

Romans 12

By Andy Elliot

1. A basic exegetical principle may be stated as “When you encounter a therefore, it’s important to understand what the therefore is there for”. So, in verse 1, what is the therefore there for?

Hint: The answer is within verse 1 and in the chapters that preceded Romans 12

2. In verse 1, Paul instructs his readers to offer their bodies to God as a living, holy sacrifice, pleasing to God. For his Jewish readers this would have been straightforward; for his Greek readers this would have been surprising and problematic. Why? (apply the why to both the straightforward and the surprising)

3. In verse 2, Paul encourages his readers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Stott notes that the Greek for "be transformed" is *metamorphoo*, the same word used in describing Jesus in the transfiguration accounts. This transformation is said to take place through renewing of the mind. Discuss.

4. There is a considerable use of parallel structure in the chapter, especially regarding the coupling of negative imperatives with positive guidance.

- a. (v. 2) Don’t be conformed; be transformed
- b. (v. 3) Don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought; think of yourself with sober judgment.
- c. (v. 9) Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
- d. (v. 11) Never be lacking in zeal; keep your spiritual fervor.
- e. (v. 14) Don’t curse those who persecute you; bless them.
- f. (v. 14) Don’t be proud or conceited; be willing to associate with those of low position.
- g. (v. 17) Don’t repay evil with evil; do what is right in the eyes of everyone.
- h. (v. 19) Don’t take revenge; leave room for God’s wrath.
- i. (v. 21) Don’t be overcome by evil; overcome evil with good.

What is the benefit of coupling the negative with the positive?

5. Verses 4-8 talks about gifts, and these gifts are said to differ according to the grace given to us. So, different people have different gifts. In our church, we don’t talk much about this, especially regarding the (scary) gift of prophesy. What are we to make of the concept of gifts at RCRC?

Footnote: Gifts can be considered from a categorical perspective (Jane has gift X, Sally has gift Y) or from a continuous perspective (both Jane and Sally have gifts X and Y, but Jane is particularly strong in X, and Sally is particularly strong in Y). Does Paul (Scripture more generally) advocate for one of these perspectives over the other?

6. The heart of the chapter is full of ethical instructions that many commentators see as similar to Jesus' teachings. Note the following verse pairs, accordingly. This is interesting, in part because Paul wrote his letter to the Romans many years before the gospels were written. Thoughts?

Romans 12:14 ("Bless those who persecute you")
Luke 6:28 ("Bless those who curse you")

Romans 12:17 ("Do not repay anyone evil for evil")
Matthew 5:39 ("Do not resist an evildoer")

Romans 12:18 ("Live peaceably with all")
Mark 9:50 ("Be at peace with one another")

Romans 12:20 ("If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink")
Luke 6:27 ("Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you")

7. Regarding the prohibition against revenge in verse 19, N.T. Wright states "Getting our moral wills around this one is every bit as difficult as getting our minds around some of the trickier bits of Paul's writing in the earlier chapters." How are you doing at asking God to bless your enemies? What's with the heaping coal thing? Is this just an indirect route of getting revenge?

8. How can we "be overcome by evil" (verse 21)? What does modern wisdom say about taking revenge vs. letting go/forgiving that is consistent with the instruction here?

9. This isn't actually a question – it is a filler to set up the label below.

Extra Inning

10. In verses 9-11, the picture of ideal Christian living entails considerable passion: **hate** what is evil (hate, in the Greek, is abhor); **cling** to, or be **devoted** to the good; **outdo one another** in showing honor; be **zealous** and **ardent** in spirit (ardent, in the Greek, means boil or seethe, to be on fire for). Often we think of the godly man or woman as gentle, meek, and mild, but Paul seems to be pointing in another direction. Discuss.

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*Romans 1-11 is about the MERCIES of God – God’s mercy in sending his Son to die for undeserving sinners, God’s mercy in justifying sinners by faith, God’s mercy in sending his Spirit for sanctification.

It is on the basis of God’s mercies that Paul makes his ethical appeal to do X, Y, and Z. The motivation here is gratitude(!). Contemplate the mercies of God and that will provide the energy to live a holy life (and the instructions that follow provide the direction).

But, gratitude is not the only motivation – elsewhere, Paul point to positive models for us to live by and asks us to remember what is valuable (gives perspective). And, it is the HS who provides motivation.

2. In verse 1, Paul instructs his readers to offer their bodies to God as a living, holy sacrifice, pleasing to God. For his Jewish readers this would have been straightforward; for his Greek readers this would have been surprising and problematic. Why? (apply the why to both the straightforward and the surprising)

*For Jewish readers – body-soul intertwined, makes sense; the sacrifice piece makes sense. For Greek readers – soma-sema, so nothing good is linked to the body; the sacrifice piece might seem foreign. Where do WE fall here?

3. In verse 2, Paul encourages his readers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Stott notes that the Greek for "be transformed" is *metamorphoo*, the same word used in describing Jesus in the transfiguration accounts. This transformation is said to take place through renewing of the mind. Discuss.

*This sort of transformation is much more powerful than the mundane, steady sanctification that we typically think of – it’s a powerful, complete, fundamental change. The HS renews the mind – gives us a different perspective through which to view things – the Kingdom view.

4. There is a considerable use of parallel structure in the chapter, especially regarding the coupling of negative imperatives with positive guidance.

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What is the benefit of coupling the negative with the positive?

*Negative alone keeps you away from bad, but doesn't get you good. Need the good to provide a concrete guide to aim for.

5. Verses 4-8 talks about gifts, and these gifts are said to differ according to the grace given to us. So, different people have different gifts. In our church, we don't talk much about this, especially regarding the (scary) gift of prophesy. What are we to make of the concept of gifts at RCRC?

Footnote: Gifts can be considered from a categorical perspective (Jane has gift X, Sally has gift Y) or from a continuous perspective (both Jane and Sally have gifts X and Y, but Jane is particularly strong in X, and Sally is particularly strong in Y). Does Paul (Scripture more generally) advocate for one of these perspectives over the other?

*Ask Tim to chime in.

6. The heart of the chapter is full of ethical instructions that many commentators see as similar to Jesus' teachings. Note the following verse pairs, accordingly. This is interesting, in part because Paul wrote his letter to the Romans many years before the gospels were written. Thoughts?

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*Paul (around 55-56 AD) is likely working off of Gospel material from oral tradition. And, the same Spirit is guiding the thoughts of both Paul and the Gospel writers. Gospels at least 9-10 years (64/71) later (Mark).

7. Regarding the prohibition against revenge in verse 19, N.T. Wright states “Getting our moral wills around this one is every bit as difficult as getting our minds around some of the trickier bits of Paul’s writing in the earlier chapters.” How are you doing at asking God to bless your enemies? What’s with the heaping coal thing? Is this just an indirect route of getting revenge?

8. How can we “be overcome by evil” (verse 21)? What does modern wisdom say about taking revenge vs. letting go/forgiving that is consistent with the instruction here?

*Modern psychology contends that seeking revenge just perpetuates the problem by making you a prisoner of the other person’s wrongdoing. Forgiveness has tremendous health benefits for the forgiver.

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Extra Inning

10. In verses 9-11, the picture of ideal Christian living entails considerable passion: **hate** what is evil (hate, in the Greek, is abhor); **cling** to, or be **devoted** to the good; **outdo one another** in showing honor; be **zealous** and **ardent** in spirit (ardent, in the Greek, means boil or seethe, to be on fire for). Often we think of the godly man or woman as gentle, meek, and mild, but Paul seems to be pointing in another direction. Discuss.

*Passion should be the underlying, uniform constant in a Christian, but it is manifest through personality. Thus, passion can appear differently in different people. So, best to be careful in making any firm assumptions about a person’s spirituality.

Leader's Intro

(Below are Tim Collins' meanderings, not to be imputed to anyone else)

- So much of this chapter is about how to live together in community, where the engine of change is cognitive, that it would be excellent to glance over Romans 5-8 and see where he talks about how the new covenant affects our thinking (things like "present yourself to God as one raised from the dead", i.e., how you pray affects how you think, and "the mind of flesh cannot please God" at the start of ch 8). 2 Cor 3:18 comes to mind as well.
- This makes me wonder how modern psychology tells us to change the way we think. What, according to our modern understanding, is the optimal way to go about that?
- Paul starts with the famous "living sacrifice" exhortation.
 - He refers to this as your "reasonable" or "spiritual" worship. Stott talks about this word, *logikon*, as meaning appropriate or natural. BDAG has a slightly different spin, saying it's "carefully thought-out". A useful quote employing *logikon* is from Philo (Spec. Leg. 1, 277), "**God places no value on sacrificial animals, but on the sacrifice of a *logikon* [carefully thought-out] spirit**". Very much what Paul is saying!
 - The initial "therefore" seems to be tying ch 12 to the preceding in that it centers on the law. He's spent all this time talking about the role of the law. Now he says, here are the real sacrifices, here's the real law.
 - Stott makes a nice observation that "be transformed" (12:2) uses *metamorphoo*, which is the same word used in the transfiguration accounts.
 - The "will of God" in v. 2 probably first and foremost refers to God's current plan in Jesus to redeem and justify us and create one community. It will refer to all of God's will of course, but we don't want to forget the main thrust of what Paul's been saying up to this point.
- The chapter makes unprecedented use of parallel structure, and this will aid in fleshing out Paul's thinking:
 - So in vv 1-2 he uses antithesis: don't be conformed to the world, do change your thinking
 - The "for's/therefores" in vv. 1, 3, 4
 - The trio in v. 3, "don't be haughty-minded (*hyperfronein*), but you ought to think (*fronein*) with prudent/thoughtfulness/self-control (*sofronein*)--i.e., don't be haugty-thinking, think like a responsible, careful adult
 - The long list in vv. 6-8 of gifts paired with graces
 - etc.
- The role of faith leading to sober judgment in v. 3; faith leading to prophecy in v. 6, is intriguing. If faith is (as it was for Abraham) the trust to follow where God leads,

whether or not it all makes sense, then how does it lead to prophecy and sober judgment, and how do these relate? If, as Craig Keener points out, the best way to pursue prophecy (hearing and speaking God's will under God's power) is by knowing God's nature so you know what God would want, maybe this say that prophecy and discernment and judgment all come from being willing to trust God and follow him.

- More examples of the parallel structure:

GIFT	GRACE
prophecy	in faith
ministry	in ministering
teacher	in teaching
exhorter	in exhortation
giver	in generosity
leader	in diligence
compassionate	in cheerfulness

- So if "X in Y" means "you need Y to do X", then all these make sense but leader/diligence and prophet/faith jump out.
- Take prophecy in the above list: I don't think for a second it's appropriate for us to water down the supernatural aspect of prophecy. A prophet is NOT simply someone who says inspirational things, nor is it a preacher, no matter how many preachers would like to appropriate that mantle. There are no prophets active in our church at RCRC. At the same time, Paul tells us in 1 Cor to earnestly desire the greater gifts, and this is among them. There ARE prophets active in the modern church, even in the west, and we steadfastly pretend the Spirit is somehow unwilling to work this gift in our time or place
- Even if we don't pursue ecstatic trances we can still pursue the heart of prophecy which is a discernment of God's will--something this passage starts out with. 12:1-2 tell us we learn God's will by trying to think the way God does (bringing to mind 2 Pet 1:4). So even if we are determinedly non-charismatic we would all do well to pursue the lofty goal, for the good of the whole church, of learning to think the way God does. And the interesting thing 12:6 does is, it relates that gift to faith.
- Faith is a loaded word in Romans. Far from the cognitive ascent to doctrine propositions which Reformation scholasticism has made it, it's what Abraham had, even before there were doctrines to subscribe to or laws to obey. He has a willingness to say, "ok, don't know how this is going to play out, but count me in, I'll do it." (It's the "obedience of faith" from Rom 1:5.) And what I suspect is that THAT is how we learn to think more like God--by taking what we do know and stepping out from there. For Abe that meant believing God would send an heir, and it meant going to a foreign land. For the Roman Jews it meant trusting that even if they didn't keep kosher God would stick by them, and one day, eventually, the churches will

again be packed with their fellow Jews. For the Roman Gentiles it meant trusting that it wasn't some cosmic mistake that the true messiah of the Hebrews was popular with the goyim but not the Hebrews themselves.

- Paul describes the ideal Christian: discerning with sober judgment (v. 3), but not emotionless, because he is to hate (the Gk means to abhor, to hate strongly) evil; cling to, or be devoted to the good (NRSV has "hold fast"); outdo one another in honor, be zealous and "ardent" (NRSV) in spirit (and the Gk is stronger than "ardent"--the word *zeontes* comes from the word meaning to boil or seethe, to be on fire for). THAT'S how we are to serve the Lord. We so easily fall into this sort of Mitford-esque quiet country parish model of the Christian life in which we go about our humble ministries. That's not what Paul has in mind AT ALL. If we are going to be Christians, let's BE CHRISTIANS. So I find it helpful with a list like this to look for the apparent contradictions, and think what such a person would really be like. Are we really that person?
- Paul uses various means to motivate obedience and it's worth reflecting on these when we see a long list of paraenesis like this. Reformed Christians tend to immediately go to gratitude and stop there, since that is featured so prominently in the Heidelberg Catechism, but Paul uses other means as well, such as role models. E.g., Heb 11, which is all about examples to follow. And Paul lifts up himself in 1 Cor 11:1 and 1 Cor 4:16, just as we are called to imitate Abraham in Rom 4. Phil 4:8-9 says it well too. If Paul had his way we'd make sure at each Huddle one of us brought a "tale of the saints" and shared about something great or small, contemporary or historical, which a saint did to be like Christ. Eric Liddel, or Laurie and Cal Frelier, who this past summer invited some neighborhood boys to join them in their home for a little worship service. Without making it a holier-than-thou club there's still room for being inspired by the good works of others. This may seem like a goofy connection, but Mister Rogers once say, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" His mom was right.
- Andy's point is a good one, that if we have learned ANYTHING from Romans we need to see how to approach this passage without making it a new law hung around our necks. It's nothing new, but I find [the chart on page 2 of this handout](#) is what helps me (taken from a Xenos teaching by Dennis McCallum on Romans 7).
- I still think this is all about cognitive change, and it would be good to know what modern psychology tells us about how to change the way we think. I guess the other thought we talked about was that a big part of our motivation is deliberately reminding ourselves of eternal truths so that we learn to value eternal things. The more we can do this, the more we will find ourselves motivated internally to pursue things like this.