

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 12:1-21.

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 (Rom 6:2-7). Without justification, we cannot grow in sanctification, and without sanctification, we can never be sure of 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 genuine Christian (Rom 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 lives in the body of the Christian. The Holy Spirit is no one less than the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, of the ascended Christ, of the exalted Lord now reigning in heaven (Rom 8:9-10). The practical and ethical life of the Christian rests on the solid foundation of Christ’s completed work of salvation. Growth in sanctification happens because the Christian belongs to Christ and Christ works the new life in the Christian through the Holy Spirit.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans chapter 12 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 12:1-21 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans chapter 12. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in **Romans 12:1. The Christian duty 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 person (Gen 2:7,21-23). And 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 (Dan 12:2; Phil 3:20-21). Because the Christian’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a Christian must dedicate all the members of his body to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13,19).

A Christian offers his body as a “living” sacrifice to God, which means, that he dedicates his body *constantly* or *day after day* as an instrument of his *regenerate* nature to God’s service.

He offers his body as a “holy” sacrifice to God, which means, that he dedicates his body to *holiness* instead of to sensual lust.

And he offers his body as a “well-pleasing” sacrifice to God, which means, that he has no other *motive than to please and glorify* God. Such offering of the body is called “spiritual worship”, which means, that a Christian consciously, intelligently and with consecrated devotion dedicates his body to Christ, in contrast to the mechanical and ceremonial externalism of the Jewish and Gentile way of worship.

(T) An important truth for me is in **Romans 12:2. The Christian duty with respect to his mind.** *The Christian mind is the key to transformation.* 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, but the will of God. Verse 2 contains a negative and a positive command and a promise.

The negative command says, “Do not conform!” and speaks of *avoiding outward conformity* to influences coming from the outside. “Do not allow yourself to be fashioned after the pattern of the evil age.” Thus, there are certain things in the world which Christians *must shun!* For example, the Bible teaches that Christians must 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. The first evidence of the Christian faith is turning away from sin (1 Thes 1:9)! A Christian's life should not be determined by the temporary, transient evil age (1 Jn 2:17; 1 Cor 2:6,8). Instead, his plans and ambitions should be determined by the coming age! He must develop patterns that abide and will continue in the age to come!

The positive command says, "Be transformed!" and speaks of *inner change which leads to eternal change*. "Allow yourself to be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Thus, there are also certain things which Christians *must do*! For example, they 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 whether their convictions are in accordance with the Bible. This positive command strikes at the stagnation, complacency and pride of achievement which often characterises Christians. Paul teaches not simply an *initial* conversion experience, but a *constant* renewal! God promises that such Christians will experience God's will how they should live. Remember, the will of God is always a reflection of his holiness, justice and goodness.

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans chapter 12 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (12:3). What is the meaning of verse 3? It 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."

(T) First, Paul speaks with apostolic authority and grace about the differences that exists among believers, differences which God in his sovereign providence and distributions of his grace has caused to exist in the church. There are three differences. Verse 3 says that Christians have been given *different measures of faith*. Verse 4 says that Christians have been given *different functions in the church*. Verse 6 says that Christians have been given *different spiritual gifts*. God's sovereign will determines these differences among Christians and thus also the direction of their sanctification and service.

Second, Paul warns Christians against the sin of over-estimating their own importance in the church. Pride consists in coveting or exercising a spiritual gift or a function in the church that does not belong to them. Christians who are not content with the spiritual gift or function in the church which corresponds with the measure of faith God has given them, are engaged in the sin of pride or exaggerated self-esteem. A Christian must think of himself with sober judgement, that is, he must not think that he possesses spiritual gifts, which he does not have. He must also not refuse to acknowledge the spiritual gift or gifts, which he has received. Over-self-esteem is sin, but false humility is also sin.

Third, The word "measure" refers to "the result of measuring", to either the limits of the quantity or the limits of the kind, which has been measured out. It may refer to *the quantity* of what has been measured. However, in accordance with Ephesians 4:7 the emphasis is more on *the kind* of faith or the kind of spiritual gift, which God has sovereignly measured out to each Christian. The "different measures of faith" means the different ways in which Christians should express and exercise their faith due to their different spiritual gifts and different functions in the church. Examples of what has been measured out to Christians are the diversity of gifts and functions mentioned in verse 6-8. Each Christian receives his own "measure", that is, that spiritual gift and that function which God has sovereignly assigned to him with a view to service in the church. The fact that spiritual gifts and functions in the church are "measured" (Eph 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.

Fourth, "Faith" is needed to perform our different functions as members of the church and not only when we become members of the church. Every Christian should express or exercise his faith by serving God with his assigned spiritual gift and function. All spiritual gifts *can only be exercised properly* by faith in Christ (12:3; Phil 4:13) and by love towards others (1 Cor 13).

2nd Question. (12:4-8). What is the duty of every Christian in the church?

(S) The duty of every Christian is to serve God with the spiritual gifts and function which 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, not only in a local church but in the whole world, together form the Body of Christ and every Christian is a member in that Body with a necessary function. Verse 5 says that "each member belongs to all the others" (Eph 4:25) and means that Christians should serve one another with the spiritual gifts and functions they have received (1 Pet 4:10). According to Ephesians 4:7-12, Christ has given to his one Body worldwide five gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. While the function of elders is *to lead the independent local church*, the function of these five gifts is *to build up the Church worldwide*. According to 1 Corinthians 12:28, the most

important three spiritual gifts are: *first* apostles, *second*, prophets and *third* teachers. Romans 12:6-8 mentions prophecy first, because there was no apostle in Rome (Rom 15:15-29, esp. 20). But in Romans 12:6-8 no rank in the spiritual gifts is intended. A “spiritual gift” is a *special God-given desire, ability or function*. According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, it is a *manifestation* of God’s power or wisdom or grace through the Christian and expresses itself in different kinds of service. In Romans 12, the first four spiritual gifts are concerned with *the sphere in which the gift is to be exercised*. They are the spiritual gifts of “prophesying”, “serving”, “teaching” and “encouraging”. The last three spiritual gifts are concerned with *the disposition of the heart and the will with which the service is to be rendered*. “Contributing to the needs of others” should be done “generously. “Leadership” should be done with diligence. And “showing mercy” should be done cheerfully.

3rd Question. (12:6). What is the Christian gift of prophesying?

(T) “Prophecy” means “to speak forth” and is the special ability or function of *communicating revelations of truth* from God (Act 2:16-17; 21:10-11). 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 Bible and therefore God used prophets to reveal his truth to them. Prophets would *reveal to the Christians especially how God wanted them to live the Christian life in the present* (Act 15:32). A few times they would also reveal to Christians what would happen in the future (Acts 11:27-28). However, the history of Christianity shows that they continued to exist until the New Testament was completed.

The New Testament prophets had to use prophecy “in proportion to their faith”. This means that they must exercise their spiritual gift within the limits of their own faith and restricted to the sphere and function which God has assigned to them. On the one hand, the New Testament prophet may not withhold truth which God wants him to speak (Act 20:20). On the other hand, after the close of the Canon of 66 books of the Bible, a prophet may not go beyond what is written in the Bible, as Paul clearly teaches in 1 Corinthians 4:6. All other Christians may judge the claims of prophets by the standard of the written Bible, as Acts 17:11 clearly shows.

4th Question. (12:10). How do Christians honour one another above themselves?

(S) Because there are different *measures of faith*, different *kinds of spiritual gifts* and different *kinds of functions* in the Christian Church worldwide, therefore every Christian has a contribution to make to the Body of Christ. Every Christian has at least one area of strength or ability, but no Christian has all the strengths and all the abilities. No Christian is good in every area of service. Christians need one another’s spiritual gifts and functions. Therefore, Christians should honour others for their unique abilities and strengths, which are better than their own.

According to Philippians 2:4, Christians should consider others better than themselves. This means that Christians should appreciate others for 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.

5th Question. (12:17-21). What does the Bible teach about revenge?

(T) First. Christians may never take revenge. Verse 17 says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil”. While the government should punish evildoers (Rom 13:4), individual Christians may not take the law into their own hands and punish evildoers! Even when evildoers do wrong against the Christian, individual Christians may never take revenge (19; 1 Thes 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9). Instead, a Christian should be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody (2 Cor 8:21). They must not only consider what is appropriate in the eyes of God, but also consider what is appropriate even in the sight of non-Christians (2 Cor 4:2; 1 Tim 3:7)! When Christians violate these rules of conduct, they bring reproach on Christ!

Second. 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 others” not only means not to quarrel with them, but also to try to heal broken relationships and to 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” may cause others to reject you and hate you. Although Christians must 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.

Third. Christians should leave the function of judgement to God. Verse 19 says, “Leave room for God’s wrath”. The right to judge and punish people belongs only to the sovereign God and to those to whom he has delegated the authority to punish. In the Bible, God has given *the government* of a country the right and responsibility to punish wrongdoing inside the country. He has given *parents* the right and duty to punish the wrongdoing of their children. And he has given *the local church* the right and duty to exercise church discipline on those Christian members who persevere in wrongdoing. However, all personal injustice, which Christians suffer at the hands of others, should be left at the feet of

God who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23 says that 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” (Ps 37:5-13)!

Fourth. 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 the ill-doing of those who persecute and maltreat them. In this way they will “heap burning coals on their head”. Either your 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 you shower on him.

(S) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. For example. Do not follow the outward patterns of the evil world. Do not let the evil world press you into its mould. Instead change your mind and behaviour to agree with the Bible. Refuse to read bad magazines or associate on intimate terms with godless and wicked people. Another example. Do not have an exaggerated self-esteem, but rather have a sober estimate of yourself. Appreciate the strengths of other Christians and honour them as being better than yourself in certain areas. Finally take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught you in Romans chapter 12.

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use “the five steps” Bible study method to prepare Romans chapter 13.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.