

## SERVING GOD IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

### **TEXT: ROMANS 12:1-8**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. The local New Testament church is God's program during this dispensation, and we should all have our place of service in the local church.
2. Christians who are not actively involved in a good local church are missing out on God's perfect will (12:2).
3. Romans 12:1 and 2 says that if we present our bodies a living sacrifice, we will see the will of God realized in our life.
4. And the will of God is for us to be actively involved in a good church.
5. Romans chapter 12 teaches the importance of church membership. This is the first time that Paul has introduced this theme of the church as the body of Christ (12:4, 5). He teaches it again in I Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians.
6. As in these other epistles, Paul uses the illustration of the body to describe the different members of the body of Christ (12:4, 5; cf. I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:16).
7. Just as the human body has many members, all with different functions, so does the body of Christ.
8. The church is an organism, not an organization. The figure of the body with its various members reminds us that each member has his and her place of useful service.
9. Ephesians 1:22 and 23 says Christ is the head of the body. Just as the head directs the body, the body of Christ is directed by Christ, because He is the head of the body.
10. Each church member has a gift to be used for the building up of the body (cf. Eph. 4:11, 12) and the perfecting of the other members of the body.
11. One of the reasons that many churches are not growing the way they should is many of the members are not involved in Christian service.
12. Romans 12:11 says, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."
13. In the context of Romans 12, this means, not slothful in the Lord's business. "Slothful" means "sluggish."
14. Are you slothful in the Lord's business?

15. In His Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 25:26, our Lord refers to the “wicked and slothful servant” who hid his lord’s talent (coin) in the earth.
16. Hebrews 6:12 says, “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”
17. These are the only three references to “slothful” in the New Testament.
18. The word “slothful” is found twelve times in the Old Testament, and eleven times are in the book of Proverbs.
19. “As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed” (Proverbs 26:14).
20. Are you guilty of being slothful? Romans 12:11 says, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”
21. Are you fervent in spirit? Our Lord said one of the characteristics of the last days would be lukewarmness. Revelation 3:16 says, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Are you lukewarm?
22. Are you serving the Lord?
23. Unfortunately, many people show up for church services but they do not want to serve in the church – “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”
24. Too many Christians just come and go without getting involved in the work of the local church. Oftentimes, a small percentage of members are carrying the load.

## **I. THE BASIS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (12:1, 2)**

1. The basis is believers (“brethren” – 12:1) meeting regularly for worship, prayer, Bible teaching, giving, etc. (12:7, 8, 13).
2. God’s program today is the local church. The program of the church is diametrically opposed to the program of the world. Christians are not to be “conformed to this world” (12:2).
3. In this context, the world means the system man has built in order to make himself happy without God. It is a system antagonistic to the things of God, and it is in allegiance with Satan, whom the Bible calls the “god of this world” (cf. II Cor. 4:4).
4. God’s program today is the local church. Before Christ came, God’s program was with the nation Israel. But God is not finished with Israel. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach the future restoration of Israel (cf. Romans 11:26).
5. But right now, God’s program is the local church, and if you are not actively serving in a local church you are not part of God’s program.

6. Our Lord said, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

## II. THE BASICS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. Romans 12:1 and 2 deal with consecration. The principle of consecration is applied in verses 3 and following.
2. Humility is the direct result of consecration (12:3). We may well speak of a consecrated Christian, and a humble Christian, but it is absurd and incongruous to speak of a proud and haughty Christian.
3. Humility has been defined as “unconscious self-forgetfulness” (W.H. Griffith Thomas).
4. The apostle Paul shows his true humility by prefacing his remarks with, “For I say, through the grace given unto me...” (12:3).
5. There is an inherent tendency in all men to exalt self. All throughout the Bible we see that God hates pride.
6. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6; I Peter 5:5).
7. We should recognize that all we have is by the grace of God – “through the grace given unto me...according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (12:3).
8. “According to the grace that is given to us”(12:6).
9. But proud sinners do not recognize the grace of God.
10. I recently read a fascinating book about a group of Hasidic Jews who moved to Postville, Iowa to open up a kosher slaughterhouse.
11. Stephen Bloom, the author of the book, is a secular Jew and a professor of Journalism at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

12. One of the key characters in the book is a man by the name of Lazar Kamzoil. He tried to convert Mr. Bloom to the Hasidic faith but was unsuccessful.
13. During a dinner conversation, Lazar said to Mr. Bloom and to the others gathered around his table, “Why is it that Israel has persisted to exist for so long? Why haven’t the Jews been extinguished after scores of attempts throughout history? That we are still here defies logic. There is only one answer. We are better and smarter. That’s why!” Lazar and his fellow Jews are all ignorant of God’s grace.
14. Stephen Bloom then noted that all of the other Hasidics nodded their heads in agreement with Lazar’s statement (*Postville*, p. 192).
15. But Bible-believing Christians understand that it is God who has preserved Israel and has blessed Israel.
16. The recognition that all we are and possess comes from God is the constant safeguard against pride (W.H. Griffith Thomas).
17. A basic reason why the local church is vitally important is fellowship (12:4, 5, 10, 15).
18. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship.”
19. There is unity in the local church (12:5). The Psalmist said, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).
20. This unity is expressed through our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, our church membership, our stewardship, and our fellowship.
21. There is unity – “one body” – (12:4). Unity is not uniformity.
22. There is also diversity – “many members” – (12:4).
23. And there is also interdependency – “and every one members one of another” (12:5b). First Corinthians 12:25 and 26 says, “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care

one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

### **III. THE BUSINESS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP (12:11)**

1. Seven spiritual gifts are listed (12:6-8). Any gifts we have are not for selfish use or for display, but for the good of the entire body.
2. Prophecy (12:6) is mentioned first because it is the most important. It is the inspired declaration of the will of God. The New Testament prophet is similar in many ways to the Old Testament prophet.
3. First Corinthians 14:3 says, “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”
4. This refers to the proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. This does not necessarily refer to prediction, but to proclamation. We need to watch out for preachers like Harold Camping who make predictions. These men are false prophets.
5. The Old Testament prophet was a “fore-teller” as well as a “forth-teller.” The New Testament prophet is also a “fore-teller” (cf. Acts 11:27-30; 21:10-13).
6. The gift of prophecy was common during the apostolic age, but these gifts of prophecy and apostleship should be understood as temporary gifts (Eph. 2:20; 4:11).
7. First Corinthians 13:8 says, “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail.”
8. With the completion of the New Testament, there is no more need for any additional revelation (cf. Rev. 22:18, 19).
9. There is much confusion today about this gift of prophecy. According to the Bible, the true prophet of God delivers a message free from error and in accordance with Scripture. Therefore, these so-called modern-day prophets are disqualified (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22; II Peter 2:1ff).
10. Since there are no inspired, prophetic utterances today, a prophet today would simply be a preacher who declares the mind of God as it has been revealed in the Bible.
11. All modern prophecy that is true “is but the republication of Christ’s message – the proclamation and expounding of truth already revealed in Scripture” – Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*.
12. The second gift mentioned is “ministry” (12:7). This is not limited to those in so-called “full-time Christian service.”

13. All church members are to do the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4:11 and 12 says God “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
14. This means God gave the church evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints to do the work of ministry.
15. Therefore, all members of the church are to be ministering. Going out soulwinning is “the work of the ministry.” Teaching a Sunday School class is “the work of the ministry.” Children’s Church is “the work of the ministry.” Working in the nursery is “the work of the ministry.”
16. Serving as an usher is “the work of the ministry.” Playing the piano or the organ, and leading the singing, and singing in the choir, etc. is “the work of the ministry.”
17. There is a lot more to the work of the ministry than preaching.
18. Teaching is mentioned next (12:7). Teaching is the ability to explain God’s Word and apply it to the hearts of the hearers. Certainly the pastor has to have this gift. First Timothy 3:2 says a bishop must be “apt to teach.”
19. Second Timothy 2:24 says, “the servant of the Lord must (be)... apt to teach.”
20. Paul told the elders at Ephesus that they were to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28).
21. Other Christians with the gift of teaching would include evangelists, Christian school teachers, Sunday School teachers, itinerant Bible teachers, etc.
22. Exhortation is the fourth gift mentioned (12:8). This means to stir people to action. Barnabas had this gift. His original name was Joses, but the apostles surnamed him Barnabas, which means, “the son of consolation,” or “the son of exhortation” (Acts 4:36).
23. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (I Tim. 4:13).
24. Giving is next on the list (12:8, 13). All Christians are commanded to give, but some have the ability to do more. God has blessed them with this gift, and they in turn are able to challenge others to give as well.
25. John Farwell came to Chicago in 1848 with \$3.45 in his pocket. He was hired as a bookkeeper in a dry goods store, earning a few dollars a month. Eventually, he became a partner in a dry goods business, and went on to become the head of one of the largest wholesale dry goods firms in the country.

26. Farwell met D.L. Moody in a Sunday School class at a church in Chicago and they became good friends. When Moody gave up his secular job to go full-time in the ministry, John Farwell gave him a home rent-free.
27. From that point on, Farwell began a life-long commitment to financially support all of Moody's endeavors. Farwell designed and built the Chicago Tabernacle for Moody's revivals there, and he was a charter member of the Chicago Evangelization Society (which later became the Moody Bible Institute).
28. There are many Christians like John Farwell who have this gift of giving. They are channels of blessing, used by God to get the Gospel out around the world. Most of them do it quietly and without recognition, because giving should be done "with simplicity" (12:8).
29. And cheerfully because "God loveth a cheerful giver"(II Cor. 9:7).
30. Giving must be done without false pretense, such as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).
31. Ruling is the sixth gift mentioned (12:8). This gift should be exercised "with diligence" (12:8). In the local church God has given this gift to the pastors, deacons, and other leaders.
32. First Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."
33. First Thessalonians 5:12, 13 says, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."
34. Some churches have boards and committees running the church, but there is no Scriptural basis for it. Churches organize these boards and committees on worldly principles, not Biblical principles.
35. Showing mercy is the last gift listed (12:8). This relates to the spiritual ability to show empathy and sympathy for those in need. Empathy is the ability to identify with another person's feelings (like the Good Samaritan).
36. Someone said, "Sympathy is two hearts tugging on the same load."
37. This gift must be exercised "with cheerfulness"(12:8). It is possible to be merciful but not be cheerful about it. First Peter 4:9 says, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging."

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. To summarize: God's program today is the local church.
2. Every believer should be "serving the Lord" (12:11b) in the local church. Those not serving are missing God's blessing.
3. The basics taught here include fellowship (12:3-5, 10), humility (12:3), diversity, (12:4, 5), unity (12:5), prophesying (12:6), ministry (12:7), teaching (12:7), exhortation (12:8), giving (12:8), ruling (12:8), and showing mercy (12:8).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be "fervent in spirit" (12:11) and effectively serve the Lord in the local church