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Daily Bible Readings

If you have any suggestions on a Bible reading plan we can do together next year let me know.

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Blog

This week's blog is on "Everyone Doing Their Part." Give examples from Scripture and/or our group at Lakeview of people who do their part to make the body function as God intends for it to.

Romans 12-13: "Present Your Bodies A Living Sacrifice"

By Dee Bowman

The epistle to the Romans is one of the most enlightening books in the Bible. It is demanding, practical, and by its very design makes confidence and encouragement possible for every Christian in every age. The book has a basic two-fold goal. First, it brings all men under the condemnation of sin (3:10; 3:23). Secondly, it gives all men the assurance that they can be saved from such sin by obedience to the gospel of Christ which is described in Paul's thematic (1:16) as "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The entire process is viewed in miniature in 6:23 where Paul says, "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The twelfth and thirteenth chapters of this great discourse constitute the most practical part of the entire treatise, citing those things which comprise the obligations and responsibilities which pertain to the individual disposed to giving himself as a living sacrifice unto God. In these chapters, it becomes obvious that the entire relationship between God and man is not at all national, nor does it have anything to do with genealogy, but is a very personal matter between the individual and God. Paul affirms such in 2:6 when he says that God "will render to every man according to his deeds . . ." In this same connection, he declares vehemently in verse 11 that, "there is no respect of persons with God." The axis on which the context of our study turns is found in the first verses of chapter 12. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God,

which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." In the following two chapters are to be found a number of timely admonitions which pertain to the giving of oneself a such a living sacrifice unto God.

At the outset we observe the function of the individual in this most practical advice. Paul indicates that a man is capable of the presentation of his body in sacrifice to God by the mere fact that he enjoins its doing. It is not a matter of coercion, nor is it the action of some automaton performing by some sort of law of necessity, but a predetermined, purposeful, and very personal voluntary process. Every person must present his own body (cf. Rom. 6:17), for the assignment can be carried out no other way.

Such service is reasonable. It is reasonable because of the case Paul has so carefully prosecuted to this point. Its assignment comes as a direct result of the foregoing information concerning salvation. Since God has concluded the Gentile under sin because of his disdain for the law (Chapter 1), and since he has likewise pronounced the Jew guilty because of his disregard for the law (Chapter 2), and since he has shown both the possibility of justification by obedience to the faith of the gospel (Chapter 5, following), it is only sensible or reasonable that each person present his body as a living and active offering to God Almighty.

Such a presentation is accomplished by a transformation from the world. The process is described in both positive and negative terms. First, "be not conformed (fashioned) according to this world." Positively, be rather "transformed." This action is again sensible and requires the "renewing of your mind," which implies a change in the "morph" or the essential part of man. All such action is an effort to "prove" the word of God. The term "prove" is an assayers' term used to describe the action of ascertaining the genuineness of metals, and is here used in the sense of testing and trying to deduce the pure truth.

The responsibility of presenting one's body as an active sacrifice to God is the most serious action if life. It means that one's love for God is so intense that he offers himself entirely to God. In doing so, he completely releases himself without reservation to the doing of the bidding of God regardless of consequences. As such a devotee, he rids himself of his own selfish intentions and purposes and bows his entire being in meek submission to God. Let there be no mistake about it, to offer oneself as a living sacrifice to God, holy, acceptable is not a flippant or trivial act, but a mature, deliberate and serious pledge of total allegiance to the Sovereign of us all.

Man's Areas of Operation

Every man operates in several spheres of influence simply as a result of his being a social creature. In this text, Paul will treat all of them as they each relate to the offering of oneself as a sacrifice to God. Notice carefully that at no time does the Christian ever lose his iden-

Practical Chapters in the Bible

Romans 12:1-8

Points to Consider

1. Change is Inevitable
2. Humility is Required
3. Interdependence is Euphoria

Change is Inevitable

We have little affect on how much things change around us, but we have total control on how those things change us.

Rom 12:1-2 *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. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

When we present ourselves to God as **living** sacrifices we will change!

Judg 6:14-15 *Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" 15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."*

Gideon was threshing wheat to **hide** from the Midianites.

When God told him he was going to deliver His people, Gideon couldn't see it because He had not presented himself as a living **sacrifice**.

Judg 6:21-24 *Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face." Then the Lord said to him, "Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die." 24 So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-Is-Peace.*

When Gideon saw the Angel of the Lord face to face, his life **changed** forever.

Judg 8:18-21 *And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" So they answered, "As you are, so were they; each one resembled the son of a king." 19 Then he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." 20 And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. 21 So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks.*

Gideon's Transformation:

- Threshing grain to hide it from the Midianites.
- He destroyed the altar of Baal at night because he feared the men of the city.
- He asked God for a sign before he started mounting his army.
- God allowed him to hear a man telling a dream that foretold of Gideon's victory over the Midianites. This was when his mind was transformed. **Judg 7:15-16** *And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand."*
- Then there was the moment of victory over the Midianites when Gideon killed their leaders.

Gideon was not conformed to the Baal worship of the day, but he was transformed by the re-
newing of his mind.

Paul is another example of one who made a huge transformation.

Humility is Required

Rom 12:3-4 *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.*

Paul told **everyone** who was among them not to think of themselves more highly than they should.

Notice that God is the one who gives to each man a measure of faith.

1 Cor 15:8-11 *Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

If we are going to be successful working together as Christians, we **all** need to remember what we once were.

We all need to be keenly aware that all glory belongs to God. Paul says he worked harder than all the rest of the apostles, but he knew it was God's grace that allowed him to do it.

Humility puts the **results** above the credit. The result of the preaching was believing Christians. It didn't matter who did the preaching.

2 Cor 12:7-8 *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*

Paul's thorn in the flesh made him **rely** more on God's grace and less on his own abilities.

Interdependence is Euphoria

Rom 12:4-8 *For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 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; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

The church only works when we work **together**.

Neh 4:15-18 *And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.*

Everyone returned to **his** work. Everyone knew his role and fulfilled that role.

Acts 11:22-24 *Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*

Barnabas **encouraged** them that they should purpose in their hearts to serve the Lord.

Ex 18:13-14 *And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. 14 So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"*

Moses led with **diligence**. He served the people from early in the morning until late in the evening.

The story of the Good Samaritan is a good example of serving with cheerfulness.

Points We Considered

1. Change is Inevitable
2. Humility is Required
3. Interdependence is Euphoria

tity when he changes from one area of operation to another. Whenever, wherever he is, he must operate as one who has emphatically dedicated himself to the service of his master.

Responsibility To The Church (12:3-8)

The church is people. One who has determined to present himself in service to God must necessarily participate with others who share his same determination. Such action is not only necessary, but commanded (Heb. 10:23-25). This "body" of believers is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). At the time of this writing the church had the need of spiritual gifts for its growth and spiritual well-being. Since there is a seeming propensity to elevate those who have some special talent (whether miraculously bestowed or a natural endowment does not matter) to a place of prominence, there is also a human tendency for those who receive such accolades to be high minded or heady. The man who presents his body to God must not be so inclined toward excessive and inordinate self confidence, realizing that his abilities are not of his own doing, but are provided by God. The man of God will be impressed with the need for all the various parts of the body to work together toward the accomplishment of the common goal. It is God who bestows all gifts (then as now) and recognition of that fact will cause the converted man of God to be more interested in the proper use of them than in glorying because he is possessed of them. Paul resultantly advises that he who prophecies should let it be according to what has been allowed him for its doing; he who ministers let him be content with his duty to minister; he who exhorts should pay attention to his own area of service; he who gives should give sincerely and not for public spectacle; he who teaches should attend to his own duties; and he who shows mercy should do so without begrudging his actions. In the church every man should do what he can.

Responsibility To All Men (12:9-16)

All of man's actions should have one motive – love. Such unpretended love is not only necessary for those with whom he shares his filial relationship in the church, but for all men everywhere. For the Christian who seeks to offer his body as a living sacrifice to God, such love must extend to every area of his

life and the guiding principle which regulates his every activity is to love the good and abhor that which is evil. This love will seek the best interests of all with whom he has to do. Several things are set forth as illustrations of the type of actions which are characteristic of one who has so renewed his mind. He will not be lazy as regards his various obligations; he will be deeply devoted in his service to God (12:11). He will be seen happily rejoicing in the hope that is in Christ Jesus; he will endure meekly the vicissitudes of life; he will derive strength for the day by regular prayer to God (12:12). He is charitable to those of his kinship; he is careful to entertain strangers (12:13). He is not spiteful, but invokes blessings even on those who would do him harm (12:14). He is empathetic, involved in both the joy and the sorrow of those with whom he has contact (12:15). And he has a certain sameness toward everyone. He treats all with the same devotion and attention, be they rich or poor, educated or illiterate. And he calls no special attention to his own accomplishments, nor does he take any special pride in his own deeds. In short, he is not fashioned according to the world, but transformed to a higher and more quality existence.

Responsibility Toward Adversaries (12:17-21)

God has never assumed that man would live in a troublefree society. He has, nonetheless, imposed certain regulations and attitudes as those to be cultivated for times of unrest and trouble. That man who has presented his body as a living sacrifice must learn to "seek peace and ensue it" (1 Pet. 3:11). Paul first advises that the Christian should not be vindictive. The reason is simple: he is not qualified to mete out vengeance. To his friends, he will be too charitable, to his enemies too strict. But he can trust God who is eminently qualified for such punitive responsibility. And he can learn that prolonged anger is not for his good (Cf. Eph. 4:26). This man with the renewed mind discourages trouble by providing for his needs without partaking of that which is evil or ill-gained. Paul's assignment is clear: Do not ask for trouble! Discourage difficulties! But he immediately accedes to the obvious truth that such will not always be possible. So he says, "if it be possible, be at peace," indicating that a strenuous

effort be made to make it so. And when such is not possible, the child of God is to take care not to seek to repay, but rather to "give place to wrath," an enjoinder to wait until God sees fit to recompense, for He is well able. Conversely, the man of God will react to ill-treatment by loving his enemies and by doing good to them that spitefully use him (cf. Matt. 5:43-48). The result of such action is then shown by Paul (notice that the result is given, not the motive for doing good to your enemies): that by so doing he may cause the adversary keen reflection upon his unkind deed. He says, "be bigger than your problems!" To react to adversity with a proper attitude is to overcome evil; to do less is to be overcome of it.

His Responsibility To Civil Authority (13:1-9)

The person who is disposed to subjugate his will to that of the Father must require and maintain a right attitude toward authority. This authority takes two basic forms: supreme authority, which belongs to God, and delegated authority, or the empowerment of others by God. One such delegation of God's power is seen in civil government. Every person must be subject to such powers for they are appointed or established by decree from God. And while it is certainly so that such powers can be abused or mishandled, the godly man must continually submit to them as long as their requirements do not contradict the laws of God. In fact, Paul asserts that to resist civil authority is tantamount to resisting God who is the source of that power.

The fact that man is a social creature demands that he have some sort of civil control. God has provided for that control in civil government. As a citizen, the Christian is to be subject, for says the writer, the very purpose for that power is to initiate such regulations as will provide for the general welfare of all those who are disposed to do right: Such respect shows regard for system, harmony, and peace. To disdain such power is to invite chaos, disunity, even anarchy. In civil law, there is the inherent right of punitive agency, or the right of enforcement, too. Paul warns that those who would disobey law should be afraid, for he says, "he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Furthermore, the Christian's motive is a consideration. Paul says that such submission must

be “for conscience sake” and not just in fear of being punished. That is, a righteous man will submit simply because it is the right thing to do, even if no one is watching!

The Christian’s obligation extends into the area of funding the processes of government and the recognition of its various officers as well. That person who seeks to present his body a living sacrifice must extend his honesty and usefulness into this as well as all areas of life. In this regard, he is to pay his taxes, legal assessments, foreign duties and the like. To do less is to incur the displeasure of government whose charge it is to attend to such matters. In addition, the Christian is called upon to extend proper honor and accord to dignitaries, for such regard is also a demonstration of his respect for authority.

Such submissions make possible a free course of action for the God-fearing man. Also, these benign actions insure a better atmosphere in which to communicate the message of Christ. And it furthermore demonstrates to government, no matter the type, that Christianity is not a detrimental competitor to civil power, but a respecter of it. These obligations are as applicable today as at the time of their writing.

Love: The Supreme Obligation (13:8-10)

Every man who would present himself as a sacrifice to God has one social obligation which is superior to all others. He is obligated to love his neighbor. This grace-love is the kind of intellectual devotion which seeks the benefit of the object of such consideration, no matter if he is friend or enemy. Because of that fact, this debt is forever owed and can never be completely satisfied. Paul illustrates that fact by showing that love is to be at the base of all the universally pertinent commands relating to and governing man’s relationships with his fellows. This sublimated form of human affection is the very same as was enjoined by Jesus in Matt. 22:34-40. He, too, says that it is the foundation for a proper relationship with others. In fact, the summation in 13:10 is a demonstration to a proof: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Notice, too, that love is not just the basis of the law of conduct to others, but also the end, or fulfillment of that law as well. We see

just how important the supreme motive is when we come to consider that love is both the foundation and the goal of law.

An Encouragement Is Given (13:10-14)

The final part of this great practical text provides still another motive for presenting our bodies living sacrifices to God. True, there is a warning here, but to my mind it is more an encouragement than a warning. It is similar to the exhortation given in Gal. 6:9, “And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” It seems to me that the fact that “our salvation is nearer than when we believed” is a great motivation for being sober in attitude and faithful in conduct. This kind of comfort provides fuel for perseverance and patience and being then so emboldened with such assurances, the Christian is admonished to prepare for the inevitable conflict by equipping himself with the armor of light. His conduct, then, becomes an illustration of his faith and it becomes apparent to all that here is a decent, tasteful, and modest person who is committed to serving God. Such a person is not given to carnal impulses such as carousing, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity. He has put off all the usual proclivities toward jealousy and its accompanying strifes and has, on the other hand, adorned himself with the principles of Jesus Christ. Realizing that the flesh has nothing to offer but a moment’s satisfaction, he makes no provision for the gratification of it.

Conclusion

Let us present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, holy, acceptable to God, for it is our reasonable service. And let us not be conformed to this world, but let us be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove that good and perfect will of God. For, if we miss heaven, we have just missed all there is!

QUESTIONS

- What is the two-fold goal or message of Romans?
- Memorize Romans 12:1-2.
- Express in both positive and negative terms the change brought about in the Christian’s life.
- How should a Christian look

upon the gifts and abilities which he has?

- When love renews and fills the mind, what is the practical effect on our conduct toward our fellow man?
- What may cause an enemy to be ashamed of mistreating his Christian neighbor?
- Since a government may do things which a Christian disapproves (justly or unjustly), he is freed by God from all obligations toward civil law, taxes or rulers. Prove or disprove this statement.
- God does not intend for civil government to use force or take vengeance on evil-doers. Prove or disprove.
- How can the love in a person work good to his enemy, or can love work good only toward a friend?
- If we understand that “our salvation is nearer than when we believed,” how will this change our attitudes and actions for the better?

Truth Magazine XXIII: 1, pp. 25-27
January 4, 1979