

Romans Part Three:

Chapters 12:1 thru 16:27

The Application of the Righteousness of God

Romans 12:1-13:14 – Righteousness of God Demonstrated in Christian Duties; Toward God & Toward Others

- 1 – In his Preface to Romans, Luther states about this chapter: *“In chapter 12, St. Paul teaches the true liturgy and makes all Christians priests, so that they may offer, not money or cattle, as priests do in the Law, but their own bodies, by putting their desires to death. Next he describes the outward conduction of Christians whose lives are governed by the Spirit; he tells how they teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live and act toward friend, foe, and everyone. These are the works that a Christians does, for, as I have said, faith is not idle.”*
- 2 – A most important word in the sentence that opens this last section of the Book of Romans is *“therefore.”* Although it is not the first word in the Greek text, it is the one that connects the following with what precedes. It is the Believer’s reaction to the doxology that concluded the last section. It is as if Paul asks us what we will do with what we read.
- 3 – Actually, Paul presents us with only one option, which is to put ourselves on God’s altar as Abraham did with Isaac, as Christ did not the cross. Our abandonment to God is in response to God’s mercy. The Greek word used here is rendered *“mercy,”* or *“compassion.”* The English word *“compassion”* is the word of choice in this context, since in its literal meaning of *“suffering together”* it expresses exactly what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He has taken our suffering upon Himself to pay for us the ransom for our freedom from sin and death.
- 4 – The presentation of our bodies to God as a sacrifice is expressed in different ways in the Old Testament in the various sacrifices. The Book of Leviticus specifies five different kinds of sacrifices: the Burnt Offering, the Grain Offering, the Peace Offering, the Sin Offering, and the Trespass Offering. In all of these, the person who brought the offering identified himself with the animal or the produce being offered. In laying his hands on the head of the animal to be killed, he confessed that what happened to the animal, in principle happened to him.
- 5 – The sacrifice of the body Paul envisions here may be seen as a combination of the grain offering and the peace offering. The grain offering was bloodless; it was the response of the creature to His Creator, without any reference to sin. The person who brought the grain offering professed that God had a claim upon

his body because He made it. The Peace Offering, or Fellowship Offering was based upon the sacrifices that made atonement for sins committed and for the sinful nature. The Trespass Offering and the Sin Offering provided the basis for the restoration of fellowship with God.

- 6 – The Book of Leviticus distinguishes two parts in the peace offering: the Thank Offering and the Votive Offering, or the offering for the making of a vow. (*chap. 7*) Understanding these meaningful Old Testament rituals will be of help in understanding Paul’s plea for us to react to God’s mercy to us in an appropriate way. Putting our bodies on God’s altar means putting them to death as far as our right to self-determination. In Galatians, Paul calls this being crucified with Christ. We read: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (*chap. 2*) Paul wants us to identify with the Hebrew slave, who when freedom is offered to him after his seven-year-term of service does not claim his freedom but proclaims his love for his master and stays in his service. (*see Exodus 21*)
- 7 – This sacrifice of our body is a spiritual act of worship. Interestingly, the Greek word rendered “spiritual” is the word from which the English word “logical” is derived. The KJV renders it “reasonable.” It is as if the apostle asks us what else a logically minded person can do in response to the demonstration of God’s great love for us in Jesus Christ.
- 8 – In stating his appeal the way he does, Paul, at the same time, defines that worship ought to be the sacrifice of ourselves to God. Worship does not merely consist in an emotional utterance of words of praise; it is the putting our bodies at God’s service in perfect obedience as a slave to his master. Paul applies the principle of worship through sacrifice in a very practical way by telling Believers that they must no longer conform to the ways of the world.
- 9 – v.2 reminds us that we are all in danger of passively adjusting to our earthly surroundings. Peer pressure has a tremendous impact upon all of us, regardless of age. The only real antidote is allowing the Holy Spirit to do His work in our hearts. The world does not ask for our permission to bombard us with its slogans and advertisements. Unless we actively resist we will be swept away by it.
- 10 – God is interested in our thinking. He is the God of logic, and He wants us not only to draw the logical conclusion of His mercy to us by putting ourselves on His altar, but He also wants us to continue thinking logically. Putting ourselves on His altar may seem suicidal, but as soon as we do it we experience a lifting of the fog of materialism from our mind.
- 11 – We only realize to what degree sin has clouded our mind when we surrender our

thoughts to God. No one is immune to the infiltration of demonic influences in his thinking. That is the reason Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* (Second Corinthians 10)

12 – Without the cleansing of our thought life, obedience to God’s will is impossible. We will not even know God’s will without the surrender of our mind to the Holy Spirit. Still, God does not demand blind obedience; He wants our full and wholehearted cooperation. This does not mean that we have the option of trying out the will of God in order to see whether we like it or not and, consequently, obey it or not. God will only reveal His will to us if by faith we are determined to obey. “Test and approve” does not make us judges of God’s will but explorers for the purpose of putting it into action. We start on the basis of the conclusion that whatever we find out about God’s will, it will be “good, pleasing, and perfect.”

Q. How is Paul’s use of “logic” here ironic?

v. 3 – 13

- 1 – The whole section through v. 21 is just packed with sound Biblical advice which shows how good a judge of human nature the apostle Paul must have been. Hence the advice old preachers give to new ones just starting out in ministry: Know the Bible. You’re your people. Know how to apply the one to the other.
- 2 – In defining our responsibilities toward society, the apostle begins by pointing us to Our responsibility toward the Church, the Body of Christ. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul works out in greater detail his thoughts about the meaning of belonging to a body of believers. (*see chap. 12 & 14*)
- 3 – As members of the Body of Christ, we have value and importance beyond our own understanding. In order to properly use the gifts God has given to us, we have to discern which place we occupy. Once we know where we belong, doing what we ought to do follows naturally. The eye knows it has to see and the ear that it has to hear. Confusion only occurs when we try to change places. The exercise of gifts begins with acceptance of the place to which God has appointed us.
- 4 – Our sinful human nature often makes us strive for places of prominence, where the

exercise of our gifts will catch the public eye and makes us the recipients of human approval and praise. It is to combat this sinful tendency that Paul advises us not to think too highly of ourselves.

- 5 – “The measure of faith,” in **v. 3** refers to the place in the Body of Christ to which God has allocated us when the Holy Spirit converted us. The Body of Christ is not the place where believers are called upon to flaunt their ego. Accepting our place by considering ourselves as being crucified with Christ, may sometimes propel us to prominence, but if that happens it will be God’s doing, not ours.
- 6 – Insight into the source of our gifts, that is, knowing that our talents are what God has entrusted to us in His grace, and that they are not the product of our own creation or ingenuity, will help us in becoming effective members of the body instead of cancerous cells that develop according to their own malignant design. Truly, pride is a sin that is born in the bone of all of us, and we must therefore be cautioned and armed against it. Indeed, if all people saw their talents as gifts of God; if all would find and occupy in society the place for which God designed them, it would prevent no small part of the uneasiness, the restlessness, the ambition, and misery of the world.
- 7 – The image of the church being the body of Christ used in **v. 5** was one of Paul’s favorite topics. He used it several times in his epistles to admonish and encourage the Believers of the churches he had planted. Besides the mention in this chapter, we find it several times in First Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians.
- 8 – Here Paul only mentions a few of the gifts that ensure the normal functioning of the body of Christ: preaching, serving, teaching, encouraging, generosity, leadership, and mercy. The list is, obviously, not exhaustive.
- 9 – Paul’s words about “prophesying” in **v. 6** are really directed toward preaching, that is, proclaiming the Gospel, either privately as any Believer may do, or publicly, as in the Ministry of the Gospel, the office of Pastor. And “let him use it in proportion to his faith” may sound like an easy statement, a brief glance at the nearly countless OPINOINS of different “experts” on the Bible indicates that this is most certainly not easily done!
- 10 – The Greek word rendered “proportion” is that from which our English word “analogy” is derived. In trying to determine Paul’s intent in the use of this word, we must start out with the basis upon which Paul places the exercise of all the gifts he mentions here, namely the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Without this sacrifice none of the gifts with which the Holy Spirit endows us will bear God-pleasing fruit.
- 11 – Here we must not say that we ought to exercise our gifts according to the measure

of our surrender to God. That would imply that we put our trust for the exercise of our gifts in our own ability. Such thinking is unbiblical.

- 12 – One way to look at this to see the measure of our faith as a unit of comparison with our fellow Believers and with God. Paul touches upon this kind of comparison in Second Corinthians, where we read: *“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us.”* (chap. 10)
- 13 – The implication here would be that the exercise of our faith would be for the purpose of God’s approval instead of the approval of others. The ultimate standard of judgment is the character of God. The realization that we will be measured with the yardstick of God’s glory is enough to reduce us all to size. No one who understands this will think of himself higher than he ought to.
- 14 – I think the best interpretation is to connect Paul’s statement here to Jesus’ introduction of the Parable of the Talents, where we read: *“To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.”* (Matthew 25) The proportion of our faith is the ability God has given to us, which is expressed in the number of talents we have received.
- 15 – In spite of what it sounds like, the proportion of faith does not limit our exercise, it stretches it. After all, faith means that we keep on reaching beyond our limitations. Paul expresses this elsewhere by saying: *“And who is equal to such a task?”* (Second Corinthians 2) And he provides the answer to his question in the next chapter by saying: *“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”* After all, the point of Jesus’ parable is that God praises those who double God’s investment in their lives.
- 16 – The subject goes even deeper when we take a closer look at the concept of prophecy itself. Most people see “prophecy” as the divine gift that allows a person to predict the future. This is a grave mistake. Although many prophecies are concerned with future events, a great deal of prophecy pertains to the past and to the present. In point of fact, the more general and acceptable meaning of a prophet is simply one who proclaims the Word of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in either private or public ministry. Whether this is always done spontaneously and extemporaneously is not the issue. In the context of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, prophecy is merely defined as words that strengthen, encourage and comfort. We read there: *“Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”* (chap. 14)
- 17 – Thus, any preaching of the Gospel would fall into this category of “prophecy.”

Some prophecy may be presented prepared and rehearsed material based on the written and inspired Word of God. The fact Paul makes a distinction between prophecy and revelation, and that the latter has priority over the former, tells us that prophecy in the New Testament usually refers to preaching. Again, we read in First Corinthians 14: *“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.”* The fact that in the days of Samuel and Elisha schools of prophets existed proves that prophecy in the Old Testament was a subject to be studied. Therefore, it did not, obviously, always come by direct inspiration. Perhaps the best way to interpret what Paul states here about prophecy is: “If you can preach, then by all means preach!”

- 18 – The meanings for the other gifts of serving, teaching, encouraging, generosity, leadership, and mercy do not offer any particular problems.
- 19 – The Greek word translated “serving” or “ministering” is that from which the word “deacon” is derived. In the practice of the early church as well as of the modern one it means providing for the various needs of the congregation; mostly spiritual, but it can also include physical as well.
- 20 – “Leadership” is the translation of the Greek word which literally means “to stand before,” “to preside over,” or “to practice.” It may refer to the gift of administration.
- 21 – The lines that divide serving, generosity, and mercy are rather fine. The difference may be more in intensity than in substance.
- 22 – The same can be said about the exhortation in **verses 9 and 10**. Love for one another, love for what is good, and brotherly love cover the same ground and only differ from each other in degree.
- 23 – The call to “Honor one another above yourselves” is interesting. The Greek reads literally “in honor one another preferring in business.”
- 24 – Most translations of **verses 11-13** amount to a kind of paraphrase. This is because the original Greek is choppier: *“In the diligence, not slothful; in the spirit, fervent; the Lord, serving, in the hope, rejoicing; in the tribulation, enduring; in the prayer, persevering; to the necessities of the saints, communicating; the hospitality, pursuing.”* Here he deals with the mode, the “how to” of the gifts. Paul demonstrates that the exercise of any gift without love amounts to futility. Love is the lifeblood of the body of Christ. In First Corinthians Paul gives an inventory of the gifts in Chapter Twelve and in Chapter Fourteen he explains the logistics of the gifts. But the foundation is found in Chapter Thirteen, the famous chapter of love. Love determines the true condition of the body of the church.
- 25 – Christ prefers His body to be hot for Him in love. Jesus reproached the church in

Laodicea: *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold - I Am about to spit you out of My mouth."* (Revelation 3) Thus, Paul states here that Believers must keep their spiritual fervor, that is, be fervent. The Greek word used is that which means, "to be hot or to boil." [When a famous revival preacher was once asked if a Christian was allowed to smoke, he answered: "No! He must burn, and be on fire for the LORD!"]

- 26 – **v. 12** focuses on the future with *"Be joyful in hope"* and on the present with *"patient in affliction"* and *"faithful in prayer."* When writing to Titus, Paul defines "hope" as the return of Jesus Christ. We read: *"We wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."* (chap. 2)
- 27 – It is this hope in the future, the certainty of Christ's return, that lifts our spirits and gives us joy. Hope sees the present as an unsatisfactory condition. We must never be satisfied with the condition of imperfection in which we live at present. Even if our physical and emotional state is more than just bearable we must not settle in as if it were permanent. We are on the road to glory and our present joy draws its strength from the future.
- 28 – The Greek word for "affliction" is that which means pressure in any kind or form. It is derived from a word that means "crowd." God wants us to be patient under pressure. He will provide enough of the green pastures and quiet waters of Psalm 23 to see us through.
- 29 – Prayer is our lifeline. To become irregular in prayer leads to disaster. If prayer becomes as natural as breathing, we will travel well on our way to glory.
- 30 – **v.13** lifts generosity out of the realm of professional charity. We must all become Servants in and of the church whether we are elected to an office or not. Our homes should be open to all. The writer of Hebrews admonishes us: *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."* (chap. 13) Not many of us entertain angels in our home. But if we keep on being hospitable, maybe one day it will happen!

Q. How is hospitality much more complicated in our world today?

v.14-21

- 1 – At the beginning of **v.14** Paul uses a direct quotation from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We read in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus said: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* (chap. 5)
- 2 – Paul's quotation is proof of the fact that at least one of the Gospels must have

existed in writing during his lifetime. Paul knows that Jesus practiced what He preached. “. . . *they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals – one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’* ” (Luke 23) Also, Stephen practiced Jesus’ command when he was martyred. We read that his last prayer was for his enemies: “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*” (Acts 7) Truly, this is one of the most severe and difficult duties of the Believer in Jesus; and it is a duty which nothing else but true faith will enable us to perform. Our natural tendency is to repay people with equal harm for the harm they do to us. Only the Holy Spirit can make us change our mind.

Q. How is forcing someone to take responsibility for their wrong actions and even causing them to suffer harsh consequences for these wrong actions NOT the same as the “revenge” of which Paul speaks here?

- 3 – Persecution points to hostility of the world around us. Paul’s recommendations in **verses 15-17** pertain to those with whom we have fellowship in Christ, although rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn may give us a way into the lives of unbelievers also. And it is often easier for us to feel sympathy in another’s loss rather than empathy with them in gain. Indeed, to feel genuine joy for another’s success is a mark of true spiritual maturity.
- 4 – As for sharing in people’s grief, we must always work toward a compassionate and sympathizing attitude. We need to feel for the distressed; enter into their sorrows, and bear a part of their burdens. It is a fact, attested by universal experience, that by sympathy a person can receive into his own feelings a measure of the distress of a friend, and that this friend then finds himself relieved in the same proportion as the other has entered into his griefs. It is not logical, but it is still often true.
- 5 – Living in harmony with fellow Believers can only be achieved if we maintain the vision of the body of Christ, which Paul referred to earlier in this chapter. As people whose sins have been forgiven, we are under obligation to love as we ourselves have been loved by God for Jesus’ sake. Being a Christian lays upon us the ministry of reconciliation, not only of sinners with God but of forgiven sinners with one another. David expressed this vision in his Song of Ascents: “*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*” (Psalm 133)

- 6 – Paul hands us the key to this harmony in the remainder of **v. 16**. There is an alternate translation for *“associate with the lowly,”* namely *“be willing to do menial work.”*
- 7 – People in our country are often more able to do this than those in other parts of the world. Europeans of the more affluent classes tend to look down upon those who do menial work. In some parts of Asia white collar workers let one or more of their fingernails grow long in order to disqualify themselves from using their hands for anything else than pushing pens. Willingness to do low-grade work may not make us better Christians, but it can enhance our testimony.
- 8 – When our Lord lived on earth He was “homeless.” *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* (Matthew 8) Few people are ready to willingly give up that much for the Lord! In turn, we must not to look down or separate ourselves from those who have been brought down that low against their will. Ah, there’s the rub; indeed many bring their low state upon themselves through much fault of their own! Still, we need to be charitable and remember that “There but for the grace of God go I!”

Q. What circumstances complicate the “homeless” situation in our country today?

- 9 – **v.17** fits in the same category as our reaction to those who persecute us. Paul’s advice pertains to threats that are less life threatening than persecution. This counsel also relates to Jesus’ command in the Sermon on the Mount. *“But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”* (Matthew 5)
- 10 – It is often more difficult to demonstrate the spirit of Christ in the lesser things of life than in the bigger ones. Repaying evil with still more evil always immediately brings us into the camp of our enemy the devil.
- 11 – A literal translation of the Greek of the last part of this verse would be *“providing right things before all men.”* A good paraphrase of this might be: “Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are completely honest.”

In writing this, Paul must have thought of the passage in Proverbs, *“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and*

man.” (chap. 3)

- 12 – Now, of course there is a limit to what we can do right in the eyes of all people. There are instances in which the approval of man opposes God’s approval. Paul referred to this himself when he wrote to the Galatians: *“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (chap. 1)* Thus, Paul’s advice is not a recommendation to become a “people pleaser.”
- 13 – Paul surely recognized that it is not always possible to live at peace with everyone. But it always takes two to fight and conflicts among believers always consist of one “old man” fighting another.
- 14 – There was a time in Israel’s history when the immediate relative of a murder victim, the “Redeemer of Blood,” was under obligation to avenge the murder. (*see Numbers 35*) In most parts of the world the need for private persons to take justice in their own hands has disappeared as central governments were formed and justice became the responsibility of the state. The inherent problem of justice being applied by private persons of course is that there is often a lack of objectivity. The first bigamist, Lamech, who lived shortly after the Fall, bragged to his two wives: *“I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.” (Genesis 4)* It seems he was a man to truly enjoyed exacting his “pound of flesh!”
- 15 – Private vengeance has led to family feuds and tribal wars that could easily have been avoided had there been a good working central system of justice. Even in Moses’ day, God argued against the need for settling of all grudges. We read: *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19)* Jesus called this “the second commandment.”
- 16 – While God urges His people not to seek revenge, He reserves His right to do so. Paul’s words, *“It is Mine to avenge; I will repay”* are a direct quote from the Book of Deuteronomy. (chap. 32) The prophet Nahum announced: *“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.” (chap. 1)*

Q. Why is it appropriate for God to tell us not to go out for revenge, but all fine and good from Him to exact vengeance?

17 – Paul’s next words in **v.20** are a direct quotation from the Book of Proverbs. (chap. 25) The context of the quotation serves as its interpretation. A literal heaping of burning coals on someone’s head would constitute an act of extreme cruelty. The act might give relief to pent-up feelings of hatred for the one who does the heaping, but for the person who is the recipient of the heat it means intense suffering. Bible scholars have argued this point for centuries since it seems that the image of burning coals does not represent the act of kindness. However, this image is actually a metaphor referring to the hot pangs of conscience that an enemy will experience upon receiving such undeserved kindness instead of revenge. The lesson is clear that God wants us to conquer our enemies by making them our friends. God wants us to reflect His dealing with us in the way we treat those who oppose and hate us.

18 – **v. 21** wraps up everything the apostle has stated in this chapter, and it forms the bridge to the next chapter, which deals with our responsibilities toward the government. *“Do not be overcome”* is in the imperative form of the Greek verb which is derived from nike, “victory.” It means, “to subdue.” The idea of its use here is that, unless we take some kind of good action evil will get the victory over us. It also reminds us that as Believers God has given us the power to resist wickedness. Being conceived and born in a world in which evil reigns supremely does not mean that evil is irresistible to us who are “born again.” Jesus states emphatically: *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16)* It is the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross that enables us to resist the evil in the world and in ourselves, not only by doing good, but by being good.

Q. How can we apply Paul’s advice here in our daily lives as Believers?