

DON'T BE DEFEATED  
BY EVIL, BUT  
**DEFEAT EVIL**  
WITH GOOD  
ROMANS 12:21

WEEK 5

**THEREFORE DO AND DON'T**



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## MONDAY – Renewed minds to “figure out what God’s will is”



**Romans 12: 1-2** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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.*

The apostle Paul told the Roman Christians their appropriate service to God was to offer themselves as a “living sacrifice.” They couldn’t do that by conforming to “this world.” “This world’ is literally ‘this age’ [in Galatians 1:4, Paul called it ‘the present evil age’]. The ‘renewing of your mind,’ then, includes thinking as citizens of the coming new world.” \* The culture’s “common sense” didn’t fit with God’s way of life. To live God’s way, they needed to let God transform their thinking. We do too.

In the ancient world, most people had made a sacrifice to some god. That usually meant killing an animal in the right temple or shrine.

**Reflection:**

In what ways are you willing to put yourself, your life, “on the altar” to live each day offering yourself to God?

Sooner or later, when we let God transform us, we ourselves become agents of transformation. In our homes, schools, neighbourhoods or workplaces, we begin to see things that aren’t quite as God wants them. What steps, large or small, have you taken to transform attitudes or practices in your settings?

**Reflection:**

Where might you have the chance now to transform things for the better?



**Prayer:** Dear God, I offer myself to You. That’s a little scary—I’m not always sure just where it might lead. But I’m learning to trust You, and so I commit myself to being a “living sacrifice” for You. AMEN.



**MEMORY VERSE:** Romans 12: 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

\* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 256236-256237). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

## TUESDAY – Different gifts—all meant to be used



### **Romans 12: 3-8**

**Romans 12: 5 & 6**...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

When we think, sometimes wistfully, about discerning God's "good and pleasing and mature" will for our life (cf. Romans 12:2), we may think in terms of visions or dramatic, "out of the blue" messages. Paul was a community-builder, one member who relied on other members of the "body of Christ." He said honest self-assessment would direct God's people to God's will. A key to God's will is that you primarily do what you're gifted to do: e.g. "If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching."

### **Reflection:**

What tools have you used in school, church, your workplace or from other sources, to help you honestly assess what you do best? What have those tools

taught you about your strengths and limitations? Are there aspects of yourself you'd still like to understand better? Are you open to the guidance of God's Spirit as you continue on the journey of learning how you function best?

Scholar William Barclay wrote that the call to "be reasonable" in how you think about yourself means "an honest assessment of our capacities, without conceit or false modesty." \*

### **Reflection:**

Which do you struggle with more: conceit ("I can do anything") or false modesty ("I'm can't do anything")? What tools can God use to help you think of yourself reasonably and accurately, with both strengths and weaknesses?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You knew Yourself and Your life mission. You were clear about what only You could do, and You called men and women to help You with any tasks You could share. Help me to see myself like that. AMEN.

\* William Barclay, Daily Study Bible Series: *The Letter to the Romans (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, p. 159.

## WEDNESDAY – “Be the best” at doing good for others



### Romans 12: 9-16

**Romans 12: 10** *Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord.*

Verse 10 stood a key Roman and Greek belief absolutely on its head. “[Roman philosopher] Cicero wrote, ‘Rank must be preserved.’ Identity is determined by ladder rung. Descent is tragedy. The Greeks knew what greatness is, and for them, greatness did not involve humility. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre noted that humility was not considered a virtue in that world. Aristotle’s ‘great-souled man’ is extremely proud.” \* Showing honour *to one another* was clearly counter-cultural.

Paul’s counsel stood firmly on the foundation of the good news he’d laid out in the earlier chapters of Romans. “The good news of God’s love for sinners (Romans 5: 6-8) translates into believers’ treatment of each other as equals, giving special attention not to

those with high status but also to those with no status (Romans 15:1-4, 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31).” \*\* If God isn’t overly impressed by human notions of fame or status, why should we as his followers be?

Gentile and Hebrew Christians in Rome clearly found themselves polarized at times, frustrated by or angry at each other. What would it have taken for them to be able to regularly “be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying”?

### Reflection:

Is that a serious possibility for us, in our highly polarized times? In what ways did that specific counsel reflect the spiritual reality behind “love should be shown without pretending” (verse 9)? Are you pretending?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, shape me into a person who can share both joy and sorrow with others. Guide me to always pursue the good for others and for Your kingdom. AMEN.

\* Ortberg, John, *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, chapter 6.

\*\* Michael J. Gorman, study note on Romans 12:16 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 295NT.

## THURSDAY “Defeat evil with good”



**Romans 12: 17-21**

**Romans 12: 19** *Do not take revenge, my dear friends....*

**Romans 12: 20** *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.*

Paul didn't “start from scratch” in these verses, but echoed Jesus' teaching (Matthew 5: 38-48.). N. T. Wright wrote, “The desire for revenge is like a deep itch somewhere right down inside ....This passage (which one suspects many Christians have never read or pondered) declares that we must find quite different ways of dealing with the problem. Revenge is ruled out. Instead, we are to find creative, surprising new ways of dealing with people who hurt us. This is a huge challenge.” \*

In Nero's cruel, unethical Roman Empire, the apostle Paul must have regularly felt the urge to lash out angrily against evil. So much was unjust and corrupt! Yet Paul, and Christians he wrote to, lived by God's opposite values and formed a movement that has long outlasted Nero's Empire.

### Reflection:

- Paul said in today's reading their mission was to “defeat evil with good.” Did that “work” for Paul and the early Christians? Does it still “work” today?
- Paul drew on ancient Hebrew wisdom, too, quoting Proverbs 25: 21-22. When, in your own dealings or in world affairs, have you seen enemies brought together because one side was willing to act toward the other with kindness rather than hatred or contempt?
- What has to happen in human hearts to bring about mutual reconciliation, to even make people willing to consider kind, generous overtures?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, it can be hard to purify myself from angry, vengeful feelings and actions. Keep growing the fruit of the Spirit in me, showing me better ways to respond. AMEN.

\* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part Two: Chapters 9-16* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 79). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

## FRIDAY – Respect human authority—but God is your true ruler



### **Romans 13: 1-7**

**Romans 13: 1 & 7** *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*  
<sup>7</sup>*Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.*

Another hard passage to understand alone. “This difficult text has received many interpretations and misinterpretations....It isn’t a call for uncritical obedience to authority, government or otherwise, for challenging power that opposed God is part of the Biblical tradition.” \* Slave masters or dictatorial rulers (even bosses or, now and again, pastors) too easily cite verse 2 by itself, although the Biblical prophets (and God himself—cf. Exodus 3: 7-12) spoke against such abuses.

Romans 13 was not alone in calling Christ followers to be the best possible earthly citizens (cf. Matthew 22: 15-21, 1 Peter 2: 12-15). Yet God’s kingdom, not any earthly country or ruler, claims those followers’ ultimate loyalty (e.g. Hebrews 11: 8-13).

### **Reflection:**

How hard is it for you to commit to living as a “stranger and immigrant” in this world, with your choices (even political ones) ultimately driven by “otherworldly” values? How highly do you value your citizenship in God’s kingdom?

Paul particularly focused (verses 6-7) on Roman taxes. “Precisely because [Paul] believes that Jesus is true Lord of the world, He doesn’t want His followers to pick unnecessary quarrels with the lesser lords – they will just be playing the empire back at its own game. They will almost certainly lose, and, much worse, the gospel itself will lose with them.” \*\* Why did it matter that Christians, especially in Rome, be the best citizens possible?



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, guide me to a clear sense of what my loyalty to You and Your kingdom asks of me. Help me to respect earthly authorities, but never more highly than I respect Your authority.  
**AMEN.**

\* Michael J. Gorman, study note on Romans 13:1-7 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 295-296NT. \*\* Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part Two: Chapters 9-16* (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 85-86). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.