

# GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

## WEEK SIX: Romans 12:1-3

### Romans Good News for All of Us: A Brief Introduction

Paul's epistle to the Romans is the most influential of his letters and has had an enormous impact on Christian theology and doctrine. Part of the reason is that it is the most systematic of Paul's letters; outlining as clearly as in any of his writings his understanding of the good news about Jesus. One consequence has been that Romans has been treated like a systematic theology rather than as an occasional document; one written to address a specific pastoral occasion. Romans, like all of Paul's letters, has a concrete situation that he is wanting to address. Scholars agree that there is evidence of division in the Roman church. The upshot of this is that the doctrine which dominates the first two-thirds of the letter is less an overview of Paul's thought and more of a foundation for the exhortations in the final chapters. In order to better understand the doctrine, we will benefit from better understanding the pastoral issues that Paul is hoping to address. To that end, we will be working through Romans backwards; seeking clarity about the concerns Paul has and then exploring the doctrinal foundations.

I have included an outline of the series and a brief bibliography at the end of this document.

### Sermon Outline:

#### A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

**Key Text(s):** Romans 12:1-13

This is the week (hopefully) that the decision to move backwards through Romans begins to pay off. We have arrived at the beginning of the final section of Romans – chapters 12-16 – and the work we've done to identify the pastoral situation Paul is going to address in these chapters will help us make sense of one of the more well-known verses in Romans: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (12:2a).

These twin commands – do not be conformed, but be transformed – provide the theme of this final section of the epistle. (As an aside, it is one of the times when the heading provided by translations aren't particularly helpful. The headings – before verses, 1, 3, 9, and 13:1 – suggest that these are all separate, stand-alone thoughts. Nothing could be further from the truth!)

Let's begin with 12:1-2. Paul's corporate appeal to his brothers and sisters in Rome is based on God's mercy which has been the theme of chapters 9-11 where "mercy" is referred to seven times. More importantly, the topic of Romans 9-11 is God's promises to the Jewish people in light of the Gentile inclusion in the people of God. It is another take on the primary fault line in the Roman community of faith.

In light of God's mercy, then, Paul urges them to offer themselves as living sacrifices. This is a critical metaphor that deserves deeper reflection. A sacrifice in the Old Testament was an embodied, public demonstration of peace with God. Sacrifices were real, concrete things – animals, birds, or food – and were offered in public at the temple. Sacrifices were a demonstration of peace with God, not a magical transaction. In other words, sacrifices "work" because of the

character of God not because the sacrifice was done correctly. The latter is magic – say the right words in the right order, sprinkle the blood in the right place and, “Voila!” something happens. However, there is one other component of a sacrifice that is important to note. A sacrifice offered to God was offered on behalf of someone else; it was substitutionary. All of this shapes our understanding of Paul’s metaphor here. He is not speaking just about an individual expression of worship, but of offering ourselves – laying down our lives you might say – to God on behalf of others. And who are the “others” Paul has identified in the letter so far? Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, strong and weak, slave and free!

This, Paul says, is our true and proper worship. As one scholar puts it, worship is ethics. If worship is the alignment of our values, priorities, and behaviours to the values, priorities, and behaviours of the one we worship, then our worship should show up in what we do (ethics).

This posture of Christ-like self-sacrifice provides the context for verse 12. The pattern of this world (which we’ll look at next week in more detail in Romans 13:8-14) is one where those divisions matter. The transformation Paul urges them to participate in is also relationally grounded. The will of God that Paul is thinking about is, once again, not God’s will for us as individuals, but his will revealed in the gospel that unites Jews and Gentiles. The renewing of our minds has to do with aligning ourselves; attuning ourselves to this revealed will.

How do we do that? How do we demonstrate, in an embodied, public way, the peace God has brought? Paul answers that in what follows – all of chapters 12-16!

“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 faith God has distributed to each of you.” (12:3) There are two things to draw attention to here. First, the grace Paul has received and the faith distributed to the Romans. This is not saving grace or saving faith, but is related to call. Paul speaks of the grace given to him in 15:15b-16 (where he speaks of a priestly task and offerings – which sounds like how he opens the section in 12:1-2).

Second, the renewal of our minds begins with not super-thinking about ourselves – in relation to others (and, it should be pointed out, this is another word to the “strong”) – but think of ourselves rightly (see Mark 5:15 where the former demoniac is dressed and “in his right mind”).

This sober-minded self-judgment in relationships leads to a second way to renew our minds: serve the (one) body. Paul’s discussion of the body of Christ and the gifts given focuses on the unity of the body and the service we owe to one another as part of the body. Whatever you have been called to do, do it.

Finally, in this introductory section, Paul urges them to demonstrate the renewal of their minds by being devoted to one another in love. The series of short exhortations are all examples of demonstrating – in an embodied, public way – the peace of God and the unity that it has produced.

And this leads into the rest of the larger section – the transformation through the renewing of our minds is what stands behind Paul’s commands around paying taxes, his advice on how they can get past the issues that disrupt their ability to eat together, and the exhortations to “greet” one another with which the letter ends! This is what Paul has been driving at. It is the local, pastoral issue that Paul applies his theology to. And it is the invitation for us: to consider how we might offer ourselves to God for others and demonstrate our renewed minds in the ways in which we live with one another!

## Questions to Ask

1. Prior to considering verse 2 in context what would you have said was the key to “renewing your mind”? What’s changed from understanding the pastoral context Paul is addressing?
2. A (living) sacrifice is an embodied, public, and substitutionary act demonstrating the peace God offers his people. Discuss.
3. Why do you think Paul connects transformation with relationships in the church?
4. Why is humility an important starting point for unity in a community? Where do you see pride or comparison creating division today?

5. How does viewing the church as one body change how we think about our responsibilities to each other?
6. What are some practical ways we can demonstrate the peace and unity God has created in our everyday relationships?

### A Prayer to Pray

Continue to pray for the unity of our community of faith. Pray that we would be a demonstration of the power of God to save everyone who believes and to unite them together in one family. Pray that we might rely on that power as we work out our salvation together.

### A Practice to Try

Choose one of the practical ways you identified in Q. 6 above and implement it this week.

### Readings to Read This Week

Read Romans 12-16 and consider how each division of Paul's argument might reflect his central theme of self-sacrifice and renewal.

### A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

One of our values is to be Others-Focused. The unity of the body of Christ is a mission-critical matter. Putting others first, serving them, and seeking to demonstrate our love for one another are all things we can do to strengthen our unity.

### A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. The annual report on ministry in 2025 was released on Friday afternoon in preparation for our AGM on Sunday March 29. Download it and have a read to be encouraged about what God is doing in our midst!

## Good News For All of Us – Sermon Series outline

Please note that this is subject to change, but as it stands right now...

Term 1 (Romans 12-16)		Term 2 (Romans 9-11)		Term 3 (Romans 1-4)		Term 4 (Romans 5-8)	
15/2	Romans 16	7/6	9:1-29	23/8	TBD	25/10	TBD
22/2	15:14-33	14/6	9:30-10:21	30/8	TBD	1/11	TBD
1/3	14:1-15:13	21/6	11:1-24	6/9	TBD	8/11	TBD
8/3	12:14-13:7	28/6	11:25-36	13/9	TBD	15/11	TBD
15/3	Baptism			20/9	TBD	22/11	TBD
22/3	12:1-13					29/11	TBD
29/3	13:8-14						
5/4	Easter						

## A Brief Bibliography

The following commentaries have been utilised in the preparation and delivery of this series.

Bird, Michael, 2016, *Romans*, Story of God Bible Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Gorman, Michael J., 2022, *Romans: A theological and pastoral commentary*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

McKnight, Scot, 2019, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas.

Witherington, Ben III, 2004, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.