

Romans 12

Division II. PRACTICAL

The Righteousness of the Believer revealed in Gospel Obedience Romans 12-16

Introduction.

It has been said that all doctrine should be practical and all practice should be doctrinal. The Apostle Paul would agree. It is a distinction in Paul's style of writing to move from a doctrinal section to a practical section. This dramatic division can be noted in *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. Chapters 1-3 are full of glorious doctrinal truths. Then in Ephesians 4:1 we read, "*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*"

In like manner, in *The Epistle to the Romans* Paul has been setting forth the great doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Now he speaks to the hearers to move from the doctrine to Christian duty. He wants the saints to go from revelation to responsibility or from the things that are to be believed to the things that are to be done.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present [yield] your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which* is your reasonable service.

12:1 The mercies of God are the mercies that Paul has been explaining in Romans 1-11.

- ◆ There is the mercy of justification whereby guilty sinners are declared righteous in the sight of God through faith in the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary.
- ◆ There is the mercy of salvation whereby the heart is opened to the gospel so that the Savior is seen in all of His splendor and glory and the heart cries out, My Lord and my God!
- ◆ There is the mercy of sanctification or the process of being conformed into the image of Christ through the manifestation of the flesh.
- ◆ There is the mercy of glorification. One day sin shall cease. One day the soul shall be set free from the body of sin and then will come the resurrection day in a new heaven and new earth.

12:1 It is an amazing concept that the body presented to the Lord is even wanted by Him. The world, the flesh, and the devil have used some bodies for unholy purposes and pleasures. Some bodies are old and limited in strength and vitality. Some bodies are diseased or crippled, and yet, God invites individuals to give them to His service. From a human perspective, the reason, in part, is this:

*"Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;*

*He has no tongue but our tongues
To tell men how to die;
He has no help but our help
to bring them to His side."*

~*~

Annie Johnson Flint

There is another sense to the Christians' concept of presenting their bodies to the Lord; the word *bodies* as used in Romans 12:1 refers to the body as it relates to this world. The understanding is that God wants believers to be separated from sin and for good reason. A willful pursuit of sin in the flesh leads to eternal judgment. The Christian is to flee fornication and all manner of evil. (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:8) The Christian is to die to sin and live unto God. (Gal. 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Jude 1:7) The Christian is to be a *living sacrifice* unto the Lord.

12:1 The concept of a *living sacrifice* stands in contrast to all the Old Testament dead sacrifices. No animal ever went in a willing manner to death, but they had to die. Unlike that, the Christian is to be alive unto God with the assurance that the presentation if done properly will be holy and acceptable in His sight. Not only that, but an initial, dramatic, and definite presentation of the body to God for His service is very reasonable. It is reasonable because it is *un*reasonable to pursue a path that will result in ultimate and eternal damnation.

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

12:2 The word "*conformed*" means, to "*be pressed into a mold*". Though the world wants to make every Christian a copy of the first Adam, fallen and depraved, the apostolic counsel is not to allow that to happen. Rather, "*be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). The antidote to sin, the solution to worldliness is a transformed mind. The mind is transformed spiritually in several ways: through reading the Word of God (Psalm 119), by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 5:23), by an act of the renewed will (1 Pet. 3:15), and by the knowledge of the truth (John 17:17).

12:2 Concerning the will of God, a distinction can be made between the decretive will of the Lord, and His preceptive will. God's *decretive* will determines whatsoever comes to pass. (Psa. 115:31; Dan. 4:17,25,32,35; Acts 2:23; Ephesians 1:5,9,11) The decretive will include every raindrop that falls, every sparrow that dies, every hair on the head, and even every sin that is committed. Nothing happens in God's universe outside of the divine decree. (cf. Genesis 6:18; 7:15,24; Matt. 10:29; Acts 2:22,23)

In contrast, God's *preceptive* will is His will by precept or command. It is His moral will. It is the will of God in the things which pleases Him. For example, God commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30) That is His preceptive will; repentance pleases the Lord. However, we know that not all men will repent. Therefore, the preceptive will, the moral will of God, will not always be fulfilled. But the decretive will of God will be always be honored (Romans 9:19) though it be inscrutable.

While no person can fully understand the decretive will of God—any more than the nature of God may be fully comprehended. (Job 9:10; Romans 11:33)—there is a holy obligation to submit to the Lord in reverent obedience, knowing that He does all things well for His will is good, acceptable, and in the end, perfect. (Isa. 45:12,13; Romans 9:16-23; 12:2)

3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

12:3 Having pleaded with the saints to present their bodies to the Lord for spiritual service, the apostle explains why this should happen.

There should be an ethical outworking of the righteousness of God because of the grace that has been bestowed. Because God has been good, it is only right for the redeemed to act in a gracious manner with all due humility.

It has been said that humility is not thinking how lowly one is; humility is not thinking of self at all. According to the Bible, humility is not thinking of one's self more highly than one ought to think. (Romans 12:3)

Humility is having a sober and realistic evaluation of one's gifts and abilities with a willingness to serve in the sphere that the Sovereign has ordained.

Biblical humility allows for individuals to think well of themselves in the sense that a person can know if he or she is intelligent, capable, well organized, personable, attractive, a good singer, etc.

There is nothing wrong with being aware of one's talents and abilities. But there are limits to just how highly a person is to admire or love themselves and not go beyond what natural grace and Divine gifts allow.

Remembering that God, "*hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*" will help to restrain the natural arrogance of the heart. This should not be all that difficult for ultimately there is nothing in life that a person has not been graciously given by the Lord. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. God has given all things in life—wisdom, health, opportunity, time, education, and resources—without which no one would be a success by any standard.

In the Church, the Christian is to restrain from exalting one's self or debasing one's spiritual gift either.

We are not to ignore the fact that God has given to each person a spiritual gift that is to be used. There is such a thing as feigned humility.

It is possible to hold the grace and gifts of God in contempt by refusing to function in the Church Body as God intended. The apostolic exhortation comes to show true humility in a spirit of essential unity.

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

5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

12:4 The unity of the body of Christ is self evident in the fact that, “*as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*” (Romans 12:4,5). Only God is truly independent. Only God is self-sufficient. All else in creation is dependent and interdependent. The Church is no exception. The Church comes together from diverse sources, denominational distinctives, and doctrinal differences, to form one spiritual body in Christ.

The vital unity of Christians with one another is possible because of the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26), and beyond that, the gifts the Holy Spirit brings to bestow in order for Christian service to take place. (1 Cor. 12:1-12)

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

12:6 The “*proportion of faith*” is the objective standard of the Word of God. By the historic faith of the Church (Jude 14) should all prophets be measured.

7 Or ministry, *let us wait* on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

12: 7-8 As there are temporary spiritual gifts so there are permanent gifts. Among the permanent gifts are ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, and the showing of mercy.

◆ **Ministry.** God has ordained that certain individuals be allowed to minister the Word of Truth to others.

◆ **Teaching and exhortation.** While teaching is addressed to the understanding; exhortation is addressed to the conscience and feelings. Ideally, these are always united.

◆ **Giving.** This refers to the ability to give with a cheerful spirit to the Lord’s work without any ulterior motives. (cf. Acts 5:1-11)

◆ **Ruling.** Not everyone by temperament or testimony should be in leadership positions. The Lord equips those who should lead with wisdom, discernment, and insight.

◆ **Showing mercy.** While all Christians are called upon to be kind, there are individuals who have unusually tender hearts in order to show great mercy to those who are in need of financial, emotional, or spiritual. These are just some of the spiritual gifts of grace.

***Commandments for Christian Conduct:
Romans 12:9-12***

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

12:9 In a series of time-honored phrases, the Apostle Paul continues to explain what it means to live out the ethics of the righteousness of God. The commandments are presented in trilogy forms.

◆ ***Let love be without dissimulation.*** When Paul says that love is to be without hypocrisy, he is teaching that love is to be genuine (1 Pet. 1:22). There are those who pretend to love by having a smile on the lips but there is hatred in the heart. An invisible sword is drawn to destroy when the opportunity comes. (Psa. 57:4) Christian love is more authentic and is reflected in outwards expression according to the terms of 1 Corinthians 13:113 and Luke 10:25-37. In summary form, biblical love is not an impulse of the feelings as it is a self-giving expression of right attitude and right actions at the right time. Such self-giving love is like God's love that has no regard for the worthiness of the recipient or object of care.

◆ ***Abhor that which is evil.*** The Bible teaches that there is a time to love and there is a time to hate. (Eccl. 3:8) In particular, there is a time to hate evil and injustice.

◆ ***Cleave to that which is good.*** The ground or soil out of which a righteous hatred of evil grows is a love for that which is good. "*There is a love that hates evil*" (Dr. S. Lewis Johnson)

The heart is to seize on that which is decent and holy in order to perform the will of God.

10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;*

12:10

◆ ***Be kindly affectioned one to another with brother love; in honor preferring one another.*** One day, during the course of His ministry, the Lord's mother and His brothers sought Him out to speak to Him. When the announcement came, Christ turned to the present audience and asked, "*Who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother*" (Matt. 12:48-50). In honor, the Lord preferred those who believed in Him with all their hearts.

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12:11

◆ ***Not slothful in business,*** [i.e., *Not lagging in diligence*]; ***fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.*** There is a natural progression of thought in this trio of exhortations. Christians are to be distinguished by a *diligence* in devotion that does not fall short or lag behind enthusiasm given to other things in life such as work or recreation. There is to be a spiritual *fervency*, which is maintained by the ministry of the Word of God (Luke 24:32).

A life of diligence and fervency will result in *service* for the Lord. One biblical example of all of this is Apollos. His story is told in Acts 18. Apollos was a Jew who had been born at Alexandria.

He was a naturally gifted man who could persuade audiences with his words and knowledge of the Scriptures. Being instructed in the things of the Lord Apollos *was fervent in the spirit* to convince others. When Aquilla and Priscilla heard Apollos speak, they two were impressed, but realized that he needed to understand the *Word of God* more perfectly. After receiving more instruction in the faith, Apollos went forth to serve the Lord more earnestly than ever before. He did not lag behind even the apostles in his zeal to win souls to the Savior. May all Christians be like Apollos.

There is a wonderful story that involves Sir Winston Churchill. In the early days of World War II, after the fall of France, and after the evacuation of soldiers from Dunkirk, Mr. Churchill went before the English Parliament to explain the situation of the country. Things appeared to be rather desperate. The government was told plainly that Adolph Hitler was in total control of Western Europe. *“The whole free world”*, said the Prime Minister, *“is now dependent upon England”*. Then he paused and said: *“Gentlemen, I find that rather exciting”*. Every Christians should find it rather exciting to be able to serve the Lord.

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

12:12

◆ *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.* With these words the apostles expresses the inner workings of the

Christian heart. It is to be a heart filled with joy, patience, and prayer. Joy is not a matter of circumstance for Christian joy can be found in the midst of tragedy such as disease or death. Rather, joy is the grasp that one has been given by the Holy Spirit on the meaning of any situation. (John 15:11; John 16:21,22,24) *“The Christian does not sink under present trials, because he is buoyed up by the hope of future glory and the divine strength which is imparted to him through prayer. Those who are without God in the world are necessarily destitute of hope, for hope belongs only to those who know God”*. (Ephesians 2:12 Romans, Geoffrey B. Wilson)

Those who know the Lord always have hope and with hope comes the ability to endure the sufferings of time all the while being sustained by prayer. One night long ago, in a cell in the city of Philippi in Macedonia, two men, Paul and Silas sang songs to the Lord and prayed after being arrested and beaten for their faith. Heaven heard and rewarded such faith for later that same night several new names were written down in glory. The Savior gave His servants souls for their labors, and it was sufficient. (Acts 16:16-34)

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

12:13 As the apostle continues to set forth a series of concrete ethical concepts for Christian believers, it must not be forgotten that the foundation on which these injunctions rest is doctrine. In Romans 1-11 the great doctrinal

truths have been set forth. Then we come to Romans 12:1 and to the transitional word, *therefore*. Paul writes, “*I beseech you therefore brethren*”. What does he mean? Paul means that because of certain doctrines, a particular type of behavior is necessitated for the Christian and a principle is established: doctrine is important. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield wrote, “*What after all is peculiar to Christianity is not the religious sentiment and its working, but its message of salvation; in a word, doctrine. To be indifferent to doctrine is but another way of saying we are indifferent to Christianity*” (*The Light of Systematic Theology*). Christian doctrine naturally leads to a Christian behavior that is both ethical and practical as the following injunctions reveal.

◆ ***Distributing to the necessity of [the] saints.*** In the ancient world, the unity between the social classes was not as agreeable as it is today. Generally speaking, people were either rich or poor, with the majority being numbered among the poor. The message and ministry of Christ mandated that the rich should look after the needs of those less fortunate. (1 Tim. 6:17-19) Specifically, those Christians who had been given generous resources by God were to look out for the needs of other saints. One way to honor this gospel duty was to be hospitable.

◆ ***Given to hospitality.*** Since travel was difficult and uncomfortable at this time in history, families who lived great distances apart would often agree themselves to establish Guest Friendships. The idea was to provide

lodging to traveling members who were well known or related. With the passing of time and the emergence of a new generation, a way was found to continue the cultural exchange by issuing a sign of recognition. Half of a token would be given to one household and half to another. In the course of travel, individuals could then present the token and, if the two halves tallied or matched, a place of rest was virtually guaranteed.

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

12:14

◆ ***Bless them, which persecute you: bless, and curse not.*** As loving hospitality was to be provided for the saints, so graciousness was to be extended to those who showed no hospitality but open hostility. Now, it would be nice if the persecution of the saints was restricted in administration to those outside the family of faith, but that is not the case. The enemy has come to sow tares among the wheat. (Matt. 13:25) Not only does the world hate the Christians (John 15:18) but the world, along with the flesh, and the devil has come into the Church to persecute the saints. (Zech. 13:6) As a result, much persecution of the saints comes from other professing Christians. The result in Christendom as a whole is great turmoil and division.

If there is to be any peace in local assemblies and local communities then the practice of blessing the perpetrators of persecution must begin. While it is not easy, it is the stated will of God, the

example of Christ, (Luke 23:34; Matt. 6:15) and the exhortation of the apostle.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

12:15

◆ ***Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*** If the believer can endure persecution then surely there is the ability to adjust to the moods and tragedies of others so that there is rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep.

Of the two facets of the soul's sensitivity, the second injunction is easier to perform than the first. One of the early church father, Chrysostom (c. 347-407) noted that it was easier to weep with them who weep because nature has prepared the heart to enter into the sorrows of others, but envy stands in the way of rejoicing with those who have been blessed by God. The petulant heart can actually resent the blessings of God on others (John 21:17-22). But the gracious heart will want to honor those whom the Lord has been pleased to honor. (Phil. 4:10; 2 John 4; 3 John 3)

16 *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

12:16

◆ ***Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*** The Law of

Selflessness and Harmony is brought into view with these apostolic words as believers are told to be humble. For some, that is very hard to do. The story is told that D.L. Moody once met a man on the streets who said to him. "*You know, Mr. Moody, I am a self-made man.*" Mr. Moody replied, "*Young man, you have just relieved the Almighty of a great responsibility*". There is room in most of us for less thinking *about high things* and more thinking of humble thoughts. (John 1:26,27; Phil. 2:4-8)

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

12:17

◆ ***Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*** When the heart is humble, there will be less inclination to repay in kind those who have wounded with their words and actions. There is such a thing as the Law of Non-hostility.

Of course, this does leave the sheep of God open to the preying wolves both practically and doctrinally. (Matt. 7:15; Mark 10:16; Luke 10:3; Acts 20:29) Those who love, embrace, and defend the doctrines of grace know something of the hostile nature of wolves.

Nevertheless, when the wolves attack and justice is needed to right any wrongs, the justice is to be administered by the Divine Being who promises to intervene for it is written, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*".

Because God will do what is right, the believer is to make gracious provisions for his enemies. If they are hungry, food is to be provided. If they are thirsty, liquid refreshment is to be given. The reason for this is so that the soul of the saint will not be soiled by the filth of the flesh. In the spiritual warfare, evil can only be overcome by doing well to the enemies of the Cross. Oh, may the Lord grant the supernatural strength of the Holy Spirit for this gospel obedience as a love response to saving grace.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth [depends on] in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

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

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome [conquer] evil with good.

*“Teach me to love Thee
as thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame—
The baptism of the heaven
descended Dove;
My heart an altar,
and thy love the flame.”*

~*~

*Spirit of God,
Dwell Thou within My Heart*

~*~

George Croly, 1854

Study Guide

Romans

Questions on Romans 12

1. List four mercies of God.
2. Explain the distinction between the decretive will of God and preceptive will.
3. List four spiritual temporary service gifts.
4. Using the form of trilogies list the commandments to Christians found in Romans 12:9-21.
5. Define "*dissimulation.*"
7. Four spiritual temporary service gifts include ministry, teaching, giving ruling, showing mercy.
8. The following list of trilogies can be found in Romans 12:9-21.
 - a. Let love be without dissimulation
 - b. Abhor that which is evil
 - c. Cleave to that which is good

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Answers to Romans 12

1. Four mercies of God include the following.
 2. There is the mercy of justification whereby guilty sinners are declared righteous in the sight of God through faith in the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary.
 3. There is the mercy of salvation whereby the heart is opened to the gospel so that the Savior is seen in all of His splendor and glory and the heart cries out, "*My Lord and my God!*"
 4. There is the mercy of sanctification or the process of being conformed into the image of Christ through the manifestation of the flesh.
 5. There is the mercy of glorification. One-day sin shall cease.
6. The decretive will include every raindrop that falls, every sparrow that dies, every hair on the head, and even every sin that is committed. Nothing happens in God's universe outside of the divine decree. (Genesis 6:18; 7:15-24; Matt. 10:29; Acts 2:22,23). In contrast, God's *preceptive* will is His will by precept or command
9. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brother love
10. Not slothful in business
11. Fervent in Spirit

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12. Serving the Lord
13. Rejoicing in hope
14. Patient in tribulation

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15. Continuing instant in prayer
16. Distributing to the necessity of the saints
17. Given to hospitality

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18. Bless them which persecute you
19. Bless and Curse not
20. Rejoice with them that do rejoice

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21. Weep with them that weep
22. Be of the same mind one toward another
23. Mind not high things

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24. Condescend to men of low estate
25. Be not wise in your own conceits
26. Recompense to no man evil for evil

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27. Provide things honest in the sight of all men
28. If it is possible, live peaceably with all men
29. Avenge not yourselves

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30. If your enemy is hungry, feed him
31. If your enemy is thirsty give him to drink
32. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good
33. The word “*dissimulation*” means to be without hypocrisy.

Personal Application and Reflection

Please answer the following questions with judgment day honesty. Simply mark “*Yes*” or “*No*” at the end of each question as it applies to your own heart. This is not a test but a means of self-examination.

1. Do you have the spiritual gift of prophecy?
2. Do you have the spiritual gift of faith?
3. Do you have the spiritual gift of ministry?
4. Do you have the spiritual gift of teaching?
5. Do you have the spiritual gift of exhortation?
6. Do you have the spiritual gift of giving?
7. Do you have the spiritual gift of ruling?
8. Do you have the spiritual gift of showing mercy?
9. Do you have the spiritual gift of cheerfulness?

10. Do you love people without dissimulation or hypocrisy?
11. Do you hate that which is evil?
12. Do you cleave or embrace that which is good?
13. Are you kind and affectionate towards others?
14. Are you slothful in your business dealings?
15. Are you fervent in your spiritual life?
16. Are you serving the Lord?
17. Do you rejoice in hope over the circumstances of life?
18. Are you patient in times of tribulation and suffering?
19. Do you have a consistent prayer life?
20. Do you help those saints who are in need?
21. Do you open your home for hospitality?
22. Do you rejoice with those who are rejoicing?
23. Do you weep with those whose hearts are hurting?
24. Do you strive to be of like mind with others rather than find a way to argue and criticize?
25. Are you a humble person?
26. Do you entertain proud notions of yourself in the privacy of your mind?
27. Do you try to take revenge on your enemies?
28. Would you feed your enemy?
29. Do you try to overcome evil with good?
30. Does an evil practice have a place in your life?