SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Romans

Chapter Twelve, Verses 1–21

A Living Sacrifice and a Renewed Mind — From the Mercies of God to Love That Overcomes Evil

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Eleven chapters of mercy turn on one word — **"Therefore"** — and Paul spends the rest of the letter showing what a life looks like when it is laid on the altar: a mind made new, a gift put to work, a love without a mask, and an enemy fed. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Romans 12:1–21

Sacrifice · gifts · love · enemies

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Doctrine turns to duty: the altar, the body, the family and the enemy

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"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." — Romans 12:21

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Romans 12:1–21

A Living Sacrifice and a Renewed Mind — the great "therefore," one body with many gifts, and a love that overcomes evil with good

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Romans 12 in 5 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 12:2

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

† Before the Passage

Romans 11 ends with Paul out of breath: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (11:33) and "To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (11:36). Eleven chapters have laid the foundation — all the world guilty (1:18–3:20), justified freely by grace through faith (3:21–5:21), united to Christ and freed from sin's reign (6–8), and the mercy of God traced through Israel and the nations until "God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all" (11:32). Chapter 12 opens with the word that turns all of it toward life: "**Therefore.**" From here to the end of chapter 15 Paul tells a church what to do with the gospel it has believed.

The appeal is made "by the mercies of God" — *oiktirmōn*, the deep compassion of God (G3628), the plural word Paul uses again for "the Father of mercies" (2 Corinthians 1:3). The vocabulary is the Temple's: present,

sacrifice, holy, acceptable, service. Israel brought bulls, goats and lambs to the altar, and the burnt offering was consumed whole (Leviticus 1). Paul asks for something the Levitical system never received — a sacrifice that walks away from the altar still alive, and keeps coming back. The same verb, "present," was already in Romans 6:13: "present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead."

The church in Rome, written to from Corinth around AD 57, was a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers meeting in homes (16:5), and chapters 14–15 show the friction between them. So the chapter moves quickly from the altar to the body: no one is to think too highly of himself, because every member has a gift and every gift came by grace. Then a burst of short commands (vv. 9–21) — some thirty of them in thirteen verses — that sound like the Sermon on the Mount: bless those who persecute you, weep with those who weep, never take your own revenge.

Two Old Testament texts anchor the close. Verse 19 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine," from the Song of Moses; verse 20 quotes Proverbs 25:21–22 on feeding a hungry enemy. Paul is not inventing a new ethic of non-retaliation; he is showing that the God who will judge has always told His people to leave judgment with Him. Read the chapter as a staircase: God (vv. 1–2), the self (v. 3), the body (vv. 4–8), the family (vv. 9–13), the hostile world (vv. 14–21) — and the same love on every step.

FIGURE · THE TURN OF THE LETTER



See how one word carries the whole weight: eleven chapters of God's mercies on the left, five chapters of response on the right, and "Therefore" (12:1) as the hinge between them — both halves ending in glory to God.

I
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 12:1–2

Present Your Bodies

The great "therefore" — mercy received, a body offered, a mind made new

> 1 *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.* 2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*
>
> ROMANS 12:1–2

FIGURE · CONFORMED OR TRANSFORMED (12:2)

DO NOT BE CONFORMED
συσχηματίζεσθε · G4964

Root: σχῆμα — the outward shape, the pose

Pressure: from outside, pressing in

Mold: "this world" — τῷ αἰῶνι, this age

Lasts: "the fashion … passeth away"
(σχῆμα again, 1 Cor 7:31 KJV)

Also: 1 Pet 1:14 — "do not be conformed to the former lusts"

a costume put on

BE TRANSFORMED
μεταμορφοῦσθε · G3339

Root: μορφή — the form, the real nature

Power: from inside, working out

Means: "the renewing (ἀνακαίνωσις) of your mind" — G342

Same verb: the Transfiguration
(Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2) and 2 Cor 3:18

Goal: the image of the Son (8:29)

a new life showing through

Both verbs are present imperatives in the passive voice — you are always being shaped; the result: you "prove" (**δοκιμάζω**, test and approve) God's will — good · acceptable · perfect

Two verbs, two directions: the world presses a shape onto you from outside; the Spirit changes the form from inside by renewing the mind — and both verbs are going on all the time.

παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα … θυσίαν ζῶσαν

PARASTĒSAI … THYSIAN ZŌSAN · "TO PRESENT … A LIVING SACRIFICE" · G3936 · G2378

Paristēmi (G3936) is the priest's verb — to set beside, to place at someone's disposal — and Paul has used it five times in Romans 6:13–19: "present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead." Here it is an aorist infinitive: a decisive handing over. *Thysia* (G2378), from *thyō*, "to kill," is the slain offering — which makes *zōsan*, "living," a deliberate paradox. The old sacrifice died once; this one lives and keeps being offered. "Holy" and "acceptable" (*euareston*) are the altar's two tests: set apart to God, and pleasing to Him.

τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν

TĒN LOGIKĒN LATREIAN · “YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP” · G3050 · G2999

Latreia (G2999) is sacred service, the priestly ministry of the tabernacle (Hebrews 9:1, 6), and “the temple service” that belonged to Israel (Romans 9:4). *Logikos* (G3050), from *logos*, appears only here and in 1 Peter 2:2 (“the pure milk of the word”). It means rational, fitting, according to reason — which is why the KJV says “reasonable service” and the NASB “spiritual service of worship.” Both are right: it is worship of the mind and heart rather than of animals, and it is the only logical answer to the mercies of chapters 1–11.

μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε … ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε

SYSCHĒMATIZESTHE … METAMORPHOUSTHE · “BE CONFORMED … BE TRANSFORMED” · G4964 · G3339

Syschēmatizō (G4964), only here and 1 Peter 1:14, builds on *schēma*, the outward form — the fashion of a thing. *Metamorphoō* (G3339) builds on *morphē*, the real form, and is used just four times: Jesus “transfigured” before them (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2), believers “being transformed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18), and here. Both are present imperatives, passive in form: stop letting this age press you into its mold; keep on being changed. The means is *anakainōsis* (G342), renovation, used elsewhere only of the Spirit’s renewing in Titus 3:5. The result is *dokimazein* (G1381) — to test and approve — God’s will, found good, acceptable and perfect.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads “therefore” as Paul’s settled pattern — doctrine first, then duty — and borrows Leon Morris to say why: “When he uses this pattern Paul is saying that the Christian life is dependent on the great Christian doctrines.” The mercies are the ones the letter has already counted: justification, adoption, the indwelling Spirit, no separation from God’s love. The body stands for the whole person, and the offering must meet the altar’s old standards, like the unblemished burnt offering — “The sacrifice is living because it is brought alive to the altar.” Working from the NKJV’s “reasonable service,” he notes that *logikos* can mean “of the word” (1 Peter 2:2): “Reasonable service is a life of worship according to God’s Word.” Transformation is *metamorphoō*, a metamorphosis — the word of the Transfiguration — and it starts with a renewed mind, not with feelings or busyness.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew’s

Sproul (“Living Sacrifices to God,” February 11, 2007) starts with the logician’s three dots: “any time we see the word *therefore* in Scripture, our attention ought to perk up.” Paul pleads rather than orders, and he pleads by mercy — justification, forgiveness, providence and election all rest on it. The old altar took bulls and lambs; the new covenant asks for the worshiper himself, not as a martyr but as a life: “It is an offering of your whole self for your whole life.” It is *logikos latreia*, logical worship, a rebuke to a church that prizes feeling over understanding. “This world” is the *saeculum*, the age that assumes this life is all there is. Separation is not the goal — “Nonconformity is the easy part” — transformation by a changed mind is, and the will of God Paul means is first our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In his exposition Spurgeon notices that Paul pleads rather than commands, and pleads from the mercies of God; the offering is the actual body — "Let this flesh and blood in which your body dwells be presented unto God." Then he presses past mere separation: "It is not enough to be nonconformists. Be transformed ones." In "Serving the Lord" (No. 885, August 15, 1869) he carries the altar into the workshop: "Our everyday labour is to be consecrated into priestly sacrifice." For Spurgeon the living sacrifice reaches into the ordinary — hands, hours and trade, offered to God day by day.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry reads the body as the sacrifice and the soul as its life: "A living sacrifice, that is, inspired with the spiritual life of the soul," and "It is Christ living in the soul by faith that makes the body a living sacrifice." The service is reasonable because "God deals with us as with rational creatures, and will have us so to deal with him"; He "must be served in the spirit and with the understanding." So "All the disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus must be nonconformists to this world," whose fashions are passing away. But the change goes deeper than habits — "the renewing of the mind is the renewing of the whole man" — and it is God's work: "we could as soon make a new world as make a new heart by any power of our own."

II
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 12:3–8

One Body, Many Gifts

Sound judgment about yourself, and seven gifts of grace put to work

3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you ⚠ not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as △ God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are ☆ one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have △ gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

ROMANS 12:3–8

FIGURE · SEVEN GIFTS, SEVEN MANNERS (12:6–8)

χαρίσματα · GIFTS OF GRACE — "according to the grace given to us" (v. 6)

	THE GIFT	PAUL'S GREEK	THE MANNER — HOW IT IS TO BE USED	
1	**Prophecy**	προφητεία	according to the proportion of his faith	v. 6
2	**Service**	διακονία	in his serving	v. 7
3	**Teaching**	ὁ διδάσκων	in his teaching	v. 7
4	**Exhorting**	ὁ παρακαλῶν	in his exhortation	v. 8
5	**Giving**	ὁ μεταδιδούς	with liberality — ἐν ἁπλότητι, single-hearted	v. 8
6	**Leading**	ὁ προϊστάμενος	with diligence — ἐν σπουδῇ, eager haste	v. 8
7	**Mercy**	ὁ ἐλεῶν	with cheerfulness — ἐν ἱλαρότητι	v. 8

Every gift is named with its manner — Paul tells not only *what* to do, but *how*.

Read across each row: Paul names the gift and then, every time, the manner of using it — the gift is grace, the manner is faithfulness.

μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν … ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν

HYPERPHRONEIN … SŌPHRONEIN · "THINK MORE HIGHLY … SOUND JUDGMENT" · G5252 · G4993

Verse 3 is a wordplay on *phroneō*, "to think, to set the mind": not *hyper-phronein* (G5252, only here) — to think above, to over-think oneself — but *phronein eis to sō-phronein*, to think toward sound thinking. *Sōphroneō* (G4993) is the word for the healed Gerasene, "in his right mind" (Mark 5:15), and for the self-control Titus is to urge on young men (Titus 2:6). Pride, on this reading, is a kind of insanity; humility is sanity. The standard is not self-esteem but a "measure" (*metron*) God has "allotted" — the humble man measures himself by what he has been given.

χαρίσματα … κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως

CHARISMATA … ANALOGIAN · "GIFTS … THE PROPORTION OF FAITH" · G5486 · G356

Charisma (G5486, 17 times in the New Testament, all but one in Paul) is a gift with grace (*charis*) built into its name: "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." No one earns one; everyone has one (v. 6, "each of us"). Prophecy is to be used *kata tēn analogian tēs pisteōs* — *analogia* (G356), only here, the word that gives us "analogy" — in proportion to, in agreement with, "the faith." Readers divide on whether that means the prophet's own measure of faith (v. 3) or the faith once delivered; the Reformers took it as the latter and called it the "analogy of faith": no word may contradict the whole of Scripture.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads verse 3 as the guard on everything that follows. We are not to overrate ourselves, and since "we should see even our saving faith as a gift from God," pride has nothing left to stand on; giftedness, he adds, is not the same thing as maturity. One body means unity must never erase individuality, and individuality must never break the unity we have "in Christ." The *charismata* come from grace, not merit. Prophecy is mostly forth-telling God's heart, and he notes the article in the Greek — "the faith" — which may mean prophecy must agree with sound doctrine. Teaching and exhortation need each other: teaching without exhortation makes "fat sheep," and exhortation without teaching burns people out or sends them the wrong way. Giving needs liberality, leading diligence, mercy cheerfulness.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul ("Serve God with Spiritual Gifts," February 25, 2007) sets verse 3 against a culture that worships self-esteem. The Greek joins thinking and feeling, so "Paul is not talking about estimation so much as he is esteem." Sober judgment is honest, not low — and it matters for men weighing ministry, many of whom leave because they were never suited to it. Every believer is gifted by the Spirit, and the church should help members find their gifts: "If God has given you a gift, He expects you to use it." He reads New Testament prophecy as forth-telling — "to function as an interpreter of the Word of God" — today chiefly the work of preaching. He warns each gift against despising the others, and insists mercy be shown with cheer, not a scowl, because every one of us lives on mercy.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition is short and sharp: "Humility is sober thinking. Pride is drunken thinking." The body has many members with different work, and none should envy or belittle another, because each is needed where God put it. On the gifts his counsel is plain: "Keep to your own work; stand in your own niche." The man who teaches should teach and the man who exhorts should exhort; the giver should give generously, the leader lead with diligence, and the one who shows mercy should do it gladly.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry: "we must have a low and modest opinion of ourselves and our own abilities," because every gift comes from God and is given by measure — and "The measure of spiritual gifts he calls the measure of faith, for this is the radical grace," the root from which the rest grow. The church is one body, each member with his own office and each serving the others. "The free grace of God is the spring and original of all the gifts that are given to men," and gifts are not ornaments: "Having gifts, let us use them." So "let him that teacheth wait on teaching," the giver give with simplicity, the ruler rule with diligence, and "He that showeth mercy with cheerfulness" — the way God shows it.

III
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 12:9–13

Love Without Hypocrisy

Love that hates evil, gives honor, burns in spirit and opens the door

> 9 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* 10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;* 11 *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* 12 *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,* 13 *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*
>
> ROMANS 12:9–13

FIGURE · THE RAPID-FIRE COMMANDS OF 12:9–21

12:9 · "LET LOVE BE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY"
abhor what is evil · cling to what is good — the heading over every command below

TOWARD GOD	TOWARD BELIEVERS	TOWARD ENEMIES & ALL
fervent in spirit (11)	brotherly devotion (10)	bless persecutors (14)
serving the Lord (11)	first to give honor (10)	never pay back evil (17)
rejoicing in hope (12)	meet saints' needs (13)	do right before all (17)
persevering in trial (12)	pursue hospitality (13)	peace with all men (18)
devoted to prayer (12)	rejoice, weep with (15)	never take revenge (19)
room for His wrath (19)	go with the lowly (16)	feed your enemy (20)

12:21 · "Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good**."

Under one heading — sincere love — the commands fall into three directions: upward to God, inward to the family of believers, and outward to enemies and all men, until evil itself is overcome.

ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος · ἀποστυγοῦντες

ANYPOKRITOS · APOSTYGOUNTES · "WITHOUT HYPOCRISY … ABHOR" · G505 · G655

Hypokritēs was the stage actor who spoke from behind a mask; *a-nypokritos* (G505) is love with the mask off — unfeigned, the same word for "sincere love of the brethren" (1 Peter 1:22) and for the wisdom from above (James 3:17). Paul writes it without a verb: "Love — unhypocritical." The next word is hatred intensified: *apostygeō* (G655, only here), *apo* + "hate," to loathe and turn away from. Then *kollōmenoi*, "clinging" (G2853), glued to what is good — the verb Jesus uses for a man joined to his wife (Matthew 19:5). Real love has both a recoil and a grip.

τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ … φιλόστοργοι · τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες

PHILADELPHIA … PHILOSTORGOI · ZEONTES · "BROTHERLY LOVE … DEVOTED … FERVENT" · G5360 · G5387 · G2204

Verse 10 piles up family words. *Philadelphia* (G5360) is brother-love; *philostorgos* (G5387, only here) joins *philos* to *storgē*, the natural affection of parents and children — the KJV's "kindly affectioned." The church is not a club of like-minded people; it is a household. Verse 11's "fervent" is *zeontes* (G2204), boiling — used elsewhere only of Apollos, "fervent in spirit" (Acts 18:25). And the "practicing" of hospitality in verse 13 is *diōkontes* (G1377), the word for "persecute" in the next verse: chase the stranger down with welcome (*philoxenia*, G5381, love of strangers) as hard as the world chases the believer with hostility.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

For Guzik love mixed with hypocrisy "isn't real love at all," and he admits much church "love" is laced with it. He notices that people usually manage one half of verse 9 — they abhor evil, or they cling to good — but not both. Affection and good manners belong to the command, and giving others preference in honor is how affection proves itself sincere. The church is no place for laziness. Hope looks to the final reward rather than to present results, and patience, in Morris's words, "denotes not a passive putting up with things, but an active, steadfast endurance." Hospitality is literally "love for strangers," and the verb behind it can mean "pursue" — believers should go looking for people to welcome.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul ("Behave Like a Christian, Part 1," March 4, 2007) hears in these short commands the cadence of the Sermon on the Mount and of James. Verse 9 heads the list: "The love that we are to manifest is to be a love that is genuine, sincere, and authentic." Evil is to be hated as "an unveiled assault on the character of God," and the good held "with all his might." He wants his people to lead the way in giving honor. On zeal: "The kingdom of God cannot be a secondary interest for a true Christian." Hope is not wishing: "The New Testament concept of hope is the absolute certainty that the promises of God for the future will come to pass." And prayer is not only for set hours; it is a life of communion with God.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition of these verses reads like a column of marching orders. Love must be real, not performed. "Be a good hater" — of evil — and hold fast to the good. Be warm toward one another and quick to put others first. Laziness is ugly in a Christian: "Burn. Let your very soul get hot." He hears threshing in the word "tribulation," so patience is needed when the flail comes down hard. His sermon "Serving the Lord" sets verse 11's phrases side by side — no neglecting your trade for religion, no cooling of the soul under the pressure of trade — and warns that "Serving the Lord is not a thing of fits and starts, spasms and excitements."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry wants love "not in compliment and pretence, but in reality." Reading verse 10 in the KJV — "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love" — he turns the honor clause into a rule for church life: "Instead of contending for superiority, let us be forward to give to others the pre-eminence." His portrait of true love runs through the whole paragraph — sincere, affectionate, respectful, generous — and lands in practical duty: distributing to the needs of the saints and keeping an open door for strangers.

IV
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 12:14–16

Bless, Weep, Stoop

Blessing the persecutor, sharing joy and grief, keeping company with the lowly

> 14 *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.* 15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.* 16 *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*
>
> ROMANS 12:14–16

εὐλογεῖτε … καὶ μὴ καταρᾶσθε

EULOGEITE … KATARASTHE · "BLESS … AND DO NOT CURSE" · G2127 · G2672

Eulogeō (G2127) is "to speak well" — *eu* + *logos* — and in Scripture to call down God's good on someone. Paul says it twice and then forbids its opposite, *kataraomai* (G2672), to invoke evil upon. The words come almost straight from Jesus: "bless those who curse you" (Luke 6:28) and "pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). The persecutors (*diōkontas*) are the chasers — the same verb as "practicing" hospitality one verse earlier. The believer is chased, and chases back with blessing.

τοῖς ταπεινοῖς συναπαγόμενοι

TAPEINOIS SYNAPAGOMENOI · "ASSOCIATE WITH THE LOWLY" · G4879

Synapagō (G4879) means "to be carried along with." Its other two uses are warnings — Barnabas "carried away" by hypocrisy (Galatians 2:13), believers "carried away by the error of unprincipled men" (2 Peter 3:17). Here it is turned to good: let yourself be carried along with the lowly. *Tois tapeinois* can be masculine (lowly people) or neuter (lowly things, humble tasks); the NASB and KJV take it as people. Either way it answers "do not be haughty in mind" (literally, "do not mind the high things") — the same *phroneō* family that ran through verse 3.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik ties verse 14 to Jesus' teaching on loving enemies (Matthew 5) and warns that persecution can come even from inside the church, citing John 16:2. Verse 14 is the one word in his outline on relating to outsiders; verses 15–21 are one practical block on getting along with people, and it starts here: rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep is how believers fulfill "the same mind toward one another" — the shared joys and griefs of the family are where unity is actually lived.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul admits verse 14 is hard and sets it beside the psalms that pray for judgment on enemies. For verse 15 he remembers his father's long illness and his mother's comment about friends who stayed away because they did not know what to say; he tells pastors that presence matters more than words. In Part 2 he says being of the same mind "means more than just having doctrinal unity" — it is affection spread across the whole body, not hoarded in a clique — and points to the Magnificat as God's pattern of lifting the lowly. On the command not to be wise in our own estimation he confesses his own struggle: when believers disagree, "the first thing I want to find out is why we have come to such different conclusions," and every opinion must be tested by the Word.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon: “A Christian man cursing is a very awkward spectacle.” The persecuted believer blesses instead. On verse 15 he makes a shrewd observation — rejoicing with others is often harder than weeping with them, because envy comes more easily to us than sympathy. And on verse 16 he calls the church to be of one mind and to drop the habit of constant argument, since unity is the health of a congregation.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry: “True love will interest us in the sorrows and joys of one another.” He reads verse 16 in the KJV, “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate,” and sums it in five words: “Love is a condescending grace.” His portrait of love in these verses is sympathetic and humble — it enters a brother’s griefs and gladness and does not mind stooping. And the persecutor, in his reading, is to be blessed in word and deed: not merely spared a curse, but given good.

V
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 12:17–21

Overcome Evil with Good

No payback, no private revenge — feed the enemy and leave the verdict to God

17 *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.* 18 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.* 19 *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.* 20 *“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”* 21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

ROMANS 12:17–21

“‘Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.’”

DEUTERONOMY 32:35

“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.”

PROVERBS 25:21–22

μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες … δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ

EKDIKOUNTES … DOTE TOPON TĒ ORGĒ · “AVENGING … GIVE PLACE TO THE WRATH” · G1556 · G1557

Ekdikeō (G1556) is to avenge, to exact justice; *ekdikēsis* (G1557), “vengeance,” is the noun in the quotation. Paul’s Greek says “give place to *the* wrath” — the article points to God’s wrath, which is why the NASB adds “of God.” The believer does not cancel justice; he steps out of the judge’s chair and leaves the room for the Judge. “Beloved” comes in the middle of the command — Paul says the hardest thing in the chapter tenderly. And the quotation, “I will repay” (*antapodōsō*), answers verse 17’s forbidden “pay back” (*apodidontes*): the repaying is God’s.

ἄνθρακας πυρὸς … νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν

ANTHRAKAS PYROS · NIKA · "COALS OF FIRE … OVERCOME" · G440 · G3528

Anthrax (G440, only here) is a live coal. The image comes word for word from Proverbs 25:22 (LXX), and readers have taken it two ways: the burning shame and conviction that kindness lays on an enemy's conscience, leading him to repentance; or the judgment he heaps on himself if he refuses it. Either way, the believer's part is bread and water. Then the last verse uses *nikaō* (G3528) twice — "do not be conquered (*nikō*) by the evil, but conquer (*nika*) the evil with the good." It is John's word for the overcomer (Revelation 2–3) and Christ's for Himself: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik borrows John Murray on verse 18: "If it be possible indicates that it may not always be possible" — peace is our side's duty, not a promise that the other side will keep it. Vengeance belongs to God, so to "give place to wrath" (his NKJV wording) means stepping aside to leave room for God's judgment. The coals of fire may be the burning conviction that kindness lays on an enemy, or a neighborly picture of sharing live coals with someone whose fire had gone out; either way the aim is the same — "we can destroy our enemy by making him our friend." That is how evil is overcome: by doing good to the one who did it.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul (Part 2) defines evil, with Augustine, as a privation of the good, and calls the urge to "get even" a form of moral corruption. Peace is a duty, but not the counterfeit peace of cowardice — he names Neville Chamberlain and Jeremiah's false prophets. Then a startling line: "Revenge is not a bad thing. Revenge is a good thing." His point is ownership — "What is evil is when we assume for ourselves something that does not belong to us" — for God never exceeds justice and we always do, and "There is a difference between vindication and vengeance." He recalls apologizing twice, as a seminarian, to a member who would not forgive; his old mentor called the second apology a mistake: "The coals of fire are on their heads." Overcoming evil with good is "the grand strategy of Jesus."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verse 21 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on October 8, 1876 ("Overcome Evil with Good") and called it an inspired proverb to set against the world's proverbs of revenge. There is no neutral ground — we are overcome by evil or we overcome it — and "Good is the only weapon which in this dread conflict we are permitted to use." Revenge feels like justice and costs nothing: no prayer, no watchfulness, no faith. Yet "Evil for evil is an edged tool which cuts the man who uses it," and "Nobody ever did overcome evil by confronting it with evil yet." He sums the moral universe in one line: "Good for evil is Godlike; good for good is man-like; evil for good is devil-like."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry reads "Recompense to no man evil for evil" as a ban on "private revenge, which flows from anger and ill-will," and names its arrogance: "We step into the throne of God if we do and take his work out of his hand." Peace must be kept and mended: "Thus must we labour to preserve the peace, that it be not broken, and to piece it again when it is broken." He gives both readings of the coals — kindness may "Melt him into repentance and friendship," or, if the enemy will not melt, it will "hasten upon him the tokens of God's wrath." And the battle is decided inside the believer: "He that cannot quietly bear an injury is perfectly conquered by it."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

The altar, the transformed mind, the body and the enemy across Scripture

> *"and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."*
>
> ROMANS 6:13

> *"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;"*
>
> ROMANS 8:29

> *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

> *"As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."*
>
> 1 PETER 4:10

> *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"*
>
> MATTHEW 5:44

> *"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."*
>
> ROMANS 13:8

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik links the transformation of 12:2 to two other places the same verb appears — Jesus transfigured on the mountain (Mark 9) and believers "being transformed" as they behold the Lord's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) — the change begins with a renewed mind, not with feelings or with mere doing.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul, in Part 2, notes that God delegates part of the work of justice to the civil magistrate — the subject Paul takes up next in 13:1–7. Laying down private revenge (12:19) does not mean living in a world without justice.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers walk the same five movements. Guzik keeps us close to the text and its Greek; Sproul presses each command for its doctrine; Spurgeon turns it into a call to the heart; Henry gathers it into plain counsel. Read across a row to hear one movement in four voices.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Present your bodies	Doctrine before duty; the sacrifice is brought alive to the altar; worship by the Word.	Therefore makes us perk up; whole self, whole life; nonconformity is the easy part.	Not enough to be nonconformists — be transformed; everyday labour as priestly sacrifice.	Christ living in the soul makes the body a living sacrifice; a new heart is God's work.
II · One body, many gifts	Even saving faith is a gift; teaching without exhortation makes fat sheep.	Sober esteem, not low esteem; every Christian gifted; prophecy as interpreting the Word.	Humility is sober thinking, pride drunken thinking; stand in your own niche.	Faith is the radical grace; free grace is the spring of every gift — use them.
III · Love without hypocrisy	Hypocritical love isn't love; abhor and cling — both; pursue strangers with welcome.	Love genuine and authentic; the kingdom never a secondary interest; hope as certainty.	Be a good hater; burn — let your soul get hot; no fits and starts.	Love in reality, not compliment; be forward to give others the pre-eminence.
IV · Bless, weep, stoop	Persecution can come from inside; shared joy and grief is the same mind.	Presence over words in grief; unity more than doctrine; test your own opinions.	A cursing Christian is an awkward spectacle; rejoicing with others is the harder half.	True love shares sorrows and joys; love is a condescending grace.
V · Overcome evil with good	Peace may not always be possible; destroy an enemy by making him a friend.	Vengeance is good but God's alone; vindication is not vengeance; Jesus' grand strategy.	Good is the only weapon; evil for evil cuts the man who uses it.	Private revenge steps into God's throne; he who cannot bear an injury is conquered.

ROMANS 12:1–21 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The hinge is one word.** "Therefore" (*oun*) in 12:1 turns eleven chapters of mercy into five chapters of response. Christian duty never stands on its own legs; it stands on what God has already done. THE TEXT
- **The altar now takes the living.** *Thysia* comes from a verb meaning "to kill," and Paul calls it "living." The old sacrifice died once; this one rises from the altar every morning and climbs back on. THE GREEK
- **Worship is logical.** *Logikē latreia* — reasonable, rational service. After Romans 1–11, giving God everything is not fanaticism; it is the only conclusion that follows from the premises. SPROUL
- **Conformed is a costume; transformed is a new nature.** *Syschēmatizō* works on the outside shape; *metamorphoō*, the word of the Transfiguration, works from inside out — and both are present tense: you are always being shaped by something. THE GREEK
- **Humility is sanity.** The same word as the healed demoniac "in his right mind" stands behind "sound judgment" (v. 3). "Humility is sober thinking. Pride is drunken thinking." SPURGEON
- **Every gift comes with a manner.** Paul never names a gift in vv. 6–8 without saying how to use it — liberality, diligence, cheerfulness. A gift used without its manner is a gift misused. THE TEXT

- **Love has a recoil and a grip.** "Abhor" (*apostygeō*, only here) is hatred intensified; "cling" is the glue of marriage. Love that cannot hate evil is sentiment, not love. THE GREEK
- **Chase the stranger.** The verb for "practicing" hospitality (v. 13) is the verb for "persecute" (v. 14). The world chases believers with hostility; believers chase strangers with welcome. THE GREEK
- **Revenge is not cancelled; it is surrendered.** Sproul: vengeance is a good thing that belongs to God alone, who never exceeds justice. Henry: to take it is to "step into the throne of God." HENRY
- **Good is the only weapon.** Spurgeon: "Good for evil is Godlike; good for good is man-like; evil for good is devil-like." The chapter ends with an enemy fed, not an enemy beaten. SPURGEON

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul does not say "present your bodies" until he has spent eleven chapters on "the mercies of God." Which of those mercies most moves you to give God your body this week — your eyes, your hands, your schedule?**

Duty that is not fueled by mercy turns into either pride or burnout.

12:1; 11:32

2 **Where is this age pressing you into its mold right now — in what you watch, what you want, or how you talk about people? What would "the renewing of your mind" look like there, concretely?**

Conformed is outside-in; transformed is inside-out, and both are always happening.

12:2; 2 Cor 3:18

3 **Is your estimate of yourself sober — not too high, not falsely low? What gift has God allotted you, and is it being used, buried, or envied?**

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking truly.

12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:10

4 **"Let love be without hypocrisy." Where in this group or your home do you wear a mask of love over resentment, indifference or performance?**

Sincere love has both a recoil from evil and a grip on good.

12:9-10; 1 Pet 1:22

5 **Who is hard for you to rejoice with right now — and who is hard to weep with? Which comes more easily to you, and what does that reveal?**

Envy makes the first hard; busyness makes the second hard.

12:15-16

6 **Name one person who has wronged you. What would it look like to "leave room for the wrath of God" and still put bread and water on his table?**

You are not asked to pretend it did not happen — only to hand the verdict to God.

12:17-21; Prov 25:21-22

Romans 12 does not leave the gospel behind; it shows the gospel walking around in a body. The man who has been shown mercy lays himself on the altar, lets his mind be remade, uses his gift, loves without a mask, and feeds the enemy who hurt him — because the One who will judge has already loved him while he was an enemy (5:10).

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; the Romans volume of his *Commentary* was completed by his successors (John Evans) from his notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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