

Present Yourself to God

📖 Romans 12:1-2

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

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🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Turn to the great epistle to the Romans, what is considered by many to be Paul's magnum opus, his greatest work and the first systematic theology. We've covered systematically Romans 1-11. In general, how would we characterize Romans 1-11? Is this doctrine or is it application? It's doctrine. What is doctrine? Doctrine is teaching, it's truth, it is what we are to think, it is how we are to think, it is the truth of God that we are to know, it is what we are to memorize and store up in our hearts and without this we are like a ship without a sail, we are like a leaf in the wind, we will be driven about by every wind of humanist doctrine and we will go to our ruin. Doctrine always comes first in Paul's epistles. Why does doctrine come first? Because we must learn how to think before we can learn how to live. Christianity is basically a thinking man's religion. It is not thinking for thinking's sake but thinking for God's sake, learning to think God's thoughts after Him. So first we learn doctrine and that is what Paul has taught us in Romans 1-11.

What doctrine has Paul taught us in Romans 1-11? It is very systematically organized. Every Bible student of any note has noticed that the doctrine is carefully organized. In Romans 1-3 the doctrine is that we are **condemned** by God, the whole human race is condemned because we sinned in Adam and on top of that we committed personal sin. There is not one of us that has a righteousness that allows us to be in a relationship with God. So we are separated from God spiritually. This is a great predicament. Because of it we have a great gaping hole in our hearts, a hole that can only be filled by a relationship with the infinite God. That is why we need the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ because He is the righteousness of God, He was without sin, He died for our sin, He paid the penalty so that by grace through faith in Him we are saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin and will ultimately be saved from the presence of sin. Salvation is in three tenses; past, present and future and it is His grace that saves us through the gospel to the utmost. This is the way back to God and it is for all men because all men are condemned. Thus condemnation is the first section in Romans 1-3. In Romans 4-5 the doctrine is the past tense of salvation, which is **justification**; we are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Justification saves us from the penalty of sin which is eternal separation from God. Those who are justified will not be eternally separated from God because they have a legal righteousness in His court of law in heaven. So justification is the second section in Romans 4-5. In Romans 6-8 the doctrine is the present tense of

salvation, which is **sanctification**; we are to know that we are sanctified by grace as we yield to the Spirit. Sanctification saves us from the power of sin which is temporal separation from God or loss of fellowship. Those who are being sanctified are being conformed to the image of Christ because they have a practical righteousness being produced through them. So sanctification is the third section in Romans 6-8. At the end of Romans 8 the doctrine is the future tense of salvation, which is **glorification**; we are to know that we will be glorified by the grace of God on the day God gives us a resurrection body. Glorification saves us from the presence of sin so that we can be in God's immediate presence. On the day we are glorified we will be entirely conformed to Christ-likeness and will never fall again. Then our salvation in all three tenses, past, justification, present, sanctification, and future, glorification, will be complete. We are to know that this so great salvation is all of God so that we are assured of our eternal security, that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ. In Romans 9-11 the doctrine is an **explanation** of the nation Israel and her security as a nation. Even though she stumbled over her Messiah she has only been temporarily set aside by God and is still beloved for the sake of the fathers, and thus God will ultimately fulfill His word in the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then they will enjoy the land. This is the doctrine that we must know. There are more details, of course, and we drew out many of those details. But it is what we are to think, it is how we are to think, it is reality and it is the truth of God and it is what we must go over and over in our minds so that we are not tossed to and fro by every wind of humanist doctrine.

In Romans 12 Paul shifts gears. Now what do we find? **Therefore**. When we see a "therefore" we ask what it is "there for." Paul has used it before in 5:1 and 8:1 so let's see how he used it there. First, in Romans 5:1 Paul said, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." Paul uses "therefore" to make application of what he had just discussed about justification by faith; now he wants to transition to the practical results of this great doctrine. The practical results here are that we have peace with God. Second, in Romans 8:1 Paul said, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Paul again uses "therefore" to make application of what he had just said in the discussion about sanctification and how we cannot be sanctified by the flesh but thankfully there is way to be sanctified and verse 2 states it to be by the Spirit. So the "therefore" here is also used to make application. Now we come to Romans 12:1 and for a third time Paul says, "Therefore." So what is it there for? The same reason it was there before. To make application of what he just discussed. The only difference here is that it refers back to all that he has discussed and not just Romans 9-11. He is looking back, all the way back to all that he has taught, all of Romans 1-11, just as we looked back at briefly and he wants us to contemplate all of that doctrine. Alva J McClain agrees, "Of course, when he uses the word *therefore*, it points back to what has gone before. In the twelfth chapter, where he says, "I beseech you therefore," he is pointing back to all that was said before."¹ J. Vernon McGee also says, "Although it has immediate connection with that which has just preceded it, I am of the opinion that Paul is gathering up the whole epistle when he says, "Therefore."² Thus we are in good company if we view all that

follows as the application of the doctrines of condemnation, justification, sanctification, glorification and explanation.

What is application? Application is what that doctrine looks like when it is put to the streets of everyday life. It is the gospel in shoe leather. Because we have a new way of thinking we also have a new way of living. Note how Paul puts it in 12:1, **I urge you**. He does not say I command you. He is not telling us what to do, he is coming alongside of us like a friend, that is the word here, "to come alongside," and he is urging us as a good friend to do something very important. It is really an encouragement. It is something he has already encouraged us to do in Romans 6 and that is **to present your bodies** to God. Turn back to Romans 6:13 where this same Greek word is used several times of our presentation. Here is where he said "do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness." The verb "go on presenting" is the present tense and refers to continual action. The word "present" means "to put at the disposal of." "Sin" has the definite article and is referring to the sin nature. The "members of our body" are every part of our person. Paul is saying do not continue putting your whole person at the disposal of the sin nature to be used for unrighteousness. That is something you once did continually and you can still do but it is not something that you should do any longer. By contrast Paul says, "but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." The verb "present" here is the aorist tense and probably refers to a sense of urgency. You are to present "yourselves," your whole person "to God." You are presenting yourself to Him "as alive from the dead" referring to yourself as a spiritually alive person, a regenerate person and you are to "present your members as instruments of righteousness to God." In other words, you are to put yourself at His service. The aorist tense used of this presentation is the same tense used in Romans 12:1 and so some refer to it as a once for all presentation. That may be. The Ryrie Study Bible note says, "The tenses may imply "stop presenting your members ... but present yourselves once for all unto God."³ Even he's not sure because the tense can't be used to prove that beyond doubt. However, what he says next is sure, "Paul exhorts us to make our experience conform to our position. *present*. A decision to dedicate the years of one's life to God (as also in 12:1)."⁴ This is what Paul is urging us to do in Romans 12:1. He is reaching back to Romans 6 and bringing it back into the forefront of our mind and he is summing up the entire section of Romans 6 with the words, **I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies...** This is *how* to live the Christian life, you must make this dedication of yourself to God. The **body** here is simply the total person that you are as a Christian, the new person that you are. You are to dedicate yourself to God to be used for His purposes. It may be once-for-all but the bottom line is that you should do this.

It is important that Paul said you should do this or **I urge you** and not I command you. Why is that important? What difference does it make? It makes all the difference in the world. If I tell you what to do that is one thing. If I come alongside of you as a friend and encourage you that is another thing altogether. One is trying to get you to do something by compulsion, because I say so; the other is trying to get you to do something of your own will, because you want to. That is a very different approach and I assure you it is a better one. It has an inviting ring to

it, almost like you are being invited into something. You would be wise to employ this method in all your dealings because it is appealing. But not only would you be wise you would also be biblical. There is an important reason it does not command but encourages. It has to do with the way of the Christian life. What has Paul already said before about living the Christian life? Are we under law or grace? Turn back to Romans 6:14. "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Let's understand this. "Sin" refers to the sin nature. Paul is saying the sin nature is not our legal master. This means we do not have to obey it. He explains, "For you are not under law." The Christian is not under law as a governing principle. If we were under law then we would be governed by the sin nature because the sin nature exerts itself against the law in order to control us. But we are not under law. We are "under grace." Grace is the provision of God in giving us a new nature through which the Holy Spirit can exert Himself against the sin nature so that we enjoy victory. So when you come to Romans 12:1 isn't it a wonder that Paul does not say, "I command you" but **I urge you?** This is not the language of law but the language of grace. McGee says, "I beg of you" is the language of grace, not law. There is no thunder here from Mount Sinai. Moses commanded; Paul exhorts. Could Paul have commanded? Well, he told Philemon that he could have given him a command, but he didn't. Paul doesn't command; he says, "I beg of you." He wants you to respond to God, respond to what He has done for you. That is the basis of presenting your whole person to God and that is what Paul says next, the basis.

I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God. What are **the mercies of God?** Paul is stealing the language of mercy from 11:30, 31 and 32. There he showed that before the cross God had tangled Gentiles up in a net of disobedience so that now He could show them mercy and now He has Israel tied up in a net of disobedience so that in the future He can show them mercy. Since in 12:1 we are clearly the recipients of God's mercy now then it is on that basis that we should present ourselves or dedicate ourselves to God. In other words, this is the motive. There is a proper motive to dedicate ourselves to God and that is an appreciation of **the mercies of God.** McClain said, "...the great mistake of modernism" is "they have lost the one motive, the one factor that is powerful enough to get hold of the hearts of men and raise them up to that plane of righteousness where they ought to be. Until sinners have experienced God's mercies, you will get no place. The mercies of God are the basis of all living that is really holy."⁵

Now why does Paul say **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice?** Two things. First, **a living sacrifice.** I thought **sacrifices** were dead. In the OT when a sacrifice was offered it was dead, the blood had to be spilled out and it was dead. But we are not dead sacrifices but **living sacrifices.** Why are we living sacrifices? The short answer is because Christ died but He rose again and when we believe in Him we died with Him and were raised with Him so that we are alive, alive spiritually. Paul already talked about this in Romans 6 so let's turn there. You will see that we are going back to Romans 6 a lot. That is where Paul lays down all the roots for Romans 12. In Romans 6:5 what I will do is circumlocute to give the original sense, which means I will add some words to give the sense so I don't have to go all through this again and we can just get the main idea. Paul says in verse 5, "For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His

resurrection," the physical resurrection. "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body used by the sin nature might be rendered powerless, so that we would no longer be slaves to our sin nature; ⁷for he who has died is freed from the sin nature. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Even so consider yourselves to be dead to the sin nature, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." He's playing off the relationship of the slave to the master. The slave had no will other than that of his master. The slave had to obey the master. That is the way it was. That is who we were when unbelievers, we were slaves of our sin nature and we had to obey the sin nature. But now we have been crucified with Christ and this set us free from the sin nature so that it is no longer our legal master and we are not obligated to obey it. And instead we are alive to God in the sense that He is our legal master and we are obligated to obey Him. And when we make this presentation of ourselves to Him, when we dedicate ourselves to Him as Paul is urging us to do, of our own volition, then we are offering ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice, not some dead person, dead in their transgressions and sins that can't be used for the glory of God, but as a living person, alive to God and useable for His glory. This is a very high calling to be invited into.

The second thing is a **holy sacrifice** and this word **holy** means "set apart" and it's particularly used in a temple context. You will see that much of the language in this verse is temple language; sacrifice, holy, worship, these are all words used in association with the temple. Why do you think that is so? Because you are the temple of God, friend. The temple is not a physical building as it was with Israel; in the Church the temple is spiritual, it is you. You are the most holy place on earth, not the temple mount in Jerusalem that lay in ruins with that despicable Dome of the Rock that sits upon it that represents the great imaginary location of Mohammad's ascent to heaven on a winged horse, even though Jerusalem is never once mentioned in the Koran but only the farthest place which is *al-Aqsa* in Arabic and so the mosque with that name is there. But as detestable as those buildings are they are not on the most holy place in the universe, you are the most holy place because you are the temple of God and the Spirit dwells in you. This is not said here but it is assumed and if you turn to Romans 8 you will see it. Romans 8:9, "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." All believers in the present age have the Spirit of God indwelling them. Verse 10, "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness." Note life. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. ¹²So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." The Spirit is the means by which we live and life is produced through us. That is the same language as Romans 12:1, living sacrifice. We are living sacrifices because we are alive to God and the one

who creates life through us is the Spirit of God who indwells us. He is not mentioned in Rom 12:1 but He is there nonetheless.

And that is why, as we go back, when we present ourselves to God as a living and holy sacrifice, it is **acceptable to God**. The word means "pleasing." It is pleasing to God. God is pleased when we make this dedication because it introduces us to walking by the Spirit such that His life is reproduced through us. That is why it is pleasing to God. We are living the exchanged life. It is His life that pleases God.

And Paul concludes 12:1, **this is your spiritual service of worship**. The word **worship** is another Greek word used in the temple, *λατρεία*, it was used of the priests who served in the temple and carried out the rites and regulations involved in Israel's worship. But now who are the priests? We are the priests. This in addition to the temple. We are the priests and the temple. As priests we offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices for His purposes. This is our **spiritual service**.

The words **spiritual service** translate an interesting word *λογικος* which means "rational and spiritual." It is rational because it is logical and we get our word logic from this word *λογικος*. If God has extended **mercies** to us it is logical that we would dedicate ourselves to Him. It is spiritual because the Spirit of God is the energizing person who makes our lives valuable for His service.

Paul is saying something like this in 12:1; in light of all of God's mercies which I have explained to you in Romans 1-11, I come alongside of you as a friend to encourage you to dedicate your whole self to God as a person made alive from the dead and set apart as the most holy temple on earth which is pleasing to God and a reasonable service because He first served you and spiritual service because Spirit energized and thereby a priestly function.

Now if 12:1 is a once-for-all dedication, as possibly indicated by the aorist tense, and I highly urge you to make such a dedication of yourself to God, not walking an aisle but a conscious dedication made of all your members to God then 12:2 is the daily maintaining of this dedication, as indicated by the present tense. There are two sides of this, one negative and the other positive. On the negative side, **do not be conformed to this world**. The word **conformed** means "model after." Do not be modeled after this world. It is in the passive voice meaning do not be being conformed, do not be in the process of being modeled after **this world**. The world has a way of influencing you into modeling your life after that pattern. A. T. Robertson thinks it means "stop being fashioned" after this world and he is quite right. It is something that we must continually stop doing because the world is continually trying to fashion you into modeling your life after its pattern. The word **world** is actually *αιων* which means "age" and here "the spirit of the age." Constable says, "The "world" (Gr. *aiōn*) is the spirit of our age that seeks to exclude God from life (1 John 2:15). The world seeks to "squeeze you into its own mold."⁶ There are varying spirits from age to age and in different places at different times but they all seek to exclude God from life. With technology the global interconnectedness of societies has made it ever so much easier for Satan to meld many spirits together into a network of deceit. Technically in the West we live in the age of post-

modernism and this accommodates itself to many 'isms, scientism, mysticism, et. al. Postmodernism at the heart means "flux." All is flux. There is no being, everything is becoming; there are no facts, everything is interpretation; there are no absolutes, everything is relative. This is the spirit of the age and it absolutely colors everything. When someone says, "That's just your interpretation" you are hearing the spirit of our age. This is why it's so hard to teach the Bible, because most of the people you are teaching think that you are talking about your interpretation of the Bible. We talk about methods of interpreting but the point of this is to say that grammatical-historical method of interpreting is intrinsic to language and so following it is the only way to arrive at the truth. *So if I could communicate one thing to you in all my ministry it would be that I am not talking about my interpretation of the Bible. I am talking about the facts of the Bible as these facts are spoken by God through the original lexical meanings of the words and syntax.* I have a biblical view of language as the creation of God and sufficient for communicating truth. This translates into a high view of the Bible and its inerrancy. This is what a Bible teacher should have and that is the only reason someone would do original language study, because he considers the words of the original to contain absolute truth. If I did not think that I would not bother learning the languages. The original languages are the closest I can get to truth. That is not to say that truth cannot be acquired through a translation. God is over all languages since He designed it at Creation and divided it at Babel. But the point is that words don't always translate over in a one to one correspondence and so some explaining must be done to get to the exact truth of the matter. That is certainly not the spirit of our postmodern age where the Bible is essentially treated as a metanarrative of an ancient bygone culture that is supremely irrelevant. In our age Paul is saying, "do not be being fashioned after those ideas." That will wreck you spiritually and that is what Satan is doing. He is attacking by slipping the idea in everywhere that all is flux, nothing is stable, there are no absolutes, no facts, no being, only becoming and relativism.

Well, how are you going to avoid it? How are you going to avoid being so heavily influenced by the spirit of our age? It is all around you. It is in your home because you let it in your home. It is in your car because you let it in your car. It is in your workplace because you let it in your workplace or your boss does. It's built into the language. How are you going to avoid being so influenced by it? By following the positive side of this verse, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** The word **transformed** means "to change inwardly." Be changed inwardly in fundamental character. It's also in the passive voice meaning be being transformed, be in the process of being changed inwardly. It's in the present tense and so it means continually be in the process of being changed inwardly. This is not a change that happens one day all at one time. This is something that occurs over time.

How does this change take place? Paul uses a dative of instrument to answer. **By the renewing of your mind.** The Greek word **renewed** is *ανακαινωσις*. We've seen it before when we studied the "inner man" in Rom 7:22. That is where Paul said "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man..." We said "the inner man" is the mind of a regenerate person. Paul is saying that his mind as a regenerate person concurred with the law of God but that he could not keep the law because every time he tried his sin nature was aroused to rebel against

the law. So the inner man or mind needs strengthening. In Eph 3:16 Paul prays that our minds would be strengthened and this strength comes from the Holy Spirit. In 2 Cor 4:16 and Col 3:10 he says that this inner man is the new man and that it needs daily renewal. That is consistent with this idea of the Christian mind in Rom 12:2. Paul is saying our Christian mind needs to be renewed. Obviously it is renewed by the word of God being strengthened by the Spirit of God.

What do you really know about the word of God? How much doctrine do you have to draw from? All of Scripture is profitable. I've had people tell me they've had enough doctrine. That's sad because that is a very arrogant thing to say. Renewal of the Christian mind is a lifelong pursuit. It is not something you will ever arrive at until the resurrection. All of our minds need continual renewal. It is important to note that Paul did not say we need renewal of our speech or renewal of our deeds but renewal of your mind. The reason is because the Christian life is lived out of the mind. Christianity is a thinking man's religion. From the mind changing the speech and behavior can change. But the thinking has to change first and that comes in no other way than training in the word of God.

Note why our minds must be renewed. **So that you may prove what the will of God is.** The **so that** is an infinitive of purpose. It states the purpose for the renewal of the mind. The purpose is **so that you may prove what the will of God is.** The word **prove** is the verb *δοκιμαζω*. This verb used here is very important. Paul first used this verb in Romans 1:28. Let's turn back there. In Romans 1:28 Paul is talking about condemnation and in particular, the descent of pagan Gentiles from knowing God to all kinds of debauchery. In verse 28 he says, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer... The verb translated "see fit" is *δοκιμαζω*. They did not approve of having God in their knowledge any longer. They had God in their knowledge but they did not think that knowledge had any value and so God then gives them over to a depraved mind. This is the picture of what happens to unbelievers. Since we were all unbelievers it is a picture of us when we were unbelievers. Now that we are believers Paul writes in Rom 12:2 that we need our minds to be renewed so that we approve of the will of God, something we disapproved of as unbelievers. We are still in the process of doing this because as unbelievers we are totally fashioned by the spirit of the age and it takes a long time to undo this damage, it takes a lifetime.

This shows that just because you are a believer and you have a Christian mind you still need a change of mind in order to further approve of the worth of **the will of God**. By **the will of God** Paul means that which God has revealed as His purpose and desire for our lives in Scripture. To approve of it, of course, we have to learn it. There is no way we can approve of something we have not tested by putting into practice. As we put the Christian life into practice we see its value and we approve of what we once disapproved.

God's will is then modified by three adjectives, **that which is good and acceptable and perfect**. **Good** is that which is in accordance with God's good character. **Acceptable** means pleasing to Him. **Perfect** means it could not get any better. This is because it is the Spirit of God who produces it through us as we walk by Him.

Constable says, "The Holy Spirit is the unidentified transformer that Paul set in contrast to the world (8:9–11; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 6:17–18; 7:1; Col. 3:9–10; 1 Thess. 5:23; Titus 3:5)."⁷

In conclusion, in general, verse 1 deals with dedicating ourselves to God and verse 2 with maintaining that dedication. The dedication is either once-for-all or urgent. The maintaining of that dedication is undoubtedly continual. In specific, 12:1 deals with the dedication. Paul writes "Therefore" to make application to all that has come before. His plea "I urge you" is not a command which would imply legalism but an appeal to the will and on the basis of "the mercies of God" enjoyed. It is thus the language of grace. The plea is "to present your bodies." This is a dedication or presentation of our entire self. We are to present our entire self a living sacrifice, since Christ died we are alive spiritually, and holy, since set apart as the articles of the temple, which we are. This is pleasing to God that we would voluntarily offer ourselves to His service as Christ voluntarily offered Himself as our sacrifice. To present ourselves to Him is a rational thing to do because of His mercy to us. It is also a spiritual thing to do because it is energized by the Spirit. In 12:2 Paul deals with maintaining the dedication. On the negative side, "do not be being conformed to the spirit of this age." We must be cognizant of the world's desire to fashion us into its mold and it pursues every venue to do so. To avoid it we must on the positive side "be transformed by the renewing of our mind." The mind needs to be renewed daily and this comes through the teaching of the word of God. By means of this we are transformed in speech and deeds so that we live the new life that we are called to live. Through this learning and applying method we may approve the value of the will of God as revealed in Scripture, that it is good and pleasing and perfect.

It may be important for some to see that this is not like Lordship Salvation that says to become a true believer one must dedicate Himself to Christ. What Paul is calling for is someone who is already a believer to dedicate Himself to Christ. This is clear from the fact that in 12:1 he bases the dedication on the mercies of God that have already been enjoyed and understood by the believer. Apart from God first showing mercy to us it would make no sense to lay this requirement on an unbeliever. Paul has now set the stage for everything that follows as far as application and his first subject will be spiritual gifts.

¹ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, p 206.

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, p 729.

³ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1799.

⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1799.

⁵ Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, p 206-7.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:2.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:2.