

# Oakland International Fellowship Jesse McLaughlin

# Romans 12:1-8 Handout

# Response to God’s Mercy

The text preceding Romans chapter twelve brings into focus the mercy of God. Paul ends the previous section with the exclamation, “How unsearchable are His judgements and unfathomable His ways!” (Rom. 11:33 NASB)

## Our Rational Service (Romans 12:1-2)

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. **Living and Holy Sacrifice (v. 1)**
   1. Imagery of Temple Sacrifice
      * The image Paul is calling to mind is that of priests presenting to God a sacrifice on the temple altar. As the community of God (the Church) we are both the priests and the sacrifice.
      * “Bodies” in the passage does not draw a distinction between physical and spiritual being but should be understood as *all that we are*. We are sacrificing ourselves not piece by piece but as a living, integrated whole. (cf. Rom. 6:13)
   2. Service of Worship
      * “Rational’ seems to be preferable over “reasonable” (KJV) or “spiritual” (NASB, NIV, ESV). This word would better communicate the meaning in Greek that the sacrifice of our bodies is an “intelligent and deliberate”[[2]](#footnote-2) act.
      * As we look back on all that God has graciously done for us (His mercies) in chapters 9-11 we respond by giving ourselves for His worship through our words and deeds. (Psalm 118:27)

***“No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies.” - John Stott[[3]](#footnote-3)***

1. **Nonconformity & Transformation (v. 2a)**
   1. Conforming to this world has been identified as \_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the preceding text of the letter to the Roman church (Rom. 1:18-32). When we sin our response cannot be to excuse ourselves with justifications such as “everyone is doing it”, “this is what comes naturally to me” or “it must be right because it feels good”. Refusing to conform to this world means *acknowledging* our rebellion and *turning in the opposite direction*.
   2. As we mature as Christians we become more aware of how we have been shaped by worldviews and patterns of thought or behavior that stand against true righteousness. Likewise, as we grow in Christ our minds are renewed by deeper understanding of the way of the righteous.
   3. The work of transformation is not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Our role is to submit to the Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does the work of transformation.

***“The stages of Christian moral transformation: first our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.”***

***– John Stott***

1. **The Will of God (v. 2b)**
   1. Paul is writing here about the revealed precepts/laws of God that reveal to us the right way to live. God’s will for his people is that we live in righteousness. We demonstrate how “good and acceptable and perfect” God’s will is when we live the transformed Christian life.
   2. Often we make the mistake of thinking that in order to know God’s will we need to see into the future. R.C. Sproul writes, “It is easier to engage in ungodly prying into the secret counsel of God than to apply ourselves to the practice of godliness.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

## New Community (Romans 12:3-8)

**3**For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. **4**For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, **5**so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **6**Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; **7**if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; **8**or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1. **Sound Judgment (v. 3)**
   1. Paul has been given the grace of apostleship. From this place of authority he commands them to act in humility with one another.
   2. There are diverse opinions about the meaning of the last portion of verse three. Some take it to mean that the standard of faith (the Gospel) shows us all to be equally undeserving of grace therefore pride is excluded. Others claim that God is giving faith, “in the sense of grasping the nature of one’s spiritual gift and having confidence to exercise it rightly.”[[5]](#footnote-5)
   3. In either case, sound judgment (“sober judgement” *ESV*) would require all believers to admit that whatever their gifts, all are God given! No one can claim to be of superior value in the Kingdom of God.
2. **Grace Gifts (vv. 4-8)**
   1. Throughout Romans 12:1-8 Paul has been addressing the entire community not individuals. He puts to use the example of the human body. The body is made up of many individual parts but each part is dependent on the others. We are not individuals seeking to honor God separately but a unified whole that can only function well when all the various gifts are being utilized.
   2. Prophecy should be understood as “speaking under divine inspiration”[[6]](#footnote-6). Such prophecy is different than what we see in the OT. The OT prophet spoke the very words of God while prophecy here is sharing something God brings to mind in one’s own words. Those who prophesy should make sure that (1) *the message is subordinate to Scripture*. And (2) *the source of their inspiration is the Holy Spirit - not human emotion or personal opinion.*

**Conclusion:** In response to God’s mercy believers must surrender themselves to God in righteous living and use their God-given gifts for the good of the community.

### Discussion Questions:

* In what area do you sense you have been most shaped by the world?
* Do you believe God’s will is always “good and acceptable and perfect”? Why or why not?
* What are your spiritual gifts? (Note: Romans 12 does not contain an exhaustive list of gifts)

1. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations taken from New American Standard Bible (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](http://www.lockman.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Harrison, Everett F. (1976)*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary.* (Vol 10 “*Romans”*, p. 127). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. All Stott quotes from: Stott, John R.W. *The Message of Romans*. The Bible Speaks Today. IVP. 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sproul, R. C. (2009). *Can I Know God’s Will?* (Vol. 4, p. 12). Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Harrison, Everett F. (1976) *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary.* (Vol 10 “*Romans”*, p. 129). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stott, John R.W. *The Message of Romans*. The Bible Speaks Today. (Ebook, p 393). IVP. 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)