



BE TRANSFORMED

THIS HANDOUT

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS CHAPTER TWELVE



FAST FACTS

ROMANS CHAPTER 12

- As a Christian you are called to offer yourself “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).
- “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).
- Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ.
- Every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift to be used for the benefit of others.
- Be empathetic to the experiences - both good and bad - of others.
- Do not be wrathful or seek revenge against people who do evil against you.

ON THE CD

- 1 CORINTHIANS 12
- MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST
- SERVE OTHERS
- SHOW LOVE
- INTERACTIVE QUIZ
- MUCH MORE!

ROMANS 12

St. Paul begins Romans chapter twelve by encouraging Christians to offer our entire lives to the worship and service of God (Romans 12:1). He states that we do this “by the mercies of God.” This means that we offer everything about us to God as a response to all the merciful things He has done (which St. Paul has discussed throughout the first eleven chapters of the Epistle).

In response to God’s mercy, we offer our bodies a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (12:1). In contrast to the animal sacrifices of many ancient religions (which were one-time events, since the animal was killed and the carcass destroyed or eaten), the Christian sacrifice is living, a continual offering of our lives to God. Such a living sacrifice of ourselves is *holy*, meaning that our lives are now set apart from the concerns of the world and instead consecrated to the service of God. Only this sacrificial life is acceptable to God.

This type of sacrificial life, St. Paul teaches, is our “reasonable service” (other translations render this phrase “spiritual worship,” or as Fr. Lawrence Farley translates it, “rational worship”) (Romans 12:1). St. Paul is saying that our worship must be intentional and conscious; in other words, we should think about, and believe in, what we are doing. This understanding of “reasonable service” leads directly into verse two, where St. Paul exhorts us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). You should not allow yourself to be shaped by the corrupted values of modern society (described so vividly by St. Paul in Romans 1:18-32), but instead should be completely transformed by your relationship with God.

In Romans 12:3-8 St. Paul examines some of the ways in which you can be transformed, providing valuable guid-

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Because it seems unnatural to humans to love our enemies, we should pray that God will empower us to engage in such love. St. Silouan the Athonite, who experienced difficulty in loving his enemies, says regarding his experiences, “I continuously beg the Lord to give me the love of enemies...Day and night I ask the Lord for this love. The Lord gives me tears and I weep for the whole world.” He further explains, “If we are incapable (of loving our enemies) and if we are without love, let us turn with ardent prayers to the Lord, to His Most Pure Mother, and to all the Saints, and the Lord will help us with everything, He whose love for us knows no bounds.” He further prayed, “Lord, teach us through Your Holy Spirit to love our enemies and to pray for them with tears...Lord, as you prayed for your enemies, so teach us also, through the Holy Spirit, to love our enemies.”

We should also pray directly for our enemies. One example of such a prayer can be found in the *Orthodox Study Bible*: “Save, O Lord, and have mercy upon those who envy and affront me, and do me harm, and do not let them perish through me, a sinner.”



CONTINUE

ance for living in unity with other members of the Church. St. Paul warns against pride, telling his readers that no one should “think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Romans 12:3). We should not be prideful because we are all members of the one Body of Christ, and no single member of a body is more important than another (see 1 Corinthians 12:12). At the same time, however, each member of your body has a different function; in the same way, each of us are members of the one Body of Christ, but each has individually been given specific and different gifts (referring to special abilities) by God to benefit the Body (Romans 12:4-6).

There are two important things to note about the spiritual gifts. First, God does not give you - or anyone else in the Church - any of these gifts solely for his or her own personal profit or self-fulfillment: the gifts are given to help the body of Christ. Furthermore, the fact that God distributes the gifts throughout the Church shows that you are not self-reliant. Secondly, we should be generous when sharing our gifts with others, and thankful for the opportunity to do this service (Romans 12:8). Instead of grudging, hypocritical service to the Church, St. Paul encourages demonstrating love and affection to others (Romans 12:10). We should never be satisfied with minimal effort; instead, we should continually strive to do even more for others. If you have this attitude, you will be diligently, fervently serving the Lord (Romans 12:11).

St. Paul foresaw the persecution that would befall the Church. He therefore tells Christians to not fail to serve others when problems come, but instead to joyfully and patiently continue to retain your hope in God (Romans 12:12). Instead of giving in to despair and rejecting God and the Church, Christians are called to remain steadfast in prayer and continue doing what you can to serve others regardless of the circumstances (12:12-13). The importance of this faithfulness can be seen in verse fourteen: even when you are persecuted you should be so filled with love for others that you extend love to those who persecute you.

This kind of love is only possible if you experience empathy for others, truly identifying with their feelings and experiences (Romans 12:15). We should be joyful when they are joyful - which prevents experiencing envy and jealousy - and commiserate with them when they are suffering. This patient, empathetic love is only possible if you are truly humble (Romans 12:16). You should not separate yourself from others because you think you are too good to lower yourself to their level.

St. Paul concludes Romans chapter twelve with a warning against wrath and vengeance (12:17-21). As much as it is possible, the Apostle implores, “have regard for good things in the sight of all men” and “live peaceably with all men” (12:17, 18). A key element of this is refusing to seek revenge when someone has harmed you (12:19-20). The best way of turning away wrath, St. Paul teaches, is to “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). He quotes Proverbs 25:21, 22 to demonstrate how this can be done: feed your enemy when he is hungry, and give him something to drink when he is thirsty (12:20).

HOW CAN I MINISTER?

The word translated “ministry” in Romans 12:7 can be considered one of the most powerful words in the New Testament. The koine Greek word for “ministry” is translated in many versions of the Bible as “service;” the root for this word is *diakonos*. In the Orthodox Church the primary responsibility of the deacon is to assist the priest with his liturgical duties. In the Greek world of the New Testament, however, *diakonos* generally referred to a servant who performed such duties as waiting on tables, or as an attendant performing free service; only in two instances - Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 - does it specifically refer to the church office of deacon.

St. John Chrysostom explains the use of *diakonos* in Romans 12:7: “The word *ministry* is comprehensive, covering everything from the apostleship itself to any spiritual function. It is indeed the name of a particular office, but here it is used in a general sense.”

This concept is reinforced by the use of *diakonos* in specific situations: people serve in the work of preaching and teaching (1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23, 25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:6) and women who serve in churches (specifically, in the case of St. Phoebe, engaging in missionary work (Romans 16:1)). Ministry - *diakonos* - is a gift that is given to all of us to serve in an endless variety of situations. This is reinforced by St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:5, “There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.”

Service is needed throughout our Church and in our communities - there is no end to the suggestions we could give for specific ways in which to serve. As an example, Matushka Ann Lardas explains ways in which we can serve in our churches:

Does your church need a dishwasher? A water heater? Or even just new sponges or dish rags, a better quality broom or dustpan. As you see a need, think if you can provide it. Then go with an offer rather than with a complaint, a solution rather than a problem...If you can't provide something expensive, provide something inexpensive but necessary, faithfully...When you see something that drives you crazy, think what you can do about it...If you cannot make vestments, can you clean them? If you cannot buy an icon frame, can you dust one? If you cannot purchase a font for baptisms, can you be there to fill and drain what the parish has now? This, too, is a gift to the church...God loves us most abundantly and knows us in our weaknesses and strengths, and therefore has provided us with a myriad of opportunities that 'fit' our situations and personalities to reflect that love by showing love, in turn, to our neighbor and to His Church. May we seize upon these opportunities while we still can, and so grow together in love for each other, for the Church, and for Him.