



## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

MORE2LIFE — BE DIVERGENT

OCTOBER 30 – NOVEMBER, 5 2016

### MAIN POINT

The gospel calls us to stand against the self-serving pattern of this world and into loving service toward others.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

*Connect the sermon to the study.*

1. **What motivates you to do well at your job or other activities?**
2. **Should a Christian's motivation to do well at work or other activities be different from the motivation of someone who does not know Christ? Explain.**

**Leader:** Everything we have comes from God. In response to Christ's sacrifice, we give every part of our lives as a living sacrifice and show our gratitude by loving and serving Jesus. When we realize what God has done, we are motivated to do our best as a testament to the God we serve and live for. Therefore, living in light of Christ's sacrifice causes us to lay aside our priorities and goals of this world to pursue the upward call of Christ. The gospel motivates us to give our whole lives as a sacrifice to God.

### DIGGING DEEPER

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:1-2.](#)

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3. **Based on all that God has done for us, what should be our response?**
4. **How do you understand the phrase "living sacrifice"? How is presenting yourself as a living sacrifice an act of worship?**

**Leader:** We may think of worship as the musical portion of our Sunday service. But worship is far more than that. The word *worship* in verse 1 may also be translated as service (as in Rom. 9:4) or ministry (as in Heb. 9:1). In fact, the terms "worship" and "service" are nearly interchangeable in relation to the Lord. We worship God with lives and actions devoted to Him. Worship is the response to being justified before a holy God. Our lives are to be living sacrifices. Living implies a daily, continual, and active

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giving of ourselves and our desires to the will of God in order to know Him more deeply and make Him known to others.

- 5. What are some signs we're conforming to this evil age? Who are we pleasing when we adopt this world's values, speech, and behavior in areas such as how we spend our free time, how we spend our money, and so on? How can we to avoid conforming to the patterns of this world?**

**Leader:** We face continual pressure to adopt the customs and mindset of the world in which we live. Although that influence must be rejected, this alone will never create the kind of change God has in mind for His followers. Real and lasting change comes from within our hearts. We must let ourselves "be transformed" by the Spirit and the Word.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:3-8.](#)

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- 6. Why did Paul choose "body" imagery to describe the church? Do you think this is an effective metaphor? Why or why not?**
- 7. Would any of these gifts be of value to an individual apart from the church? Why or why not? How does that help us see God's plan for turning the tide on evil in this world?**

**Leader:** Paul's metaphor of the body is effective because it is a clear picture that anyone can understand. Having all legs or all ears would make a body virtually useless. The gifts that God gives believers are meant to be unifying because, together, all the gifts make up a complete body. The church must work harder when people do not use their gifts for the good of the church. In verses 6-8, Paul listed some of the spiritual gifts the Spirit has distributed among the church. This list of gifts, like others in the New Testament (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10; Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10-11), should not be seen as comprehensive, but clearly point to the truth that these gifts are not for ourselves but for the benefit of others.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:9-21.](#)

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- 8. What qualities of Christ-like love does Paul mention in verse 9? Why are these qualities necessary?**
- 9. How are each of these commands in verses 10-21 others-centered? How does following Jesus reshape our self-centered hearts?**

**Leader:** Being a follower of Jesus calls us to put love into action. In love for God and love for one another, we seek to give ourselves away for the sake of God's glory in the

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church and in the world at large. The call to Christ is the call to love those inside and outside the church. God has treated us so much better than we deserve. God was not obligated to save us or redeem us but did so out of His mercy, grace, and love. We embody this love by living out the gospel through the church in the world.

- 11. How should the gospel shape our relationships with unbelievers as well as believers? Do you find it easier to live out these things with fellow Christians, or with those who don't know Christ? Why?**

### **DOING LIFE TOGETHER**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

- 12. How is your mind being renewed currently? How is not? What are you doing to fill your mind with God's truth? What are some ways this truth is overflowing into your life?**

- 13. What examples of genuine love have you observed in our church? In the community? How does diligent service through genuine love affect a community? What can our group do better to help one another live the lifestyle we've looked at today?**

### **PRAYER**

Thank God for His rich and undeserved mercy. Praise Him for the grace He bestows upon us every day. Ask for the help and conviction to live every day as a response to the grace you have been shown in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **MEMORIZE**

Do not conform any longer 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. — Romans 12:2

### **SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE**

ROMANS 12:1-21

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12:1. Paul urged all believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice. Jesus had given Himself as the once-and-for-all Sacrifice for sin on the cross. Believers thus were to live in light of Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice, bringing glory to God. Paul further explained that living as a holy, pleasing sacrifice was a believer's spiritual worship. Paul taught that in light of God's gracious redemption (by the mercies of God), living as a sacrifice was the logical and pleasing way for Christians to serve God.

12:2. As Christians, we're also to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of the age, to adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship (sin). The apostle urged his readers to reject worldliness and to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. The result of having our minds renewed by the Spirit is to grow in our ability to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. The word translated discern literally means to prove by testing. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (see John 10:10).

12:3. Paul encouraged believers to remain humble while seeking God's will for their lives. Knowing that God gave spiritual gifts to all believers, Paul also knew of the human propensity to "think . . . more highly" of oneself, even in relation to what God has given us. Paul asserted his authority as an apostle ("the grace given to me") to make sure that did not happen in the Roman church. He urged his readers to think sensibly. Each believer possesses a "measure of faith." The phrase "God has distributed" should not be taken to mean some believers do not have full saving faith. Rather, it means that God decides the particular gift or gifts He gives to each Christian based on His sovereign design for the church, not on any individual's supposed merit. Keeping this truth in mind will help us avoid becoming prideful.

Verses 4-5. The unity of our faith in Christ is expressed among the various members by a diversity of functions. As with a human body with its diversity of members, not all the "parts" would "have the same function." The church is "one body in Christ" with its many members gifted for various kinds of service. As Christians, we are "individually members of one another." When we keep this truth in mind, we are less likely to think and act in ways that damage the body of Christ.

12:6-8. Paul listed seven of the various "gifts" God has distributed among the church. This list—like others in the New Testament (see 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)—should not be seen as comprehensive.

"Prophecy" is the gift of speaking God's inspired message. "Service" is the gift of serving in ways to meet the practical needs of others. "Teaching" is the gift of effectively instructing others, especially in scriptural understanding and moral living. "Exhorting" is the gift of encouraging others toward godly living. "Giving" is the gift of contributing generously and effectively to help meet others' needs. "Leading" is the gift of organizing and guiding Christians in cooperative ventures of service and spiritual growth. "Showing mercy" is the gift of acting with grace and cheerfulness to alleviate suffering and hardship, including such activities as feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and tending to the elderly.

12:9. The final thirteen verses of this chapter defy outlining. If a single theme is to be identified, it would have to be "love in the face of evil," as that is Paul's first word—hate what is evil; cling to what is good—and his last—"Do not be overcome by evil, but

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overcome evil with good” (v. 21). Almost every other evidence of love he mentions will fit under this theme.

The love of which Paul speaks is, of course, agape, the selfless, unconditional expression of grace and compassion exemplified by the love of God for sinners (John 3:16; Rom. 5:5, 8). Just as nothing can separate the believer from the benefits of God’s agape (Rom. 8:35, 39), so nothing should be able to come between a believer and his or her love for sinners (Rom. 13:10; 14:15). By dissecting sincere, it is easy to see what Paul means. *Anupokritos* is simply the negative of *hupokrites*, from which derives our “hypocrite.” Therefore, sincere is not hypocritical. “Hypocrite” was used in the Greek world of the actor who wore masks to portray the emotion of his character—sincere Christians wear no masks. What you see is (should be) what you get, and Paul says that others should see love. It would be hypocritical to hate what is good and cling to what is evil; therefore, hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

12:10. Only those who are living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1) could possibly carry out the exhortation to honor one another above yourselves. “Looking out for number one” may be a modern mantra, but it was written in the Garden of Eden. Considering others better than yourselves (Phil. 2:3) is just as offensive to the ancient carnal mind as it is to the modern one. Only a renewed mind can tell that it is the “good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2) of God. Paul’s special commendation of the believers in Thessalonica for how they loved “the brothers throughout Macedonia” is worthy of note (1 Thess. 4:9-10), especially since Paul seems to indicate that they learned to do so from God (as opposed to a human instrument such as Paul or another apostle).

12:11. Here Paul touches a theme mentioned to the Corinthian church after a long exposition concerning the future resurrection of the body, the putting on of immortality for eternity. Though that is not the subject here, maintaining zeal in service is, especially in the face of persecution or partisanship. He told the Corinthians, “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

12:12. While Paul refers to life in the church in verse 10 (referring to “brotherly love”), here is the first hint of persecution—Be ... patient in affliction. Only the believer who has made a decision to be a living sacrifice can maintain zeal and patience in affliction. Joy in hope was a theme in Romans 5:2, as was prayer in Romans 8:26-27. Once again we see Paul going back to the doctrinal part of his letter and making application for the present situation. The knowledge that the Holy Spirit is able to intercede through us in times of trouble can be a lifeline to the other side of the quagmire.

12:13. Another evidence of a living sacrifice is a person who gives generously. Does sharing with God’s people who are in need, and the exhortation to practice hospitality, refer just to materially poor believers in Rome, or to those who have been made poor or destitute through persecution and affliction? Here is a good example of a practice that has been mentioned as a grace-gift in some believers’ lives—giving (v. 8) to meet the needs of others—being presented as a responsibility of the church at large. Certainly some believers have been gifted and resourced by God so as to be able to give more than others, but all believers have a responsibility to practice hospitality and meet the needs of God’s people.

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12:14. Now comes the hard evidence that believers in the church were being persecuted, and with it the need for evidence that these believers were responding as living sacrifices. Paul paraphrases Jesus' words to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and "bless those who curse you" (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). Jesus Himself was the chief example of blessing the enemy when He prayed for those who were torturing and crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

12:15. Identifying with others in their joys and sorrows is evidence of love flowing from one who is a living sacrifice. These are admonitions that Paul had made in his lengthy writing on body dynamics in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. v. 26). He also touches the subject in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Galatians 6:2.

12:16. This verse provides evidence of possible internal conflicts within the church in Rome—class and racial distinctions that caused some to look down on others in contempt. There were no doubt slaves in the church, as well as people of means (cf. Paul's personal greetings to members of the church in Rom. 16). Also, there was the possibility that Jews in the church were maintaining a position of superiority over the Gentile believers (see Rom. 2:17-24). Paul's teaching in places such as 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 2:15-16 confirm the principles underlying all of Romans 12: all have been leveled by sin, and any who have been redeemed have been so by God's mercy. Therefore, anyone who would look upon another believer with contempt or conceit because of status or position in life has not grasped the enormous implications of having been redeemed solely by grace.

12:17-21. Finally, Paul concludes the chapter with the most lengthy, and perhaps the most difficult to manifest, evidence of being a living sacrifice: loving when wronged. The clear command is, Do not repay anyone evil for evil—whether a fellow believer or an unbeliever outside the church. There are at least two reasons for not taking revenge into one's own hand. First, it puts an individual, a part of the creation, in the place of judge over another part of creation. The second reason is that it could bring disrepute and harm to the cause of the gospel. Paul tells the Roman believers, If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. That would include peace with believers and nonbelievers, those in the church and outside the church. Since it takes two to fight, if the believers do not seek revenge, there will be no long-lasting disruption of peace.

The point of this last section is to do toward others what God has done toward us: forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). God loved us when we were enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). Though Israel is an enemy of the gospel still (Rom. 11:28), God loves her. And we are to love those who are our enemies. We are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good.