

KINGDOM.

LESSON 40

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God's kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] JEREMIAH 15, 17, 18 and 23
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Jeremiah 15, 17, 18 and 23).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [GOD'S RESOURCES] (4) JAMES 1:5
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Review two by two.

(4) God's wisdom. James 1:5. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) [THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS] ROMANS 12:1-21
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Introduce. Although the whole book of Romans is full of Christian doctrine and practice, Romans chapter 1-11 emphasises *doctrine* and Romans chapters 12-16 emphasises *practice*.

The subject of chapter 12 is *sanctification*. Romans chapter 6 has already taught us that the basis for justification and sanctification is spiritual union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:2-7; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30). Without the legal state of justification and the moral *state (position)* of holiness, we cannot grow in our personal *style (process)* of sanctification! And without sanctification we can never be sure of our justification! Because the spiritual union with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is permanent, growth in sanctification is a constant dynamic process in the Christian (Romans 6:10-11). Spiritual union with Jesus Christ means that a person has asked Jesus Christ to live in his heart and life. It means that the Holy Spirit is present in the body of the Christian. The Holy Spirit is no one less than the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the resurrected, ascended and exalted Lord, who now reigns in heaven (Romans 8:9-10). The practical and ethical life of the Christian rests on the solid foundation of the redemptive accomplishment of Christ. Growth in sanctification happens because the Christian belongs to Christ and Christ works the new life in the Christian through the Holy Spirit.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
LET US READ Romans 12:1-21 together.	
Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Consider.</i> WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART?	
<i>Record.</i> Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook.	
<i>Share.</i> (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share).	
Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered.	
(Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

12:1

Discovery 1. The responsibility of the Christian with respect to his body.

The Christian body is an important part of sanctification. Verse 1 says, "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." Several religions in the world depreciate the body and regard the body as evil. Their ethical ideal is to be set free from the body and its degrading influences. In contrast, the human body is very important in the Christian faith. Since creation, the body of man is an integral part of his being (Hebrew: his soul), that is, of whom he is as a human (Genesis

2:7,21-23). At the end of man's life the body dies due to sin. However, this is regarded as abnormal, because God's intention is to resurrect all bodies (Daniel 12:2; Philippians 3:20-21).

Because the Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a Christian dedicates all the members of his body to God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13,19). A Christian offers his body as *a living sacrifice* to God, which means, that he dedicates his body consciously and continually as an instrument of his regenerate nature to God and his service. He offers his body as *a holy sacrifice* to God, which means, set apart from the evil (for example, sensual lust) and dedicated towards the good. And he offers his body as a well-pleasing sacrifice to God, which brings joy to God glorifies him. Such offering of the body is called "spiritual worship" (Greek: *logikén latreian*), which means, that the Christian in contrast to the Gentiles and Jews do not worship by means of external and mechanical ceremonies (rituals), but by means of conscious, intelligent and sanctified dedication of their bodies (lives).

12:2

Discovery 2. The responsibility of the Christian with respect to his mind.

The Christian mind or way of thinking (Greek: nous) is the key to transformation (change). Verse 2 says, "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." In order to live the practical Christian life, a Christian must have a standard. His standard should not be the sinful world, any religious leader or any religion in this world! His standard should be nothing less than the God of the Bible who revealed himself in the life of love of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2) and his perfect will as recorded in the Bible. Verse 2 contains a negative and a positive command and a promise.

(1) The negative command.

"Do not conform (Greek: *suschématizomai*) (command, present continuous tense)!" It speaks of avoiding *outward* conformity to evil people or influences. "Do not allow yourself to be fashioned after the pattern of the evil age."

Thus, there are certain things which Christians must avoid! For example, the Bible teaches that Christians must avoid speaking offensive language, singing scurrilous songs, reading filthy magazines and books, watching immoral films, wearing tempting clothes, getting involved in questionable pastimes and following the godlessness and wickedness of so-called friends. The first evidence of the Christian faith is turning away from sin (1 Thessalonians 1:9)! A Christian's life should not be determined by the temporary, transient evil age (1 John 2:17; 1 Corinthians 2:6,8). Instead, his plans and ambitions should be determined by the coming age! He must develop patterns that abide in the present age and will continue in the age to come!

(2) The positive command.

"Be transformed (Greek: *metamorfoomai*) (command, present continuous tense, passive)! It speaks of *inner* change that leads to eternal change. "Allow yourself to be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Thus, there are also certain things that Christians must pursue! For example, Christians should actively seek to change, seek God's will in the Bible, fill their minds with God's words and be willing that the Holy Spirit use God's words to change them. They should constantly send their own conscience, beliefs and convictions back to the school of the Bible and receive instruction from the Holy Spirit. They should test if their convictions are in accordance with the Bible. This positive command strikes at the stagnation, complacency and pride of achievement that often characterises Christians. Paul teaches not simply a conversion or a second blessing experience, but a constant renewal!

(3) The promise.

When Christians do this, they will through experience know how God wants them to live. The holiness, justice and goodness of the Christian's life will be a reflection of God's will.

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 12:1-21 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

12:3

Question 1. What is the meaning of verse 3?

Notes.

Romans 12:3 says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Paul speaks about the differences, or rather about the variety that exist among Christians in the Body of Christ. God has allowed at least three differences among Christians:

- According to verse 3, Christians receive different measures of faith
- According to verse 4, Christians have different functions in the Church
- According to verse 6, Christians have been given different spiritual gifts.

God's sovereign will determines these differences among Christians and thus also the direction of their sanctification (personal development) and their service (for Christ).

(1) Exaggerated self-esteem is sin.

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought”. God warns the Christian against the sin of over-estimating their importance in the church. Pride consists in coveting or exercising a spiritual gift in the Church that does not belong to him. Pride also consists in coveting or exercising a function in the Church that does not belong to him. Christians who are not content with the spiritual gift or function in the Church that corresponds with the measure of faith God has given to them are engaged in the sin of pride or exaggerated self-esteem.

(2) False humility is sin.

“Think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” Although he must not consider himself to possess gifts that he does not have, he must not refuse to acknowledge the gift or gifts that he has received. False humility is also sin.

(3) The measure of faith.

The word “measure” refers to the result of measuring, to either *a certain quantity* or *a certain kind* that has been measured out. It may thus refer to the quantity of faith that has been measured. However, in accordance with Ephesians 4:7 the emphasis is more on the kind of faith, that is, the kind of spiritual gift (for example, the ability to teach) or the kind of function (for example, teacher of children) that God in his sovereignty has measured out to each Christian. The different measures of faith mean the different ways in which Christians express and exercise their faith due to their different spiritual gifts and different functions in the church.

Examples of faith that has been measured out to Christians are the diversity of gifts and functions that are mentioned in verse 6-8. Each Christian receives his own *measure*, that is, that spiritual gift and that function that God in his sovereignty has assigned to him with a view to service in the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11). And every Christian should express or exercise his faith by serving God with his assigned spiritual gift and function.

“Faith” is not only needed when we become members of the church. Faith is also needed to perform our different functions as members of the church. All spiritual gifts or functions can only be exercised properly by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 12:3; Philippians 4:13) and by love towards others (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). The fact that spiritual gifts and functions in the church are measured (Ephesians 4:7) means that every spiritual gift has limits as to the type of function and as to the area in which it should be exercised.

12:4-8

Question 2. What is the responsibility of Christians in the Church?

Notes.

(1) Definition of a spiritual gift.

A spiritual gift is a special God-given *desire, ability or function*. According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, a spiritual gift is a manifestation of God's power, wisdom or grace through the Christian and expresses itself in different kinds of ministries.

(2) The purpose of spiritual gifts.

The duty of every Christian is to serve God with the spiritual gift or function that God has assigned to him. The human body has many different members and each member has a different, yet necessary function in the human body. Likewise, all Christians together form the Body of Christ and every Christian is a member in that Body with a necessary function.

Christians are members of one another” (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:25). Each Christians should serve the other Christians with the spiritual gift he has received (1 Peter 4:10).

(3) The kinds of spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:28 teaches that the most important three spiritual gifts or functions are: first apostles, second, prophets and third teachers. Romans 12:6-8 mentions prophecy first, because there was no apostle in Rome (Romans 15:15-29, especially verse 20, the apostle Paul did not build on the foundation of another apostle).

The intention in Romans 12:6-8 is not to give a rank in the spiritual gifts or functions. In Romans 12:6-8, the first four spiritual gifts are concerned with the sphere in which the gift is to be exercised. For example, the ability to teach is exercised in the area of teaching (for example: children, youth, adults or the handicapped). Likewise with prophesying, serving and encouraging.

The last three spiritual gifts are concerned with the disposition of heart and will with which the service is to be rendered. Contributing to the needs of others should be done generously (Greek: haplotés). Leadership (literally: going in front) should be done with diligence or dedication (Greek: spoudé). And showing mercy should be done cheerfully (Greek: hilarotés).

12:6

Question 3. What is the Christian gift of prophesying?

Notes. The word “prophecy” means “to speak forth”, “to proclaim”. Prophecy is the special ability or function to communicate revelations of truth from God (Acts 2:16-17; 21:10-11).

(1) Prophecy in the Early Church.

In the Early Christian Church, before the New Testament was completed, there was a real need for New Testament prophets. Christians did not possess the written New Testament and therefore God used New Testament prophets to reveal his truth to them. New Testament prophets especially revealed how God wanted Christians to live the Christian life in the present. A few times they revealed what would happen in the future of some Christians (Acts 21:10-11). The history of Christianity shows that the New Testament prophets continued to exist until the New Testament was completed.

The New Testament prophets had to prophesy “in proportion to the faith” (Greek: kata tén analogian tés pisteós) (objective Genitive: the Christian body of faith, that which God wants Christians to believe, Romans 1:5; Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 1:19; 4:1,6; 6:10,21). This means that they had to exercise their spiritual gift restricted to the limits of the revealed Christian Faith (the Christian doctrine, the Bible) (Jeremiah 23:21-22; Acts 20:27). “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit (essence) of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10), that is, they had to exercise their spiritual gift restricted to everything Jesus Christ revealed (taught) and especially about what he had revealed about himself. They certainly had to exercise their spiritual gift within the limits of what they themselves believed was good (profitable) (Greek: sumferon) for the hearers (the Christian practice) (Acts 20:20).

(2) Prophecy after the close of the Canon of the Bible.

After the close of the Canon of the Bible (the 66 books of the Bible), no one was allowed to add anything to the contents of the Bible. Revelation 22:18-19 warns, “If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” Christians with the spiritual gift of prophecy should speak forth the Word of God as it has been revealed in the Bible, whether it has relevance to the past, present or future. But they may “not go beyond what is written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Christians with the gift of prophecy remain 100% responsible for what they proclaim, because their human spirit remains subject to their control (1 Corinthians 14:32). Other Christians must judge (evaluate) the words of these Christians in the light of the standard of the Written Word (the Bible) as Acts 17:11 and 1 Corinthians 14:29 clearly teach: “The others (who proclaim the Bible) should weigh carefully what is said.”

12:10

Question 4. How do Christians honour one another above themselves?

Notes.

Because there are different measures of faith, different kinds of spiritual gifts and different kinds of functions in the Christian church, every Christian can do something useful and good. Every Christian has a contribution to make. Every Christian will have at least one area of strength or ability. But no Christian will have all the strengths and all the abilities. No Christian is good in every area of service. Christians need one another’s spiritual gifts or functions.

Therefore, Christians should respect one another’s spiritual gifts or functions. And Christians should honour others for their unique spiritual abilities and strengths that are better than their own. According to Philippians 2:3, Christians should “consider others better than themselves”. This means that Christians should regard others in this area better than themselves. Appreciate their strengths and the special contribution they make to the church. Nothing is more destructive in a church than criticising one another or thinking little of what other Christians do in the church. But when Christians encourage one another and appreciate one another’s strengths and abilities, then the church will grow and be built up.

12:17-21

Question 5. What does the Bible teach about revenge?

Notes.

(1) Christians may never take revenge.

Verse 17 says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil”. While the government should punish evildoers (Romans 13:4), individual Christians may not take the law into their own hands and punish evildoers! Although Christians suffer wrongdoing or injustice, they may never take revenge (Romans 12:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9). Instead,

Christians should be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody (2 Corinthians 8:21). They must not only consider what is appropriate in the eyes of God (Matthew 5:20-48; Luke 6:27-37), but also consider what is appropriate in the sight of non-Christians (2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 3:7)! When Christians violate these rules of conduct, they bring reproach on Christ!

(2) Christians should live in peace with everybody.

Verse 18 says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”. To live at peace with those that do wrong against you means three things:

- not quarrel with them.
- trying hard to heal the broken relationship with them.
- do good to them.

This is not always possible. Sometimes the continued bad attitude of others may cause them not to live in peace with you. And sometimes higher considerations such as “not taking part in the sin of others” (1 Timothy 5:22), may cause others to reject you and hate you, because you do not want to participate in their sin.

Although Christians want to live in peace with everyone, they also have the duty to rebuke the sin of other Christians and to oppose the teachings of false teachers.

(3) Christians should leave judgement to God.

Verse 19 says, “Leave room for God’s wrath”. The right to judge and punish people belongs only to God and to those people to whom God has delegated the authority to punish. In the Bible, God has delegated authority to punish wrongdoers to the following people:

The government of a country has the authority and responsibility to punish all the wrongdoers in their country (Romans 13:3-4). However, their authority is limited and their authority may for example not be extended to persecute law-abiding Christians in their country (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

Parents have the authority and responsibility to punish the wrongdoing of their immature children (Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Hebrews 12:5-11). However their authority is limited. Fathers may not exasperate and not embitter their children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).

The local church has the authority and responsibility to exercise church discipline¹ towards those Christian members who persevere in wrongdoing (1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10) and to judge disputes between believers (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). But all personal injustice that Christians suffer at the hands of others should be answered with unexpected kindness (Matthew 5:38-41) and the urge to retaliate should be left at the feet of God. When people hurled their insults at Jesus Christ, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23; cf. Psalm 37:5-13)!

(4) Christians should overcome evil by doing good.

Verse 20-21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”. Christians should not get discouraged when other people heap evil on them. On the contrary, by well-doing they are to be God’s instruments of quenching animosity and stopping the ill-doing of those who persecute and maltreat them. In this way they will heap burning coals on their head. Either such an enemy will be softened by kindness, or, if he is so ferocious that nothing may persuade him, he will get a burning sense of shame and remorse due to the kindness the Christian showers on him.

STEP 4. APPLY. APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 12:1-21.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application. (Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 12:1-21.

- 12:1. Constantly dedicate the members of your body as instruments of your regenerate nature in the service of God.
- 12:1. Separate your body from whatever displeases God and dedicate your body to whatever pleases God.
- 12:2. Avoid outward conformity to evil people and trends. Do not allow yourself to be fashioned after the pattern of this evil age. Shun speaking offensive language, singing scurrilous songs, reading filthy magazines and books, watching immoral films, wearing tempting clothes, getting involved in questionable pastimes and following the godlessness and wickedness of so-called friends. Deliberately turn away from sin.

¹ See www.dota.net Manual 8, lesson 39

- 12:2. Dedicate yourself to inner change that leads to outward change. Actively seek to change, seek God's will in the Bible, fill your minds with God's words and be willing that the Holy Spirit use God's words to change you. Constantly send your own conscience, beliefs and convictions back to the school of the Bible and receive instruction from the Holy Spirit. Test whether your convictions are in accordance with the Bible. Refuse to get stagnated in Christian growth. Fight complacency.
- 12:3. Do not think that you have a particular spiritual gift or function when God has not given such a gift or function to you. Give up an exaggerated self-esteem.
- 12:3. Do not refuse to use the spiritual gift or function that God has entrusted to you. Give up false humility.
- 12:5. Realise and acknowledge that you need other Christians to remain standing, to grow, to function properly and to serve God. Give up unhealthy independence and foster healthy inter-dependence.
- 12:6. If you have the gift of prophecy, then use it to proclaim God's Word in the Bible with respect to the past, the present and the future.
- 12:8. If you have the gift of contributing to the needs of others, then give generously to those causes that will make the greatest difference to the needy people.
- 12:8. If you have the gift of leadership, then govern diligently. But never be an authoritarian leader (Matthew 20:25-28).
- 12:10. Honour other Christians and the gifts or functions that God has entrusted to them.
- 12:11. Never stop doing your task with enthusiasm and faithfulness.
- 12:12. Be joyful because God's promises are definitely going to happen in the future.
- 12:12. Be patient in affliction, because it will show that you love even in difficult circumstances.
- 12:12. Be faithful in prayer, because he who asks receives, he who seeks finds and he who knocks gets opened doors.
- 12:13. Especially share with fellow Christians in need. Practice hospitality.
- 12:14. Bless the people who persecute you and pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27-28).
- 12:15. Develop empathy.
- 12:16. Be willing to associate with people of low position.
- 12:17-21. Never be overcome by evil, but rather overcome evil with good.

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 12:1-21.

I do not want to follow the outward patterns of the evil world. I do not want the evil world to press me into its mould. Instead I want to change in my inner being, have a transformed mind, transformed conscience and transformed behaviour. Therefore, I will refuse to read bad magazines or associate on intimate terms with godless and wicked people. I want to seek to know God's perfect will for my life.

I do not want to have an exaggerated self-esteem, but rather have a sober estimate of myself. I want to appreciate the strengths of other Christians and honour them as being better than myself in certain areas.

STEP 5. PRAY.	RESPONSE
LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 12:1-21. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)	

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[INTERCESSION] PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. **Preach, teach or study** Romans 12:1-21 with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Jeremiah 25, 29, 30 and 31** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (5) God's healing. **2 Chronicles 7:14.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Teaching.** Prepare the parable of "**the workers in the vineyard**" in Matthew 20:1-16. Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.