Sacrifice
Romans 12:1-13

FIRST THOUGHTS
What's in it for me? It's a question we've all heard—and one we've probably asked ourselves. When we give our time, money, or abilities, we feel entitled to know what benefit we'll receive in return. But when we shift from being consumers to being participants, a different question emerges: What can I do to help?

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT
In chapter 12, Paul made a sharp turn from a logical presentation of the theology of the gospel to the practical outworking of the gospel in the lives of believers. Here, he encouraged the Roman Christians to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), hearkening back to the Jewish sacrificial system. In the Old Testament, sinners could not approach God unless an animal was offered.

In the New Testament, Jesus became the Passover Lamb, offered for our sins (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 John 2:2). Peter said that Christ died to bring us back to God (1 Pet. 3:18). Christ sacrificed His life, dying to save us. However, in Romans 12, Paul called upon Christians to sacrifice themselves. Unlike the Old Testament sacrifices and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, this sacrifice was a living sacrifice.

LIVING SACRIFICE (ROMANS 12:1-2)
Considering the gospel Paul described in previous chapters, he gave two commands as he moved the Romans' attention from doctrine to application. ***Therefore*** provides a pivot point for his teaching. He also shared these commands ***in view of the mercies of God***. The word *mercies* refers to a trait of God's character that leads individuals to care about others. God's mercy prompted Him to save people from their sin. This set the foundation for Paul's commands.

KEY DOCTRINE
The Church
A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. (See Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:7.)

The apostle wasn't issuing stern, disciplined commands. Rather, he appealed to the Romans to fulfill these commands. Literally, the word *urge* meant to call to one's side or even to beg. For Paul, these principles were urgent. First, he encouraged them to ***present your bodies as a living sacrifice***. The word *present* pointed to the sacrifices made in the Old Testament. However, unlike the Old Testament, this sacrifice would not result in death. Paul called for a *living sacrifice*.

Paul described the sacrifices as ***holy***. Believers can only be holy by the work of Jesus. Paul had established the principle already when he told the Romans to not let sin control their lives (Rom. 6:12). Believers' sacrifices are ***pleasing to God***. This also was sacrificial language. Living sacrifices must be presented in a way that acknowledges who God is and what He desires. This is an act of ***true worship***.

After the positive command telling the Romans what to do (be living sacrifices), Paul issued a negative command that identified what to avoid. He encouraged his readers against being ***conformed to this age***. He wanted them to break from the mindset of the flesh (Rom. 8:7). If the Roman believers embraced the world, they would be pressed into an unholy mold. Instead, Paul encouraged them to ***be transformed by the renewing of your mind***. This is a necessary part of becoming a living sacrifice and rejecting the influence of the culture. Rather than conforming to the world, we embrace God's way of thinking.

If the Romans allowed their minds to be transformed by the Spirit, they would identify the ***good, pleasing, and perfect will of God***. Discerning the will of God is the focus of Paul's commands. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and worship as tools in renewing our minds so we can identify and obey His will.

IN THE CHURCH (ROMANS 12:3-8)

The grace given to me referred to Paul's calling as an apostle (Rom. 1:5; 15:15). God had gifted him to serve as an apostle. As he prepared to call others to serve in their gifting, he reminded his readers that he spoke from his own calling.

But such service requires humility. No believer should ***think of himself more highly*** than appropriate. This is not self-loathing or denigration, but a proper estimate of oneself from God's perspective. To think ***sensibly*** was to have sober judgment about oneself and others. This could only be done because of the ***faith*** God has given His people. God distributes gifts to His children (1 Cor. 12:11), and His gift of grace is the basis for any other gift believers might receive (Eph. 4:7). So, we have no room to boast.

Believers are diverse, but they also are part of a unified body. The church consists of ***many parts in one body***. And like a human body, ***all the parts do not have the same function***. Every part is essential to the body, even though each part is different (1 Cor. 12:14-24).

Paul's list of gifts here certainly was not exhaustive (see 1 Cor. 12:8-30; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:11). The first gift he mentioned was ***prophecy***. The early church held this gift in high esteem (1 Cor. 12:28; 14:1; Eph. 2:20; 4:11). Paul emphasized that it had to operate in ***the proportion of one's faith***.

Paul also mentioned ***service*** and ***teaching***. *Service* is related to the Greek word for "deacon," but God also has gifted others with the ability to serve others. *Teaching* involves instruction in various settings (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; 14:26; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 5:12; Jas. 3:1). It clarifies God's words revealed in Scripture. Paul's list culminated with ***exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy***. Exhortation, like teaching, emphasizes the application of the gospel to daily life. It challenges practical faith. Giving was a gift defined by generosity.

IN RELATIONSHIPS (ROMANS 12:9-13)

Paul followed up a call for living sacrifices and a list of spiritual gifts with a string of countercultural exhortations. Renewed minds lead to a new way of living. In all, Paul listed thirteen exhortations, starting with ***love*** . . . ***without hypocrisy***. People can be kind toward others, and yet still not love them. Christians must love each other sincerely.

Paul next told believers to ***detest evil*** and ***cling to what is good***. In this, Paul used one of the strongest words for hatred in the Greek language. A renewed mind never dwells on or entertains evil. A renewed mind hates evil, but it also will *cling* to good. The Greek wording literally means to glue or join together.

Continuing his exhortations about love, Paul encouraged his readers to love other believers ***deeply as brothers and sisters***. The tenderness and warmth of family served as a model for the church. As physical siblings often compete, Paul urged the Romans to ***take the lead in honoring one another***. The Greek wording used here meant to esteem others more highly than themselves. The three exhortations in verse 11 focus on ***zeal***. Christians who love others are diligent in their relationship with the Lord. Paul affirmed that this diligence is God-ordained, as he challenged the Romans to be ***fervent in the Spirit.*** Christ followers need the Spirit in their lives as they ***serve the Lord***. They should not serve God coldly or with indifference.

The exhortations in verse 12 deal with difficult situations. ***Hope*** is what allows Christians to ***rejoice*** in their suffering. *Hope* arises from the gospel that Paul proclaimed in the first eleven chapters of Romans. Jesus justified them, was sanctifying them in their trials, and would one day glorify them for eternity. Paul certainly was no stranger to ***affliction***, but God upheld him by hope. The call to be ***persistent in prayer*** also sustained him during difficult times. Devotion to prayer is a characteristic of sincere believers. As long as believers remain fervent in the Spirit and devoted to prayer, they can rejoice in any circumstances.

Next Week – Represent, Romans 13:1-14