

Romans Lesson 10

Romans 12:1-2: We Give Back to God

The author of Romans, the Apostle Paul, spent the first eleven chapters of Romans teaching about what God has given to believers in Christ. Now in Romans 12, he tells us what believers in Christ need to give God. People get frustrated because they want even more stuff from God in a materialistic sense, but here Paul gives the secret to a fulfilling life in Christ--give yourself to Christ. The key to a productive spiritual life is in giving up your self-promotion, your agenda, and your selfish desires, and offer yourself to God. Because of God's grace in overcoming your lost condition, you must not live for yourself, but give yourself completely to God. We were dead in our sins, but God has sent Jesus to atone for our sins and declare us justified. Now that we are saved, Romans 8 details how God has also graced us by indwelling us with His Holy Spirit so we can be empowered to live righteous lives even now. Now he expands upon the Romans 6 teaching that we are to consider ourselves dead to our old lustful desires and alive in Christ. By dying, we live. We need to put into practice what Jesus told His disciples, "deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me". We need to die to our own goals, our own agenda, and our own desires in order to properly serve Christ.

Romans 12:1: "Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice"

Romans 12 begins with "Therefore", which explains that chapter 12 is connected to chapters 1-8. Because of the great mercy that God has bestowed on us, we need to give ourselves completely to God. First of all notice the seeming paradox of "a living sacrifice". He is referring to the image of the Jewish priest in the Old Testament who placed the animal sacrifices on the altar at the Temple. The law commanded that they bring a sacrifice for their sin to the priest who slayed the animal and placed it on the altar. Now that Jesus has made the perfect sacrifice of infinite value, the priesthood and the animal sacrifices are unnecessary. Now we are to figuratively offer ourselves to God to serve Him and glorify Him. There is a competition for our lives. The fallen world offers us acclamation, wealth, and pleasure, but Jesus offers His blood for our devotion, worship, and service. This sacrifice we are to make must be "holy and acceptable", meaning God's way not our way. Most people portray themselves as serving God, but they do it on their terms and their timing. They would compartmentalize God, and make this only on Sunday, or only when they are not serving themselves. Romans 8:12 told us we used to serve ourselves, but now we are obligated to live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This sacrifice we make is our "spiritual service of worship". When I was in High School, I had to read Charles Dickens book, A TALE OF TWO CITIES. All through the book the selfish worthless guy Sydney lived only for himself, but he admired from afar the virtuous Charles Darnay. In the end Charles Darnay is on death row in the Bastille during the French Revolution. In an act of pure love, Sydney substitutes himself for Darnay who goes free. Sydney goes to the guillotine, but says the famous line, "It is a far far better thing I do than I have ever done; it is a far far better rest I go to than I have ever known". Jesus died for us, so now we can live for Him. A person's self sacrifice of his life is the ultimate proof of love. Jesus' sacrifice was an atonement for sin, but we are sacrificing our ambitions, goals, and personal agenda for what is infinitely better--a life lived for Christ.

Paul said it well in 2 Cor. 5:15, "we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again". Then again in Gal. 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me".

Romans 12:2, A Warning and a Command

In order to present ourselves to Christ, we need to move away from the lies of this fallen world, and instead fill our minds with the spiritual things of God. The peer pressure in the world we live in is enormous and overwhelming. It is the ultimate "garbage in, garbage out". We have all bought into the lies of the world to varying degrees. Think of all the teaching, demands and pressure our parents, teachers, and coaches unknowingly put on us to win at any cost. Remember the Al Davis motto, "Just win baby"? We have all been bombarded with sayings and commercials--I need some me time, this is the Pepsi generation, winning isn't everything it's the only thing, just give me the bottom line, I don't care how you do it just get it done, and the ultimate one we all buy into---the ends justify the means. How about all the best selling books---WINNING THROUGH INTIMIDATION, LOOKING OUT FOR # 1, I'M OK YOUR OK. An egotistical guy once told me his purpose in life, "He who dies with the most toys, wins". I replied, "No, actually he is just dead!" Therefore Paul writes "do not be conformed to this world". Stop going along with the crowd, and stop filling your head with all the worldly nonsense. Instead of conforming to all this, we are to be changed from the inside out so that we are increasingly being conformed to the image of Christ. When computers were first invented, the input of programmers had to be perfect or the resulting output was nonsensical, and therefore they used the saying "garbage in, garbage out". The phrase means that if input data are not complete, accurate, and timely, then the

resulting output is of no useful value. The human brain operates the same way---if you fill it with worldly lies and nonsense then you can expect it to result in worldly sinful living. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as a man thinks in his heart so is he", also Proverbs says, "There is a way which seems right to a man whose end is destruction". Jesus taught in Matt. 6:33 to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added", meaning that we think we need all the stuff in the world, but what we really need is to be seeking the things of God. "Do not be conformed to this world" is the warning of Romans 12:2 to stop being preoccupied with all the stuff in the world which can only result in worldly behavior.

The fallen world has a pattern and it wants us to conform to it. German theologians have a term they use for the dominant school of thought in the culture during a certain era—the zeitgeist. It is the zeitgeist of this twenty first century typified by Postmodernism and materialism. The German philosopher George Hegel is credited with having said that every era and every culture has had its ZEITGEIST (isn't that a cool word?). The mass of opinions and the spirit of our time is that truth is relative so just make up your own, and happiness comes with riches and stuff. In Romans 12:2, Paul is telling us that if we appreciate what Christ has done for us we will not allow ourselves to be conformed to these worldly schools of thought.

Therefore, Paul also gives us a command in Romans 12:2 to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". Break out of the world's way of thinking and instead let your minds be molded by the Word of God. Basically it comes down to more of Him and less of me. "Be transformed" is a passive command to let the Spirit change you from within. You actively show up and actively stop subjecting yourself to worldly input, and let the Spirit of God transform you. It is a gradual process and a gradual transformation. We need to feed our faith and starve our lusts, and if we do so the result will be that we experience that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect.

Practical Application #1 of Being Transformed, Romans 12:3-16

The first application of being inwardly transformed concerns the Christians relationship with fellow believers. How do we treat our Christian brothers and sisters? First our attitude changes--we used to be proud and obsessed with ourselves, but now in Christ we are humble. Romans 12:3 says "don't think more highly of yourself than you ought", but to have sound judgment that the members of the body of Christ (the church) need us to transfer the love of Christ to them. God has given each one of us spiritual gifts to edify the church, and it's all about the commandment to love one another as Christ loves us. The human body is a good analogy of how we use our spiritual gifts to edify the church. Our body has many parts that all have an important function, and for the body to work efficiently all the individual parts have to work together. All the members of the church need help, they all have needs, and God has gifted all the members to meet those needs. In Romans 12:6-8, Paul lists some examples of gifts that people can share. Basically there are speaking gifts and serving gifts, and Paul does not give an exhaustive list but some examples. Those who teach and/or preach do so for the building up of the members of the church. By far and away the most numerous gifts are the serving gifts in administration, giving, encouraging, leading, physical service, etc. All of us are to serve in whatever capacity the Spirit enables us. Our attitudes toward each other are to be marked by love as Paul teaches in Romans 12:9-16, and this Godly love we show each other is really our manifestation of love for the Lord. We serve others as if we were really serving the Lord.

Practical Application #2, Romans 12:17-21

We have two different relationships surveyed in Romans 12. First is our relationship with other believers, which is to edify them and meet their needs. Secondly in Romans 12:17-21, Paul teaches on our relationship to the rest of the world. The world we live in is typified by conflict. We will never be free of conflict as long as we are alive in these bodies in this world. The way God expects us to deal with conflict is to overcome it with kindness and goodness. The obvious example of this is when we are wronged or harmed. Our natural human inclination is to strike back in anger and get our revenge. Nevertheless, Paul wrote that we are to "never pay back evil for evil" and "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good". I must not destroy my witness for Christ by my reaction, but instead disarm those who would harm you by being kind and forgiving. The summary statement is awesome, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men".

Revenge is one of the great subjects of literature and the movies. Just think of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" or the great novel THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO. The main characters in each spend the rest of their lives plotting revenge so much so that they

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become miserable angry despicable people. In the end they get their revenge, but there is no satisfaction. Consider the great Oscar winning movies like RAMBO. The returning war hero is the brooding mistreated and unappreciated victim of the local Sheriff's miscarriage of justice. Therefore, for two hours we follow Rambo as he single handedly wipes out the entire police force and National Guard troops. Then Rambo goes into the town and blows up the entire city and population. We in the audience were happy and clapping for him to get his revenge because we could relate to his pain, but it escaped our notice that just because Rambo was treated harshly, an entire Metropolis was wiped out. This is the problem. We are not righteous judges of retribution. As a race of people, we are typically unrighteous in response to evil. Therefore, Paul teaches us a better law—"leave room for the wrath of God for it is written 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay'" says the Lord. If we believe in the future righteous judgment of God, then we must let Him give back what is due. Our job is to win some for Christ.

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