

# Romans: Chapter Twelve

## Romans 12.1-15.13: SERVICE (Righteousness Reproduced)

Romans 12 commences the final major section of the epistle. The apostle has moved from *doctrine* to *duty*; and positional righteousness *reckoned* to practical righteousness *reproduced* in the lives of the saints. The gospel is intended to transform a person's life, thus what God has done for us and in us, must be in evidence through us. **David Newell:** *All true godly behaviour is the natural product of an appreciation of sound doctrine.* This section therefore gives a general outline of practical Christian living, much of which is clearly based on the words of the Lord Jesus, cp. 12.14, Luke 6.28.

### The Exhortation of Supreme Devotion (12.1-2)

**v.1:** *Personal consecration* (vv.1-2) is the foundation of the *practical conduct* that follows (vv.3-21). Once we have committed ourselves to God, we can begin to serve others. In v.3 Paul will speak with apostolic authority, but here he tenderly takes his place alongside his brethren to plead with them. The basis of his appeal is the great mercy (compassion) of God so clearly emphasised, not only in 11.30-32, but also the whole epistle. The wonder of *justification* (Romans 1-5), *sanctification* (Romans 6-7), *glorification* (Romans 8) and *eternal purpose* (Romans 9-11) should cause us to willingly and worshipfully lay down our lives for God. **CT Studd:** *If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.* The word 'present' (*paristemi*, 'yield' in 6.13) means to 'place beside' another. Christians are those who, characteristically, have completely (*aorist*) placed themselves at the disposal of their God, like a tool in the carpenter's hand. Specifically, 'bodies' (representative of the whole person), which in unconverted days were entirely used in the service of *sin* (cf. 3.13-15) are now to be used for the glory of God and as the vehicle of *righteousness* (6.19). These sacrifices (which implies *cost*, 2 Corinthians 4.10-11) have three qualities. They are: *living*, *holy* and *acceptable*. Living, as those who are 'alive from the dead' (6.13) and walking in 'newness of life' (6.4) in contrast to dead animal sacrifices. Holy, set apart to God and free from blemish. Acceptable, devoted to God's will causing a sweet savour to ascend to Him (well-pleasing). This sacrificial response to God's mercy is described as our 'reasonable service'. Animal sacrifices were brought to the altar with no appreciation or consciousness of why they were there. In contrast, believers devote themselves entirely to God as a rational, intelligent and deliberate act of spiritual worship. Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one's life to him is the height of folly and irrationality (Schreiner). Has the wonder of salvation so gripped us that we feel we can hold nothing back?

**v.2:** Such a devoted life is in evidence through *non-conformity* and *transformation*. Negatively, believers are commanded 'not to be conformed to this world (age)'. **JB Phillips** famously translates: *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.* The age we live in is evil (Galatians 1.4) and ruled by Satan (2 Corinthians 4.4). Believers are therefore not to assume an outward expression which is patterned after the world. Our dress, language, actions and activities should be determined by the *word* (will of God) not the *world*. Positively, believers are to be 'transformed' by the 'renewing of the mind' (inward). The word 'transformed' is used of the Lord Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17.2; Mark 9.2); His appearance completely altered as His glory was expressed in the form of the *King of kings* (Mark 9.1), rather than a lowly *servant* (Philippians 2.6-7). Thus, the character and conduct of believers should be fundamentally transformed away from the standards of the world and into the image of Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 3.18). Like that of a caterpillar to a butterfly, a vital change expressed in new life is expected (*metamorphosis*). How is this possible? Through the adjustment of our thinking by the word of God! The believer has a new nature and mind (cf. Ephesians 4.23; Colossians 3.10; 2 Corinthians 4.16). As we are occupied with Christ and His word, we are transformed into moral and spiritual conformity with God's will. **Leckie:** *Transformation is heart occupation with Christ.* This results in the discernment and proving of God's 'good' (beneficial *manward*), 'acceptable' (pleasing *Godward*) and (morally) 'perfect' will. This is all we need to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God. Worldliness hinders Christlikeness.

### The Exercise of Spiritual Gift (12.3-8)

**v.3:** Our renewed minds help us make a true evaluation of ourselves. No believer is to proudly overestimate (lit. 'over-think'), or even under-estimate themselves, but think sensibly and reasonably. After all, anything we are spiritually is by God's grace – there is nothing for *me* to glory in! Indeed, God has divided to each believer a 'measure' (quantity) of spiritual gift (cf. Ephesians 4.7; 1 Corinthians 7.17). 'Of faith' probably refers to the *source* of the gift rather than its *kind* (possessive genitive). **v.4:** The following verses (vv.4-8) are explanatory. Just as the human body has many different parts (members), but not all parts have the same function (activity) so it is amongst Christians. **v.5:** There are many believers (diversity) with different spiritual gifts, but we are all 'one body in Christ' (unity) and depend upon one another to function effectively (harmony). Believers are united because they are united with Christ! There is no doubt this kind of teaching was much needed at Rome amongst the multi-ethnic Christian community (cf. 14.13, 15).

**v.6:** Thus, by the grace of God every believer has spiritual gift that is to be exercised for the benefit of every other believer. In these three verses, Paul enumerates *seven* gifts which divide grammatically into *four* and *three*. The first four emphasise the *sphere* of exercise, the last three the *spirit* of exercise. Prophets. They spoke spontaneously by direct revelation from God in order to edify, exhort and comfort (Acts 11.28, 21.10-11; 1 Corinthians 14.3). There are no prophets today as this was a foundational gift whilst the canon of Scripture was being completed (Ephesians 2.20). Prophets spoke 'according to the proportion (*analogia*, true agreement) of (the) faith' which may be a warning against going beyond what God gave them and faith received (WE Vine) or the definite article points to the body of truth, so prophets must not contradict what had already been divinely revealed (cf. 1 Corinthians 14.29). **v.7: Ministry**. The gift of serving others in their trials, afflictions and sicknesses. These individuals are more concerned about serving others than remembering themselves (cf. 16.1-2; 2 Timothy 1.16). Teacher. One who gives instruction and expounds divine revelation. The teacher has taken the place of the prophet today (2 Peter 2.1). It requires great diligence to search, arrange, explain and apply Scripture. **v.8: Exhortation**. One who speaks to the heart, challenging the will and conscience (Acts 4.36, 11.23). He calls the saints to match their profession with practice. In the case of these last three gifts, Paul emphasises *sphere* and *commitment* by saying 'ministry, let us wait on ministering' or 'if it is teaching, he must teach' (NET). Those who have such gifts should *devote* themselves to using them and not try their hand in other spheres. Are you a teacher? Then do not try to prophesy, but give yourself wholeheartedly to teaching. Giving. Those who in a particular way impart their earthly possessions on those who are needy (Acts 4.37). This they do with 'simplicity', i.e. generously and without ulterior motive. Rule. To take the lead and guide the flock by standing before them as an example. This must be done with 'diligence' (intense effort and determination). Showing mercy. Those who gladly and readily ('cheerfulness') show particular empathy and compassion for those in distress (Acts 9.36).

#### The Exposition of Sincere Love (12.9-21) To Saints (vv.9-13); To Society (vv.14-21)

Although Paul is not always specifically speaking about **love**, the injunctions of this section all flow from this most basic and fundamental of Christian virtues (Romans 13.8, 10; Galatians 5.14, 22). **v.9:** 'The love sincere' is literally how the Greek reads, suggesting this is a title for what follows. Christians do not *impersonate* love (*hypokrites*), but demonstrate true *agape* by hating evil and clinging (like glue) to what is good (Psalm 97.10). **v.10:** Believers must be devoted to one another in 'brotherly love' exhibiting the kind of tenderness and care that marks the best of earthly families. This love is expressed in valuing and honouring others before ourselves. **v.11:** Christians must never be lacking or slow in their zeal (not related to secular business activities), but 'fervent' (enthusiasm at boiling point) in the Spirit (Acts 18.25) as they serve the Lord. **v.12:** Concerning trials in the way, believers rejoice in hope of future glory (8.20, 24), patiently endure afflictions (*thlipsis*) and persevere in prayer. **v.13:** The saints must not become so preoccupied with their own troubles that they forget others. There should be practical and material fellowship with those who are needy (Acts 2.44-45), perhaps through earnestly seeking opportunities to be hospitable.

**v.14:** A shift in grammatical style suggests a change in focus towards people in society in general. Believers are to constantly bless their persecutors by responding in kindness and seeking their welfare, rather than wishing them evil. **v.15:** The Lord Jesus rejoiced with those who rejoiced (John 2) and wept with those who wept (John 11). **Chrysostom:** *It is natural to sympathise with sorrow, but it requires a noble soul to rejoice in the joy of others.* **v.16:** Believers should so enter into the feelings of one another that they 'think the same thing' creating harmony in their relationships. It is wrong to think of ourselves as socially, intellectually or spiritually superior to others, instead, association with people of lower reputation and standing in society is encouraged. **v.17:** These final verses deal in particular with the Christian's enemies. There should be no retaliation or desire to hurt anyone who seeks to do us evil (harm), instead, we must think beforehand what is commendable in the sight of all men. **Leckie:** *Without compromising doctrine or morals, we must be watchful as to what others think, taking care that words and deeds are not inconsistent with profession.* **v.18:** Peace should be the watchword of the believer, seeking harmony (not argument or division) with all men. Paul recognises that this may not always be within the Christian's power to achieve, but, wherever possible, they should never be responsible for breaking the peace. **v.19:** In light of the impending great persecution of the believers in Rome (cf. 8.18), Paul appeals compassionately not to seek vengeance or retaliation on their persecutors (1 Peter 2.23). This prerogative belongs to God. The question of wrath, judgment and vengeance is His (Deuteronomy 32.35; 2 Timothy 4.14). God is the maintainer of moral order in the world, and the righting of wrongs is to be committed to Him. **vv.20-21:** Christians should therefore not be 'overcome of evil' by yielding to the temptation to seek revenge on their enemies, but 'overcome evil with good' by taking the opportunity to show kindness and love instead. This is exemplified in Proverbs 25.21-22 by ministering to the physical needs of any enemy. In so doing 'coals of fire' are heaped 'on his head'. Whilst some commentators find a link to an ancient Egyptian ritual where penitents carried burning coals on their heads as evidence of genuine remorse and shame for their actions, it is more likely that this refers to the judgment of God (as the parallel in v.19). When used in the OT, the metaphor is always negative (e.g. Psalm 140.10). It seems then that Paul is encouraging Christians to do good to their enemies knowing that God will right all wrongs in the end. We remember that to recompense evil for evil is *natural*; evil for good is *satanic*; good for good is *courtesy*; but good for evil is *divine*.