

ROMANS

Chapter 12

A Living Sacrifice

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ch 12 Luth: “In chapter 12 [Paul] teaches what true worship is, and makes all Christians priests. They are to offer not money or cattle, as under the law, but their own bodies, with slaying of the lusts. Then he describes the outward conduct of Christians, under the spiritual government, telling how they are to teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act toward friend, foe, and all men. These are the works that a Christian does; for, as has been said, faith takes no holidays” (AE 35:378). (TLSB)

12:1–16:27† Paul now turns to the practical application of all he has said previously in the letter. Paul goes into detail to show that Jesus Christ is to be Lord of every area of life. These chapters are not a postscript to the great theological discussions in chs. 1–11. In a certain sense the entire letter has been directed toward the goal of showing that God demands our Christian life as well as our believing and thinking. Faith expresses itself in obedience. (CSB)

12:1 *I appeal to you.* Paul draws an important inference from the truth set forth in chs. 1–11. (CSB)

mercies of God.† Much of the letter has been concerned with demonstrating this truth. (CSB)

Key to understanding the rest of Rm. God’s mercies have been fully expressed in Christ and powerfully articulated in chs 1–11 (note esp 11:30–32). The exhortations to follow are the proper response to those mercies; however, obedience does not earn or add to God’s favor. (TLSB)

The new worship is grounded in “the mercies of God.” In that phrase Paul sums up the creative and transforming power of the Gospel of God as he has been proclaiming it in the first 11 chapters. (Franzmann)

your bodies. Since men are never without their bodies, worship is constant. Since bodies are visible, all worship becomes a witness and a proclamation, a lived doxology to God. (Franzmann)

living sacrifice. In contrast to dead animal sacrifices, or perhaps “living” in the sense of having the new life of the Holy Spirit (see 6:4). (CSB)

In the OT, animals were offered by putting them to death. Christ’s one sacrifice replaced the need for such sacrifices (6:10). We can dedicate our entire lives to God. The terms “worship” and “sacrifice” are related to all of one’s earthly life, not simply to time spent in church. “A true and not a false putting to death [mortification] happens through the cross and troubles, by which God

exercises us.... They are the spiritual exercises of fear and faith. In addition to this putting to death, which happens through the cross, there is also a necessary, voluntary exercise” (Ap XV 45–46). (TLSB)

When archaeologists unearthed the house-church of Dura Europas in eastern Syria, they learned much about the personal character of early Christian congregations. The rooms would hold no more than 50 people. Humble frescoes decorated the walls, illustrating biblical stories. A wealthy member had either donated the building at Dura Europas or allowed the congregation to gather there. Instead of the “public” character most Christians associate with church today, early Christians would have regarded their gatherings as more personal or private. (TLSB)

In chs 1–11, the apostle Paul describes the personal and fearsome ability of the Law to motivate people. The Law urges us to do good—or else! In contrast, as Paul describes the Christian life for the congregation of Rome (chs 12–16), he seeks to motivate them not with the Law but with the Gospel and with personal care for one another. He asks them to present their bodies as living sacrifices in view of God’s mercy. (TLSB)

Motivated by the Gospel

In 12:1, Paul uses the Greek term *oiktirmon* to move the Roman Christians to active care for one another. This term is plural: “God’s mercies.” In chs 1–11, Paul lists the incredible acts of kindness God had performed for His people and continued to perform: choosing the patriarchs, rescuing Israel from Egypt, preserving a remnant of believers, and saving both Jew and Gentile through Christ. Paul reminds his readers that God continually has mercy on His people. (TLSB)

The Roman Christians would have immediately recognized *oiktirmon* from the Psalms, which they sang when they gathered for worship. The Psalms of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) use this word repeatedly to describe the surpassing loving-kindnesses and graces of God. (TLSB)

Most likely, the Roman Christians followed the Jewish prayer custom of requesting God’s mercies. When the Romans gathered for prayer and Paul’s new Letter was read to them, they would have heard 12:1 in this context. After asking God for His mercies, the apostle’s Letter would encourage them—on the basis of those mercies—to sacrifice their lives to the Lord. Rather than intimidating the congregation with the Law, Paul seeks to move his hearers by the mercies of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Transformed by the Gospel

As Paul encourages the Roman Christians with the Gospel of God’s mercies, he has both particular goals and general counsel for them. The rest of ch 12 outlines these goals and gives us a picture of what was most needed in the Roman congregation. (TLSB)

Paul begins by urging the Romans to conform no longer to the pattern of this world. The Christian life is one of transformation, leaving behind the former ways and attitudes. Even for the believers who had grown up in the Church, this would be a challenge. The world and its patterns constantly pulled at them, demanding conformity. (TLSB)

As we travel life’s road, the patterns of the world work like ruts into which we slip. They pull us down into the ways of self-righteousness, self-interest, and bitterness. Once we fall into such patterns, only God can pull us out. Therefore, Paul urges, “be transformed” (12:2). We trust that the Lord will transform us through the mercies of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Moved to Service

Once the Gospel transforms us, God calls us to greater service. We serve the Lord as He enables us. Each member of the Body of Christ serves with his or her particular gift or gifts. (TLSB)

An unfortunate concern that plagues many churches is that a handful of people usually ends up doing much of the work. Three problems contribute to this situation. First, many people fail to recognize that God wants them to actively serve in the congregation. Second, pride and impatience on the part of some congregation members easily discourages others from serving. People stay at home because they feel that their service is neither needed nor appreciated. Third, most of us keep ourselves too busy. We fill our time with things that do not encourage us or anyone else in the faith. How easily we slip back into the ruts! (TLSB)

Remember the Mercies

As you consider your pattern of life and the pattern in your congregation, remember the mercies of God rather than focusing on the Law. God's Law, though it is holy, righteous, and true, will never properly motivate you or the people around you. God does not want you to conform. He wants to transform you in view of His mercies. (TLSB)

As a Christian, only the mercies of God can properly motivate you to genuine service. When discouraged, certainly remember what God says in His Law. But more important, look for His mercies in your Bible readings, in the services of your congregation, and in your day-to-day life. You are God's precious child. He has given the life of His Son, Jesus, for your salvation. He continues to bless and sustain you each day. Even now, He prepares a place for you in His joyous presence. Therefore, serve willingly—in view of His mercies. (TLSB)

“Therefore” (*oun*) makes the preceding verses and chapters the basis for what follows. “By the mercies of God.” The exhortation that follows is grounded in the mercies (*oiktirmōn*, 9:15) of God in justifying sinners. “Your bodies” are sacrifices. Our bodies are animated by our minds (12:2), so that the sacrifice offered is nothing less than our whole being, body and mind. “Sacrifice” (*thusian*) is modified with four adjectives or adjectival phrases: “living,” “holy,” “acceptable to God,” “your reasonable/spiritual worship.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Christ's sacrifice fulfilled and did away with all sacrifices of atonement and rendered all animal or dead sacrifices obsolete. The sacrifice of our bodies is “acceptable” (*euaireston*) through the propitiating sacrifice of Christ (3:25). Because our sacrifice brings honor and praise to God, we seek not to please others or ourselves, but God alone. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Our bodies are a sacrifice, not slaughtered but “living” (*zōsan*), alive to virtues and new life, but dead to sin and vices. They are “holy” (*hagian*), having been washed clean in Holy Baptism and set apart for God's service (6:1–14). The sacrifice of our bodies is true worship, like the daily rites of the Old Testament (9:4; Heb 9:1, 6), a truly “reasonable” (*logikēn*) and “spiritual” (1 Pet 2:5) offering to God. Here is the priesthood of every Christian. The sacrifice is given for the benefit of the neighbor and for the glory of God. Such self-sacrifice for the neighbor is true worship (*latreian*) of God (9:4; 1 Pet 2:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

spiritual worship. Not merely ritual activity but the involvement of heart, mind and will. (CSB)

“Paul has spoken of reasonable service (*logike latreia*; Romans 12:1), namely, of the worship of the mind, of fear, of faith, of prayer, of thanksgiving, and so on” (Ap XXIV 88). (TLSB)

worship. Obedient service. (CSB)

12:2 *not conform...be transformed* – This is an outward molding to fit a pattern. Believers should not be molded by the ways of this world. (TLSB)

Same Gk word is used of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mk 9:2–3). God has changed us in Baptism (6:2–4); the passive verb form conveys that God does this work. (TLSB)

“Do not be conformed (*suschēmātizesthe*) to this world,” for “the present form (*schēma*) of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). This conformity includes our bodies, that is, all that must die and be raised again, like the body of Christ (7:4). We must be transformed, that is, we must become new and different, as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new (*kainē*) creation.” The body is ruled by the mind, so that the transformation of the body must begin with the “renewal (*anakainōsei*) of your mind” (see 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:23; Col 3:10). “Reasonable/spiritual worship” (12:1) begins with the mind, that is, with faith and the divine “wisdom and knowledge” (11:33) of Holy Scriptures. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The purpose clause that follows indicates why the mind must be renewed: “that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” “Good” (*agathon*) indicates the restoration of the body to its initial and intended state (Gen 1:31). The body is holy and “acceptable” (*euareston*) to God for sacrifice (12:1). “Perfect” (*teleion*) indicates not only that God’s will is flawless, but that it comes to its intended purpose. God’s good and gracious will (*thelēma*, Mt 6:10) is revealed and done in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” (J.B. Phillips)

The verb tense and mood stress the continuing action necessary to avoid conformity. All the time we must be on our guard against those influences that would force their patterns upon us. (The Hilarity of Community – Marva Dawn)

this world. With all its evil and corruption (see Gal 1:4). (CSB)

be transformed. Here a process, not a single event. The same word is used in the transfiguration narratives (Mt 17:2–8; Mk 9:2–8) and in 2Co 3:18. (CSB)

This transformation therefore involves a perpetual renewal of the mind, making-new of the religious intellect for the life in the new age. In every case, as each case may arise, the child of God is called upon to “prove” the will of God, that is, to weigh and ponder and decide what the revealed will of his Father God is asking of him now. The child knows that will; it asks of him that what he says and does be “good,” that is be a kindly, gracious furthering of the welfare of the man whom God has set beside him as his neighbor. (Franzmann)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

mind. Thought and will as they relate to morality (see 1:28). (CSB)

God has restored our minds to the manner of thinking He created them to have. (TLSB)

That . After the spiritual transformation just described has taken place. (CSB)

testing. Background of the word involves testing of metals. We are to examine how to live in a manner “acceptable to God” (v 1). The “gold standard” for discerning God’s will is His Word. (TLSB)

will of God. What God wants from the believer here and now. (CSB)

good. That which leads to the spiritual and moral growth of the Christian. (CSB)

acceptable. To God, not necessarily to us. (CSB)

perfect. No improvement can be made on the will of God. (CSB)

12:1–2 Keep Paul’s opening words in mind as you study chs 12–16. He urges us to present ourselves as living sacrifices because it is the proper response to “the mercies of God” (v 1). On this side of heaven, we are not fully renewed (7:14–25). As a result, the exhortations of chs 12–16 show us that we still sin and fall short (3:23). But that is not the only purpose for this section; it is a guide for Christian living (see FC Ep and SD VI). God has shown us His undeserved mercies in Christ. God has transformed our lives in Baptism and continues to renew us daily by His Spirit. • Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your mercies in Jesus Christ and for the transforming work You began in my Baptism. Empower me by Your Spirit to present my body as a living sacrifice of worship acceptable to You in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Gifts of Grace

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, [e] and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

12:1 *by grace* – Grace is the free, undeserved, and immeasurable gift given to Paul, the chief of sinners, as an example for all of us (1Tm 1:16). (TLSB)

do not think of yourself more highly than you ought – Paul’s office as apostle is a gift of God’s grace (*charitos*; cf. 12:6) for the Church, to speak the Word of God to the Church. Here he teaches that offices, gifts, and works of Christians are to be received and used in humility. “The measure (*metron*) of faith” means that faith brings gifts, which God apportions (*emerisen*) as he wills. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

All men are soloists by nature and inclination; they must learn the art of playing in God's orchestra. (Franzmann)

sober judgment – We have different gifts and callings, but it is God who calls and gives. Sober judgment recognizes all gifts are from grace. Christ's humble attitude is the pattern for our thinking (cf Php 2:5–8). Luth: "In God's presence all must tuck their tails and be glad that they can gain forgiveness. Let no one think that as long as he lives here he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness [1 John 1:8]. In short, if God does not forgive without stopping, we are lost" (LC III 90–91). (TLSB)

measure of faith. The power given by God to each believer to fulfill various ministries in the church (see vv. 4–8). (CSB)

Faith receives gifts of grace from God's hand (cf v 6). This realization counters the human tendency to be puffed up about one's gifts. The measure corresponds to one's calling, as vv 6–8 show. (TLSB)

God has assigned. Since the power comes from God, there can be no basis for a superior attitude or self-righteousness. (CSB)

12:4–8 Paul likens Christians to members of a human body. There are many members and each has a different function, but all are needed for the health of the body. The emphasis is on unity within diversity (see 1Co 12:12–31). (CSB)

12:4-5 The simile of the body (*sōma*) is used in 1 Cor 12:12–30; Eph 1:22–23; 4:4, 16, and elsewhere. The members all belong to the same Body, of which Christ is the head, from whom also they derive their life and fruitfulness (Jn 15:1–9). All Christians are members because they are "in Christ" (12:5). The various members have distinct gifts and different offices, for the sake of others. Each member is to be content with his own gifts and rejoice in the gifts of others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:5 *one body in Christ ... members one of another*. Cf 1Co 12:13. Members of Christ's body are never alone. We have been joined eternally to Him, as well as to one another (14:7–8). (TLSB)

in Christ. The key to Paul's concept of Christian unity. It is only in Jesus Christ that any unity in the church is possible. True unity is spiritually based. (CSB)

12:6–8 Paul lists grace gifts elsewhere (1Co 12:7–11, 28–30; Eph 4:11–12). Each list is different and provides specific examples. No list is exhaustive; there may be other gifts. The key is to receive all gifts humbly in faith and to use them to serve others. (TLSB)

12:6 *gifts*.† Greek *charismata*, referring to special gifts—freely given by God to his people to meet the needs of the body. (CSB)

Different members of the Body have been given different gifts (*charismata*), not by merit or works, but by God's grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The first gift is prophecy (*prophēteian*)—not new revelation or the foretelling of future events, but the common Gospel proclamation or explanation of Holy Scripture (1 Cor 14:5). This gift is to be exercised according to the analogy of faith. Faith is *fides quae*, the doctrine that is believed. "Analogy" (*analogian*) denotes comparison and right relationship to faith; therefore the preaching

accords with sound doctrine. The Church's creeds and confessions have often been called the "analogy of faith," the pattern of sound words (2 Tim 1:13) by which every sermon is tested. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

prophesy. Mentioned first and highly valued by Paul in 1Co 14. Instead of merely predicting the future, prophecy more often takes God's Word and will (v 2) and applies it to people in their situation. (TLSB)

let us use them. There is to be no false modesty that denies the existence of gifts or refuses to use them. (CSB)

in proportion to his faith. Probably means about the same thing as "measure of faith" in v. 3 (see note there). (CSB)

Cf v 3. The measure is not the gift, but faith, which justifies before God (3:28) and receives all else as gifts from Him. (TLSB)

12:7 *servicing*. Any kind of service needed by the body of Christ or by any of its members. (CSB)

Gk *diakonia*, could refer to specific ministry in the Church or to Christian service in general. (TLSB)

The office of "ministry" (*diakonai*) includes both preaching (Acts 6:4) and service to those in need (Acts 6:2). The office of "teacher" (*ho didaskōn*) is specifically a catechizer in Christian doctrine (1 Tim 4:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:8 Focus of these gifts is their use within the Christian community. (TLSB)

exhortation. Exhorting others with an uplifting, cheerful call to worthwhile accomplishment. The teacher often carried out this function. In teaching, the believer is shown what he must do; in encouraging, he is helped to do it. (CSB)

"Exhortation" (*parakalōn*) is the gift exercised by Paul in Rom 12:1: "I appeal (*Parakalō*) to you . . ." By this appeal, Christians are urged not to grow weary or lazy or negligent, but to be fruitful in good works. The "one who contributes" (*ho metadidous*) brings alms and gifts for the needy and for the church (Eph 4:28) and is to do so freely, with simplicity and generosity of heart (2 Cor 9:13). "The one who leads" or rules (*ho proistamenos*) has oversight over other church offices and thereby serves other offices and the whole Church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). He must carry out his office with zeal, not indolence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

contributes. Giving what is one's own, or possibly distributing what has been given by others. (CSB)

who leads. Possibly a reference to an elder. The Ephesian church had elders by about this time (see Ac 20:17; 1Th 5:12; 1Ti 5:17). (CSB)

does acts of mercy. Caring for the sick, the poor and the aged. (CSB)

cheerfulness. Serving the needy should be a delight, not a chore. (CSB)

Finally, all Christians are included in “the one who does acts of mercy” (*ho eleōn*). This clause introduces much of the exhortation that follows. All Christians, having received divine mercy, are to have mercy on others. But mercy should be done with hilarity, merriment, and cheerfulness (*hilarotēti*), for it arises out of the “mercies of God” (12:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:3–8 God graciously bestows various gifts to be used for the benefit of others. Our abilities can cause us to think of ourselves too highly. Paul urges Christians to avoid that temptation while exhorting us to use God’s gifts to serve others. Paul repeatedly emphasizes the gracious gifts of God that are received in faith. • Thank You, God, for bringing me into the Body of Christ and for the gifts You give to those who have served me in many and various ways. Enlighten me with Your gifts, and empower me to be a living sacrifice, that I may humbly use my gifts to serve others. Amen.(TLSB)

Marks of the True Christian

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

12:9–21 Illustrations of genuine love (cf 1Co 13:4–8). (TLSB)

12:9 *Love*. The Christian’s love for fellow Christians and perhaps also for his fellowman. (CSB)

genuine. True love, not pretense. In view of the preceding paragraph, with its emphasis on social concern, the love Paul speaks of here is not mere emotion but is active love. (CSB)

Lit, “without hypocrisy.” This love is not concerned with whether it receives anything in return. (TLSB)

The mark of genuine love is therefore an abhorrence of evil coupled with a holding-fast to the good. (Franzmann)

Abhor. Despise and be repulsed. (TLSB)

12:10 *brotherly affection*. Love within the family of God. (CSB)

Those in Christ’s family should exhibit familial love toward one another. (TLSB)

Where there is genuine love, there the church as the family of God is a reality. There all the brothers of the firstborn Son love one another and care for one another. Both the words used

here, “love” and “brotherly affection,” are taken from the vocabulary of warm, spontaneous family affection. (Franzmann)

outdo one another in showing honor. Only a mind renewed by the Holy Spirit (see v. 2) could possibly do this (see Php 2:3). (CSB)

Implies to go out ahead first; do not wait to be loved first. (TLSB)

The ESV has “Outdo one another in showing honor.” Paul speaks these commands calmly and concisely, as if obedience to them were self-evident. It is self-evident, not only under the impetus and inspiration of the mercies of God. Here particularly the Christians are being summoned to nonconformity with their world. The Greco-Roman culture which they breathed in as their native air put no premium on humility. And yet, “humility” is not the adequate word for what Paul is saying here, for the negative not of self-depreciation is not dominant in his common. The emphasis is on the positive, on seeing the man beside you with eyes of the eyes of the God of all mercies, as a man of infinite worth, the man for whom Christ died, worth your love and honor, not because he is such and such a man but because he is there placed there by God. (Franzmann)

12:11 *fervent in spirit.* † Lit. “fervent in spirit.” If “spirit” means “Holy Spirit” here, the reference would be to the fervor the Holy Spirit provides. (CSB)

Lit, “boiling over with the Spirit,” who fills our lives and flows out from us to others. (TLSB)

Such love cannot remain a sentiment; it becomes an action, to be carried out with a zeal that never flags. This must be “love of the Spirit” (15:30). The Spirit is the source and power of this love; the energies of our humane goodwill will do not suffice for it. It is a service rendered, through the other man, to the Lord Himself. (Cf. Matthew 25:40) (Franzmann)

12:12 *rejoice in hope.* The certainty of the Christian’s hope is a cause for joy (see 5:5; see also 8:16–25; 1Pe 1:3–9). (CSB)

Love and hope belong together. Paul more than once expressly connects the two (1 Cor 13:7; Col. 1:4-5; cf. Phil 4:5; Romans 13:10-11). The command to “rejoice in hope” seems to come in rather abruptly; perhaps Paul’s first readers, whose life was lived in constant hope, did not find the transition so abrupt as we do. The joy which they drew from their hope helped them to bear the burden of the never-ending claim upon their love and made their service to the Lord the taking of the kindly yoke. They drew strength from their hope to bear up bravely under tribulation. They prayed continuously, “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22; cf. Rev 22:20), and bore up under the pressure of the present until their Lord should come. (Franzmann)

patient. † Enduring triumphantly—necessary for a Christian, because affliction is his frequent experience (see Jn 16:33). (CSB)

faithful in prayer. One must not only pray in hard times, but also maintain communion with God through prayer at all times (see Lk 18:1; 1Th 5:17). (CSB)

12:13 *contribute to the needs of the saints.* The Christian has social responsibility to all people, but especially to other believers (see Gal 6:10). (CSB)

Not only does the Christian hope give courage and stamina in enduring afflictions; it also gives the Christian that largeness of heart which makes him sympathetic towards the needs of his fellow saints. (Franzmann)

Share with others in need. (TLSB)

show hospitality – This would be a special form of this active sympathetic helpfulness, for hospitality is thought of here not as a general social graciousness but as a form of aid to be supplied to travelers, especially to exiled or persecuted fellow Christians. (Franzmann)

Lit, “love of strangers.” In the Dispersion, Jews likely had the custom of welcoming fellow Jewish travelers into their homes. Paul would be encouraging the continuation of this custom. (TLSB)

12:14 *Bless those who persecute you.* Paul is echoing Jesus’ teaching in Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28. (CSB)

Speak well of and pray to God on their behalf; follow Jesus’ example (Mt 5:44; Lk 23:34). (TLSB)

If hope gives largeness of heart toward the persecuted, it also creates the capacity to love and bless one’s persecutors. Our Lord’s command to love and bless one’s enemies and persecutors (Matt 5:44) was not a blank, detached ethical imperative; it has its setting in the hope created by His proclamation of the Kingdom drawn near (Matt 4:17) and in the promises of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12). Paul is recalling this command of Jesus here. Peter likewise gives the command to refrain from vengeance and to bless those who revile in a setting of hope (1 Peter 3:9). (Franzmann)

12:15 See Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:4). Though Paul was not one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples, he was well informed about the content of Jesus’ teaching and the historical content of the Gospel writers. Cf 1Co 15:3-8 for Paul’s summary of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Identification with others in their joys and in their sorrows is a Christian’s privilege and responsibility. (CSB)

The largeness of the heart created by the Christian hope makes a man open for the joys and sorrows of others generally. Since “the appointed time has grown “very short” (1 Cor 7:29) and the “form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31), a man’s own joys and sorrows in this age cease to be of ultimate significance. He has a loose hold on the blessings of this age (1 Cor 7:30). He can enter into the joys and sorrows of his fellowman with ready sympathy because he is not shut up in his own concerns. He becomes like his Lord, who manifested His glory in this passing age both by supplying wedding wine at Cana (John 2:1-11) and by weeping at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35) (Franzmann)

12:16 Paul again warns against regarding oneself too highly (v 3; cf Lk 14:11). (TLSB)

LIVE IN HARMONY...NOT BE CONCEITED – An admonition to unanimity, humility, and gracious condescension, and a warning against pride are not out of place where present tribulation and the hope that rises above tribulation are being spoken of; Paul’s words to the suffering church at Philippi witness to that (Phil 1:29-2:4; cf. 2:14-18; 4:2). Common tribulation and the prospect of a common martyrdom do not of themselves insure unanimity and humility in the troubled church. The church’s strength is in her hope; Paul gives the motive and dynamic for this serene forbearance in the words: “The Lord is at hand.” (Phil 4:5b) (Franzmann)

Have the same attitude toward one another (cf Php 2:2). (TLSB)

12:17 *repay no one evil for evil.* See Mt 5:39–42, 44–45; 1Th 5:15; 1Pe 3:9. (CSB)

Be honorable in sight of all. A possible reflection of Pr 3:4 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). Christian conduct should never betray the high moral standards of the gospel, or it will provoke the disdain of unbelievers and bring the gospel into disrepute (see 2Co 8:21; 1Ti 3:7). (CSB)

Preoccupy yourself with doing excellent things before all people that they may also glorify God (Mt 5:16). (TLSB)

If haughtiness and conceit are overcome, the desire for vengeance is cut off at the root. Paul is to speak against taking vengeance again, from another point of view, in v. 19. Here he is concerned about the witness given to the world by Christians in their suffering. If Christians present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, they will present to the world meekly suffering bodies, a noble witness in whom they hope. (Franzmann)

12:18 *If it is possible ... live peaceably.* Jesus pronounced a blessing on peacemakers (Mt 5:9), and believers are to cultivate peace with everyone to the extent that it depends on them. (CSB)

Now the focus extends beyond the believing community. Peace may not always be possible, but believers should never intentionally cause hostility. (TLSB)

Their witness will be not only passive but active also. Mindful of their Lord's beatitude upon peacemakers, they will turn the other cheek, give the cloak to him who sues for the coat, and go the second mile (Matt 5:39–41). They will have peace with all men – “if possible”; they cannot purchase peace at the price of denying their Lord or by obeying men rather than God. (Franzmann)

12:19 *never avenge yourselves* – A Christian repaying evil for evil is a sorry witness to the world; he is also denying his God, the God of hope. The wrath of God will judge God's enemies at the end of days, after God's mercies have had full scope to do their work. (Franzmann)

Christians do not take vengeance into their own hands, but leave it to God, the highest authority. See note, 13:1. “Private remedy is prohibited not by advice, but by a command (Matthew 5:39; Romans 12:19). Public remedy, made through the office of the public official, is not condemned, but is commanded and is God's work, according to Paul (Romans 13). Now the different kinds of public remedy are legal decisions, capital punishment, wars, and military service. Clearly, many writers have thought wrongly about these matters. They were in the error that the Gospel is an outward, new, and monastic form of government. Also, they did not see that the Gospel brings eternal righteousness to hearts, while it outwardly approves the public state” (Ap XVI 59–60). *Vengeance is Mine.* Sung by Moses just before Israel conquered the Promised Land. God's wrath will ultimately avenge (2:5, 8). Cf 13:1–5 for one way God carries out His vengeance now. (TLSB)

12:20–21 In Ps 140:10, this image is a sign of harsh judgment. But Paul's quote from Pr 25:21–22 points toward driving the enemy to repentance (cf v 14). (TLSB)

12:20 *heap burning coals on his head.* Doing good to one's enemy (v. 21), instead of trying to take revenge, may bring about his repentance (see note on Pr 25:22). (CSB)

The only “vengeance” which the Christian has at his disposal is the vengeance of unsought and unmerited love, love shown to his enemy. The only pangs which the Christian can bring upon his enemy at the salutary pangs of contrition; these are the “fiery coals” heaped on his enemy’s head. Paul uses the picturesque language of Prov 25:21-22 to express this thought. The origin of the metaphor of heaping fiery coals on someone’s head is obscure, but the interpretation given above seems probable and is confirmed by the following verse. (Franzmann)

12:21 *overcome evil with good* – If the Christian allows his natural impulse to carry him away and responds to evil with evil, that is a defeat for him (cf. 1 Cor 6:7); he is overcome by evil. The flesh has triumphed over the Spirit, and the renewed mind has again become a “base mind” (1:28). If he is led by the Spirit and requites evil with good, that is a victory for him; the victory of Christ, who loved His enemies and interceded and died for them, is being realized in his life. He is overcoming evil as Christ overcame it, in meekness and suffering. His love for his enemy proclaims the Christ to his enemy, confronts his enemy with the invincible love of Christ, and leads his enemy through shame and penitence to faith. This is, of course, the very opposite of the heroic ideal of man. The Christian is not “a man’s man,” but God’s man, with a hope given him by the God of hope who raised Jesus from the dead and gave man a victory over sin and death which quenches in him the desire for any other victories. This thought of victory, or overcoming, is closely associated with the resurrection in Paul (1 Cor 15:55-57) and in the NT with the hope that does not put to shame generally, particularly in Revelation. (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7) (Franzmann)

12:9–21 Here is what a life of genuine love (v 9) looks like in specific detail. It is a life that follows Christ’s example (Php 2:1–11) and models His words from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7). We all fail to live up to this standard. However, as living sacrifices, we have been transformed to live according to God’s loving will (vv 1–2). This serves as a powerful witness to others (cf Mt 5:16; Jn 13:34–35). God in Christ has first loved us in this way and, by His mercies (v 1), our salvation is secure and not dependent on how we love. • Father, thank You for loving me first and forever by sending Your Son and making me a part of His Body. Train my heart in hope and my hand in mercy in harmony with Jesus’ words and deeds. Amen. (TLSB)