

The Background of the Letter

The Ecclesia in the 1st Century

From 120, crowded together in a second storey room, the ecclesia of Christ had grown rapidly and spread quickly all over the Roman Empire. Dynamic preachers like Paul and Apollos convinced many Jews that Jesus Christ truly was the Messiah of the Jewish people, crucified by their own priests, but raised again from the dead, now sitting down at the right hand of God as the great High Priest for men. Many Gentiles, too, saw the reasonableness of this new teaching: they were persuaded to forsake their idols and immoral worship, and turn to the God of Israel. So the ecclesia, at first completely Jewish became more and more multicultural and this began to cause some problems.

Jews were proud of their history. When all nations had worshipped a host of different gods and goddesses, the Jews had been faithful to Yahweh and had lived uprightly, clinging to the Law of Moses. (They forgot all the times when they had been just as bad as the nations around them.) Even Jews who were persuaded that Jesus was their Messiah, and had turned to Christianity - even these Jews were still proud to be Jewish. Paul's words in Phillipians 3:4-6 show how Jews felt about their heritage.

So when Gentiles began to believe in Jesus, the Jews in the ecclesia saw them as second rate citizens of the Kingdom of God. Even when Peter persuaded them that Gentiles were fellow-heirs of the Kingdom (Acts 11 :18), many Jews still insisted that Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. This meant Gentiles had to be circumcised uphold the dietary laws of the Law and keep other regulations which were laid down in the Law.

Strict Jews travelled from Jerusalem to foreign cities to tell the newly baptised Gentiles that they had to keep the Law. In some areas such as the ecclesias in Galatia, they managed to persuade brothers and sisters that it was essential to their salvation. But when they came to Antioch, they ran up against the Apostle Paul.

The arguments of these Jews were strong and convincing, especially as they claimed to speak with the authority of James the Lord's brother who was a leading figure in the Jerusalem ecclesia at the time (Acts 15:1; Gal 2:12). Even some of Paul's closest friends— stalwart brethren in the Truth like Barnabas and the Apostle Peter felt embarrassed by the claims of these Jews (Gal 2:11-13).

But Paul would not have a bar of it. One thing Jesus Christ had accomplished was to end the Law of Moses. The Law had served its purpose: its time was past and its regulations no longer bound men and women. Paul persuaded Barnabas that these Jews were wrong. He rebuked Peter publicly (Gal 2:14ff). Then the three of them set out for Jerusalem, where a conference had been called to discuss the problem. This conference is called the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15).

The Conference resolved once and for all that Gentiles did not have to keep the Law in order to be saved and a letter was sent to all ecclesias telling them of this decision.

But the problems still hung around. Jews found it very hard not to be proud of being Jewish. They still believed that circumcision was an advantage, even if it wasn't essential (Rom 3:1). They looked down their noses at the Gentiles, calling them the 'Uncircumcision' (Eph 2:11). They still thought that the diet laid out in the Law of Moses was the right way to live and that the Sabbath and the Jewish feasts should still be kept (Rom 14:2, 5).

But the Gentiles were also to blame for the tension in the ecclesia. They gloated a little over the fall of Israel from God's grace (Rom 11:18-22, 25). Some kept up their old connection with the pagan temples (1 Cor 8:4, 9-10). Many of them were not separate from the world in the way they lived (Rom 14:22; 1 Cor 6:9-12). They refused to compromise with the Jewish point of view (Rom 15:1); and they sneered at the sensitive conscience of Jewish brothers and sisters, calling them 'weak in faith' (Rom 14:1).

But by the time Paul came to write a letter to the ecclesia of God in Rome, the tension: were easing. Gentiles and Jews were learning to live together in peace. The letter to the Romans is calm and carefully reasoned. In earlier letters (such as Galatians and Corinthians) Paul had to vigorously defend himself against false claims that were made about his character and his teachings. He appealed emotionally to his audience. He remember their early days in the truth, the love they had shown for him then and their appreciation for the good news he had told them about God's mercy. By contrast, in Romans Paul does not have to defend himself. He can calmly expound the great doctrine of the Atonement and show where Israel still fits into God's plan. His spirit soars on the lofty things of God and several times he breaks out in poetry at the thought of the abundant goodness and mercy of God.



Rome, the sewer of the Western world

The Roman Empire was the great power of the time, protected by the iron discipline of its legions, supported by slaves from conquered nations and heavy taxes that had to be paid for the privilege of being part of the Empire. It sprawled across three continents - Europe, Asia, and Africa - its boundaries touching the limits of the civilized world. Within the borders, hundreds of different nationalities, religions, cultures and languages intermingled. Thousands of miles of roads crossed the Empire, linking all the major cities.



Right at the hub was Rome herself, the queen throned upon seven hills, fairly humming with the trade and talk of the nations. Rome was a large city—her population has been estimated at between two and three million—large by today's standards, and huge in those days! Every language, every culture and religion could be found somewhere in the great metropolis. It was a giant melting pot for all the Empire, where everything was thrown in together.

Romans prided themselves on their traditions, their justice, their traditions of morality. But their boasts were hollow. A historian, Tacitus, writing at the time, said the epoch "was rich in disasters, savage with battles, rent with factions, cruel even in peace; the swallowing up or overthrow of cities, the pollution of sacred functions, the prevalence of adulteries, the corruption of slaves against their masters, of freedmen against their patrons, and when there was no open enemy, the ruin of friends by friends."

Another writer¹ comments,

"Underneath this showy power and magnificence was a sink of rottenness. Family life was unspeakable. Tyranny and cruelty was rampant. The people were degraded and brutalized...Slavery was the curse of the Empire... The slaves were wretched. The best of them crowded to Christianity when it came. The worst of them debauched Rome. They brought in new unnatural vices. They corrupted the

masters. They corrupted the children... The Roman boys grew old and jaded and rotten with vice before they were out of their teens."

In Rome all the dregs collected. Tacitus described it as

"the common sewer, into which everything infamous and abominable flows like a torrent from all quarters of the world."

Paul sums up the sickening evil of Roman society in the latter verses of Romans 1. It is no wonder that "God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts."

The Ecclesia in Rome

Against this sickening backdrop, the Roman ecclesia had steadfastly maintained their faith and upright way of life. Paul commends them (1:6-8). He styles them "the called of Christ Jesus...beloved of God, called to be saints." "First," he says, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." They were an outstanding example of a living faith in the worst of places. But he was very conscious of the degraded atmosphere in which they lived, and he prayed earnestly to God, that he might be given an opportunity to go to Rome and strengthen them.

The ecclesia probably began when Jews returning from the feast of Pentecost told others about the amazing things they had seen in Jerusalem (Acts 2): how that the followers of Jesus were able to speak in foreign languages; how they had told them of their Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who had been crucified by the hands of the leaders of the nation; how they themselves had been conscience—stricken by Peter's words and how they had been baptised into the name of Jesus Christ.

But by the time Paul wrote to the ecclesia it seems that many Gentiles had joined their ranks. The brothers and sisters whom Paul greets in chapter 16 nearly all have Greek names, an indication that there were now many Gentiles in the ecclesia. Paul has to carefully balance exhortation to Jew and Greek in this letter, to remind each of their responsibilities, to point both of them to the right way of life and the right attitude of mind.

The writer — Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles

"Paul, one of the slaves of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, singled out for the gospel of God" (1:1). This humble claim is made by the man who had in the past proudly chased the followers of Jesus Christ to foreign cities. Humbled in spirit, pride broken, he was chosen by the Lord as the ideal person to carry "the gospel of God—God's good news—to the Gentile world."

Ever afterwards he was conscious of the enormous mercy of God in giving him this great honour. He did not only tell the Gentiles about Jesus Christ—He was Christ to the Gentiles. Isaiah had prophesied of the Servant of Yahweh, "He shall sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Isa 52:15). But how did Christ do this?

¹ J. Paterson Smyth, an Anglican priest, academic and author.

He was born, lived, and died within the borders of the Land of Israel! Somebody had to 'be Christ' to the Gentiles! And that somebody was Paul.

This duty was not a prestigious thing. It meant Paul was continually humiliated as Christ had been. It meant Paul had to suffer a lot of pain, as Christ had done. But Paul was glad to be able to share in the sufferings of Christ. He could "rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is left over of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" (Col 1:24). He said, that before the very eyes of the Galatians "Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you" (Gal 3:1). He said, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal 6:17). Paul was overwhelmed with gratitude to God, for having given to him a way to express his deep appreciation for God's mercy.

The message of Romans

The letter to the Romans is about the Gospel, or good news, of God. Not the good news God was giving out, but good news about God: what He had done and what He was going to do.

Look at man, says Paul. He is in a hopeless state. Whether Jew or Gentile, he is in an impossible situation, trapped in sin, doomed to die. Gentiles have deliberately ignored the evidence of God's existence. If they had really wanted to find God, they could have seen Him in His creation, a constant witness to His existence. But they did not want God. They wanted to follow all the lusts of the flesh and do as they pleased. So God let them go—He gave them up to uncleanness: and what a sickening and evil world had resulted (chapter 1)!¹⁾

What about the Jew? God had given His own law to the Jews. They had been entrusted with the very words of God Himself. They studied it intently, microscopically. But had they turned out any better than the Gentiles? No, says Paul. They taught others not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to steal, but they themselves were guilty of the very same things! Eventually they killed the Son of God, who had done them nothing but good. So they were no better than the Gentiles (chapter 2). It looked like man was doomed to sin and death for ever. He was in a hopeless blind and he could not get himself out of it.

But somebody could get him out. Man couldn't save himself. But there was someone who could—God could. God could save man: and in His love and mercy He did just that (chapter 3).

But on what basis did God save man? Was it on the basis of obedience to a set of rules? No. The experience of Israel with the Law of Moses proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that man could not keep a set of rules perfectly. Somewhere along the line he was doomed to fail. Man just could not do it. But somehow man had to become righteous. God could not tolerate sin for ever: how then could man be saved?

Paul tells us how. Man will be saved by faith. He will be saved by believing in the promises that God has made (chapter 4). He will be saved by believing that God has the power to forgive his sins through the grace that He has given in Jesus Christ, to credit him with righteousness and to bring him ultimately to moral perfection. Man is too weak to save himself: but God is strong to save him (chapter 5).

Does that mean we can do what we like and God will just keep on forgiving us? Of course not, says Paul. We are dead to sin; we are alive to God. God is our master now; we must serve Him, not Sin (chapter 6). But however hard we try, we still sin! We try harder and harder to serve God, and still we just can't manage to be perfectly righteous (chapter 7) How can we ever reach the perfection of character that God requires?

Don't worry, Paul tells us. Trust in God, as His Son did. Trust in Him, and He will bring you to perfection, to the glory of immortality. Nothing will stop this process—nothing at all—so long as you trust in God and do your best to obey Him, to imitate His character, to glorify Him (chapter 8).

And God hasn't given up on the nation of Israel. He has not abandoned them. His mercy is still in store for them also. However, first He is going to build an ecclesia of individuals, Jew and Gentile, who believe and trust Him. When that is complete, He will turn back to Israel, and save them also (chapters 9 to 11).

That is the message of Romans. Of course, along the way Paul answers many Jewish questions; he explains the details of the Atonement for us; he shows how God sent His Son and how that really did achieve the salvation of man. But these paragraphs outline the basic message of the letter to the Romans.

Where Romans 12:1 to 15:13 fits into this

Where does it fit in? Well, says Paul, God has shown great mercy to us. It doesn't matter whether we are Jews or Gentiles, God has shown such amazing love to us that our minds are struggling to really understand it. If we appreciate His love, then surely we would want to show our appreciation: surely we would feel deeply moved at this display of God's love, undeserved by anyone of us. Surely we would want to do something to show how thankful we were.

Of course we would! So in Romans 12 to 15, Paul gives us practical advice on doing what God asks. He pleads with us to respond to God's mercy. He tells us to start by transforming the mind. He exhorts us to be humble and conscientious in using God's gifts. He urges us to live peaceably within the ecclesia, and with men in general. He warns us to submit to worldly authorities for the time being. He explains to us that the only way to fulfil the Law is by showing love to our neighbour and that this 'debt of love' can never really be repaid. He rouses us from apathy, to put on the armour of righteousness and fight off the desires of the flesh by spending all our time in the service of God. He shows us how to resolve differences between ourselves and points out the right attitude we should have to those who have a different conscience on a matter. Finally, he reminds us of the attitude of Christ—selfless, not selfish, in serving God—and shows that the whole purpose of Christ's mission was to bring Jew and Gentile together in glorious harmony and peace, to manifest the praises of the great and merciful God of heaven. What a wonderfully exhortational section of Scripture!

A Breakdown of Romans

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1:1-15 | Introduction |
| 1:1-7 | Paul's commission to preach |
| 1:8-15 | Paul's desire to visit Rome |
| 1:16-17 | The Righteousness of God in the Gospel |
| 1:16 | The power of God to save both Jew and Gentile |
| 1:17 | The righteousness of God to lead men from faith to works of faith |
| 1:18-3:20 | Man's failure to attain to Righteousness |
| 1:18-32 | The failure of the Gentiles |
| 2:1-16 | The basis of God's judgment |
| 2:17-29 | The failure of the Jews |
| 3:1-8 | Jewish objections answered |
| 3:9-20 | Scripture witnesses to the total failure of all men |
| 3:21-5:21 | The Righteousness of God revealed |
| 3:21-31 | God's righteousness revealed in Christ |
| 4:1-25 | The righteousness of faith in the life of Abraham |
| | <i>Abraham justified by faith (4:1-8)</i> |
| | <i>Abraham justified before circumcision (4:9-12)</i> |
| | <i>Abraham justified before the Law (4:13-17)</i> |
| | <i>Abraham's example of faith (4:16-22)</i> |
| | <i>Abraham's seed justified by faith (4:23-25)</i> |
| 5:1-11 | The personal benefits of justification |
| 5:12-21 | Condemnation in Adam, righteousness in Jesus Christ |
| 6:1-8:39 | The Righteousness of God with Believers |
| 6:1-7:6 | The Relationship between Grace & Sin |
| | <i>We live a new life (6:1-14)</i> |
| | <i>We serve a new Master (6:15-23)</i> |
| | <i>We are espoused to a new Husband (7:1-6)</i> |
| 7:7-25 | The Law of Moses served a valuable purpose in highlighting sin |
| | <i>The Law of Moses vs The Law of Sin (7:7-12)</i> |
| | <i>The Law of God vs The Law of Sin (7:13-25)</i> |
| 8:1-39 | The Relationship between Spirit & Flesh |
| | <i>Christ did what the Law could not (8:1-4)</i> |
| | <i>The triumph of Spirit over Flesh (8:5-11)</i> |
| | <i>Sonship through a spiritual life (8:12-17)</i> |
| | <i>The suffering & future glory of God's children (8:18-25)</i> |
| | <i>The present assurance of our sonship (8:26-30)</i> |

God has done everything to facilitate victory (8:31-39)

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| 9:1-11:36 | The Righteousness of God toward Israel |
| 9:1-5 | Paul's distress at Israel's unbelief |
| 9:6-13 | But God's purpose has not failed: all Israel were never included |
| 9:14-18 | God's choice in showing mercy – Election |
| 9:19-21 | God's method of development – The Potter |
| 9:22-29 | God's calling of Jew & Gentile |
| 9:30-33 | Gentiles attained righteousness, Jews did not |
| 10:1-4 | The self-righteousness of Israel |
| 10:5-10 | The nature of righteousness by faith |
| 10:11-13 | Righteousness available to Jew & Gentile |
| 10:14-18 | Scripture anticipates preaching to the Gentiles |
| 10:19-21 | Scripture anticipates Gentile acceptance |
| 11:1-10 | Israel's rejection is not total—a remnant will be saved |
| 11:11-24 | Israel's casting away is not forever |
| 11:25-29 | The certainty of Israel's salvation |
| 11:30-36 | God's wisdom in saving both Jew & Gentile |
| 12:1-15:13 | The Righteousness of God in Practice |
| 12:1-2 | Right conduct before God |
| 12:3-8 | Right conduct in Ecclesial life |
| 12:9-21 | Right conduct in daily life |
| 13:1-7 | Obligations to rulers: Obedience |
| 13:8-10 | Obligations to all men: Love |
| 13:11-14 | Obligations to God: The urgency of the times |
| 14:1-4 | Accepting differences of conscience |
| 14:5-9 | Doing all things unto the Lord |
| 14:10-12 | Christ is the judge |
| 14:13-23 | Proper use of our liberty of conscience |
| 15:1-7 | Seeking each other's good, to the glory of God |
| 15:8-13 | Accepting each other, to the glory of God |
| 15:14-16:27 | Conclusion |
| 15:14-21 | Purpose of the Epistle |
| 15:22-29 | Plans for the future |
| 15:30-33 | Request for their prayers |
| 16:1-16 | Greetings from Paul |
| 16:17-20 | Warning and encouragement |
| 16:21-24 | Greetings from others |
| 16:25-27 | Closing blessing & praise |



Study Notes

Romans 12:1-15:13

12:1-2 – Right conduct before God

These first two verses are the foundation on which the Apostle builds the rest of the letter. He exhorts us to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, ready to serve Him with our powers. First we need to allow God to transform the way we think. As our minds begin to be transformed, we will also begin to change the way we speak and act toward others—our family, brothers and sisters, those around us and those over us such as our employer. We will be diligent, joyful, positive, balanced, loving. We will avoid the evil things of the world; we will strive for righteousness and holiness; we will learn to tolerate the weaknesses of others; we will try to build up those around us; we will work for true unity. We will aim at God's glory, first and foremost (12:3 onwards). But it all begins in the mind. So that is where Paul begins.

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present you bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

beseech

- GK *parakaleo*, lit 'to call to one's side'
- RSV 'appeal'
- Diag 'entreat'

We will take a closer look at this important word in verse 8. For now, consider how Paul introduces the exhortational section of other letters he wrote (Eph 4:1; 1 Thess 4:1). Notice that Paul pleads with his readers: as an apostle he could have commanded, but God is really looking for spontaneous obedience from people who see and think about and understand intelligently respond to His own love for us.

brethren

Both Jew and Gentile are included in Paul's appeal. Everybody has experienced God's mercy, no matter what our background is.

by the mercies of God

- GK *oiktirmos*, 'compassion or pity for others'
- Diag 'tender compassions'
- NIV 'in view of God's mercy'

God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). All His works are full of compassion and mercy. But Paul is referring particularly to his earlier exposition in the letter of Romans—the mercy of God in saving all men and women when they could do nothing for themselves except to believe His promises and accept His offer of salvation (11:30-32). This is a very comprehensive appeal—it encompasses the whole of our life; it challenges us to respond: who could refuse?


- Examine Paul's use of 'mercy' elsewhere in Romans.
- present

- GK *paristemi*, lit 'to set beside'

- NIV 'offer'

When a sacrifice was brought to the Tabernacle to be offered it was first set beside the altar for the priest to inspect it for blemishes. The sacrifice could only be offered if it was unblemished. This is the sense of this word—to present ourselves for inspection. Jesus Christ worked, first through his sacrifice, and then through the apostles, to perfect the saints so that they would pass the inspection of the great High Priest when they were finally presented to him (Eph 5:27; Col 1:21-22, 28-29; 2 Cor 11:2). This work still goes on today. But an animal might struggle so fiercely against its offeror, tugging and straining against the rope, that it could not be offered at all. Paul calls on us to voluntarily come to the altar and willingly submit to God's requirements.

Paritemi has occurred before in this letter (cp 6:13, 16, 19). Also note the example of Daniel's friends (Dan 3:16-18, 28).

- Find other examples of people who "yielded their bodies" so as to serve God.
 Read *The Genius of Discipleship*, chapter 6 - Jesus. - SKPVM
 Paul (Rome) - Isaac - Gen 22.

- *Gk soma*, 'the whole body, the complete man or woman'

In the corrupt pagan worship of Paul's day, the bodies of men and women were used in many unrighteous ways, indulging the lusts of the body. Others lived as ascetics, like the Stoics, thinking to become holy by starving and torturing their bodies and by subjecting themselves to rigorous self-discipline. But this way of life could not overcome fleshly desires either (Col 2:23). Both practices ended up looking inward, focusing on the lusts of the flesh.

The right and positive way to overcome the desires of the flesh is to yield the body, heart, soul, mind and strength—every power, every faculty—in service to God (Matt 22:37). Jesus did this all his life (Psa 40:5-8). In death, too, he yielded himself entirely to God (Matt 27:50; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30). This wholehearted devotion to God's work does not leave room for fleshly impulses (Rom 13:14).

Once we are baptised, our body is "for the Lord": we are 'organs' and 'limbs' of the body of Christ. "Come", says Paul, "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:11-20).


We might wonder why Paul speaks of our bodies. After all, our bodies are the source of all our weaknesses and faults and sins! But of course, God knows this. It is only through the strength that comes from Him that we could ever serve Him anyway. God is able to work powerfully through us, despite the weakness of our bodies. When God triumphs in our lives, despite all our imperfections, He is glorified (2 Cor 12:7-10—note the context). And that is the point of our life. Sin is put down and He is exalted.

a living sacrifice

The idea of a living sacrifice is a 'paradox': the two ideas seem to contradict each other! But Paul means that whilst literally speaking we are alive, spiritually we give ourselves totally to God (cp Rom 6:11). (The Burnt Offering teaches the same lesson in Lev 1:3-17.) Christ was the ultimate 'living sacrifice' (Psa 40:5-8).

All this is a great contrast to the sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses. These were almost always dead—absolutely dead. There were two exceptions to this rule. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, two goats were brought to the Tabernacle: one was offered and the other was led out into the wilderness and freed (Lev 16:7-10, 15, 20-22). Likewise in the arrangements for purifying a person cured of leprosy, two birds were brought: one was sacrificed, the other was let go (Lev 14:5-7).

These two provisions foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ. He died to make atonement for man, to cleanse man from his moral 'leprosy'; now, "he ever liveth to make intercession for us (Rom 4:24-25; 5:6-11; Heb 7:22-28). In this we rejoice; and, in appreciation for what God has done, we follow the Lord. As he died, so in baptism we die to the flesh; as he rose again to eternal life, so we rise from the water to "newness of life", living unto God (Rom 6:1-11) We follow him, carrying our cross behind him, putting 'to death' our own independent will, subjecting every thought and word and action to the will and glory of God (Matt 16:21, 24). If we can do this, then we have understood the 'doctrinal' section of Romans.

- Note Paul's example (2 Cor 4:10)
 Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part 1, chapter 12.

holy

The issue is simple. God is holy—so we must be holy, separate from all unrighteousness in every aspect of our thought and behaviour (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). As the sacrifices under the Law of Moses had to be free of any little mark or blemish, so there must be no mark of any uncleanness on our minds. How can we be holy when we have to live and study and work among people who are becoming more unrighteous every day? We must try always to be conscious of God, aware that He sees everything. We must make a deliberate choice to avoid anything—books, movies, TV shows, entertainment, places, friends—that put some of the world's uncleanness into our heads. This takes effort and perhaps involves some embarrassment and pain, but it is absolutely essential if we want to share in the glories of the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21, 6:7-8)

- Read *Genius of Discipleship*, chapters 8 & 11

acceptable unto God

- *Gk euarestos*, 'well-pleasing'

God delights in justice and righteousness (Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:8). He delights in people who show these characteristics. These "spiritual sacrifices" are the very purpose of our existence (1 Pet 2:5): they demonstrate that we really do appreciate God's goodness to us.

Epaphroditus is a good example. He gambled with his life to bring a gift to Paul. His attitude and the gift were together "a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Phil 2:25-30; 4:18). Onesiphorus is another, who apparently lost his life ministering to Paul in prison (2 Tim 1:16-18).

Do you want God to be delighted with your life, your sacrifice? Then show justice, goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth in everything, as He asks you to do (Jer 7:22-23; Mic 6:6-

8: Eph 5:8-10). Do not think that you could not please God—He will help you, if you pray for help (Heb 13:20-22).

reasonable service

- GK *logikos*, 'logical, reasoned, intelligent, rational'
- Diag 'rational'
- NEB mg 'for such is the worship which you, as rational creatures, should offer.'

Serving God is 'a fair thing: it is 'fair enough' for us to serve God. But this is not really what Paul means: he means that we serve God because we understand what He wants and we agree with it. Our service is based on intelligence: we have reasoned the matter out in our own heads as Paul himself did (2 Cor 5:13-15). We are not like the unreasoning animals sacrificed under the Law, who died bleating in terror and kicking.

What is the basis of our reasoned service? "The sincere milk of the Word" (1 Pet 2:2, the only other occurrence of this Greek word). We read and understand and agree with it. This understanding moves us to "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5).

12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

conformed

- GK *suschematizo*, 'to be fashioned like', from *schema*, 'outward form or fashion'
- RV 'fashioned'
- Wey 'Do not follow the customs of the present age'
- NEB 'Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world'
- Only other occurrence = 1 Pet 1:14

Today the world revolves around the whims and fancies of the flesh. Mass communication encourages people all over the world to watch and wear the same things. Global brands and advertising are a driving force in the business world.

How can we really look forward to the Kingdom, the age to come, when we are busily trying to look like those around us? How will people believe us if we tell them about the future, when we seem the same as they do? We ought not to endeavour to look and speak like the world.

Jesus Christ was sent to deliver us from "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4). The present age is doomed: we look for one to come. Be brave enough to stand out.

this world

- Diag 'this age'
- NEB 'this present world'



Paul described the world of his day in Chapter 1, and our times are very similar (2 Tim 3:4). The world is hardly a good pattern to copy! We must follow a different course. We must be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29)—be spiritually like Christ—so that future we can be "conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil 3:21) and "be like him" (1. 3:2).

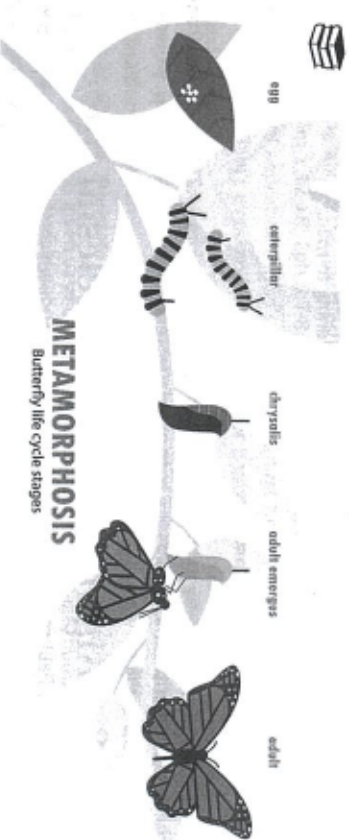
transformed

- GK *metamorphoōmai*, 'to change the essential nature of something: to conform an outward thing—to be transformed is to be changed from within'
- Roth 'be ye transforming yourselves'—indicates a continuing process

From this word comes the English 'metamorphosis', the change some living things undergo in the course of growth, such as the change from larva to butterfly or moth. The unattractive brown larva, unable to fly, is like the mind that thinks fleshly thoughts. The butterfly with delicate wings shimmering with myriads of colours is like the spiritual mind. *Metamorphoōmai* is also used of the transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:2; Mk 9:2). Christ was transformed physically because he had first been transformed morally. He displayed God's glory morally—his character reflected God's glorious and balanced character, so he was transformed for a brief time into the radiance of immortality.

God has called us "out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9). But how can we be transformed? By considering the moral and physical glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, reveal for us in the Scriptures. As we read the record of his life, we too are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory [moral to, eventually, physical glory]" (2 Cor 3:18). We grow, a baby grows, by the "milk of the Word" (1 Pet 2:2). As we read daily from the Bible, the "inward man [the spiritual mind] is renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16), "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col 3:10).

Read *Genius of Discipleship*, chapter 1



renewing of your mind

- GK *anakainosis*, 'renewal in character or quality'
- Wey 'entire renewal'
- Thayer: "a renewal, renovation; complete change for the better"

Renewing the mind transforms the life. This is a life-long process. We are renewed by the power of God, through the reading and obeying of His Word (Titus 3:5-8). This is a complete rebirth (In 3:3-8; Gal 4:19), a process that involves pain.

that we may prove

- Gk *dokimazo*, 'to test anything with the expectation of finding it good'
- NIV 'Then you will be able to test and approve'
- Wey 'learn by experience'

Dokimazo is often used in Greek writing of the times to describe the assay or testing of metals by fire. As our spiritual mind develops through reading and meditating on the Word, we learn about God's will—what He wants done in the earth. When we obey, we test out His will, and we find as we expected, His will to be good and acceptable and perfect. But if our mind is not renewed, we will not see God's requirements in that light. They will just seem to be annoying restraints. With the spiritual mind we "put God's design to the test of our own experience, and so prove how kind, how gladdening, how flawless it is" (Way).

Until we begin to follow God's instructions sincerely, we are only mere theorists: but when we begin to obey, we know from our own experience that it is God's own will (In 7:17). When we "walk as children of light", and produce spiritual fruit, we test and approve the will of God (Eph 5:8-10). God helps us to do this, if we ask Him (Heb 13:21). God is glorified when we work out His will in our own lives: this is the result of "knowing God" — of our relationship with Him (Jer 22:15-16; 9:23-24; Psa 40:5-8). The earth will be full of His glory only when every man and woman has His character.

good

God's will is good, and therefore good for man.'

acceptable

- Gk *euarestos*, 'well-pleasing, as in verse 1

God's will is well-pleasing to Him, and therefore gladdening to man.

perfect will of God

- Gk *teleios*, 'mature, complete'

God's will is the perfect way to fill the earth with His glory (cp. Num 14:21). It brings us from childhood to spiritual maturity as the sons and daughters of God (2 Tim 3:16-17).

12:3-8 – Right conduct in Ecclesial life

In verses 1 & 2, Paul reminded us of the mercies of God, which should move us to give ourselves intelligently and of our own free will to the service of God. He pointed out that we can only ever understand or agree with the will of God if we first abandon the ways of the world and transform ourselves into children of God by reading and meditating upon His Word.

Now Paul looks to the gifts that God has given us. In Paul's day, these included the gifts of the Holy Spirit—the power of God operating directly through men and women. Among

these gifts were prophecy, "helps" (service), teaching, and "governments" (administration) (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28). Paul speaks of other gifts in these verses as well—exhortation, and showing mercy. Whilst these were not gifts of the Holy Spirit power, they were abilities and resources that were given from God.

Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, people often forgot that the gifts were to them for a purpose and that they were to be used for the good of the ecclesia as a whole. Sometimes people saw the gifts as something that made you important: they were of personal prestige. People were lifted up in pride. So, in verses 3 to 5, Paul reminds that gifts from God are not given to boost our self-importance: we are to be humble, we are not to overreach ourselves, or over-estimate our own abilities.

Sometimes people were not conscientious in using the gifts they had been given. They tired of teaching; they began to express their own thoughts, rather than the bal thoughts of God; they became lax in their administration of the ecclesia. So in verse the apostle exhorts us to be conscientious, to be diligent in the duties God has assigned us, to concentrate on what we are doing, and do it as well as we can.

Today we do not have direct Holy Spirit power. But God still gives to each of us ability which we can serve Him. Like the brothers and sisters of Rome, we must be diligent humble, serving God faithfully. Remember, too, that verses 9 to 21 speak of 1 everybody must do, qualities everybody must show: there is exhortation for everybody, these verses.

12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

the grace given unto me

- 'grace' Gk *charis*, 'gift freely given'

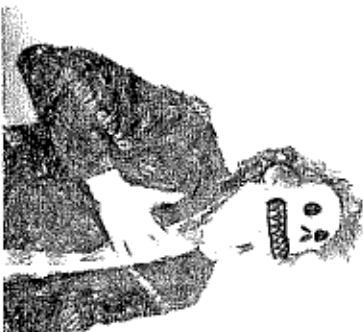
Paul is talking about the apostleship he has been given, for which he was always grateful (1 Tim 1:12-16; Eph 3:7-8; 1 Cor 15:10). He was greatly humbled on the road to Damascus and appreciated God's grace for the first time. (Interestingly enough, the sent to open Paul's eyes, and prepare him for baptism, was named Ananias, *The grace given unto me* Yoh.)

Now he appeals to fact that it is God's grace that has saved us from hopelessness destruction and given us various gifts in His service. It was only by grace that Paul made an Apostle, therefore he ought not be proud. Paul therefore exhorts us to appreciate the abilities God has given us and use them to the best advantage, humbly acknowledging we only received them by God's grace.

not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think

- 'think' *Gk phroneo*, 'to exercise the intelligence'
- 'think...more highly' *Gk hyperphroneo*, 'to be high-minded, proud, or arrogant; to esteem oneself overmuch'; the only occurrence of this word in the NT
- We're 'not to value himself unduly'

As our minds are transformed by the Word, we realise that we personally are not essential to God or to the smooth running of the ecclesia: we come to understand that all our abilities come from God, and that there is no room for pride or self-importance. Gratitude to God takes the place of pride (1 Cor 4:6-7).



 Read *Genius of Discipleship*, chapter 10.

soberly

- *Gk sophrono*, 'to be sober, sane, moderate, realistic'
- NIV 'think of yourself with sober judgment'

There is a real play on words here, as the Greek words for 'think' and for 'soberly' are all related: "...not to over-think beyond what it behoves him to think, but to think unto sober-thinking" (Vines).

dealt

- *Gk merizoo*, 'to divide into parts, to distribute, to share among'
- NASV 'allotted'
- Diag 'distributed'

Talents
Memoria

God has given to every man and woman abilities they can use. the measure of faith

- 'measure' *Gk metron*, 'measuring instrument'

Faith gives us a right perspective on life. It humbles us and corrects our thoughts. We are not to compare ourselves with others (2 Cor 10:11-18): the true standard is "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). So what if we are better than, do more Bible study than, have higher standards than somebody or somewhere else? The real question is, "How do we measure up to the Christ himself?" God will give us certain roles in the Ecclesia appropriate to our faith and abilities.

12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

Paul uses the figure of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 also.

members

- *Gk melos*, 'a limb or organ'

office

- *Gk praxis*, 'mode of acting, function'
- NASV 'function'
- Diag 'action'

In our bodies, every limb and organ play its part. Our heart does not argue with our lung as to who is the more important organ. The hands do not fight with the feet as to who is going to carry the body around. In a healthy body they all work harmoniously together carrying out the function God designed them for.

12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another.

being many

- 'the many' (Roth, YLT, Diag)

'The many' is a thought running through all Scripture, speaking of the many men and women who are part of the family of God. For example, "the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for the many" (Matt 20:28); "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify the many... he bore the sin of the many" (Isa 53: 11-12). It is particularly used of the redemption of many by the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that we must have the same attitude.

one body in Christ

A great truth is contained in this phrase: Jesus Christ himself died, he gave his body as a sacrifice to reconcile man to God, to make peace between man and God; to make mankind one with God again, as in the beginning (Eph 2:16). And what about the spiritual body of Christ - the ecclesia? All the members should be diligently working for peace, just as their captain has done. His selfless attitude should encourage us to selflessly work for true unity. So just as Christ died to declare the glory of God and give mankind peace with God, so Christ's brothers and sisters should sacrifice themselves for the glory of God, and the peace of true unity. If we all share the same sacrifice, we should be at peace amongst ourselves! (Jas 3:17).

members one of another

- NEB 'serving individually as limbs and organs to one another'

All the parts of the body of Christ are interdependent. No one is self-sufficient, no one is to be despised. Each part should contribute for the good of the whole body.

- This idea of 'one of another' becomes a real theme through chapters 12-15: look out for it as you study.



12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

- Gk *charismata*, 'gifts freely given'

Although we do not have the gifts of the Spirit today, we all do have abilities and resources given to us by God. Some are able to do this, and some can do that. Everybody can do something! We must use the abilities we have been given as best we can in the service of God.

differing according to the grace that is given to us

God's grace is manifold: many coloured. He has given out a multitude of different abilities, some to us, some to the next person. We are stewards of these abilities: that is, they have been given to us to be used wisely and profitably in the service of God (Matt 25:14-30). When we share these abilities, by using them for each other's benefit, "ministering it among ourselves", "in all things will be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4:8-11). The body of Christ, working together, yields far more glory to God the individual parts, working alone, can ever do. We cannot to be envious—envy disrupts this process of sharing the benefits of these gifts.

widened up basis

- Gk *propheteia*, 'to speak out': "speaking forth the mind and counsel of God" (Vines)
- NEB 'inspired utterance'

Prophecy was one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the 1st century ecclesia had many prophets. We think of prophets as people who foretold the future. Many NT prophets did prophesy of the future, but their main function was to speak forth and encourage the brothers and sisters. Together with the apostles, the prophets were the foundation of the ecclesia, upon which the rest of the body was built (Eph 2:20). Prophecy is a work of love, building up the ecclesia, comforting it in time of trial and persecution, rebuking it when apathetic, encouraging it when disheartened by setbacks. To Paul, prophecy was the greatest of all the gifts. He would rather encourage brothers and sisters with a few words, than deliver lengthy addresses in a foreign tongue (1 Cor 13 & 14).

The proportion of faith

- Gk *analogia*, 'the right relation to'
- Diag 'according to the analogy of the faith'
- NIV mg 'in agreement with the faith'

But wonderful as the gift of prophecy was, the prophets were not to get carried away with their own eloquence. They had the power to restrain themselves and be silent when necessary (1 Cor 14:32). They had to present a balanced picture of God, of His character and purpose. They could not emphasise positives and push valid criticisms to one side: they could not rebuke without referring also to the wonderful mercy of God. Their words had to correspond to correct doctrine. They had to "have regard to the symmetrical presentation of the faith" (Way).



Balance is essential in all we do. Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part 1, chapters 1 & 2.

12:7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

- Gk *diakonia*, 'a servant, with emphasis on the fact of doing something for somebody'—sometimes translated 'deacon'
- NASV 'service'

service

This word is used of practical service in the ecclesia (1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6). Phoebe, who carried the 'Letter to the Romans' to Rome, is described by Paul as a deaconess of the ecclesia in Corinth. The term covers all sorts of administrative duties—committee work, doorkeeping, reading, hall—cleaning, just about anything. Paul wants to remind us that, if we are given some job to do or duty to perform, we should give ourselves conscientiously to it and not be looking around wishing we had been given some other task, which we might think to be more glamorous or more enjoyable, or perhaps a little easier. Be conscientious!



teacheth

Preaching

- Gk *didasko*, 'teaching aimed at shaping the pupil's will and influencing his or her understanding'

Under this description would fall Sunday School teaching and the instruction of interester friends. It includes both practical and doctrinal instruction (1 Tim 4:10-11; Heb 5:12-14) Sisters, brethren, if you have to teach or instruct, be conscientious! You have an opportunity to shape the future direction of your pupil's life: use the opportunity profitably

12:8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Gk *parakaleo* 'basically 'to call another alongside', or 'to go to someone's side'
- NIV 'encouraging'
- NEB 'stirring speech'

Parakaleo is an important word in the NT. Apart from the literal meaning, it conveys many other ideas which all spring from it (Barclay's NT Words):

- to plead a man's cause
- to be an ally, counsellor or adviser
- to comfort or console so as to give a man the strength to stand on his feet and face life
- to urge or exhort men to noble deeds, or to apply their minds to think about things, or remember
- to incite a person to some act or emotion

- to exhort troops who are about to go into battle
- to rally troops who are tired and despondent
- to encourage a man to embark on a great adventure
- to fill a man with that spirit of strength and courage that enable him to cope triumphantly with life
- to help a man in a situation where he cannot cope by himself

As you can see from this long list, the word speaks of encouragement, of renewing the fervour and zeal of others. Everybody can encourage those around them—this is not just a task for speakers! Anybody can offer a few words of comfort from the pages of the Word (Rom 15:4), we don't need to be eloquent. All we need is enthusiasm and determination to live the life God asks us to live, with the joyful prospect of the kingdom always in view a short way ahead. And don't limit yourself to people you know well. There are always people on the fringes who do not have close friends. These need encouragement even more than others. Go and encourage them—make them one of your circle of friends: and encourage your friends to have the same attitude.

Barnabas is a shining example of an 'encourager', both by the things he did and by the words of exhortation and of comfort he was always so quick to give (Acts 4:36-37; 9:27; 11:22-26; 13:43, 52; 14:22-23; 15:31).

- Consider other occurrences of *parakaleo* in the NT.
- Plan to contact or seek out a young person who may be struggling or just one you don't know so well.

giveth

Primarily Paul is talking about giving money and material things to those in need. But the idea doesn't stop there. We must be quick to give other things, too, for the service of the Truth and the welfare of others: a bit of muscle, a late night, an invitation home, a sympathetic ear, a letter—in many ways we can give time and effort to God.



Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part I, chapter 6, and part II, chapter 12.

simplicity

- GK *haplotēs*, 'singleness', implying both 'unmixed motives' and 'single minded dedication'
- RV 'liberality'
- NIV 'generously'
- RV mg 'singleness'
- NEB 'with all your heart'

"Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt 10:8). God loves people who give generously, without thought for themselves, without reservation or reticence (2 Cor 9:7), because that is His character (Jas 1:5): it was in this spirit that He gave His only begotten Son whom He loved. Giving in this spirit signals that we are truly thankful for all His blessings, spiritual and natural: and this gives glory to Him (2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13).

ruleth

- GK *proistēnu*, 'to stand in front of'
- NASV 'leads'
- NIV 'governs'
- Diag 'the president'
- Wey 'in authority'

Paul is exhorting all in positions of authority or leadership: arranging brethren, committee members, presiding brethren, heads of families (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12).

diligence

Leadership can be a very wearying thing. The burden of administration and constant emotional strain can tire such people out. But Paul says do not become apathetic or lose energy and enthusiasm for the work—remember, it is God's business!

sheweth mercy

Now Paul speaks of those who help the sick and comfort the sorrowful. Again, this is: Divine characteristic: "God, that comforteth those who are cast down." (2 Cor 7:6). God has shown great mercy to us: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). We should be moved by "the mercies of God" (Rom 12:1) to do likewise. Even a card encourages the sick to have faith and confidence in the Father—but a personal visit is even more uplifting!

cheerfulness

But it is no good encouraging people when we ourselves go about with mournful look and bowed shoulders. We must first have a positive attitude to life ourselves. We may no always feel cheerful: but we must look to the brighter future in store for all the sons and daughters of God; and then impart that same radiant hope to others who may have lost sight of it for a moment.



12:9-21 – Right conduct in daily life

Paul has explained how the way we think can be transformed: he has reminded us to conscientiously and humbly use the gifts - the abilities and resources - God has given to us. Now he gives general guidelines for all to follow, first for ecclesial harmony, and then, in verses 17-21, for harmony with those around us.

He begins by pointing out the most important fact—that, as a community, we must show warm and genuine affection for each other, always avoiding hypocrisy and evil motives. Then he exhorts us to diligence, fervour, hopefulness, endurance, and prayer. He reminds us to be hospitable and look after each other's needs. He encourages us to bless any who persecute us. Finally, he appeals to us to share with each other the joys and sorrows of life and to mingle happily without considering social status.

12:9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

love

- Gk *agape*

Agape is a difficult word to define, but it is another very important NT word. It comes from the mind rather than from the heart, but that does not mean that it is cold or purely intellectual. It is a love that is determined to love, come what may. You cannot naturally love your enemies: you have to really work at it. "*Agape* ... is a deliberate conquest and achievement of the will... unconquerable benevolence, invincible good will. It is not simply a wave of emotion; it is a deliberate conviction of the mind issuing in a deliberate policy of the life; it is a deliberate achievement and conquest and victory of the will" (Barclay).

Like giving, encouraging, and showing mercy, love is not limited to certain individuals with special abilities. It is something everybody can manifest—in practical ways.

- Consider how *agape* is used in the NT. Paul himself expounds it in Rom 13:8-10 and 1 Cor 13. To begin, you might like to note that love is practical (1 Jn 3:18); it is forbearing (Eph 4:2); it controls our freedom to do as we please (Gal 5:13; Rom 14:15); it is the bond of fellowship (Phil 2:2); it is the motive power behind faith (Gal 5:6). See what else you can dig up.

without dissimulation

- Gk *anupokritos*, 'without hypocrisy'
- RSV 'genuine'
- Diag 'unfeigned'
- Wey 'perfectly sincere'

Heavenly wisdom is without hypocrisy (Jas 3:17). When our mind is renewed by "the wisdom that is from above", our love for those within the ecclesia will be entirely free from show: it will not be 'putting on an act', as 'hypocrisy' means. All God's commandments lead us to this attitude (1 Tim 1:5; 1 Pet 1:22). Genuine love will be seen in spontaneous acts of kindness and affection.

- Find examples of 'unfeigned love' in the Scriptures.

abhor

- Gk *apostugeo*, 'to shudder with horror'
- Diag 'detest'
- Roth 'loathing'
- Wey 'regard with horror'

evil

- Gk *poneros*, 'wicked, malicious, sin seen in harmful actions against others'. This is the only occurrence in Romans.

Love is not mere sentimentality and it does not mean that we all agree to ignore each other's sins and weaknesses, either! Love is a moral principle. It is true devotion to each

other, on the basis of a common devotion to the things of God. We must abhor evil acts as stick fast by good acts. Love is not blind (2 Cor 2:4)

cleave

- Gk *kolliaomai*, 'to glue or stick to', used of the close relationship between husband and wife
- NASV 'cling to'
- RSV 'hold fast'

good

We must follow the example of Messiah, passionately loving righteousness and hating evil with every fibre of our being (Psa 45:7).

The next few verses are poetically structured. This structure is common in Hebrew poetry, such as the Psalms and large slabs of the Prophets, but it is not obvious in the Authorised Version. Rotherham's Emphatic Bible brings it out.

12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

kindly affectioned

- Gk *philostorgos*, 'warm affection for near relations' - this is the only occurrence of this word
- RV 'tenderly affectioned'
- NASV 'devoted'

Believers are all members of the one great family of God, "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph 3:14, 15). Whatever annoying habits or attitudes those around us might have, we must overcome these problems and show warm affection on toward another.

brotherly love

- Gk *philadelphia*, 'warm affection for brothers'
- NEB 'let love of our brotherhood breed warmth of mutual affection'

Peter commands us to add brotherly love to godliness (2 Pet 1:7). It is possible, that in striving for godliness, we might become indifferent to those around us, or super-critical of their failings and weaknesses. We need to be constantly reminded of this danger and care for each other as members of the same family would do.

If we want this warm mutual affection in our midst, one thing is essential. We must have the right attitude toward gossip and rumour. Brother Robert Roberts spoke about this in his last address to his ecclesia. In his diary he wrote, "I implored them to stand as with a drawn sword over this principle. Their present well-being as a community depended upon it, not to speak



of their acceptability with Him who would judge us all presently by the standard of His revealed will. Nothing would sooner chill and disaffect and finally disintegrate them and scatter them one from another, than the habit so common among men of repeating evil rumour or indulging in personal criticism, or making charges on hearsay" (*Diary of a Second Voyage*, p7). "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal 5:15).



Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part I, chapter 7.

in honour preferring

- Gk *proegeonai*, 'to lead the way for others, to be an example'
- NASV 'outdo one another in showing honour'
- Wey 'yield to one another'

Christ has given us the greatest example: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...he riseth from supper... and began to wash the disciples' feet" (Jn 13:1-5; Phil 2:5-8). We are bound to follow (Jn 13:13-14; Phil 2:1-5). If we refuse to "be subject one to another" (1 Pet 5:5) "in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21), we are setting ourselves above Christ (Jn 13:15-16)! That's something to think about!

12:11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

not slothful in business

- 'business' Gk *spoude*, 'earnestness, diligence, despatch, eagerness, industry, ardour'
- RV 'in diligence'
- NIV 'in zeal'
- Diag 'in duty'
- NEB 'with unflagging energy'

However enthusiastic we might generally be, sometimes it all seems just too much; and we feel like having a break, and 'getting away from it all'. But Paul exhorts us: don't let yourselves become slack and apathetic. Keep going. Don't have short bursts of energy, and long stretches of inactivity. (This applies specially to preparation for Study Weekends!) Running in the race of life is not a short speedy sprint: it is a long marathon (2 Tim 4:7-8). But the prize is there for those who make it to the finish line (Matt 25:23).



Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part II, chapter 8.

fervent in spirit

- 'fervent' Gk *zelotes*, 'to boil or glow'
- RSV 'be aglow'
- NEB 'in ardour'

But we need some source of energy to keep us going. Human strength is not enough. We need a fire inside us, a positive mental attitude to work, a mind to work (Neh 4:2, 6, 10; 6:16). This comes ultimately from God: "Cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and He shall sustain thee" (Psa 55:22), through the reading of His word and through the encouraging words of those around us. Spiritual fervour is contagious (Acts 18:25).

servicing the Lord

If we are doing "all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31), nothing we do is in vain "in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). We are "servicing the Lord Christ", and we will "receive the reward of the inheritance" from him. This knowledge helps us to do all things "heartily, as unto the Lord" (Col 3:23-25; Eph 6:5-8). "God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love": but we must keep it up. We must "show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end", walking in the footsteps of the faithful, who "patiently endured" so many years ago (Heb 6:9-12). When Christ returns, let him find us busily servicing him, right to the very last minute.



Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part II, chapter 14.

12:12 *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;*

rejoicing in the hope

- 'rejoicing' Gk *chairō*, 'to be cheerful, calmly happy'
- 'hope' Gk *elpis*

It is the hope—the hope of Israel—that we rejoice in. Even while the chains were chafing his wrists, Paul could say, "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). The truth has a unique radiance: because our future is so full of happiness and joy, the present catches some reflection of it and even in the most difficult circumstances of life (and none of us have been unjustly thrown in jail for years at a time!) we can still hope for the day when we will share the glory of God (Rom 5:2).

Brother John Thomas was moved to write *Elpis Israel*, 'The Hope of Israel', by Rom 8:24, which says, "We are saved by the hope". He said, concerning 'hope':

"How consoling and cheering is it, then, amid all the evils of the present state, that God hath found a ransom, who is willing and able to deliver us from the power of the grave; and not only so, but that "at the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:17-25), when he shall appear in power and great glory, "we shall be like him; because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Then will the saints be "changed into the same image from glory", now only a matter of hope, "into glory", as seen and actually possessed, "even as the Lord" himself was changed, when he became "the spirit giving life", or "a quickening spirit" (p 41)."

How will we keep this glorious vision alive? Only by reading and meditating on what is revealed in the Scriptures, and by speaking about it to those around us. Books like *The Final Consolation* can also help to make the future live. But live it must if we are going to be able to endure. This is the next thing Paul speaks of.



Read *Genius of Discipleship*, chapter 16.

patient

- Gk *hupomone*, 'pressing on despite a burden, enduring'
- NASV 'persevering'

Hypomone is one of the great words of the NT. It speaks of enduring the sting of grief, the shock of battle, or the coming of death. It is used of the ability of a plant to survive under difficult circumstances. It is described as "spiritual staying power", pressing on with radiant hope and unbowed head, progressing on to the dawn (Barclay). It speaks of courage, of an attitude that does not give in, a determination that cannot be conquered. It does not sit down and wait for the storm of trial to pass: it presses on, turning every trial into one more step toward the kingdom of God.

- Find other occurrences of *hypomone* which tell you something about this important word: who had this quality, how they showed it, where it came from, how it is rewarded.

tribulation

- GK *thlipsis*, 'pressure'
- NIV 'affliction'
- NEB 'trouble'

We are "appointed" to tribulation (1 Thess 3:3-4). "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). As Hymn 207 points out:

Why should we complain of want or distress?
Temptation? Or pain? He told us no less.
The heirs of salvation—we know from His word—
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.

Why is it a *must*? Isn't there another way? No. Tribulation forges endurance within us (Rom 5:3; Jas 1:3-4). Only those who endure can enter the kingdom, and we can only learn to endure if we go through tribulation. "He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt 24:13). But how can we learn to endure? Through constant prayer (Jas 1:5). And this is the next thing Paul reminds us of.

continuing instant

- NASV 'devoted'
- NIV 'faithful'
- RSV 'constant'
- NEB 'persist'
- Way 'steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer'

in prayer

How are we going to keep on hoping in the darkest of times? By keeping up the habit of prayer. Regular prayer is not only a good habit, it is essential. In prayer we find fellowship with God. From God we receive the strength we need to be able to endure. So, we must "pray, and not faint"—not tire of prayer (Lk 18:1). We must persevere in prayer (Eph 6:18). How else do you think our Lord found strength to



endure (Heb 12:2)? And this is how we, too, will find strength to endure temptation and trial, and come at last to the full glory of God.

- Consider the examples of prayer set by faithful men in the past: David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, and the pre-eminence example, the Lord Jesus Christ. What do they teach you personally about prayer?
Read *Genius of Discipleship*, chapters 12 & 13.



12:13 *Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.*

distributing to the necessity of saints

- 'distributing' GK *koimoneo*, 'have fellowship with, sharing in'
- NIV 'share with'
- Roth 'having fellowship'

Putting money in a collection for brothers and sisters in need is very necessary; but that is not the same thing as "fellowshipping the needs of the saints". We must try to enter into the feelings of those in need. Fellowship is much more than which meeting you attend or Sunday mornings! It means we share hope, tribulation, joy—as well as material things (Act: 2:44). This is the practical evidence of love for our fellow young people and brothers and sisters; it shows how much we appreciate God's love for us (1 Jn 3:17). We should "do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).

given to hospitality

- NASV 'practising...'
- Diag 'pursuing...'

The inns of Paul's day, in which strangers usually had to stay, were evil places, full of all sorts of immorality. Paul urges the Romans to go out of their way in being hospitable: not to wait to be asked or wait for a knock on the door. Hospitality was a prerequisite for being chosen as an elder (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8) and was commended by the apostles (3 Jn 5-8). Hospitality is a mark of the body of Christ and it still surprises people that Christadelphians can travel just about anywhere in the world and find ready hospitality. It is one of the things that binds us together as a community and we should be happy to stay in the homes of other brothers and sisters when we travel (Matt 25:35, 38).

12:14 *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.*

Paul is obviously quoting from the teachings of the Master: "Bless them that curse you and pray for them that despitefully use you (Matt 5:44; Lk 6:28).

bless them

Meekness is not weakness! To return good for evil, or to bless those who persecute you, is not an act of weakness: it requires great strength of character. Our natural reaction is to hit back, to retaliate; or at least to carry a grudge. God does not want us merely not to hit back: He wants us to positively seek the good of our enemies.

Jesus Christ is once again the great example, when he prayed, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Stephen followed his example (Acts 7:60); and so did Stephen's own persecutor (1 Cor 4:10-13; 2 Tim 4:16). This is God's mind. He is not

willing that any should die, 'but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet 3:9). Remember, *agapé* seeks a man's or woman's highest good, whoever they might be.

persecute

- Gk *dioko*, 'pursue': as in v13 (s/w "given to")!
- 'curse' Gk *katarazomai*, 'to curse bitterly, to doom someone to destruction'

Paul repeats his exhortation, warning us not to curse our persecutors. Nor can we bless them through gritted teeth! We must genuinely seek to bring them to repentance by our example of patience and longsuffering.

- A question: Are we, are you, persecuted today? If so, in what ways?

12:15 *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

The Jews paid for both of these. For weddings they hired merry makers and for funerals, they hired professional wailers (Mk 5:38). But this 'sympathy' was very external, very superficial and hollow (cp Mk 5:40)! It is meaningless without love (1 Cor 13:1). Paul asks us to genuinely share each other's joy and sorrow. Perhaps it is a little harder to "rejoice with those who rejoice." Envy makes it harder. But we must overcome these feelings and be genuine in our congratulations.

12:16 *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

of the same mind one toward another

- NIV 'live in harmony with one another'
- Roth 'the same thing one to another regarding'
- Wey 'have full sympathy with one another'

Paul is saying: "Don't discriminate amongst yourselves". Don't get into small, exclusive cliques. Build a team spirit. Don't indulge in gossip and politics.

It is easy for us to be tolerant of the weaknesses of our friends and be very harsh on those of people we do not know so well. But we must avoid biased views. All those we mix with should be judged by the same standard—Jesus Christ.



Read *Principles and Proverbs*, part 1, chapter 5; and *Genius of Discipleship*, chapter 24.

mind not high things

- NASV 'do not be haughty in mind'

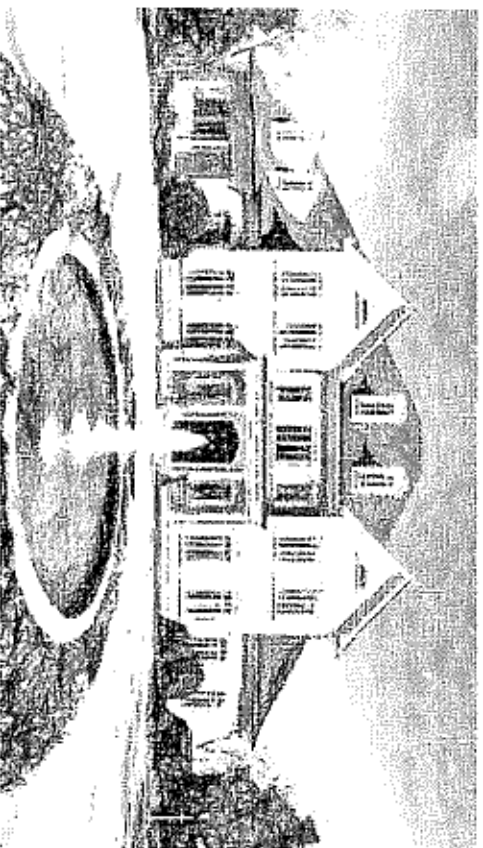
Do not get carried away with worldly ambition, the talk, the plans of the rich and famous. Do not be too concerned with a career, and with worldly achievement. A few more days, and it will all be gone, anyway.

condescend to

- Gk *sunagago*, 'to be carried along with, like the current of a river' (Thayer)

- NASV 'associate with'
- NEB 'go about with'
- NASV mg 'accommodate yourself to'

It is easy to get carried away with talk of expensive clothes, cars, big houses, travel, sport holidays, hobbies, restaurants, and all the other trappings of the world. It is hard to get carried away with the poor of this world: they seem to have nothing of interest to tell about! But in the Truth, there should be no discrimination. We should show love to on another with no preference based on wealth, esteem or popularity.



Likewise, it is easy for committee members or close family and friend groups to spend all their time together and overlook the need others have for friendship, company and encouragement in the things of the Word. Everybody must avoid these tendencies and have "the same mind toward each other."

men of low estate

- 'low estate' Gk *tapeinos*, 'humble circumstances or attitude'
- NIV 'people of low position'
- NEB 'humble folk'

Remember God's estimate of those who are poor but faithful: "To this man will I look, ever to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa 57:15; 66:1-2).

The Greek here is not entirely clear, and the 'men of low estate' may possibly mean things that are considered 'humble things' or 'menial tasks'—like hall cleaning, or washing up wine glasses. Some translations read the verse in this way:

- NIV mg 'be willing to do menial work'
- NASV mg 'lowly things'
- RSV mg 'give yourselves to humble tasks'

The same spirit applies, whatever the meaning. We should be quite happy doing small, apparently unimportant tasks, or befriending the poorest and least prominent person. Perhaps Weymouth's translation sums it all up: "Let humble ways content you."

be not wise in your own conceits

- NASV 'estimation'
- NIV 'do not be conceited'
- RSV 'be not getting presumptuous in your own opinion'
- CEV 'Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others'

This appears to be quoted from Proverbs 3:7, which says, "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear Yahweh and depart from evil." Refusing to change opinions and estimations and refusing to listen to others is another possible cause of disharmony. "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight" (Isa 5:21). Let us not jealously guard our own opinions and refuse to listen to the suggestions and exhortations of others: let us have a ready ear for the thoughts of others, and value their opinion as highly as our own.

12:17 *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

recompense to no man evil for evil

- NASV 'Never pay back evil for evil to anyone'

Most people are happy to treat their friends well, but the followers of Jesus Christ must be prepared to "love their enemies" (Matt 5:38-48). "See that none render evil for evil to any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thess 5:15). Our natural reaction is to 'hit back', to return some biting words which make the other person look small, but we must struggle to suppress these feelings. If we have faith, we believe that one day God will set things straight we don't need to worry about it (1 Pet 4:19).

- Consider the example of Jesus Christ. (Start with 1 Pet 2:19-23).

provide for

- GK *pronoeo*, 'to consider in advance, to look out for beforehand'
- RV 'take thought for'
- NASV 'respect'
- NIV 'be careful to do'

things honest

- GK *kalos*, 'good, virtuous, honourable'
- NASV 'what is right'
- RSV 'what is noble'
- Diag 'honourable things'
- Wey 'what is right and seemly'

We need to live "providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor 8:21).

in the sight of all men

- NIV 'in the eyes of everybody'
- Diag 'in the presence of'
- Wey 'in every one's esteem'
- NEB 'let your aims be such as all men count honourable'

In everything we do, the way of the Truth must be honoured and this will lead other men and women to speak well of the Truth (Tit 2:10). If our behaviour is obviously honest, it will glorify God (1 Pet 2:12). We will grow in favour with God and man.

12:18 *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

possible

- GK *dunatos*, 'powerful, capable'

Paul is not saying we should try as best we can and then let fly, saying "It was more than could bear", "It was beyond my patience", or some similar excuse! No: as much as is within our power, we should try to live at peace with those around us. We must do everything we can to prevent trouble. We must be able to look our Judge in the face and say, "I did everything I could to prevent the trouble."

as much as lieth in you

- NIV 'as far as it depends on you'

Of course, the demands of God come before the wishes of mankind, and this will often cause trouble. But we should never be trouble makers.

live peaceably

- RV 'be at peace'

We should always look for the peaceful solution and put all our energies into chasing peace (Psa 34:14). Is there a peaceful method of solving a problem, a peaceful way to live, which does not conflict with the ways of God? If there is, then we should follow that path (Heb 12:14).

12:19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'*

Dearly beloved

Paul tenderly pleads with us not to take our own revenge, not to take responsibility for judgment into our own hands. If we really believe we are 'dearly beloved' by God, then we believe that He is looking after us. When the time is right, He will maintain our cause, and punish the wicked. We don't have to worry about it now. We accept injustice, prejudice and fraud, knowing that we have a far, far greater reward in store for us (Heb 10:30-37).

avenge not

- NIV 'Do not take revenge'

The greatest and most noble and generous of God's sons and daughters have had to suffer all sorts of injustice, outside and inside the ecclesia. Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Job, David, Jeremiah

Daniel, Jesus Christ, Stephen, and Paul himself, are all examples of suffering wrongfully. Questions spring to mind: "Doesn't our enemy deserve punishment? Wouldn't society be better off if he were punished?" But God wants us to put up with trials and suffering and has forbidden us to take our own revenge. He wants to develop our characters, our faith and trust in Him. Trials at school, at work, in business, in the ecclesia, and personally all tests our obedience to Him.

give place

In other words, 'back off'. Don't stand up for your rights! Don't retaliate! Faithfully leave your cause in God's hands.

unto wrath

- lit 'the wrath'
- RV mg 'the wrath of God'
- NASV 'leave room for the wrath of God'
- RSV 'leave it to the wrath of God'
- NEB 'leave a place for divine retribution'

God is able to punish our enemies more righteously and much more effectively than we can! He sometimes seems slow to act, but there is a good reason for this. He wants all to repent, "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9). So He delays His judgments as long as possible. But be assured, they will eventually come (Nah 1:2-3). "Shall not God avenge His elect, which cry to Him?" (Lk 18:7). We should not be tempted to move before God does (Psa 37:89). If we do, we get in the way of God's wrath. Step back and allow God to move when the time is right.

'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord'

- NEB 'Justice is mine'
- RV 'belongeth unto me'
- NIV 'It is mine to avenge'

This verse quotes Deuteronomy 32:35-36, "To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time...Yahweh shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone (Roth 'exhausted')." He is in control; we must just trust this fact and wait for Him to act.

12:20 *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*

Therefore

- NIV 'On the contrary'
- RSV 'No, if...'

The thought of God's wrath coming upon our enemies should move us to pity them and provide for their needs. Maybe, too, our example will move them to repentance. The ultimate need of men is righteousness and salvation, and we should be ready to give this knowledge to anybody.



if thine enemy hunger ...

This is a quotation from Prov 25:21-22: "*If thine enemy be hungry, give him to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and Yahweh shall reward thee.*"

for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head

Does this mean we should do good to people because God will reward us and burn them and that the more we do good to them the worse their punishment will be? This seems unlikely, as it would contradict the overriding message of Paul's exhortation in v16-21 – to be unified v16, humble v16, not seeking revenge v17,19, living peaceably v18 and overcoming evil with good v21.

What does it mean then? A number of propositions have been put forward to explain this phrase. Two are presented here for your consideration.

Amongst other things, coals of fire speak of Divine judgment throughout the Old Testament (Psa 18:8,12,13,47; 140:9-10). The first idea, therefore, is that we are placing the pressure of God's judgments on the head of our enemy in order to prick their conscience now to save them from eternal judgment.

Another explanation lies in a custom of the times. Fires were harder to light in the time of antiquity, where matches and firelighters did not exist, so if your neighbour's fire went out, they would likely come around and ask for coals to reignite their fire. It was also customary to carry things, such as water pots and other vessels, on the head. Thus, when your neighbour came asking for coals to light their fire, you would generously fill up their day brazier which they would then place on their head to carry home. To heap coals of fire upon their head, therefore, would be a sign of generosity and love, providing cooking facilities and warmth to all in the house.²

12:21 *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- NEB 'Do not let evil conquer you, but use good to defeat evil'

overcome

There are great rewards in store for those who do overcome (Rev 2-3). And God gives us the victory (1 Cor 15:57). Let us seize it with both hands.

with good

- Wey 'with goodness'

The only way to avoid evil is to put all our energies into doing what is good (Lk 11:24-26; Rom 13:14).

²The closing precept is of wide application and is a useful principle for life" (Brother John Carter). Only a good habit can break a bad habit; only goodness can lead a wicked man to repentance.

² Bowen (1944), *Strong Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind*, p. 31-32.