



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 12:1-8

For groups meeting June 7 evening through June 14 morning.

“Therefore.” This word in Romans 12:1 calls us to understand that what Paul wrote here was tied directly to what he had written just before. At the end of the unit that included Romans 9-11, Paul spent some time discussing the greatness of God and His ways, and how no human being could fully know the mind of our God. He concluded with a word of praise:

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11:36)*

This high view of God and His ways led Paul to appeal (urge, implore) believers living in Rome “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God ...” (v. 1). And of course, God’s ways are seen clearly in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in light of this glorious Gospel – in light of God fulfilling the law through the life, death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah – we who have received His mercy must give ourselves to Him through the power of that same mercy.

The phrase “living sacrifice” is a powerful one. It brings to mind the many animals that had been slaughtered under the Old Testament law, and for believers it certainly brings imagery of our Savior upon the cross. So many animals were killed. Our Savior laid down his life and experienced physical death as he submitted himself to the instrument of death used by the Romans. And yet here, we see not just a sacrifice, but a living sacrifice. There is no physical death as the body of the believer is still living, and yet our bodies are to be a sacrifice given to God. They are to be “holy and acceptable” to Him. This means that we die to our own selfish desires and instead use our physical bodies in pursuit of the life God commands us to live. We are to dedicate our bodies to the service of God, and this is referred to as “spiritual worship.” It is not an act of ritual, but instead a meaningful expression of our worship to God.

In conjunction with this instruction about the body, Paul also wrote about the mind (v. 2). The fallen world we live in puts constant pressure on the mind of the believer, pushing us into its mold in an attempt to conform our thoughts to its own ways. However, we who believe are not enslaved to this world and we are not forced to succumb to its pressures. Paul wrote that we can take action; we are to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” (v. 2). The apostle instructed that this is done “by testing” ... that this process would help believers determine “what is the will of God,” which he stated is “good and acceptable and perfect,” (v. 2). These words do not describe God’s will so much as they define His will. In other words, God’s will is what is good, His will is what is acceptable to Him, and His will is what is perfect (complete).

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.

John A. Witmer, "Romans," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 488.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, Paul wrote about living a life pleasing to God, and in that passage he states that the will of God is our sanctification (the process of becoming more like Jesus). This passage echoes Paul's words in Romans 12 as well.

Paul continued his appeal to the Roman church and encouraged them to live in humility rather than arrogance (v. 3). He exemplified humility in his appeal as he did so by the grace God had given him. Paul was not interested in furthering his own agenda or doing things in his own power. He sought to accomplish the will of God according to the grace of God that had been given to him. Finally, he reminded the church that it was a body consisting of many members, each of which had its own function (vs. 4-8). This teaching is tied to his appeal to humility in the previous verse, as believers who value all parts of the body will not think too highly of themselves. These verses are parallel to his teachings in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Ephesians 4:11-16.

Discussion Questions

1. Thinking practically, how can you personally present your body as a living sacrifice to God? Be specific.
2. Why do you think Paul described presenting the body as a living sacrifice to God as “spiritual worship”? What other types of worship are there? How are they different from “spiritual worship?”
3. What are some specific ways that the world system attempts to force believers into being conformed to its ways? Paul teaches that instead of being conformed to the world, we are to be transformed as we renew our minds. How do we do this?
4. If you haven’t already, read the quote in the group guide from the Bible Knowledge Commentary, about the will of God. How does that help you understand what Paul means when he writes about discerning the will of God?
5. Last week Paul’s writing included instruction about arrogance (Romans 11:18). This week Paul references this concept again in Romans 12:3. How can we seek to live in humility, not thinking more of ourselves than we should?
6. Why is it so important to value all members of the body of Christ? How can we cultivate this attitude in our hearts?