

Romans Chapter 12- John Karmelich

1. We are now beginning "Part 3" of the Book of Romans. My title for this section is, "Now what?"
 - a) When you study most of Paul's letters, especially those addressed to churches as opposed to individuals, Paul style is to spend chapters explaining all the good things God has done for us. The latter chapters will then explain what is our response back to God.
 - b) In other words, "God has done great things for you and me. Now what?"
 - i) The "now what" is God's desire of how we are to respond to His love to us.
 - ii) We are now starting the "now what" section of Romans.
2. In this lesson, I'm going to spend an extraordinary amount of time on the first two verses.
 - a) These verses are the "methodology" of Christian living.
 - b) It is as if Paul is going to say, "Here is how I want you to live your lives (Verses 1-2). Then let me give examples and illustrations for the remainder of Chapter 12.
3. Before I start, I need to talk a little about "giving one's all to God."
 - a) "The entrance fee to God's kingdom is nothing, but the annual dues are everything."
Henry Drummond
 - b) As a Christian, one has to understand one's personal behavior matters. Yes, we are saved as long as we are trusting in Jesus, but that is not an excuse to sin as much as we want.
 - c) The life of the Christian keys upon one word: "Gratitude". God saved us from an eternity in hell. God works in our lives to mature us. God gives us all sorts of power in order to overcome sin. What does God expect in return? Gratitude.
 - i) God demands obedience out of gratitude. It is the greatest motivator one can have in order to serve God. God can "stick a gun to our head" and ask us to serve Him under duress. We would then resent it. However, if we served God out of gratitude for His love, we are then serving because we love Him.
 - d) In many lessons, I spoke of the danger of trying to please God through our own efforts without God's intervention. One is technically "worshipping themselves" as opposed to God if we don't give Him the credit or praying for Him to help us in the first place.
 - i) The other danger is laziness. God never calls us to say for example, "I'll just lay here until God gives me a sign to do something." God can only guide us if we are "moving". God expects us to live a life of gratitude in service for Him. The remainder of Romans gives examples of how this is to be so. My point here is to avoid laziness in our service to God.
 - ii) Another danger is, "I can go do whatever I want as long as I'm trusting in Jesus." That is true, as we have the freedom to do whatever we want. The problem is the freedom God gives us also comes with responsibility. God saying in effect, "You want to turn your life over to Me? Terrific; I have a book full of instructions on how I want you to live. Start reading and obeying!" God gave us these "do's and don'ts" for our own happiness. Those laws and word-illustrations are "on the books" for our benefit on how to live a happy and fulfilled life.
4. One has to remember that giving one's life to God is more than just salvation; it also gives us a purpose for living.
 - a) If there is a God, then the first question is, "What does God require of us and expect of us?" That is where God's laws come into effect. Those laws are God saying to all people: "You want to know what I want from you folks? Here's a set of laws and instructions. Start obeying or you'll be toast". ☺
 - b) Since humans are incapable of being perfect, God in His love for us, then provided a perfect-punishment on our behalf, so we can spend eternity with Him. That is the Gospel message in one sentence.

- c) If all we have to do is accept Jesus, what's the point of living on earth after that? Grant it, some accept Jesus on their deathbed and are saved. For most of us, there is still a long life to live. What do we do after we are saved? In other words, "now what"?
 - d) The purpose of living gets back to the concept of gratitude. We live a life in gratitude to God. If we are grateful for God's salvation, then out of gratitude for God, we spend the rest of our lives serving Him. All we do, in whatever we do, is designed to give glory to God. This applies to work, school, home, waking hours, sleeping hours, household chores, and recreation activities.
 - i) Do you want practical examples? Hang in there. Most of Chapter 12 all the way to the end of the book are examples of such.
5. I also want to talk a little about some mistakes Christians make in serving God.
- a) One mistake is "trying to do it all on one's own power". I have watched Christians practically work themselves to death trying to help others to a point of mental and emotional exhaustion. It never occurs to them that God designed us for rest and sleep in order to have the power and energy to serve others. Some people serve others out of guilt or they believe they need to do more to please God. That is getting back to the danger of trying to please God through one's own efforts. Yes, God wants us to give it everything we got, but one also has to understand the concept of rest and recuperation in order to have the strength to keep moving.
 - b) Another danger is to not put up boundaries over those who use and abuse us. There are people who take advantage of one's good nature. I'm not talking about ignoring those in need. God may have called you to minister to that person. I'm talking about the kind of person who controls you through manipulation and guilt. God never calls us to serve out of guilt. Further, we are not truly helping people who take advantage of our good nature.
 - c) Another danger I've seen is people who "try and try and try, yet never feel connected to God". They go to Christian seminars and pray constantly, yet they complain they never feel God's power working in them. A similar idea is a person who knows the bible cover to cover, goes to church regularly, and then complain how miserable is their lives.
 - i) The solution is often found in Verses 1-2 of Romans 12, which we'll get to in a moment. (I promise! ☺) It has to do with not giving ones all to God." We're impatiently waiting for God to do something for us, as opposed to us living a life for God. We're waiting for God to work instead of us working for God to be His witnesses to others on our behalf.
 - ii) As an example, when you and I are having a pity party for ourselves, often the best solution is to go help someone else in need. Getting our minds off of our problems by serving someone else gives us perspective and gratitude for all God has done for us.
6. Romans Chapter 12, Verse 1: 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.
- a) I'm going to discuss Verses 1 and 2 phrase by phrase, as these two verses are the "methodology" needed in order to serving God effectively. The remainder of Chapter 12 is illustrations and examples of such. If we can grasp the concepts of Verses 1 and 2, the rest is "downhill". The pace will pick up after that point.
 - b) Notice the last phrase of Verse 1: "-- This is your spiritual act of worship".
 - i) Paul desires that we worship God in gratitude for what God has done for us.
 - ii) The word "this" refers to the words that come before the dash ("--") in the verse.
 - iii) We think of "worshipping God" as getting on our knees and expressing gratitude. The idea of "worship" is far greater in scope. Paul's comment of "spiritual act of worship" means we are to give are "all" to God and minister to others. Again, most of Chapter 12 gives examples and illustrations of how to do this practically.

- c) Let's start with "Therefore". When you see a "therefore", ask yourself why it is there-for.
 - i) In other words, the "therefore" connects to some previous thought.
 - ii) The first and logical answer is that it ties to all of Romans so far.
 - iii) The key point so far in Romans is "God keeps His unconditional promises:
 - a) Chapters 1-8 are about God keeping His unconditional promises to Christians. As long as we are trusting in Jesus, we are saved. We can't mess it up because it is God's faithfulness that is at stake, and not ours.
 - b) Chapters 9-11 are about God keeping His unconditional promises to the Jewish nation. They still have a future destiny within the land of Israel, not due to their goodness, but because of God's unconditional promises.
 - iv) If it's all up to God and no longer up to us, what do we need to do? That is what the "therefore", is there-for.
 - v) You can also argue that the "therefore" ties to the last few verses of Chapter 11.
 - a) Remember in the original text, there are no chapter breaks.
 - b) Paul ended the last few verses of Chapter 11 with a prayer of praise. It praises God's mercy toward us and how God has blessed our lives. The "therefore" can be seen as "What is our response to His mercy upon us?"
- d) Next, let's talk about "urge you brothers":
 - i) In the original Greek, the verb-tense a command like an army captain giving a command his soldiers. At the same time, it is a plea, like one who is equal.
 - ii) Paul sees all Christians as equal to him in stature. He is pleading with us to "do as He does". Paul is implying his authority as one sent from God. At the same time, again, Paul is pleading "as an equal".
- e) The next phrase is "in view of God's mercy".
 - i) This gets back to the introduction about service out of gratitude. It is the idea that because God has been merciful to us, we need to live a life of gratitude to God.
 - ii) God's "mercy" is the fact that He has forgiven all of our sins, past, present and future because He has provided payment for them, at "no cost to us."
- f) Now we get into the actual discussion of "How to worship God". Remember the main point of Verse 1 is Paul urging us to be obedient to God. So far, we have only focused on the "why" issue (i.e., out of gratitude). Now we get into the "how" issue.
- g) The next phrase is begins the "how" issue: "offer your bodies as living sacrifices."
 - i) In the Old Testament, for one to have forgiveness of sins, one had to offer an animal as a sacrifice for ones sins. This had multiple purposes:
 - a) Killing an innocent animal reminds us that innocent people suffer when we sin. There are consequences to others when we are disobedient to God.
 - b) Remember that small animals were a form of money. They didn't have currency and people had to barter for services. Payment was often in the form of animals. My point here is that offering an animal actually cost that Jewish person "something" as a sacrifice.
 - c) Finally, an animal sacrifices were a reminder of death. Sin ultimately leads to death. By seeing death via killing an animal, it is a visual reminder of what can ultimately happen if we continue in that sin.
 - d) We as Christians no longer do animal sacrifices. Those sacrifices were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus' payment on the cross.
 - e) We are "not done" with sacrifices. That is what this verse is all about.
 - ii) Getting back to Verse 1, it says to offer our bodies as "living sacrifices".
 - iii) The key word is "living". If you think about it, this can be a contradiction in terms. We think of a biblical sacrifice as to kill something, yet Paul uses the word "living" with sacrifice. The term sacrifice means to give up something for someone else.

- iv) This is about giving one's "all" to God. This is about putting our bodies up on a "mental" sacrificial altar and saying, "OK, God, You are now the owner of my body. You are in charge. If You want me to die tomorrow, that is Your problem. If you want me to live another day, then my desire is to live to do Your will."
 - a) The classic joke here is, "The problem with a living sacrifice is it keeps squirming off the altar. " A dead animal just lies there on the sacrificial table. A live animal has a desire to get off the table as the fire is hot.
- v) We as Christians constantly battle "our will versus God's will". In a sense, most of the remainder of Chapter 12 are examples and illustrations of how we can fully live for God and not for our own desires.
- vi) It is also important to talk a little about human bodies:
 - a) Many people mistakenly think of our bodies as what causes our sins. They think it is the bodily desires that cause us to sin in the first place.
 - b) All sin begins with a thought or desire. The body then "acts" on that thought if it goes unchecked. For example, if we steal, is it the fault of our hands for grabbing what is not ours? The point is our bodies are not bad; it is just how our minds use them that are bad.
 - c) Getting back to the text, if we give our "bodies" on the sacrificial altar, that starts with our thoughts, and our bodies follow. It is our mind telling our body, "get up there on that altar" and the body follows. It starts with our desire to want to please God in all that we do, and our actions must follow.
- h) The last phrase left in Verse 1 is "holy and pleasing to God".
 - i) The word "holy" is the idea of "separated for God".
 - a) For example, if you have a special dinner plate that is only used for one person with no exceptions, that plate "separated" for that person. If that plate were only for God's use, then one can think of that plate as "holy". It is the idea of something completely dedicated only for God's service.
 - ii) The word "whole" is similar to "holy" in that the whole thing is being used.
 - iii) We as Christians are designed to be "holy" in that all our lives are designed to be of use to God. That not only includes the "God stuff" time (i.e., church, prayer, etc.), but anything and everything we do. It is best to think that our entire lives are designed to be "witnesses" for God in all that we do.
- iv) The last phrase is pretty self-explanatory: "pleasing to God".
 - a) I have to admit, I've never been happy with the currently popular Christian cliché, "What would Jesus do?" I prefer the expression, "What would Jesus want me to do?" God does not call us to literally say, walk on water or be crucified. God calls us to live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do. If you are not sure whether or not something is a sin, ask yourself, "Is what I am doing pleasing to God?"
 - b) I can here some people thinking, "Does this mean I can't go shopping or go to say, a sports event or to a movie? Of course you can. The secret is to take God with you! We can still enjoy recreational things. We must remember that we are witnesses for God whenever and wherever we are.
 - c) I find that if one has a heart for God, one's interest in other "things" will be limited. If we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (Ref.: Matthew 22:37), then our desire is to spend our time living for Him.
 - d) I also try to put things in balance. If I act so much "like a non-Christian" so that no can tell even tell I'm a believer in Jesus, then I've gone too far. I always liked the question, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"
- i) Wow, we actually made it to Verse 2. ☺

7. Verse 2: 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.
- a) I warned you the first two verses are slow going, and then I pick up the pace.
 - b) The first two verses focus on "how" to please God. The remainder of the chapter is illustrations and examples. The methodology is key, which is why I'm spending so much time on these two verses.
 - c) Let's start with "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"
 - i) This gets back to my concept of "If I were on trial for being a Christian, is there enough evidence to convict me".
 - ii) I am also reminded of the classic joke, "Some of you are excellent secret agents for Jesus Christ. You're neighbors don't suspect in the least you are Christians." ☺ (Water Martin)
 - iii) So what does Paul mean by "the pattern of this world"? It refers to living for anything and everything other than the true God.
 - a) Everybody has some "god". Find out where people spend their free time and their spare income and you will find their god.
 - b) This gets back to idea I brought up in the introduction that if there was no God, life ultimately has no purpose. You can live to make lots of money, be famous, or even "do good", but if there is no ultimate purpose of an everlasting life for mankind, inevitably, it is futile.
 - iv) The "pattern of this world" is to "do whatever feels good". It is about living for anything and everything other than God himself.
 - a) I need to add that life is meant to be enjoyed. A miserable Christian is a lousy witness for God. The secret is to let God work through us so we can appreciate it all the more. Anything life has to offer eventually leaves us short in satisfaction. God designed us with a need to worship Him. If we fulfill that need with anything else, we ultimately will be unsatisfied.
 - b) People who are in marketing understand this concept well. A commercial may start with, "Are you happy with your old car?" Marketing people understand that no "thing" ever fully satisfies and we always crave more.
 - v) Again, to be a Christian is the opposite of living for things other than for God. It is about living to please God in all that we do. After we comprehend that, we can put every other aspect of life in perspective. We can then enjoy "things" because we've got the right perspective. We understand things can only bring limited satisfaction and not ultimate satisfactions.
 - vi) If we are to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, then are behavior must follow. It starts with the mind i.e., our thoughts, and then are actions follow.
 - vii) The problem is we fail a lot. We see "things" we want and turn away from God. Just how do we live a life that is always pleasing to God? That is what the rest of Verse 2 is all about.
 - d) The key phrase is, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."
 - i) Let's start with "be transformed". This means to be changed from the inside-out.
 - a) It is the same Greek word that we get "metamorphosis". For example, it is like when a worm goes through a metamorphosis to become a butterfly.
 - b) The same word was once used of Jesus. There was a time when Jesus was alone on a mountain with three disciples and Jesus became "glowing white". There was a physical change from the inside out. Jesus was "metamorphosized". (Ref.: Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-7; Luke 9:28-36).
 - ii) So how do I be transformed? Is there some button I push to start the change? ☺
 - a) The answer is the "by renewing of your mind" part of that verse.

- b) By seeking God through prayer and a desire to please Him, we literally change from the inside out. Do you want proof? Ponder how much desire did you have to pray and study God's word prior to being born again?
 - c) Being transformed is about being "God-focused" instead of "me-focused".
 - d) This is about praying regularly for God's will to be done in our lives.
 - e) It is as if God is saying, "I'm just waiting to take over "x" aspect of your life at this moment. Just tell me you want Me to take it over, then I'll step in."
 - f) This gets back to the idea of being a "living sacrifice to God". God desires that He be in charge of every aspect of our life all the time. Again, the classic joke is the problem with being a "living sacrifice" is we crawl off the altar a lot. That is why the "renewing of one's mind" is a constant and consistent process of turning different aspects of one's life over to God.
 - g) This is about "control". At any given moment, one needs to consider, "am I letting God be in control of my life, or is it me? Sometimes the simple test is to ponder if what you or I are doing is pleasing to God at that moment.
- iii) How do I stay focused? I can't focus that long on any one thing. Don't panic. ☺
- a) This is not about praying around the clock to the point of ignoring one's life. It is about praying "regularly". It is about sticking close to God as our best friend. If we are to be dependant upon God, then we have to "mean it" and do it regularly and often.
 - b) Let me give some practical advice. Start one's day with a few minutes in prayer. Pray for God's will to be done in our life. Spend some time, be it 5 minutes or a half hour reading one's bible every day. Did you have a bad day where it didn't get it done? Let it go, and start again. During the day, when you "catch yourself" doing something that is not pleasing to God, stop and think, "OK, that's not right. I confess that sin to you. Lord, take over this aspect of my life and help me to live all the better."
 - c) I am not arguing one will be perfect by regularly "renewing one's mind", but it is a step in the right direction. Remember our Christian maturity is up to God, not up to us. All God asks of us is to be "willing". It's God's job to fix us. All God asks of us is availability.
- e) This leads to the second sentence of Verse 2: Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.
- i) In other words, our life as Christian is a two step process:
 - a) Step 1 is to regularly pray for God's will to be done in our life.
 - b) Step 2 is to live our lives for God and watch the results.
 - c) The bible becomes our "barometer" as to whether or not our life is pleasing to God. Our conscious becomes our "barometer" as well.
 - d) If for that moment, we are violating any biblical principal, then we are not doing "God's will.
- f) This is a good time to briefly discuss "God's will" for our life:
- i) First of all, God's-will for you can be different from His will for me. God gives each of us special talents, passions and gifts. Just because the "Christian next door" is called to special ministry, it does not mean God calls you to the same one.
 - ii) I take the view that if we pray regularly for God's will to be done in our life, and we study God's word as a pattern for how to live our life, then we can "go do what we want" assuming it is our desire to live a life pleasing to God.
 - iii) God gives each of us "desires" and talents that He intended for us to use for His glory. The joy of life is to be able to combine one's God's given talent in a location or "area" of one's life that one enjoys.

- iv) My main point is that “God’s will” is not some verbal revelation that we are suppose to receive moment by moment. Doing God’s will goes back to the classic line by Augustine, “Love the Lord Your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and then go do whatever you want”. If you love God with all of that “might”, then one’s life will follow and “God’s will”, will be done. It’s not one’s ability that is important; it is about making one’s life available to God.
 - v) Our goal is to make an impact for Jesus in our lives. A question to ask is, “Are you a thermometer or a thermostat?” A thermometer “conforms” to the world around them. A thermostat “controls” the world around them. (Source: Jon Curson.)
 - g) Hey look, there is a Verse 3! ☺
8. Verse 3: For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.
- a) Let me paraphrase Paul’s thought: “God can’t use us if our big fat ego gets in the way! Let’s get off of our high horse thinking we’re someone special. Think of ourselves as pawns that can be used by God. Let’s humble ourselves so we can be available to God!”
 - b) It is important here to describe “humility”. Humility is not to think that we are some “low-life nothing”. It is not about being masochistic about ourselves.
 - i) Humility is about not thinking about ourselves at all. It is about looking at a situation and helping someone in need without thinking of the consequences to one’s self. It is about “getting ourselves out of the way” so God can use us.
 - ii) The danger is we manage to go, say five minutes without sinning and we think we’re pretty impressive. ☺ Thinking “humbly of one’s self” is to realize that we still are sinners and without God’s help, we would fall apart.
 - c) Much of the remainder of Romans gives illustrations of how to live a life that is pleasing to God. It starts with a humble attitude. That is why Verse 3 is here. God can’t use us if our ego’s and personal desires get in the way of God’s desire for our lives.
9. Verse 4: Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
- a) In Verses 4-5, Paul uses the human body as an illustration of how to get God’s will done.
 - b) One of the important things to grasp about living the Christian life is that God never intends for us to be a solo act.
 - i) If I had to describe the main purpose of living the Christian life, it would be to “build up the body of Christ”. (See Ephesians 4:11-12.) That means we as Christians work as a “unit” to help mature each other, build-up each other’s faith, bring in new members, encourage each other, comfort each other when we are sick etc. It is all about helping each other grow in our relationship with God.
 - ii) With that said, the human body is a good illustration. Each part of the body is designed to work with every other part of the body. Each body part has a specific function. The brain, or the liver, or the heart cannot live all by itself. Each part needs each other in order to survive. The same applies to Christians.
 - c) By the way, this does not mean we ignore non-Christians. For starters, we never know who will be eventually saved. If God’s love is inside of us, it should be poured out to whoever happens to be in the neighborhood. ☺ Our primary goal is to use our gifts to help other Christians, but it never should be limited to that group.
10. Verse 6: We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

- a) Now that we understand that Christians are to work as a unit, it's time to focus on our responsibilities and duties. Just as each body part has a function, so each Christian has a function. Our job is to work together as a collective unit to "build up the body of Christ".
 - i) What does "build up the body of Christ" mean? It is God's intent is for Christians to work together to help each other mature in our relationship with God.
- b) God gives us spiritual gifts to accomplish this goal. First of all, a spiritual gift is just that: A gift. It is not something to brag about or take credit for. If it is a gift from God, then one gives the credit to God.
- c) When Paul traveled from town to town as a missionary, he established churches. He then appointed "elders" to be in charge of that church. The word "elder" simply means "senior", as in someone who's lived for a good while. I believe Paul wanted people who were more spiritually mature to be elders. One can find a list of elder qualifications in Paul's 1st Letter to Timothy Chapter 3 and his letter to Titus, Chapter 2.
 - i) My point here is those qualifications never say, "Pick somebody who has outstanding spiritual gifts". In other words, Paul wanted spiritual maturity, not raw talent. One can have great spiritual gifts but still be an immature Christian.
 - ii) This gets back to these verses. Although the word "humility" is not used in describing these gifts, it is implied by the tone of these verses. The idea is that one uses these gifts to help others, not to build up one's own ego.
- d) Understand that all Christians are given some special gift(s), and I've yet to meet anyone who is given all of them. Also, understand that no one gift is any more special than the other is. The Christian "body" collectively, needs all of these just as the human body is designed to functional at peak performance when it has all of its parts.
- e) Also, understand that if one has a great gift in some aspect they are not to ignore the others. For example, one cannot say, "I have the gift of teaching, therefore, I don't have the gift of "giving". Go ask someone else." ☺
- f) Another aspect of spiritual gifts is to understand "timing". Some people have special gifts that only occur on an irregular basis. Some have gifts that can be used more consistently.
 - i) For example, I have occasionally seen people who have a special gift of healing. They can pray over someone, and they miraculously get better. I've yet to see anyone who could "clear a hospital". Such power is on God's timing and not at the will of the individual. It is not an on-off switch.
 - ii) On the other hand, I have seen bible teachers who can consistently teach well. They have a gift. Do they have bad days? Of course. My point is sometimes gifts are consistently there to be used and sometimes God just give them to people to be used on His timing only.
- g) It's time to talk about the gifts themselves: Paul gives a "specific subset" of spiritual gifts in these three verses. They are: 1) prophesying; 2) serving; 3) teaching; 4) encouraging; 5) giving; 6) leadership and 7) mercy.
 - i) Some commentators take the view this is a complete list. There is a classic debate in Christianity over say, whether or not the gift of "tongues" is for today, and some point out speaking in tongues is not on this list.
 - ii) My view is that Paul is not limiting spiritual gifts to these seven. It's not our job to put God in a box and limit when and what He can and cannot give as gifts.
 - a) My view is that these seven are examples. Grant it, they are prime examples, but just that. It is not designed to be a complete list.
- h) Let me define each one as to help understand them better:
 - i) The word "prophesying" literally means "to shine forth". It is as if one turns on a light in a dark room and illuminates the room. The most important aspect of prophesying is to make God's word "shine forth". It includes preaching (a topical study) and teaching (usually a straight-through-the-bible study).

- ii) Propheying also includes predicting the future. This is a complicated topic. In summary, it does not come with an on-off switch. God does give some people an ability to tell things about other's future. One can never put God on the spot and just give out some prediction. I also find that God confirms such predictions to us. For example, if someone gives me a prediction, my first thought is, "Why didn't God just tell me this directly? Gee, did God lose my phone number?" ☺ My point is when someone make a prediction about our lives, "test" it and see what happens as opposed to just assuming it is going to happen. (Ref.: 1: John 4:1.)
- iii) The next one is "serving". That is simply to put other's needs above one own need. All Christians are to serve in some capacity. My problem has always been with people who think they are "above" serving because of their position in life.
 - a) The spiritual gift of serving is someone who has a special sense of patience. Many people who work in hospitals or elderly care facilities have this gift.
- iv) The next one is "teaching". Some have it as a regular gift and any Christian can have it for a moment. We can be in a situation where we fire up a quick prayer and say, "Lord, give me the right words to say here". All of sudden, something wonderful comes out of our mouth and we think, "Wow, that was good. I never would have thought of that!" My point is anyone can have a gift of teaching.
 - a) We think of biblical teaching as someone who does it on a regular basis. That type of teaching is equally (but not more) important than other gifts.
- v) The next one is "encouraging". (The King James term is "admonishment".) It is the idea of actually encouraging people to be obedient to God's word. This gift does not include violence or threats. Some people have a gift to get others motivated to action. Again, any Christian at any time can help encourage, just as we can teach, or have mercy or any other gift listed.
- vi) The next one is "giving". All Christians should give of their time and income. That's another topic. Some people have a "giving" gift more than others. Some are blessed with more financial resources and are called to financially give more. Others give of their time volunteering in services helping the church. My point is God gives some "extra-ordinary" gifts of giving of one's time and resources.
- vii) The next one is "leadership". The way to tell if one has the gift is to see who follows them willingly. A godly gift of leadership is also one who follows biblical models for leadership. This includes humility, wisdom, and the ability to listen to other's opinions before making key decisions.
- viii) The final one is mercy. Some people have an extraordinary gift to be merciful to those who are hurting. They have a great ability to comfort others. They don't condemn when one is down, they have compassion.
 - a) The verse says if we have the gift of mercy: "let him do it cheerfully". The point is to have a proper attitude when showing mercy upon others.
- i) One word used over and over in this text is the term: "let him".
 - i) It is the idea that, "If a person has a spiritual gift, let him go for it! (I believe that's in the King James. ☺) In other words, if a member of a church has one of these gifts, don't suppress them from using it. If you know you have one of these gifts, then use them as God has intended.
 - ii) That phrase is used several times in this passage.
 - iii) The word "him" is intended to be generic. It can refer to a male or a female.
- j) Let me end this section and talk to Christians who have never thought about what are their spiritual gifts. I find the best way is simply to ask others who you know well. They usually can tell from watching your behavior. Another way to tell is based on what you enjoy. For example, teachers love teaching. Givers love to give. Merciful people like to help others that are hurting. Finally, "watch the results" as an indication of one's gift.

11. Verse 9: Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
- a) From here to the end of the chapter, Paul gives examples and illustrations on how one is to apply spiritual gifts. This gets back to my opening theme of “now what?” In other words, if God has blessed with eternal salvation, forgiven our sins and given each of us special gifts to help each other, “now what?” The answer is to use our talents to help grow and mature fellow Christians.
 - i) From Verses 9 to the end of the chapter are illustrations and examples.
 - b) The first sentence is “Love must be sincere.”
 - i) Biblical “Love” means to put others needs as priority over one’s own needs. It is about giving of one’s self (time, money, resources) to help someone else.
 - ii) The point here is love should never be “tit for tat”. It should never be about expecting something in return. It should never be so others around you can see just how wonderful we are. In other words, it should be sincere.
 - c) The next phrase is “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good”
 - i) A classical sign of Christian maturity is, “How much do you hate sin and how much do you love the sinner?”
 - ii) To understand how bad “sin” is, is to hate the act itself. Our focus should be on ourselves first and then on others for this issue.
 - iii) The way to avoid sin is by “clinging to what is good”. This gets back to living a God-focused life where one realizes all that we do is accountable to God. We are to rely on God’s power to overcome sin, not our own will-power.
12. Verse 10: Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.
- a) I stated in Verse 9 that “love” is putting others’ needs before one’s own.
 - b) Paul is essentially defining “love” for us here in Verse 10.
 - c) Jesus said in effect, “People will know you are Christians by your love for one another”. (John 13:35). Jesus did not say people would know we are Christians by our bumper stickers or the crosses dangling from our necks. Further, Jesus did not say people would know we are Christians by our spiritual gifts.
 - i) My point is the primary purpose of Christian living is to help each other grow in our relationship with others. We can’t help others if we don’t have a love for each other. Love is putting other’s needs in front of one’s own.
 - d) When it comes to loving service to others, beware of the two “extremes”: One extreme is to be self-centered as to ignore other’s needs. The other extreme is to work so hard serving others that lets their own lives fall apart emotionally and physically. Notice the verse does not say to ignore one’s own needs, just to put other’s needs as a priority.
13. Verse 11: Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- a) The word “zeal” implies passion combined with action. It is the idea that if one really has a heart for something, one’s actions will follow.
 - b) If we have God’s love within us, we need someone to express that love upon.
 - c) The way to have a lot of “zeal” is by sticking close to God. If one spends a lot of passionate time drawing upon God’s strength (i.e., prayer, bible time, praising God, church attendance”) one becomes “full of God” and needs an outlet for that “fullness”.
 - i) For example, I love studying God’s word. I need to “let it out somehow” and that is one reason I write these studies. For others, one enjoys being compassionate and such people need others to express that compassion upon.
 - d) Finally, let’s talk about “serving the Lord”. The way one serves God is by serving others.
 - i) Remember Christian living is all about God “getting us involved in His program”. It should be our desire to live a life that is pleasing to God in all that we do. The word “Lord” means He is in charge and we are not. “Serving the Lord” is about doing His will. Helping others is a major part of “Serving the Lord”.

14. Verse 12: Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- a) The first one is about “hope”. I talked about this in earlier lessons. Biblical “hope” is the opposite of doubting. It is not, “I hope it doesn’t rain today”. Biblical “hope” is saying something like, I trust that God has forgiven all of my sins and I’m willing to bet my eternal life on that hope”.
 - i) The point of “be joyful in hope” is to have a positive attitude about it. We should not say with a gloomy tone, “Gee, I hope God is going to help me here.”
 - b) The second phrase is “patient in affliction”.
 - i) We all go through some suffering during our life. The timing for relief is up to God and not us. Thus, patience is needed. We need to remind others of this. We can’t make affliction just go away because we desire it to end at that moment. Yes, we should pray for it to end. Yes, we should take steps to make it better. Still, we need to accept the fact that the ultimate timing is up to God and not ourselves.
 - c) The final phrase is “faithful in prayer”. If we pray for something, we need to expect results, or else, why pray in the first place? “Faithful prayer” can be saying to God, “I don’t know what Your will is in this situation, so I’ll just ask what is mine. The results are up to you. May You be glorified by this situation.”
 - i) The term “faithful prayer” can also be saying to God, “Your Word says this-and-that should happen. I’m asking that You apply it here. I’m not asking based on my goodness, but based on Your faithfulness to Your word!”
 - ii) It also means to actually pray, regularly and consistently, as opposed for example to telling someone, “I’ll pray for you” and never following through.
15. Verse 13: Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
- a) This verse is about the idea of helping those who are in need.
 - b) It does not mean one is to take a vow of poverty to help others. It means, “If you have more than what you need, be willing to share with those in need.”
 - c) An example of the last sentence would be to sharing one’s home with others. It can mean opening one’s home to fellow Christians and people in need.
16. Verse 14: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
- a) Now comes the tough one. God calls us to bless those who persecute us. Let me start by saying this can only be done by God’s power working through us, not on our own.
 - b) There are a number of reasons God wants us to have this attitude. First of all, anger blocks our relationship with God. When we are busy being angry at someone, we can’t pray effectively or love around us.
 - c) I have found the best way to get over one’s anger at someone is to pray for them. It’s hard to be angry at someone if we are sincerely praying for their well-being. It helps to separate the “sinner from the sin”.
 - d) This verse is not a call to be passive. If someone is chasing you with a weapon, it is “God’s will” that you run! ☺ There are places in the world where Christianity is a death sentence. I do believe in aiding and helping Christians in such situations. This verse is about attitude and not retribution.
17. Verse 15: Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
- a) When someone just got some great news, it is not a good time to remind them that they are sinners and need God’s repentance. ☺ Just be happy with them and share their joy.
 - b) When we are hurting, sometimes we just need someone willing to listen. If someone lost a loved one, mourn with them. I was correctly taught many years ago that funerals are for the living, not for the dead. One goes to a funeral to comfort the living.
 - c) These are both examples about doing what is appropriate in these situations. Sometimes the best thing we can do for someone’s faith is simply to be happy when they are happy and be sad when they are sad. When one is hurting, the mistake made, (especially by men) is we want to fix the situation as opposed to comfort a hurting person.

18. Verse 16: Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
- a) When we associate with other Christians, status or position in life becomes irrelevant. We are to treat all other Christians as “saved sinners”, no more or no less.
 - i) This ties back to Paul’s illustration how every Christian is like a body-part. All the body parts are needed to be healthy. Therefore, no one person should be thought of more highly than another.
 - b) This verse also applies against bigotry. Unfortunately, the history of the Christian churches is full of stories of bigotry by race or even by wealth-status. Thank God that in recent times, some denominations have publicly apologized for its own actions of being guilty of racial discrimination in its pas. I also know of one denomination that “partners” wealthier-located churches with less-wealthier located churches where they must share in their funds. That is a great application to this verse.
19. Verse 17a: Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
- a) This verse expands on “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse”. (Vs. 15.)
 - b) It is the idea of not seeking revenge on those who hurt you.
 - c) If you think about it, most of these illustrations are just commentary on biblical “love”. If we have love for another, why would we want to hurt others?
 - d) This verse implies that someone did us wrong and we want retribution. This verse does not mean for example, we shouldn’t call the police if someone stole from us. It means we shouldn’t do likewise and go steal from them. Sin should not be used to pay back sin.
20. Verse 17b: Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.
- a) One has to remember that our lives are a public witness. Yes, our private life should be pleasing to God as well, but this verse is a reminder that people watch our behavior.
 - b) One of the great lessons my father taught me was, “Sometimes you not only have to do what is right, but also do things that are above suspicion whenever possible.”
 - i) My father and I were in a business situation once together. My father “killed a deal”, not because it was illegal, but that it could look immoral to an innocent bystander. His point was whenever possible, avoid things that could “appear” to be bad. Our lives are a public witness whether we realize it or not.
21. Verse 18: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
- a) Paul desires that we live at peace with anyone and everyone. If we hold some sort of anger, it blocks our relationship with God. God then “can’t work through us” to love and minister to others.
 - b) Paul adds the disclaimer “if it is possible”.
 - i) Paul understands we are sinners and in reality, this won’t happen all the time.
 - ii) Further, there are people who resent us (or far worse). Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, it is out of our hands. In such situations, remember, “God is bigger” than whatever situation we face.
 - iii) Paul’s underlying point is “just because it is impossible to do all the time, don’t make that an excuse to not try in the first place”. In other words, be at peace with everyone around you as much as possible.
 - c) Notice the phrase, “as much as it depends upon you”.
 - i) In other words, Paul is saying don’t wait for the other person to apologize first. ☺
We need to make the effort our self!
22. Verse 19: Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.
- a) Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 here. If God loves us, then He must also want to protect us from those who do us harm.
 - b) Again, this is not about being passive when people are trying to hurt you. God is not against self-defense. Paul is preaching against seeking retaliation.

- c) The solution to anger is to give it to God. We need to vent it out in prayer and tell God it is now “His problem” to deal with. Again, pray for people who are harming You. It is amazing how God can work to resolve such situations.
 - d) So how does God get revenge? Where are the lightening bolts striking down those who are trying to harm us? ☺ The answer is God is working on His timing and not ours.
 - i) Remember we don’t know who is saved and who isn’t. God may have “plans” for those we consider our enemy.
 - ii) That is why a resurrection into heaven or hell helps me sleep at night. Perfect justice does not exist in this world. God must judge people’s actions one day.
23. Verse 20: On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."
- a) This is a quote of Proverbs 25:21-22.
 - b) I don’t believe Paul is literally saying when we feed our enemies, God dumps a bunch of hot charcoal briquettes upon someone’s head. I’ve yet to see that one. ☺
 - i) It can refer to eternal judgment and it can refer to the fact that God himself will deal with those who want to harm us and not us.
 - ii) This coal-reference is an idiom. For example, if someone wants to harm us, they want to see us suffer. If we can be nice to them while they want to harm us, it infuriates them. It is mentally “heaping burning coals on their head”.
 - c) Let me add that sincerity is an issue here, as is our witness for God. One should not be nice in front of an enemy so we can watch them squirm.
 - d) I should also define “enemy”: An enemy can refer to anyone around you, who for the moment, wants to do you harm. One has to separate the “personal” from the “corporate” enemy. For example, if you’re country is being invaded, I don’t see this verse as an argument to avoid military service. Notice this verse is not applying to situations where your enemy is attacking you. It is about helping one’s enemy when they are hurting.
24. Verse 21: Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- a) Paul wraps up the last five verses with this one summary statement. In a sense, Verse 17-20 can be summarized by Verse 21.
 - b) Remember that Satan can’t get you to lose your salvation. He can make you an ineffective witness for Jesus by getting you to focus on our pain or our anger. It can become an obsession. That is what Paul meant by “overcome by evil”.
 - c) The second phrase is “overcome evil with good”. The secret is to give that anger and hurt to God. The pain may be legitimate and not our fault. That is not the issue. The issue is that pain is blocking our relationship with God. The secret is letting God’s power work through us to overcome evil. I’ll give an example of such in the closing prayer.
25. Let me wrap this up with this reminder: I spent a lot of time going through the first few verses and then went at a high speed through the remainder of the chapter.
- a) The first few verses are the “methodology” in order to accomplish all the things listed in the rest of the chapter. The concept of “renewing one’s mind” is the secret and the power in order to do all the things from hospitality and overcoming evil. God gives each of us special gifts so that we, as a collective unit can work together to accomplish God’s will for our lives. That is why I spent so much time on the first few verses. Without God’s power, we can’t do all the “things” listed in the rest of the chapter.
26. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, We ask for Your love flow through us so we can be loving to others. We ask that Your gifts be given to us corporately so that we can minister to each other. We ask that Your Spirit be upon us so that Your will be done. Help us to renew our minds, moment by moment, so that we can live our lives as You desire. Give us the boldness to go out and make a difference to those You call us to minister to. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.