

2025 BIBLE STUDY SERIES
THEME: "HOPE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTY"

March 19, 2025

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER:
"Persevering in a Transformed Life"
Romans 12

Topics

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- Background and Context
- Exploring The Text
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- Life Application

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A. To what worldly lifestyles or values do we typically conform?

B. What are the patterns of the world that tempt us to conform?

C. How can a Christian renew his or her mind?

IMPORTANT EMPHASIS

The Transformative Not

Handling the Not(s) of Life with Wisdom makes us better. There are several people who indulge in behaviors simply because someone told them not to do it. These individuals intentionally participate in forbidden activity. Let's take for an example a child who is instructed "don't go in there" (speaking of a room or area). There is an instinctive curiosity of the unknown. What does he or she say to themselves "I have to find out for myself" instead of trusting the Parent (Parental Guidance). Is this possibly what we do in our lives with our heavenly Father? He instructs us "do not go in there" or do that (**Genesis 3:3** First law of mention) The reason(s) that you should comply is because there are benefits in trusting God and there are residual rewards in our consistent submission to His will.

This 12th Chapter and 2nd verse of Romans starts off with what I call the "Not" of life. Do *not* conform to this world. This is not just the mindset of Paul, but we also find this wording ("Not") in the Gospel among others in Matthew chapter 6 while Jesus is speaking about effective practices of prayer. **Matthew 6:6** Let's explore this. As we review these words of Jesus we begin to run into these Not(s). **Matthew 6:8** then renders to us the key "**Not**" Jesus explains "Do not be like them"! How do we live out these providential principles? It is all in the mind! Paul knows this so he states be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.

The mind in scripture is viewed as the center of the emotions. It is oft times associated with the heart. The primary word in the Hebrew is *Leb* which means heart. **Numbers 16:18**. In the Greek the word that is used is *kardia* **Matthew 13:15**. One of the most noted citations of Paul which concerns the mind is found in **Philippians 2:5**.

The reference to the mind is important. Paul does not envisage a mindless emotionalism, but a deeply intelligent approach to life as characteristic of the Christian who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Our thinking in Christ is vital to our Christian character and conduct. "Because your mind holds only one thought at a time, that thought is either contributing to your life or contaminating it". Nothing pushes out bad thoughts like God thoughts. **Proverbs 23:7** "For as a man thinketh in His Heart so is he." If your thoughts aren't working for you, it's time to exchange them. Tommy Newberry and Lyn Think 4:8.

Testimony of the Power of Romans

According to Augustine his long movement toward Christianity ended in a garden in Milan when he seemed to hear a voice saying, "Tolle lege, tolle lege" (Pick up, read it). His eyes fell on Paul's words in **Romans 13:13** and all his previous resistance to conversion was overcome.

Changing the Trends of the Mind

Insights to the landscape of Romans: There is a shift in Emphasis here to **Exhortation**. First dealing with more general issues of Christian living. Then there are **Ethical Implications** of eschatological existence (how we behave and think) *Smyth*

Paul expresses to the believers what disposition God desires them to model before their families and the world. They are to be a living _____ and to engage in sincere _____ **service** or worship.

Secondly, he tells them to beware to not pick up the habits of the world. The Habits of the world are _____. Worship of self or others outside of God is not a source of success

Verse 2 is a parallel exhortation to verse 1. The first focuses on bodies the 2nd concerns us as "minds." Taken together the emphasis is on the total self-given to God.

Rejecting- "Do not conform to this world" (the present evil age with its distorted values) Leenhardt when speaking of this age stated, "what madness it is to join this puppet show which is displayed on a tottering stage". With this positive attitude toward God Paul links a negative attitude to the pattern of this world. What a tragedy, then if (Christians) they conform to the perishing world they have left.

Renewing – The renewal of the mind in etymology is the force of the present tense which means that there is continual renewal. The verbs are passive "be conformed, be transformed" The self is caught between cosmic powers that struggle for control of life :sin and God. Christians are freed from the power of sin. Sin is still possible, but it is not necessary! Christians possess an enabling power that makes righteousness possible. By way of the Holy Spirit. Paul is still looking for a transformation at the deepest level which is more significant than to the conformity to the world's pattern. **2 Corinthians 3:18**

Revaluing- "Only such a transformed mind has the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgement at each given moment". This can only happen when our minds are changed. Gandhi suggests that "Love does not burn others it burns itself it will joyfully suffer even unto death". "The Christian has received the ability to prove what God's will is in the concrete situation."

KEY TERMS

Acceptable
Authentic
Blessing
Body
Commitment
Conformed
Conflict
Culture
Countercultural
Doctrinal
Empathy
Evil
Genuine
Gifts
God

Grace
Harmony
Holy
Hospitality
Humility
Hypocrisy
Living Sacrifice
Love
Mercies of God
Mind
Obedience
Overcoming Evil
Peace
Practical
Proportion

Real
Rejoicing
Renewing of Your Mind
Righteous
Service
Self-esteem
Sincere
Spiritual Gifts
Spiritual Service
Thinking
Transformation
Vengeance
Virtue
Will of God
Worship

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE Romans 12:1-21 NASB 1995

¹Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. ⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

OUTLINE

- I. **Present Yourself to God** (Romans 12:1-2)
 - A. Sacrifice
 - B. Separate
 - C. Shift
- II. **Practice Righteous Humility** (Romans 12:3-8)
 - A. Be Unpretentious
 - B. Be Unassuming
 - C. Be Unaffected
- III. **Practice Real Love** (Romans 12:9-13)
 - A. Be Authentic
 - B. Be Affectionate
 - C. Be Affirming
- IV. **Practice Peacemaking** (Romans 12:14-21)
 - A. Be a Blessing
 - B. Be Benevolent
 - C. Be a Builder

INTRODUCTION

In Romans Chapter 12, the apostle Paul encourages believers to live with humility, love, and peace despite the tumultuous and chaotic world that surrounded them. Each section in this study highlights the call to represent these virtues authentically. Paul has created a comprehensive guide for Christian conduct. It is also designed as an encouragement for believers to _____ in their transformed life until Christ's return.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul's letter to the Roman church, addressing Jewish and Gentile believers, aims to strengthen their faith and unity. Romans 12 emphasizes practical Christ-like lifestyles, urging believers to be living sacrifices, embracing worship, service, love, and spiritual gifts. Paul further urges the believers to present themselves to God, and be _____ by the renewing of their minds. Conversely, they were warned not to be conformed to the worldly patterns of the surrounding culture. Paul highlights the diversity of spiritual gifts among the believers and encourages serving with enthusiasm, rejoicing in hope, being patient in adversity, and overcoming evil with good.

EXPLORING THE TEXT (Romans 12:1-2)

I. Present Yourself to God (Romans 12:1-2)

- A. Sacrifice
- B. Separate
- C. Shift

¹Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul moves from a _____ discussion to a _____ discussion, for Christian doctrine translates into action. The first eleven chapters of this letter reveal God's mercy to sinners in that he sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins. The last five chapters explain our obligation to God. If the early message of the letter is the way we all can come to God through Christ, then the closing part of the letter is the way we all can live for God in Christ. In view of all God has done for us, how can we respond in a way that is pleasing to him?

Sacrifice. In verse 1, Paul encourages believers to live for God by offering their entire selves, represented by their bodies, as "**living and holy**" sacrifices. This means dedicating all aspects of life—emotions, thoughts, desires, and actions—to God's service. While sacrifices were important in the Old Testament, God values heartfelt _____ more (**1 Samuel 15:22**). Obedience is the foundation upon which true worship and a relationship with God are built. Believers are urged to set aside personal desires, use their resources for God, and trust in His guidance, making their lives a thank-offering [agape' love offering] to Him.

Separate. When believers offer their entire self to God, a change will happen in their relation to the world. Christians are called to a **different lifestyle** than what the world offers with its behavior and customs, which are usually selfish and often corrupting (**Galatians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:14**). Christians are to **live as citizens of a future world**.

Shift. There will be pressure to conform, to continue living according to the script written by the world, but believers are forbidden to give in to that pressure. However, refusing to conform to this world's values must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs must go to the **transforming of the way we** _____. We must be willing to "shift" from the unbiblical temptations of this world to the things of God (**Colossians 3:1-11**).

Believers are to **experience a complete transformation from the inside out**. And the change must begin in the mind, where all thoughts and actions begin. Much of the work is done by **God's Spirit in us**, and the most effective tool used is **God's word**. As we memorize and meditate upon God's word, our way of thinking changes. Our minds become **first informed**, and **then transformed to the** _____ **of God**, the pattern for which we were originally designed. When believers have had their minds transformed and are becoming more like Christ, they will know what God wants and they will want to do it for it is good, pleasing to God, and perfect for them.

Several biblical figures experienced dramatic transformations or Changed for the Better":

Moses from a fugitive to a leader

Saul/Paul of Tarsus from a persecutor to an apostle, and

Zacchaeus from a hated tax collector to a repentant follower of Jesus

The Woman at the well from a woman of questionable character to an evangelist

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the first step for believers in the transformation process? (12:1)

"...to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice..."

2. What did the apostle Paul tell the believers in Rome not to do? (12:2)

"...do not be conformed to this world..."

3. What did the apostle Paul tell the believers in Rome to do to be transformed?

"...be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

4. Who are some of the biblical figures who experienced a dramatic life transformation or Change for the Better?

Moses from a fugitive to a leader

Saul/Paul of Tarsus from a persecutor to an apostle, and

Zacchaeus from a hated tax collector to a repentant follower of Jesus

The Woman at the well from a woman of questionable character to an evangelist

EXPLORING THE TEXT (Romans 12:3-8)**II. Practice Righteous Humility (Romans 12:3-8)**

- A. Be Unpretentious
- B. Be Unassuming
- C. Be Unaffected

³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul emphasizes the importance of _____ **and unity among believers**. He advises individuals not to think too highly of themselves but to exercise sound judgment, recognizing that each person has been given a measure of faith by God. Paul highlights the diversity of spiritual gifts within the Christian community, encouraging believers to use their unique gifts for the benefit of the whole body of Christ. These gifts include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and showing mercy. Each gift should be exercised with sincerity, diligence, and cheerfulness, contributing to the unity and functioning of the church as one body in Christ.

Be Unpretentious [modest, humble, without airs]. Paul is here speaking as **God's messenger**, an apostle (**Romans 1:5**). The authority he was about to exercise was not his own by right, but was an evidence of God's grace. He warned the believers that inflated pride has no place in a believer's life (**Romans 3:27; 11:18, 20**). This is especially significant in light of Paul's teaching up to this point in his letter. The Jews are not better than the Gentiles; the Gentiles are not better than the Jews. Rather, all are dependent on God's mercy for their salvation, thus there is no room for pride. Any such pride would undermine the oneness vital to the growth of the church.

Be Unassuming [humble, inconspicuous, not arrogant]. Paul describes the identity of God's redeemed people as a body with many parts, each having a special function. Just as physical bodies have different parts like eyes and ears, Christ's body is made up of many believers performing different roles. All parts must work together for the body to function properly, emphasizing unity and _____ among believers. This concept is further explained in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**. And as our bodies cannot be taken apart, so **we belong to each other**. The members work together to make the body work. When it is not done, the body suffers.

We must be humble and recognize our partnership in the body of Christ. Only then can our gifts be used effectively, and only then can we appreciate others' gifts. God gives us gifts so we can build up his church.

Be Unaffected [genuine, natural, sincere]. If a person has the gift of **serving**, then he or she should use it where and when it is needed, and use it to its best and fullest capacity. The same

goes for the other gifts that Paul mentions teaching, encouraging, sharing, leading, showing kindness. Whatever gift a believer has, he or she should faithfully use it in gratitude to God. By focusing on the application of the gifts, Paul is removing the tendency toward unhealthy self-congratulation in the discovery of gifts. If we are busy using our gifts, we will be less taken up with concerns over status and power. Genuine service controls pride.

III. **Practice Real Love** (Romans 12:9-13)

- A. Be Authentic
- B. Be Affectionate
- C. Be Affirming

⁹ *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*

¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*

¹¹ *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*

Romans 12:9-13 emphasizes the importance of genuine love and community among believers. It encourages love without hypocrisy, abhorring evil, and clinging to good. Believers are urged to be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honoring each other, and serving the Lord with diligence and fervor. This passage highlights rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, and being devoted to prayer. It also calls for contributing to the needs of the saints, as desired by Jesus (**Matt. 25:40**), and practicing hospitality, fostering a supportive and loving Christian community (**John 13:35**).

Be Authentic. The key ingredient in interpersonal relationships is love—God's love (*agape*). This kind of love is a self-sacrificial love, a love that cares for the well-being of others. All the gifts that are exercised in the body should be expressed in this love.

To hate what is wrong means turning toward what is good and clinging to it. This principle is practiced when we are able to detest an evil act while practicing compassion toward the one who has done it. This principle is also important regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts. Believers must always be careful that the use of their gifts does not lead them to unloving or evil motives, attitudes, or actions (**1 Corinthians 13:2**).

Be Affectionate. Paul emphasizes the importance of brotherly love and respect among believers, countering the idea of rugged individualism. This love, akin to familial loyalty, accommodates imperfections and fosters communication and commitment, essential for a church's unity and impact. Honoring others involves recognizing their value as God's creations and their unique contributions to the church, as supported by **Ephesians 5:21** and **Philippians 2:3-4**.

Be Affirming [supportive, encouraging, upholding]. Believers are encouraged to serve the Lord enthusiastically, using their spiritual gifts without succumbing to laziness or apathy. They should maintain high spiritual zeal, fighting against discouragement and negativity. Joy and patience are essential, trusting in God's control and being prayerful. Christians are called to help those in need, emphasizing the importance of community and hospitality. Unlike social entertaining, Christian hospitality focuses on meeting guests' needs, regardless of the host's resources.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

5. How did the apostle Paul advise the believers in Rome to view themselves in relation to one another? (12:3)

“...not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think...”
6. How did the apostle Paul counsel the Roman believers to use their different gifts: (12:6)

“...according to the proportion of his faith...”
7. How does the apostle Paul counsel the Roman believers about the character of their love? (12:7)

“Let love be without hypocrisy.”
8. How were the Roman believers counseled to deal with tribulations? (12:12)

“...persevering in tribulation...”

EXPLORING THE TEXT (Romans 12:14-21)

- IV. **Practice Peacemaking** (Romans 12:14-21)
- A. Be a Blessing
 - B. Be Benevolent
 - C. Be a Builder

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

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:14-21 emphasizes the importance of living in _____ and _____ with others. It encourages believers to bless those who persecute them, rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Paul advises against pride and urges association with the lowly. He instructs believers not to repay evil with evil but to respect what is right and strive for peace with everyone. Revenge is discouraged, leaving room for God's justice. Instead, believers are encouraged to care for their enemies, overcoming evil with good.

Be a Blessing. Paul advises believers in Rome to avoid retaliation and respond with good when persecuted, following Jesus' teachings. Christians should share in others' joys and sorrows, offering compassion and support. Embracing both life's hardships and excitements, believers can fully experience life, showing love by identifying with others' emotions.

Be Benevolent. In order to live in harmony with others, and especially with fellow believers, we must not act important or think we know it all. Instead, we are to enjoy the company of ordinary people. James leveled a scathing indictment on believers who were practicing favoritism and elitism in the church (**James 2:1-9**). People of low position are only identified as such by the world's standards. Christ thought they were worth dying for, and so we can associate with them.

Be a Builder. Paul emphasizes the importance of responding to evil with good, particularly in interactions with nonbelievers. Believers are encouraged not to repay evil for evil but to act honorably, maintaining peaceful relations whenever possible (**Isaiah 35:4; 1 Peter 3:9**). Paul advises leaving vengeance to God, as taking revenge can lead to grudges and feuds (**Romans 12:19**). Instead, believers should care for their enemies, meeting their needs and potentially making them feel ashamed of their actions (**Romans 12:20-21**). Ultimately, overcoming evil is achieved by doing good and allowing God to cultivate sincere love within us.

In the context of peacemaking, a builder is someone who actively works to create and maintain peace by fostering understanding, reconciliation, and harmony among individuals or groups. This involves mediation, empathy, and constructive dialogue, all of which contribute to building a peaceful and unified community.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" **Matthew 5:9**.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

9. What were the believers in the Church at Rome told to do to those who persecuted them? (12:14a)

"Bless those who persecute you."

10. What did the apostle Paul counsel the believers in the Church at Rome to do to those who persecuted them? (12:14b)

"...bless and do not curse."

11. Who is responsible for vengeance against those who persecute you? (12:19)

GOD

12. Whose responsibility was it to keep the Roman Church community in peace and harmony? (12:14-21)

All the members working together!

LIFE APPLICATION

Think about it—

Refraining from Retaliation. How do we do it?

It's a call to refrain from returning evil with evil, and instead, to choose a path of love and forgiveness. Jesus himself exemplified this by praying for his persecutors from the cross, saying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**).

What will you commit to do over the next 30 days to make your church community more loving and harmonious?

RESOURCES

Adult Questions for LESSONMaker, LOGOS Bible Software.

Anchor Bible Dictionary

Baker's Bible Dictionary

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

Christ and Culture, H. Richard Niebuhr

Christ and Culture Revisited, D. A. Carson

Life Application New Testament Commentary