

ROMANS 12 – 13 PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING



We have now gone through the *first eleven chapters* of Romans, where Paul describes the *doctrinal* aspects of God's *Wonderful Plan of Salvation* based on His laws – going from *true conversion to glorification* as a godly spirit being.

Now, in *chapter 12*, as his custom was, he goes from the *doctrinal* to the *practical* aspects of these principles. As *Wiersbe's Commentary* notes, "*In all of his letters, Paul concluded with a list of practical duties based on the doctrines he had discussed. In the Christian life, doctrine and duty [should] always go together. What we believe helps to determine how we behave. It is not enough for us to understand Paul's doctrinal explanations. We must translate them into living it and show by our daily lives we trust God's Word. The key idea here is relationships. If we have a right relationship with God, we will have a right relationship with the people who are a part of our lives.*"

So, Paul begins, "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* [or proper spiritual worship]" (Rom. 12:1).

How do we apply this principle of "becoming a living sacrifice" in a concrete way? Paul focuses on the *first great practical principle* dealing with the First Commandment. As Jesus said, "You shall *love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the *first and great commandment*" (Mt. 22:37-38).

Believer's Commentary adds, "*Serious and devout consideration of the mercies of God in the first eleven chapters...leads to only one conclusion—we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...If the Son of God has died for me, then the least I can do is live for Him.*" Barclay adds, "True worship is *not offering a liturgy or ritual to God*, but offering our bodies and all that we do with them to God daily."

Now, how does this principle of being "a living sacrifice" apply to this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4, BBE). Paul answers: "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"

(Rom. 12:2). So, true worship is not adopting the false system of values and beliefs of "this present evil world" but instead, *renovating* our minds by *conforming* them to *God's Word* and therefore *doing* His will.

The word "transformed" is *metamorphousthai* in the Greek, from where we get the term "metamorphosis" -- a total change from the inside out. In nature, an ugly caterpillar is said to one day *metamorphize* into a beautiful butterfly.

As Paul brings out, we too are in a process of *metamorphosis from the inside out*, through God's spirit. From being a weak, carnal, physical being we turn into a converted member who one day can become a glorious and eternal spiritual child of God, *shining like the very sun* (Mt. 13:42).

Yet, Paul emphasizes this change requires, above all, *godly humility*. He says, "And because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, *be modest in your thinking*, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you" (Rom. 12:3, GNB).

One of the great dangers that can ruin this process of metamorphosis in us is vanity and pride, especially when receiving gifts and abilities from God, thinking instead they come from us. Paul reminds us that all of this comes from God, and we must have humility to recognize it.

He now lists *seven* of these God-given gifts: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 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; or *ministry*, let us use it in our ministering; he who *teaches*, in teaching; he who *exhorts*, in exhortation; he who *gives*, with liberality; he who *leads*, with diligence; he who *shows mercy*, with cheerfulness." (Rom. 12:4-6).

The first gift from God is prophecy, mostly, the ability to preach His Word. The word *prophecy* in Greek is *propheteia*, which in the New Testament primarily means *preaching from the Scriptures*, and only rarely does it mean predicting the future.

As *Vine's Dictionary* mentions, "With the completion of the canon [or biblical books] of Scripture, prophecy apparently passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-9). In his measure, the teacher has taken the place of the prophet. The difference is that, whereas the message of the prophet was a *direct revelation* of the mind of God for the occasion, the message of the [preacher] is gathered from *the completed revelation contained in the Scriptures*" (p. 221). Barclay adds, "It is only rarely that prophecy in the New Testament has to do with *foretelling* the future; it usually has to do with *forthtelling* the Word of God."

The second gift is *serving*, from the Gk. word *diakonia* (where we get the term "deacon") and is the ability to serve the brethren and God's work with gusto in a practical way. Everyone can participate in this manner and some are blessed to greatly develop this gift or talent from God and for His glory, not ours (see Mt. 5:16).

Thirdly is *teaching*, from *didasko*, or the ability to faithfully and clearly explain God's Word. As Barclay points out, "The message of Christ needs not only to be proclaimed, but also *explained*. To preach *without understanding the background of the teaching* is to labor in vain." As Paul said, "The elders who *do good work as leaders* should be considered worthy of receiving double pay, *especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching*" (1 Tim. 5:17).

Fourthly is *exhorting*, from the Gk. *paraklesis*, meaning to *encourage* others, such as Barnabas, "a name that means 'one who encourages others'" (Acts 4:36, ERV). Such encouragers are a wonderful gift to the Church.

Fifthly, is "giving freely," from the Gk. *metadidomi*, which means *generosity*--sharing our lives and income with the brethren and others. Like God, they are a "cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). Sixth, comes "he *who leads*, with diligence," from *proistemi*, or those placed to lead, in this case, mainly the ministry placed in charge who should do their jobs diligently since they have to give an account to God (Heb. 13:17). As Paul said, "Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2, NLT). Seventh is the gift of *being merciful*, from the Gk. *eleos*, which is showing compassion for others and striving to

forgive offenses in such a way that the other person does not feel humiliated (see Gal. 6:1-2).

In the next section, in Romans 12:9-21, Paul gives in staccato style *twenty golden nuggets of wisdom and godly attitudes* to fulfil God's will.

He begins: (1) "Let love be without *hypocrisy*," from the Gk. *anupokritos*—not playacting or feigning love—like many Pharisees did (Mt. 23:5-7,28), but love sincerely. *Believer's Commentary* says, "Love should not wear a mask, but should be *genuine, sincere, and unaffected*." (2) "*Abhor* what is evil, *cling* to what is good." Let's not be passive in the face of evil but repudiate it and instead, do what is biblically correct. (3) "Be kindly affectionate to one another with *brotherly love*," from *philostorgos*, or brotherly kindness. *Believer's Commentary* says, "We should demonstrate our love by tender affection, not by cool indifference or formality." We love one another because we are members of a spiritual family and have the same Father, God, and our older Brother, Christ. (4) "In honor, giving *preference* to one another." This is difficult, to honor another person instead of self. As Phil. 2:3 says, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as *better than yourselves*" (NLT).

(5) "Not lagging in diligence." Not being lazy, especially in spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible study, meditation, and fasting. (6) "Fervent in spirit" from the Gk. *zeontes*, where we get the word "zeal" and means "boiling" or "hot" in fervor; a strong, passionate zeal or enthusiasm. (7) "Serving the Lord," this shows us to whom we should have that fervor. (8) "Rejoicing in hope," having that optimism that if God is for us, who can be against us? "There are no hopeless situations in life, only people who have lost hope" (Barclay). (9) "Don't give up in a time of trouble" (TPT). It means those who spiritually persevere and never give up. As Christ said, "But the one who *perseveres* to the end will be saved" (Mt. 24:13, NABRE).

(10) "Continuing steadfastly in prayer" from *proskartereo*, which means, "to be constantly diligent or to assiduously [do] all the [spiritual] exercises" (Strong). (11) "Distributing to the needs of the saints," it means to have a generous heart toward needy brethren in the Church. The local church assistance funds are a good way to

show such generosity toward widows and other needy people, not only locally but internationally. (12) "Given to hospitality," which is the willingness to invite to eat or lodge a member in need. (13) "Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse." We have the examples of Jesus, Stephen, and Paul who did this, and the principle is summarized by Christ when he says: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45).

(14) "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." Here is the golden principle of *empathy* – the ability to feel another's pain. Pr. 25:20 shows just the opposite, "When you sing a song of joy to someone suffering in the deepest grief and heartache, it can be compared to disrobing in the middle of a blizzard or rubbing salt in a wound" (TPT). The afflicted person wants comfort and respect for their feelings, and this is not the time to be cheerful, but to console. (15) "Live happily together in a spirit of harmony, and be as mindful of another's worth as you are your own. Don't live with a lofty mind-set, thinking you are too important to serve others, but be willing to do menial tasks and identify with those who are humble minded. Don't be smug or even think for a moment that you know it all" (TPT). Once a person is baptized, they are our brethren, and economic or cultural status does not matter. We should associate with everyone, not just with a few brethren. That does not mean that preferences do not exist, which are natural, but that we should not exclude anyone. (16) "Do not be wise in your own opinion," quoting Pr. 3:7-8. There should be no room for vanity or pride, for true wisdom comes from God (James 1:5).

(17) "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men." We must set an example for the world by not mistreating anyone or responding with violence, even if it is an enemy. (18) "If it is possible, *as much as depends on you*, live peaceably with all men." Sometimes it is not up to us to keep the peace and we will have to distance ourselves from the person who makes war instead of peace. God only

expects us to do our part. Even God had to act to repel and crush the angelic rebellion, which did not depend on Him, but on those rebellious angels who did not keep the peace (2 Pet. 2:4). (19). "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." We should never seek revenge, which produces the damaging thoughts and actions of hatred. We know that if we pray to God and leave it in His able Hands, He will take care of our adversaries. (20) "Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). The Bible is proactive not reactive and says we should act positively toward our enemies. This behavior will put them to shame and please God.

In this fashion, Paul has covered in chapter 12 practical principles about *right relationships* between Christians in the Church and even toward those that are unconverted.

Now in chapter 13, he covers *relationships between Christians and worldly civil authorities*.

He begins, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1-2).

Paul is teaching the biblical principle that we owe rulers respect, no matter who they are, and that we should not rebel against them, even if we dislike them. It is a fact that without rulers and the police, thieves and criminals would run rampant and there would be absolute anarchy. That is why we owe those in uniform our respect and gratitude, and if the laws of the country are respected, we normally need not fear those who watch over peace and order. Jesus himself said: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). In other words, we must fulfill our civic duties *and* our duties to God. Now when these two duties conflict, we have to put God first. As Peter and the apostles had said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).