

# CONCERNING THE WAY

March 8, 2011

## LESSON 119: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS



### Chapter 12 – Living a Life of Sacrifice

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul took us through quite a bit of heavy doctrine. Correct doctrine is important, and you can see how important it was to Paul by the fact that he spent so much time writing about it. But doctrine is never taught in the Bible as an end in itself. It is always taught so that you can translate it into practice. In his letters Paul typically follows a section of doctrine with a practical section, and he likes to start the practical section with the word “therefore”. There are three therefore’s in Romans, marking major divisions in the book, and this chapter starts with the last one (the first one is in Romans 5:1, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> one is 8:1).

Now Paul is going to tie all the doctrine together and tell us what it means to us in our everyday lives.

**Romans 12:1 Therefore 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. (NASB)**

**Romans 12:1 I therefore urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God, for this is the reasonable way for you to worship. (ISV)**

Notice Paul is not demanding the Roman Christians do this, he is urging them, exhorting them. He certainly had the authority from Christ to command the believers to act a certain way. Remember that we’re not bound by law to do this – we’re now under grace. He is asking us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice because of the many mercies of God that he has been speaking of for the first eleven chapters, most incredibly the fact that Christians have been justified by faith in Christ the Son, being sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit, and will be glorified as heirs of God the Father.

The word “mercies” in Greek also means compassion or pity, which God has shown in showering mercies on us who don’t deserve any of it. That’s what all the preceding chapters have been about. So, because of all that, God wants us to be persuaded to freely offer ourselves as a sacrifice.

Paul is writing to believers here, this is not speaking of salvation. **We don’t present ourselves as a sacrifice to obtain salvation, but in response to the salvation we have already received.** This is related to the discussion of sanctification in chapters 6 and 7 (Romans 6:13, 19). Notice God wants us to present ourselves, our whole person as a LIVING sacrifice, not a dead animal sacrifice. In the Old Testament people didn’t worry about offering their whole selves as a sacrifice, they had to offer an animal in their place to be killed on the altar. Well, we know we have died with Jesus, and so we can present Him with our lives that are IN Him.

And not only is this sacrifice living, but it is holy and acceptable to God, because it is from our position in Christ that we make this offering. It would not be acceptable to God any other way – not from ourselves or in self-effort. Christians are believer-priests, identified with the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:23-28; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6). A believer’s offering of his total life as

a sacrifice to God is sacred service.

And Paul says this is the reasonable, logical way for us to worship God in response to what He has done for us. This is true worship after we have trusted Christ. Real worship is not just singing praise songs on Sunday morning or listening to a sermon. Real worship is offering ourselves completely to God, of our own volition, without holding anything back, without playing games with God. This can only be done in the power of the Spirit, no one can do this on their own.

**Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God's will is — what is proper, pleasing, and perfect.**

“World” in the Greek really means “age” or “this generation”. We are not to conform to this present generation. We’re not to let ourselves be squeezed by the culture into a lifestyle that, while it is accepted by those around us, is unacceptable to God. The world system of this age is evil (Galatians 1:4) and is dominated by the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), satan. This means today that we’re not to be ruled by postmodern thinking that tolerates everything, believes nothing, and cares about no one.

It’s important to recognize just how evil this world system is to understand how necessary it is for us to not conform to it. Although there are many good things in this world that God created, the enemy from the beginning of the Fall has corrupted almost everything, with the goal of persuading men that they don’t need God.

*“We read that Cain “went out from the presence of Jehovah and builded a city” (Gen. 4), which became filled with inventions—“progress”: music, arts; its whole end being to forget God,—to get along without Him. And ever since, Satan has developed this fatal world-order, with its philosophy, (man’s account of all things,—but changing from time to time); its science (ever seeking to eliminate the supernatural); its government (with man exalting himself); its amusements (adapted to blot out realities from the mind); and its religion (to soothe man’s conscience and allay fears of judgment).” William Newell*

How do we avoid being conformed to the world system, this satanic order of things? Paul says by being transformed, like the metamorphosis of a butterfly. Our thinking process has to be remade. This is far more than just behaving differently. Our minds must be changed if we are to live a life that is holy and acceptable to God. Then we will have the mind of God, so we know instinctively what God’s will is, and be able to discern what is good, pleasing, and perfect. The word perfect doesn’t mean what we think of perfect - it means “whole”, or “mature”.

Well, we know that we were renewed by the Holy Spirit at salvation. Titus 3:5 says:

**Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,**

What is this renewing of our minds? The Greek word for “renew” is a word only Paul uses. It means “to grow up new, fresh” – like foliage in the spring. It can’t be our spirit that is renewed, because our spirit is born brand new when we trust Christ:

**2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

And it can't be our body, because Paul has already told us that our bodies, while they may be sustained by the Holy Spirit in this life, are still condemned. Our bodies won't be renewed until Christ returns. So, that only leaves the soul, which includes the mind, with its thoughts, memories, and imagination. Our minds are naturally under the influence and power of the sinful flesh. It is the mind that needs to be continually renewed by the Holy Spirit. This translation (ISV) accurately picks up the sense of the Greek – it is a continual process, not a one-time thing. **We must keep on being transformed to keep from being conformed to the world. Our entire soul-life must come under the Spirit's control.**

How do we do this transforming? Well, we can't make it happen on our own. The process begins the moment we trust Christ for our salvation and the righteousness of Christ is placed on us like a coat. Paul talks about this renewing more in Ephesians:

**Ephesians 4:22-24** in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, (23) and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (24) and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

And in Colossians:

**Colossians 3:9-10** Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, (10) and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--

So, the Holy Spirit does the work of continual renewal of our minds, but we have a part in our sanctification as well. We are told to "lay aside the old self", and "put on the new self". This is an act of our will, a conscious decision moment by moment, day by day, to walk in the Spirit. This is the offering ourselves as a living sacrifice. It is a surrendering of our will, so that the Spirit can renew our minds.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. Then Paul says this:

**2 Corinthians 7:1** Since we have these promises, dear friends, let's cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit by becoming mature in our holy fear of God.

There are things in this world that we need to stay away from, because they will contaminate us.

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5** Of course, we are living in the world, but we do not wage war in a world-like way. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not those of the world. Instead, they have the power of God to demolish fortresses. We tear down arguments (5) and every proud obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive in order to obey the Messiah.

**Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one enslaves you through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to the Messiah,

So you see, there are things we must actively choose not to be a part of if we want to be a living

sacrifice and become mature in Christ.

Back in Romans 12:2, Paul then says that this not only helps us know what is good and evil, but it helps us see what God's plan is no matter what is happening to us, that His will is being carried out. There's an important truth here. **God has a plan for our lives, and He wants us to know it. But we can discover it only if we surrender ourselves to Him and reject conformity to this world.**

*“As a Christian is transformed in his mind and is made more like Christ, he comes to approve and desire God's will, not his own will for his life. Then he discovers that God's will is what is good for him, and that it pleases God, and is complete in every way. It is all he needs. But only by being renewed spiritually can a believer ascertain, do, and enjoy the will of God.” John Walvoord*

**Romans 12:3** 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.

This is one of the first indications that your mind has been transformed, if you can judge yourself accurately, not thinking too much of yourself. Only through surrendering yourself to God can you be fully honest with yourself. Thinking too highly of yourself can cause problems in your relationships and cause disunity in the Body. That's sometimes pretty hard for us, isn't it? But humility is one of the results of a transformed mind.

Self-pride is probably what drives the majority of our sins. We want to have our own way. We want to do what we want to do. Paul is saying our main problem is pride. Our culture teaches us to think highly of ourselves, to have pride. Why, that's the American way! But Paul says that is a problem. We are to have sound judgment, especially when it comes to judging ourselves!

**Romans 12:4-5** For we have many parts in one body, but these parts do not all have the same function. (5) In the same way, even though we are many people, we are one body in the Messiah and individual parts connected to each other.

Paul points out that we are not just individuals – that is why we should not think too highly of ourselves. We are just one part in the body of Christ. All believers are connected to each other through Him. We are not individuals that are just trying to go their own way and please ourselves. This is why humility is so important to a believer, because we are to be living our lives in relationship with other believers.

In the body of Christ, no matter what your station in life is, or how much education you have, we all have an important part to play. Even though it might seem that some parts are more important than others, that's not how God sees it. All of the parts are important, and we're all in this together. And God, in His sovereignty, has just the right place for each one of us. We all gain from what others contribute to the body. No one should have an attitude of superiority.

*“A number of years ago I fell and injured my wrist rather severely. It swelled up and became very painful. And the rest of my body felt so bad about it that it sat up all night to keep it company. That is what the body of Christ is to do when one member is hurt. We are tied to one another, and when one hurts, all hurt.” Ray Stedman*

**Romans 12:6-8** We have different gifts based on the grace that was given to us. So if your gift is prophecy, use your gift in proportion to your faith. (7) If your gift is serving,

**devote yourself to serving others. If it is teaching, devote yourself to teaching others. (8) If it is encouraging, devote yourself to encouraging others. If it is sharing, share generously. If it is leading, lead enthusiastically. If it is helping, help cheerfully.**

Every believer is given at least one spiritual gift to be used to minister to the body. Paul doesn't give a full list of the spiritual gifts here – a more complete discussion of them can be found in 1 Corinthians 12-14 (Paul lists nine gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Paul tells us in other letters that along with the gift we are given the right amount of faith to be able to use it (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, Ephesians 4:7). They are distributed to us according to God's sovereign will (1 Corinthians 12:11) and to be used for the entire church congregation (1 Corinthians 12:7). We should never feel pride in our gifts, because we didn't choose them – God gave them to us to accomplish specific tasks in the church. We are to enjoy our gift(s), and use them to build up the church (Ephesians 4:7-16), but never boast or become full of pride because of the gift.

**Prophecy** - Prophecy is not necessarily foretelling the future. The only ones the New Testament says had the gift of foretelling the future were the apostles and a man named Agabus. There may have been more, but the Bible doesn't speak of them. But this gift of prophecy is broader than that. It is the ability to receive revelation from God and communicate it to others (also 1 Corinthians 12:28).

In the context of Paul's day when the church was just getting started, **God anointed some believers with the gift of prophecy, which is like a super-teacher.** They had a special insight from the Holy Spirit to be able to teach the truths of scripture. Remember they didn't have the New Testament written down then – maybe Matthew and Mark but that's it. But they did have some people with the gift of prophecy that could teach the Christian doctrine as we now have it written down in our Bibles. Some would say there is no longer a need for this gift, because we have the complete canon of scripture. Others say that we have had true prophets since then, persons who have had a special gift to teach God's Word – men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Darby, and Dwight Moody. These men seemed to have a special anointing, a unique authority from God.

Some people call themselves prophets today, but in my experience they don't have the gift that was present in the early church, or the authority that these other men had. Some that claim to be prophets speak things that disagree with already revealed scripture. That can't be from God. Other people claim to be prophets but everything they say can easily be found in the Bible, and they don't really have the spiritual authority or authenticity a true prophet would have. You can see how this could be a problem. Anyone could claim to be a prophet and say, "I have new revelation from God. Religions and cults have started this way (Islam, Mormonism, etc.)."

On the other hand, some of us have been present in praise services where a person gets up and gives their testimony and their words sounded like they were coming from heaven itself, and cut to your heart, edifying and exhorting everyone around them. Those kinds of occurrences are obviously Spirit-led. But is this the gift of prophecy? I don't believe this gift is gone forever. I think that there will be more true prophets in the future. For example, the 144,000 Jewish witnesses that are sealed in Revelation during the Tribulation will all surely have the gift of prophecy.

**Serving** – The ability to minister to the material needs of others in the congregation. This could cover many different kinds of service (also 1 Corinthians 12:28).

**Teaching** - The gift of teaching is the ability to teach truths from the scriptures so that people can understand it and be affected by it (also 1 Corinthians 12:28). That's different than the gift of

prophecy, which was the ability of being able to teach revelation from God with a special authority and power. The teaching gift is not only to teach the scriptures, but teach it in a way that the hearers will understand it, love it, and act on it!

**Encouraging** - can be translated “exhortation”, or even better, “counseling”. This is the ability to encourage the fainthearted and comfort the afflicted (also 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

**Sharing** – or giving – the ability to give material blessings to others without ulterior motives (also 1 Timothy 6:17-18).

**Leading** – the ability to govern others with humility, not lording it over them (1 Timothy 5:17).

**Helping** – or “showing mercy” – the ability to minister to the sick or needy with cheerfulness (Luke 10:33-34).

Paul is saying to us to take our eyes off of ourselves. If we get our eyes off ourselves, and on to using our gifts to help the other believers in the body, then we start making progress as a church and in renewing our minds as individuals.

The way of the world is to focus on ourselves, what we want. But we have to renew our minds by thinking of other believers instead, and how we can be used by God to help the body. So, Paul is saying, if you have these gifts, use them with all your heart! Get busy and serve God and others by exercising your gifts!

## Living a Life of Service

In the next section of this chapter, Paul is going to switch to a series of exhortations to us. He goes through them quickly without going into detail on them. This is a chapter that you should sit down and read slowly and ask yourself, “Am I doing this?” They have to do with the “sound judgment” Paul was speaking of in verse 3. We need to use sound and honest judgment on ourselves when we read through this list.

When it comes to serving, the best example we have, of course, is Jesus. He was a servant for us and calls us to be a servant for Him. And Paul, Peter, James, and others in the New Testament are examples to us of what being a servant of Christ means. It’s our turn now to live a life of service in response to what Jesus did for us.

We shouldn’t read through this quickly. They are little brief exhortations, but they are powerful and so important to the Christian life. This is in many ways a practical outworking of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

**Romans 12:9 Your love must be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.**

“Hypocrisy” comes from a Greek word which means “divided”. Our love must be genuine, not put on

or showy, but real. And this Greek word for love is the brotherly type of love. It's the kind of love the Father has for the Son. We should love all believers in the body, no matter their race, heritage, station in life, or financial status. Anything else is hypocritical and unworthy of Christ.

This word "abhor", or "hate" in some translations, is a very strong Greek word, and is only used here in the New Testament. It means to have an absolute horror at something. We should consider any evil as despicable; it should fill us with revulsion. Most of us today don't really abhor evil like this. Today we just tolerate it, there's no horror at sin anymore. We shouldn't expect God to remove sin from us until we actually hate it.

"Clinging to what is good" is what we should do instead of entertaining evil. We should love the Bible, good theology, and good preaching, of course, those things have eternal value. But we should also love good literature, good music, good art, good food, etc. God has created many good things that he wants us to enjoy. Why would we want to enjoy evil things when there so many good things God has given us?

**Romans 12:10 Be devoted to each other with mutual affection. Excel at showing respect for each other.**

Always keep in mind the context, and Paul has been talking about the body of Christ. Not that we shouldn't love everyone, but Paul is specifically speaking of our brother and sisters in the body of Christ here (Galatians 6:10). We should be totally devoted to each other in brotherly love. Biblical brotherly love is tender, understanding, and forgiving. There should be an intimacy that we don't have with friends and family outside the body.

**Romans 12:11 Never be lazy in showing such devotion. Be on fire with the Spirit. Serve the Lord.**

Another way of saying Ecclesiastes 9:10. We shouldn't be lazy or sluggish in anything we do for the Lord Jesus. Ouch, that hurts – sometimes it's tempting to be lazy when it comes to serving others, isn't it? The phrase "Be on fire with the Spirit" doesn't mean running around spouting Bible verses acting like a maniac. It means to be spiritually blazing for God. It means making sure that what drives you in life is to serve God and others. And it means doing it with humility and even tears sometimes (Acts 20:18-19).

**Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in trouble, and persistent in prayer.**

How do we be hopeful in this crazy sinful world that is heading for destruction? Jesus Christ gives us a living hope (1 Peter 1:3), a dying hope (1 Corinthians 15:55-57), and a resurrection hope (Revelation 20:6). He is the blessed hope (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), and He gives us eternal hope (Titus 3:7). Watching the news and seeing the trouble that is going on all around us can bring a sense of hopelessness. But Jesus is the answer to all of that. We rejoice in hope because we rejoice in Christ. He is our "hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

And if we are persistent in our prayer life, we will not despair, and we'll have patience in trouble.

**Romans 12:13 Supply the needs of the saints. Extend hospitality to strangers.**

People in the body of Christ have many different needs. We are to be sensitive to supplying a need when we become aware of it, whether that is a listening ear or a financial need.

Hospitality is becoming a lost art. Modern times and busy lifestyles have almost wiped it out. I remember when I was young if a travelling evangelist, musicians, or youth team visited our church we would put them all up in people's homes. Maybe that still happens in some places, but for the most part nowadays they just stay at a local motel and the church picks up the bill. Of course hospitality can mean more than having someone stay at your house. It can mean taking someone out to lunch that you don't know very well, or watching someone else's children for a while, or helping a single mom with something around the house. We should look for opportunities to practice hospitality.

**Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you. Keep on blessing them, and never curse them.**

From here on in this chapter these exhortations are for how Christians are to live with non-Christians as well as other believers. This can be a hard one, too. Showing kindness to someone who has wronged you in some way takes some courage and a strong character. Jesus is a great example to us here.

**Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who are rejoicing. Cry with those who are crying.**

Jesus also is a good model for us here. He celebrated with His friends when they were celebrating (Mark 14:3, John 12:1-2), and mourned with His friends when they mourned (John 11:35). He felt other's pain, and we should do the same.

**Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with each other. Do not be arrogant, but associate with humble people. Do not think that you are wiser than you really are.**

Some translations say "Be of the same mind toward one another." Obviously this means spiritually, because when it comes to physical things in our lives, we all have different tastes, don't we? We have our own preferences for cars, clothing, food, etc. We may not always see eye to eye with other believers, but we must live in unity with them. How are we going to attract unbelievers to want to join the body if we're always fighting with each other?

"Do not be arrogant" in the original Greek this literally means "Do not be huge-headed." Many people in the church crave praise or want to be given special consideration. We should constantly be checking ourselves for "huge-headedness"! See also Matthew 23:12, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:6, 3 John 1:9, and Matthew 6:2.

And Paul tells us to not just hang out with people in our same social class. We should not be afraid to associate with people who do not have the same financial standing as we do (also Luke 14:11-14).

"Do not think you are wiser than you really are." In other words, don't take yourself too seriously. Be honest with yourself. Let God search your heart to allow you to judge yourself accurately. Use His standards, not your own (Proverbs 3:5-6).

**Romans 12:17 Do not pay anyone back evil for evil, but focus your thoughts on what is right in the sight of all people.**

Don't be vindictive. We are supposed to be a blessing to people, not a curse.

And we are to live our lives so that no one will be able to accuse us (1 Timothy 5:14, Romans 14:16, 1 Peter 3:16).

**Romans 12:18** *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.*

Most of this has been about how to live with other believers in the body. But living a life of service can also minister to our neighbors – people that we come in contact with outside the body. We should do everything we can to live in peace with everyone. But notice he says “so far as it depends on you”. Sometimes we do all we can and can’t live in peace with someone. We shouldn’t beat ourselves up about that if we’ve done our best.

**Romans 12:19-20** *Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me. I will pay them back, declares the Lord." (20) But "if your enemy is hungry, feed him. For if he is thirsty, give him a drink. If you do this, you will pile burning coals on his head."*

This is similar to verses 14 and 17. Paul was really concerned about us taking revenge on people who have wronged us. He quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 to tell us to leave vengeance to God. That’s His job, let Him do it. Many times it doesn’t happen immediately. But a day of retribution is coming, we can be sure of that (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

That’s a heavy verse. Sometimes we just need to step back and let God handle things. Instead of trying to take revenge on someone who has done us wrong, we should do good to them. In verse 20 Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21. What does the “burning coals” thing mean? Some say it refers to an ancient Egyptian ritual where a man showed his repentance by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head. Sounds kind of funny to us, but it definitely refers to a sense of shame a person feels when a person they have wronged shows kindness to them.

The “coals on the head” was very common in Paul’s day. It would have been a recognizable reference. Keeping your fire in your fireplace going was very important – for cooking and for warmth. If it went out, you had no choice but to go to a neighbor and ask for live coals from their fire. If they were kind enough to give them to you, you would carry them back to your home in a container on your head. You would be indebted to your neighbor for his kindness in sharing his fire with you.

**Romans 12:21** *Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.*

Paul warns us to not cave in to evil. In Ephesians 6:11 he tells us to “Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.”

Instead of letting evil conquer us, we are to conquer evil by doing good. If we do the things Paul has been admonishing us with, then we will conquer evil. Part of the battles is recognizing that we are already victors in Christ (Romans 8:37). This concept of conquering, or overcoming was a popular concept with the apostle John. You’ll find it all over his epistles and in Revelation (1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4, 5:4-5, Revelation 2:7, 11,17,26; 3:5, 12,21; 5:5; 6:2; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14).

Of course, the Christian is only able to do these things if they have surrendered themselves to God, offering themselves to God as a living sacrifice. It is only by the indwelling Holy Spirit’s power that we can live this kind of life.

