

May 26

Lesson 13 (NIV)

CALLED TO BE TRANSFORMED

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 34:1–14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 12

ROMANS 12:1–8

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform 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.

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 faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have

different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.



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KEY VERSE

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view

of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.—**Romans 12:1**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 3: Call to Life in Christ

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List several spiritual gifts.
2. Explain why “living sacrifice” seems paradoxical.
3. Make a plan to use a spiritual gift more effectively.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Asking the Right Question
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Transformed Person (ROMANS 12:1, 2)
 - A. Sacrificed Body (v. 1)
 - B. Renewed Mind (v. 2)
- II. Transformed Congregation (ROMANS 12:3–8)
 - A. Checked Egos (vv. 3–5)
It's (Not) All About Me!
 - B. Activated Gifts (vv. 6–8)
What Gift(s) Do You Have?

Conclusion

- A. Drawing the Right Conclusion
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Aquila	Ack-wih-luh.
Claudius	Claw-dee-us.
Colossians	Kuh-losh-unz.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Ephesians	Ee-fee-zhunz.
exhortation	eks-or-tay-shun.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Messiah	Meh-sigh-uh.
Priscilla	Prih-sil-uh.
Suetonius	Soo-toe-nee-us.

Introduction

A. Asking the Right Question

Church leaders often decry the so-called 80/20 rule in church operations: 80 percent of the members account for only 20 percent of the giving and volunteer service. Many areas of business and economics are viewed through the lens of the 80/20 rule, also known as “the Pareto principle.” Businesses, for example, may expect 80 percent of its customers to yield only 20 percent of the company's sales revenue.

Whether the formula is actually more like 85/15, 90/10, etc., is not the primary issue. The bigger picture is that a source of input can be expected to yield results far out of proportion to its size. Church leaders lament this. Many are the preachers and elders who have thought *What if we could fully mobilize 100 percent of our membership? We could increase our ministry impact enormously!*

In turn, these musings lead one to wonder how to know when members were fully mobilized. How much volunteer time should a church expect from each of its members?

Or are these even the right questions to be asking? Today's lesson may surprise us in that regard. Make no mistake: this is a vitally important issue. Acceptance of Jesus as Lord ([Romans 10:9](#)) must be followed by service to him as Master.

B. Lesson Context

The Lesson Contexts of the previous three lessons apply, so that information need not be repeated here. Even so, a bigger picture needs to be kept in mind: Paul always understood (1) the church had its roots in the synagogue, (2) the gospel had its basis in the Jewish Scriptures, and (3) Jesus was the Messiah the Jews had long awaited. These three facts could not be ignored. The issue Paul confronted was how the Christians of Jewish

background could welcome Christians of Gentile background as full-fledged members of the body of Christ.

We see the members of the famous council of Jerusalem wrestling with this issue in [Acts 15](#), perhaps around AD 51. Roman history mentions a dispute among the Jews in Rome about this same time. We surmise from comments made by the Roman historian Suetonius (lived about AD 69–122) that this was a nasty fight between Jews who had converted to Christianity and those who had not.

The result was that Emperor Claudius (reigned AD 41–54) expelled all Jews from Rome, including a husband and wife by the names Aquila and Priscilla. Paul met these two Christians in Corinth afterward ([Acts 18:2](#)). It was likely therefore that Christians of Gentile background, who were not subject to the edict, remained in Rome as leaders of the church in the city.

The death of Claudius in AD 54 opened the door for Jews to return to Rome after a few years of absence (including Aquila and Priscilla, per [Romans 16:3](#)). With Paul writing to the church in Rome in about AD 58, issues of reintegration there still needed to be sorted out. Paul was aware of these issues, given the content of the letter we now study.

I. Transformed Person

(ROMANS 12:1, 2)

A. Sacrificed Body (v. 1)

1a. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy,

Paul has just completed three chapters of discussion regarding the disappointing lack of faith in Jesus Christ among most of his fellow Jews. With the striking phrase *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters*, he connects what is about to follow with the doctrinal truths of those prior chapters. The word in the original language translated *urge* points to a desire that is stronger than a mere request but not as strong as an outright command (see also [1 Corinthians 4:16](#); [Ephesians 4:1](#); and [1 Timothy 2:1](#)). Compliance with the desire Paul is about to express should be motivated *in view of God's mercy* (previously described) rather than by obligation to obey a command of one in greater authority.

1b. to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—

Here is Paul's desire. But without doubt, *a living sacrifice* is a contradiction in terms for both Jews and Gentiles. Each group is familiar with the distinctives of the sacrificial system of its own past, of course. But one thing those systems have in common is the slaughter of animals. A sacrifice isn't a sacrifice if it's still living!

Having caught his readers' attention

with this seeming paradox, Paul proceeds to stress the nature of such a sacrifice. The concepts of *justification* and *sanctification* are important to consider. To be justified is to be pronounced in right standing before God; Jesus' death in payment of sin's penalty makes this possible (compare [Romans 3:21-26](#); [4:25](#); etc.). To be sanctified speaks to holiness, consecration, being set apart for sacred use. The work of Christ sanctifies us initially; the Holy Spirit works to separate us from sin for the rest of our earthly lives ([Romans 8:13](#); [15:16](#); [1 Corinthians 6:11](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#)). A *holy* sacrifice is a *pleasing* sacrifice.

What Do You Think?

How will you know when you have become a living sacrifice? What will you do to be this?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures support your conclusion?

1c. this is your true and proper worship.

This summary phrase is rich with significance. The two Greek terms behind the translation have a range of meanings, depending on context.

The first term, which is translated *proper*, is the basis for the English word *logic*. Thus it speaks to something that is reasonable and rational. The use of the second term, translated *worship*, can be

compared with its use in [John 16:2](#); [Romans 9:4](#); and [Hebrews 9:1, 6](#). These contexts connect the ideas of service and worship. The sense is that of serving God with worship in an ordered and well-thought-out manner. We serve God when we worship (think of the phrase “a worship service”), but we also worship God when we properly serve him. These are inseparable for Paul.

B. Renewed Mind (v. 2)

2. Do not conform 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.

Paul’s admonition for self-sacrifice resulting in worshipful service is accomplished in two ways. First, is the *renewing of your mind*. For Paul, this is a departure from conformity to the world. We are called to be renewed by being *transformed*. The word being translated is the basis for our word *metamorphosis*. It points to a complete, radical change, a change contrasted with the patterns and desires of the world (see [1 Peter 1:14](#)).

This is not wholly of our doing, for Paul does not command us to transform ourselves. We are changed through the work of the Holy Spirit, the great sanctifier and transformer of men and women

([2 Corinthians 3:18](#)). As we find sinful ways more repugnant and God’s ways more appealing, we are being transformed.

II. Transformed Congregation ([ROMANS 12:3-8](#))

A. Checked Egos (vv. 3-5)

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 faith God has distributed to each of you.

Keeping in mind the Roman church may have had some recent leadership turmoil (see the [Lesson Context](#)), Paul lays down some ways for that church to conquer their strife. First must come individual self-examination. For someone to *think of yourself more highly than you ought* is a key ingredient of a recipe for disaster. Dueling personalities are often at the root of church conflict. We don’t just have to be right; we must win. Whether this resulted in a crisis when leaders of Jewish background returned to the church (see the [Lesson Context](#)) and desired to regain the upper hand, we don’t know. But the story is far too familiar for many church leaders.

Paul knows this is touchy, so he

speaks by *the grace given* to him. He is plenty blunt, though, in asking for *sober* thinking. His readers must sober up from their ego binge.

This gives us some questions for today. Can you evaluate your motives in conflict objectively and soberly? Are you acting in the best interests of the church or according to your own desires? Paul reminds us that everyone is on an equal footing here, for they have whatever *faith God has distributed to each* of them. No one in the church has a relationship with God that is more important or privileged than anyone else.

What Do You Think?

On a scale from 1 to 10, from “a worm” (Psalm 22:6) to “a god” (Acts 12:22), where should you see yourself? Why?

Digging Deeper

In what contexts, if any, should this fluctuate? Why?

4, 5. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Equality in God’s eyes does not mean uniformity in service, however. Paul echoes the language of 1 Corinthians 12, a text that some Christians in Rome may be

familiar with. His point in that text is the same here: we have both unity and variety in the body of Christ. We are united as *in Christ we ... form one body*, and *each member* is in this one body. Even so, there is variety in *function*. The word being translated that way is elsewhere rendered as what a person “has done” (Matthew 16:27), “action” (Luke 23:51), and “practices” (Colossians 3:9). Thus the idea is not one of position or rank, but of differing abilities of service.

When Paul speaks of *members*, he is using an analogy to refer to body parts such as arms, legs, etc. In English we see this idea when we say a body has been dismembered, meaning its parts have been divided. Here there is no splitting of parts, for *each member belongs to all the others*. It is one body made up of very different parts. It is one Christ, one church, with many members.

IT’S (NOT) ALL ABOUT ME!

I was in a fast-food restaurant one day when screams filled the place. Startled, I turned to see the source: a 3-year-old boy standing on a seat, protesting his mother’s choice of food.

The embarrassed woman plaintively tried to reason her son into silence, but in vain. A few moments later, the young manager came from behind the counter and walked briskly over to the boy. The

man bent down close to the child and looked him in the eye. With a loud, assertive voice, the manager said, “Sir! We cannot have you acting this way in our restaurant!” The shocked child sank into his seat in cowed silence while his mother tried to regain her dignity.

We reluctantly accept this “it’s all about me” attitude in small children who are still learning the rules of conduct. Yet society fawns over celebrities, and, in so doing, encourages their self-centeredness. We are tempted to follow their bad examples, glorying in our own imagined importance.

This is a sign of emotional and/or spiritual immaturity. Paul warns us against such attitudes. He reminds us that, as members of the body of Christ, we each have a gift or gifts from God. Since the glory is God’s, then not one of us is more important than any other. You see, it’s not all about me ... or you either!

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways your church can affirm differences among individual members while maintaining an overall spirit of unity?

Digging Deeper

What would indicate that unity was being stressed at the expense of individual differences or vice versa?

B. Activated Gifts (vv. 6–8)

6. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;

Paul now addresses the difference in functions as *gifts* from God. Given *according to God’s grace*, they are true gifts, not payment or reward for work. Therefore, the nature of each person’s gift is determined by God. The differences are intentional, provided for the body of Christ according to the church’s needs and God’s plans.

The first gift Paul mentions is *prophesying*, an esteemed gift in the first-century church. Prophesying is done by prophets, individuals entrusted by God to speak publicly on his behalf, even in (or especially in) the face of opposition ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#)).

To exercise the gift of prophecy *in accordance with the prophet’s faith* surely means that both the giving and receiving of a prophetic word is an act of faith. But some commentators suggest that there is more to it here. They propose that the phrase *in accordance with your faith* is best understood as “according to the analogy of faith.”

Traditionally, the analogy of faith has described and used the tenets of faith that unite Christian doctrine and Scripture in a comprehensive way. These are

things like the oneness of God, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of Scripture for faith and practice.

Those proposing this understanding of the phrase point out that the analogy of faith helps us clarify less clear teachings and doctrines with those that are clearer and explained more fully in Scripture. Thus, Paul is thought to be giving a subtle warning to aspiring prophets in the church: their prophetic words should be measured against the well-understood doctrines of the church.

In this “analogy of faith” sense, prophecy in the church is not for the purpose of innovation but for reinforcement. That is, it clarifies and applies previous teachings. Under this theory, Paul is seen as having no fear of encouraging any prophets in the church in Rome. The reason is because he believes they will reinforce rather than contradict his teachings.

7a. if it is serving, then serve

Serving is focused on helping others, whereas the service/worship mentioned of [Romans 12:1](#) focuses more on God. Church volunteers who are given tasks involving serving others often burn out quickly. To be a person with a lifelong passion for helping others is truly a gift of God.

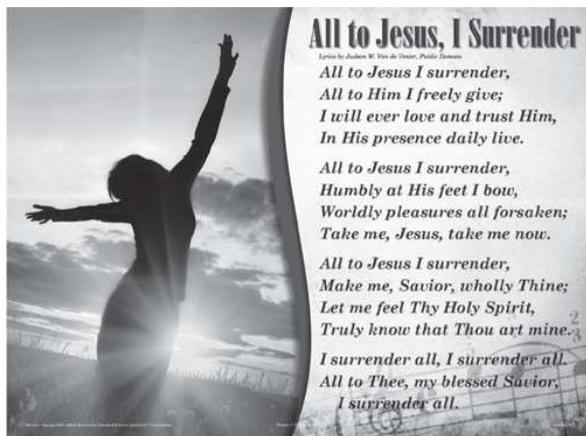
This does not excuse any member from refusing to care about others, for we

are members of the same body ([Romans 12:5](#)). But this gift does recognize that some Christians are tireless servants who are called to relieve the suffering of others.

7b. if it is teaching, then teach;

Teaching is explaining the Scriptures. Christian teaching helps people better understand God, their duty to him, and the nature of their salvation. Jesus saw teaching as an important element to his earthly ministry (see [Mark 14:49](#); [Luke 21:37](#)), and so does Paul ([Acts 18:11](#)).

To be “able to teach” ([1 Timothy 3:2](#)) is a gift ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#); [Ephesians 4:11](#)), but effective teaching requires preparation and study. The gift is in the passion to teach others more about God through an exposition of Scripture. In addition, many experienced teachers can relate instances where their effectiveness in teaching seemed to go beyond their preparation, experiences of spiritual insight sometimes called serendipity. A church without capable teachers is somehow missing out on a vital gift God intentionally gives to the church.



Visual for Lesson 13. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “How does having a transformed mind relate with being fully surrendered?”

What Do You Think?

What plan can a church enact to identify and encourage those who have the gift of teaching?

Digging Deeper

Conversely, how can a church deal kindly and appropriately with ineffective teachers?

8a. if it is to encourage, then give encouragement;

Paul rounds out his list by moving to four more gifts for the church. The word translated *encouragement* is elsewhere translated “consolation” (example: [Luke 2:25](#)), “comfort” (example: [2 Corinthians 1:3](#)), and “exhortation” ([Hebrews 13:22](#)). But Paul is not speaking merely in the sense of one who empathizes with and comforts those who are suffering. The sense here is more like the coach who

pushes an athlete to increase performance to the maximum level.

Most churches need voices that prod complacent members to higher levels of commitment. This can be a discouraging and thankless task. The gift is not just the ability to motivate others. It is also the diligence encouragers need to offer a persistent word of higher expectations.

8b. if it is giving, then give generously;

A spiritually gifted giver is not always the person with the most money. Rather, these are the ones who understand the self-sacrifice Paul speaks of in [Romans 12:1](#). Some of the best givers in churches may be persons of modest means, yet the amount of money given over their lifetimes may be staggering. On the word translated *generously*, see also [2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:13](#).

8c. if it is to lead, do it diligently;

To *lead* implies directing or guiding the actions of others (compare how the same word is translated in [1 Timothy 3:4, 12; 5:17](#)). Church leadership may take on a variety of specific responsibilities, but Paul insists this must be done *diligently*. As with all of these gifts, this requires ego-suppression and self-sacrifice. For example, coordination of volunteers can be discouraging, for the coordinator’s commitment often exceeds that of some workers. Diligence implies patience and

attention to details.

8d. if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

The gift of *mercy* is somewhat related to the gift of giving or the gift of service. The members of a church should well understand the great mercy shown to them through the work of Jesus Christ. All should be merciful, but some are called to shower this mercy on others.

We understand this better when we see Paul expecting mercy to be shown *cheerfully*. Showing mercy is not to be done grudgingly. Bringing cheer into the life of a discouraged or downtrodden individual may be an expression of mercy all by itself.

As with all these gifts, showing mercy requires a degree of self-sacrifice and self-denial. Paul himself is something of an expert on the subject of mercy, having received it himself in abundance (1 Timothy 1:13, 16).

WHAT GIFT(S) DO YOU HAVE?

“What is your spiritual gift?” Asking that of your friends will elicit varying opinions, both on- and off-target.

Take, for example, a friend of mine who has a PhD in history. He recently retired from a long teaching career at a prestigious California university, where his specialty was early Christian history. That was an unusual discipline in a secu-

lar university! He consistently got rave reviews from students and administrators for his courses. Would you say he had the gift of teaching?

One particular individual did not think so. This person, a member in a church a friend attended, claimed to have special insights into the spiritual gifts of others. He (let’s call him John) was not impressed by the unique opportunity my professor friend had to be a witness to the historical validity of the Christian faith in a hostile setting. John advised the professor to quit his job at the university and take a position in a community agency teaching English to Hispanic children. My judgment was that John’s spiritual gift was definitely not that of discernment!

How does one discover his or her spiritual gift(s)? A web search will bring up numerous tests claiming to help you determine just that, some in as little time as five minutes! A better approach might be to (1) ask for God’s guidance in evaluating your potential spiritual gifts, (2) start using them, (3) see if you end up being passionate about them, and (4) see if others are blessed by what you do. You may be surprised at how God has equipped you to serve!

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What procedure should your church use to energize the members to recognize and use their spiritual gifts?

Digging Deeper

How will you know whether the procedure you propose is the best one?

B. Prayer

Father, help us both to discern and employ the gifts given to us! As we do, transform and renew us through the work of your Spirit. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our great example of sacrifice. Amen.

Conclusion

A. Drawing the Right Conclusion

Two principles seem to present themselves in today’s lesson. First, all the gifts Paul has listed call for sacrifice. How do we become a “living sacrifice”? Paul implies that it happens by the exercise of our spiritual gifts. As we do, we will find ourselves transformed.

But let us not fool ourselves into thinking that we are transformed by our own efforts. We are transformed into a living sacrifice through the work of the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that gives us the passion and skills for a specific gift or gifts within the church.

This leads to a second great principle: spiritual gifts are all for the unity and benefit of the church. We are not called to prophesy to ourselves, give to ourselves, or show mercy to ourselves. The gifts Paul lists are necessary for the church to be all that Christ intended her to be.

C. Thought to Remember

Be transformed as you serve.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Form students into groups of three or four. Distribute a sheet of paper to each student. Say, “Working with your group, you can do anything you like with your papers until I say that time is up. You might tear or fold the papers into a shape, make or draw something, or anything you want to do. Be creative. Go!”

After a few minutes, let the groups show what they did with their papers.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Survey Says” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Allow students 60 seconds to write one answer for each survey statement. After you call time, have students share their answers. Commend those who voice especially creative ones.

After either activity say, “God gave us our bodies and our unique talents so that we can work together to serve him.”

Into the Word

Ask two students to alternate reading the eight verses from today’s text aloud. Then have the first verse read again. Lead a brief discussion of the verse with these

questions:

1-When the Roman Christians—whether Jewish or Gentile in background—heard the word *sacrifice*, what mental picture popped into their heads? (*Expected response: an animal being killed as an offering to God or a god.*)

2-Why is the image of being “a living sacrifice” so unusual? (*Expected response: those who see themselves as such remain alive while sacrificing themselves in service—thus a paradox.*)

Form learners into groups of three or four. Distribute index cards printed with the following statements (you prepare), one per card:

1-I have so much going on with work, family, and things that I just don’t have much time for church activities.

2-I’m so glad that I’m not like some of the people who come to church here who don’t lift a finger to help.

3-Why can’t more people be part of the hospitality team and help greet people?

4-The lady in charge of the nursery was upset with me when I said I could no longer work there, but I cannot lift babies because of my back.

5-I don’t really know for sure what my gift is.

6-I think my spiritual gift is mercy, but I wish I had one that was more significant and useful.

As you distribute the cards, say, “Find a verse from today’s text, and use it to help you come up with a response to someone who might make the statement on the card.” When students are finished, allow time for each group to share and defend its responses.

of your kingdom. We praise you in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Into Life

Record the spiritual gifts listed in [Romans 12:6–8](#) on the board. Ask students to voice which they think they have and how to use it/them better. Jot ideas on the board as they are voiced. Ask students also to share real-life examples of how others are using those same spiritual gifts in service to God.

Option. Distribute copies of the “May I Serve You?” activity from the reproducible page. Invite students to select the correct multiple-choice answers in less than a minute. The first one to do so can shout *Serve!* Have that learner share his or her answers. Discuss. Give an inexpensive token prize to match the nature of the activity.

Conclude the lesson in prayer: “Lord, give us strength and courage to not conform to the world, but to live transformed lives for you. We know that you are delighted when we use the spiritual gifts you’ve given us to make the body of Christ stronger. Help us do our best to work with others to accomplish the work