

Romans 12:1-8 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ 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.

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ 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.

What does it mean to be a part of the Body of Christ? Is that something that's important, or is it optional?

It's common for people to separate church membership from being a part of the Body of Christ, which is correct. Being a member of a local church does not always mean that you are a member of Christ's Body.

It's also common today for people to claim that they are spiritual, but not necessarily religious.

- They are Christians, but subscribe to no creed.
- They are believers, but they don't feel the need to go to church.
- They say that their faith is important to them, but they're just not practicing it right now.

So what then does it mean to be a part of the Body of Christ? Simply put it is this: **The Body of Christ is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God.**

Its members are united with Christ and other believers throughout the world and throughout the ages; all striving toward the consummation of that Kingdom for the glory of the Triune God.

We pray about this every time we worship: *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

The Body of Christ is made up of redeemed people who are actively a part of God's redeeming work in the world. That work will continue until the return of Jesus Christ who will judge the living and the dead.

The Body of Christ is called the Family of God, the bride of Christ, the new Israel.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The Body of Christ is both spiritual and physical. It is made up of people who are gifted first with the Holy Spirit, and then particular gifts that contribute to the rest of the body.

Today we're going to begin to talk about those gifts, the purpose of those gifts, and the giver of the gifts.

But first let's return to the first part of this passage that describes what kind of people we are to be as members of the Body of Christ.

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We are a people who are the recipients of the mercy of God. Our worship and our lives ought to reflect that. When you have received mercy, it does something inside you. It affects the way you look at the world.

It is out of the mercy of God that we offer to Him our Spiritual worship. Mercy evokes a response. It changes your outlook.

If a police officer pulls you over for speeding, but lets you go with a warning, you've received mercy. You also keep a closer look at your speedometer, at least for a while.

But the real change comes internally. When you first saw the flashing lights behind you, the typical reaction is, "I'm not the only one speeding. Why am I being picked on? That's not fair."

When you received mercy, your attitude changes. The police officer, who a minute ago was an absolute jerk, now is a highly esteemed public servant.

And the speed limit, which was something to be ignored before, now is something you do pay attention to.

Now, spiritual worship is not just obeying the rules, and the God that we worship isn't like police officer who is deciding whether or not to give you a ticket.

But the one that we worship is the ultimate prophet, priest and king. His laws are not vague guidelines or suggestions.

And He doesn't pick and choose who's going to get a break and who's going pay a hefty fine.

JESUS Christ paid the penalty for our transgressions. He took the wrath that we deserved. He demonstrated the perfect justice of God and at the same time, showed us mercy.

It is in that context that we are called on to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is our spiritual worship.

A living sacrifice is like an oxymoron. In OT worship a sacrifice was brought to the altar and was slaughtered. It represented the need for atonement.

God is holy, we have sinned in thought, word and deed. Blood represents life, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

The mercy of God is that He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

As living sacrifices, we are to put to death our sinful inclinations. We are to live to offer up sacrifices of praise. We do this not out of mere obligation or out of fear of getting a ticket, but because of His great mercy.

Mercy and grace changes everything. We're not getting what we deserve, just the opposite. True spiritual worship is given in gratitude for that grace and mercy.

We are to strive to live holy, consecrated lives not to impress God or others, but because of His mercy. That is our reasonable service and response.

Verse two goes into more detail in how this is to be worked out in our lives.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The renewing of your mind involves your thoughts, your goals and aspirations. A renewed mind seeks wisdom and values discernment and understanding.

An engineer's mind is analytical. An intellectual is academically oriented. An artistic person has a creative mind. An architect can imagine and design beautiful things.

A renewed mind can't do everything, but it heightens the gifts that you do have. It sparks the imagination. It stirs noble thoughts.

Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

People often speak of head knowledge and heart knowledge. We need both, and that's what a renewed mind aspires toward.

One of the first things a renewed mind will do is to give you a desire not just for knowledge, but for wisdom. Wisdom is a perceptive understanding of life, the world, and of yourself.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. With that wisdom you learn to walk humbly before God and man.

Romans 12:3 (ESV)

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.

- The world talks about self-esteem.
- Social media is all about presenting an image of yourself to a virtual world.
- Our culture exalts outward appearance and physical beauty.
- The entrepreneurial world is all about self-promotion the marketing of what you have to offer.
- In sports, the athlete is to assert brash confidence to intimidate opponents.

Maybe some of that has its place, but the disciple of Christ is not to think more highly of themselves as they ought.

We are to put the needs of others above our own needs. We are to consider others as better than ourselves. We are to put others in the very best light as possible, giving them the benefit of the doubt.

We are to show respect, honor and deference to those in authority, and to those who otherwise would be ignored or discarded by society.

Renewing your mind changes the way you think about those who come into your life for good or ill.

Think about this, the person who irritates you most, was sent into your life by a sovereign God who has your best interest in mind.

You need that person to help you grow in Christ. Instead of looking for ways to put that person in their place, you think about how you can bless them.

This is just applying what JESUS taught when He said that we are to love our enemies and do good to those who speak evil against us.

If you're in ministry long enough, you'll have that experience where people can say some very harsh and demeaning things.

Those conversations are never pleasant at the time. But looking back, I'm thankful for every one of them now.

You learn a lot about yourself when you are criticized. (much more than when you are complimented) It's not so much what's said, it's your reaction to what was said.

The first reaction is to be offended, and then to think of a good zinger of a comeback. (I've thought of some good ones over the years)

But when I think of JESUS, who was despised and rejected by men, who did not answer back when he was reviled, I'm given a different path to follow.

None of **us** are above criticism. It's humbling to hear things about yourself that are unflattering. But God gives grace to the humble. That grace is needed just as much if not more than knowledge.

That takes us to this next section dealing with the Body of Christ and the gifts given to the church.

Romans 12:4-8 (ESV)

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ 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.

I want us to note two characteristics about the gifts.

- They are natural
- They are supernatural

They are natural in the sense that they are displayed through the abilities, interests and aptitudes of people. These are talents and skills that are developed.

Believers and non-believers alike have gifts simply because we are made in the image of God. The more we hone these gifts the greater the capacity we have to use them.

The Bible often mentions skilled workers, talented and trained musicians, or highly articulate orators. These are natural gifts that can be sharpened with use or they can be neglected.

They can be used for good or evil. They can be shared with others or they can be used privately. Your natural gifts may have value in the marketplace or they may be for personal enjoyment.

These natural gifts tap into your interests, desires and passions. They motivate, inspire and stimulate us.

A part of parenting is to assist our children in this area. Where are they gifted and how can we help them develop those gifts? It is a sin to waste your God given talents.

The supernatural gifts are those abilities, talents and skills that are used for the building up of the Body of Christ for the glory of God and the edification of others.

They are supernatural in that they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit takes our humble, flawed, and sometimes feeble efforts and makes them a spiritual act of worship.

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.
(reasonable service)

The greatest gift of all is the gospel, the gift of salvation. When you become a child of God, the Holy Spirit transforms the natural into the supernatural.

When you offer yourselves to God in faith, He uses your efforts as a pleasing offering; a living sacrifice; but **it has to be offered in faith.**

Many people believe that if they really do have to stand before God in judgment, that their good works will be their claim to a place in heaven.

But what does the Bible say about good works apart from saving faith? "Your good works are like filthy rags."

The Holy Spirit gives us a new nature. What we offer to God is offered in faith. We're still sinful; our motives are still mixed and our efforts aren't perfect, but Jesus is everything that we are not.

A supernatural gift is that which we present to God through faith in Christ. It's not just what we do, it's what God does with what we do that matters.

Are you presenting yourself to God as a living sacrifice in Christ? Then your gifts are a pleasing aroma to God; not because you are endowed with such great talent, but because they are being used for the building up of the Body of Christ.

That takes us to the purpose of the gifts. There are two that we'll note today.

1. To display the grace and mercy of God.

2. To display the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ.

³For 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.

Whatever gifts or abilities we have are primarily to display the grace and mercy of God.

It's in view of God's mercy that we can offer anything to the Lord, and it's only by His grace that what we offer is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

John the Baptist had it right when He said, "I must decrease so that He might increase."

The purpose of our spiritual gifts is to get the attention off of ourselves and onto the mercy and grace of God.

The more of Christ people see, the less we will interfere with what He's doing through us. Everything we do is somewhat tainted by our ego and the thoughts and intents of our sinful nature.

Without His mercy, without His grace, we can't offer anything acceptable to the Lord. Many people today like to say that they don't need the Body of Christ, they can worship God in their own way.

They can do that, but it's idol worship. Anything that we value more than Christ is an idol. Our idols could be money, sex, power, or even our own gifts and abilities.

That's what the Pharisees did. They made their own goodness to be an idol.

Our gifts, our abilities, as great or small as they may be, are to display the richness of God's mercy and grace.

That requires a humble and contrite heart, which leads to our final point. Our gifts are to display the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ.

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is never to just build up the individual, but to build up the Body of Christ.

So the emphasis of the gifts of the Spirit should always be in the context of the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

The fruit of the Spirit is what the Body of Christ needs to display to the world and to each other.

It doesn't matter how gifted you may be, without love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on, it does no one any good.

The purpose of the gifts is to display Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:2

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are inseparably connected to Him and to one another. You may not always like the church because it is filled with imperfect people, like me, and like you.

Sometimes the most gifted people in the church can be so full of themselves that it's difficult to stomach. That's where your focus needs to turn from the gifts to the giver of the gifts.

Christ is the giver of the gifts because He is the ultimate gift given to sinful man.

When all is said and done, it's not what we have done for God that will matter, but what He has done for us.

Our gifts, our abilities, our service are all given back to God in response to the Gospel.

What we do here, what we do throughout the week, is a response to what JESUS accomplished on the cross.

2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

The test of your faith is whether or not Jesus is displayed in your life as a member of the Body of Christ.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the Body of Christ; the body which was broken for us on the cross, and the Body of Christ which is the church. If we are a part of your Kingdom here on earth, then you have quipped us to be a part of that Kingdom work.

Lord, make us cognizant of our potential; aware of our limits, and spark our imaginations to the possibilities around us for your glory & honor.