

RIGHT IN ROMANS

Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

PART FIVE – APPLICATION IN LIFE (12:1-15:13)

A. A CHURCH UNIFIED IN LOVE (12:1-21)

After the Excursus of three chapters on the relation of Israel to the Gospel, Paul now turns back to his main theme—that of salvation by faith—and enlarges upon some of the practical fruits that should be cultivated in the redeemed and sanctified life.

1. A call for consecration (vv. 1, 2)

a) Motivation in grace presented (1)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” There we have motivation in the Lord presented. The apostle appeals to his readers, in view of all that they have received at God’s hands, to give themselves in surrender to His service. **“I beseech you by the mercies of God.”** We need to turn mercies into motives. What we have received from God should impel us to give of our utmost to Him. Memories of past benefits should be like fuel that we put into the fires of consecration to make them burn brighter.

But Paul has especially in view the wondrous treasures of redemptive grace that are ours in Christ Jesus. We do well to think far more than we do of what we have in them. There would be more motivation from the cross if there were more meditation on the cross. If people thought more about Jesus’ sacrifice for them, they would not be so negligent in their devotion to Him, and in their willingness to go where He bids, and to do what He asks.

“To present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” Paul bids his readers abstain from fleshly lusts, to shun all sins of immorality, because they belong to Jesus Christ. **“Ye are bought with a price.”** As Paul writes in Corinthians, we are also warranted in thinking of our bodies as the instruments for the Spirit; and so Paul bids his readers yield their lives, their time, their strength, and talents to the service of the Lord Jesus. “Can you give less than your best to Him who gave His all for you?” is substantially what Paul challenges, the Roman Christians with in this opening verse.

b) Conformation to the world forbidden (v. 2a)

“And be not conformed to this world . . .” Many Christians, alas, seem to be more interested in being conformed to the world than they are in being transformed by the Lord. The chameleon changes color very easily for purposes of protection. Some Christians are very skillful in adapting themselves to whatever situation they happen to be in. “When in Rome do as the Romans do,” is a most dangerous policy to follow. Paul says, **“Be not conformed to this world.”** We must be more interested in being in tune with the Lord than in being in style with the world. The world will never be transformed by a church that is conformed to the world.

c) Transformation by the Lord commanded (v. 2b)

The caterpillar knows nothing about the beauty of a higher region, but the butterfly proves the virtues of a new order of life. So Paul says, **“But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** Some people will not taste to see that the Lord is good; they are not willing to try out the glorious possibilities of the new life. Doing the Lord’s will means wings for the soul. Some men and women think that it is hard to commit themselves absolutely to God’s will. They are afraid of hard things the Lord will ask them to do, forgetting that one never does God’s will without being lifted higher.

2. Plea for co-operation (vv. 3-8)

a) Vanity of self (v. 3)

A great many men like to look at themselves through magnifying glasses. They see their powers vastly enlarged as they gaze into magic mirrors of conceit. The exaltation of self may lead to exploitation of men. When we exalt ourselves more highly than we ought to, we are likely to think of other people less highly than we ought. Immanuel Kant said, “So act as you would be willing to have your principle of conduct made the principle of the universe.” Or, in other words, treat men as ends, not as means. Do not make them simply instruments for advancing your interests.

“ . . . according as God hath dealt to each man the measure of faith.” When we stop to think of it, misuse of gifts for self is a robbing of God. If God has given us our talents and our strength to be used for His glory and His service, and we just use those powers for ourselves, is not that spiritual embezzlement? **“Will a man rob God?”** (Malachi 3:8) That is a reference to holding back temporal treasures, but if all of our material possessions belong to God, what about our resources of mind, heart, time, and life?

b) Unity in Christ (vv. 4, 5)

The Church is the Body of Jesus Christ. He indwells it through the Holy Spirit. Life results in unity in the body. Death means dissolution and decay.

It is life that gives unity to the physical body, and is it not truer spiritually of the Church of Jesus Christ when His life animates the Church? When there is consciousness of devotion to Him, there is bound to be unity, but when the Spirit of Christ is not given the right of way in the hearts and lives of individuals, we have all sorts of friction and misunderstanding. Loyalty to the Lord is the key to unity in the Church.

c) Ministry of gifts (vv. 6-8)

Notice the diversity of gifts. Not all of them are intellectual talents. Traits of personality are included— generosity, hospitality, sympathy, and so forth. So often we overlook that kind of gift. If a person is gifted with a winsome personality, if he has the power to sympathize with others, let him use those gifts for Jesus Christ.

We must not let what we lack blind us to what we have. Peter said, “**Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee.**” Suppose Peter had just thought of the fact that he did not have any money. Perhaps we are not overburdened with money, but we have the riches of Jesus Christ. Are we using what we have in Him? We are to be using all of our gifts for His sake. If we do not stir up the fire and open the drafts, the fire will go out; so we need to ask God to make clear what gifts he has bestowed upon us, and then to cultivate those gifts to the full, depending upon the quickening power of God’s Spirit.

3. Practice of love (vv. 9-16)

a) Sincerity (vv. 9-12)

Insincerity in love spoils that love. If there is anything that suggests insincerity, it destroys our power to influence others. If we truly love, we shall try to show others their faults. We shall seek to bring out the best in them.

True love is creative art, especially Christian love; and if the Lord Jesus Christ means more than anything else in the world, is there anything that we can more earnestly desire for people with whom we come in contact than for them to grow in the righteousness of Jesus Christ? True love seeks only the best for its object.

“**. . . fervent in spirit; serving the Lord . . .**” “Fervent in spirit” means boiling over with zeal. There is a real connection between intensity of spiritual life and real Christian love. When our love for Christ grows cold, our love for fellow Christians diminishes. Zeal for Christ promotes love for man. Fellowship with Jesus results in continuance in love.

b) Generosity (vv. 13, 14)

Hospitality meant more in those days than now because men traveling were more dependent upon it. If a Christian came from another town, believers in that town would see that accommodations were afforded him. They would provide entertainment for overnight. They would open their doors to entertain him even though it meant real sacrifice.

“Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.” These words are an echo of one of the beatitudes. We are to forgive our enemies. We should see that hate is a disease in the soul of the one who hates, and should ask help of God to conquer it by the power of love.

c) Sympathy (vv. 15, 16a)

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice; and weep with them that weep.” It is more difficult to rejoice with people that rejoice than to weep with those that weep. We are so likely to be jealous. It takes more real Christianity to rejoice with people that sail on the smiling seas of good fortune than to sympathize with those who have been wrecked on the rocks of disaster. When we do rejoice and share other people’s joys, we transplant into our own hearts a slip from the plants of joy in other lives. We may thus grow gardens of unselfishness, if we will, for the delight of our own souls.

d) Humility (v. 16b)

“Be not wise in your own conceits.” Do not despise those on a lower plane than you are. Such admonitions are needed in some churches today. Pride is utterly foreign to the spirit and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pride really punishes the one who is proud. Pride puts out many a cheering fire in the soul. The proud person is terribly poor in his own inner life. Pride’s scorn is love’s loss. When we have scorn for others we lock our own hearts against them. We cut down our own riches by closing to ourselves many a potential market of inspiration. When, on the other hand, we are sympathetic, when our interests are wide, when we see the good in people, then are our own souls on the way to enrichment.

4. Conquest of hate (vv. 17-21)

a) Pursue peace (vv. 17, 18)

Why do many people seem to take more enjoyment in promoting strife than in pursuing peace? The real harm done by our enemies, after all, is the hate that they succeed in injecting into our own spirits. The resentment gets into our souls as a poison. We need to keep a generous supply of spiritual antidotes on hand so that if someone does an injury to us, we may be able to treat that thing as we would poison, and pray God to give us grace to conquer the unchristian feeling that has come into our hearts. Some people are too sensitive; they are so sensitive that the least little upset is like a spark that starts a fire. A Christian ought to be above such smallness.

b) Postpone wrath (v. 19)

“Avenge not yourselves . . .” Let fires die down for lack of fuel. It takes two to start a quarrel, but one can stop it. Some people revel in their dislikes and hatreds. They masticate their antipathies thoroughly. Revenge is a two-edged sword, it cuts the one who wields it; and the person who practices retaliation is injuring himself a good deal more than the one to whom he shows it. Harboring resentment is like walking on a broken ankle for the purpose of feeling the pain.

c) Outwit hate (vv. 20, 21)

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” The church should be a spiritual fire department, putting out fires of strife and bitterness and misunderstanding. The church should do everything possible to apply the Gospel of Jesus to the hearts and minds of men, so as to put out the fires of hatred. Christians should constitute themselves members of a fire brigade to extinguish incipient conflagrations. Churches would be in a healthier state if more of their members were to devote themselves to such a beneficent undertaking. And we must look to God to keep our own spirits fireproof.

B. THREE COMPREHENSIVE COUNSELS (13:1-14)

1. Be law-abiding (vv. 1-7)

a) Civil powers ordained of God (v. 1)

We may find it somewhat difficult to understand the injunction in this verse in the light of subsequent history, and in view of present-day world conditions. We get the key to it when we lay emphasis upon the phrase **“ordained of God.”**

There is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God. Paul was living under Roman rule, which at that time was outstanding for justice. He had frequently benefited by it, and he realized the importance of stable government and the need of obedience to it, and this is a principle that holds good at all times. Without obedience to law we have chaos, confusion, insecurity. But man’s laws must be rooted in God’s laws.

A government that defies the laws of God is heading for disaster. Paul most assuredly would not advocate blind obedience to a government brazen in its defiance of religion and morality. Paul is laying down the general principle that the security of society rests upon stability of government, and that, of course, requires obedience on the part of the subjects. But we repeat; man’s laws must be rooted in God’s laws.

b) Lawlessness is resistance to God (v. 2)

“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” Lawlessness is essentially Godlessness, and one leads to the other. In the latter part of this verse the apostle is referring to judgment inflicted by civil powers; furthermore, disobedience to the law brings further penalties that originate in God (that is, providing that the man-made laws are not at variance with God’s moral laws).

Breaking the law imperils the social structure. It is playing with the controls of society. Rulers should themselves be governed by the laws it is their solemn duty to enforce. When the rulers themselves break the law of their country, they are tampering with stabilizing forces, and there is grave danger ahead.

c) Rulers a blessing to the good, a terror to the bad (vv. 3, 4)

Many men blame the law for the result of their own sin. If a man drives through a red light and meets with trouble, it will do him no good to smash the light. The light is not responsible. It was his disregarding of the light that caused the trouble. The law is for the purpose of protecting the good and of resisting the bad. It is a terror to the evil-doer.

We might say that love of the bad within breeds fear of the good without. If a man loves his own sin more than he does good government, then he will fear the police officer. The best way to receive good from the state is to become good in the life, providing the state is good and sound in its government.

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.” Lawlessness results in fearfulness in two senses.

Fearfulness is often used in the sense of terrible conditions, a state of affairs that breeds terror; and it cannot be denied that lawlessness does result in fearfulness in that sense. Then fearfulness also means a spirit of fear. We speak of a person being fearful, living in dread of someone.

The man who breaks the law is simply storing the cellar of his own inner life with bombshells of dread. Those who go forth upon careers of crime, live in perpetual fear of the law and of their rivals in crime.

d) Be submissive for conscience' sake (vv. 5-7)

Paul has no words of comfort for chronic tax dodgers. He probably would not be very popular with people who try to get things into this country without paying duty. People who bring in treasures from Canada and England without paying duty may keep the treasures of jewelry, but they lose the treasure of a clean conscience.

“... for conscience' sake.” We multiply our compensations as we elevate our inspirations. We can raise our own spiritual salaries at will. We may transform compulsion at the hands of men into devotion to the will of God. That suggests Jesus' teaching about the second mile. The best way to get rid of the pain involved in doing a disagreeable duty is to do it in a spirit of love to Jesus Christ. Taking Colossians 3:17 as our life motto will make for a fabulous increase in our spiritual wealth.

2. Be love-fulfilling (vv. 8-10)

a) The principle stated (v. 8)

“Owe no man anything, save to love one another . . .” Love is the fulfillment of the law. Read I Corinthians 13, and also the passage in Colossians 3:12-15 where love is so matchlessly glorified. What Paul means is that love is the girdle that holds all these other things together.

It is true that as we grow spiritually rich, the heavier grows our sense of indebtedness with respect to love. True love keeps no credit accounts. Self-centered people think about how much others owe them, and not about how much they owe others.

What is our dominant attitude? Do we magnify our rights and minimize our duties, or do we reverse the process?

b) The principle illustrated (vv. 9, 10)

Man is not likely to deface a picture in his home that appeals to him. That which he prizes and cherishes he takes care of to the best of his ability. If we are loving others, we are not going to go out of our way to injure them.

3. Be light-revealing (vv. 11-14)

a) Wake up to light (vv. 11, 12a)

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep . . .” Paul here is referring to the coming of Christ, whether it be the end of the world, or at death. With the individual the two are equivalent because, whether Christ comes while we are alive and we are caught up to meet Him in the air, or whether it be at death that we are taken immediately into the presence of our Saviour, we are to be ready to meet Christ when the call comes.

“. . . let us therefore cast off the works of darkness . . .” The world exalts sin as life, but the Lord condemns sin as death. The world talks about sin as being life, but that is not God’s point of view. Why is it always thought smart to break the law? Would that we might popularize these three slogans:

- It is smart to be good;
- It is smart to do right;
- It is smart to serve God!

It is a triumph to do right and serve God. Christians should be alert; they should be on fire for Jesus Christ.

b) Dress up in Christ (vv. 12b-14)

“. . . let us put on the armor of light. . . . But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” The Christian life is a battle. For the Christian to be well dressed is to be well armed, fighting the battle of righteousness. We have all seen copies of the Pilgrims going to church with guns over their shoulders for protection in the event of an Indian attack. If more people came away from church spiritually armed, we would find a much better state of affairs in the church.

C. THE STRONG AND THE WEAK (14:1-15:13)

1. Mutual consideration enjoined (vv. 1-6)

These verses deal with the question of meats and days as these two problems bear upon the great principle of mutual consideration.

In verse 1 Paul has reference to one who has not entered into a full understanding of the doctrine of salvation through trusting in the atoning merits of Jesus, who has not entirely broken away from the idea that the doing of certain works has a part to play in the winning of security. Paul does not say that those who hold that position are right, but he bids his readers who are strong in the faith not to coerce those who are weak. Do not drive them to the truth. You cannot thus convince them. Do not force them to go against their conscience in the matter of eating meats or observing certain days.

This has a pertinent bearing upon Christian tactics today. We cannot nag people into the truth; we must seek the guidance of the Spirit that we may be able to persuade them, to pray them into the light. In other words, do not knock the crutches from under the lame man, but try to strengthen his limbs spiritually. If a person has not come into the full light, try to help him into a fuller realization.

Verses 2, 3 and 4. Let the strong beware of scornfulness, and let the weak steer clear of carping criticism of those who have different standards. It is so easy for us to laugh at those who entertain ideas that perhaps we think are childish or stupid. It is also too easy to pick flaws in those who have gone beyond us.

What Paul says is this—that every Christian is responsible to his Lord. Our duty is to try to bring others into a closer fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

“Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” The important thing is not so much for us to dictate to people just what they must do, or not do, with reference to particular applications of Christian truth, as it is to inspire them to seek God’s will for themselves through the study of the Bible and through earnest prayer. That is the imperative procedure. The Master’s will may not be the same for all. He may have one plan for you and another plan for me.

“He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord . . .” Paul then proceeds to bid his readers to be considerate in the matter of observing days, because there were some in Rome that were more or less under the influence of Judaism. The observance of days is in itself a matter for the individual to decide. This, however, is not to be construed as license for Sabbath breaking.

The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. It was designed to contribute to man’s spiritual enrichment; it was not given him for the purpose of desecration. We may say that abstaining from breaking the Sabbath is not enough; we must give ourselves to keeping the Sabbath; we should take advantage of every avenue for coming into a more real and vital fellowship with God, for learning more about the Bible, for worshiping with God’s people.

2. Common accountability to God a motive (vv. 7-12)

a) We are in Christ in life and in death (vv. 7-9)

“For none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” We live and die unto the Lord. If we are Christians our lives belong to God. He is our Master; He has the right to direct our way. He is the one we serve; we are responsible to Him. We are Christ’s in life, and in death. Our Saviour is our Master. Paul is not referring to Christ’s earthly life, but he is referring to His death and risen life. Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again; the resurrection was the climax to the crucifixion; it proved the efficacy of Jesus’ death upon the cross.

The Christian life can be summed up in just two phrases, “Christ for us, and Christ in us” (A. H. Strong). Christ who died in our behalf lives in us through the Holy Spirit. He wanted us for His own, and He paid the price with His own life; and to the degree that we sense how Jesus did suffer the cruel death upon the cross, the more willing will we be to give Him full control of our hearts and of our lives.

b) Therefore we are not to judge (vv. 10-12)

Paul says in effect, that if every Christian is responsible to God, then others have no right to pass judgment upon him, because the believer must answer to his Lord. That does not mean, however, that we are warranted in condoning sin in those who come under our influence by saying that it makes no difference whether they do wrong or not. We should seek to bring those who have gone astray to realize their relationship to God through Jesus Christ, and to persuade them to seek God’s forgiveness.

It is not important that we get people to do just what we want, but it is highly needful that we get them to do what they feel, after prayer and study of the Scriptures, God wants them to do. It is very easy for parents to overlook this very simple fact. Are we content to give our views to those who come to us for counsel, or do we lead them to look to God for His direction? We ought to bring them into that relationship with God where they depend upon Him.

Paul is dealing here with the vexing question of the eating of meats offered to idols, and of the observance of days. Do not be bound, he enjoins them, by scruples, by mere forms, but enter into the spirit of the Christian life, into a deep and true relationship with God. Of course, that would apply to Sabbath-keeping today. Seek to lead people to realize the priceless privileges at their command to replenish their depleted resources. Keeping the Sabbath is not a work of law, but a means of grace.

3. Stewardship of influence a motive (vv. 13-32)

a) Meats harmless in themselves are sinful if a stumbling block to others (13-16)

“But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” Paul says that if a thing is a stumbling block to others, it is a borderline wrong.

If we are close enough to the Lord, indulgences should lose their attractiveness for us. We must keep others in mind, to see that our liberty does not injure those for whom Christ died. The thing that is all right for us we are not to use in such ways as will harm others.

b) Right transcends rites and rights (vv. 17, 18)

Paul says that the essential thing is not going through certain rites, conforming to definite forms, doing this and not that; the essential thing is to live a life of vital fellowship with God and to follow His will to the very best of our ability. If that is so, then we are more than willing to forego certain rights. We may wave our rights in pride or we can waive our rights in love (I Corinthians 8).

c) Waive rights that harm the weak (vv. 19-23)

If one does something that is against his conscience, even though that thing may not be wrong for others, it is wrong for him. Some people see everything just black and white. We need greater skill in the discernment of shadings.

4. Obligation to help the weak a motive (vv. 1-7)

a) A duty in imitation of Christ (vv. 1-4)

Paul reminds his readers that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left His throne, the Son of Glory laid aside that which was His right (Philippians 2), and took the form of a man. Why? That He, the strong Son of God, might help fallen man, might save sinning man and open for him the gates of Heaven.

If the Lord Jesus Christ were willing to forego His divine glory in Heaven, we ought to go to the utmost limit in self-denial.

b) Edification of the weak a glorification of the Lord (vv. 5-7)

Go without some of your rights, Paul counsels his readers, if need be, if you can bring these weaker Christians into a fuller knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; and as you help others to grow in Him then you are glorifying your Saviour.

What a noble motive we have in the realization that we are actually glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ when we seek, at the cost of some self-denial, to build up our weaker brethren in the faith!

5. Christ for Jews and Gentiles a motive (vv. 8-12)

Paul reminds his readers that Christ came for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles alike. He came for the benefit of all who put their trust in Him. If Christ was willing to do this for the salvation of the Jews and Gentiles alike, ought not we His followers, to be willing to do all that we can to bring others into a closer fellowship with the Saviour?

Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show how this grace granted to the Gentiles had been provided away back in the Old Testament dispensation.

6. Benediction (v. 13)

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Ghost.”

There is no such joy and peace in all the world as that which comes through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Belief in the heart involves a surrender of the will.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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