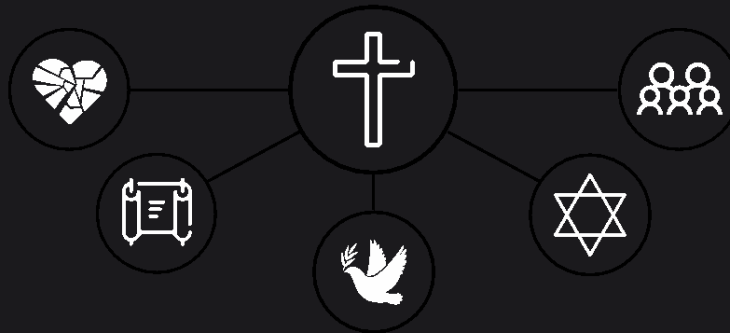




ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Title: How Should We Live?

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Date: June 4, 2023

Main Idea: We offer our body as a living sacrifice to Christ because of the “mercies of God” and to be transformed in Christ.

READ ROMANS 12: 1-2 ¹“I APPEAL TO YOU THEREFORE, BROTHERS,¹ BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, ²TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES ³AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.² ³DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD,³ BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY ⁴THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND, THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY ⁵DISCERN WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, WHAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT.⁴”

Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will

need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Discussion-Based Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Lecture Tip: If your style is largely lecture style, you can use the headings and questions to make your main points for the text. Then as you teach, you could follow-up with application and apply questions sprinkled into the explanation of the text in your teaching. The answers are provided below.

There is also additional space after each section if you print the lessons and take notes.

Highlight – What stands out?

These two short verses hold an immense amount of weight. Paul is stating that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifice because of “the mercies of God” - but what does that mean? Let's find out.

1. What stands out to you in verse 1? Are there keywords or phrases that make you pause and think?

He switches tone in what and how he is talking. He moves to an imperative instead of a theological tone. There are a lot of action words: appeal, living sacrifice, worship, present your bodies. There are also a lot of contrasts: do not do this, do this instead.

What does it mean to be transformed by the renewal of the mind? What is God's will? What does it look like to be a living sacrifice? They would have understood sacrifices because of the Jewish sacrificial system.

2. What theological concepts or ideas does Paul talk about in these verses?

Mercies of God. Living sacrifice. Holiness. Worship. Renewing the mind. Discernment. Will of God.

3. How does the tone of these verses differentiate from chapters 1-11 of Romans?

He moves from the theological to the practical in these verses.

4. What do you feel Paul is trying to tell us in these verses?

Theology leads to transformed living. We can know a lot of things, but it must lead to worship and transformed living.

Explain – What does this mean?

I'm sure in the Highlight section you noticed that verse 1 has the word "therefore" and you asked yourself, what is it there for? It is presumed that Paul is referring to the "mercies of God" as everything BEFORE chapter 12, especially chapters 1-8. Let's dig into the first 8 chapters of Romans. Understanding Romans 12:1-2 and being able to apply it to your life can only happen if you understand the "mercies of God" that Paul is referring to.

Tip for Lecture Style: As you write your lesson, you can summarize these details and explain them in your lesson to your class.

Romans Chapter	Brief Overview	Notes
Chapter 1 "Man's Rebellion"	The prospect of submitting is hard. We turn away because of sinful nature and suppressing the Truth.	(In this section, write down your observations that could help you as you teach and facilitate)
Chapter 2 "Jews Condemned"	Jews disobeying the spirit of the law. All about the internal condition of the heart.	
Chapter 3 "All Men Condemned"	None are justified. The law cannot be a pathway to justification.	
Chapter 4 "Just and Justifier"	Justification by faith. Christ takes our sin and we take Christ's righteousness.	
Chapter 5 "Peace with God"	Being justified by faith means we have Peace with God.	

Chapter 6 “Free From Sin, Slaves to God”	The faith that justifies is always accompanied by fruit, action, worship, disciple making, etc.	
Chapter 7 “Struggling with Sin”	Flesh battles with the Spirit. “I do what I don’t want to do and do not do what I want to do.”	
Chapter 8 “Living by the Spirit”	Living by the Spirit for Christ!	
Chapters 9-11	What does it look like for God to be merciful to all people?	

Based on all of this, what are the mercies of God? List out all that God gave us. **(Teacher Tip: You could ask your class to remember all the ways God has been merciful to us in Romans 1-11).** Why is it so important for us to understand the overview of the “mercies of God” to live our lives for Christ?

God's mercies are all of his goodness and kindness to us in Christ. Everything Paul writes about in Romans 1-11 are the mercies of God. He has justified us, there is nothing left to prove. He has reversed the curse of sin that Adam brought. He gave up his son for our sins. We're united to him by faith. He's given everything for us. How can we not also give him all of our lives?

Our obedience is fueled by a right understanding of who God is. If we don't understand him and how he acts in the world, we won't understand how we are supposed to live lives of obedience to him. All of Romans 12:1-2 is about walking in obedience to him. We need to know him to obey him.

1. How does this “living sacrifice” differ from Old Testament Law? What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? Remember, the audience Paul is writing to would think of sacrificial language as literal because it was still in practice.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices paid the penalty for sin, but Paul has already made it clear that we are justified by Christ, not the law. So he can't be talking about self-justification by offering as a living sacrifice. In many ways, this feels like a response to what Christ has done (because he says he appeals to them “by the mercies of God.”). But the audience would have understood what a sacrifice meant—it meant death. Something had to die in order for them to live, so he is getting at the totality of what it means to follow Christ. We are to die to our lives and ourselves in order to obey Christ. We aren't paying the penalty of our sin, but we are casting our lives down for the sake of Christ and obedience to him.

A living sacrifice gives everything to Christ. There is no part of the sacrifice in the Old Testament system that was left unaffected by the process. They had to die. But Paul is not asking us to die, he is asking us to live. He is calling us to live for Christ and lay everything at his feet. Every part of our lives is worship to him.

2. What are your thoughts on the following quote; “Justification cost you nothing, but sanctification will cost you everything”?

This is the message of Romans 12, but also the message of so much of the New Testament. John talks about abiding in Christ in John 15, and that we will bear fruit. This is the same message. We can't earn our salvation, but in order to live out our salvation our whole life must be transformed.

3. Look up cruciform in a dictionary. What does it say? Read Matthew 16:24-28 and compare with the WHY of Romans 12:1-2.

The shape of a cross.

Paul gives us the “why” of taking up our cross. We take up our cross, we make our life the shape of the cross, because of what Christ has done for us. He’s done everything for us. We follow him with all we have. We take up the symbol of death—the cross—in order to worship him with all that is in us.

4. In verse 2, Paul states “do not be conformed of this world, but be transformed”. Look up these words in a dictionary. What is the difference between “transformed” and “conformed”?

Transformed: make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character of

Conformed: comply with rules, standards, or laws.

To be conformed is an external action (you can comply, but you’re whole being isn’t moved). But to be transformed is an “inside/out” change.

5. Verse 2 says that we are transformed by the renewal of our minds. Look up the following verses. How are we transformed based on these verses:

- 2 Corinthians 3:18 – *the Spirit*
- John 15:1-8 – *Abiding in Christ*
- Psalm 1 – *the Word*

6. What is the effect of being transformed by the renewal of our mind?

Being able to test and discern God’s will.

It’s a progression. We look at all that God has done for us in Christ, we respond in whole life worship and devotion to him, and it leads us to want to be like him, which causes us to put off our old life (conformity to the world) and put on the new life (transformation by the word). So when we question whether we are in God’s will or want to know what God would have us do, we lean into the word that we’ve already poured into our life. Our union with Christ is essential in this process.

Apply – How does this change me?

This passage is highly practical, so it would be good to spend time as a class talking about all the ways the text lands on you and convicts you of ways you need to confess sin and make a change. Some of these questions will lend themselves to that type of discussion and teaching. These answers aren't included here because they are subjective to everyone's own application.

1. In a commentary by F.F. Bruce, he states that “Doctrine is never taught in the Bible simply that it may be known; it is taught in order that it

may be translated into practice”. We often forget that our belief in Christ is only the starting point to our walk with Him. We are to continuously grow and worship with obedient hearts. Read John 13:17 and reflect on the verse in conjunction with Romans 12:1-2. How do you feel this has impacted you in your current walk with Christ?

2. One commentator talks about false stories of this world, such as, romanticism, postmodernism, perfectionism, etc. (with the true story being the story of the Gospel). These false stories aren't inherently bad, but trusting them in a way that we don't trust Christ is where we fall short. Are there false stories of this world that you find easier to trust/try to control than Christ?
3. One commentator says: “Instead of living by standards of the world at discord with God, believers are exhorted to let the renewing of their minds by the power of the Spirit transform their lives into conformity with God's will.” God's mercies are countless and immeasurable. Do you find it easy to live as a living sacrifice to Him? Where do you feel you consistently fall short? Is there a part of your life you are holding back from submitting to Christ in total worship? (Money, job, family, friendships, free time, purity, etc.) How can you use your community to help you in this area?
4. Due to Christ's dying on the cross for our sins, our worship looks different than those in the Old Testament. A commentator stated “....there is always room for worship rendered by obedient hearts.” How many ways do you find yourself worshipping God? Do you find it easier when you're refreshed or renewed?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. This text is meant to encourage, not condemn. How is it an encouragement to you? Think about your walk with Christ right now, how do you want this knowledge to change your walk?
2. Think about Paul’s heart writing this letter to his people in Rome. The letter is an encouragement, but also a truth giving letter. How will you use this letter to share the Gospel and about true heart change with believers and unbelievers?
3. What ways do you need to renew your mind? What steps can you take this week to commit to being transformed by the renewal of your mind?

Teacher Tip in preparing your lesson. Try to summarize what Paul is saying in a few sentences before you read the commentary. That will help anchor your lesson, whether you're discussion style or lecture style. Then use the commentary to reinforce what you have personally learned from the text. The John Stott commentary below is a supplement to the F.F. Bruce commentary you were given in August.

Commentary: Taken from John Stott's commentary on Romans 12:1-2

Note to Group Leaders: You also have your F.F. Bruce Commentary on Romans you were given on Team Night. You can use that one, in addition to this one, to help you grasp the text. Reach out to Courtney Reissig if you need one or haven't received yours.

17. Our relationship to God: consecrated bodies and renewed minds

12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, Paul begins, probably conveying by the verb *parakalēo* a mixture of entreaty and authority. He then goes on to indicate the people to

whom he is addressing his appeal, the ground on which he bases it, and what it consists of.

The people the apostle is about to exhort he calls *brothers* (1), and we can hardly doubt that his choice of this word is deliberate. Throughout the letter's earlier chapters he has been conscious of the tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church, and in chapters 9–11 he has been describing the roles of Israel and of the nations in the unfolding, historical plan of God. He will revert to them again for the last time in chapters 14–15. But now, as he develops his appeal, the distinction between the olive tree's natural and grafted branches fades into the background. Now all believers, irrespective of their ethnic origin, are brothers and sisters in the one international family of God, and so all have precisely the same vocation to be the holy, committed, humble, loving and conscientious people of God.

Secondly, the ground of Paul's appeal is indicated by his use of the conjunction *therefore* and by his reference to *God's mercy*, literally his 'mercies' in the plural (RSV), a Hebraism for the many and varied manifestations of his mercy. For eleven chapters Paul has been unfolding the mercies of God. Indeed, the gospel is precisely God's mercy to inexcusable and undeserving sinners, in giving his Son to die for them, in justifying them freely by faith, in sending them his life-giving Spirit, and in making them his children. In particular, the 'key-word' of Roman 9–11 is 'mercy'.¹ For salvation depends 'not ... on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy' (9:16), and his purpose is 'to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy' (9:23). Further, as the disobedient Gentiles 'have now received mercy', so too disobedient Israel will 'now receive mercy' (11:30f.). 'For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all' (11:32).

It is, then, *in view of God's mercy* (1a) that Paul issues his ethical appeal. He knows—not least from his own experience—that there is no greater incentive to holy living than a contemplation of the mercies of God. F. F. Bruce has written: 'It was well said by Thomas Erskine of Linlathen that "in the New Testament religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude". It is not by accident that in Greek one and the same noun (*charis*) does duty for both "grace" and "gratitude".'² God's grace, far from encouraging or condoning sin, is the spring and foundation of righteous conduct.

Thirdly, having considered the objects and the ground of Paul's appeal, we note its double nature. It concerns both our bodies and our minds, the presentation of our bodies to God and our transformation by the renewal of our minds. First, our bodies. *I urge you ...*, he writes, *to offer your bodies as living*

RSV The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NT, 1946; second edition, 1971; OT, 1952).

¹ Cranfield, vol. II, p. 448. True, 'mercy' translates *oiktirmos* in 12:1 and *eleos* (or its cognate verb) in 9:16, 23 and 11:30ff. Nevertheless, although the words are different, the sense is the same.

² Bruce, p. 213 footnote, quoting Thomas Erskine, *Letters* (1877), p. 16.

sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (1b). In order to maintain the sacrificial imagery throughout the sentence, Paul uses five more and less technical terms. He represents us as a priestly people, who, in responsive gratitude for God's mercy, *offer* or present our bodies as living sacrifices. These are described as both *holy* and *pleasing to God*, which seem to be the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a fragrant aroma.³ Such an offering is our *spiritual act of worship*. 'Spiritual' translates *logikos*, which could mean either 'reasonable' (AV) or 'rational'. If the former is correct, then the offering of ourselves to God is seen as the only sensible, logical and appropriate response to him in view of his self-giving mercy. If 'rational' is correct, then it is 'the worship offered by mind and heart' (REB), spiritual as opposed to ceremonial, 'an act of intelligent worship' (JBP), in which our minds are fully engaged. Several commentators illustrate this by a delightful quotation from Epictetus, the first-century Stoic philosopher: 'If I were a nightingale, I would do what is proper to a nightingale, and if I were a swan, what is proper to a swan. In fact I am *logikos* [sc. a rational being], so I must praise God.'⁴

What, however, is this living sacrifice, this rational, spiritual worship? It is not to be offered in the temple courts or in the church building, but rather in home life and in the market-place. It is the presentation of our bodies to God. This blunt reference to our bodies was calculated to shock some of Paul's Greek readers. Brought up on Platonic thought, they will have regarded the body as an embarrassing encumbrance. Their slogan was *sōma sēma estin* ('the body is a tomb'), in which the human spirit was imprisoned and from which they longed for its escape. Still today some Christians feel self-conscious about their bodies. The traditional evangelical invitation is that we give our 'hearts' to God, not our 'bodies'. Even some commentators, apparently disconcerted by Paul's earthy language, suggest as an alternative 'offer your very selves to him' (REB). But Paul is clear that the presentation of our *bodies* is our *spiritual* act of worship. It is a significant Christian paradox. No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies. Similarly, authentic Christian discipleship will include both the negative 'mortification' of our body's misdeeds (8:13) and the positive 'presentation' of its members to God.

Paul made it plain, in his exposure of human depravity in 3:13ff., that it reveals itself through our bodies, in tongues which practise deceit and lips

³ Cf. Lv. 1:3, 9.

AV The Authorized (King James') Version of the Bible (1611).

REB The Revised English Bible (1989).

JBP *The New Testament in Modern English*, by J. B. Phillips (Collins, 1958).

sc Seneca

⁴ Epictetus, *Discourses* I.16.20f, quoted by Cranfield, vol. 2, p. 602, and Dunn, vol. 38B, p. 711.

REB The Revised English Bible (1989).

which spread poison, in mouths which are full of cursing and bitterness, in feet which are swift to shed blood, and in eyes which look away from God. Conversely, Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So we are to offer the different parts of our bodies not to sin as 'instruments of wickedness' but to God as 'instruments of righteousness' (6:13, 16, 19). Then our feet will walk in his paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues will bring healing, our hands will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.

If the first part of Paul's appeal relates to the presentation of our bodies to God, the second relates to our transformation according to his will. *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* (2). This is Paul's version of the call to nonconformity and to holiness which is addressed to the people of God throughout Scripture. For example, God's word came to Israel through Moses: 'You must not do as they do ... in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws....'⁵ Another example is found in the Sermon on the Mount. Surrounded by the false devotion of both Pharisees and pagans, Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not be like them.'⁶ 'We are not to be like a chameleon which takes its colour from its surroundings.'⁷ And now Paul issues the same summons to the people of God not to be conformed to the prevailing culture, but rather to be transformed. Both verbs are present passive imperatives and denote the continuing attitudes which we are to retain. We must go on refusing to conform to the world's ways and go on letting ourselves be transformed according to God's will. J. B. Phillip's paraphrase catches the alternative: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within.'

We human beings seem to be imitative by nature. We need a model to copy, and ultimately there are only two. There is *this world*, literally 'this age', which is passing away, and there is *God's will*, which is *good, pleasing and perfect*. Because the two verbs contain a different word for 'form' (*schēma* in *syschēmatizomai*, 'conform', and *morphē* in *metamorphoō*, 'transform'), earlier commentators used to argue that *schēma* meant 'outward appearance' and *morphē* 'inward substance'. Thus Sanday and Headlam rendered Paul's appeal: 'Do not adopt the external and fleeting fashion of this world, but be ye transformed in your inmost nature.'⁸ But because these nouns are often used

⁵ Lv. 18:3; cf. 2 Ki. 17:15; Ezk. 11:12.

⁶ Mt. 6:8.

⁷ Barclay, p. 157.

⁸ Sanday and Headlam, p. 353.

interchangeably, there is now ‘a large consensus strongly of the opinion that the two verbs ... are more or less synonymous.’⁹

More important for our understanding of the transformation which Paul urges is the fact that *metamorphoō* is the verb used by Matthew and Mark of the transfiguration of Jesus. And although the evangelists vary in saying that it was his skin, his face and his clothing which shone, Mark is clear that he himself ‘was transfigured before them’.¹⁰ A complete change came over him. His whole body became translucent, whose significance the disciples would not be able to understand, Jesus implied, until after his resurrection.¹¹ As for the change which takes place in the people of God, which is envisaged in Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 (the only other verses in which *metamorphoō* occurs), it is a fundamental transformation of character and conduct, away from the standards of the world and into the image of Christ himself.

These two value systems (*this world* and *God’s will*) are incompatible, even in direct collision with one another. Whether we are thinking about the purpose of life or the meaning of life, about how to measure greatness or how to respond to evil, about ambition, sex, honesty, money, community, religion or anything else, the two sets of standards diverge so completely that there is no possibility of compromise. No wonder Karl Barth called Christian ethics ‘the great disturbance’, so violently does it challenge, interrupt and upset the tranquil *status quo*.¹²

How then does the transformation take place? *Be transformed*, Paul replies, *by the renewing of your mind*. This is because only a renewed mind can *test and approve*, that is, discern, appreciate and determine to obey, *God’s will*. Although Paul does not here tell us how our mind becomes renewed, we know from his other writings that it is by a combination of the Spirit and the Word of God. Certainly regeneration by the Holy Spirit involves the renewal of every part of our humanness, which has been tainted and twisted by the fall, and this includes our mind.¹³ But in addition, we need the Word of God, which is the Spirit’s ‘sword’,¹⁴ and which acts as an objective revelation of God’s will.¹⁵ Here then are the stages of Christian moral transformation: first our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.

To sum up, Paul’s appeal is addressed to the people of God, grounded on the mercies of God, and concerned with the will of God. Only a vision of his mercy will inspire us to present our bodies to him and allow him to transform

⁹ Dunn, vol. 38B, p. 712.

¹⁰ Mk. 9:2.

¹¹ Mk. 9:9.

¹² Barth, pp. 424ff.

¹³ E.g. 1 Cor. 2:14ff.; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:20ff.; Col. 3:9f.; Tit. 3:5.

¹⁴ Eph. 6:17.

¹⁵ E.g. 1 Thes. 2:13; 4:1ff.; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6.

us according to his will. In particular, his will embraces all our relationships, as Paul now goes on to show—not only to God himself (12:1–2), but also to ourselves (12:3–8), to each other (12:9–16), to evildoers and enemies (12:17–21), to the state (13:1–7), to the law (13:8–10), to the day of Christ’s return (13:11–14) and to the ‘weaker’ members of the Christian community (14:1–15:13).

Additional Resources:

Hymn: [Take My Life and Let it Be](#)

Podcast: [Knowing Faith: Episode #141 - Romans 12:1-2](#)

Course Notes and Lecture: [Romans 12 by Michael Kruger](#)

Conference Lecture: [The Mercies of God and the Transformed Christian Mind](#)

