

Romans 12¹

It is a common pattern for the letters of Paul for him to first teach truth and then show how we allow that truth to permeate our lives. After having taught the Romans about who they are in Christ, he now speaks to their hearts about living out there faith.

Ephesians 4: 1

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

Colossians 3: 1-3

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Philippians 2:12-13

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Often this encouragement to live our lives reflecting what has been done in us is taught as rules and regulations of the Christian life and that not living up to them is sin. For example, Paul teaches us in Philippians not to be anxious, and “we” make the conclusion that, “Worry is a sin”. This is false. Worrying is not a sin. It is a natural response to some sort of threat. We are told not to worry because it isn’t good for us and we are given a better way to respond. God isn’t peeved if we worry. He cares about what we care about. So, he asks us to cast our care on Him.

Paul does not teach that we are free from laws to turn again and put us under them. No. He encourages us to allow this life that has been freely given to us to manifest itself in our daily living. He isn’t giving commandments, but showing us what is the reasonable way for us to live in light of what Christ has accomplished in us. He is saying, SINCE you are holy, blameless, accepted, and beloved, walk that way.

You will notice many parallel truths from the teachings of Christ. To the Jews of that day who were His audience, His teachings must have seemed an impossibility; even a heresy. Now, in light of the cross, we know that His teachings are entirely valid because He makes us new creations and because we are transformed by the renewing of our mind.

¹ In this lesson, the number of the comment corresponds with the number of the verse.

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The apostle exhorts to a life in conformity with the exalted position in which chapters 1-8 place the believer, and in view also of the God-given ability which the believer has to live such a life.

Doctrine must always precede exhortation since in doctrine the saint is shown his exalted position which makes the exhortation to a holy life, a reasonable one, and in doctrine, the saint is informed as to the resources of grace he possesses with which to obey the exhortations.-Wuest

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

1. The use of the word “therefore” refers back to everything Paul has taught in His letter. Because we are now the righteousness of God by faith... this is how we live, and for the remaining chapters of the book, he describes this life by faith.
 - a. “Beseech”² is also be translated encourage, comfort, implore, appeal, entreat, exhort. Paul, based on what He has taught is now encouraging the Romans to let the life of Christ in them reflect their living.
 - b. Mercies is also translated: pity, compassion
 - c. “Present” means to take your stand, put at the disposal of, to yield. Formerly, we presented ourselves to unrighteousness. Now that we are righteous, let us yield ourselves to God.

Romans 6:12-14
Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.
 - d. Living sacrifice: We already died. Paul is not asking us to die. He is asking us to live, to give of ourselves willingly.
 - e. Paul is not telling us to MAKE ourselves holy and acceptable to God. He is saying that our living sacrifice IS holy and acceptable to God.

Colossians 1:21-22
And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—
 - f. “Reasonable” is logikos, from logos, rational (“logical”): - reasonable, of the word.

These are described as both holy and pleasing to God, which seem to be the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a fragrant aroma. Such an offering is our spiritual act of worship. 'Spiritual' translates **logikos**, which could mean either 'reasonable' or rational. -Stott

Brought up on Platonic thought, they will have regarded the body as an embarrassing encumbrance. Their slogan was “soma sema estin (‘the body is a tomb’), in which the human spirit was imprisoned and from which they longed for its escape. Still today some Christians feel self-conscious about their bodies. **The traditional evangelical invitation is that we give our ‘hearts’ to God, not our bodies.**- Stott

² Word definitions, unless otherwise stated, are from Strong’s.

Paul made it plain, in his exposure of human depravity in 3:13ff that it reveals itself through our **bodies**, in **tongues** which practice deceit and lips which spread poison, in **mouths** which are full of cursing and bitterness, in **feet** which are swift to shed blood, and in **eyes** which look away from God. Conversely, Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So we are to offer the different parts of our bodies not to sin as 'instruments of wickedness' but to God as 'instruments of righteousness' (6:13, 16, 19). Then our **feet** will walk in his paths, our **lips** will speak the truth and spread the gospel, our **tongues** will bring healing, our **hands** will lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our **arms** will embrace the lonely and the unloved, our **ears** will listen to the cries of the distressed, and our **eyes** will look humbly and patiently towards God. -Stott

- g. **“Service” is "latreia", ministration of God, that is, worship: - (divine) service.**
- h. **To sum it up, after having explained righteousness by faith, and showing all that God has done and is doing in our lives, Paul encourages the believers by the compassion of God to yield themselves to God as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice (which God has made them already) which is the logical and reasonable service-worship.**
 - 1) **To live otherwise would make no sense in light of what Paul has taught. It would be illogical.**

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

- 2. **Don't be CONformed; be TRANSformed. In other words, don't allow yourself to be like the world (twisted into the shape of), but rather allow yourself to be changed (made something entirely new) by the renewing of your mind. Conformation comes by behavior modification. Transformation is a miracle.**
 - a. **Conform means : to give the same shape, outline, or contour to : bring into harmony or accord; to be similar or identical; also : to be in agreement or harmony; to be obedient or compliant —usually used with to<conform to another's wishes>; to act in accordance with prevailing standards or customs <the pressure to conform>³**
 - b. **Transform is metamorphōō; to transform (literally or figuratively “metamorphose”): - change, transfigure, transform. This word is used in only two other places in the New Testament; once at the mount of transfiguration when Jesus was transfigured/transformed before Peter, James, and John and in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 where Paul is contrasting the Old Covenant Law which he calls “the ministry of condemnation” with grace of the New Covenant which he calls, “the ministry of righteousness”.**

1) **This answers the question, “HOW ARE WE TRANSFORMED? Is it something we work really hard at to obtain? No. It is something that HAPPENS TO US because there is no longer a veil in Christ. As we behold HIS glory we are transformed into His image by the Spirit of the Lord.**

2 Corinthians 3:7-9; 15-18

But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of

³ Websters Dictionary

righteousness exceeds much more in glory... 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

- c. In other words, don't let the world pressure you into going along with its system, but allow God to change you completely as you behold His glory making you into what you are meant to be. The world is trying to assimilate us. God wants to make us new.

Here then are the stages of Christian moral transformation: first our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it. -Stott

- d. When we come to Christ our minds are full of the world's ways. "The world" not only refers to a general acceptance of sin, but also the way the world thinks. Ideas such as self-sufficiency and our merit-based educational and professional systems are prime examples. Everything from how the world presents we should look, how they say we should eat, what is "cool" and what is not. Beliefs and attitudes and rules and regulations are all part of "the world".
- 1) New believers will need to be encouraged to allow themselves to be transformed by the renewing (renovating) of their minds. This takes time!
 - 2) Believers who have come under a law-based "Christianity" need a similar transformation. Religious expectations permeated the mind and thus the lifestyle which has been indoctrinated with law. That mind will need to be transformed. This takes time!
 - a) Law/religion permeates our perception of God's attitudes toward us.
 - b) Law/religion infiltrates into our relationships.
 - c) Law/religion separates us from joy and life on every level.
 - 3) All believers "have the mind of Christ", so this renewal will take place automatically by the work of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, learning who we have been made and what He has done for us helps us to forsake the world's thinking. When a believer becomes convinced of God's love for him, his mind will be more and more renovated.
- e. Thayer defines the word, "a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better." That is, the change of outward expression is dependent upon the renovation, the complete change for the better of the believer's mental process.-Wuest
- f. What is the purpose of this metamorphosis? It is so "that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God".
- 1) The word "prove" here means "discern". God isn't asking us to prove anything but wants us to discern what His will is.
 - 2) THERE ARE NOT, NOT, NOT three different levels of God's will as some have taught!!! There is one will of God. HIS will is good. HIS will is acceptable. HIS will is perfect. As our minds are made new, we discern His will which is good, acceptable, and perfect.

AT THIS POINT, THERE SEEMS TO BE A DIVIDE, BUT THERE ISN'T. Paul is describing the transformed life. HE IS NOT GIVING CHRISTIAN COMMANDMENTS. He just spent 12 chapters saying we are not under law. He is telling us what it looks like to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. He is showing us how to not be conformed to the world.

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think⁴, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

3. The grace given to Paul was his calling as an apostle.
 - a. The faith that God has dealt to each one is our spiritual gift.
 - b. Paul is telling them to humble themselves and be who God has made them. This is only possible as we are transformed.
 - c. The world teaches, "I am Number One. My fulfillment is more important than the needs of others."
 - d. Jesus taught us to be meek. Meekness is a fruit of the spirit.
Matthew 5:5
"Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth."
Galatians 5:22-23
But the fruit of the Spirit is... meekness (KJV).

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

4. Our physical bodies have "members" (arm, leg, face, eyes, etc.), and each of those members has a separate function but each is part of the one body.
 - a. The body of Christ is the same way. We are many members making up one body of Christ, and each of us has a different function.
5. As we are transformed, it becomes less about "me" and more about "we" as the body of Christ. We begin to recognize that we need each other and learn to both give and receive from each other. We discover the gifts and callings God has for us.
 - a. The world teaches us to be self-sufficient, "pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps". The world is also comprised of individuals seeking to exalt themselves to fame or fortune.
 - b. Jesus taught us to serve each other.
Matthew 23:1-11
"But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

⁴ Also don't have the opposite "worm" view of yourself, but think soberly, accurately.

6. Notice now he is specific about what the “grace” is that is given to us. Paul is referring to our spiritual gifts.
 - a. Prophecy can refer to both inspirational speaking or foretelling.
 - 1) If someone has the gift of prophesy. They should speak only what they have faith to speak.
 - 2) "Prophecy — in the New Testament, as in the Old, the prominent idea is not prediction, but the inspired delivery of warning, exhortation, instruction, judging, and making manifest the secrets of the heart" (Vincent).-Wuest
 - 3) “In this case we should note that 'faith' has the definite article, and we should translate the phrase 'in agreement with the faith'. That is, 'the prophet is to make sure that his message does not in any way contradict the Christian faith.’” -Stott
7. “Ministry” means serving. If you have the gift of serving, then serve.

The exhortation is that the one who renders service should render service in the realm or sphere in which God placed him and for which He gave him that gift. Wuest

Both words are in the locative of sphere, the idea being that the one who is given a teaching gift should remain within the exercise of that gift, and the one who has been given the gift of exhortation, within the exercise of that gift. It is a wise man who stays within the sphere of service for which God the Holy Spirit has fitted him, and does not invade some other field of service for which he is not fitted. -Wuest

8. “Exhortation” means encouragement. If you have this gift, use it.
 - a. If you have a gift of giving do it liberally.

*"Simplicity" ("liberally" in the NKJV) is **haplotētēs**, "singleness, simplicity, sincerity, mental honesty," the virtue of one who is free from pretenses and hypocrisy, openness of heart manifesting itself by benefactions, liberality (Thayer). A cognate word, **haplōs** is used in James 1:5, and is translated "liberally" by the A. V. Thayer gives for **haplōs**, "simply, openly, frankly, sincerely." That is the way God gives. -Wuest*

- b. If you are a leader, lead diligently.

*"Diligence" is **spoudē**. The verb is **spondazō**, "to make haste, do one's best, take care, desire." The idea of making haste, being eager, giving diligence, and putting forth effort are in the word. The word speaks of intense effort and determination. Wuest's*

- c. If you have a gift of showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness.
 - d. If you have the grace for any of these gifts, that gift will be your joy and passion; it will seem the most natural thing in the world for you.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

9. Love is to be sincere. We are to hate what is evil. We are to embrace what is good.
- a. A transformed life will love because its mind has been renewed to understand the love that God has for us.
- 1) The world believes in love, but it is often conditional love or a love that must be performed.
 - 2) Jesus commands us to love each other. Love is a fruit of the Spirit.
John 15:12
This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Galatians 5:22
But the fruit of the Spirit is love...
1 John 4:10-11; 19
In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 19 We love because He first loved us.
- b. A transformed life will abhor/hate what is evil.
- 1) As we are transformed and our minds are renewed, the desire to do evil will disappear to the point that we actually detest the idea of engaging in it.
 - 2) The world accepts and often delights in evil.
 - 3) Jesus exposed the evil of the world.
John 7:7
"The world... hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil."
- c. A transformed person will cling to what is good.
- 1) As we are changed, our hearts begin to long after and cling to what is good. If it's not good, we reject it.
 - a) "Cleave" is "*kollaō*", "to glue to, cement, to join or fasten firmly together."
Wuest's Word Studies -- Wuest
 - 2) The world often mocks "good" or they make their own definitions of what is good, and that sometimes means redefining evil as good and good as evil.
 - 3) Jesus said that who we are determines what fruit we will produce: good or evil.
Matthew 12:35
A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

10. Short sentence with a powerful message! This is not talking about a feeling from without, but love that can be seen in action. Human beings tend to be self-centered. God wants us to be other people-centered. Only by knowing that God has this attitude toward us can we live this type of love.

So that the exhortation is, 'love the brethren in the faith as though they were brethren in blood' (Farrar) . . . The A. V., in the word **kindly**, gives the real sense, since **kind** is originally **kinned**; and kindly affectioned is **having the affection of kindred**. "Wuest's

- a. Loving each other “as I have loved you” seems an impossible command, but Jesus knew that as we would be transformed, we would be able to love. As stated above, love is a fruit.
- b. The world loves, but love can turn quickly to hate when the object of one’s love does not measure up to one’s expectations. The world’s love is conditional.
- c. Jesus taught about the type of love that puts the value of others above our own.

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

11. It is important not to see Romans 12 as Christian commandments. In context, Paul is speaking of being transformed by the renewing of our minds. As we are transformed we will find in ourselves the ability to be diligent, fervent in spirit, and serving the Lord. We will no longer be like many in the world who give up when life gets hard nor like those who only serve themselves.

"Fervent" is zeō, "to boil with heat, be hot," used of boiling anger, love, zeal for what is good or bad." -Wuest

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

12. Hope, steadfastness and patience are also fruits of the Spirit.
 - a. As we are transformed, these fruits will grow from our lives
 - 1) Hope means “joyful anticipation of good”. The Christian life is one of hope for we serve the “God of all hope”.
 - a) *It is, "rejoicing in the sphere of hope." That is, when earthly prospects are dark, the Christian's rejoicing should be in the sphere of hope that the Lord will send deliverance, and in the meantime take care of His afflicted child.*
 - 2) Everyone “who lives godly in Christ Jesus” will suffer persecution. When it comes, God will give us the patience we need.
 - a) Thayer defines the word (patient), "to remain, abide, not recede or flee, to persevere, to endure, bear bravely and calmly." "Tribulation" is “*thlipsis*”, "a pressing together, pressure, oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits.-Wuest
 - 3) Continuing steadfastly in prayer implies that we are already praying. Keep it up. Don’t give up. Be patient. Hope in Him.
 - a) "Continuing instant" (continuing steadfastly) is “*proskartereō*”, "to persevere, to give constant attention to a thing, to be devoted or constant to one, to be steadfastly attentive to, to give unremitting care to, to wait on continually, to be in constant readiness for one." -Wuest

13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

13. Sadly, these two areas are often neglected in the church today.

- a. "Distributing" is *koinōneō*, "to enter into fellowship, make one's self a sharer or partner." The exhortation is to make one's self a sharer or partner in the needs of our fellow-saints in the sense that we act as if those needs were our own.-Wuest
- b. Most of the monies collected are used for the needs of the facility and pastoral salaries. This is not to say these things are wrong. However, there is nearly no focus on distributing to the needs of the saints in the modern church. This being the case, let us do so. A transformed individual will look for opportunities to do good unto all "especially to the household of faith".
- c. In some areas of the world, this is part of the culture... to be given to hospitality... but for some people this is a challenge. We live hurried lives and we often don't make room for opening our lives and time to others in hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

14. Jesus said to love our enemies and to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. In doing this we would be like our Father who gives rain (as a blessing) to the good and to the evil. Blessing is thus more than just saying, "God bless you," but also doing something to bless someone.
 - a. Thayer defines (bless), "to bless one, to praise, celebrate with praises."-Wuest
 - b. A transformed life will even find compassion for an enemy.
 - c. The world fights against their enemies.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

15. This is actually part of loving each other.
 - a. The transformed life will be so connected with other believers that they will share in each other's joys and sorrows.
 - b. The world is capable of quite the opposite: being annoyed when someone is rejoicing and mocking those who weep.

16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

16. "The humble" or as another translation says "the lowly" is an interesting word and helps us understand what this verse means. It is the word "*tapeinos*" in the Greek. It means: depressed, that is, (figuratively) humiliated (in circumstances or disposition): - base, cast down, humble, of low degree (estate), lowly.

Be of the same mind one toward another" is literally, "thinking the same thing with respect to one another." -Wuest

It is not uniformity but unanimity of which Paul is speaking here. The negatives which follow, Denney says, "introduce explanatory clauses: they forbid what would destroy the unanimity of love." -Wuest

'The reference is to the most indigent and ignorant and least influential in the Church. It is to them the believer ought to feel most drawn. The antipathy felt by the apostle to every sort of

spiritual aristocracy, to every caste-distinction within the Church, breaks out again in the last word. -Wuest

- a. In the world, those who are down and out are despised for the most part. It's easy to be high minded in regard toward someone who is going through humiliating circumstances. There is a tendency to throw people away who aren't "normal".
- b. The transformed life will reflect thinking that does not put oneself above another, but will associate with those in need. It will help and not judge.

Matthew 7:1-5

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

- c. "Associate" also aids in understand verse 16. It is the word "sunapagō" which means "to take off together, that is, transport with, - carry (lead) away with, condescend.
 - 1) So, it seems that associating is more than a casual acquaintance but rather involves being part of someone's life. Sometimes opening our lives to those among us who are in need is just what that person needs.

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

- 17. **Revenge is not acceptable for believers. We are to regard (respect) what is good-beautiful before (within the sight of) all.**

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

- a. The world is clearly revenge oriented. Movies are often based on someone getting revenge for a wrong done. It's everywhere obvious.
- b. The transformed life will find grace to forgive. Although they will understand justice, mercy will take over.
- c. **Jesus taught us:**

Matthew 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

- 18. **This scripture teaches us that it won't always be possible to be at peace with every person. There are people who do not want to be at peace with you. What this means is that from**

your end of the situation be at peace. Don't add wood to the fire. Back off. This is opposite from what the world teaches and demonstrates. It is someone who has been transformed who will be willing and able to live this way.

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

19. It is entirely natural to be angry when we have been wronged and to want to pay someone back for what they have done against us, but this is the way of the world. The transformed life will lay aside wrath and let God deal with that person.

- a. "Avenge" is *ekdikeō*, "to vindicate one's right, do one justice, to avenge one's self." Denney says: "Even when the Christian has been wronged, he is not to take the law into his own hand, and right or vindicate himself." -Wuest

20 Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

20. It takes a transformed life to do this. It is unthinkable for most people in the world.

Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Recent commentators draw attention to an ancient Egyptian ritual in which a penitent would carry burning coals on his head as evidence of the reality of his repentance. In this case the coals are 'a dynamic symbol of change of mind which takes place as a result of a deed of love'. Stott

In Bible times an oriental needed to keep his hearth fire going all the time in order to insure fire for cooking and warmth. If it went out, he had to go to a neighbor for some live coals of fire. These he would carry on his head in a container, oriental fashion, back to his home. The person who would give him some live coals would be meeting his desperate need and showing him an outstanding kindness. If he would heap the container with coals, the man would be sure of getting some home still burning. The one injured would be returning kindness for injury, the only thing a Christian is allowed to give back to the one who has injured him. This act of kindness God could use to soften the heart of the person and lead him on to repentance and the offering of a recompense for the injury sustained. In this way the Christian would overcome evil with good. - Wuest's

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

21. Evil has the ability to overcome us (subdue, conquer). How does the transformed life conquer over evil? It is not by fighting it. We subdue evil with good. This is completely contrary to the world's ways.

Matthew 24:12

And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Some see the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as a magnification of the Law. A better way to see these teachings is showing what God really wants from us... our hearts. A man, for example, under the law, might be able to restrain from having adultery, but Jesus said to not even look at a woman with lust. When He taught this, He was presenting the need for a supernatural change of spirit, soul, and body.

In the Sermon on the Mount and here in Romans 12, we are not being given a list of how to live which some have called “Christian commandments”. Jesus and Paul both knew that this type of living, if it was to be done from the heart, would only come from those who were made new creations. They knew that having come from a world whose thinking and behavior is completely contrary to the way God desires for us to live, that we would need time to transform by the renewing of our minds.

If in any area above we are falling short, the idea of now “trying really hard to be good” will not give the ultimate desired results. You see, it is not altering our behavior that is in God’s heart, but in altering US. When we are changed, our behavior will follow. He can do it. Let Him. You will realize one day that you have been changed and that this type of behavior comes as a fruit in your life.