

Romans 12: Overcome evil with good...

Paul describes the quality of life that should characterise those who believe in the gospel as set out in Chapters 1 to 11. The close connection between belief and life-style is emphasised by the significant word “therefore” (verse 1)...

A living sacrifice (Romans 12 v 1 and 2)

- What are the “mercies of God” (v 1) Paul is reminding us of in his appeal? See Romans Chapters 5 and 8. Why present “your bodies” (v 1), rather than your souls or your hearts? What's the difference between a dead (Levitical) sacrifice and “living” sacrifice (v 1)? Which one gives the greater service?

“Your spiritual worship” (v 1) translates the Greek phrase την λογικην λατρειαν υμων (*ten logiken latreian humon*), ‘your reasonable (or intelligent or ‘of the word’ as in 1 Peter 2 v 2) service to God (or worship of God, as required by the Levitical law’.

“Be transformed” (v 2) translates the Greek word μεταμορφουσθε (*metamorphousthe*), from which we get ‘metamorphosis’ – it is used in only three other verses in the New Testament: Matthew 17 v 2 and Mark 9 v 2 (referring to Jesus' transfiguration), and 2 Corinthians 3 v 18.

The word for ‘renewal’ is ανακαινωσις (*anakainosis*), which means ‘a complete change for the better’ (the same word is used in Titus 3 v 5); the word for ‘mind’ is νους (*nous*), meaning ‘intellect’ or ‘understanding’. A similar thought is expressed in Ephesians 4 v 23.

- Notice the contrast between “conformed” (e.g. chameleons) and “transformed” (e.g. caterpillars). How are we transformed? By feelings? By actions? As we are transformed on the inside, what should become evident on the outside?
- What are some of the ways our minds can be renewed? See Psalm 1 v 2.

Gifts of grace (Romans 12 v 3 to 8)

The Greek word for “gifts” (v 6) is χαρισματα (*charismata*), often translated as ‘spiritual gifts’. The root word is χαρις (*charis*), meaning ‘grace’ – so ‘gifts of grace’ conveys the true meaning.

These verses contain one of three lists of spiritual gifts in Paul’s letters (the others being in 1 Corinthians 12 v 8 to 10 and Ephesians 4 v 11).

- Why do you think Paul prefaces his teaching on gifts with the warning in v 3? On what basis are the different gifts assigned to us by the Holy Spirit? Remember, even ‘faith’ is a gift from God.
- Verse 4 reminds us that the Church is a unified whole, yet we are distinct within the Body of Christ – there is unity but not uniformity. ‘Prophecy’ is ‘forth-telling’ the heart and mind of God, which may include ‘foretelling’ – how should prophecy be practised? How does Paul tell us to exercise the other gifts of ‘service’, ‘teaching’, ‘exhortation’, ‘contribution’, ‘leadership’, and ‘acts of mercy’?

[MORE OVER...]

The life of the true Christian (Romans 12 v 9 to 21)

Paul ends this chapter with a series of brief instructions on living as a Christian with other people – this shows Paul knew the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount: with v 14 compare Matthew 5 v 44, Luke 6 v 28.

- *Warm relationships, good manners and hard work* – do you think this is fair summary of v 9 to 11?
- “Rejoice in hope” (v 12) – hope for what? Notice it is not ‘rejoice in results’.
- “Be patient in tribulation” means active, steadfast endurance in the face of deep and serious trouble. “Hospitality” (v 13) is literally ‘love for strangers’ – this means love in action, not just warm feelings.
- “Rejoice... weep...” (v 15) means being considerate of the feelings of others.
- “If possible... live peaceably...” (v 18) indicates that it may not always be possible...
- Verse 20 is a quotation from Proverbs 25 v 21, 22 – do you think the “burning coals” are good or bad? Perhaps it refers to the ‘burning conviction’ that our kindness places on our enemy. Remember, we can destroy our enemies by making them our friends...
- “Overcome evil with good” (v 21)...

Prayer – Lord, help us to apply Paul’s teaching in this wonderful chapter:

We pray that our love may always be genuine.

Help us to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good.

Help us to love each other with brotherly affection, and to outdo each other in showing honour.

Help us not to be slothful in zeal, but to be fervent in spirit, and to serve you, Lord.

Help us to rejoice in our hope, to be patient in tribulation and constant in prayer.

Help us to contribute to the needs of the saints, and seek to show hospitality.

Help us to bless those who persecute us; to bless and not curse them.

Help us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep.

Help us to live in harmony with each other.

Help us not to be haughty, but to associate with the lowly; help us never be wise in our own sight.

Help us never to repay anyone evil for evil, but to give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all, and as far as possible to live peaceably with all.

Lord, help us never to be overcome by evil, but always to overcome evil with good.

We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.