



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 19: Romans 12:1-21

Throughout the last three chapters Paul has been emphasizing the unique role that the Jews and Gentiles each had in God’s plan to redeem man to Himself. He has focused in on the idea that the Jews and the Gentiles have each made mistakes, been lost, and had the opportunity for redemption only by the grace of God. In particular he has wanted us to understand that we shouldn’t look down on or condemn those who don’t have the same background we do because, ultimately, we are all equally sinners and in need of the blood of Christ.

As we begin to study chapter 12 Paul is going to use this foundation to emphasize the unity we should have in Christ, and what it looks like to actually live a new life (6:4). He is really going to focus in on our mindset and our relationships with those around us. As Americans we tend to have a very independent mindset, however Paul is going to make it clear that the way we treat those around us and interact with them, particularly our brethren, has a direct impact on our standing before God.

Before you begin, read Romans 12:1-21 and mark any key words or phrases in the text.

Read Romans 12:1

Verse one sets the stage for the entire chapter, and it’s important to note that Paul begins with the word, “appeal,” (your version may say “urge” or “beseech.”) Although different words these all have the same meaning, and they are each what we refer to as petition verbs. In the English language a petition verb is simply a request, however in the original Greek language these strong, emotional words served the same purpose

as an exclamation mark, all caps or highlighting would today.

Paul is begging and pleading with his brethren to fulfill the command that follows: to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. He’s going to elaborate on this command in verse two and will then spend through chapter 15 detailing how we are to fulfill this command. Verse one concludes with the phrase, “which is your spiritual worship.” The word for “spiritual” can also mean “reasonable” or “thoughtful” (Pollard 426). Our lives are to be spiritual, intentional, thoughtful. Sisters, we will not enter Heaven by accident, we must be intentional about our daily lives. “Worship” here is the word “latreia,” which varies slightly from what we typically think of transpiring on Sunday mornings. “Latreia” literally means “divine service,” and has a connotation to the offering of sacrifices under the Old Law.

How does the meaning of “latreia” fit into Paul’s context?

How do we live out our spiritual worship, our thoughtful “latreia,” on a daily basis?

How does Romans 6:4 carry forward into what Paul is teaching here?



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Read Romans 12:2

This is a very popular “refrigerator magnet” verse, however I am afraid that we don’t spend as much time as we should focusing on the power found here. Verse two begins with, “Do not,” which is followed by a, “but.” Paul is telling us both what not to do, and what to do, and both statements are imperatives with the full weight of a command behind them.

We are not to be “conformed to this world.” This literally means “molded after.” Sisters, we should not dress like the world, walk like the world, talk like the world, or be entertained like the world. We *cannot* look like Jesus and the world at the same time, it’s impossible. However, as Christians we are to be “transformed.” This word is amazing, it’s “metamorpho,” which is actually the same word used for the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:2. In Matthew Jesus literally shone like the sun, in like manner sisters we are also called to shine like the Son. There was no doubt in the apostle’s mind in that moment that there was something different, something more, to Jesus. This should be the same effect we have on those in our sphere of influence.

What are the three ways Paul tells us to be transformed in this text?

It’s important to note that this transformation begins in our minds. Another way to understand the word “mind” would be “attitude.” Do I have a harsh, critical or judgmental attitude? Am I negative or self-absorbed? What words would those who know me best use to describe me? Do those descriptions fit someone whose mind is being transformed into the mind of Christ? Concluding verse two Paul uses three words to

describe the will of God: good, acceptable and perfect.

Use a concordance (www.blueletterbible.org is an excellent free resource) and look up each of these three words, then compare and contrast them.

Read Romans 12:3-5

How many times thus far has Paul commanded us not to think too highly of ourselves, or not to look down on others?

With these verses Paul is setting the stage for the remainder of chapters 12-15. I personally do not care for the ESV’s use of the word “assigned” in verse three. The NASB translates this “allotted,” and the NJKV “dealt,” both of which more clearly convey Paul’s intent. He isn’t saying that we have each been given a specific “assignment” of faith and that’s all we get, but rather that God has given, or dealt, us all faith (or belief, conviction) and this faith is what we should base our thoughts and judgments on. It is interesting to note that in this text Paul reminds us that both grace and faith are gifts God has given us, and that both are key to the transformation God expects to take place in our lives.

Also of note is the phrase, “one body.” Paul refers to the church as “one body” no less than 13 times in his 13 epistles, which tells us that the Holy Spirit found this important enough to have it repeated over, and over again. We have seen throughout Romans the struggle for unity between the Jews and the Gentiles, and sadly



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unity is one of the biggest struggles facing the church still today.

What do you believe are some of the greatest causes of division in the Lord’s church today? What steps can we actively take to overcome this division?

Where does Paul say unity is found? How can we better act on this teaching with our brethren?

Read Romans 12:6-8

We must understand Paul’s phrasing in verse six to fully understand everything that follows. The Greek word for “gifts” here is “charismata,” which has the meaning of “grace gift.” Paul specifically lists seven different “gifts” here, with each also have a specific caveat as to how it is to be used. While “charismata” is frequently found directly tied to the Holy Spirit and miraculous gifts, that is not always the case. For instance, in Romans 1:11 it appears to refer to miraculous gifts, however in 5:15, 5:16, and 6:23 it does not appear to have a miraculous connotation. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand that the “gifts” Paul is referring to here are those which are accessible to all Christians, including us today (Pollard 433). Continuing on we will break down each gift and how they were to be used (all definitions Zodhiates):

1. Prophecy (*propheteías*) – can be either the miraculous gift of telling the future, or the ability to speak forth the word of God. How is it to be done? In proportion (or as it relates to) our faith. When sharing

God’s Word we must have both the “what,” and the “so what.” If we don’t include how to live out what God’s word says, we have only accomplished half of our charge.

2. Service (*diakonia*) – Often translated “deacon.” Refers to a ministry or a service. How? Just do it!
3. Teaching (*didáskeō*) – To tutor or instruct by word of mouth. How? Once again, just do it!
4. Exhorting (*parakaléo*) – To aid, help or encourage. How? With comfort and joy!
5. Contributing (*metadidōmi*) – To give or share with someone, frequently material gifts. How? Generously, or without ulterior motives.
6. Leading (*prostēmi*) – To stand before with diligence, to shepherd or to guide. How? With zeal! Earnestly and eagerly!
7. Acts of Mercy (*eleéo*) – To extend help for the consequence of sin, to be sympathetic. How? With cheerfulness or gladness.

How many of these do we typically think of as a gift that we can use to glorify God?

What gifts has God given you? How are you using those gifts to be transformed and glorify our Creator?

Read Romans 12:9-21

In this section we are given 29 very specific commands, all of which describe for us exactly how we are to be transformed, unified, and use our gifts to exhort each other and glorify God:



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1. Let love be genuine
2. Abhor what is evil
3. Hold fast to what is good
4. Love one another with brotherly affection
5. Outdo one another in showing honor
6. Do not be slothful in zeal
7. Be fervent in spirit
8. Serve the Lord
9. Rejoice in hope
10. Be patient in tribulation
11. Be constant in prayer
12. Contribute to the needs of the saints
13. Seek to show hospitality
14. Bless those who persecute you
15. Bless and do not curse them
16. Rejoice with those who rejoice
17. Weep with those who weep
18. Live in harmony with one another
19. Do not be haughty
20. Associate with the lowly
21. Never be wise in your own sight (again!)
22. Repay no one evil for evil
23. Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all
24. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all
25. Never avenge yourselves
26. If your enemy is hungry feed him
27. If your enemy is thirsty give him something to drink
28. Do not be overcome by evil
29. Overcome evil with good

Notice how many of these descriptions are compared and contrasted with each other. Paul is diligent not only to tell us what *not* to do, but also what to replace our less desirable traits with.

Do we have the same balance with our families and with each other, or do we tend to err towards focusing on the “no’s” without encouraging, or to focus on the “good-jobs” without correcting?

What two things from this list come easiest for you? Are you actively focusing on using these strengths in your daily life? How can you do better?

What two things from this list are hardest for you? How can you grow in these areas?

What does it mean to live peaceably with all so far as it depends on us?

There is one thing in particular in this list that begs for further discussion: What does it mean to heap burning coals on our enemies’ head? First of all, this appears to be a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22. A common understanding is that there is always the chance that our kind treatment will lead to the individual feeling ashamed and coming to repentance (Pollard 449). However, the overall idea seems to be that God has, and will continue to, consistently vindicate His people. Regardless of how we understand this specific phrase, any interpretation that leads to us rejoicing in the suffering or condemnation of our enemies does not fit with what is seen in the rest of Scripture (Matthew 5:43-48).



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What are some ways we can cultivate the idea of returning evil for good in our hearts, as this is certainly a counter-cultural teaching?

Make a plan to specifically focus on growing in your two weakest areas. Seek out a sister in Christ to help hold you accountable for this growth.

Pollard, Paul PhD. (2018). Truth for Today, Romans an Exegetical Study. Searcy, AR. Resource Publications.

Zodhiates, [The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000 n.page).