

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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### Romans 12:1

#### Study Notes:

Connecting Romans chapter 12 to chapter 11: Chapter 11 and 12 not only connect, but continue Paul's argument about the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles in God's kingdom.

Paul is making a transition. He's reminding the Gentiles that it was God's mercy that allowed them to enter the Kingdom of God during this time when the bulk of Jews have rejected Christ.

Considering that mercy, Paul has a number of areas that he wants to draw their attention to, but all are related to the fact that God's mercy has been shown to them.

One of Paul's greatest strengths: The ability to tie "doctrine with duty, and belief with behavior." Theology cannot stand by itself, but life-instructions should not be divorced from the theology that undergirds them.

Romans 12 marks a transition from doctrine or theology to the practical outworking of much of what Paul has said for eleven chapters. Paul is moving from explaining the theology of gospel to describing what the community of faith should look like.

- **Creed, Conduct, and Ethics all work together.**

#### - Chapter 12:

- Offer our bodies to God because of his mercy
- Serve one another because we are one body in Christ

- Leave vengeance to God

### - Chapter 13:

- Submit to the state because its officials are God's ministers
- Love our neighbor to fulfil the law

### -Chapter 14:

- Avoid harming others in God's family, because Christ died to be their Savior.
- Remember Christ's Return will include an evaluation of our behavior.

Paul's Teaching – Jesus' Teaching: Romans 12–15 has a remarkable number of Paul's references to Jesus' teaching. John Stott's table of comparisons:

*Paul:* "Bless those who persecute you." - Romans 12:14

*Jesus:* "Bless those who curse you". - Luke 6:28

*Paul:* "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" - Romans 12:17

*Jesus:* "Do not resist an evil person." - Matthew 5:39

*Paul:* "Live at peace with everyone" – Romans 12:18

*Jesus:* "Be at peace with each other." - Mark 9:50

*Paul:* "If your enemy is hungry, feed him." – Romans 12:20

*Jesus:* "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." - Luke 6:27

*Paul:* "Love one another." – Romans 13:8

*Jesus:* "Love one another." - John 13:34

*Paul:* "Each of us will give an account of himself to God." – Romans 14:12

Jesus: “Men will have to give an account on the day of judgment...”  
– Matthew 12:36

- **A Pattern of Relationships:**

Paul begins with our relationship to God – and then moves to our relationships to others: If we do not have a healthy relationship with God, how can we expect to have a healthy relationship to anyone else, including ourselves?

- **Starting with Romans 12:1**

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

A very important verb: [Greek] “parakaleō” or as our English translations put it, “I urge you”. A tone of encouragement and authority.

- **“Brothers”:**

Paul’s choice of addressing these instructions to “Brothers” is intentional. In the prior chapters of Romans, Paul has intimated the existing tensions between Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians. He has warned the Gentile believers about adopting an attitude of pride or criticism of their fellow believers.

In chapters 9–11, Paul details the roles of Israel and of the nations in God’s unfolding plan of salvation. In chapters 14-15 he will return to it.

Paul insists that all believers, regardless of their ethnicity, are brothers and sisters in the one international family of God. All have the same calling to emulate holiness, commitment, humility, and love.

All of this is predicated upon what Paul calls the “mercy of God.” In the Greek, mercy is plural; it’s the mercies of God. It’s a Hebraism for the many types of God’s mercy can experience.

- **The Gospel of Mercy:**

In the prior chapters, Paul has shown us two major demonstrations of God’s mercy: 1. God’s mercy towards his Chosen People – a nation that departed from Him and served pagan gods. 2. God’s mercy towards the Gentiles – a people who, in Adam, once knew God, but also chose to reject Him and forget they ever knew Him.

God’s mercy is revealed towards those who are without excuse. It’s the bedrock of the Gospel. Without God’s mercy we would all be facing an eternity separated from God – suffering the just reward of our corporate sins.

Romans 9–11 is all about “mercy”:

- In Romans 9:16 Paul told us, “salvation doesn’t depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”
- In Romans 9:23, Paul said God’s purpose in the Gospel was to “... Make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy.”
- In Romans 11:32 Paul told us that despite the disobedience of the Gentiles they have now “received mercy” and this will also be extended to the Jews.
- In that same verse, Paul informs us that God has “... bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

Friends, when we consider all of this, it should make us realize that God’s mercy revealed in Christ is one of the very reasons we should respond in faith and obedience.

- **A Duality of Response to God's Mercy:**

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Two parts of our human nature come into focus; our bodies and our minds. We are to present our bodies to God but renew our minds.

First, Paul urges us to “*offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is [our] spiritual act of worship.*”

Paul is making a backwards reference to the Old Testament sacrifices and a forward reference to our own responsibilities to God.

This is not a simple sentence in Greek. Paul is using words and images that are punctuated with Hebrew ideas. He represents believers as a priestly people, who offer or present our bodies as living sacrifices. He describes this action as both *holy* and *pleasing to God*.

Paul’s phraseology reminds us of the necessity for animal sacrifices to be physically unblemished, without defect, and to become a fragrant aroma. In New Testament terms, there is a definite moral overtone to this presentation of our bodies to God.

Our offering is a “spiritual act of worship”. Different translations use the word “spiritual” or “rational”. That’s because the word “*logikos*” can mean “reasonable” or “rational.” An alternative translation: “Offer your bodies to God because it is the sensible, logical, spiritually appropriate response to his mercy.”

Paul’s use of the sacrificial illustration points forward to our New Testament experience. Our sacrifice does not find its presentation in the temple courts. Instead it is played out in the world’s arena.

Paul’s reference to offering our bodies as living sacrifices was meant to shock some of his Greek readers. That’s because many of them

were taught that the body was – in Platonic thought – “an embarrassing encumbrance.”

That sentiment has survived in Christianity. Many evangelicals stress that we give our hearts to God, not our bodies. Still, Paul clearly says the presentation of our *bodies to God* is our *spiritual* act of worship.

Perhaps we have missed Paul's point. Our obedience to God cannot just be inward, abstract and mystical. It must have a practical application – and that means using our bodies.

That's the reason the Bible has so much to say about our human bodies being used for either good or bad. Paul emphasized this in the early chapters of Romans. The Gentile world, in all its depravity, manifested its alienation from God through the use of the members of its bodies.

- Their tongues practiced deceit.
- Their lips spread poison.
- Their mouths were full of cursing and bitterness.
- Their feet were swift to shed blood.
- Their eyes looked away from God.

What is supposed to happen when Gentiles come to Christ? We are to offer the different parts of our bodies not to sin as “instruments of wickedness” but to God as “instruments of righteousness.” - Romans 6:13, 16, 19

A whole new set of manifestations occur in our lives, demonstrating that we have passed from death to life. As John Stott points out ...

- Our feet walk in his paths.
- Our lips speak the truth and spread the gospel.
- Our tongues bring healing.
- Our hands lift up those who have fallen.
- Our arms embrace the lonely and the unloved.

- Our ears listen to the cries of the distressed.
- Our eyes look towards God.

All of this is possible because of the mercy of God that saved us. It is possible because we are offering our bodies to God as a reasonable and spiritual response to his mercy.

Next time we will see what it means to not be molded by the world.