

# **Romans: The Good News of God**

## **How Should We Then Live?**

*Romans 12:1a*

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# How Should We Then Live?

## Scripture

Last week we started a new section in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. I introduced you to Romans 12:1-2, and gave you a brief overview of those two verses.

In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul begins applying the doctrine that he has been teaching for the previous 11 chapters. Now, it is not that he has made no application in the previous 11 chapters; he has. However, as he begins chapter 12 he is, in a sense, saying, "In light of all that I have taught, how should we then live?"

And so I would like to take the next few weeks and look carefully at each phrase in the two verses in Romans 12:1-2.

Let's read Romans 12:1-2:

**<sup>1</sup>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. **<sup>2</sup>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.** (Romans 12:1-2)

## Introduction

The Apostle Paul has written 11 chapters of doctrine. In those 11 chapters he has explained how we come into a right relationship with God, which is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Dr. John MacArthur, in his commentary on Romans, said that some years ago, a tearful and obviously distraught young woman approached him at a conference where he was speaking. She told him a story he had heard many times.

"I just can't seem to live the Christian life the way I should," she said. "I'm frustrated. I don't have spiritual victory or a sense of

accomplishment. I struggle with the simplest forms of obedience, and I'm constantly defeated. Can you help me?"

Dr. MacArthur asked her, "What has been your approach to solving the problems yourself?"

She replied, "I've tried everything. I've attended churches where they speak in tongues, have healings, and have all kinds of extraordinary spiritual experiences. I've spoken in tongues myself, had ecstatic experiences, been prophesied over, and experienced several supposed miracles. I've been 'slain in the spirit.' But in spite all of that, I'm not pleased with my life and I know God isn't pleased. *I've tried to get everything from him that I can*, but I'm not satisfied. I'm still miserable and want more."

"I think you have just put your finger on the problem," said Dr. MacArthur. "The key to spiritual victory and true happiness is not in trying to get all we can from God but in giving all that we are and have to him."<sup>1</sup>

Did you get that? *The key to spiritual victory and true happiness is not in trying to get all we can from God but in giving all that we are and have to him.* That is a profoundly helpful statement. Dr. MacArthur continues:

Countless thousands of people today, including many genuine Christians, flock to various churches, seminars, and conferences in search of personal benefits—practical, emotional, and spiritual—that they hope to receive. They do just the opposite of what Paul so plainly emphasizes in Romans 12:1-2. In this forceful and compassionate exhortation, the apostle does not focus on what more we need to receive from God but on what we are to give him. The key to a productive and satisfying Christian life is not in getting more but in giving all.<sup>2</sup>

There it is again: *The key to a productive and satisfying Christian life is not in getting more but in giving all.*

There are many people who call themselves Christians who

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996, c1991, c1994), 138.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, 138.

are frankly frustrated and disappointed with Christianity. Perhaps you are one of them. Oh, you might not say that you are frustrated or disappointed, but deep down in your innermost being you ask yourself, “Where is the joy? Where is the delight? Where is the satisfaction? Where is the growth? I just don’t see much of it in my life.”

Now, you cannot have more of God than you now possess. God has given you himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. He resides in you, and has done so from the moment you were born again. So, the problem is not on God’s side.

However, many of you do not have the fullness of joy that you know should be yours. You know that the Bible has countless statements about the blessing and joy and delight that belong to the people of God, but you don’t sense it in your life.

The Apostle Paul tells us in these two verses in Romans 12:1-2 that blessing and joy and delight is found in giving yourself completely to God.

## Lesson

So, in our lesson today I want us to see how we should then live.

### I. I Appeal to You (12:1a)

First, the Apostle Paul begins by saying in verse 1a, “**I appeal to you. . . .**”

The word “**appeal**” is from the Greek word *parakaleo*. It has the basic meaning of calling alongside in order to help or give aid. In later Greek usage it came to connote exhorting, admonishing, or encouraging.

On the night of his arrest, when Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples, he referred to the Holy Spirit as “another Helper.” He said in John 14:16, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” The word “Hel-

per” is *Parakletos*. The Holy Spirit would be “another Helper,” who in this present life takes the place of Jesus.

And so Paul is speaking as a human helper to those in Rome to whom he is writing. He is saying as he begins chapter 12, “I want to help you, I appeal to you, I beseech you, I encourage you, and so on.” In our modern parlance, we might say something like, “Now, listen up!”

Two weeks ago I visited Dr. Johnston at the Chamberlain-Hunt Academy in Port Gibson, MS. The Chamberlain-Hunt Academy is a Military Boarding School for boys for grades 7 to 12. On Tuesday morning I visited the campus. I started the morning in the dining room where about 120 cadets were seated at the tables. They were all in their uniforms and were chatting noisily. After a while the teachers came into the room. Then Dr. Johnston came in. He talked briefly to one or two teachers, and then he went over to where the boys were sitting. He shouted, “Now, listen up!” The chatter stopped instantly! The boys gave their immediate attention to Dr. Johnston. He then gave them their instructions for the day that, if followed, would enable them to have a successful day.

Well, the Apostle Paul is saying the same thing as he begins chapter 12. He is saying, as it were, “Now listen up! I am about to tell you how to apply what I have been teaching you. And if you follow it, you will find the key to a productive and satisfying Christian life.”

## II. Therefore (12:1b)

Then, the Apostle Paul says, “I appeal to you **therefore**. . .” (12:1b).

Small, single words often have significant meaning. For example, take the word *then*. The word *then* is found in the title of Francis Schaeffer’s well-known study of the rise and fall of western culture, *How Should We Then Live?* (which is also the title of today’s message). It is also a quote from the *King James Version* of Ezekiel 33:10.

Schaeffer had a gift for using words well, and this is nowhere seen more clearly than in that book's title. *Then* is a very simple word. We hardly think twice about our use of it. But when you reflect on the word in *How Should We Then Live?* it is clear at once that it is the most important word.

Suppose the book was called *How Should We Live?* There would be nothing remarkable about that. "How should we live?" is a common question. It's not much different from asking, "What shall we do today?" or, "Where shall we have dinner tonight?"

But put *then* back into the title, and the question becomes, "How shall we live in light of the fact that God has redeemed us from sin's penalty by the death of Jesus Christ and freed us from sin's tyranny by the power of the Holy Spirit?"

Schaeffer is very clear about where he thinks Western culture is headed. Even though Schaeffer wrote this book over 30 years ago (in 1976) he is remarkably up-to-date. He looks at trends such as increasing economic breakdown, violence in all areas of life and all countries, extreme poverty for many of the Third World's peoples, a love of affluence, and the underlying relativism of Western thought. He concludes that the choice before us is either totalitarianism—an imposed but arbitrary social order—or "once again affirming that base which gave freedom without chaos in the first place—God's revelation in the Bible and his revelation through Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Schaeffer's point is that those who have received this revelation must also act upon it, because that is the very nature of the revelation. It demands application. Writes Schaeffer, "As Christians we are not only to *know* the right worldview, the worldview that tells us the truth of what *is*, but consciously to *act* upon that worldview so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life, as much as we can to the extent of our individual and collective ability."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), 252.

<sup>4</sup> Schaeffer, 256.

So, for example, we live in a culture in which there is an increasing assault on God's existence, God's law, and biblical revelation as the basis for how we should then live.

Do you remember several years ago there was an emphasis on "family values"? This was particularly true during the elections in the 1990s. But unless we acknowledge God and God's saving acts as the source and basis for our values, anyone who thinks clearly may refute our concern with such questions as these: What kind of family values are we talking about? A nuclear family? A single-parent family? A homosexual family? Why should one be preferred above another? Or why should we want families at all? In other words, the call for values always invites these rejoinders: Whose values are we talking about? and Why those?

During a meeting of college educators at Harvard University in 1987, President Frank Rhodes of Cornell University suggested in an address on educational reforms that it was time for the universities to pay attention to values and the students' "moral well-being."

At once there were gasps from the audience, and one student jumped to his feet, demanding indignantly, "Whose values are to be taught? And who is to teach us?"

The audience applauded loudly, which meant that in its judgment the student had rendered the president's suggestion foolish by these unanswerable questions.

President Rhodes sat down without even trying to answer them.<sup>5</sup>

A generation or so ago, it would have been natural for an educator to at least point to the accumulated wisdom of more than two millennia of Western history—to the writings of philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, and to historians and modern thinkers, and some would even have included the Bible as well. It is for a return to precisely this type of education that Allan Bloom called for so eloquently in his book *The Closing of the American*

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<sup>5</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 170.

*Mind*.<sup>6</sup> But all this has been forfeited today, as President Rhodes's capitulation showed.

And it is not just that times have changed or that people today are skeptical. The problem is that without the absolutes provided by God's revelation of himself and his ways, all views are relative and there is no real reason for doing one thing rather than another—except for selfish, personal reasons, which obviously destroy morality rather than establish it. In other words, our days have become like the times of the Jewish judges when there was no king, the law was forgotten and, as a result, “everyone did what was right in his [or her] own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

If revelation is the basis for social morality and ethics, then it is impossible to have valid, effective or lasting morals without it. We must have Romans 1-11 in order to have Romans 12-16.

John Calvin spoke about this at the start of his lectures on Romans 12, only he was comparing Christianity and philosophy. He said, “And this is the main difference between the gospel and philosophy: for though the philosophers speak excellently and with great judgment on the subject of morals, yet whatever excellency shines forth in their precepts, it is, as it were, a beautiful superstructure without a foundation; for by omitting principles, they offer a mutilated doctrine, like a body without a head. . . . Paul [in Romans 12:1-2] lays down here the principle from which all the duties of holiness flow.”<sup>7</sup>

Last week I said that whenever we see the word “therefore” in the Bible we should always see what it is “there for.” “Therefore” always points back to something else, and this means that we can never understand the importance of what is coming or the connection between what is coming and what has been said until we know exactly what the “therefore” is referring to.

We have already had to think this through several times in our study of Romans, because a couple of important *therefores* have already occurred.

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<sup>6</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (2002) (Romans 12:1). Galaxie Software.



We saw it in Romans 2:1, which bases the condemnation of the allegedly moral person on the failure of the entire race as described in Romans 1.

We also saw it in Romans 5:1, which links the permanence of God's saving work as expounded in Romans 5-8 to the nature of that work as described in Romans 3 and 4.

These earlier *therefores* were important, but the **therefore** of 12:1 is more significant still.

What does the **therefore** of Romans 12:1 refer to? The immediately preceding verses, the doxology that is at the end of Romans 11? The whole of the eleventh chapter, in which Paul explains the wisdom of God's saving acts in history? Chapter 8, with its stirring assertion that nothing in heaven or earth will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Or, to go back even further, the doctrine of justification by faith expounded in chapters 1-4?

There have been able defenders of each of these views, and with reason. Each can be defended by good arguments.

Dr. James Montgomery Boice said that one summer, after he had been teaching the Book of Romans to a group of teaching leaders from Bible Study Fellowship, he received a letter in which a woman thanked him for the series and explained how she had come to understand the importance of God's grace in election for the first time. She wrote that for years she had considered election strange and dangerous but that her eyes had been opened.

She wrote, "Not only was my mind opened, my heart was touched. The tears were impossible to restrict several times as I realized what a privileged and totally undeserving recipient of his grace I am. I can hardly believe what a gift I have received from him. It truly brings me to say, 'Yes, yes, yes' to Romans 12:1-2. It's the very least and only rational thing we can do in light of God's unimaginable gift."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991-c1995), 1487. Some of the material in this message is taken from Boice. In fact, Boice has been excellent in helping me see the depth and the riches in Romans 12:1-2.

This woman was moved by the doctrine of election, which is taught in Romans 9-11. But the answer to what the **therefore** of Romans 12:1 refers to is probably *everything* in Romans that precedes it.

Charles Hodge summarizes this way: “All the doctrines of justification, grace, election, and final salvation, taught in the preceding part of the epistle, are made the foundation for the practical duties enjoined in this.”<sup>9</sup>

This is Paul’s normal pattern in his letters, of course.

In the Book of Ephesians the first three doctrinal chapters are followed by three chapters dealing with spiritual gifts, morality, personal relationships, and spiritual warfare.

In Galatians the doctrinal section in chapters 3 and 4 is followed in chapters 5 and 6 by material on Christian liberty, spiritual fruit, love, and the obligation to do good.

In Colossians the doctrinal material is in 1:1-2:5. The application is in 2:5-4:18.

The same pattern occurs in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

It is also in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians, though it is not so apparent in those books.

Strikingly, this does not seem to be the case with the other New Testament writers, such as Peter and John. It seems to have been unique to Paul to lay out the doctrinal foundation first, and then follow it up with the practical application.

Leon Morris says, “It is fundamental to [Paul] that the justified man does not live in the same way as the unrepentant sinner.”<sup>10</sup>

So, when Paul says “**therefore**” he means, “In view of what I have just been writing, you must not live for yourselves but rather give yourselves wholly to God.”

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans* (Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 393. Original edition 1835.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 431.

### III. Brothers (12:1c)

Finally, the Apostle Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, **brothers. . . .**” (12:1c).

Paul is writing to believers. He is not writing to unbelievers. It is important to remember that.

Paul is going to tell believers “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1e). Only believers can do that.

Unbelievers cannot present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. They must first receive and embrace the mercies of God *before* they can present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

All that the Apostle Paul is about to say applies only to the believer. That is why he calls them **brothers**. That means that if you are a child of God, if you are a recipient of the grace of God, then what Paul says applies to you. And if you receive it and apply it as Paul intends it, your life will be radically transformed.

### Conclusion

At the start of this message I quoted John MacArthur who said, *The key to spiritual victory and true happiness is not in trying to get all we can from God but in giving all that we are and have to him.*

As Paul transitions from doctrine in chapters 1-11 to application in chapters 12-16, he says, “**I appeal to you therefore, brothers. . . .**” He is writing to believers, and he is urging believers to understand that *the key to spiritual victory and true happiness is not in trying to get all we can from God but in giving all that we are and have to him.*

May God help us to apply that to our lives. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAAYER:**

O Lord, you call us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to you. Help us to do so fully, immediately, and completely.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.