

Paul’s Quick Start to Christian Living

Romans 12:1-12:21

Have you ever noticed that men don’t like to be told what to do? I mean, directions – guys will wander around aimlessly and totally lost for days before stopping to ask for directions. And putting things together – when I get a new piece of furniture, or a new computer program – the first thing I do is take out the parts or the disk and start working. Look at the manual? Forget about it!

Okay – often I end up with odd parts left over – or haven’t the faintest clue how to use my new program once its installed. If I’d just used the manual I would have saved so much trouble and gotten a much better result.

When it comes to life, we often react the same way – we don’t want anyone telling us how to live, we just go out there and start living – making it up as we go. We have a manual, a book of directions – it’s the Bible. We should read it . . . understand it . . . live by it.

But it’s a pretty big manual – and many of us don’t take the time to read the whole thing. When I buy a program I don’t look for the manual, I reach for the little card labeled: “Quick Start.” It gives me just what I need to get by until I’m ready to delve in deeper.

I’m not suggesting that we not read the Bible – but today we’re going to look at Paul’s Quick Start Guide to Christian Living – it is found in Romans, Chapter 12. Here we find the basic elements to help us live the Christian life – to see what’s expected of us.

You’ll notice that starting in chapter 12, Paul leaves the purely theological discussion of chapters 1-11 and directs our attention to a number of really practical aspects of Christian living..

In so doing, he addresses three areas of life: our relationship with the Father, our relationship with ourselves, and our relationships with others – both in the community of believers and in the world. In each area I’ll highlight a “Life Principal”. And if you want the “quick start” guide to the “quick start” guide – it is contained in just two verses – 1 & 2.

1. Our Relationship with the Father

Live a Worshipful Life dedicated to the Father.

Romans 12:1 – “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.”

In the Old Covenant – an act of worship meant you took an animal and sacrificed it on the altar. Now that Jesus has become our sacrifice for sin – we offer ourselves up not as dead sacrifices on the altar, but living sacrifices. The problem with living sacrifices, of course, is that we can get up off the altar. Sometimes we feel like we’re “giving it all up for God” but at other times we get scared or selfish and we jump down and say – not today God.

“Spiritual” here means – informed, understanding. It is reasonable to give ourselves to God’s service in light of what God has done for us through Jesus – extending His mercy to us who didn’t deserve it.

The word “worship” doesn’t actually appear in the Greek – it’s the word: “service” which means – hired service, or service to God. We aren’t slaves in the sense of not having a choice – every day we have a choice to serve God – and we do it because we love Him.

Now Paul doesn’t just leave it there – a picture of sacrifice of self – he goes on to get very specific. First he talks about our relationship with the Father – one of giving up, of laying down – then he talks about our relationship with ourselves. But notice that it all begins with this – our relationship with God, our laying down our lives for His service – without that, none of the rest is possible

2. Our Relationship with Ourselves

Live a Transformed Life to find Real Purpose

Romans 12:2 – “**you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**”

Sacrifices burned on the altar change – they are burned up – their literal chemical properties are different as the fire oxidizes the meat. We as living sacrifices should also be changed – no longer conforming (the word means “to fashion something after another”) but transformed (from the word where we get “metamorphosis.”).

The world system around us sets a pattern for behavior and demands that we conform to that pattern. Instead, Paul says, we should be changed to a different pattern – how? By the renewing of our minds. That word “renewing” comes from the Greek word for “renovation.”

God takes us a sacrifice and starts a remodeling project on our character and our behaviors – tearing out walls here, laying new carpet there, so to speak – invading our lives to change us from the inside out.

It starts with the intellect – we take in from God – His wisdom, His precepts – and we incorporate it into our lives. It happens sometimes when we don’t even know it. Hebrews 4 tells us that God’s Word is so sharp that it can slice into us and tell us the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Ephesians 5 talks about “washing” your life with the Word – that it has cleansing properties as well.

What is the result? The more we are washed in the Word the more we are able “test and approve” Paul says, God’s will. It’s the idea of discerning God’s will.

Paul gives that will three qualities – good . . . pleasing . . . and perfect.

- ➡ Good means just that – good. What God wants for you is good for you, even if it doesn’t feel like it at the time.
- ➡ Pleasing means “acceptable.” It makes sense, and you can accept it – the more you know God the more He can take you through tough times and its okay – then perfect –
- ➡ Perfect it means “complete” or “mature.” God is maturing you, transforming you into His image. And that transformation leads in a certain direction – read on:

Romans 12:3 – “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 think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

I think if everyone one of us took this verse to heart there would be so much less backbiting and jealousy and problems in our lives . . . in the church . . . and in the world for that matter.

We need to look at our lives realistically – that means not riding ourselves down unduly, nor puffing ourselves up. Paul says we should do this according to the measure of faith God has given us. This could indicate that we should gauge our abilities realistically and the gifts God has given us and then act accordingly.

If God has gifted you in leading people in worship – then you should lead people in worship. If, however, you are tone deaf, then maybe some aspects of leading in worship are not for you.. Another way to look at it is to gauge ourselves as compared to the example set for us by Jesus Christ.

If or anyone else does something that is not in accord with the character of Christ then I’m not doing the right thing. That puts a lot of pressure on us to learn who Jesus was and what He believed and valued, doesn’t it?

In 1 Corinthians 15:49 “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”

But what happens is that we do something and feel like we’re something pretty special – and then we look at others around us and we start thinking that we’re better than them and pretty soon we’re not judging ourselves by Christ’s example, but by comparing ourselves to others.

So we need to (1) give our lives over to serving God and let Him renew our corrupt minds, then(2) have an accurate assessment of our lives in light of who Jesus is – THAT is how we can then start to turn outward.

3. Our Relationship with Others

Live a Shared Life to benefit the Covenant Community

Romans 12:3-4 – “as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

Each and every one of us has a function in the body of Christ. Do you know what yours is? It may not be glamorous or up front – but it is important. Maybe its visiting the sick, or cleaning the church building, or just praying for those you know. The point here is that “each member belongs to all the others.” I can’t do it without you and you can’t do it without me. And who puts this system together, us? No, God has put this system together.

Romans 12:6 – “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.”

Not everyone is a James W. Watkins or the Apostle Paul. We have different gifts – we need to get over envying someone else’s gift and look to do with diligence what God has enabled us to do. Don’t know what He’s called you to? Ask Him to reveal it to you – and often He will use the very things that interest you – its not often that he asks a person to do something totally out of character. Next Paul gives some examples.

Romans 12:7-8 – “Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with

liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

What I want to point out here is that – it seems there is a positive and negative way to use the gifts God has given us. Prophecy (teaching) can be encouraging and challenging – or it can be destroying and self serving. Giving can be done begrudgingly or with selfish motives (I’ll give since God will reward me in a specific way that I’m counting on). Don’t just take the gift – but look to how it should be given – again, as Jesus would have done it.

Live a Sincere Life in a world of selfishness

Romans 12:9 –Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

Bottom line – love must be sincere. Ask God for that sincere love for others – you may be shocked at what He does. This is especially important given the world we live in – a world full of evil that often masquerades as good. Paul says “hate” evil – it comes from a word that means “odious.” Ever smell a skunk?, Sure you have! Evil, or that which is not like Jesus, should stink so much that we are repelled by it.

Contrast that with “cling” to what is good. It’s the word “glue.” You know, with glue you put it on and for a little bit it’s tacky and you can remove it – but after a while of holding the objects together they become bonded – the glue actually melts a bit of both items and forms a bond between them.

That’s the way it should happen with us. We cling close in our relationship to God, praying, worshiping, reading His Word, letting Him have access to our lives

and shape us – and for a while we can kind of come and go in our closeness to Him. God wants us to remain so close that being like Him and doing good won’t be hard – we’ll stick to good like glue.

Romans 12:10 – “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.”

This goes right along with Paul has just said – be devoted to each other, especially since you are related in Christ. “Honor” means to show deference. Do we do that? Or do we seek people to show deference to us? In many ways this is a radical thought – as is the next:

Romans 12:11 – “Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

I know people who need zeal – they need to catch on fire for God. I also know people with plenty of zeal or fervor – but it’s not serving God. How do you know the difference? Again – is what you are doing in concert with the character of Christ? Is your life fully ceded to Him – not thinking of yourself, but how to best serve others. This is especially important in light of the world we live in.

Live a Giving Life in the presence of conflict

Romans 12:12-13 – “Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

These three ideas I think form a great simple guide to Christian living.

➡ Be joyful in hope – God is doing a good work in you – don’t fret.

- ➡ Patient in affliction – you’ll get through it because God is always with you, just hang tight –
- ➡ and faithful in prayer – make you communion with God a priority. If we would do these three things – then what follows comes much easier.

Romans 12:14 – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

This is the opposite of what we normally do – but when we have an eternal perspective it becomes easier to love those who hate you.

Romans 12:15 – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

As God begins to shape your character, you begin to act appropriately for the situation. I think too this means – don’t be a “cookie cutter” Christian. It’s okay to rejoice – and its okay to mourn. We don’t have to be “happy happy” all the time – and its not right to chide someone who is mourning to say “you should be happy.”

Romans 12:16 – “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.”

The King James translates it: “Be of the same mind,” I like that. We need to focus on the goal – serving God, being transformed into His image, then taking His love out to the world. That’s the mind we should have – not “what am I getting or not getting that I think I deserve.” Be willing to associate with people of low position – that’s the opposite of what we see in the world. We see “Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous” and think that’s the way we should go. Jesus didn’t do

that, did he?

Live a Pure Life in the face of Evil

Romans 12:17 – “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”

Going along with “bless those that curse you” we should be careful not to take revenge – and Paul gets to what we should do in a moment. The point here is: we ought to behave in a way that gains approval of those outside of the church – but not at the expense of Christ’s character in us. If by getting approval we must lie – then we cannot gain approval. But if it means we go the extra mile, then we should.

19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

This doesn’t mean that we take our lit barbeque and dump it on our feisty neighbor’s head – this signified a good thing – wrapped up coals that could be used to restart a kitchen fire – carried on the head. Our tendency is to do as much to push down those that hurt us – Paul says, do the opposite – and by doing that you show what Jesus said: “They will know you are my disciples by your love one for another.”

Paul sums it up nicely with one short sentence: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

CONCLUSION

It’s actually pretty easy to be overcome by evil. Think about the times you get upset – how once that train starts down the tracks its hard to call it back.

Someone insults us and we snap back, someone stabs us in the back and we run over them with a tank. The Lord is calling on us to have a different system – instead of “returning evil for evil” we bless instead of curse – fight back with good.

I promise you this is not easy. And I don’t mean the kind of grit your teeth and say something nice about the person kind of thing either. But if we look at it this way instead: people do bad things because 1- they don’t know better, or 2 – they are controlled by evil themselves. We can break that cycle – we show them God’s love to break through the cycle of ignorance or control by sin. Every person has a God-shaped hole in their heart – and are often bitter or angry because it can’t be filled by anything other than Jesus.

So we need to find ways to show kindness, consideration, and love – to show them that God really does love them and accepts them through His Son.

Finally, I want to take a moment to bring us back to verse 1. Even though the word “worship” doesn’t occur in the Greek – it is implied and it fits. I want to say two things about worship – One, it is more than just what we do here on Sundays – we should live a worship life.

And secondly, our worship corporately as a body should be “informed.” We shouldn’t just sing songs by rote memory, they should truly be musical prayers to God, reasonable responses from intelligent beings who know who is God and that He deserves our worship.

God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation