

A Study in Romans

Study Twelve

Romans 12:1-13:6

Day One

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.

v. 1 – I have at times been guilty of a partial commitment to God. I gave Him my free time, but not my career. I yielded my mind, but not my mouth. I would give Him some of my finances, but not surrender the control of all. Here Paul urged that we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. God isn't interested in halfway measures. Since He is Lord of all, He cannot be Lord of some of you and me.

The word sacrifice has a different connotation than we give it today. In modern terms, a sacrifice would be defined as the following: I have five dollars and I feel impressed that the Lord wants me to give it to someone in need. But I don't want to give it; it's all I have. So I resist, but then yield to God's direction. That is what we call a sacrifice. But that isn't the Biblical concept at all.

A Biblical concept of a sacrifice is giving to God what already belongs to Him. It has nothing to do with my attitude or whether the "sacrifice" brings me hardship. So if I am giving my body as a living sacrifice, I am simply giving to God what already belongs to Him. If I worship with hands lifted, that isn't a sacrifice because I don't want to raise my hands or I am embarrassed. It is a sacrifice because my hands are God's, and when I lift them I am simply following the directions of their Owner.

If you are holding back on God and then yield to His demands, that isn't a sacrifice for you. That has simply revealed your sinful attitude. God doesn't need you or me doing Him any favors. He needs our obedience and submission to His absolute Lordship.

v. 2 – Christians of all people should not struggle with knowing God's will. The problem with knowing God's will doesn't lie in God's ability to speak it, but our ability to hear and process it. For me to process God's will, I must deal with my mind so that I know who God is, how He works and how He responds to me as I pray to Him.

Paul said not to be conformed to this world. I have found that culture and the prevailing thought in any generation are powerful tools. They shape us. If the prevailing mindset is that I need to buy a new car every three years, then that mindset is a hard one to escape. It presses and shapes my thinking. If my culture tells me that I should follow one particular political party, then I will follow and defend that party. Culture is powerful.

There is only one way I can break free from that cultural thinking and that is by having my mind renewed. As one preacher said, I must be free from my “stinkin’ thinkin’”. This will lead to my transformation. This word is from the Greek word that is the root for the English word metamorphosis. It is what happens to a caterpillar when it goes into a cocoon. When it comes out a butterfly, it has experienced a metamorphosis. That is the kind of change that God wants to bring about in your life through a renewed mind!

Are you fighting against or cooperating with the transformation God wants to cause in your life? Do you find yourself changing your mind and thinking new thoughts, being open to new things? If not, then you are in danger of being conformed to the thinking of this world, without realizing it!

Day Two

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;

8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

v. 3 – Paul realized that what he saw and taught was by grace. It wasn’t because he was smart, although he had a brilliant mind. What has grace allowed you to see and understand? Do you present it as an object of grace, or like you’ve figured it out for yourself?

God has given us all a measure of faith; for some it’s two cups full, for others just one. It is not important what you have, but what you are doing with it. Quantity isn’t important. Remember what Jesus said:

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Luke 17:6).

vs. 4&5 – This admonition not to think more highly of yourself is in the context of your purpose and who God created you to be. There are things that you can do and spiritual gifts that you have that are from God. But there are many things that you cannot do or be, and to think that you can just decide to do or be them is a serious problem. I know some pastors who consider themselves a good judge of people, yet their success at hiring

people is horrendous. Yet they keep on hiring. Why? Because they don't have sober judgment about themselves. They should rely on someone else to do the hiring, but they persist in doing something they cannot do.

You cannot be everything; that is why we have the body of Christ. We are each to be who we are and then learn to rely on others who are what we aren't!

v. 6 – Even in our gifting, there will be some who are more spiritual than we are, even though we have the same gift. When someone more anointed than you comes along, you would be wise to step aside and let them operate in their gift. Paul's first example was of those who prophesy. He urged them to do it according to the measure of faith that they had. Again, I know some prophets who feel pressured to have a "word" about everything and for everyone. And I know others who have spoken inaccurate predictions, who then don't go back and take responsibility for their errors. This is because they don't understand that they have a ceiling, a limit that is predetermined by the amount of faith that God has given them.

You are wise to stay within the boundaries of what God has given you and who He has created you to be.

vs. 7&8 – Paul referred to prophesy as a gift and then goes on to mention serving, teaching, encouraging, serving, leadership and mercy-giving. I don't think this was meant to be an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts, but rather a partial list of potential gifts. Take a moment now and list those gifts that you have, whether you have ever seen them listed as a spiritual gift. For instance, I have a gift of humor. I can make people laugh and I feel God helping me do that at times. You won't ever see that on any spiritual gifts test or profile, but I know that I have it and that God gave it to me. What about you? Do you have the gift of art? Counseling? Building?

Day Three

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

v. 9 – It occurs to me that Paul changed the nature of his presentation in this chapter. Up to this point, he was writing about the great theological issues of faith and works, Jews and Gentiles finding the Lord. In this chapter, Paul got practical. Not that the first 11 chapters weren't practical, but now Paul began to write about practical everyday behaviors that were expected of believers.

This is the pattern that Paul followed in all his epistles. He devoted the first half to doctrine and the second to behavior. I think this is a formula that all pastors should follow, dividing their pulpit time between theology and right living.

v. 9-13 – These verses present some of Paul’s recurring themes that he wrote about to his churches. Paul especially devoted a lot of time teaching people how they were to get along as newly saved brothers and sisters. Here he urged the saints to be devoted, honor one another, to share and to be hospitable. Then he urged each individual to be sincere, to hate evil, cling to good, be zealous, serve the Lord, and to be joyful, patient and faithful.

Can you imagine a church where people practiced these things with one another and in their personal lives? What a great church that would be? Unfortunately, there isn’t one, for Paul outlined the ideal, but we must learn to live with the real. Paul set the bar high, so to speak, but few have been able to clear the hurdle. The problem is our humanity. We strive in the power of the Spirit to do and be the things that Paul wrote about, but we are imperfect creatures. That is why forgiveness is the glue that holds the people of God together. While we are striving for the ideal, we deal with the real by acknowledging our shortcomings and trusting the Lord .

Is there anyone you need to forgive today? Is there any issue such as love, joy, hospitality, or patience that you sense is an issue that needs improvement in your life?

Day Four

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

v. 14 – This sounds like the words of Jesus:

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36).

This is certainly what I call radical righteousness. Only the Buddhists put forth anything close to this code of behavior when you are mistreated. Theirs, however, is a self-centered righteousness, for the goal of the Buddhist is to eliminate suffering in the life of the believer. The goal of Christ was for His followers to make the other person the focus even when the believe is suffering and being mistreated. Christ modeled this best when He ministered to the thief on the cross.

Are you practicing radical righteousness? There is only one way you can do this and that is to die and allow Christ to live in you and work through you. It is your choice to do this, but you are powerless to carry it out.

v. 15 – Even our emotions should be directed by the emotions of others. We are asked to identify so closely with other people that we make their emotional condition our emotional condition. The boundaries of my emotions are to merge with the boundaries of others. Their pain is my pain; their joy, my joy.

This means that I must be close enough to other people to sense what they are going through, and then willing to submit my life to be a comfort to them.

v. 16 – The gospel is a source of reconciliation, not just for the races and genders, but also for the classes. The rich are to fellowship with the poor and vice versa. Paul urged that we work at living in harmony with one another, and that there be no conceit in our hearts. Conceit is an unusual occupation with self—my abilities, my needs, my accomplishments. If there is no harmony between believers, it is probably because conceit is operating.

Are you consumed with the needs and accomplishments of others, or caught up in your own? What can you do today to make someone else's life journey a little more pleasant for them?

Day Five

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

v. 17 – There is a standard that even non-Christians believe is right. When non-Christians don't see in the church what they know they should see, they are disillusioned, first with the Church and then possibly with God. I think of what the prophet Nathan said to King David when Nathan confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba:

“But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die” (2 Samuel 12:14).

God is mindful of His reputation, which He has tied to His people. Are you a good representative of God?

v. 18 – I am glad that Paul put some limitation on other people’s happiness, for there are some who, no matter what you do, won’t make peace with you. Once you have done all you can do, you must turn the situation over to God and get on with your life.

v. 19 – Paul was really telling the saints here to expect to be mistreated. He urged them not to repay evil with evil, and not to take revenge. I don’t think it is just nonbelievers who can inflict pain on a believer. Often it is your brother and sister who will do the damage. Because our expectations can be so shattered when someone we trusted offends us that we can go on the offensive to “get even.” We are not permitted to do that.

Instead we should be forewarned that people will mistreat and disappoint, even those closest to us. When that happens—not if it happens—we are to conduct ourselves according to the model that Christ provided. And Paul was reminding the Romans of that reality.

Paul wasn’t saying, however, that the matter would be finished. God promises that He will get involved and will judge the situation for your vindication, in a way that can lead the offending party to repentance. All God asks of us is to trust Him to set the record straight, if not in this life, then in the life to come. Can you trust the Lord to do that?

v. 20 – Paul quoted from Proverbs 25:21-22 at this point. You will actually hasten God’s involvement in resolving the wrong done you if you conduct yourself according to God’s will. But you don’t do nice things to your offender just so you can see God judge them, for you cannot rejoice in someone else’s misfortune. But when you see God move on your behalf, you will marvel at God’s power and be humbled, lest He deal with your shortcomings in the same mighty way.

v. 21 – My vindication should not be my primary goal. My primary goal should be to overcome any evil by doing good. I cannot overcome evil by being primarily concerned with my well-being. In overcoming evil with good, I must have the sincere objective of seeing the offender delivered from evil and get right with God. That is a very hard thing to grasp and then do. Is there a situation to which you can currently apply this principle in your own life?

Day Six

13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

v. 1 – God has established governing authorities. Why would Paul write about this? Well, first of all, he was writing to residents of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. We know that at some point, all Jews were banished from Rome:

There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome (Acts 18:2).

Since the Roman government considered Christians to be a Jewish sect for a long time, I am sure that some Jewish Christians were included in this ban. Most believe that Paul wrote this epistle about four or five years after this edict. Perhaps there was additional pressure coming from the Roman government against Christians and their practices.

Having instructed in the preceding verses not to repay evil for evil, Paul now instructed Christian citizens to recognize that God had established the government, if not their decisions. The appropriate response was joy and submission.

v. 2 – It is a hard thing to submit to the office and not the imperfect, even unrighteous, office holder. But once again, Paul was not instructing us to do anything that Jesus Himself wasn't willing to do. Consider this example:

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (John 19:8-11).

Here we have a story of the sinless Son of God standing before a corrupt Roman politician. Pilate wanted Jesus to speak, but Jesus would not. Finally in exasperation Pilate asked Jesus whether He was aware that Pilate had judicial power to kill or set Him free. Jesus could have exposed Pilate's sins or given a discourse on the corruption of Rome, exempting Himself from its edicts or effects. Instead, Jesus recognized that if Pilate did have the power to release or condemn, it was only power that God had given him. Pilate would answer to God for how he used that power.

Now was Jesus referring to Herod or Judas when He said, "Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." I think He was referring to Judas. If He was, then Jesus was saying He had more of a problem with a covenant-breaker and betrayer like Judas than He did with a corrupt politician who would abuse his powers like Pilate. Does that make sense?

v. 3 – I am not sure whether we are assured that all governing officials will commend us when we do wrong. They may, but then again, they may not. But our submission doesn't rest on their behavior. It rests on obedience to God's word.

v. 4 – God has instituted civil authority to maintain order and to carry out punishment for crimes against others. There is not question about that. Have you ever been speeding only to look in your rearview mirror and see a police car following you? How do you feel? You are a afraid. When they pass you by to go on some other business, you are relieved.

But if you weren't speeding, you probably won't react that way when you see the police behind you. If you don't want to fear authorities, then do good. That doesn't mean they'll always do good to you. If they don't, then Paul has instructed you how to act.

v. 5 – We submit not only because they "bear the sword" and could punish us. We submit because it is the right thing to do; it is the will of God. We submit because it is a matter of conscience and not just a matter of avoiding punishment.

Day Seven

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

v. 6 – Paul obviously did not object to paying taxes as a good Roman citizen. Paul may have had a different perspective than most Jews, since he was from Tarsus and a Roman citizen. Where other Jews resented Rome, Paul seemed to have an appreciation for some Roman culture. He actually described the governing authorities as God's servants, doing God's work for them.

When you think of it, Paul had more rights as a Roman citizen than Jesus did. When Jesus was beaten and condemned, He had no right of appeal. When the magistrates beat

Paul without a hearing in Acts 22, those magistrates were scared when they found out who Paul was. Paul was in a better position to speak to the issue of government than Peter was, for Paul had grown up with the rights and privileges of citizenship.

v. 7 – Of course, Paul was influenced by the words of Jesus: “Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s’” (Matthew 22:21).

v. 8 – I don’t think Paul was saying don’t be in debt; he was saying here to pay your debts. But of course, there is no way that Paul could have anticipated the current economic situations that encourage large debt. I think the principle can be applied from this verse: Stay away from debt and if you incur it, pay it!

v. 9 – Again, Paul reflected the saying of Jesus, his Master.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:35-40).

v. 10 – Love is the fulfillment of the Law. When I read the Old Testament, I haven’t always seen that love was the end goal of the Law. I see a lot of rules and regulations that govern worship and human relationships. But God is the same yesterday, today and forever. If He is love, He has always been love; He is motivated by love. Therefore the Law was given out of love to produce love for God and man.

Paul taught that since love doesn’t harm a neighbor and love for neighbor is fulfillment of the Law, then love is the means to keeping the Law. How simple, yet how impossible without the power of God producing that love in our hearts.

I hope that as we study, you follow Paul’s philosophy. It is wonderful to study God and the things of God. But if your study doesn’t produce results in your relationships with other people, then you are in danger that your studies are simply an academic exercise. Paul ended every letter with instructions for living with one another, whether with family, governing officials, or fellow believers. As you grow in the knowledge of God, I pray that you will grow in your ability to love others and serve them. If you don’t, then our studies are for nothing.