

The Book of Romans Study Guide

Chapter 12

After presenting a detailed theological argument on the past, present and future of national Israel in regard to their inclusion in the people of God, and addressing his concern about Gentile believers acting in arrogance toward Israel because of a flawed understanding of God’s plan, he now moves on to covering some issues related to the general life of believers.

12:1-3

- v 1 In light of Paul’s words at the end of chapter 11 concerning the mercy, wisdom, knowledge, and judgments of God, he calls upon believers to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God. This would not be a literal act on the altar. After all, this sacrificial offering keeps on living the entire time. But any sacrifice would need to be consistent with the Levitical offerings, most notably the need to be without spot or blemish, which is also consistent with being a holy sacrifice.

So, this is an exhortation to dedicate not just our souls to God in an eternal sense, but the purity of our bodies in earthly sense. A living sacrifice, then, is the daily, voluntary dedication of a believer's entire life—body, mind, and actions—to God as an act of worship. How, then, can we make our bodies acceptable to God?

- v 2 He shows that it requires a change from the inside out. He instructs us – “do not be conformed to this world.” The Greek word used here is *suschēmatizo*. It literally means “to fashion with.” It has the sense of a sculptor making a figure just like a previous one. The English also bears that out—con (“with”) and form. So it is about fashioning something to look just like something else. And that is what happens when we allow ourselves to take on the same form as others that are ungodly.

Paul is saying that we, as believers, need to resist that. Instead, he writes that our need is to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Here, he uses a very different term, *metamorpho*’ō – that means “to change into a different form.” These words seem similar, but conforming is a shaping from the outside, like being influenced by culture, while transforming, in contrast, is an inner change that produces a different outer appearance.

So, the question is – what brings about this inner change? We know from God’s Word that when we believe in Yeshua and we receive the gift of salvation, we become something new. In John 3:3 Yeshua said that we become born again, which is a new birth. In Titus 3:5 Paul describes this change as the “regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Paul also writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17—“Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creature: the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” So, we become something new that has changed from the inside out, and will be apparent to others. That is what it means to be transformed.

Notice also in Romans 12:2 that is a transformation by the “renewing of your mind.” You have a new way of thinking that wasn’t there previously. And it is an on-going process. A born-again believer is able to think differently than those who are not, and differently than the way you yourself thought before you were saved.

It doesn't mean that you will never sin again. But you have the ability to think differently and to exercise your will in such a way that you are not conformed to the world around you. And, by doing so, that will prove that you are complying with the will of God.

v 3 Paul shows that humility is an important factor in the renewing of a person's mind.

In chapter 11, we saw that humility is the opposite of arrogance.

Only now, instead of warning Gentiles about arrogance toward Jews, he calls for every man/person not to think too highly of himself.

And that means having sound judgment, which implies seeing ourselves as we truly are, rather than being taken over by pride.

12:4-13

v 4 Paul now builds upon his exhortation in verse one to present our physical bodies as a living sacrifice, by using the body as a metaphor for the unity of believers. So, just as we have various body parts that accomplish different functions, the same is true for the members of any given congregation. We all have a function (Gr. *praxis*), meaning an office or a role or simply things that we are called to do.

v 5 Paul is showing the importance of living collectively instead of individually. To put it another way, it's not just about you. The Bible is very clear about the importance of seeing ourselves connected to other people. The metaphor of the body brings that out. The same is true for the teachings of Yeshua. The Lord's prayer, for example, only uses plural pronouns. And if we see ourselves in that light, it will have an impact on the way that we think about other people.

v 6 He applies this general principle of diversity within the body of Messiah to spiritual gifts. The point is that since spiritual gifts are distributed throughout the body, and no one gets them all, we need one another in order to flourish

v 6-8 Paul cites 7 spiritual gifts as being representative of the full measure that the Holy Spirit grants to believers:

- **Prophecy:** Perceiving and declaring a specific message from God.
- **Serving:** A selfless capacity to meet practical needs.
- **Teaching:** Explaining and applying the Word of God effectively.
- **Exhortation:** Motivating and comforting others in their faith.
- **Giving:** Sharing personal resources with extraordinary generosity and sincerity
- **Leadership:** Directing and motivating the body of Messiah with diligence.
- **Mercy:** Showing deep compassion and practical help to those who are suffering.

The implication is that each person is called to use his/her gift from the Spirit, so that the body functions well, just like a human body does when healthy.

Other gifts are described in 1 Corinthians 7, 12 and 1 Peter 4:

- **Word of Wisdom:** Supernatural insight for practical decision-making (1 Cor. 12:8).

- **Word of Knowledge:** Divinely revealed information about a person or situation (1 Cor. 12:8).
- **Faith:** Extraordinary confidence in God’s power to intervene (1 Cor. 12:9).
- **Gifts of Healing:** Divine restoration of physical, emotional, or spiritual health (1 Cor. 12:9).
- **Working of Miracles:** Deeds beyond ordinary human ability performed by God's power (1 Cor. 12:8).
- **Discerning of Spirits:** The ability to tell if a spirit or teaching is from God, man, or an ungodly source (1 Cor. 12:10).
- **Tongues:** Speaking in a language not previously learned (1 Cor. 12:10).
- **Interpretation of Tongues:** Explaining a message given in tongues for the benefit of the congregation (1 Cor. 12:10).
- **Helping:** Assisting others in their ministries (1 Cor. 12:28).
- **Administration:** The ability to steer a ministry toward its goals (1 Cor. 12:28).
- **Hospitality:** Making strangers and guests feel welcome and served (1 Pet. 4:9).
- **Celibacy:** A special grace to remain single for the service of God (1 Cor. 7:7).

In the remainder of this chapter, Paul shifts the focus to practical, daily living as a response to God's mercy, emphasizing that true love is seen in actions, not just words. His exhortation is very much an echo of Yeshua’s teachings, especially from His Sermon on the Mount.

v 9-13 In these verses, he outlines the characteristics of authentic godly love, by urging believers to possess sincere affection, abhor evil, and hold fast to good. It commands fervent service to the Lord, prioritizing others with honor, maintaining hope and patience in trials, and practically supporting fellow believers through generosity and hospitality. So, for each of these points, it can serve as a means of self-evaluation. We can ask—does that truly describe me? And, if not, it becomes an indicator that we have some work to do.

So, for example, are we “devoted to one another in brotherly love?” And “give preference to one another in honor?” Or do we tear down other people who don’t fit into our preferred box?

Do we serve Adonai, the true and living God, and Lord above all lords? Or do we serve other lords of power & wealth and false deities?

Do we rejoice in the kind of hope that is in God alone instead of rejoicing in what we have accomplished in our own strength? Are we truly devoted to prayer or do we tend to seek answers elsewhere?

12:14-21

v 14 He narrows the focus to responding in a righteous way to the difficult situations of life, beginning with persecution. This may be the ultimate test of faith and righteousness. For persecution is almost always undeserved, and it may not be about you personally at all, but about what you believe. So, our response to persecution serves as a testimony of the strength of our belief.

Paul's exhortation to bless in response is very much like Yeshua's words: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). And that truly makes persecution a spiritual battle for where souls end up in eternity.

- v 15 Paul calls believers to act with the same kind of humility and compassion as Yeshua, by treating fellow believers as family by connecting with their emotional and social lives, rather than pursuing prideful individualism. Rejoicing with others is, in part, a call to worship together, as we do on Shabbat.

What about when other people are having a difficult time of some sort? He doesn't call upon us to try to diminish the sorrow that people experience or to try to get them to get over it. He simply calls us to weep. That means being there when times of pain and sorrow come in the lives of others. In such times, it is often best just to be a good listener rather than trying to fix things. And, the best message of all might be expressed with your own tears instead of your words.

- v 16 The reason he calls for believers to "be of the same mind toward one another" is that in the previous chapter, he wrote about Jews and Gentiles being united in the same "olive tree." He also gave warnings against arrogance, so here in this chapter, he is showing that it is important for the branches to get along with one another.

- v 17 When Paul calls upon us never to "pay back evil for evil to anyone," it is a challenge to our very nature that is manifested in virtually any situation of life. And he doesn't give us the option of behaving graciously with other believers and mean-spirited with those who do not believe. Again, he is following Yeshua's lead, for He described how we are to respond to mistreatment by others this way:

"But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:39-42).

- v 18 That kind of response is at the heart of Paul's call to be at peace with all men.

- v 19 And the same is true in regard to other people facing consequences for evil. We are to leave vengeance up to God alone. And the reason is that God has reserved it for Himself, as shown by Paul's quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35, which is a passage in which Adonai makes it clear that when people engage in acts of evil, He will deal with it in His own timing and manner. Our calling is about trusting God who, in His perfection, will get it right, when the time is right.

- v 20-21 Instead of vengeance, we are called to the same radical sacrificial alternative that Yeshua proclaimed earlier, by demonstrating tangible love toward our enemies. Again, these words serve as a means of self-evaluation regarding the extent of genuine righteousness in our lives.

Can you rightly say that you are feeding and satisfying the thirst of your enemy? These

things are not easy to do – they are contrary to our nature that desires retribution. But both Yeshua and Paul have shown us that this is what it means to be genuine citizens of His kingdom of God. And, as we read at the beginning of this chapter, that requires a new way of thinking that that is transformational in nature, not a result of being conformed to the way of the world.