

TRANSFORMED LIVES

Romans 12:1-21
Key verse 12:1,2

Lesson 12

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Paul begins this chapter with the words, "therefore", and "in view of God's mercy." Christians are not people who transform themselves. We are sinners who have received God's mercy, God's grace of forgiveness through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are great debtors to God's grace. Therefore, we must worship God our Savior.

1. A living sacrifice (1-2)

But what kind of worship is pleasing to God? It is not the offering of sheep and goats on a bloody altar. Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God ended all of that. God wants from us an act of spiritual worship; he wants us to offer our own bodies as living sacrifices to him. How can we do this? Romans 1:17 says, 'The righteous will live by faith.' We began by offering ourselves to God by faith. We make a decision to live by faith, to live according to God's word--not by our human calculations.

Before we knew God's love and Jesus' grace, we lived according to the patterns of the world. We did not question the standards and values of the people around us, but fit easily into the pattern and lived like everyone else. But as the people of God, we should not be conformed any longer to these worldly patterns. Rather, we should try to please God. This means that our way of thinking about ourselves, other people and the world must be changed. We must learn to think about these things from God's point of view. Instead of naturally acting to please myself, I must ask, "How can I please God?" When my mind and heart are renewed by God's grace and by his forgiving, transforming love, then I can discern what his will is, and, with his help, I can live a life that pleases him.

2. Sincere love in the body of Christ (3-13)

The first evidence of a transformed life is a changed relationship with other people. The Bible commands us to love God and love our neighbors. When we become children of God, we suddenly have many brothers and sisters, and our first priority is to love them. This is often the hardest part of being a Christian. It's easy to love Jesus, who is my shepherd and who laid down his life for me, but it's hard to love fellow Christians. However, when Peter confessed his love to Jesus, Jesus first,

second and third commands to him were 'Feed my lambs'; "Take care of my sheep"; and "feed my sheep." If we are Christians, we must have a close relationship with other Christians. How close? Paul says that we are like hands and feet and eyes and ears on the same body. (1 Co 12) Verse 5 says, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

In order to have a right relationship with others, we must not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We must be very realistic about ourselves. We must not compare ourselves with others, for if we do, we began either to feel inferior or to feel superior to them. Both of these attitudes are wrong and keep us from loving our brothers and sisters.

Paul tells us to think about the gifts God has given us and how we can use those gifts to serve the fellowship of Christ. Some of these gifts are for anyone who claims them by faith. For instance, the gift of prophesying is very close to being a Bible teacher. This is God's grace, and it is claimed and exercised by faith. Some of these gifts seem to be opportunities to minister to other believers, and the eyes to see those opportunities. These gifts are given so that we may use them--not just hide them away and become proud. If God gives us the opportunity to serve, we should serve; the opportunity to teach, or encourage or give material things to someone in need, then we should do these things, by faith. Those put in a position of leadership must work harder than anyone else. Those who forgive others who have sinned against them should do it cheerfully. God's gifts are given to be used in humble service of others. They are not given to make believers proud.

The most important one factor in the body of Christ is love. God's people must love each other with sincere love. This means that we must learn how to love from Jesus. If we really love our co-workers and our sheep, then we must hate the things that weaken and damage their faith. We must seek their highest good, and earnestly pray for them to grow up in the image of Jesus.

To be devoted to one another in brotherly love means that we must make a commitment to the body of Christ. Commitments are not vague; they are specific. Christians should be committed to the particular body into which God has led them. Church tramps, who go here and there looking for human or spiritual benefit, never making a commitment to a particular church or community of believers can't please God or learn what it means to be a Christian, for they are always getting, never giving.

Christians should also be aware of their influence in the body of Christ. So we should not live by our feelings. We should never lack in zeal, but keep spiritual fervor; we should be faithful in prayer, and be joyful in hope--gloomy faces are not a good influence on others. We should share freely and always welcome one another with the hospitality of Christ.

3. Christians in a hostile world (14-21)

Jesus wanted his disciples to live in the world--but not be worldly. When we live a life of faith in a world that is in rebellion against God, we can expect to be persecuted and misunderstood. But we must bless those who persecute us. We are misunderstood, but we must be understanding--we must overcome ourselves and rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. (Our human tendency is to do the opposite.) We must live in harmony with believers, so as not to invite the scorn of the non-Christian world. We must not become proud and self-righteous, but humbly associate with all kinds of people in order to share the gospel with them.

Revenge is one of the big underlying motives for much of what goes on in a non-Christian society. People are created with an innate sense of justice. If they don't believe in God, they seek revenge on those who they think have wronged them. There are so many lawsuits in our present society. Of course, some of them are entered into because of money, but many lawsuits are brought for the sake of revenge. Even when we drive on a busy street, the spirit of revenge sometimes takes over at a red light, when somebody in a fast car zooms ahead when the light changes. The thought that crosses the mind is, 'I'll get him at the next light or worse, "I hope he gets a ticket." But what does Paul, reflecting the mind of Jesus, say, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." "Don't take revenge." God said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay." Paul says, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath." But even more, he tells us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, and if he is thirsty, give him drink. We must overcome evil with good.