

12:1: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, (which is) your spiritual service.*

In the previous chapters Paul established that men are justified by faith in Christ. He also argued that all are equal in regard to salvation. This chapter begins to set forth the implications of the material in chapters 1-11. Stated another way, since Paul has presented the doctrinal information, he was ready to make this information practical. McGuiggan (p. 336) makes this wonderful point: “This is where 12:1-15:13 comes in. It is Paul’s call to the saints to ‘live down’ (as well as argue down) the slanders of their opponents.”

Many who read this book are tempted to skip much of the material in the first eleven chapters because the practical material is easier to understand. This is a mistake because it prevents readers from knowing *why* the practical material was written.

The opening words in this chapter are “*I beseech*.” Paul was an apostle so he did not need to *beseech* anyone. He could have said, “I order” (see Acts 10:48). Paul *begged* people and this showed his humility. Strong men who beg are people who have humility. Also, there are times when pleading works better than a command. “When parents appeal to mature children to pursue a certain course, out of a sense of indebtedness, the young people will more likely obey than if they had been commanded” (Allen, p. 101).

The word translated *beseech* (*parakaleo*) is used elsewhere in the New Testament (see Acts 2:40; 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16; Phil. 4:2), and here it is a present tense (continuous action) verb. The basis for Paul’s “begging” is stated in the text; it was “*the mercies of God*.” God’s mercy is a common subject in the previous eleven chapters; here it serves as a basis for Christian living. *Mercy* is here expressed in the plural (in both Greek and English). In 2 Cor. 1:3, this same term is used (again in the plural), and there Paul spoke of the “*Father of mercies*.” *Mercy* “expresses the disposition of God towards man, which serves as a model for the believer” (CBL, GED, 4:328).

Because of God’s *mercy* Paul begged these Christians to “*present their bodies*” as a “*living sacrifice*.” Vincent says the word *present* (*paristemi*) “is the technical term for presenting the Levitical victims and offerings.” Brown (1:475) says it “is a sort of codeword for changing the form of one’s existence by changing one’s Lord. The justified recognize that Jesus is *Kyrios, Lord, and practise* (sic) submission.” Before becoming a Christian, sin is the master, king, lord, and god, but this all changes upon conversion. Since the tense of *present* is *aorist*, it means Christians are to present their bodies in a way that is fully and completely devoted to God’s service. The word *living* shows that God has no interest in half-hearted service and poor sacrifices. We must present ourselves as a *living* sacrifice. This does not mean “barely alive.” Under the Old Testament system, worshippers brought a sacrifice that was dead. We are to be *lively stones* (1 Pet. 2:5, KJV). *Sacrifice (thusia)* is another way of emphasizing the point conveyed by the terms already described in this paragraph. Brown (3:432) says in Romans 12:1, “Paul sees the Christian life as a sacrifice... The word ‘therefore’ implies that the act of total commitment is a response to all that has gone before. It is life, not ritual, which is now the true sacrifice of the people of God.” God requires that we offer a “*holy*” (*hagios*) life (one that is upright, consecrated, and pure).

Lenski makes an interesting comment on page 747 of his Romans commentary. He said, “The striking thought is that our bodies are to be ‘a living sacrifice.’ The very words show that *thusia* (from *thuo*, to let go up in smoke) does not refer to sacrifices in general but to a sacrifice that is slain; the expression is not ‘a living prosphora, offering.’ Here there is a strong paradox: our bodies are to be presented like those of the animals but not like them to be slain, yet like them so completely to be made God’s that during their whole life they are as good as slain. The thought goes deeper than is generally supposed; this implies more than a complete surrender of the body to God.”

Some have recognized this principle and concluded that all of life is worship. This conclusion goes too far because worship is associated with and requires *intent*. Several passages describe service to God that was not worship (compare Jas. 1:27; this shows that “*religion*” is separate from worship). Another helpful passage is Col. 3:18-23. A person’s work is not worship, but it is activity that can be “done unto the Lord.”

“*Acceptable*” (*euarestos*) is an adjective that occurs nine times in the New Testament (it occurs only in the writings of Paul and once in the Hebrew letter). Elsewhere it is joined with our *labor* (2 Cor. 5:9), our *sacrifices* (Phil. 4:18), *obedience* (Col. 3:20), our *good works* (Heb. 13:21), and those who are *over us* (Tit. 2:9). This term is used in both Rom. 12:1, 2 as well as Rom. 14:18, and in the New Testament it almost always describes actions that please God.

The word translated “*service*” (*latreia*) in Rom. 12:1 is used elsewhere in the New Testament. It is used as both a noun (*latreia*, the form in Rom. 12:1) and a verb (*latreuo*). Sometimes (see Rom. 1:25 and Heb. 13:10—places where the verb form is used) this term is best translated “*service*.” The verb form can also sometimes refer to worship (Acts 24:14; Phil. 3:3 and Heb. 10:2). The context determines the meaning of the word, and in some places, the context clearly *prohibits* the idea of worship. Providing for our families, setting a Christian example, and taking care of our religious duties (growing and studying) are not acts of worship, but they are acts of *service*. Brown (3:551) rightly notes how in Rom. 12:1 *service* describes “the Christian’s walk.” Kittle’s definition for Rom. 12:1 is, “The service which Christians are to offer consists in the fashioning of their inner lives and their outward physical conduct in a way which plainly distinguishes them from the world and which corresponds to the will of God. This is the living sacrifice which they offer.”

As a *living sacrifice*, we should remind ourselves that our service to God is ongoing. We do not “shut it off” or “turn it on.” If we are a *living sacrifice* (someone who has completely dedicated himself/herself to God), we will be a *holy* person. McGuigan (p. 345) said, “If we’re not careful with this teaching we just might cause people to believe that Christ is really interested in what they watch on television; what they read; what they wear; how they complete their tax returns; how they dress; how much they eat; how they treat their partners and family; how they act on the job. You never can tell, they just might begin to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord.”

Many in the religious world think of *holy* people as the “*clergy*.” The Bible says that *holy* people are those who are saved. Every Christian who is pleasing to God is a *holy* person since those who are saved are free from moral filth. Compare 2 Cor. 7:1 and Rom. 6:12-13.

By being a *holy* person, and by presenting ourselves to God as *living sacrifices*, we become *acceptable* to Him (see the preceding information for an explanation of *acceptable*). Some think God asks a lot from us. Some may even say, “I want to be a Christian, but I desire to retain control of my life. Being a living sacrifice and completely dedicated is more than I want to offer.” Though this is surely how some think, Paul described total commitment in Rom. 12:1. God wants us to commit our entire being to Him.

This commitment is described as our “*reasonable*” (spiritual) service. The word *reasonable* (*logikos*) meant “rational; agreeable to reason, following reason, reasonable” (Thayer, p. 379). Vine (p. 253) added, “The sacrifice that we offer to God is to be intelligent, in contrast to those offered by ritual and compulsion; the presentation is to be in accordance with the spiritual intelligence of those who are new creatures in Christ and mindful of ‘the mercies of God’.” This tells us that Christianity is not an external or ritualistic kind of religion. Christianity is a faith that requires our total involvement and life. God demands our “body” in the sense that we give Him all of our physical and mental abilities, and this means what we do conforms to His word.

Many professing Christians would be willing to die for the Lord. Finding Christians who will daily live and work for Jesus is a lot harder. There is a definite shortage of people who will exert themselves for Jesus. The Bible teaches that we must be willing to both live and die for the Lord because God has given His people *mercy*.

12:2: *And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Those who are saved must avoid being “*fashioned according to this world*” (verse 2). The word *fashioned* (*suschematizo*), used only here and 1 Pet. 1:14, is related to the English word *mold*. Brown (1:709) defines *fashioned* as, “to assume the form of something, to identify oneself essentially with someone else.” The world has a *mold* that it uses to shape people (compare Eph. 2:1-2). Those who

allow the world to squeeze them into this *mold* are condemned because the thinking and lifestyle of the world are contrary to the ways of God. Paul used a special grammatical construction that means “stop being fashioned or do not have the habit of being fashioned” (Robertson, 4:402).

What things can we list to illustrate the world’s *mold*? What morals, philosophies, manner of dress, and customs cause people to conform to the world?

Instead of following the path offered by the world, Christians must be “*transformed*.” *Transformed* (*metamorphoo*) is very similar to the English word *metamorphosis*. This word is used to describe Jesus’ transfiguration (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2). Aside from Rom. 12:2 and the two passages in the gospels, *metamorphoo* (transformed) is found only one other time in the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:18). The word *transformed* means that Christians must seek to dramatically change their lives so they can glorify God and show the world what He is like. This change starts in the heart (the inside of man) and works to our outer man (2 Cor. 3:18). Brown (3:864) describes our transformation this way: It “is accomplished by an inner renewal of the mind and by a resistance of the influence of the world (or ‘age,’ *aion*). A more detailed explanation of the Christian’s transformation is given in 2 Cor. 3:18, where the experience of Moses in Exod. 34:29-35 serves as an imperfect model. The glory brought by the gospel is not temporary, like the radiance of Moses’ face, but is enduring. The Christian believer has an open relationship with the Lord of glory, which has a transforming effect.”

The key to making this change is the “*mind*,” the part of humanity that controls our attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions (Eph. 4:22-23). Paul said our *minds* must be “*renewed*” (re-worked). There must be an alteration. This change comes by learning and obeying God’s word. Scripture molds our thinking into the ways that are right and true. Both the promises and warnings in God’s word transform our lives and behavior.

As Christians become increasingly aware of God’s commandments, they will repeatedly use the power of the gospel to transform their lives into what God desires (1 Thess. 2:13). This transformation, which is both internal and external, allows the saved to be a *holy sacrifice* to God.

In Romans 8:6 Paul presented the two choices that all people have (living after the flesh or living after the spirit). A similar point is made in Rom. 12:1-2. We can either live “*after the Spirit*” and be “*dead to sin*” (6:11), or we can be “*fashioned according to the world*” and “*live after the flesh*.” A living sacrifice or being molded into the ways of the world—these are our only two choices.

When people become Christians, they “*approve what is the will of God*.” The new life, the death to sin, and the *living sacrifice* mean a person will be as *perfect* as possible. Though sin will still be committed at times (Rom. 3:23), the constant transformation brings Christians closer and closer to the Lord’s example (1 Pet. 1:21). This type of life is the fulfillment of God’s will.

Prove (*dokimazo*) was used by Septuagint writers to describe the testing of precious metals (Zech. 13:9). In the New Testament, this term describes “the testing process which salvages the good and discards the useless” (CBL, GED, 2:160). What endures is the “accepted” or “approved.” Thayer’s definition (p. 154) is, “*to test, examine, prove, scrutinize*.” Stated another way, Paul meant we seek to develop and then use the ability “*to give a critical answer* with the renewed mind concerning the will of God” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:342). *Prove* is a present tense verb. *Acceptable* (*euarestos*) is explained in the commentary for Rom. 12:1.

12:3: *For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.*

Paul has already shown that he received “*grace*” from God (1:5). His readers had also received this *grace*, and God’s *grace* should have caused them to understand that they had no reason to boast. There was no basis for pride. In fact, Paul previously warned both the Jews and Gentiles about pride (11:25; 3:9, 27). This warning is repeated, and the severity of it is seen in the words “*every man that is among you*” (compare 11:13). Paul’s word for pride or high mindedness (*hyperphroneo*) is found only here in the New Testament. In Classical Greek writers employed this term “to express how a person thought of himself in the sense of being proud and how a person thought of others in looking

down upon them. Thus the meaning was ‘to despise, to overlook, to think slightly of or with contempt’” (CBL, GED, 6:366). Another key word is “*think*” (*phroneo*). If thinking (our attitude or mindset) is grounded in or associated with pride, as is the case here, it usually leads to a false sense of security. An attitude associated with pride will also promote disunity in local congregations.

If the recipients of this epistle had thought “*soberly*” about the gospel, their pride would have vanished. A proper understanding and application of the gospel would have prevented these Christians from having an inflated view of themselves. McGuiggan (p. 350) observed that “We aren’t vermin crawling around a garbage pail (as I once heard a man say); we’re made in the image of God. But we’re not spiritual tycoons either.” A clear contrast exists in verse 3, and this difference is marked by the preposition “*but*.” Instead of having an attitude of pride, a Christian must have the mindset devised by heaven. When Paul described our *thinking* he used present tense (continuous action) verbs. *Sober* (*sophroneo*) is well defined by Spicq (3:360): “Christians, who should be measured and reserved in their self-concept.”

In the latter part of verse 3 there is a reference to “*faith*.” McGarvey and Pendleton (p. 491) call this “an expositor’s puzzle” because the thought is difficult. McGarvey and Pendleton believe Paul meant, “As saving faith is belief in testimony, it is the product of a man’s own action, and God does not deal it out, or give it to any one. If he did, how could he consistently condemn men for the lack of it (Mark 16:16), or how could he exhort men to believe (John 20:27)? But even those whose theological errors permit them to look upon faith as a gift, are still in a quandary, for Paul is evidently talking about measure of gifts, and not measure of saving faith, and the passage parallels 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:7.” In other words, this faith was not *personal faith* (the faith developed by man when he hears the gospel, Rom. 10:17). Rather, this faith was related to the miraculous gifts that existed in the first century.

Barnes makes a slightly better suggestion. He implies that this *faith* may have referred to a *believer’s piety*. God deals with each man, and His dealings are based upon how a person lives (i.e. the word *faith* is a metonymy for our life).

12:4-5: *For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.*

According to Eph. 4:4-5 there is “*one body*.” In Rom. 12:4-5 Paul described this *one body*. Within the single body, which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), there are “*many members*.” This is a wonderful description of the church built by the Lord. This fact teaches us that not every one in Jesus’ church is of the same gender, race, educational background, financial standing, social background, or cultural standard. Furthermore, as Paul observed, “*not all have the same office*.” Not everyone is in a position to preach, serve as an elder, deacon, song leader, etc. And, there are some jobs that are not open to some members of the body (1 Tim. 2:8, 12). For a discussion of how equality can exist while not everyone serves in the same way see the commentary on Gal. 3:28.

The word translated *office* in verse 4 (*praxis*) is a fascinating word. Thayer says in this passage it may mean “*a thing to be done*.” If we combine this definition (*a thing to be done*) with the word “*some*” (this term is also found in verse 4), we may draw a conclusion. *Some* are responsible for *a thing to be done*. In other words, not everyone is responsible for (or even qualified for) every task in the church.

One of the things that needs done in a congregation is preaching. *Some* must take charge of this, but this is not the responsibility of all. *Some* need to offer *encouragement*, but not all are encouragers. Paul showed that not every member must be involved in every project or activity. This should be a great comfort to those who fear public speaking. Some must speak publicly, but this is not required of all.

Although Christians do not need to be involved in every activity, the 5th verse shows that all are required to associate and work with other members of the *one body*. We must associate with each other because all the redeemed have entered into the “*one body in Christ*” (the *one body in Christ* is the church, Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4). When people are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) for the forgiveness

of their sins (Acts 2:38), Jesus adds them to His church (Acts 2:41, 47, KJV). Everyone who is saved is saved in the same way (see the commentary on Jude 3) and becomes a member of the same church. We differ in our talents and abilities, but we are united in the church built by Jesus. The New Testament does not recognize or approve of denominationalism.

Because Christians share a common experience (baptism), and they are all members of *one body* (the church Christ built), “This interrelation with each other should keep down pride, selfishness, jealousy” (Lanier, p. 88). The strong bond between Christians should also promote love. Additionally, when members of the *one body* are working, the body (church) is working. In the physical realm we know that when our hands are working our bodies are working. The same is true for the church. When some members of the church are working, the church is at work. Not every part (person) has to be in constant operation for the Lord’s body to be active. Thus, if there are times when only the elders or a minister is involved in “church work,” the body is still operating.

Lest some read this and think, “We will let others work; we are not needed,” a warning must be issued. A few working members may keep the body alive, but the productivity level of the body will be limited. In our physical bodies each part is expected to fulfill its function. The same is true in the spiritual realm. If a body part fails to function, it is essentially dead. Being a dead or inactive Christian, when we could be participating, means the Lord will remove us from His body (Jn. 15:2).

12:6-8: *And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, (let us prophesy) according to the proportion of our faith; 7 or ministry, (let us give ourselves) to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching; 8 or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, (let him do it) with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Some think the “*faith*” in verse 3 is related to the “*gifts*” in verse 6 (i.e. Paul spoke of the miraculous faith described in Mt. 17:20). This is a possibility. Whether this is right or not, Paul showed that members of the first century church had received gifts. Both miraculous and non-miraculous were given to the first Christians. The miraculous gifts were temporary (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13 and Eph. 4). At the present time people have gifts that are *not* miraculous. Paul’s word for *gifts* (*charisma*) is also associated with justification (Rom. 5:16) and eternal life (Rom. 6:23)—blessings that are not supernatural.

Some of the miraculous gifts in Paul’s time are listed in verses 6b-8. He first mentioned the gift of **prophecy** (*propheteia*), an ability that is also described in 1 Cor. 12. According to 1 Cor. 12:7, 10, *prophecy* was a “*manifestation of the Spirit*.” This gift “enabled one to be a spokesman for God. This is obvious in 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul says that the one who prophesies edifies the church (14:4).” These quotes are taken from Owen (p. 91). While it is often assumed that prophecy allowed God’s people to tell the future, this gift was mainly associated with speaking for God. A prophet was a spokesperson for God since he or she revealed God’s will. In the first century church, because there was no written New Testament, prophets were able to tell Christians what to do and what to avoid. Prophecies were messages “inspired by the Spirit and given in a present situation” (CBL, GED, 5:361). This gift was essential since the New Testament had not been written.

Those who had the gift of *prophecy* were to “*Use it according to the proportion of our faith*” (6b). Although there is disagreement as to what this means, one reasonable explanation is that these Christians were to use their gifts to the best of their ability. When prophecy was properly used, the church was edified, exhorted, and comforted (1 Cor. 14:3-4). Because Christians are members of *one body* and *severally members one of another* (verses 4-5), not using this gift for edification, exhortation, and comfort was unthinkable.

Another explanation of this phrase is that those who prophesied were to be in “agreement with *the* faith” (compare Jude 3). In other words, those who had and used this gift were to avoid saying anything that conflicted with sound doctrine. Support for this view is found in the fact that a definite article (“*the*”) does precede the word *faith* in the Greek text.

Christians who had the ability to prophesy were distinct from those who preached. Those who were prophets stood between God and the people. They received information from God and delivered

it directly to whom they were sent. Preachers stood between the *prophet's message* and the people. As a general rule, preachers have taken information revealed by prophets, sometimes related it to other truths, and then applied it to the lives of their listeners.

Another gift listed by Paul is described as **service** (*diakonia*), though he did not specify a particular type of service. Perhaps this was something like hospitality. There are people who are wonderful hosts and hostesses. These people have an uncanny ability to serve others. The people who had this ability needed to dedicate themselves to using their gift. A Bible character that had this kind of ability was Dorcas (see Acts 9:36, 39). Another example of gracious hospitality is found in 1 Tim. 5:9-10. Even single people can excel in the area of service and hospitality.

Other places the word *service* (*diakonia*) is used in the New Testament include Lk. 10:40 (Martha was cumbered with much “serving”); Acts 1:17 (Judas had a “ministry”); Acts 6:1 (widows were part of the daily “ministration”); Acts 11:29 (“relief”); 2 Cor. 3:7 (“ministration” of death); Rev. 2:19 (“ministry” or “service”); etc. There are many acts (ways) when it comes to serving, and it is God’s will for His people to serve every way they can, even though this may not be one of our best abilities.

At the end of the 7th verse Paul mentioned the gift of **teaching** (*didasko*). Some teachers are blessed with a natural ability to impart knowledge to others. There are also people who want to teach but simply lack the ability to do so no matter how hard they try. In the first century there were teachers who received a miraculous gift that allowed them to teach. Some may have wanted to teach but lacked the natural ability. This gift would have helped them. This gift may have also allowed people to teach without any preparation (Mt. 10:19-20). In at least two other places Paul put teaching in the same context as prophecy (Eph. 4:8, 11-12; 1 Cor. 12:29-31). In light of this fact, it appears that some teaching was associated with a miraculous ability.

The miraculous gift of teaching is gone. Yet, this passage still has application. Every person who has been blessed with the ability to teach needs to use his or her gift as widely as possible. Also, teachers who are naturally gifted should do their best to train others so their influence and skills can continue to spread the gospel long after they are gone.

In the 8th verse reference is made to the gift of **exhortation** (*parakaleo*). This word can mean “exhort,” “comfort,” “console,” or “help.” Here it seems to describe the encouragement of others. This miraculous ability is also gone, but many still have a natural talent for encouraging others. Those who have this ability need to use it as fully and widely as possible. Several parts of the New Testament put an emphasis on *exhorting* (comforting and consoling) people. In the first century church, this was a common practice (Acts 15:32; 16:40). Timothy was sent, in part, to exhort the church (1 Thess. 3:2). *Parakaleo* (exhort) is used in each of these texts. Additional cross-references containing this term and important to study are Heb. 3:13 and Heb. 10:25.

In the Greek text the word translated “or” (*eite*) precedes every gift described in verses 6-8a. When Paul listed the remaining gifts (*giving*, *ruling*, and *mercy*) he did not use this word. This grammatical point is one more indication that the gifts in verses 6-8a were miraculous and the gifts described in 8b (*giving*, *ruling*, and *mercy*) were not.

The gift of **giving** is also a part of New Testament living. *Giving* (*metadidomi*) occurs only five times in the New Testament. It described the giving away of an undergarment (Lk. 3:11), the sharing of one’s income (Eph. 4:28), the giving of a spiritual gift (Rom. 1:11), and the sharing of Christian knowledge and fellowship (1 Thess. 2:8). Here the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:414) defines *giving* as “one who *distributes* [to others].” A further description of giving comes from the word “*liberality*” (*haplotes*). This term indicates our giving is to be generous. In fact, a full definition for this term is “*simple, gracious, objectivity, not seeking gain for self or showing partiality*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:124). Vine (1:416) says this gift “suggests singleness of heart, freedom from selfishness of aim, and where this is the case liberality is inevitable. Mixed motives wither liberality.”

Though some practice generous giving on a seasonal or sporadic basis, others are prone to be frequent and generous givers. Some are naturally inclined and talented when it comes to giving, and this giving does not necessarily involve money. Some have the ability to give compliments or lend a helping hand. Others excel at giving their time for worthwhile projects. Those who are good givers

need to use their gift.

In the church there must be some type of **rule** (*proistemi*); this is also a gift. For all the other places in the New Testament where this term appears, see 1 Thess. 5:12 (“*are over*”); 1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; Tit. 3:8, 14 (it is translated “*maintain*” in Titus). There must be people who “manage” a local congregation. Other passages show that God has given this job to elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7); for a full discussion of this matter, see the commentary on these verses plus the commentary on Phil. 1:1. Appointed men are to rule with “*diligence*” (*spoude*). Thayer (p. 585) says *diligence* means, “earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything.” Those in the eldership must take their responsibility seriously and carry out their duties with zeal. This same term (*diligence*) is later applied to all Christians (Rom. 12:11).

The last gift in verse 8 is the ability to extend **mercy** (*eleeo*). *Mercy* “refers to a ‘feeling’ namely, the feeling of one who is moved by the sight of another’s suffering and in a way shares in it: compassion” (Spicq, 1:471). Some do extremely well in granting mercy to others. Instead of thinking, “I don’t really want to be merciful to you but I will,” those with this gift say, “I want to be merciful to you. It makes me happy.” Those who have the gift of mercy can use their gift with “*cheerfulness*.” The word translated *cheerfulness* (*hilarotes*), which occurs only here in the New Testament, is the basis for our English word “hilarity.” This means some get great joy from extending mercy to others.

Verses 6-8 demonstrate some of the ways God’s people can be a *living sacrifice* (verse 1). If we are serving in a “*diligent*” way (verse 8), our life is on the altar of service. We are serving God with both our mind and our body.

In addition to using our gifts, there are certain standards that should be followed when we interact with others. These standards are found in the following verses.

12:9-10: *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. 10 In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another;*

The brethren at Rome, and everywhere else, were to *love one another*. This love (*agape*) was to be *sincere* (“*without hypocrisy*”). *Without hypocrisy* comes from a single term (*anupokritos*) which is quite a fascinating word. English words can be “negated” by adding a prefix to them. For instance, *balanced* can quickly be changed into *unbalanced* by altering the word’s beginning. Greeks did this same thing, and their method of alteration was the addition of an “*a*” to the prefix of words; *without hypocrisy* is an example of that. Greeks added a prefix to their word for *hypocrite* and this radically changed the term to mean *without hypocrisy* (the complete opposite of hypocrisy). It may be instructive to see all the other places in the New Testament where this term is used (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 1:22).

McGuiggan (p. 357) noted how people have spoken of 3 types of love: **if** love; **because** love; and **anyway** love. The “if” love works this way: “If you do this, I will love you.” Although this is a common practice in the world, this is certainly not the kind of *love* described in Scripture. The second type of love says, “I love you because you are fun, nice” or something else. This is a healthy kind of love but it is not the deepest kind.

The last kind of love says, “You have displeased me but I will love you anyway.” This is the type of love that Christians are to have for each other and for others. We do not pretend to love others in order to gain something. Loving others or saying we love others to get something is hypocritical. Professing something that is not in our hearts is wrong. Our love and the expression of it must be genuine.

Along with a heart of love, there must also be *hatred*. “*Abhor*” (*apostugeo*), a present tense verb, occurs only here in the New Testament. It is a compound word (a preposition plus the word “hate”), and this combination means “to hate violently” (CBL, GED, 1:405). Christians are to have a strong detest of and for “*evil*.” God wants His people to be disgusted with the things that are wrong. Though the world smiles at wickedness and frequently calls evil good and good evil, God says His people have died to evil (6:2). For this reason the things that are wicked are to be shunned and hated; it is not enough simply avoid evil. Christians are also to pay attention to what is “*good*” (this is a contrast to

hating evil). Paul described this with the word “*cleave*” (*kollao*), a term that means to “glue, weld, or cement” ourselves to something (compare Phil. 4:8). “In Romans 12:9 and 1 Corinthians 6:17 the word describes a spiritual relationship existing between the Christian and ‘good’ or the Christians and the Lord” (CBL, GED, 3:373). Once members of the church do this, the problems associated with right living will be solved (adopted from Lanier, p. 90). McGuiggan added, “The ultimate question is not, What’s wrong with it? It is, What’s right with it?”

Because the world does not accept God as its supreme source of authority, it usually has difficulty determining right from wrong. Moral questions such as “When does life begin?” and “What is pornography?” create perplexing problems for judges and lawyers. Christians are qualified to answer many of the moral questions raised in the world because they are familiar with the standard given by God.

The 10th verse returns readers to the subject of love. Paul told those at Rome to be “*tenderly affectioned*” (*philostorgos*); this term is found only here in the New Testament and it denotes being “a lover of family affection.” True love (verse 9) is characterized by this quality—a quality that means Christians have “tender devotion to each other” (Spicq, 3:462). It is “an expression in which Paul emphasizes the need for love in the church by piling up words for love” (Brown, 2:542). God’s people are to also have “*brotherly love*” (*philadelphia*), a word found only a few times in the New Testament (for all the other places it occurs see 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:7). *Brotherly love* means great love for fellow Christians. Included in this love is the need to “*prefer*” one another “*in honor*.” *Honor* (spelled *time* in Greek) is defined as “deference” (Thayer, p. p. 624) or “showing respect” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 817). *Prefer* (*proegeomai*) is found only here in the New Testament, and it can be interpreted three ways. It can “mean ‘outdo.’ The RSV reads ‘Outdo one another in showing honor.’ (2) The verb could mean ‘lead the way.’ Barclay translates this statement, ‘You must lead the way in honouring each other.’ This is plausible and follows the basic meaning of the word. (3) Finally, the word could mean ‘regard before oneself, consider better,’ or ‘esteem more highly.’ The KJV and NIV follow the third option. The problem, however, is that this exact usage is not attested elsewhere, though similar ideas do exist in the Septuagint and Apostolic Father” (CBL, GED, 5:301). How can anyone doubt that God wants Christians to treat one another with love, mutual respect and honor?

12:11-12: *in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer;*

The 11th verse tells Christians to be *diligent* and avoid *laziness*. There is no room in the church for lazy members. Even though the tasks done by church members differ, every member of the body must make a contribution. When Christians understand that they “*serve the Lord*” (11b), they will not be lazy.

A comparison of the KJV and ASV reveals a distinct difference in translation. Those responsible for the ASV rendered 11a, “*in diligence not slothful*.” In the KJV the text says, “*not slothful in business*.” *Diligence* (*spoude*), the same term used in verse 8, is not only at the end of the prepositional phrase in the KJV, it is translated by a much different word. Usually the KJV translates this term as *diligence* or *haste*. Here the KJV translators may have chosen *business* to describe every aspect of our lives. *Slothful* (*okneros*) is well illustrated by Jesus’ use of this term in Mt. 25:26. Spicq’s comment on this word (2:576-577) is quite good. *Slothful* “refers to the lazy person, or the loafer, who stays in bed (Prov. 6:9; 26:4), whose ‘hands refuse to work.’ Such a person is eminently worthy of scorn, inspires disgust, even has the face to justify his inactivity. This is the case with the wicked and idle servant” in Mt. 25:26. He not only “failed to work to produce a profit on his master’s property but in addition makes excuses for his idleness” (Spicq, 2:577). Upon receiving God’s instructions in the Scriptures, Christians are “expected to be active, diligent, quick to act” (ibid).

The *diligent* Christian will certainly be “*fervent in spirit*.” *Fervent* (*zeo*) is a present tense verb that is found only here and Acts 18:25. It literally meant *to boil* or *to seethe*. “Emotions such as love, anger, etc. are described in this way” (CBL, GED, 3:23). *Fervent* is very similar to the “English idiom

‘bubble over’. The word ‘*spirit*’ (emphasis mine, BP) is used here in the sense of ‘attitude’ (Eph. 4:32). The zeal of each member should be such that the body is ‘bubbling over’ with excitement for the Lord and his work” (Owen, p. 94). If we do not see this type of enthusiasm where we worship something is wrong. At the end of verse 11 is the word “*serving*” (*douleuo*), the same term Jesus used in Mt. 6:24 when He spoke of *serving two masters*. Paul applied this term to his service to God (Acts 20:19) and said Christians should not *serve* (same word) sin (Rom. 6:6, see the KJV translation). Some *serve* (same word) idols (Gal. 4:8, see the KJV translation). It is also possible to *serve* (same word) the ways of this world (Tit. 3:3).

The 12th verse either presents additional information or it further tells Christians how to serve the Lord. The things listed in this verse are: (1) *rejoicing in hope*; (2) *patient in tribulation*; (3) *continuing steadfastly in prayer*.

Christians are to be *joyful in hope* because our hope is rooted in Christ (Eph. 1:3) and Jesus has authority over all things (Mt. 28:18). He is the King, we are His people, and we will share in His kingdom. Part of our joyful hope is also found in the glory that will one day be given to faithful Christians (8:18). Our hope is so great it allows God’s people to *boast* (5:2). Wuest (1:214) noted how “when earthly prospects are dark, the Christian’s rejoicing should be in the sphere of hope that the Lord will send deliverance, and in the meantime take care of His afflicted child.”

Because Christians have a joyful hope, they are able to be “*patient*.” Literally this term meant “‘to remain under,’ that is, to remain under the test in a God-honoring manner, not seeking to escape it but eager to learn the lessons it was sent to teach. That is patience. Thayer defines the word, ‘to remain, abide, not recede or flee, to persevere, to endure, bear bravely and calmly’” (Wuest, 1:215). While waiting is usually not much fun, the Christian is someone who waits with confidence and joy. No matter what comes our way (compare 8:38-39), we continue to wait for the Lord’s return and the complete fulfillment of His promises.

The word translated “*steadfastly*” (*proskartereo*) is also found in Acts 2:42. This word shows that prayer is to be persistent (Acts 1:14 and 6:4 also use this word and again join it with prayer). It is also applied to the soldier who continually waited on Cornelius (Acts 10:7). Clinging to what is good (9b) means Christians are to spend a lot of time in prayer.

12:13: *communicating to the necessities of the saints; given to hospitality.*

God’s people have some obligations towards fellow church members. Some of these duties are listed in this verse. The first responsibility (“*communicating*,” ASV and “*distributing*,” KJV) means *sharing*. This term (*koinoneo*) is a present tense verb that first occurs here in the New Testament. For all the other places it is used, see Rom. 15:27—*made partakers*; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:15; 1 Tim. 5:22; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pet. 4:13; 2 Jn. 11. Here this term is understood as helping “meet the physical needs of other believers” (CBL, GED, 3:366). This teaching is illustrated in other parts of the New Testament (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32; 34-37; Rom. 15:25-27). Lard said, “Better to have no coat at all than to have two and refuse to share one with a brother who has none” (p. 391). Paul was careful to construct the point with a key word: “*necessities*” (*chreia*), the same term John used in 1 Jn. 3:17. By having this term in the text we are authorized to consider if a person is seeking the fulfillment of a *need* or a *want*.

When we share with others, we must use wisdom and tact. In some cases, those who receive help are left with feelings of shame and embarrassment (“Since you are so poor take this”). Though not all have the gifts of tact and diplomacy, these skills should be used when we help others. The best gifts meet a need and the receiver is left with a sense of joy instead of humiliation. Giving needed gifts and giving in the proper way *communicates to the necessities of the saints* (13a).

In addition to giving to those who need assistance, there is an obligation to practice “*hospitality*” (*philoxenia*); this term is found only here and Heb. 13:2. A similar word used in Phile. 22 and Acts 28:23 (*xenia*) denoted a “guest room.” In the first century, there were surely many Christians who lacked food and lodging when they visited Rome. Those in the first century used hospitality to meet the needs of traveling Christians. Today we usually engage in hospitality by having friends and church members come into our homes. The type of hospitality has changed, but having a residence

where others are welcome hasn't. Being hospitable promotes harmony within the church, helps develop friendships, and allows brethren to encourage and help each other. Such a quality is important in the eyes of God and this is reflected in the ASV and KJV. Both these translations say "given to." These two words come from a single term (*dioko*) which is elsewhere translated *persecute* (in fact, an example of this is in verse 14—this same term is there rendered *persecute*). Just as Christians were *pursued* by those who hated the faith, so Christians are to *pursue* the quality of hospitality. Hospitality is a quality we should actively seek to cultivate in our lives.

For those who received this letter, hospitality was certainly not a new concept. In the Mediterranean world, hospitality was an important part of daily life and a "sacred duty." With the Greeks, hospitality was a mark of culture. Egyptians viewed hospitality as a way to ensure a favorable existence in the next world. Romans saw it as a sacred duty and the Hebrews knew it was a divine command (compare Gen. 18:2-8; Judg. 19:20; 2 Kgs. 4:10; Job 31:32; Isa. 58:7). It was not uncommon for people to have special rooms for unexpected guests; when visitors came, they normally received the best preparations hosts could offer. Other passages that instruct Christians about the need for hospitality include Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; Mt. 25:31-46; Mt. 22:39; 1 Tim. 3:2.

12:14-15: *Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not. 15 Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.*

There are many persecutors of God's people. Sometimes these persecutors are in the church (compare Phil. 1:15-18). There can be times when fellow Christians vex and hound us. Persecution also comes from those who are not Christians. No matter who our enemies are, Paul said we are to "bless them" (this is stated twice). The apostle also said we are *not* to "curse" those who are opposed to us and or the gospel. This teaching echoes Matt. 5:44, Acts 7:59-60, and Lk. 23:34. We should think of this *blessing* as "a friendly disposition towards enemies" (Brown, 1:215). *Bless* (*eulogeo*) is the same term Jesus used in Mt. 5:44. Those who first read this may have been surprised with the tenses; the idea is "keep blessing those who are continuing to persecute you." *Bless* and *persecute* are both present tense verbs, and *bless* is constructed in such a way where it has the force of a command. Wuest (4:374) renders this verse, "Be constantly blessing those who are constantly persecuting you; be blessing and stop cursing."

"Persecute" (*dioko*) is a common New Testament word for persecute, though it does have other meanings in the New Testament (see the commentary at the end of verse 13 where it denotes the quest for a Christian quality). Throughout time God's people have suffered persecution. This was the fate of faithful prophets (Mt. 5:12), Jesus (Jn. 5:16), and members of His church (Lk. 21:12).

McGuigan (p. 362) recalls a true story of a Christian woman who worked in an office. This woman was in line for a prestigious promotion. A fellow employee also wanted the job, but she was not a Christian. The unsaved woman began to slander the saint. The defamation continued until the Christian was rejected for the promotion. After the slanderous woman was promoted, the Christian who was rejected sent her a dozen red roses and a card of congratulations. The Christian even offered to help her. The woman who was rejected did not praise her slanderous co-worker for the lies and smear campaign. She did praise her persecutor for her promotion. After the slanderous woman saw the flowers and read the note, she was converted. In a similar way, we can *bless* our enemies.

A quick point about the *cursing* (*kataraomai*), the same term used in Mt. 5:44, should be made. Instead of describing *swearing*, this *curse* is a request or desire for calamity to come to those who injure us. This is something that we must avoid because James said God is the "lawgiver and Judge" (Jas. 4:12). Compare too Jude 9. Apparently it was a problem for some Christians because the construction of the point, as Wuest noted (see his comments in the above paragraphs), has the sense of *stop cursing*.

In verse 15 we are introduced to two more instructions which are present tense verbs: "weeping" and "rejoicing." We are to share in people's sorrows and joys. While those in the world are often jealous and envious of someone's good fortune, God's people are to share in the joys experienced by others. The same is true with grief. What affects one member of the body is supposed to affect the

other members of the body (church). When one member of the body is hurting, other members of the body should share in the pain. “Mutual sympathy is not native to us; it must be cultivated” (Lanier, p. 90).

Rejoice (chairo) is a fairly common New Testament word that occurs several times in the book of Philippians. Brown (2:359) noted how this term “has its source beyond mere earthly, human joy. It is joy *en kyrio*, in the Lord, and therefore outside ourselves. This is why Paul constantly reminds his readers of its existence and exhorts them to manifest it (Phil. 3:1; 4:4, 10; Rom. 12:12; 2 Cor. 6:10).” A little more information about this word can be found in the commentary on Phil. 3:1. Like *rejoice* and *rejoicing*, *weep* and *weeping* are translated from the same term. *Weep (klaio)* is the expression of an emotion and often associated with compassion; it is the opposite of *rejoice*. Jesus did this in Lk. 19:41, though the Hebrew people were not at that time *weeping*. Luke used the same term found in Rom. 12:15.

12:16: *Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

It is possible to share in the joys and sorrows of others because we are of “*the same mind*.” This means we have the same attitude towards one another. We view each other with the same level of importance and we are dependent upon the other members in the body. The first part of this verse deals with the idea that we are better than other Christians. God says we are not better than anyone else. Instead of thinking of how great we are or could be, our attention is to be fixed on the “*lowly*” (others). These verses point us away from self and towards other members of the church. If Christians do not live by these instructions, they will be *wise in their own estimation*; and, therefore, displeasing to God.

A fuller understanding of this verse comes through studying some of the key terms. *Be of the same mind* is from a single word (*phroneo*); this is a present tense verb and it occurs twice in this verse. Two New Testament books make extensive use of this term (Romans and Philippians). In this chapter it also occurs in verse 3. In this context it condemns those who are full of spiritual pride. When spiritual pride exists, “the unity of the church” will usually be endangered “by the arrogance of individuals or of whole groups” (both quotes from Brown, 2:618). A further illustration of the spiritual pride is found in “*high things*” (*hupselos*). While this term is often used as an adjective (Jesus went to a *high* mount, Mt. 4:8, same word), it can function as a noun. Here it is a noun and it refers “to mankind’s inverted value system” (CBL, GED, 6:399). Man often exalts what God condemns. God wants His people to focus on what is “*lowly*” (*tapeinos*); the KJV says “*of low estate*.” Jesus applied this term to Himself in Mt. 11:29. Paul said God *comforts* those who are in this kind of state (2 Cor. 7:6) and *gives grace* to those who live in this manner (Jas. 4:6). A third description of and for humility is found in “*condescend*” (*sunapago*), a term we may view negatively but such is not the case with this word. Found only three times in the New Testament (the other two places are Gal. 2:13—*carried away* and 2 Pet. 3:17—*led away*), *condescend* suggests we should “be ‘led along with’ the humble rather than the proud or the lofty” (CBL, GED, 6:183). God knows His people will be led with one group or another. It needs to be the right one, and it needs to be continual; *condescend* is a present tense verb. A final term deserving attention is “*wise*” (*phronimos*). While this term is often used in a very positive sense (Mt. 7:24; 25:2), here it has the sense of *arrogance* (compare Rom. 11:25 where this term again occurs and has this same meaning).

12:17-18: *Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men.*

There are times when even the best Christians are tempted to take revenge. A natural human tendency is to injure those who injure us. The Romans (who lived in a society where revenge was common) were reminded that revenge and punishment belong to God. “*Evil*” (*kakos*) is used several times in this book as well as throughout the New Testament (see how it is used in Rom. 12:21).

Thayer (p. 320) pretty well sums it up with these definitions: “thinking, feeling, acting.” He also described it as “what is contrary to law, either divine or human.” Christians need to know that God will eventually give everyone what they deserve and this includes revenge (compare 2:6).

Even though God’s word is clear about taking revenge (1 Thess. 5:15 is another good cross-reference), many still want to retaliate against those who hurt them. Many are under the impression that revenge is “sweet” and engaging in it will make them feel better. This misconception may be examined in light of the following four points (these are adopted from McGuigan, p. 364).

- Since he hurt me, I will hurt him (this is vindictiveness).
- Since he hurt me, I will treat him the same way (this is retaliation).
- Since he hurt me, I will ignore him and have nothing to do with him (this is disdain).
- Since he hurt me, I will love and serve him (this is the way of Christ).

For the Christian there is only one way to respond to injuries that are not criminal: leave the punishment to God. The Lord revealed this same truth in Mt. 5:39. The instructions in Mt. 5 and Rom. 12:17 deal with *personal wrongs*; criminal acts require a different response. Paul dealt with criminal activities in the next chapter. In the current chapter, to help Christians deal with personal wrongs, Paul instructed believers to pursue “*peace*.” This is the right response to personal wrongs because vengeance only adds fuel to a fire. God wants His people to do everything possible to avoid faction and strife. He will take charge of retaliation and retribution. At the end of verse 17 the thought seems to mean, live “in such a way as not to provoke enmity, or give any occasion for breach of peace” (Expositors, 2:694). Something quite similar is said about elders (see 1 Tim. 3:2 and the commentary on “*blameless*”). Christians are to get along with others. “Because the salvation of God gives peace, Christians must demonstrate their new status by living harmoniously” (CBL, GED, 2:280).

In some cases, it is not possible to have or make peace (verse 18). God understands this because Paul said, “*If it be possible*.” Attaining peace with others is not always possible. Our job is to exhaust every avenue of establishing peace and harmony. If we cannot create peace, the matter must be left to God.

Those who are familiar with the life of Christ know that Jesus did not always have a peaceful relationship with everyone. Teaching the truth will cause turmoil and commotion. Rebuking religious error and sin will disturb the peace. Defending the faith will shatter peace (Acts 17:6b). We will not always be able to have peace, but we can avoid being the type of person who prefers war over peace. We can also do our best to be peacemakers (Mt. 5:9).

12:19-21: *Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath (of God): for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. 20 But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

“*Avenge*” brings to mind an important point. When a circumstance involves ourselves, we can “be too severe. Our own wrongs swell out of proportion in our own minds...Generally speaking, to balance the scales exactly is a matter that is too delicate for us” (Lenski, Romans, pp. 778-779).

Paul quoted from the Old Testament (Deut. 32:35) to support what he said. He was familiar with the fact that *wrath belongs to God* and “*vengeance*” is “*His*.” *Vengeance (ekdikesis)* describes “the rendering of divine justice” (CBL, GED, 2:323). See how this same term is used in 2 Thess. 1:8. Paul knew God is capable of punishing those who need to be punished, and that He has reserved this job for Himself. Paul let God punish those who injured him and other Bible characters did the same thing. On two occasions, David had opportunities to kill Saul, but he left Saul’s fate to God. Many Christians would fare much better if they followed the examples and left their enemies to others.

Instead of conjuring up ways to retaliate against our enemies, Christians are to follow God's plan—a plan that says God's people must be kind to their enemies. The type of kindness described in these verses is related to physical needs. If our enemy is hungry, thirsty, runs out of gas or something else, Rom. 12 teaches us to help him. In describing this process the word “*coal*” (*anthrax*—a word we now employ to describe an infectious disease) is used. There is no other place in the New Testament where this term occurs, but its meaning is clear. It is a metaphor meaning we cause an enemy anguish or cause him to blush with shame because our kindness makes him realize how unkindly he treated us. As Christians we strive to “*overcome evil with good*,” and our greatest weapons are kindness, goodness, and love. Kindness kills! Whereas those in the world might respond to an enemy with taunts or a deaf ear, Christians are to aid those who hate them. This approach often allows “enemies” to be transformed into friends. “Vengeance may break an enemy's spirit, but kindness will break his heart” (CBL, Romans, p. 201). “Those who stoop to vengeance are themselves conquered by evil” (ibid).

Overcome (nikao) is the same term found in Rom. 3:4. Outside the New Testament this word (in various forms) described “‘victory’ or ‘superiority,’ whether in the physical, legal or metaphorical sense, whether in mortal conflict or peaceful competition” (Kittle, 4:942). We conquer our enemies by and through love.

Introduction to chapter 13: The instructions in this chapter were written to Christians living in Rome. Rome was the imperial capital and the seat of the empire's civil government. Everyone who lived in Rome was very aware of these facts. Those who were Christians understood Rome's role in the world. They also realized that they were citizens of another kingdom—Christ's kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13). For this reason Paul presented information on how Christians should relate to their government. This chapter is a detailed study of Christianity and civil authority. Other passages that relate to civil government are 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Tit. 3:1; and 1 Pet. 2:13-17.

The twelfth chapter in Romans opens with a command to present our bodies as a “*living sacrifice*.” The material in Romans 13 presents another way for Christians to be *living sacrifices*.

There are religious groups (the Jehovah's Witnesses are one example) that believe earthly governments are part of Satan's organization and, therefore, demonic. The basic argument for this view goes something like this.

- Whatever comes from God is good, holy, just, and pure.
- Governments are often evil, unholy, unjust, and impure (just like Satan).
- Since governments are often brutal and cruel, they are from Satan.

McGuigan (speaking of the Jehovah's Witnesses) wrote, “Flag-saluting is regarded as the equivalent to the ‘Heil Hitler’ of the Nazis” (p. 368). The Witnesses argue that the “higher powers” in Romans 13 *are not governments*. Rather, they describe *Jehovah and His Son Jesus*. Part of this conclusion is based upon how the “higher powers” are described (see verses 4 and 6). Paul said that the “*higher powers*” are *avengers for wrath against those who do evil and continually attend to God's will*. The Witnesses also point to part of the 3rd verse that says the powers are “*not a terror to good work but to evil*.” The Witnesses link these thoughts together to conclude that the description is more consistent with God and His role in the world instead of governments.

This conclusion is easily refuted. The first thing to be noted is that Rom. 13:1-7 presents five simple facts:

- There is no power unless God allows it.
- The *higher powers* (civil authorities) are *ordained of God* (1b). If the “higher powers” are God (the Jehovah Witness view), God has *ordained Himself*!
- Those who resist civil authority resist God's ordinance.

- Governments are to support what is good and oppose what is evil.
- God uses governments to punish those who commit wrongs.

These five points describe God's will for civil government, but as we know, God's will is not always followed. God would like His people to be perfect (Mt. 5:48), but we do not live perfect lives (1 Jn. 1:10; Rom. 3:23). In a similar way God wants civil governments to support what is good and oppose what is evil. Civil governments are supposed to punish those who commit wrongs and honor good citizens. This is God's will, but men (governments) do not always fulfill it. This same point may be made about the church. God has a will for His people, but this will is not always followed or realized (Rev. 2:1-3:22).

In Romans 13 Paul affirmed that governments are from God. "Five times in the first four verses of this chapter the phrase 'of God' occurs. It indicates the origin of government; the origin is God's authority. All government goes back to God" (CBL, Romans, p. 203).

Because God has ordained governments people are to respect and obey the government's laws unless there is a conflict between Christianity and the governing authorities (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). When conflicts arise between the laws of the land and God's word (and this is not too often in America), Christians must follow the Bible.

Teaching that civil authority has come from God and affirming that Christians must submit to a government does not mean that God's people agree with everything a nation believes or practices. Governmental support and acceptance of abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, gambling, or something else does not prohibit Christians from condemning these things. God's people should use every lawful means at their disposal to oppose what is wrong and promote what is right.