

THE BOOK OF ROMANS
LESSON 21

Comments on Romans 12

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service.

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

1. What should be the Christian's attitude toward God? 12:1-2.

Paul's opponents had said that the logical end of Paul's doctrine was for people to continue in sin so that grace might have multiplied opportunities to work and bring glory to God. Paul dealt with this nonsense in 6:1 - 8:17. He had shown there that the logical end of his teaching was a life that pursued holiness.

Just the same, if the Christians lived ungodly lives all of Paul's reasoning would go for nothing. "Yes, they talk a good case," an opponent might say, "but when it comes down to the test of living their doctrine doesn't seem to go along with their practice."

While this may not be a logical argument, it is a frequent argument: an ungodly life causes the Word to be blasphemed. Romans 2:24.

This is where 12:1 - 15:13 comes in. It is Paul's call to the saints to "live down" (as well as argue down) the slanders of their opponents. A life of holiness is to be pursued because it is Christ-like to be holy. Peter reminds us that well doing puts to silence the foolishness of men. 1 Peter 2:13ff.

Instead of giving a command, Paul put forth all his apostolic authority in tender appeal -

"I beseech you." This very first expression, one word in the Greek, indicates the character of final chapters of the epistle. Exhortation is not completely absent from the earlier chapters. Doctrine is not completely absent from the final five chapters. That having been said, the earlier chapters and largely explanation while the final chapters are largely exhortation.

The exhortation is made in view of God's great mercy – a basis that should lead each one to dedicate his entire being to God. Literally, Paul exhorts the Romans to offer their bodies as living sacrifices. These sacrifices must have certain characteristics:

1. Living – This is not said in contrast to the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament. No Jew ever offered a dead animal as a sacrifice. Living animals were brought to the altar.

See Romans 6:13,19; Rom. 8:11. Our bodies, once dead in sin, are now made alive in the service of God. They are to be presented to God as living active instruments in his service.

2. "Holy" - from a word that means devoted to the Gods. Any gift given was devoted to the gods. It is easy to see the application - bodies, as living sacrifices, are devoted to the worship of God. Our bodies are important. No command can be obeyed, and no kind of service to God can be rendered without the use of the body. Yet the body here stands for the totality of our being.

3. Well Pleasing – Not only accepted by, but heartily welcomed by the

One to whom believers dedicate themselves.

4. Worship – Paul is thinking about the action of worshiping, the wholehearted consecration of heart, mind, will, words, and deeds, in fact of all one is, has, and does, to God. Nothing less!

v. 2 – It is one thing to point out the goal; it is another matter to point out how the goal is to be reached. Paul tells us what should be shunned and what should be done – shun conformation and seek transformation.

Some want to copy the ways and practices of other people; Paul forbids it. Transformation demands a radical change in thinking and the conduct of those who become Christians. "Transformed" is rendered "transfigured" in Matt. 17:2 and Mark 9:2. The Christian is made responsible for this change; it is not brought about suddenly. Renewing the mind, the inward man, day by day brings it about. No one can transform his character while holding to the same old stock of ideas and ideals.

If you want to learn how to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, read Eph. 4:20-32; Col. 3:2; Heb. 8:10; 10:16; 1 Pet. 1:13. The renewal does not come through some mystic operation of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the word of God.

2. What should be the Christian's attitude toward fellow Christians? 12:3-13

3 For I say, through the grace that was

given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.

4 For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office:

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

6 And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of our faith;

7 or ministry, *let us give ourselves* to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching;

8 or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, *let him do it* with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

A. We, who are many, are one body in Christ. 12:3-8.

Either because Paul knew human nature or because of specific problems in the Roman church, Paul warns them not to have a sense of exaggerated importance. Don't fancy yourself to be irreplaceable – all members have talents, God-given ones at that. 1 Cor. 12:20-31. Strangely, some even carry the attitude over toward God. "Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I" is rejected with the cry, "I am not a worm." Such need to read Job. 25:6; Ps. 22:6; and Isa. 41:14. We must recognize the talents of each and remember that the absence of one keeps the whole from functioning as God intended it to function. The one who says I am not important is the opposite end of the same ugly stick. Could it be a method of drawing attention to ourselves by exaggerating our unimportance?

Paul calls each to the faithful use of his ability. While there is some discussion as to whether these gifts are common or charismatic, mundane or miraculous, there is no need for us to enter the debate. For us they cannot be miraculous, but we must not use that as an excuse to say that we have no responsibility to exercise our talents.

In ordinary language, the gifts are prophesying, rendering practical service, teaching, exhorting, contributing to the needs of people, exercising leadership, and showing mercy. The only one that can be questioned as inapplicable to today is

prophesying. Even it is brought forward when it is understood as taking the word of God (the Bible) and imparting its message to men. The important thing for us to remember is whether supernatural or natural the principles still govern our relationship with our brethren.

v. 3 – Paul warns them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought, but to think soberly. To think soberly is to think sensibly - to think of our proper relations with God and our fellowmen. No one should feel himself to be wise above what is written, nor feel so important as to be domineering.

"Measure of faith" - Has the significance of a measuring instrument. Faith is the instrument by which we are to measure our thinking. Whether faith here refers to the gospel or our faith in the gospel is indifferent since the gospel is to be the source of our personal faith. Rom. 10:17.

B. Be devoted one to another in brotherly love. 12:9-13.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another;

vv. 9-10 - There should be no pretended, hypocritical love; that man who does not abhor evil neither loves the good nor cleaves to it. "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Heb. 1:9.

Because Jesus loved man he hated evil. If we love our fellowman we hate that which is hurtful to him.

When Christians are "tenderly

affectioned one to another" they will fight against everything that is hurtful to others.

They will also in honor prefer one another. See Phil. 2:1-8. This does not require Christians to do business with Christians. A TV repairman at a congregation where I preached discovered that I had taken my set to a non-member to be repaired. He asserted that this passage obligated me to bring it to his shop. When I pointed out that the passage said "preferring one another" and asked what discount he planned to give me, he abandoned his argument if not his conviction. The exhortation does not require that I consider every member to be abler and wiser than I. It does require that I in humility consider every member to be better than I and that I be devoted to him or her.

11 in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;
12 rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer;
13 communicating to the necessities of the saints; given to hospitality.

v. 11-13 - Flagging in zeal (slothful) implies excessive and sluggish indolence.

The Christian must be industrious in the Lord's work, else he can have no hope.

Hope sustains people in all their undertakings; and to the Christian hope of future bliss brings joy and happiness even in tribulations and difficulties.

Patience is steadfastness - endurance. Hope helps the Christian to be patient, or steadfast, in tribulation; for without hope we would not endure trials and persecutions. Patience holds on ; it does not quit.

Realizing our continuous dependence on the Lord leads to steadfastness in prayer. Indifference and a feeling of self-sufficiency causes a neglect of prayer.

To Communicate to the necessity of the saints is to help them in their needs. Hospitality is the receiving and entertaining of guests generously and kindly, or to be generous to any who needs, and that includes strangers.

If all these traits of character are manifested by all the members of a church, that church is a power for good.

3. What should be the Christian's attitude toward outsiders, including enemies? 12:14-21.

vv. 14, 15 - Persecutions are the common lot of Christians. "Yea, and all who would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3:12. It is not personal enmity that brings persecution, but enmity against Christ. The greatest blessing we can confer upon the persecutor is to lead him to be a Christian. To curse does not mean to use ordinary profanity; it is a call for calamity to befall a person. If one has a righteous cause for rejoicing, we should rejoice with him. Too often we envy the good of others. We should also enter into full sympathy with others in their sorrows, showing them that our heart is in the right place.

v. 16 - The admonition to be of the same mind is directly connected with v. 15, but it more than a restatement of that exhortation. It is the Golden Rule imposed in different language. What mind would I have others have toward me? Be of the same mind

14 Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits.

toward them. Don't be ambitious to appear to be greater or better than others. "Associate" or "condescend" literally means "be carried away with." It denotes a yielding or being guided and led in the thoughts, feelings, plans, by humble objects. Thus, condescend as we use it carries a wrong idea. Nothing turns people away faster than an "I am better than you" attitude.

Such a condition of mind makes one feel superior to others and is to be avoided. "Be not wise in your own conceits."

17 Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men.

v. 17 – The Golden Rule strikes again. Returning evil for evil settles nothing and generally makes bad matters worse. Further, returning evil for evil puts one on a level with the evildoers. Spite work is of the devil.

Two wrongs are condemned: 1) vindictiveness, the desire to get even for a suffered wrong; and 2), assuming that private individuals have the right to take upon themselves the function of the civil government in punishing crime. Remember that "an eye for an eye" referred to judicial action and not to private rights.

"Take thought" means to pre-think - to think before you adopt a certain course of action. Honorable actions do not result by accident.

18 If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men.

v. 18 - Christians should strive to be at peace with others. There are two qualifications to the requirement.

1). "If it be possible." We should do our best, without sacrificing truth and duty,

to be at peace with all men. If we preach the truth, some will not like it; thus, it is not possible to be at peace with all men. Peace without sanctification is not worth the name.

2). “As much as in you lieth.” There are situations that require the sacrifice of peace, but we must be certain that we are not responsible for those circumstances. WE must do all within our power to be peaceful until it reaches that point that we must obey God rather than man. Acts 4:19; 5:29. But the Christian can afford to sacrifice his own personal rights and preferences rather than stir up trouble. The Christian should certainly not stir up trouble over matters of no vital importance.

19 Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath *of God*: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord.

20 But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

vv. 19-21 - Paul addresses them as beloved, reminding them that they should have the same attitude toward others. We are to do good unto our enemies and make them burn with shame (coals of fire) that they treated us so. That feeling would promote peace and good fellowship rather than vengeance. The individual should not seek to take satisfaction for injuries with his own hands. Paul quotes Deut. 32:35. It does not refer to final judgment. Under the law of Moses, God took vengeance on evil doers through duly constituted authority. The vengeance here taken will be taken in the same way. In Chapter 13 Paul will show how this is done.