

Opening comments overheard in a Christian Life class at imaginary Quest Bible College

Dr. Quest (on starting with the negatives)

Romans chapter 12 is one of the top chapters in the Bible on the Christian life, but since we are using the Plus Bible Study method, we will begin with negatives. I've asked Tech to give us a report on Paul's use of negatives. What does the data show?

Tech (on the use of negative terms)

Well, my search for common negative terms like *no, not, nor, none*, etc. showed that there are many of them in Romans, including in chapter 12, though chapter three has more. The only letter of Paul that has more common negatives than Romans, with a count of 250, is First Corinthians at 295. Second Corinthians comes in third at 144.

As for chapter 12, there is a concentration of negatives near the end in the section about persecution (12:14-21). Yet, negatives also appear up front in verses two, three, and four. We are not to be conformed to the world (12:2) or proud (12:3). Serving with love but without hypocrisy (12:9) and laziness (12:11) may be the focus in the middle section. Here is the raw data.

12:2	And be not conformed to this world
12:3	not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think
12:4	all members have not the same office
12:9	Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]
12:11	Not slothful in business [diligence]
12:14	bless, and curse not .
12:16	Mind not high things,
12:16	Be not wise in your own conceits.
12:17	Recompense [repay] to no man evil for evil.
12:19	avenge not yourselves
12:21	Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Frank (on the lack of obvious negatives)

I like the way Plus Bible studies begin on the dark side, but what about the many verses in our chapter which don't have any obvious negatives in them, 12:5-8 and 12:10, for instance? Frankly, I decided to just skip over these verses at first. Is that ok?

Dr. Quest (on underlying, potential negatives)

No, it's not. You should ask, "What are the underlying, potential problems?" One of the common ones with the variety of gifts (12:5-8) is that individuals get stuck in ministries in which they do not fit very well. Moreover regarding the commands to show brotherly love in 12:10, it is obviously bad to disobey this command and **not** care for others. So there are potential but real negatives to write about regarding verses like these.

Make concise notes on the negatives and positives in the passage. Then make personal applications based on the most important points.

Parallel Negative & Positive Points

The main topic in Romans chapter 12 is serving the Lord. The main (outlined) points below indicate that for every negative point there is a corresponding positive one. Go through the chapter verse by verse recording parallel negatives and positive subpoints. If you have trouble doing so, take a quick look at the answer worksheet.

NEGATIVES (main points)

Worldly people do not serve God (12:1-2).

It is bad for the body to be dysfunctional (12:3-8).

Love can be perverted and neglected (12:9-13).

Persecution and evil are big problems (12:14-21).

POSITIVES (main points)

It is good to serve the Lord (12:1-2).

It is good to serve in the body of Christ (12:3-8).

Showing love to one another is good service (12:9-13).

It is good to overcome persecution & evil (12:14-21).

NEGATIVES (Add subpoints.)	POSITIVES (Add subpoints.)
<i>bad, dangerous, difficult, evil, inadequate, sad, sinful, ugly, etc.</i>	<i>good, blessings, clean, healthy, joyful, safe, well done, wise, etc.</i>
biggest	biggest
negative	positive

APPLICATIONS

Caution: this is the answer sheet or study leader's note page. Use the blank worksheet for personal and group studies.

NEGATIVES	POSITIVES
<i>bad, dangerous, difficult, evil, inadequate, sad, sinful, ugly, etc.</i>	<i>good, blessings, clean, healthy, joyful, safe, well done, wise, etc.</i>
Worldly people do not serve God (12:1-2).	It is good to serve God (12:1-2).
We were lost sinners needing mercy (12:1).	Total dedication is reasonable (12:1).
The world wants us to conform (12:2).	It is reasonable for the saved to serve (12:1).
We do not naturally like to change (12:2).	Real inner transformation is possible (12:2).
Many believers are not in the will of God (12:2).	God's will is good and perfect (12:2).
It is bad for the body to be dysfunctional (12:3-8).	It is good to serve in the body of Christ (12:3-8).
Proud use of gifts leads to division (12:3-5 16).	It is good to fit in well with others in Christ (12:3-5).
Word-centered gifts are sometimes misused.	There are gifts which are word centered . (12:6-8)
<i>Pride easily comes with speaking and teaching.</i>	<i>prophecy, teaching, and exhorting</i>
Gifts of giving and the like are sometimes misused.	There are gifts which are centered in things . (12:6-8)
<i>The rich and the powerful can become problems.</i>	<i>ministering, giving, leading, showing mercy</i>
Love can be perverted and neglected (12:9-13).	Showing love to one another is good service (12:9-13).
Some do not love that which is good (12:9).	It is good to love that which is good (12:9).
Some do not love other believers (12:10).	It is good to love other believers (12:10).
Some are lazy and do not serve well (12:11).	It is good to serve the Lord with zeal (12:11).
Some lack hope, don't pray, and quit (12:12).	It is good to have hope, persevere, and pray (12:12).
Some do not help other believers with needs (12:13).	It is good to help meet needs in the church (12:13).
Persecution and evil are big problems (12:14-21).	It is good to overcome persecution and evil (12:14-21).
Some hate and curse believers (12:14).	We can overcome by blessing those who curse (12:14).
Some weep (12:15) for various reasons.	It is good to join others in rejoicing / weeping (12:15).
Some are proud and overconfident (12:16).	It is good to be impartial and humble (12:16).
Some hit back quickly and are careless (12:17).	It is good to show restraint and do good (12:17).
Some people are difficult to get along with (12:18).	It is good to try to make peace with others (12:18).
Some are vengeful, forgetting the Lord (12:19-21).	It is good to trust the Lord about enemies (12:19-21).
Our enemies have needs too (12:19-20).	The Prov. 25:21-22 quote is good (12:20).
If we are vengeful, we lose (12:21).	It is good to overcome evil by doing good (12:21).
What is the biggest negative in the passage?	What is the biggest positive in the passage?
It is bad to not serve God or to do so poorly because of unbelief, pride, selfishness, or anger.	It is good to lovingly serve God in the body of Christ and to overcome evil by doing so.

APPLICATIONS

I will (re)dedicate my life to God and try to serve him as he enables and directs.

Commentary from various perspectives as overheard in a Christian Life class at imaginary Quest Bible College

Dr. Quest (on Rom. 12:1-2 being misunderstood)

"Have you offered your body to God as a living sacrifice like it says in Rom. 12:1-2?" I often ask this question in churches. Some members say that they have, but others admit that they have not. The surprising thing is that many who admit that they have never made such a commitment don't think there is anything wrong. They assume that Rom. 12:1-2 commitment is only for preachers. To counter this, I point out that all the people brought offerings to the temple in Jerusalem. It was not just the priests.

At lunch recently, Dan and I got talking about the relationship between Romans chapter 12 and the Old Testament, and we agree that there is much more to it than just sacrificial terminology in the first two verses. So I've asked Dan to speak about this today. (As you know, Dan is a messianic Jewish believer who lived in Israel for several years.)

Dan (on Romans chapter 12 being transitional)

I prepared a chart to make four points of contrast between Hebrew living by faith before the Messiah came and Christian living by faith now as taught in Romans chapter 12. Basically, I believe that **all** of Romans 12 was designed to help believers, including messianic Jews, transition to life in the body of Christ [the church]. Though the temple still existed when Romans was written, it did not last much longer.

ROMANS	Main Points in Romans 12	Changes After the Fall of Jerusalem
12:1-2	Each believer is to be a personal, living sacrifice.	All Israelites had brought animal sacrifices to the temple, but this became impossible.
12:3-8	Spiritual gifts enable the service of ALL believers.	The Levitical priesthood, in which only Levites could serve, ceased to function.
12:9-13	Loving service and mutual help are to be prominent.	The security net built into the law for poor Israelites ceased to function.
12:14-21	Persecution and evil can be overcome (Prov. 25:21-22).	Gentile nations had been the main enemies, but Jewish nationhood ceased (for a time!).

Dr. Quest (two quick questions)

I have two questions, Dan. First, what does "Jewish nationhood ceased for a time" in the last row mean? Second, what do you think are the biggest negatives and positives?

Dan (on Israel and the biggest positives and negatives)

Well, I believe that Romans chapter 12 on Christian living follows naturally from chapter 11 about the coming of the Gentile-dominated church age, even though it is **not** a permanent replacement of Israel. A remnant will be saved in the future (11:25-28).

As for the greatest positives in Romans 12, I think they are God's mercies (12:1), salvation, and the chance to serve God in the body of Christ. For the greatest negative, however, I think we have to go back to 9:1-3 and the sorrow that Paul felt regarding the lostness of his people. Only a few of us Jews are truly serving the Lord today.