

# SECRETS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIANS

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries  
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## Let's Begin

*Success is a big item in American culture. Bookstores are filled with titles on how to be a success. Presently, definitions of success center on achieving financial wealth as well as achieving positive emotional health. In other words, "feeling good about yourself."*

*The fact is, success is not a bad thing. Yet, because we are fallen creatures, our fleshly desires prod us to pursue success in the wrong things. Paul tells us in Romans 12 precisely the things in which God wants us to succeed. Remember: the first eight chapters of Romans focused on the plan of salvation, what we could call the "doctrinal section." The great redemptive truths of God's love for humankind are there explained.*

*In addition, Paul takes three chapters (chapters 9-11) to explain how God's redemptive love still includes His special love for His special people — Israel. Actually, these three chapters are parenthetical in scope.*

*Beginning in chapter 12 and extending through chapter 16, Paul now teases out precisely what redemption looks like in the life of the Christian. This section is thoroughly practical in nature.*

*Hence, we ask the question: what does success look like in the life of the believer? As we journey through chapter 12, Paul offers a fourfold answer to that question:*

- I. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Dedication (vv. 1-2)**
- II. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Incorporation (vv. 3-8)**
- III. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Illumination (vv. 9-13)**
- IV. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Consideration (vv. 14-21)**

## I. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Dedication (vv. 1-2)

We must not be surprised when we speak of success for believers, the Bible begins with *total dedication*. Listen to the apostle Paul, "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" (v. 1). Absolute surrender is the beginning point of successful Christian living. It is not 50%, not 90%, nor even 99%. Instead God calls us to 100% dedication.

Someone may ask, "does 100% dedication mean I must be morally perfect?" It does not. What it does mean includes three elements. First, there is the *obligation* of dedication. Notice Paul speaks of the, "mercies of God." Indeed he "beseeched" the believers to base their obligation upon God's mercies. The term "beseech" literally means, "to call to one's side," "to exhort." It's as if the apostle is putting his arms around the Christians as he makes his loving appeal.

Second, there is the *offering* of obligation. Christians are to, "present your bodies." The term translated "present" would be a well understood exhortation for most Jewish leaders. Why? For the simple reason "present" is the terminology of a sacrificial consecration to God, the language of the priestly offering on the altar.

For them, as well as us, making consecration to God possesses little surprise. However, the *content* of the consecration possesses a startling surprise.

### Reflection Connection

*What effect, if any, does the admonition "present your bodies" have on how we treat our physical bodies? For example, is what we eat or what we drink a matter of significance to our sacrifice? Why or why not?*



Whereas an Old Testament offering presented the body of an animal, the offering Paul proposed was the body of the believer, “present your bodies.”

Also, the verb tense of “present” translates, in the Greek, as a once for all action. In other words, presenting our bodies to God is a deliberate, moment of decision when one surrenders himself or herself totally to Jesus Christ. Even more, this sacrifice is a “living” sacrifice. Whereas in the Old Testament the animal’s throat was slit, draining out the animal’s life as it was offered in sacrifice, the New Testament sacrifice for believers is a sacrifice which *lives*. Our daily, ordinary life in every detail and routine, is an act of worship to God.

Finally, there is the *outcome* of obligation. Paul is clear concerning the result of sacrifice, “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.” Already, Paul pushed the believers to present themselves as both “holy” and “acceptable” which, according to Paul, defined their “reasonable service.” In other words, our surrender to God results in a life of separation from the world. The term translated “holy” literally means “to set apart.”

Every part of our body is to be set apart to God—our mind to think for Him, our heart to love Him, our eyes to see Him, our hands to serve Him, and our feet to go for Him. Hence, rather than being conformed to the world, we are transformed by Him, through Him, and for Him. The believer is fully successful who takes his spiritual dedication seriously.

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## II. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Incorporation (vv. 3-8)

While believers are to present themselves to God as individual sacrifices in living for Him, no believer is a loner, a single entity to himself or herself. Instead, believers are incorporated into what Paul refers to as the body of Christ. Note carefully his words, “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” (vv. 4-5). What is the body to which Paul refers? The church! While there are many other images for the church Paul uses in the New Testament, the body is one of his favorite figures of speech (cp. Eph. 1:22-23).

One reason Paul so often uses the body as an analogy to the church, is because the believer’s relationship to each other in the church is similar to one part of the physical body in its relationship to other parts of the physical body. How so?



As your physical body possesses *diversity* in its parts, so the church body possesses diversity with its members. This is what Paul means when he speaks of, “being many, are one body” and “members one of another.” Each believer though individually dealt his or her own “measure of faith” is nonetheless bound together by “grace” (v. 3).

The binding together believers experience through the grace of God constitutes the *unity* of the body of Christ in the same sense in which the various parts of the physical body are bound together in unity, in oneness. And, Paul continues to remind the believer that we are one in Christ, we do not have the “same office” (v. 4). Each of us has a different work to do for the glory of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to learn to appreciate the differences each has.

Being spiritually incorporated into the body of Christ not only displays both *unity* and *diversity*, it also displays our dependency upon one another. Paul writes, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (v. 5). Each part of the body has a job to do, a function to beautifully perform. But only as each part depends on the other parts is beauty on display. In the body there is no rivalry between the parts, or competition to be first. Were that the case, our physical bodies would become dysfunctional and, therefore, useless.

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Our spiritual incorporation into the church reaches maximum potential when ministry in the body takes place. Hear well the apostle Paul, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy... ministry... teaching... exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness” (vv. 6-8). Every believer is graced with at least one gift given by the Holy Spirit. Hence, a simple definition of spiritual gifts is this: *spiritual gifts are spiritual abilities given to the believer by the Holy Spirit* (cp. 1 Cor. 7:7; 12:11). One of the tragedies of the modern church is the divisive movements over spiritual gifts. Rather than wrongly placing emphasis on so-called “sign gifts” which divide churches, Paul makes clear spiritual gifts are for serving one another and bringing people to Jesus.

### Reflection Connection

*Invite your pastor to share with your group the biblical focus on spiritual gifts and special abilities God gives each believer to minister and serve one another.*

Note Paul’s primary concern: *explaining the Word of God*. May the Lord Jesus be thanked for preachers today who stand before God’s people and proclaim Scripture verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, testament by testament; preachers who expound the whole counsel of God. Hence, Paul speaks of both “prophesy” and “teaching.”

In addition, Paul focuses on *expanding the work of God*. The church does this as it gives and goes. Whatever the gift is, believers use them with all their hearts because they are spiritually incorporated into the body of Christ.



### III. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Illumination (vv. 9-13)

When something is illuminated, light has been thrown upon it; the object illumined becomes decorated and on display. The Lord Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). In other words, we are to illumine the path to Jesus for all the world to see.

Paul gives several indicators in these verses which gauge whether our lives bear spiritual illumination. First, he speaks of *conviction*: “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (v. 9). On the negative side, Paul says to “abhor” evil, which means to completely break with it. The believer cannot be comfortable with sin. The Holy Spirit convicts believers swiftly for their sin against God.

On the positive side, believers are to “cleave” to the good. “Cleave” is a term similar in effect to our English word “glue.” Believers take their stand on the right side of things; they are glued to righteousness. It’s not enough to be against evil. Christians are for good.

Second, Paul speaks of *affection*, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (v. 10). Believers show warm affection for each other. The term “brotherly love” is the term from which we get the name of Philadelphia, the “city of brotherly love.” Also, our affection for one another includes our “honor” to one another. We count others higher than ourselves.

*Our lives are only illuminating when we glow with the Spirit’s fire.*

Third, Paul addresses our *emotion*: “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (v. 11). Believers should never slack in zeal. We are to be “fervent in spirit.” The term “fervent” means “to boil with heat.” Our lives are only illuminating when we glow with the Spirit’s fire.

Fourth, Paul mentions our *distinction*, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (vv. 12-13). The joy we display is indicative of the illumination we possess. Jesus is our hope!

In addition, we are to be “patient in tribulation.” How are we patient even during suffering? Paul is clear. It is through our “continuing instant in prayer.” Hence, we are then in a position to share with others and care for their needs.

### IV. Successful Christians Pursue Spiritual Consideration (vv. 14-21)

As believers, we are joined in community with one another, and in the community, there are different relationships we must maintain. Of course, our vertical relationship with God remains first. However, on a horizontal plane, we must relate well with all our fellow men, both inside and outside the church.



Jesus said it like this, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). Having healthy human relationships was a priority for Jesus. It should be no less for us.

Our difficulty comes when we are expected to love even those who are not quite so lovable. Inevitably, along our path we will meet those whom we feel, at times, are impossible persons with whom to deal. These difficult folk are the very ones Paul has in mind in these verses. And, successful Christians will develop healthy consideration in dealing with them.

First, we express *kindness* (vv. 14-15). Believers are to “bless” those people who actually “persecute” us, “rejoicing” as our faith is wed to Jesus and not this world. As people grieve, we grieve. Hence, our kindness shown them expresses our consideration toward them.

### Reflection Connection

*Do you think the church focuses on reaching upper class people or lower class? Explain. Is there merit in targeting only one “class” of people with the gospel? Why or why not?*

Second, we express *meekness*. Paul writes, “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” (v. 16). Some Christians drive lost people away by their obnoxious, uncouth behavior. Why is meekness a virtue Paul exhorts us to pursue? Meekness displays an attitude of harmony which is what Paul means when he says, “be of the same mind.” Paul encouraged brothers and sisters in the church to seek a common ground with each other. Even more, toward lost people outside the church, we are to seek common territory in order to win them to Christ.

Furthermore, meekness displays *humility*. Paul insists believers must not focus on “high things.” In other words, Paul is saying Christians must not be haughty (cp. 3 John 9). Instead, believers “condescend to men of low estate.” The church should never overlook common, ordinary people.

Finally, successful Christians display *goodness* (vv. 17-21). Believers face many battles, battles which reveal the fact that not all people appreciate you or your work. Yet, Paul insists we must never return “evil for evil” but, in his words, “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (v. 17). In other words, we live “peaceably” as possible with them (v. 18).

Nor are we to “avenge” (v. 19). No believer is called to be a vigilante. God is our avenger (cp. Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1). Christians must seek to, “overcome evil with good” (v. 21).

### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul uses the strongest word imaginable in verse one as he explains the believer’s consecration to God—“present.” This is a technical term from the ancient world of sacrificial altars where animals were slain as worship offerings. The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest captures the force of it in his translation, “by a once-for-all presentation to place your bodies at the disposal of God.” No doubt remains here that Paul referred to a definitive moment of deliberate decision in offering one’s self to God.

### Wrap Up

*Success-driven people often travel through life chasing after things which ultimately do not matter. God calls believers to be successful, but successful only as He defines it. Believers begin to be successful only as they offer themselves as, “living sacrifices” to Him. Consequently, the corporate life in the body of Christ—the church—is the community where success is teased out through our relationship to both our Lord and our fellow man.*

