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Romans 12: How God's Righteousness Transformes Lives

Don Fanning

Liberty University, dfanning@liberty.edu

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Chapter 12 How God's righteous transforms personal lives

Paul demonstrates the importance of correct doctrine as a priority, followed by the practical application of truth to daily living. This pattern will be followed in others of his epistles. In Ephesians and Colossians the doctrinal and practical portions are equally divided, whereas in Romans the doctrinal part is twice as long as the practical.

I. Genuine worship is personal consecration (12:1-2)

^{NET} **Rom 12:1** Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice— alive, holy, and pleasing to God— which is your reasonable service.

:2 Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God— what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.

12:1 Positive Worship. The entire verse defines and gives the reason for “your reasonable *service*” (*latreia*, refers to any service done for God. This is the origin of the word, “liturgy” or religious duty or worship). In Heb 9:6 the NAS translates it “the divine worship.” This verse, then, describes the spiritual duty of acceptable worship. How did Jesus discern what true worship was, and what it was not, in Matt 15:8?

- How does one demonstrate that his worship is from the heart? The first part of this verse defines this “**reasonable**” service (*logiken*, “logical”). That is, Romans 1-11 describes the amazing “wisdom and knowledge of God” in designing a comprehensive salvation designed to “have mercy on all” people (11:32-33). To know this salvation is to want to share the message and worship the Savior. What does the “**therefore**” imply?
- However, worship without sacrifice was impossible to the Jewish mind-set. The disciples of Christ are now believer-priests, followers of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 7:23-28; 1 Pet 2:5, 9). However, the only sacrifice the believer-priest has to offer is his own body. The body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). There is a direct relationship between the body-Spirit-worship, as long as the body aspect does not quench the relationship. If our body is His temple which is designed for worship, it must be dedicated to His purpose and not our own selfishness. In the OT the sacrifice had to die to be acceptable. In the NT the sacrifice of a true worshiper has three characteristics. What were these acceptable characteristics?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

The next verse explains how this sacrifice is to be made. The body is the center of sinful desires, emotional depression, selfish passions and spiritual doubts. How did Paul treat his “body” in 1 Cor 9:27?

What is the proper attitude towards one's body in 1 Cor 6:19?

12:2 Practical Self-Sacrifice Worship. To be acceptable and pleasing, God's temple had to be different from the world. We are commanded not to be “**conformed**” to the world or age (*suschematizo*, “fashion one's mind and character to a pattern, fashioned according to a

“mold”) is either a middle or passive with either or both of these meanings: a conscious permissive, passive or a subjective passive, unconscious conformity to the world mindset. J. B. Phillips translates this phrase, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.” Kenneth Wuest paraphrased this clause, “Stop assuming an outward expression which is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God.” 1 Peter 1:14 says, “Like obedient children, do not **comply** with the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance.” What does God require before any worship or praise is pleasing to Him as seen in 1 Sam 15:22?

- **Positively, we are to be “transformed”** (present passive imperative: “keep on being transformed,” *metamorphoo*, “change into another form from the inside out.”). It is used of the transfiguration (Mat 17:2) and the goal of the Christian life (2 Cor 3:18). The way this transformation takes place is by the “renewing of” the mind (*anakainosis*, “renovation, complete change”). Change is not as “miraculous” as it is intentional and progressive. How is one to react to the thoughts that one repeats in the mind according to 2 Cor 10:4?
- **Thoughts produce beliefs** (what we think is true), which generate **values** (what we think is important), which form **convictions** (what we must do or have), which together result in **emotions** (a positive or negative sentimental reaction to things that agree or disagree with the first four steps of our psychological makeup), which combine to give us our **motivation** (the impulse to satisfy what we think and believe to be important and necessary), which in turn produce our **behavior** (how we act out what we think, believe, value and are convinced to be essential to our well being). What was David’s key to a right mind-set (a renewed mind) in Ps 119:11?
- **The mind is the gateway to our heart.** It is programmable. Every individual is responsible for how he programs his mind and therefore his heart. How important is the mind in these verses?
 1 Chron 28:9
 Prov 4:23
 Eph 4:17
 Col 3:2
 2 Thes 2:2
- **The Purpose of the Transformed Mind.** The phrase “so that” translate *eis* + an infinitive which introduces a reason or purpose, thus the mind-set of a believer is to be progressively transformed to the understanding of God’s revelation in His Word for the purpose of being able to “test and approve” (*dokimazo*, “discover, examine, accept as proved”) what the will of God is. The meaning is two-fold: (1) only the transformed mind can *discern* what God’s will is, and (2) the transformed mind can prove how great the will of God is. What are the three descriptive words that define how great the will of God is in verse 2?

If you give your body over to His will your experience will be that God's will is beneficial, well-pleasing, and maturing for the follower. Well worth it.

II. Transformed lives are demonstrated in Christian ministry (12:3-8)

Paul now begins a series of commands and instructions on how to serve one another and relate to one another under new principles that honor the presence of God in our midst.

12:3-5 The spiritual gifts in ministry

^{NET} **Rom 12:3** For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you **not to think more highly of yourself** than you ought to think, but to **think with sober discernment**, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith.

⁴ For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve **the same function**,

⁵ so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who **belong to one another**.

12:3 Command for how to think about yourself. The importance of this command is evident by Paul referring to his special "grace" (*charitos*, "favor" or a reference to his special unmerited position as an Apostle – 1 Cor 15:9-10). Do we have a "grace" gift? (See 12:6)

- What is the command?
- Look at these verses and write how we are commanded to think:
 - Matt 6:7
 - 1 Cor 8:2
 - 2 Cor 3:5
 - Gal 6:3
 - Phil 4:12
- The basis of our biblical self-image (how to think about ourselves) has a negative factor (not too high or exaggerated beyond our giftedness) and a positive factor (according to the "measure of faith"), that is, how God has equipped us to serve one another. What is the opposite problem in 1 Cor 12:23?
- If we think too highly (like we are too important or too great) or if we think some are "less honorable" (*atimos*, without honor, of less esteem, despised") for their giftedness, then either error will render us ineffective. Either false pride will make a person think he is too important to be serving someone else or the lack of respect or honor for some areas of service will quench one's motivation for strategic and spirit-motivated service to other believers. Describe why this attitude is so important to you.
- It is interesting that the word for "sober discernment" or "sober-minded" (*sophroneo*, "be in one's right mind") is used twice of the new mind-set of one delivered from the influence of demons (Mark 5:15 and Luke 8:35). Is there a suggestion here?

12:4-5 One body, many members, many functions. This is the doctrinal basis for the exhortations after v. 5. Once a person becomes a "participant of the divine nature" (1 Pet 1:4), a joint sharing of the Holy Spirit He becomes a part of every other believer through

the Holy Spirit (see Eph 4:25 and Rom 12:5). We are just as much a part (participant) of other believers as we are a part (participant) with Christ. In the following verses note how anything done to other believers is perceived as being done directly to Christ.

Acts 9:4-5

Matt 25:40

What does this imply for how important it should be to serve each other?

12: 6-8 The Imperative of serving as God has gifted the believer

^{NET} **Rom 12:6** And we have **different gifts** according to the **grace** given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual **must use it in proportion to his faith**.

⁷ If it is service, he **must serve**; if it is teaching, he **must teach**;

⁸ if it is exhortation, he **must exhort**; if it is contributing, he **must do so with sincerity**; if it is leadership, he **must do so with diligence**; if it is showing mercy, he **must do so** with cheerfulness.

12:6a Everyone has a different gift (1 Cor 12:4). Again Paul reiterates that the gifts for service are granted according to “grace,” that is a gift that is unmerited or deserved. None of the spiritual gifts are granted because they are sought, asked for or prayed for. In 1 Cor 12:11, who decides what spiritual gift is given to the believer?

12:6b- 8 In this context Paul enumerates seven gifts that are given to believers, none of which (except possibly prophecy) are sign gifts. Beside each of the gifts write out the command that is given for the exercise of that gift:

Prophecy:

(Note: “in proportion to his...” should be rendered, “in agreement with **the**...”)

Service:

Teaching:

Exhortation:

Contributing (giving):

Leadership:

Showing Mercy:

- Is it an option for the believer to serve others in the area of his giftedness or to seek another more impressive or “important” area of giftedness? Explain.
- Other texts that list spiritual gifts are the following:
 - In Peter 4:10-11 there are two categories of gifts: What are they?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - In Ephesians 4:11 there are five leadership gifts: What are they?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

III. Transformed lives are demonstrated in social relationships (12:9-21)

In this passage Paul will give a series of commands that describe how the believer is expected to relate to others, whether saved or lost.

12:9-10 What it means to love one another.

^{NET} **Rom 12:9** Love must be **without hypocrisy**. **Abhor** what is evil, **cling** to what is good.

¹⁰ **Be devoted** to one another with mutual love, **showing eagerness** in honoring one another.

12:9 The introduction to how to love others is followed by five modifiers that carry an imperative implication. Love is a choice, not an emotion. How can you explain what Luke 6:27 means?

- What is the opposite of love, if it is a choice, not an emotion?
- If you answered something about selfishness, you were right. We choose to either serve our own interests or the needs and interests of others. Love chooses to prioritize the needs of other.
- In light of this, what is the meaning of “hypocrisy” (*nupokrito*, “fake, disguised, to act on stage, play a part”) in relation to the meaning of love and how we are to express it?
- Are these next commands to be seen as explanations of how to love or general relationship principles? Either way they are guidelines to a healthy relationship. What do these verses teach we are to **hate**?
Ps 97:10
Ps 119:104
Ps 119:128
Prov 8:13
Prov 13:5
- What are some “good” (*agathos*, “beneficial, practical, fruitful”) things that we are to “cling” (*kollao*, “to glue together, join firmly”) to in these verses?
Col 1:10
1 Tim 1:5
Tit 2:10
Heb 6:9
In general, it refers to anything that is a practical benefit for others and honors the Lord Jesus.

12:10 The one-another commands.

^{NET} **Rom 12:10** Be **devoted** to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in **honoring** one another.

- The key to a deep spiritual relationship is the commitment to do certain things that are beneficial to the other person. The ideal is that it is reciprocal, but we are obligated to fulfill our part regardless of the response of any other person. In this verse there are two one-another commands. What are they?

1.

2.

- We are to be “devoted” to one another (*philostorgos*, which is used to describe a sibling or an ideal parental relationship). How is the biblical husband and wife relationship suppose to be structured in Eph 5:21?
- Honoring others (instead of ourselves) is a characteristic of a loving person. We want so much honor that we can’t afford to give any away, we think. He who want to be honored, must give twice as much honor to others first (personal slogan). “Honor” (*time*, “fix a high price on, esteem in public”) others as a priority and negatively, never “put them down,” cause to loose face, embarrass, or to tease. How would you apply this concept to Phil 2:3?

12:11-12 Six commands for our attitudes in serving others

^{NET} Rom 12:11 “Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord.

¹² Rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, persist in prayer.”

12:11 The word “lag” (*okneros*, “sluggish, slothful, lazy”) means to never be hesitating or lazy in “zeal” (*spoude*, “diligence, earnestness, haste”). Whatever you do, do it with all your focus and energy. The attitude of being “fervent” (*zeo*, “to boil with heat” which can either be anger or passion for something). In Acts 18:25 it is translated, “with great enthusiasm” Apollos taught about Jesus. These describe how we are to “serve” (*douleoo*, “be a slave, submitting to, obeying) the Lord. How do these instructions fit with 1 Cor 10:31?

12:12 Keeping with the serving focus three more commands imply what can be expected in serving the Lord: There will be a need for hope, an anticipated affliction and a need for God’s intervention. Hope is the key to serving – it will be worth it all both now and in eternity. How does 1 Peter :6-9 give us hope in the midst of conflict?

- Why did Paul rejoice in “suffering” in Rom 5:3?
- The “persisting” in prayer (*proskartereo*, “to adhere to, devoted to, continue all the time” in the Present Activite meaning, “to habitually be doing something”) implies the need for God’s intervention on a constant basis. How did Jesus pray in these verses?
Luke 6:12
Luke 22:45
See also Col 4:2

12:13 Believer’s responsibilities towards other believers

^{NET} Rom 12:13 “Contribute to the needs of the saints, pursue hospitality.”

Genuine Christians responds to the needs of other believers in his life. The command is to “contribute” (*koinoneo*, “share, participate, become a partner” in the present tense thus “continue habitually...”) to the “needs” of the saints (*chreia*, “lack, necessity”). This was one of the most dramatic characteristics of the early Christians. Write how the Early Church practiced this command:
Acts 4:34-37
Acts 11;27-30
1 Cor 16:1-4
Rom 15:25-27

- The second command is similar: to “pursue hospitality,” (*philonexia*, “love to strangers”). This is so important that it is a required characteristic of pastoral leadership (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8) and

one of the one-another commands in 1 Pet 4:9. What is the attitude that is necessary in the practice of this command in 1 Peter 4:9?

12:14-16 The commands for the general reactions towards the actions and emotions of others.

^{NET} **Rom 12:14** “Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Do not be conceited.”

12:14 The attitude of the believer toward those who oppose, hurt, inflict pain, etc. against them is to “bless” (*eulogeo*, “praise, ask good things for, ask for prosperity, etc.” Present Imperative implies a continual habitual action). What do the following verses teach us about how and why to bless others?

Luke 6:28

1 Cor 4:12

1 Pet 3:9

- Jesus taught us not to respond to others according to how they respond to us, but rather according to what they need. What do these two examples teach us?

Luke 23:34

Acts 7:59-60

12:15 Christians are generally commanded to empathize with all others. Ironically the more difficult of the two commands is the first: “rejoice with those who rejoice.” Human nature envies those who rejoice or looks for reasons how unfair is the rejoicing of others. It is easier to “mourn” (*klaio*, “to weep, lament from grief.” Present tense imperative implies continuous, habitual action). This is not to be exaggerated, but rather is a general means of demonstrating Christ’s care for others. How is the opposite command to be understood in 1 Cor 7:29-30?

12:16 Four commands for building unity and oneness.

- **Live in harmony.** Here is another of the “one-another” verses. Literally, “the same to one another be thinking” to emphasis the need for everyone to have the same mind-set or attitude. There are 35 verses in the NT that deal with how we are to think. This does not mean that we are forced to agree on minutia or non-essentials, but rather everyone is to have the same giving attitude towards each other. How does this verse harmonize with Phil 2:2-3?
- **Do not be proud.** This command tells us not to “think on high things like honors and riches.” In Rom 11:20 Paul warned the Gentiles not to be “high minded or haughty” because of their privilege at this time. How does this command help build the unity of a group of believers?
- **Be willing to associate with people of low position.** “Lowly” (*tapeinos*, “not rising far from the ground” is used metaphorically to mean a condition of life, “brought low with grief, depressed, lowly in spirit, humble.” The same word is translated “humility” in 1 Peter 5:5. What additional insights can be learned from this verse concerning this attitude?
- **Do not be conceited.** This is the third command of the same root, *phron-* meaning “to think.” Here the idea is “mindful of one’s interests.” The Gentiles as a group had just been warned not to be “conceited” or “wise in your own estimation” (Rom 11:25). How would the disobedience of this command make harmony very difficult?

12:17-18 The believer’s relationship with unbelievers

^{NET} **Rom 12:17** Do not repay anyone evil for evil; consider what is good before all people.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all people.

12:17 The NT standard is the opposite of the OT standard, which was an “eye for eye” (Ex 21:24).

Now the believer is not to seek revenge. The word for “repay” or “recompense” is *apodidomi*, “to give something for one’s own profit” can be either good or bad, depending on the context. Is it positive or negative in Rom 13:7?

Who alone has the right to judge this “recompense” according to Romans 2:6?

- The second command in this verse is to “consider” what is good (*pronoao*, to foresee, to think of beforehand, provide for”). Instead of planning on how to get even with someone, a believer is to think ahead to intentionally do “good” to everyone (*kalos*, “useful, suitable or commendable”). What more can you learn about this same imperative in these verses?
2 Cor 8:21
1 Tim 5:8

12:18 The command to “live peaceably with all people” or “keep the peace” is to be our goal. It is noteworthy that Paul knew it would not be possible with everyone, “as far as it depends on you.” It always takes two to bring harmony. How do these verses reinforce this imperative?

Eph 4:3

Col 3:15

1 Cor 14:33

1 Thes 5:13

12:19-21 The believer’s response to persecution, hurts, or antagonistic responses from others.

^{NET} **Rom 12:19 Do not avenge yourselves, dear friends, but give place to God's wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord.**

²⁰ Rather, if your enemy is hungry, **feed him**; if he is thirsty, **give him a drink**; for in doing this you will be heaping burning coals on his head.

²¹ **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

12:19 This command is similar to 12:17. The reiteration implies greater importance. It is virtually impossible to maintain a peaceful relationship when each one (or anyone) is trying to get even for any perceived offense or hurt they might have suffered from someone else in the group. In the context a peaceful, harmonious group of believers is the priority. How does the last part of verse 19 encourage the believer to obey this command?

- **To obey this command** requires that a person trust in the justice of God, and that He sees and will justly to a real abuse. As God promised to take vengeance on their enemies **in His time** (Deut 32:35) so now the believer is not allowed to enter into God’s domain of giving just recompense, both now and in the next life. Why does this require so much “trust?”

12:20 Christianity is not just non-violent, it is extremely proactive. Paul quotes Prov 25:21-22. The believer responds in love-actions no matter how he may feel about the abusive or hurtful person. The Jewish expression “heaping burning coals on his head” seems horribly cruel, but it was understood as a metaphor to show how to make him ashamed of his hostility, by surprising him with unexpected kindness and help. How many reasons for this kind of action can you find in the Matt 5:43-45 passage?

12:21 The secret to conquering evil – overcome it with good. The black scientist, George Washington Carver said, “I will never let another man ruin my life by making me hate him.” The word “overcome” is *nikao*, “to conquer, become victorious,” implies a conscious strategy and aggressiveness. The strategy is given in the context as to how to deal with persecutors or abusive persons. The strategy is to be consumed with doing good, instead of being filled or overcome with resentment, bitterness and vengeance. The present tense of these commands indicates a continual dedicated persistence. The structure of the sentence implies that the way to not be overcome by evil is to constantly be thinking of how to do “good” (*agathos*, “useful, pleasant, honorable”) to meet his needs. How do the following verses relate to this theme?

1 Thess 5:15

1 Pet 3:9