

ROMANS 12-16

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THE FREEDOM OF CHRISTIAN LIVING



7 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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 **matthiasmedia**

The Freedom of Christian Living

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»» CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| How to make the most of these studies | 5 |
| STUDY 1: Transform your life <i>[Romans 12:1-8]</i> | 9 |
| STUDY 2: Lovers not fighters <i>[Romans 12:9-21]</i> | 15 |
| STUDY 3: Reasons for living righteously <i>[Romans 13]</i> | 21 |
| STUDY 4: Freedom perfected <i>[Romans 14]</i> | 29 |
| STUDY 5: The end of weakness and strength <i>[Romans 15:1-13]</i> | 37 |
| STUDY 6: God bless America (and everyone else) <i>[Romans 15:14-33]</i> | 45 |
| STUDY 7: Friends and enemies <i>[Romans 16]</i> | 51 |

» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains five main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- an ‘Implications’ section that helps you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

[ROMANS 12:1-8]

THESE DAYS THERE IS AN impressive industry in life coaching. If you are struggling with weight gain or with fitness, you don't have to go to the gym alone, or even with a friend. You can engage your own personal trainer. And it doesn't stop there. The personal-advice industry can also help you with diet, finance, relationships and goal setting. If you lose your job, they can

even help you become a life coach!

What is the Bible's view on how to change? And what is the goal of that change? Romans 12 has a lot to say on change and 'transformation', but it is not the self-focused type of change being promoted by the life-coaching industry. It is a transformation that begins with God, focuses on other people, and results in glory not to people but to God himself.

What the 'therefore' is there for

It's a basic rule of understanding when you are reading an argument: the first thing you must do when you stumble upon a 'therefore' is ask yourself, "What is it there for?" We meet one such 'therefore' in Romans 12:1, when Paul says "I appeal to you *therefore*, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ..."

Paul has been talking about God's mercy in the verses immediately before this passage. In particular, he has been talking about how God has shown mercy to the Gentiles, and will again show mercy to Israel. So in one sense, the 'therefore' picks up these "mercies of God" from chapter 11. But the summary of God's mercies to both Jew and Gentile in chapter 11 is really the climax of Paul's whole argument in Romans.

Paul started back in chapter 1 with an explanation of God's righteousness (note the verse that sets out Paul's theme, Romans 1:17: "For in it [that is, the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'"), and then moved on to its implications. Those implications are massive—for the Christian life, which is by faith; for the law, which has been satisfied; for the future, ►

Read Romans 12:1-3.

1. Consider the word 'sacrifice' in verse 1.
 - a. Is Paul talking about offering sacrifice for sin? Why or why not? (Compare Romans 3:21-26.)
 - b. What normally happens to sacrifices? (For an example, see Leviticus 3:1-5.)
 - c. Given your answer to question 1b, what does it mean to be a "living sacrifice"?

-
- d. In the Old Testament, Israel offered **'worship'** and 'sacrifice' in the temple. Where do we 'worship' and offer sacrifice today?
2. What do you think it means to be "conformed to this world":
- a. at work?
 - b. in your family?
 - c. in your daily routine?
 - d. at church?

because nothing is "able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). Chapters 9-11 show that God remains righteous, even though his promises to the Jews seem, at first, to have failed. Indeed, the Gentiles especially must realize that the *true* Jews have certainly not been rejected, and in the triumphant purposes of God, both Jew and Gentile will end up praising him together. The instructions to transformed living in Romans 12-16 flow directly out of the mercies of God in Christ. In other words, everything that follows is a response to God's goodness and righteousness, not an attempt to win his favour.

Worship

The Old and New Testaments use a number of different Hebrew and Greek words to describe the act of 'worship', but the heart of the idea is making a fitting response to God, sometimes expressed in a direct physical way by bowing down before him (e.g. Genesis 24:52, where the word 'bowed' could equally well be translated as 'worshipped'). In the rest of the Old Testament, especially in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, God sets out the right way to worship him—at the temple, controlled by the priests, and in accordance with the sacrificial system. ►

However, this was never meant to be simply a matter of external ritual, and later Old Testament prophets criticized Israel again and again for their failure to match their lives with their worship. God complains through Isaiah:

"What to me is the
multitude of
your sacrifices?
says the LORD;
I have had enough of
burnt offerings
of rams
and the fat of well-
fed beasts;
I do not delight in the
blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of
goats.

"When you come to
appear before me,
who has required of
you
this trampling of my
courts?"
(Isa 1:11-12)

In other words, true worship has never been simply a matter of performing the right rituals in the right location. As King David says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps 51:17). Verses like these lie behind Paul's exhortations to *spiritual* worship.

3. How does transformation take place?

4. Verse 2 assures us that when our minds are renewed, the result will be "that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect".

a. What will this look like in practice? (Use verse 3 to work out one application.)

b. What are some ways in which we are tempted to think too highly of ourselves?

Read Romans 12:4–8.

5. A renewed mind leads to a new way of thinking about ourselves. In verses 4–8, this then flows on to how we relate to others. What does the person with the renewed mind do with the gifts God has given?
6. How do these verses help the person who feels:
- a. inferior?

 - b. superior?

The battle within

WHEN PAUL TALKS ABOUT BEING “transformed”, he is not simply talking about behaviour change. That is far too easy! He is talking about a complete transformation of our lives, including our thinking. In fact, the renewal of our minds is the driving force behind the transformation of our lives.

All this presupposes a great battle, expressed in Romans 12:2 as a struggle between our desire to follow the “world”, and our desire to “discern what is the

will of God”. Earlier in Romans, Paul makes us aware of this battle in other ways. So in Romans 6 we can be “slaves of sin” or “slaves of righteousness”. In Romans 7, “I do not do the good I want”. In Romans 8, the flesh and God’s Spirit are at war within us. All of these perspectives remind us that the Christian life is not going to be an easy road to glory, but will involve a continual decision on our part to respond wholeheartedly to God’s transforming mercy.

» Implications

- Paul commands us to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind”, and has already spoken about how this can happen (e.g. Rom 6:12-13, 6:17 and 8:13-14). Reflect on what Paul says, and discuss how the “renewal of your mind” can become a daily practical reality.

- Christians often think of ‘worship’ as something that happens in church. What does Romans 12 have to say about this?

- Considering Paul’s list of gifts in verses 6-8, what gifts has God given to you? What gifts has he given to others in your group? How will you use them to serve?

- What comfort can we offer to the person who says, “I didn’t think the Christian life was going to be this hard!”?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that we are transformed by his mercy.
- Pray that we will have a “sober judgement” about ourselves.
- Pray that we will use our gifts to serve others in the church.

THE FREEDOM OF CHRISTIAN LIVING



"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ..."
(Rom 12:1).

So begins the final section of Paul's majestic letter to the Romans. In these last five chapters, Paul spells out the practical implications of God's amazing free gift of life and sonship in the gospel. He deals with our relationships with each other, our interaction with the non-Christian world around us, our attitude towards civil authorities, and more besides.

In the last of his series of studies in Romans, Gordon Cheng guides us expertly through the rich teaching and practical encouragement of these challenging chapters.

