; for me it's total commitment."

The chicken's role in this meal plan represents the popular idea of stewardship—I make a contribution to God and I go on doing my thing. The pig's role in this meal plan represents the Biblical concept of stewardship. Biblical stewardship is not giving to reach some legalistic, minimum standard and then we have done our part. Biblical stewardship requires total commitment of all we have and all we are to God.

The exhortation for total commitment isn't just for pastors and missionaries. The church in America must put away the medieval thinking that makes a distinction between clergy and laity. We are all called to place all we are on the altar. Paul isn't presenting a double standard here where clergy give 100%, whereas, laity give 50-75%. All believers are called to be totally committed to Christ.

### **The basis of our offering is God's mercy**

What is Paul referring to when He writes about the mercies of God? Mercy is that quality or characteristic of God which moves Him to demonstrate compassion and pity towards us as sinners rather than giving us what we deserve. By His mercy, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place, to pay our sin debt, so that those of us who trust Him as Savior are now delivered from the bondage, power, and condemnation of our sins. Paul wrote about the many ways God has shown us grace and mercy in the first 11 chapters of Romans. In chapters 12-15, Paul presents the application to the gospel message.

Since God has done so much for us out of His love, grace and mercy towards us, we have an obligation to respond appropriately. The appropriate response of course is to hand over our life to God. We don't respond in this way so as to earn God's favor. We have already received His favor and commit our life to Him as a sacrifice as the expression of our gratitude.

Ralph Porter writes, "The driving force in authentic Christian living is never the hope of gain, but a heart of gratitude. People will never live godly lives until we understand how deeply we're indebted to God's mercy."

## **The character of our sacrifice:**

### **Our sacrifice is a living sacrifice**

Sacrifices of dead animals are no longer needed or acceptable to God. Jesus Christ has been offered as the once and for all sacrifice for sins. All that remains for us as worshipers of God is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. God isn't asking for a dead sacrifice, He wants our life presented to Him as an offering.

Paul lived what he preached.

1 Thessalonians 2:8-9- "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."

Philippians 2:17- "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you."

Paul offered his life as a sacrifice to God. When serving God required he spend His life in ministering to and reaching out to others, Paul didn't hold back, but gave his all.

The story is told of a Chinese Christian who was moved with compassion when many of his countrymen were taken to work as coolies in South African mines. In order to be able to witness to his fellow Chinese, this prominent man sold himself to the mining company to work as a coolie for five years. He died there, still a slave, but not until he had won more than 200 men to Christ. He was a living sacrifice in the fullest sense.

### **Our sacrifice is to be holy**

Unblemished, set apart, holy offerings were required of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. The same quality is required today of living sacrifices. We need to renounce sin and lead lives that are set apart to God.

### **Our sacrifice is pleasing to God**

To be pleasing to God, our offering needs to be faithful to God's specifications. God's specifications for what is acceptable or pleasing to Him have just been defined. It is a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. Is our offering a pleasing, sweet smelling savor to Him?

### **Our sacrifice is a logical act of worship**

The word that is here translated "spiritual" is the Greek word *logikos* from which we get our word logical. When we yield our bodies to God as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice, we are doing that which is reasonable, rational, or logical.

It is reasonable for us to give the totality of our life to God. It makes sense. It does not make sense, in light of all the mercies of God, not to yield our life to Him or to give part of our life and to keep other parts for ourselves. Christ, as the demonstration of God's mercies towards us, held back nothing and gave everything. How can we do anything but the same?

The word which is translated "worship" is the Greek word *latreia* which refers to service of any kind and because of the context is translated worship. When we offer our total lives as a sacrifice to God, we are performing an act of worshipful service.

I think of two things as I reflect on the concept of offering our bodies as our reasonable act of service or worship: First, worship of God is not passive. We give something. In the case of giving God our bodies, we give Him our life, our devotion, our all. It is our giving that constitutes our worship. Second, worship is not something we do only on Sunday mornings. Worship is offering our life to God every day of the week. As Warren Wiersbe says, "Everyday is a worship service when our bodies are yielded to the Lord."

The hymn writer Frances Havergal captures what our worship should look like in response to God's mercy, grace, and love.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee; Take my moments and my days—Let them flow in ceaseless praise, Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love; Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee, Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King; Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee, Take my silver and my gold—Not a mite would I withhold; Take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose, Take my will and make it Thine—it shall be no longer mine; Take my heart—it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne, Take my love—my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store; Take myself—and I will be ever, only, all for Thee."

Read Romans 12:2

**We are called to respond to God's mercy by not being conformed, but transformed (Romans 12:2)**

### **The conformed allow their life to be molded after the pattern of this world**

The Greek word translated "conformed" carries with it the idea of conforming to a pattern or a mold. Another way to express Paul's thought is, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold." The verbal form used here is a present, passive, imperative. The passive communicates to us that conformation is something we are not to allow the world to do to us. The present tense communicates the idea that the world's pressure for us to conform is constant or continual. The imperative indicates we are being commanded not to conform, to stop conforming to the pattern of this world.

The world is the organized system of values, goals, and ways of doing things that is ruled by Satan and follows a course that is in opposition to God. It is the system that encourages us to indulge the lusts of our eyes, the lusts of our flesh, and the boastful pride in what we have and do (1 John 2:16).

The world encourages us to look out for #1, to do whatever feels good, to get more for ourselves so that we will be happy, to define success based on fame, wealth, pleasure, and power. There is a lot of pressure out there for us to conform and be just like everyone else. Don't give into that pressure.

**The transformed allow their life to be changed by the Holy Spirit through the instrument of God's Word**

The verb here is also a present, passive, imperative. The passive tells us that our transformation is done to us. The present tells us that we are to allow ourselves to be transformed all the time. And the imperative tells us that allowing ourselves to be transformed is a command and not an option. The word translated "transformed" is the Greek word from which we get our word metamorphosis. The kind of transformation we are to allow God's Spirit to accomplish in our life is illustrated by the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. A caterpillar is an unattractive creature that is changed from the inside out to become a creature of beauty. It's transformation totally changes how it looks and how it acts. The same kind of transformation needs to occur in us.

How does this transformation take place?

It takes place by the renewing of our minds—the control center of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Our transformation is accomplished by the Holy Spirit's work of changing the way we think so as to cause us to live differently.

How are our minds renewed?

Our minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit through instrument of God's Word. As our minds are continually made new by the input of God's Word through the work of God's Spirit, our lifestyles will be continually transformed.

Although we are all to aspire for change to be more like Christ, we cannot accomplish it on our own. We will never have a changed, different, transformed lifestyle until we allow God's Spirit to teach us a different way to think through God's Word. If we desire a life that is transformed, we must be in God's Word regularly and allow His Spirit to do His transforming work.

This begs the question. How much time do we spend in front of the tube or the computer absorbing the standards and patterns of our world as compared to the time spent in the Word of God, allowing God's Spirit to mold how we think, to change our minds?

**Our transformation enables us to test all things and accept only that which conforms to God' will**

The end result of being transformed is our ability to test and approve what God's will is. The metal assayer tests the ore to discover and approve what is of value and to discard that which is rubble and dirt.

Likewise, when we are transformed, we can spot and refuse to take part in the normal behavior practiced by our sinful world and we can spot and pick out the godly behavior that conforms to God's will. God's will is good. God's will is that which is pleasing and acceptable to Him. Not only is it pleasing to Him, but it also proves to be pleasant to us. When we do God's will, we never find ourselves disappointed. God's will is perfect which means that it is complete and in no way lacking.

Have you been struggling recently to determine God's will for your life? Perhaps Romans 12:2 has uncovered the problem. Maybe you're still allowing the world to squeeze you into its mold instead of allowing the Spirit to transform your life by giving you a new way of thinking that enables you to discern God's good, acceptable, and perfect will.

Paul does not limit his discussion of God's will here to the theoretical, but goes on to describe concrete, practical ways we are responsible to carry out His will.

Read Romans 12:3

### **God's will is that we think rightly about ourselves (Romans 12:3)**

Paul begins verse three with the words, "For by the grace given me." The words he would write next are an expression of Paul's gift as an apostle. Paul, as an apostle, was authorized to reveal God's Word. Paul recognized his gift to be something which he received by the grace of God. Paul did not earn or deserve to be an apostle, but was made one by God's grace. He had no right to boast about it. The only proper response for Paul was one of humility. Paul, by his example, encourages the Romans to reflect on themselves and their gifts with the same humble attitude.

When God uses us to accomplish significant work; it's easy to get proud. However, instead of a proud response, God would have us to see ourselves and our role in His service from His perspective. We need to think rightly about ourselves. We shouldn't have an exaggerated concept of our own importance. We shouldn't think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Paul uses a play on words to underline the main idea. Don't over think about yourself. Kent Hughes writes, "Don't get 'hyper' about yourself." Instead, we should think of ourselves with sober, sound judgment. We are sound or sober in our judgment when we see things from God's point of view, when we see ourselves as God sees us.

God has given each of us a measure of faith. He has given us faith to believe He wants to do something through us. Friends, God gives us both the faith by which we serve Him and the spiritual gifts to equip us to serve Him. It isn't sound thinking to think highly of ourselves. When we see ourselves from God's perspective, with sound judgment, we realize that it's by His grace in giving us the faith and gifts we need to serve Him that we are used in significant work—there is no cause for chest thumping or fist pumping boasting in that.

Read Romans 12:4-6a

**God's will is that we understand how Christ's body functions and where we fit in the process (Romans 12:4-6a)**

Paul uses the human body to illustrate how Christ's body functions. Each of us has a body with many members all of which have different functions which they carry out for the benefit of the whole. In the human body, there is unity—it's one body, there is diversity—there are many members with different functions, and there is mutuality (each member belongs to all the other members and can't function properly in isolation from the other parts of the body). So in Christ, there is one body (unity) made up of many members with many different gifts to serve the body (diversity) who belong to one another and depend on one another for the body to function properly (mutuality). We have an obligation then both to identify the function God has assigned for us and to do what were designed to do in cooperation with the other members of the body.

The story that is told about Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody identifies a common problem within the body of Christ.

There were some important jobs that needed to be completed and Everybody was asked to pitch in and help get them done. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do these jobs. Anybody could have helped do them, but Nobody did. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's responsibility to do their part. Everybody thought Anybody could help in some way with the tasks at hand, but Nobody realized that Everybody blamed Somebody.

The Solution: If Everybody will get in the act and pitch in, then Nobody will need to blame Anybody because Somebody will have done the jobs that Everybody needs to be involved in doing by fulfilling their part.

Christ's body can't function as it should if some members are missing. Everyone is needed and has a part to play. Everyone has a responsibility to discover where they fit in God's plan and get involved. God gives us a measure of faith to believe He wants to do something through us. By faith, let's think of ourselves from His perspective and do what He says.

Paul's illustration helps to correct some common misconceptions about spiritual gifts:

**Misconception #1—We have to be good at everything**

So often, churches make the mistake of thinking those who serve in its ministries need to be good at everything. Instead of encouraging church members to focus on the areas God has gifted them or wired them to serve, they'll demand improvement in the areas where people lack gifts and skills. Churches have a tendency of asking people to be responsible to be good at something God didn't equip them to do. Paul's illustration, however, shows us that we should focus on what we are gifted to do, on the role God has given us. God does not ask us to work on the things He did not design us to do. We should let others who are gifted at the things we aren't gifted in to do what God has wired them to do.

God didn't design the church with all members being alike and all carrying out the same functions. He designed the body of Christ with diversity. We need to acknowledge and honor that diversity.

### **Misconception #2—The up front gifts are the one's that are really important**

Which part of your physical body are you alright with a doctor cutting off. That big toe on your left foot doesn't look that important, but cut it off and all of the sudden, balance will be difficult.

That thumb on your right hand doesn't look that significant, but cut it off and you will struggle to pick up anything or write with that hand. Friends, every gift is important, the behind the scenes gifts and the upfront gifts.

What capacity for service has God given you? Perhaps you don't know. What should you do? First, you need to get busy. When God brings something to your attention that needs done, get busy in doing it. Second, observe what happens. Did you help others? Did you enjoy what you did? Third, ask other people for their evaluation. Ask, "Where do you think I fit?" God has a way of speaking to us through others. I believe that through this process, God will help you to recognize where He has gifted you.

What are we doing with the gifts God has given us? By God's grace, we have each received at least one gift and many times more. God intends to do something special for us and through us by way of these. God wouldn't have us to leave our gifts wrapped. He would have us to unwrap them and put them to use. He would have us to fulfill our function enthusiastically.

Read Romans 12:6b-8

### **God's will is that we enthusiastically fulfill our function with our gifts (Romans 12:6b-8)**

If your gift is prophecy, proclaim what God has said. Prophets in Scripture are involved in foretelling and forth telling. The role of foretelling the future isn't for today, but the need to forth tell God's Word as His spokesperson is for today. Those with the gift of prophecy need to announce what God has said in proportion to the faith God has given him.

If your gift is service, then get busy serving other people.

If your gift is teaching, then teach others.

If your gift is encouraging, us it to encourage others.

If your fit is sharing, then give generously.

If your gift is leading, then lead diligently.

If your gift is showing mercy, then do it cheerfully.

Notice Paul's focus here. It isn't to break down and define in detail what each of the gifts is and how it should be used. His focus is on the spirit with which the gift is used. Our gifts are to be put to use and our attitude as we use them is to be enthusiastic.

I want to remind us of the lesson that we learned recently in 1 Peter 4:10- "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

Spiritual gifts are given to us as a stewardship. Stewards were individuals entrusted by the owner and master of the house with administrative responsibilities for household affairs. Stewards handled the master's property and wealth according to his will and direction and for his benefit. God, our owner and master, has entrusted us with a wealth of spiritual gifts which He intends that we faithfully administer as He has willed and directed us. We are stewards, not owners of the gifts we possess. God has entrusted us with spiritual gifts so that we might faithfully use them to serve others in His service.

Is our life on target or are we like the German military in WW11, wasting valuable resources? What are the characteristics of a life that is on target? A life that is on target is yielded to God, it is a life that has been presented to Him as a holy and pleasing sacrifice. A life that is on target is a life that is being transformed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. A life that is on target is a life that is putting to use the resources God has given us to serve Him. Is your life on target? Are you yielded, are you being transformed, are you putting God's gifts to work in His service? God help us to be faithful stewards of the valuable resources He has given us—the resource of our life and the resource of our gifts.