



Romans - Chapter Twelve

Summary of Chapter Twelve

It is all too easy for people to be influenced by the world and what is going on around them. The world changes, standards of morality, behaviour and expectations change, but it is vitally important that Christians approach life with a renewed mindset, the mind of Christ, and to do so as a living sacrifice, a fragrant offering of the whole self - body, mind and soul - fully given over to God's will and purpose.

It is extremely important that Christians understand the world as it is today, especially if they are to communicate the Gospel effectively to those who share life with them; however, God and his message do not change and there are limits as to how far Christians can conform to the cultural norms of the world. They are not to be the people that society perhaps expects them to be, but people who reflect what God has done for them and, indeed, for all mankind.

Paul picks up on the theme of Jesus' own teaching that love is the essence of life: <<For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life>> (John 3:16), is not just a catchy phrase to put on notice boards outside church buildings; it is a life-changing statement, and something so profound about the nature of God that every human being needs to understand. Paul uses this theme in his letter to the Roman church by stating that it is love that underpins all the other aspects of church life. In order for all the congregational members to be able to live as part of the body of Christ, they need to understand not only their own role but that of others, to be able to support them in their role and to have genuine concern for them, celebrating their achievements, encouraging each other in their growing and supporting each other through times of trial; all that has to be truly understood in terms of humility, which is essential if the church model is to fulfil what Jesus intends it to be.

Paul starts by explaining how the relationships should work within the church and how believers should interact with each other. He then goes on to speak about how they should interact with the wider community, and also with the authorities. Paul anticipates persecution in the churches and encourages the congregations to respond to such treatment with love and not to look for revenge. Although they are to promote good and to resist evil, they are to show kindness to their enemies in the hope this will turn them away from their own evil desires in order to receive the love of God in their own hearts.

VI Romans 12:1-15:13 - God's righteousness in everyday life

The gift of God's saving righteousness leads to a new life. In this section, Paul works out some of the practical implications of God's saving mercy as he now moves from the doctrinal aspects of the Christian faith to its practical application. The faith is not just there to shape the

judgements of believers, but to reform their hearts and lives. It could be broken down into three principal headings:

- their duty to God;
- to themselves; and
- to their brothers and sisters in Christ.

VI.a Romans 12:1-13:14 - Marks of the Christian community

The law had served as an ethical framework for the Jewish community to live by. To live within the boundary of the law meant also following the rules laid down by the law, the rules for life, for social relationships within the boundary, and also for relationships with those outside the boundary. In calling into question the role of the law in defining Israel's ethnic boundary, had Paul not also destroyed it in its role as providing an ethical framework? Having redrawn the boundaries of the people of God, what redefinition of the ethical characteristics of the people of God is also required? As Paul now turns from theological exposition to exhortation, his task is to redraw some of the principal ethical guidelines in order to provide a sufficient indication of the ethical and social expression of the corporate identity of the new family of God.

The new life of believers is described in this section. The first responsibility of a follower of Jesus is to surrender themselves completely to God and to make him Lord over all aspects of their lives: <<And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will>> (2 Corinthians 8:5). Man consists of body and soul: <<the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being>> (Genesis 2:7), <<and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it>> (Ecclesiastes 12:7), and: <<"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" – but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also>> (1 Corinthians 6:13-14).

VI.a.i Romans 12:1-8 - Living sacrifices

These verses summarise the response to God's grace and serve as the introduction for all of Romans 12:1-15:13. They encapsulate what it means to live in a way that pleases God. Here Paul urges his readers to offer themselves completely to God. Using the same word, Paul appeals to, rather than orders, Philemon to accept his slave Onesimus back in love and grace: <<Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus>> (Philemon 8-9). Paul, in these situations, shows humility and grace in his approach, which is the way Christians should always act.

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1

'The problem with a living sacrifice is that it can crawl off the altar'.
Rick Warren
Purpose Driven Life.

Therefore points back to the entire argument from Romans 1:18-11:36.

God's mercy. Christians are to give themselves entirely to God because of his saving grace, as shown in Romans 3:21-11:36. Sacrificial language from the OT is used to denote the new life of Christians, and this means that the word bodies here refers to Christians as whole persons, for both body and soul belong to God.

They are a living sacrifice, meaning that they are alive from the dead since they enjoy new life with Christ: <<We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life>> (Romans 6:4). Living also means that they will not be put to death as OT animal sacrifices were; the purposes and meanings of the sacrifices are described in Leviticus Chapters 1-7, for Christ has fulfilled what was predicted by those sacrifices. Whereas OT worship focused on offering animal sacrifices in the temple, Paul says that your spiritual act of worship in a broad sense now includes offering one's whole life to God: <<Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased>> (Hebrews 13:15-16).

We are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God in the same way as the bodies of animals were offered up as sacrifices under the now surpassed ceremonial law, for Jesus had offered up his body as the everlasting sacrifice through death, but we can offer ourselves in life: <<you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body>> (1 Corinthians 6:20), and: <<you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ>> (1 Peter 2:5). Our bodies are: temple, priest and sacrifice; just as Jesus was. Under the ceremonial law there were sacrifices of atonement and sacrifices of acknowledgement. Christ was the only necessary sacrifice of atonement, bearing the guilt and shame of all mankind on the Cross. Our bodies and lives are tendered to God through Christ, our priest, as sacrifices of acknowledgement to the honour of God. It should be a freewill offering. In Leviticus 22:23 it states: <<You may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfilment of a vow>>. But under our new covenant with God, it is our bodies we offer, with all its imperfections, as allowed in the ceremonial law. It is Christ, living in our soul by faith, that makes our body a living sacrifice: <<I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me>> (Galatians 2:20).

The sacrifice is required to be holy. It becomes holy because it is offered to God, but the requirement goes deeper than that, as it requires our hearts and lives to be fully right with God at the time of offering. For our body is a temple for the Holy Spirit: <<Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own>> (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is the state that our heart is in when we make our offering to God that will determine whether or not it is pleasing and acceptable to him.

Elsewhere, however, the NT can also use the word worship in a narrower sense, to speak of specific acts of adoration and praise: <<and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him">> (Matthew 2:2), <<Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem>> (John 4:20), <<While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them">> (Acts 13:2), <<and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!">> (1 Corinthians 14:25), <<Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe>> (Hebrews 12:28), and: <<I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there">> (Revelation 11:1).

This is your spiritual act of worship. Participation in corporate worship is always an important aspect in the life of any faith group. Having in effect removed part of the Jewish cultic act of daily sacrifice as worship to God, Paul is now encouraging people to the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world; the boundary has now

been transformed into non-ritual expression, into the much more demanding work of human relationships in an everyday world.

² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:2

Verse 2 speaks of the present age through the believer's conformity to the pattern of this world; in Galatians 1:4b Paul refers to it as: <<the present evil age>>. Paul saw the present age as the part of world history characterised by rebellion against God, from which corruption and death result. There is an age to come in which God would give new life to the world and to mankind: fulfilled hope, to bring with it justice, joy and peace, once and for all. Paul's Gospel, in part, is that the age to come has started in the death and resurrection of Christ; the 'now' of the Kingdom of God. The present evil age still threatens those who belong to Christ, so they must resist its pressure. Their lives are changed as their minds are made new, contrast this with Romans 1:28 <<Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done>>, so that they are able to discern God's will. God does not impose upon people anything that is too hard or unreasonable, but that which is altogether agreeable to the principles of right reason. However, it must be acknowledged that he formed our bodies, he purchased them and maintains them, so it is incredibly gracious that he now wishes to negotiate with mankind over anything, for we owe him everything, we should be prepared to give him everything, and also to expect nothing in return.

For believers to accommodate this change they need a new mindset, i.e. a whole new way of thinking, a Kingdom outlook, which comes about with the believer's conversion and sanctification; it is about changing the qualities of the soul: having their understanding enlightened, their conscience softened, their thoughts rectified, their will bowed to and tuned to the will of God, and their affections made spiritual and heavenly. Therefore, the man is not what he was: <<Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!>> (2 Corinthians 5:17). This transformation uses the same Greek word metamorphousthe that was used to describe the changes in Jesus' appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration: <<There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light>> (Matthew 17:2), and in these words: <<And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit>> (2 Corinthians 3:18).

No one can think in the way the world does and live like a Christian should! Paul's analysis of human rebellion against God is given in Romans 1:18-32, which includes a fair amount of wrong thinking. Having the mind renewed by the persuasion of the Spirit is the vital start of that true human living, which is God's perfect and loving will for all of his children. The mind, as well as the body, is to be offered in sacrifice. The big difference between the Jewish sacrificial system is that they killed their offering, whereas the Christian offering brings renewed life in mature, Christ-like thinking and actions. But the evil deeds of self are required to die in order for this to take place.

Christians are therefore already in a position to stop letting the world dictate the terms and conditions for life, but are equipped to figure out for themselves how to think, speak and behave with maturity in a way that is appropriate for this new age, which is breaking through; that is, to be counter cultural, at least to a required degree.

To be counter-cultural is not to go against everything in the world, but to make a positive, informed stance for Jesus against aspects of life that are leading people away from life and

straight to hell, even if it is being done in a quiet, seductive, appealing manner. Even Christians are being drawn in by the 'acceptable face' of cultural change, and adopting attitudes that lead to poor work practice or ethic, untruthfulness, dishonesty, sexual immorality, law breaking - even if it is only in terms of minor road traffic offences it surely matters, and there are many other habits that are played out in daily life, accepted as normal behaviour. All such attitudes are wilful disobedience to the call of God on a believer's life; another name for this is sin.

You will be able to test and approve, literally 'by testing you may discern', translates the Greek word dokimazō, which often has the sense of finding out the worth of something by putting it to use, or testing it in actual practice, such as: <<Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me'>> (Luke 14:19), <<his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work>> (1 Corinthians 3:13), <<In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you>> (2 Corinthians 8:22), and: <<They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons>> (1 Timothy 3:10).

This cannot be achieved by human power but only by the power and will of God, although believers have to be willing recipients: <<and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness>> (Ephesians 4:24). The same applies to the giving of a new heart and a new spirit to make believers conform to the likeness of Christ: <<I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws>> (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Paul warns of an ever-present danger and barrier for believers to comply with this instruction. Ephesians 2:1-2 reminds them of where they have come from: <<As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient>>, and they are not to be drawn back to a place where they conform to the world, and: <<Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong>> (Exodus 23:2a), for that will bring enmity between their spirit and the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, will lead them to a state of confusion, and end up being a barrier to them fully devoting themselves or perhaps even partially devoting themselves to Christ.

Paul shows that the will of God is good, and acceptable, and perfect, three excellent properties of a law:

- **It is good:** <<He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God>> (Micah 6:8).
- **The only way to be acceptable is to conform to his will, which is pleasing to God.**
- **Believers have the added benefit of perfection as in John 7:17** <<If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own>>.

Neither Paul nor his readers in Rome would see this as a soft option or open door to irresponsibility, for to ascertain the will of God is never easy, and far less so when it is recognised that God's will cannot be reduced to a set of rules and regulations; the key, however, is the willing and eager submission of the creature to live out of his dependence on God, to seek to know God's will as the first objective, and his enabling for the still harder task of doing it.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Romans 12:3

I say to every one of you. Paul wants to make sure that everyone realises this exhortation is for them and not for someone else. The Lead Pastor at Scunthorpe Baptist Church, Rich Webb, often jokes, 'Of course, I'm not speaking to you but to the person behind you!'

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. In setting the guidelines for this new community to work and live together, Paul wants to tackle one of the key issues that could so easily separate them. That which divided Jew and Gentile, and hindered the promises of God reaching their climactic fulfilment, was the first and most serious danger to be avoided. Whether it was pride in race, or in loyalty to tradition, or in seeming favour by God, or in charismatic prowess, such pride should be resisted and brought low, for it was the greatest danger to the unity and oneness of corporate identity as God's people. Everyone is in danger of harbouring such false and divisive notions of self-esteem, none more so than the one who thinks the exhortation is addressed to someone else.

God has granted a differing measure of faith to each of his children, and Paul calls upon each to assess him or herself realistically. By starting with grace and ending with faith, Paul is reiterating that whatever gifts each individual is given, it is a gift of God that is not earned, and they should not hold themselves in higher esteem because of such gifts. The opposite side of the coin of grace is presumption. Paul has, time and time again, reiterated that God works through faith and faith alone.

In v.3 Paul warns against personal pride and conceit. It is something that most human beings, and it seems at times, followers of Jesus in particular, are capable of and it nearly always leads to their downfall: <<If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself>> (Galatians 6:3). Believers should never have an opinion that they are too good to be slaves to sin. Nor should they show false humility but live according to the gifts and grace that has been given to them. Not assuming things that are above those which they have been given or called for, and not neglecting to fulfil what they have been raised to do: <<My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me>> (Psalm 131:1-2), <<We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand>> (2 Corinthians 10:13-15), and: <<Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions>> (Colossians 2:18). It is good for believers to be wise, but bad to think of themselves so, for all good things are given to them by God: <<Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows>> (James 1:17), and: <<For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?>> (1 Corinthians 4:7). Believers are limited by what God has given, but they are assured that he has given them all that is sufficient to do his will; that is, of course, providing they use all the gifts they have in the way they were intended to. Only Jesus was given the Spirit without limit: <<For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit>> (John 3:34), and yet he remained meek and lowly; so why should believers be proud and self-conceited. Although there is nothing to stop them from

asking for more, and it will be given if they are showing themselves to be faithful and true in that which they already have: <<But eagerly desire the greater gifts>> (1 Corinthians 12:31).

⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4-5

Paul goes on to use the analogy of the natural body to show that followers of Jesus are all one body in Christ, with each member being given the ability to perform its function. The image would have been familiar to his Roman audiences, since the body of a single entity made up of diverse members, mutually interdependent, was obvious and common enough in popular philosophy. And that body, functioning only in Christ, dismisses any nationalistic or cultic claims at the same time. There are similar expressions and ideas in: <<The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ>> (1 Corinthians 12:12), and: <<From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work>> (Ephesians 4:16). Paul made much of this image to the churches in Corinth and Ephesus from which it can be deduced that he saw it as one of the best means of encouraging the right sort of community spirit in the Diaspora congregations. Just as the body has different parts with specific functions, so too God gives believers different gifts to perform different roles for him; all do so equally in his sight, although it may seem, humanly speaking, that some have greater purpose. It is not for believers to show pride if they appear to be chosen for apparently higher office, and not to be discontent if called to perform more mundane roles in the faith. Providing they fulfil all they are called to do in obedience to God, and not to question his judgement, then they will come to him to be told: <<'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities'>> (Luke 19:17), a sound that is guaranteed to fill anyone with great and genuine humility and certainly not with pride!

The diversity and unity of the church is illustrated by comparison to the human body. Just as the human body is one with many members, literally body parts or limbs, so the church is united, although it is composed of many members. On the theme of the church as the body of Christ, see 1 Corinthians Chapter 12. In Ephesians 4:4, Paul states: <<There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called>>, and: <<to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work>> (Ephesians 4:12-16).

To get the full picture of what Paul is saying here is to see it in context to Romans 6:1-14 <<What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die

again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace>>, and [Romans 8:12-17](#) <<Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory>>. [Christian living does not start with a set of rules; these are developed as believers progress in their walk with God. Their life in Christ begins with a self-offering of their whole self, with all its sinful rebellion that leads to spiritual as well as physical death, and to enable God, through his Spirit, to renew their minds and their whole way of life. The first thing for them to learn is that they are different members of one family, and that they must not think too highly of themselves: <<I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in>> \(\[Romans 11:25\]\(#\)\), but to be content as members in the body of Christ, for he is God over all: <<Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen>> \(\[Romans 9:5\]\(#\)\).](#)

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

[Romans 12:6](#)

Humanly speaking believers sometimes have a tendency to rank some of the [different gifts](#) as being more important than others. Although Paul does require them to desire ‘greater gifts’, he also indicates that it is using whatever gifts they have that is important: <<There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit>> ([1 Corinthians 12:4](#)), and: <<Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you>> ([1 Timothy 4:14](#)), and Peter confirms this: <<Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms>> ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). Paul goes on to name seven particular gifts in vv.6-8, but does not seem to rank them in anyway. The variety of the body is evident from the various [gifts](#) God has given the church, see the chart at Appendix 1.

On the gift of prophecy, i.e. [prophesying](#), the word prophecy, Greek prophēteia, as used by Paul, refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or reveals to the speaker, but which is spoken in merely human words, not words of God. Therefore, it can have mistakes and must be tested or evaluated. An alternative view of this gift, held by some, is that it involves speaking the very words of God, with authority equal to the OT prophets and equal to the word of Scripture. A third view is that it is very similar to the gifts of preaching or teaching. The gift is widely indicated throughout the NT churches. Prophecy is used to build up, encourage, and comfort the gathered community. Prophecy is also used evangelistically to disclose the secrets of the hearts of unbelievers, and lead them to worship God. Because God used this gift to build up the Christian community, Paul especially urged the Corinthians to value it highly. There are generally two viewpoints held:

1. Some teachers and scholars hold that, in NT prophecy, there are two potential kinds of problems with such prophecies: first that there could be mistakes in the prophecies

themselves, and second that there could be mistakes in the prophet's own interpretation. This then would be an example of why Paul commands that prophecies must be tested, that is, to guard against both:

- a. possible mistakes in the prophecy itself, and
 - b. possible mistakes in the interpretation of the prophecy.
2. Other interpreters hold that, although such prophecies themselves are completely accurate, because they come through the Spirit, there still could be mistakes in the interpretation of the prophecy. Thus, even though the prophecy is accurate, such prophecies still need to be tested.

In the first case, both the prophecy and the interpretation may be wrong; in the second case, only the interpretation may be wrong. In either case, all prophecies would need to be tested, as Paul commands.

The OT prophets were to foretell and inform people of future events, but also to warn them that such events were often punishment for their apostasy and sin. NT prophets are seen in a different light, but often to the same effect as the warnings given by their predecessors, therefore, NT teachers can be seen as prophets for they reveal the word of God, and foretell the likely outcomes for those who do not heed their message. Just as no one can hear the word of God properly without faith; so too the teacher or prophet cannot proclaim the word well without that same faith; we need to believe and then speak: <<I believed; therefore I said, "I am greatly afflicted">> (Psalm 116:10), and: <<It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak>> (2 Corinthians 4:13). Everyone also needs to test what they hear, whether through teaching or prophecy: <<do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21), just as the Bereans did when Paul preached to them: <<Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true>> (Acts 17:11). We can then hold on to what we have been told in faith: <<and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us>> (Titus 2:8), and: <<What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus>> (2 Timothy 1:13).

In proportion to his faith. Paul instructs prophets to speak only when they have faith or confidence that the Holy Spirit is truly revealing something to them, and not to exceed the faith that God has given them by trying to impress others.

⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:7-8

Christians should concentrate upon and give their energies to the gifts God has given them, whether in serving others, teaching God's word patiently and diligently, or in exhortation and encouragement in all the things of God. Thus Paul highlights three attitudes necessary in exercising particular gifts:

1. those who have a special gift of helping others financially should never give grudgingly but always generously;
2. those who lead often have no one to whom they are accountable, and hence they must beware of complacency and even laziness;

3. those who show mercy to the hurting must not grow weary but continue to minister with gladness.

There are those who are given gifts to deal with church business: <<Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the house of God>> (Nehemiah 11:16), or to serve the poor in the daily distribution of needs: <<So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables>> (Acts 6:2). There are those given to leading worship as musicians: <<Those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night>> (1 Chronicles 9:33). We are to honour those who are particularly called to higher office in the church: <<The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching>> (1 Timothy 5:17), but they should serve in greater humility for being raised up for and entrusted with such responsibility.

Even though gifts are given by the Spirit they still have to be worked at. For example, a preacher cannot just get up and say the first thing that comes into his head, it has to be carefully and prayerfully worked through to ensure the message comes together to say what the Spirit has prompted the person to say. This is true of all other areas of ministry; people need to think about and prepare for the work they are called to do and then to do it, whenever and wherever they are required to do it, irrespective of how they feel on any given day. They are also required to do it genuinely. People should get pleasure from serving, and therefore their demeanour should reflect this, but a false smile may smack of hypocrisy.

There is a serious issue that often arises through the misunderstanding of church leadership gifts and roles. If a church is blessed by having visionary leaders then the membership of that church should not see that gift squandered by expecting to see such leaders use up their time and energy on issues of daily pastoral care or active service in general church ministries. God gives them their gifts for a purpose and that purpose is not for others to determine on behalf of God.

VI.a.ii [Romans 12:9-21 - Love](#)

From verse 9 Paul starts to talk of practical demonstrations of emotion within the church. He starts with love, for love is of God: <<This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother>> (1 John 3:10), and it is shown practically: <<Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth>> (1 John 3:18), <<I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others>> (2 Corinthians 8:8), and: <<Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves>> (Philippians 2:3). The church must not take 'prefer one over another' to mean that they allow others to do the work while they sit idly by doing little or nothing: <<Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives>> (Titus 3:14). A good summary statement is: <<Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love>> (1 John 4:8)

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

[Romans 12:9](#)

The remainder of the chapter is a description of the life that is pleasing to God. Not surprisingly, love heads the list, for all that Paul says is embraced by the call to love. Love must be the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples. Jesus gave a command for his disciples to love one another which takes its point of departure from the Mosaic commands to love the Lord with all of your powers and to love your neighbour as yourself, but Jesus' own love and teaching

deepen and transform these commands. Jesus even taught love for our enemies. The command to love our neighbour was not new; the newness was found in loving one another as Jesus had loved his disciples and now loves his church.

Sincere. Love has to be genuine in terms of caring about someone's welfare; it cannot be reduced to sentimentalism.

Hate. Christians are to hate evil in all its forms and are to actively oppose it, but they are to love the perpetrators of evil, not for the deeds they do but because they are created by God.

Paul states, and in fact Jesus commands, that his disciples love one another. The language they use though is often misinterpreted when translated into English, and some people are open enough to ask the question, 'How can I love someone that I just don't like or can't get along with? Surely, if I pretend I do love such people then I am being a hypocrite?' The language behind Jesus' command to love one another is speaking of meeting their welfare needs, whether to do with their finances, other material needs, spiritual needs or health. We can all pray genuinely for those whom we do not get along with, and we can make provision out of what we have to make up the deficiencies in what they do not have, without having to pretend to be their best friends or bosom buddies. It should also be noted that we should be caring for people's needs and not their wants. We should also be promoting self-sufficiency in others as they grow and not creating dependency.

A potential problem for churches, as Paul recognises all too well, is that love itself can become formalised in expression, a cloak of pretence hiding an insensitive lack of genuine concern, an outward form for a judgemental and condemnatory spirit. Hence the call for a love which is genuine in deed as well as in word, in mutual relationships, as fully accepting of the brother and indeed the enemy, as God in Christ has accepted them: <<You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!>> (Romans 5:6-10). That this opening exhortation stands as a heading for all that follows and has in mind both Christ as model and the quality of love expressed in: <<Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres>> (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), and is thus indicated by the word itself, so distinctive in its Christian usage, by echoes of Christ's own teaching.

The fact that Paul uses the most general categories, i.e. evil, good, indicates an awareness that unbalanced emphasis on spiritual factors, especially the gifts of the Spirit, can result in attitudes and conduct which others can see to be evil, by generally accepted standards, but which the devout claim to be able to justify; although the Christian is not to be conformed to this world (v.2), there is a level of moral sensibility in the wider community which the Christian congregation ignores at its peril. But to be an effective check there must be a passion both in the revulsion against evil and in the commitment to what is good.

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:10

With v.10 the body imagery gives way to that of the family. The love Paul calls for and sees as essential, if the Christian congregation is to function as one body in Christ, has the quality of

family love, i.e. brotherly love. At that, Paul will mean the kind of love which recognised and can speak about, within the intimacy of the family, weaknesses and failings, but which has a quality of loyalty that outlasts repeated disappointments. If the new communities, which have cut across the usual divisions of nation and class, can experience the reality of such love, they have a bond which will hold them together through thick and thin. Such relationships can only be formed through people that can be trusted and those that honour one another above themselves.

Another side of such love is the readiness to recognise strengths and to praise attainments of family members. Paul will no doubt already have had sufficient experience of congregations where some members were unwilling to extend genuine respect across the full range of membership, but cherished doubts and questions about the realities of others' commitments and gifts. Where brotherly love and family affection are in effective interaction, each will be ready to take the lead in showing respect for others, including those whose understanding of commitment and practice of their gifts is different from that of others. Love without respect for the other is hollow and self-defeating.

In James 2:15-16 we read: <<Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?>>, so clearly speaks of the practical applications of our love towards our brothers and sisters, and indeed to our wider community, as well as the insincerity and even hypocrisy that can be displayed in church. But it is not just the material giving that is important, for as Paul says elsewhere: <<Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles>> (Philippians 4:14), leading to: <<Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers>> (Galatians 6:10).

When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he taught everyone about true brotherly love as well as servanthood: <<After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him>> (John 13:5), and: <<A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another>> (John 13:34). This act and the subsequent outcome was designed especially to intimate to believers that to love one another in the true spirit of love is to be willing to stoop to the lowest office of kindness for the good of one another. Love is not a condescending grace. Paul is intimating this in v.6, showing that believers must not be ambitious of honour or preference, not look upon worldly pomp and dignity with any inordinate value or desire but rather with a holy contempt.

¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.

Romans 12:11

The next three exhortations become less specific, focusing on matters of basic attitude and motivation. A quality of zestful eagerness and vibrant spirituality is desirable as an expression of the love which binds together the family of Jesus and motivates the functions of the body of Christ. The double emphasis, lacking in zeal, spiritual fervour, suggests that the life of the Spirit in the Christian community has an uncomfortable character; an inner drive matched by a personal discipline.

The third phrase in what seems to be a triplet, serving the Lord, probably functions once again as something of a control check on what might otherwise be interpreted as an invitation to unbridled enthusiasm. The love which binds a congregation together needs that inner spontaneity bubbling up within, if it is to remain fresh and personally real, but it can easily become too experiential and 'frothy' unless it expresses also the fundamental commitment to Christ as Lord, and is motivated solely and completely by the desire to serve him. The imagery of the slave is a reminder that what is in view is not personal satisfaction or flights of spirituality, but the will and command of the master.

If we want our service to be pleasing to God it must be through our spirit working in tune with the Holy Spirit. God does not require us to serve him with our heart and soul, he requires us to serve him with all of our heart and all of our soul. As Paul will later go on to say: <<For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification>> (Romans 14:17-19).

¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:12

The next three phrases seem to hang together also as a triplet. The association of hope, rejoicing, affliction and patient endurance, is one which came naturally to Paul, and being faithful in prayer, as an expression of being patient in affliction, was equally natural. Christians can be called on to rejoice, not so much in what has already been accomplished in them, but in their firm confidence in God. Such joyful hope sustains the patient endurance in suffering and then being faithful in prayer. Likewise, it is itself sustained by prayer; for, in the midst of suffering, only an uninhibited crying out to God can provide a sufficient safety valve for the pressures of potential disaster.

Paul speaks of how we should serve the Lord, a subject he is passionate about and has demonstrated time and again how it should be done. It is clear that he was fully committed to the Lord in statements such as the one given when his ship was in danger of being lost in hurricane force winds, while he was being taken as a prisoner to Rome: <<Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me>> (Acts 27:23). Paul knew he was fully and completely owned by God, bought and paid for on the Cross.

God also requires us to show patience in tribulation. It does not mean that we have to suffer in silence for we can call out to him in our prayers, but they should not be complaints, as we are called to suffer, just as Jesus suffered for us. And, as we have seen with others that have suffered for Christ, we can do so with rejoicing which is pleasing to God, e.g. <<The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name>> (Acts 5:41), <<But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God>> (Acts 7:55), <<About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them>> (Acts 16:25), etc. We are a people called to pray, to pray with passion, and to pray often: <<Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up>> (Luke 18:1), Paul writes and clearly demonstrates that believers should: <<pray continually>> (1 Thessalonians 5:17), <<And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints>> (Ephesians 6:18), and: <<Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful>> (Colossians 4:2).

¹³ Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12:13

Another practical application of love is to share our homes with strangers who are Christians, who are visitors and perhaps unable to afford appropriate accommodation. Even if they can, it is good to share in their fellowship and not just because they may be angels: <<Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it>> (Hebrews 13:2).

Hospitality was very important for early Christians, for most of them could not afford lodging houses when travelling, but depended on the provision of fellow believers. Examples of this are: <<Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon>> (Acts 9:43), <<When

she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us>> (Acts 16:15), <<Leaving the next day, we reached Cæsarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven>> (Acts 21:8), and: <<Some of the disciples from Cæsarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples>> (Acts 21:16).

Paul would be well aware of the strain this statement could make on the resources of the Roman congregations. Many of the Christians were not wealthy. The Jews had been expelled from Italy, were now returning and starting to rebuild their lives, thus the request to practice hospitality in the hub of the empire, where hundreds of visitors a year would be passing through on business, was not one to be taken lightly, but also one that presented evangelistic opportunities not to be missed. Yet it is at the heart of the message and a step of faith in doing just this. One way of achieving this was for those who had resources to share with God's people who are in need, the very essence of the Gospel that Paul preached.

At the time of writing, Paul himself would have expected that he would be in need of such hospitality. However, wherever Paul went he earned his keep as he explains here to the Ephesian elders, then the churches in Corinth and Thessalonica: <<I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'>> (Acts 20:33-35), <<And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so>> (2 Corinthians 11:9), and: <<Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you>> (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Verses 6-8 are tasks for specific people to undertake according to the gifts they are given, whereas vv.9-13 are commands for all followers of Jesus. Although it is true that some people will be better placed than others to fulfil these commands, it is worth re-reading them on a regular basis and to feel the practical energy they evoke. They offer a no-nonsense vision of Christian living. In particular, it should be noted the remarkable command in v.9; <<love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good>>. It doesn't get much simpler or clearer than that!

In the final verses of this chapter, Paul broadens his perspective from the internal relationships within and among the Christian congregations, to take in their relationships with the wider community, within which they had to live and make their living. Paul was evidently mindful of the political realities, which confronted these new small groups within the cities of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. In particular, he would be aware of the fact that the little churches in Rome were an endangered species; vulnerable to further imperial ruling against Jews and societies. His first concern, therefore, is to urge a policy of avoiding trouble by refusing retaliation to provocations, and by responding with positive good to all hostile acts directed against them. This latter concern is the linking theme, being repeated with variations no less than four times (v.14, v.17, v.19 and v.21), buttressed by scripture (v.20), and given the place of emphasis at both beginning and end (v.14 and v.21). The fact that Paul takes for granted that persecution and acts of malice would be directed against the small house gatherings, is significant enough, even if fully anticipated and proclaimed by Jesus: <<If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first>> (John 15:18). It speaks eloquently of the atmosphere of threat and intimidation within which these Christians had to live out their discipleship. All the more striking it is, therefore, that Paul advocates such a positive outgoing goodness in response, not merely passive resistance. It was, no doubt, a policy of prudence; a reputation for kindness might well help ensure the support of the communities at large in any confrontation with the

authorities. But even more important, it is a policy which Jesus had advocated by word and deed, and was a characteristic expression of that same love which should characterise relationships within the congregation of faith, therefore it is only a natural extension to display it externally as well. This is a second striking feature that Paul is drawing on in this passage; although it promotes its distinctive Jewish heritage, it is also clearly embedded in the teaching of Jesus even though Paul does not quote him directly. This does not diminish the effect one iota just as his omissions to quote directly from Proverbs or Leviticus in vv.16, 17 and 19.

The fact that vv.15-16 seem to focus attention back once again more on the internal relationships of the Christian congregations should not be seen merely as a disruption of the wider concern. On the contrary, these verses should be taken as some indication of the degree to which Paul saw the life of the Christian churches as integrated into the wider life in the city. Paul did not see a Christian's life as divided neatly into two sets of attitudes and obligations, one to fellow believers, the other to non-believers. The same sympathetic concern and positive outgoing love should be the rule in all cases; a love which does not reckon or depend on receiving a positive response in return. All in all, Paul has no thought of the Roman Christians as compartmentalising their lives into spiritual and ordinary affairs, or of living their lives cut off from contact with the wider community. He takes it for granted that Christians will live out their daily lives in wider relationships, motivated by the same love as in their relationships with fellow believers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Romans 12:14

Bless and do not curse. These words reflect the teaching of Jesus: <<But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you>> (Matthew 5:44). More importantly, it reflects Jesus' actions for, as he hung on the Cross in excruciating agony, his thoughts and prayers were for his persecutors: <<Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" >> (Luke 23:34a).

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Romans 12:15

These are actions that we take on naturally within the church. Baptisms, weddings and funerals are formal events that take place, where these emotions would naturally come to the fore, but there are many more occasions too where this would be natural. But Paul is looking at a wider context too. This is not something to be limited to our relationships with believers but also within our wider communities too. It is important for our Christian witness that we be seen to share in all the good things in life that are appropriate to celebrate in God's name, and to offer our condolences and share in our community's pain at times of grief and sorrow.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another. We are also to live in a spirit of peace with one another: <<Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord>> (Hebrews 12:14), and: <<Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace>> (Ephesians 4:3). <<But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere>> (James 3:17), indicates that **peace without purity is the peace of the devil's palace. Some are raised up for strife in God's name:** <<Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have

neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me>> (Jeremiah 15:10), and believers must be obedient to their calling, but they must never seek discord of or for themselves: <<I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war>> (Psalm 120:7).

Do not be proud. <<My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me>> (Psalm 131:1). With these words, David shows the higher he rose in worldly position the humbler he became before God. The Roman readers of Paul's letter lived in the imperial city, a city of great wonder and splendour, offering all the trappings of the world, and so it was important for them to hear this teaching from Paul, just as it is for modern believers, especially those living in the midst of the trappings of the western world in this present time.

Be willing to associate with people of low position. Paul, like Jesus, does not speak out against wealth or those believers who hold high positions in society. What he requires is that they acknowledge their position as a gift from God to be used for his glory and that such a position should not lead such people to despise those who are chosen to serve in a lower social status. David also states: <<I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts>> (Psalm 119:63), showing his acknowledgement of God's requirements. True love values grace in rags as well as dressed in purple. A diamond is still a diamond when it is buried deep within the rock and the dirt. James warns believers against partiality: <<My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?>> (James 2:1-4).

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

Romans 12:17

Tom Wright comments: 'the bible tells us not to seek revenge against evil in the world or against those who personally hurt us in some way. We should note that this does not mean going soft on evil. Saying you shouldn't take revenge isn't a way of saying evil isn't real, or that it didn't hurt after all, or that it doesn't matter. Evil is real; it often does hurt, sometimes very badly indeed and with lasting effects, and it does matter. This is, perhaps, one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and, say, Buddhism. Because we believe in a creator God who made a good and lovely world, we believe that everything which defaces and distorts, damages or spoils part of that creation is not just another variety of goodness but is actually its opposite, evil. The question is, what are we going to do about it? For Paul, that question begins with the question, what has God already done about it? Quite a bit of the letter, earlier on, has been devoted to answering this question, and it boils down to what he says in Romans 5:6-11 <<You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation>>.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Again, an allusion to Jesus' teaching: <<But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also>> (Matthew 5:39).

Be careful to do what is right. Again, this is doing right in the sight of God. The Christian witness can easily be destroyed if believers choose to live hypocritical lives.

What followers of Jesus should note is that revenge keeps evil in circulation. God, by taking all the sin and evil on himself, offered the whole world a way to remove the burden of individual sin from ourselves, but he also offered each of us a way to ease and even remove the pain caused to us as a result of the sin of others, and that comes by copying God's forgiveness of our sins. If we forgive others, truly forgive them, which means actually wishing them well, but not necessarily forgetting whatever it was that hurt us so badly, but instead removing the burden of it from our own hearts, that will allow us to move on in our own lives. Such forgiveness does not depend on the other person being sorry or showing any remorse or guilt for what they may have done. That is a burden they must carry or deal with in the same way as the person who is forgiving them has done. We cannot change the past but we can choose to be changed and to shape a better future by following the ways of God.

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18

If it is possible. Paul recognises it is not always possible to be at peace with everyone, even when one makes the effort.

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Romans 12:19

Do not take revenge. There are, of course, times when justice needs to intervene and that will be dealt with in Chapter 13, but as the individual that is wronged it is inappropriate to seek revenge if the rule of law is too ponderous or does not seem to adequately deal with a particular situation. God will judge all of us in his own time, in his own way, with complete impartiality but with full and true justice. We just have to trust in him and leave him to deal with it, unless we have an official role of public duty in such matters, of course. This is what Paul is referring to when he says leave room for God's wrath.

It is mine to avenge; I will repay is a quote from Deuteronomy 32:35 and another allusion to Jesus' teaching as seen in Matthew 5:39. Feelings of revenge can be overcome by realising that God will make all things right, and that he will pour out his wrath, not on those who deserve it, for that is all of us, but on those who are unrepentant and for whom it is appropriate for him to punish.

²⁰ On the contrary:

 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

 if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:20-21

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. There will be enemies and we may find that life is a battle; for there are those who would choose war against Christ. Although we must stand up for Christ, we should do so in a spirit of love, with no intent to do our enemies any harm, but to do them all the good we can: <<You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you

may be sons of your Father in heaven>> (Matthew 5:43-45a). If for no other reason then we should remember that when Christ died for us we were enemies of God. And, just as he has forgiven us, so too we should forgive them, which means wishing them well as already discussed. If fact, v.20 goes even further to instruct us to meet their needs whenever we can, i.e. if he is hungry, feed him.

You will heap burning coals on his head could mean it would melt his opposition in the hatred he previously held, similar to that which happened to King Saul: <<Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly">> (1 Samuel 26:21), or it will aggravate his condemnation and make his malice against you the more inexcusable, thus bringing God's judgement on him all the sooner; although this must not be our motivation in showing him kindness in the first place.

Burning coals is quoted from Proverbs 25:21-22. Most interpreters think Paul is teaching that the Christian is to do good to people so that they will feel ashamed and repent, and that sense is possible. But in the OT, 'burning coals' always represent punishment: <<Out of the brightness before him coals of fire flamed forth>> (2 Samuel 22:13 ESV), <<On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot>> (Psalm 11:6), <<Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it>> (Psalm 18:8), <<Hailstones and fiery coals lit up the sky in front of you. Lord Most High, your voice thundered from the heavens, as hailstones and fiery coals poured down like rain>> (Psalm 18:12-13 CEV), and: <<Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise>> (Psalm 140:10), so another interpretation is that Paul is repeating the thought of v.19: Christians are to do good to wrongdoers, recognising that God will punish them on the last day if they refuse to repent.

Although interpreters differ about the meaning of the metaphor of heaping burning coals on the enemy's head, it is likely an image for leading him to repentance or shame, suggesting that he will feel inward burning pangs of guilt for his wrongdoing. In any case, the message is clearly to repay evil with good. The image of burning coals does not imply something that harms the enemy, because it further explains the bread and drink, which do him good, and also because Solomon forbids taking personal vengeance: <<Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you>> (Proverbs 20:22). Finally, the Lord will reward you implies a good result from these burning coals, which is most consistent with leading the person to repentance.

Overcoming evil with good will ordinarily include acts of kindness toward evildoers, but it may sometimes also include the good: <<For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer>> (Romans 13:3-4), of the civil government stopping evil through the use of superior force, military or police, as Paul explains in this quote from the next chapter.

The amazing thing about God's commands, as shown by Paul's wording here, is not only that we should forgive people who have wronged us, even those that have shown no regrets or remorse, we are commanded to go out of our way to undertake distinct acts of kindness towards them! If by doing so it leads the other person to repentance it then opens the way for reconciliation as well; something that would truly benefit the person who was hurt by it initially. The converse is of course not to forgive and to remain in a state where bitterness twists the soul, where pain will grow like a cancer, and the mind be continually tortured. A person needs to break the cycle through forgiveness. This is what Paul means by do not be overcome by evil.

Appendix 1 to Romans Chapter 12

Spiritual Gifts in Paul's Letters

<u>Romans 12:6-8</u>	<u>1 Corinthians 12:7-10</u>	<u>1 Corinthians 12:28</u>	<u>Ephesians 4:11</u>
Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us	To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good	God has appointed in the church	And he gave
prophecy	prophecy	apostles prophets	the apostles the prophets the evangelists
	ability to distinguish between spirits utterance of wisdom		
teaching	utterance of knowledge	teachers	the shepherds and teachers
exhorting			
	working of miracles gifts of healing	miracles gifts of healing	
service		helping	
leading		administrating	
	various kinds of tongues interpretation of tongues	various kinds of tongues	
giving			
	faith		
mercy			