

Study 14: Romans Chapter 12

Introduction

The “doctrinal” issues have been dealt with, and Paul now moves to practical application lessons over the next few chapters. He calls us to make the transformation that the new birth (and death to the former life) demands.

Body of the Study

What does Paul connect the “therefore” with in 12:1?

How do we put our faith into action?

Why does Paul liken us to a physical body?

What are the gifts Paul talks about, and how do we use them?

How does Paul define working relationships?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What is the basis of Paul’s appeal for the pursuit of holiness?*
- *Can we ever attain the things that Paul (God) calls us to do in this chapter?*

- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 13 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 14: Chapter 12

Introduction

Chapter 12 marks somewhat of a change in direction in the letter. After having dealt with the “doctrinal” issues, Paul now moves to some practical application lessons over the next few chapters. He calls us to make the transformation that the new birth (and death to the former life) demands.

Body of the Study

What does Paul connect the “therefore” with in 12:1?

He has built his argument, and concluded that justification comes by faith in Jesus, and that it doesn’t matter whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Further, we should not forget that we are instruments of God, and that He is able to cut us out and graft others in. Therefore....

Because we are seeking to be the obedient children of God, what we should do is to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice goes to the earliest times of human history – right back to Cain & Abel. Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. Sacrifice was not something that came from the Law. It pre-dated the Law, and pre-dated the flood. Central to the idea of sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus.

Sacrifice is to take something of *value*, and destroy it in order to show respect and honour to God. “*primarily denotes the act of offering*” – Vines. The lambs or the doves that were given as a sacrifice were to be perfect in order to be acceptable. A broken down lamb that was ready to die was not suitable for a sacrifice. It had to be *without spot and without blemish* so that the person making the sacrifice would feel the loss that came from the offering.

What we are to do with our bodies is to offer them as living sacrifices. Not a literal sacrificing of our lives (by throwing ourselves into a fire or similar), nor giving ourselves to God in death - but *a living sacrifice*. We are to have a *life* characterised by sacrifice to worldly things. Paul describes this as *holy* – set apart – and a life *acceptable to God*. These are a few words, but a big ask! How can our lives in any way shape or form be acceptable to God? Paul has already answered that question – because it is a life characterised by our faith.

After saying all of that, he then says that this is *our reasonable service*! If we could only live up to such a life – a life worthy of the calling we have from God – a life set apart for God – a life which we could present to God as acceptable – then all of that could only be regarded as “*reasonable service*”.

If we think in human terms (terms of “law”), then such an attainment is futile. We can never pass the test. But the whole of the Roman letter has argued that justification does not come in such a way. What God wants – and expects – from every one of us is a life characterised by faith. And Paul is calling us here to live that life. He does not leave us wondering about *how* to do it, but outlines it for us in practical ways.

How do we put our faith into action?

We are not to be conformed to the world. Rather than *conformation*, we are called to *transformation*. We could let the world rule us, and not be any different than those around about us. But we have a choice. There are many ways that we can conform ourselves to the world. Some of them might be participating in activities that are not centred on Christ (and are not compatible with a christian life). They would include such as going to the pub, drinking parties, nightclubs, gambling institutions (casinos, poker machine venues etc). Such activities are sought

(and regarded as “good”) by worldly people. But God expects better than that from His people. And it starts with the heart. He expects us to have *renewed* minds. Back in chapter 6, Paul dealt with death to sin, and the new birth. The practical outcome of that is a *renewed* mind. We should no longer *want* to be involved with such activities. The renewed mind and transformed man has his mind set on *doing* the things of God.

The transformation could bring the thought that we are right with God because of what we are *doing*! Paul warns us “...*not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think...*” (12:3). We need to recognise that we are only responding to the grace (charity) of God. Our position is so pitiable that we deserve nothing. We need to be circumspect (sober KJV/NKJV) and recognise our true position. It is only because of our faith that we are where we are.

Why does Paul liken us to a physical body?

Paul is dealing with the *practical application* of our faith. Without practical application, all we have is theory that accomplishes nothing. It is only by putting our faith into *practice* that we can build ourselves – and others – up. But *how* do we function? God’s intention is that we function together as an entity. We cannot exist effectively as Christians in isolation. We are all different, and we all have our individual strengths and weaknesses. It is only through the sharing of our strengths and helping each other through our weaknesses that we grow towards the people that God wants us to be.

The example of a body is the same analogy that Paul uses in 1 Cor 12 – but in that place he is discussing the miraculous spiritual gifts. Here, Paul primarily deals with the *natural* gifts. We need to keep in context that the church at Rome was largely (but not totally) without the miraculous gifts (1:11). By comparing 1 Cor 12 and Romans 12 we can see (*importantly*) that the process – how we use the gifts we have, whether natural or miraculous – and how we relate to one another and function together – is exactly the same. In the post-miraculous age we learn a very needed lesson from Romans 12.

What are the gifts Paul talks about, and how do we use them?

The first gift that Paul discusses is the gift of prophecy. This might be the ability to predict the future, but it is more likely to be the ability to speak as an inspired spokesperson for God. It is the only one of the gifts discussed here that is miraculous, and shows that the church at Rome was not totally bereft of the miraculous gifts. We have previously discussed this, but considering the number of people in the church at Rome that Paul knew personally, the length of time since the cross (around 25 years), and that there were some people from Rome who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), it is not the least surprising that some of the people would have received the miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:17-18).

- Prophecy – speaking for God by inspiration
- Ministry – serving (*diakonia*) the work of servants / deacons
- Teaching – an obvious gift, but differs from prophesying in that what is taught does not need to be learned by inspiration, but can be learned by perspiration,
- Exhortation – encouragement and teaching (*paraklesis*) “having the ability to establish rapport with others, often for correction. (How marvellous a gift!)¹”
- Giving – again an obvious gift, but one that is often overlooked by brethren when we do not give according to our ability,
- Leading – a role appropriate to the leaders of the congregation, particularly the elders. The leadership is to be performed diligently,
- Merciful – a role of encouragement and “helping out” to those who need help. We are to do it with cheerfulness, not grudgingly *because we have to*.

¹ Turner Robert F: Reading Romans, p 93

How does Paul define working relationships?

Whilst the roles and gifts (and their application) has been defined, Paul now goes on to define relationships between brethren.

- **Love without hypocrisy** – now there's a big ask!!! Hypocrisy is saying one thing but doing the opposite (or not doing what we say). Yes we can show love to others, but how easy is it to criticise what they do whilst we do the very same things ourselves.
- **Abhor what is evil.** Sometimes we might not *like* evil, but we just develop a tolerance for it. Evil and God are like day and night, like black and white. They cannot exist together. The transformed and renewed mind doesn't have a tolerance for evil, but an abhorrence of it.
- **Cling to what is good.** We need to embrace the good things and never let go of them.
- **Be kindly affectionate to one another.** Paul has used several terms for love – he is saying that at all levels we should love one another – prefer one another. When we want to be around other people, the people we should be seeking are our brethren. Unfortunately, some brethren only want to have fellowship with their brothers and sisters when they come together to worship. How much we miss out on!
- **Not lagging in diligence.** We need to be *active* in our love, our fellowship, and our service.
- **Fervent in spirit.** We serve God, our brethren, and others because of what God has done for us. Like the Jews, we need to have a zeal for God (10:2), but unlike them we need to base it on knowledge of God's word, and of Jesus the Messiah.
- **Serving the Lord.** Jesus came as a servant. When we truly understand the nature of God, and the nature of Jesus, then we will want to serve others just as Jesus came and served us.
- **Rejoicing in hope.** Of all people, Christians are filled with hope. We *know* what life on earth is about. We *know* what follows after this life. The hope that we have in Christ is His return and coming to take us to ever be at home with Him. We have every reason to rejoice and be happy – not the least because of the burden of sin that has been lifted from our shoulders.
- **Patient in tribulation.** Just because we are Christians does not mean that we will not suffer. We will have trials. It is through the trials that we develop character and grow (Jas 1:2-8). We need to be patient, knowing that on the other side of this life there awaits for us the crown.
- **Continuing steadfastly in prayer.** Prayer is our communication with God. Relationships are built on communication, and we strengthen our relationship with Him by communication.
- **Distributing to the needs of the saints.** In the beginning of the church in Jerusalem, the brethren sold what they had and shared their things with the needy. Paul is not saying that we should sell all of our material things and give them away to make ourselves poor. He is saying that when others are in need, that we need to give whatever help we can. Notice that he talks about the needs of the saints, not the needs of the community. This is not to say that we do not have a responsibility to help those outside of the church – we do, but our first responsibility should be to our spiritual family.
- **Given to hospitality.** We should pursue hospitality. Not just begrudgingly use the opportunity when we have to, but actively seek to invite others to our homes for meals or to stay with us. As we do so, we engage in the richest fellowship as we learn about others faith and their service to God in ways that we have often not even thought about. Remember that there are millions of brethren around the world with whom we will share an eternity in heaven. We have a wonderful opportunity now to meet them and learn about their faith – and for us to encourage them in their service to Him.
- **Bless those who persecute you – bless and do not curse.** How hard it is to love our enemies. It is easy to love those who do good to us, but it goes against our *human nature* to love our enemies. But it should not be against our *spiritual nature*. God loved us whilst we were His enemies (sinners) and came and gave the life of His only Son (Jn 3:16). If we are renewed and transformed, then we need to wear the same kind of character that God showed. It is easy to say, but hard to do.

- **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** If we have truly bonded as brothers and sisters – as if we were different parts in a body – then we will feel their pain and their joy with them.
- **Be of the same mind towards one another.** In the fullest extent of our renewal and transformation, we take on the mind of God. Not that we can ever attain that, since His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. But if we all have our minds tuned towards God, then our thoughts should be aligned – of the same mind. We need to engage in fellowship (sharing) to communicate with and understand one another. We need to “talk through” issues with one another so that we can have the same mind. We cannot do these things just by coming together for worship on Sunday morning. The Jerusalem church had “*all things common*” (Acts 2:44), and were “*of one heart and one soul*” (Acts 4:32). It came from being “*together daily with one accord...and eating their food together*” (Acts 2:46). If we want to restore the New Testament pattern for the church, then we also need to restore the New Testament pattern of fellowship that bound the brethren together.
- **Do not set your mind with the high things, but associate with the humble.** If we are looking for prominence then we will miss out. Jesus came in humility. His humility made Him great. It was not His greatness that made Him humble! We are called to emulate Him.
- **Do not be wise in your own opinions.** My cousin has a saying “everyone has their funny little ways....(pregnant pause)....except me”. It illustrates the point that we can often see the fault in others but it is hard to see it in ourselves. We need to listen to what others have to say. Importantly, we need to listen to what God has to say. Our opinions don’t matter – what God *says* is what is important. But even on things where God is silent, it is right for us to have opinions on them, but we must not bind them on others. Communication (even sharing our opinions) with others is about listening to and understanding what others think. Sometimes (oftentimes!) there are no right and wrong answers.
- **Repay no one evil for evil.** Like loving our enemies, this is contrary to our human nature. Our natural instinct is to hit back when we are attacked. For the supreme example of how to deal with this, look to Jesus at the cross. When He was falsely accused He stood there and took it. *Like a lamb before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.* Against those who put Him to death He said “*Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*”. Paul is about to say that God will right the wrongs of the world. Leave it to Him.
- **Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.** The character that we are called to transform to is one of good. We should not just be good when we are in the view of our brethren – but we should be that way by our nature – no matter who sees us. It goes to the heart of the matter (in fact to our heart). It is *who we are*, not just how we behave.
- **If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.** It is not always possible. It takes two to tango. Sometimes we can *cause* problems, and sometimes we can *exacerbate* them. God calls us to do neither, but rather go the other way, and do whatever we can that we might bring peace with others. At least as much as we can control the situation.
- **Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give way to wrath.** Like some other things that Paul has discussed, our *human nature* says hit back. But God says that there is going to be a day of judgement when those who are evil will be judged rightly and justly. Leave the revenge to Him. In fact, do good to our enemies. It might touch their conscience, and cause them to repent of what they have done.
- **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** It is easy to get swallowed up by the evil things that happen around us. But how do we react to those who do bad things to us? Remember the examples of Jesus.

Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds...