

Just A Minute! *With Scripture*

The King James Bible is used for all references. Verses may be made bold or numbered for emphasis.

Newsletter Theme: Application of Romans 12

Having a Prepared Heart to Serve

Paul was a ready servant and our example: *"So, as much as in me is, I am **ready** to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."* (Rom. 1:15) So too, God desires that we become prepared: *"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and **prepared** unto every good work."* (II Tim. 2:21) Do you feel ready to serve? Sometimes we can feel ill-equipped, not knowing how and feeling powerless. So, we passively observe.

Preparation is a topic found throughout the Scriptures. Wise saints in the past understood this issue: *"For Ezra had **prepared his heart** to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."* (Ezra 7:10) So how can we be prepared today to walk by faith in the details of life?

Pause here to read *Romans 12*. Think about 'why' God waited until this chapter to address godly service. It was because He knew that to be ready and mature, we need to be established in the basics. This is why God laid out each chapter in the order He did. He wanted us to be prepared in specific foundational teachings to be enabled to serve and live unto Him.

All of Paul's letters were written to the Body of Christ and strategically organized into three sections: 1) Foundational teaching (*Romans thru Galatians*), 2) Advanced instruction (*Ephesians thru II Thessalonians*), and 3) Leadership epistles (*I Timothy thru Philemon*). As we think about the structure of God's education to us, we see it was done step-by-step. It's similar to how a curriculum today is written, progressively: *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."* (Isaiah 28:10).

The structure of Paul's teaching was designed to teach a babe to grow up into a spiritual adult. As we approach *Romans 12*, we need the specifics of *Romans 1-11* teaching, in order to have the proper understanding, heart attitude, and God's selfless love and power to live this *Romans 12* grace teaching.

To Do: Once a saint trusts Christ's blood as payment for sin, it's natural to desire to serve. However, a babe has much to learn in order to mature and serve Christ in grace, rather than in the works of his flesh. His first priority is to learn about his new identity and godly love. As he yields, Christ can live and work within him. So, to have a prepared heart, a saint would do well to read, study, meditate, and practice the fundamentals.

Learning From Gracious Love Attitudes

Notice how Paul opens *Romans 12* with a grace word: *"I **beseech** you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."* (Rom. 12:1) Beseech means to implore earnestly, or appeal. Paul is making a request in love, not a demand or requirement. Being a living sacrifice is just 'reasonable service' to be done in grace and thankfulness, given all that God has provided.

Much can be learned about someone's heart by what they say and do: 1) Through the Bible, God manifests His great love and patience. 2) Christ died as a love sacrifice. 3) Paul suffered greatly as he taught & wrote epistles in love to the Body. What perfect witnesses and examples.

To Do: How can knowing this affect your relationships? Paul says, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* (I Cor. 11:1) Apply II Corinthian verses about love:

II Cor. 2:4: Be real and share, being vulnerable to walk by faith, not in fear. Show true feelings as did Paul: out of affliction, anguish of heart, with tears.

II Cor. 2:8: Confirm your love to others, especially in the midst of challenges.

II Cor. 5:14: Be constrained by Christ's love, yielding in selflessness, holding forth the Truth through tough times.

II Cor. 8:24: Prove the sincerity of your love. Think how to show it regularly.

II Cor. 12:15: Spend and be spent, expecting nothing. This is grace, not law.

Further ideas: Use a concordance to find other verses in Paul's epistles that provide grace examples or instructions on how to love. Apply them to even one relationship and observe how God mightily works. It will be the fruit of the Spirit: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..."* (Galatians 5:22-23)



Search it out!

Choose Something to Study in This Section

Romans 12: Noticing Illustrations or Analogies

Examine verses!



Noticing illustrations and analogies can be helpful when studying Scripture. This tool was taken from p.18 of "Exploring the Bible Using Study Tools." It can be purchased on Amazon:

Illustrations/Analogies: God uses parables, examples, and comparisons to help the reader understand and apply doctrine: *Matthew 13*: parable of the sower, *1 Timothy 1:16*: Paul as a pattern, and *Romans 11*: Grafting of an olive tree.

1. Read about sacrifices in *Exodus 29*: God instructs Israel to offer sacrifices, describing in detail how it was to be prepared to be an acceptable offering unto God. This analogy helps us realize the basics of what a sacrifice is, and we also need to be readied. *Romans 12* adds that we're to be a 'living' sacrifice, that is, dead to ourselves, while we live as God's servant on earth.

2. Read to notice another analogy in *Romans 12:4-5*: God states the Church is the Body of Christ; each member is an interdependent part of the whole. It is quite similar to the human body, which functions in unity for common living goals and caring for itself.

3. Find a third illustration used to help us further understand The Body in *Rom. 12:10*: Read to observe the comparison of the Body to a family. Paul uses the term brother and in subsequent writings he continues using family terms. Read to prove things: *Romans 16:1*, *1 Thess. 2:11*, & *1 Tim. 5:2*. Can you find other verses?

4. Do your own research: Skim through Paul's epistles to find more illustrations and analogies. Then, branch out to the rest of the Bible to observe that it is a consistent method God uses to teach in His Word.

**Newer students: Focus on 'reading' Scripture rather than on using many new study insights.*

How to Attain the Goal of Reasonable Service Unto God

To be reasonable means to be moderate or fair; not considered extreme or excessive. So what service is reasonable to expect from believers who were totally undeserving, yet given not only eternal life in heaven, but all things by the Father? "*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*" (*1 Tim. 6:17*) Also recall we are God's, bought and paid for by the blood of His own dear Son: "*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*" (*1 Cor. 6:20*)

In grace we are free to use the wealth of resources God has freely given us to serve our own selves, instead of exalting Him. We can also live without regard for His 'beseeching' us to be a living sacrifice to serve His Body in love. Yet as we think about this attitude, it sounds a lot like someone who is still struggling with the carnal issues found earlier in *Romans 6:1-2*: "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*"

If we have a prepared heart as we approach being a living sacrifice (*Romans 12*), we would know how to move past carnal thinking (*Rom. 6-7*) to learn how to yield, so we can be led by the Spirit (*Rom. 8:14*). We would also be thankful, realizing the great love of God, but also know some things about enduring and suffering, which prepares us to serve. As we are made ready, we stop relying on our flesh (*Rom. 7*), gaining trust in the Father, His ways, and in His love (*Rom. 8:31-39*). We are confident: "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*" (*Romans 31-32*)

Reasonable service unto God would be founded on the many preliminary qualities taught in *Romans 1-11*. If these are not dwelling in the inner man, asking us to be a living sacrifice would be too much. We (our flesh) can't do it. However, once these doctrines begin to work in us, we joy to serve and see it as 'the least' we could do. We would be fully persuaded of God's love through our Lord Jesus Christ and the great need for saints in the Body to be built up (edified). So in love, we would want to teach. We would see their need for love and support, desiring in grace to fulfill it. As for the lost, we would recall our own lost and separated condition from God, remembering the hopelessness. We would count it a joy to be an ambassador to lead them to Christ. This is one view of how to live out reasonable service.



Nourishment... What and How Often?

The instruction from God to us is to be nourished upon the Word to renew our minds: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:2)* We are to read all the Scripture, yet pay attention to the context (*II Tim. 2:15*), focusing on what God wrote to the Body of Christ to mature us. This refers to sound doctrine found in Paul’s epistles, *Rom.-Phile*. **Think** about how you are functioning and evaluate your spiritual habits for healthier living unto God.

What we eat: Are we junk food eaters or do we do meal prepping, a process of wisely planning and preparing meaty spiritual meals for our inner man? **Think**, do you mostly read man-made books ‘about’ Scripture, review favorite verses when needed, or randomly read Bible passages out of context. What can help you grow into a meatier diet is taking in the milk of the Word, like Romans-Galatians: *“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” (I Cor. 3:2)*

Suggestion: Choose to read and reread Romans-Galatians to gain understanding in foundational teaching.

How often we eat: Are we regularly nourished on the Word, with God at the center in our lives? Or, do we exercise the nourishing doctrine once or twice a week, when we can squeeze it in? **Think** how the daily intake and application of spiritual food can help you stay healthier to live godly. *“But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (I Tim. 4:7-8)*

Suggestion: Make time daily to read, start with ten minutes and meditate on it through the day: *“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” (II Cor. 4:16)* This can help us make decisions and be a wise minister and teacher: *“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9)*



Service Starts With Family

Notice that Paul begins our instruction for the ministry with serving saints in *Romans 12*. Teaching us about our close relationship with other believers helps to unify us in Christ as one body, with one Spirit: *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5)* It is interesting that Paul uses family terms through his epistles when referring to saints: brother, sister, mother, father, and son. *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” (Romans 12:10)*

What does this teach us? One thought is that serving family first may be the best way for us to start ministry. Children learn to help at home to be a productive member of the family as part of their natural growing process. So too, we are to minister to our spiritual family, with whom we’re intimately connected: *“Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality.” (Rom. 12:13)* Through this we grow in selfless love, needed to deal with the lost, which can be more challenging service.

In time, we see we are only one of many individual parts of the Body of Christ. (*Romans 12:5*). Every saint has a vital but distinct role and gifts for the proper operation of the whole. *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is give to us...” (Rom. 12:6)* We begin to acknowledge that each member has a unique contribution to the proper functioning of our multi-faceted Body.

In this process, we develop a closeness as family, genuinely caring for each interdependent member: *“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” (Rom. 12:15)* Saints notice when there is a need and learn to naturally fulfill it, stepping up to the plate to be whatever is needed for the whole to be healthy and live God’s purpose. Paul speaks of Timothy who lived as a good example, *“For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” (Phil. 2:20-21)*

God focuses our service on our spiritual family first.

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Stamp

To:

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 3:24)

Passivity Abounds in the Church. Why?

Do Christians regularly function as a living sacrifice? What this would look like is putting themselves aside to prefer others, taking the initiative to serve, encourage, and edify the Body as one sees the need. *“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.” (Rom. 12:16)* God asks us to do this and it’s reasonable, but the flesh doesn’t want to do it.

There’s no miracle pill or self-help book with specific steps to live God’s will. The flesh will **never** want this, so if we wait for our flesh to be ready, we’ll never live as a sacrifice. What we need is a mind transformation, which only happens as we daily read and apply the Word. We are a new creation (II Cor. 5:17), but we still have carnal thinking patterns, which strives against the Spirit. *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” (Gal. 5:17)*

It’s not natural for the flesh to set itself aside to live Christ. However, as we’re humbled, God is exalted and we’ll do what is needed to renew our mind, forming Christ in our inner man. *“For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.” (II Cor. 13:4)*

Think on This: As we dwell on the verses God placed in us, we are empowered by faith to yield and be whatever we need to be, even to set self aside. *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:2)* This is how the Word can effectually work within us to be able to be a living sacrifice (I Thess. 2:13). **To Do:** Now think how you can yield unto God in new ways.

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