

## **The Epistle to the Romans - Duties How to live soberly, (in oneself) Chapter 12**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Over the next six weeks, we will complete our study of the Epistle to the Romans. Let me recap on the structure of the letter. Chapters 1-8 is the doctrinal section. Paul explains the Gospel and the righteousness of God. Basically, we are all sinners but by repentance and acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ we have freedom from our sins. This brings us from the place of condemnation to being perfectly and freely justified by God. The Holy Spirit enters our souls, and He powers our lives. He directs us to Christ and gives us assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. In chapters 9-11, Paul explains that the Gospel does not set aside the covenants that God made with Israel. He closes chapter 11 with a doxology, that is praise and worship to God. In chapters 12-16, Paul explains the practical side of living as a Christian.

In September 2019, I had the privilege of visiting believers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. While we were there, we studied the book of Romans in three sessions, in two different locations. This was quite a challenge, especially in the heat and sometimes through two interpreters! I must say that I was challenged as I studied and preached on this amazing book. The believers in the DRC because of culture and way of life face different challenges to what we have in the UK. But the teaching of this book is for every individual the world over, without exception. Can I encourage you to read the book of Romans as it will give you a good foundation as a Christian? If you want some help, I recommend the Emmaus Bible Study course on Romans. One brother in our local assembly used to say, “a good Roman could go anywhere”, meaning if you take on board and live as the book of Romans directs, you will be a model Christian and servant of God.

Titus 2 v.12 is a good text for this talk. In the King James version of the Bible, we read,

“teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

In the English Standard Version, we read,

“training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”

The dictionary explanation for soberly is, “living in moderation or self-restraint: temperately.” The title for this talk is ‘How to live soberly, (in oneself)’. Titus 2 v.12 makes it clear that Christians have a constant battle on their hands and the battle takes place within us. The sinful flesh battles daily against the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Christian wants, in fact it is his or her duty, to live a self-controlled, upright godly life, because this is what pleases the Lord. But the sinful nature we have constantly attracts us to the things that delight the senses. The Christian must allow the Holy Spirit to completely control mind and body.

You say to me: "I cannot do it; I always fail; I continually let the Lord down." Don't worry, you are not the only one who feels like this. I feel the same! Paul felt the same! In Romans 7 he is in the depths of despair as he feels the battle of his two natures. But in Romans 8 he comes to realise that there is now no condemnation, no accusation, and no separation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul, in his despair, realises at last that because of the death of Christ he stands before God holy and righteous. Paul's heart had been liberated. Listen to his language at the end of chapter 8: "If God be for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. I am sure NOTHING will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Following on from these wonderful words at the end of chapter 8 Paul comes straight to the challenge for every Christian in chapter 12 vv.1-2,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Paul appeals to the heart of every Christian as he highlights the mercies of God. These mercies for us are found in abundant measure! Surely this is the incentive to that "living sacrifice."

I am reminded of the words of a lovely hymn:

"What riches of kindness he lavished on us;  
His blood was the payment, His life was the cost.  
We stood neath a debt we could never afford  
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more."

Matt Papa, Matt Boswell 2016

An 8-year-old boy was challenged one day by the Gospel message. As the collection plate came round at the end of the service, he wondered what he could do in response to what Christ had done for him. He thought, "I have no money to give, but I can give myself for His service." So, he took the plate, put it on the floor and stood on it! This young boy kept his promise, and when he was older became a missionary in the West Indies. What can I give? I can give myself!

These first two verses in chapter 12 are the introduction to the entire practical part of the letter. The heading we could use for these verses is "my behaviour before God". When we think of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, I first think of something I must suffer, something I must do outwardly. But no! These verses speak to us of things that only God sees in our lives. The secret things of our hearts. The things we do that nobody knows about. The Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord are always on us.

Job 34 v.21, "For His eyes are on the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps."  
Proverbs 15 v.3, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."  
1 Peter 3 v.12, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer." "But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Our bodies are the vehicle of expression for us; our feet, our hands, our ears, our eyes, and our tongues, they are all to be in subjection to the will of God. To do this we must strive to live lives that are without sin, lives that are righteous and pure. Our inward being is visible to God. He

knows the thoughts and the intents of our hearts. If we can truly present our bodies as a living sacrifice, the character of this will be seen in our lives.

The Christian has been made holy and acceptable to God because of the perfection of the sacrifice of Christ. But Paul is saying here that it is our duty as the acceptable ones, to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable because this is our divine duty (it is also spiritual worship). This is not a choice; it is a duty of love. When you consider the mercy of God and the death of Christ, surely out of love we should be saying, "If God has done all this for me, then I must give my body to Him. If Christ died for me, the least I can do is to live for Him." C.T. Studd said, "If Christ is God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

Paul goes on to warn us in v.2 that we should not be conformed to this world. Being conformed to the world means that we think like the world does, but the Christian should be different; he or she should be looking at things as God sees them. The dictionary meaning of the word 'transform' is "to change the form of; to change the shape or appearance; to metamorphose as a caterpillar transformed into a butterfly." When a sinner comes to Christ, a change takes place, it takes place from the inside out. The Holy Spirit enters in and gives us a new nature. Because of this internal change, our lives should not be like the caterpillar who crawls along the ground, but more like the butterfly who is free to rise and enjoy the freedom of the air. The butterfly is also beautiful to look upon; so too should be the Christian who has been changed (transformed). The Christian takes on a whole new higher, greater dimension of living as they can now see things from God's perspective.

The Greek word translated as 'transformed' here occurs in only three other places in the New Testament. It is used to describe the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 17 v.2 and in Mark 9 v.2. In 2 Corinthians 3 v.18 it is also used to describe the glorious change wrought in the believer who steadfastly contemplates the Lord Jesus. Remember Moses and Stephen, how their faces shone because their lives had been transformed by God. The Holy Spirit works within us. He brings Christ before our eyes. He renews and transforms the soul. The Holy Spirit does not force us into how we live our lives, there needs to be desire and discipline from us. To be a true living sacrifice the Holy Spirit must have control of the body and have free access to our minds. Remember Peter and John. The people saw their boldness and they made the comment that "they had been with Jesus." It is important to spend time in the Lord's presence and this will have a great effect on our lives.

At the end of verse 2 we read, "that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." How do you know what the will of God is for your life? This is an age-old question. This question has been asked down through the generations. The Bible teaches that we must work out our own salvation in the sense that every Christian is responsible to discover for themselves what God's will is for their life. God's will for us is good; God's will for us is acceptable and God's will for us is perfect. Sometimes in the Bible we see those who went against God's will, like Jonah. And we know what happened there. The children of Israel were brought through experience after experience so they would learn to trust God more. God leads us along life's paths, maturing us as we go, so we are ready (or should be ready) to meet the giants in life - the giants of sin and temptation.

God sees His whole plan for us, but we only see bits and pieces. We measure things with human vision. He sees past, present, and future. He sees when, where, and why we touch the lives of others. He weighs our actions. He controls our circumstances.

Psalm 18 v.30 says, "As for God, His way is perfect."

Isaiah 55 vs.8-9, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The rest of this chapter deals with our service, our attitude to fellow Christians and our treatment of non-Christians. We have a list of many things that are common courtesies. These things should be natural to the Christian. But unfortunately, we are human; circumstances of life affect our judgments. We still have the old nature that continually nags at us daily trying to knock us down. So we need reminded of these things on a regular basis. We need challenged because our witness and testimony are at stake so that the Lord's name is not dishonoured.

Verses 3-8 teach us how we are to behave towards the body of Christ. You may be saying, that is a strange thing to say? The Bible tells us that Christ is the Head of the Church, which is His body. Christ the Head is in heaven and we His body are on earth. The body of Christ is made up of Christians, every person who truly belongs to Christ. They are His representatives in this world. In your natural body, it is your head that controls every member of your body. It is the same with Christ; He controls the members of His body. Every member has his or her function; everyone is as important as the other. Every one individual is precious to Christ, so we must respect and love one another.

By nature, we human beings like to inflate our perception of ourselves. We also like to do what we want to do. Paul before his conversion bore down on Damascus intent on capturing Christians and the Lord stopped him in his tracks. Paul was soon to realise that he was not the important one, but Christ was. His life was transformed, as he asks the Lord, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" His mind was renewed; his life was changed; he was no longer controlled by himself. We need to be asking the question, "Lord, what do You want me to do?", and we need to accept the answer. Philip the evangelist was doing a great work in Samaria when the Lord called him to go to the desert and without any questions he obeyed. It takes faith but God has work for us to do and an inflated view of ourselves will only get in the way. Each Christian has a gift from God, something that they are good at. God will use this gift if we allow Him. The list starts with one who serves, one who teaches, one who exhorts, one who gives generously, one who leads with zeal and one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. There are people I know who undoubtedly have these individual gifts. But I also see people who have many of these gifts. Verse 6 says, "Let us use them!" So, get on with it and serve the Lord; do not spend years waiting to see what gift you have or telling yourself you are worthless. Serve the Lord with a good attitude while working out the gift He has given you.

Verses 9-16 show the marks of a true Christian. Let your love to others be genuine! It is hard to love some people! Dear friend, think about the love of Christ. His love is always the same; remember He loved us when we were unlovable. The love of Christ is a forgiving love, a compassionate love, and a selfless love. We are to love others as Christ loves us. We must outdo each other in showing honour. Serve the Lord with enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication. We must rejoice in hope, be patient during tribulation and constant in prayer.

This section ends with a real challenge for me. We are to bless those who persecute us, and Paul repeats the word 'bless' a second time. We have not to be cruel to them. This is tough from a human point of view. But once more, look at it through God's eyes. The Lord Jesus, when He was persecuted, turned the other cheek. Although He had the power to take Himself from the situation or even take the persecutor's life, He showed mercy!

"Rejoice with those who rejoice," should be easy enough. However, there are times that we do not rejoice with others because of jealousy or ill feeling. "Weep with those who weep," I think of the Lord as He stands at the grave of Lazarus weeping. If we are imitators of Christ these things will be done with a true heart. The next statement is a challenge: "live in harmony with one another," or "be of the same mind." Each one of us sees things differently but we must put aside our differences and serve the Lord together. Serving the Lord together is a wonderful and powerful thing.

Verses 17-21 focus on our behaviour towards Christians and non-Christians alike. “Repay no one evil for evil.” This is a very challenging one for me. How often after feeling I have been wronged, my first thought is to get that person back or make them suffer in some way. We are instructed to think about what the right thing is to do. Of course, the correct thing to do is to do them good. That is not easy! It goes on to say that if they do you wrong, you do them good. From a human viewpoint this seems crazy. But once more we must look at things in God’s eyes. How can I be used to win someone for Christ if I have retaliated? The Lord promises that He will judge and act if He wants in His time. We must leave this with Him. The Bible tells us that the full wrath of God will be delivered upon those who persecute His own. God delights to look after His own. He has promised, “he that honours Me I will honour.”

We are then told to go even further; we must feed our enemy. Remember the instance in 2 Kings 6 where the king of Syria was at war with the king of Israel. Elisha’s servant rose early one morning and saw that the hills around were full of horses and chariots; they had been surrounded. Elisha prayed that the enemy would be blinded, every one of them. God answered Elisha’s prayer and Elisha led the enemy army right into the middle of Samaria, where the enemy’s eyes were opened. Imagine their surprise which quickly turned to fear. The king of Israel asked Elisha if he was to kill them. But Elisha said that he had to feed them and give them water. The king prepared a great feast, fed them, and then sent them away. Can you imagine the telling of this story back in Syria? The Bible tells us that this group of Syrians never troubled Israel again. When you feel you have been wronged, show mercy, show compassion, give what is not deserved. In grace, the Lord gave me what I did not deserve so why should I not do the same?

In summing up, I pray that this talk will help you to realise that God has got more to do in you than through you. Let us realise the duty we have as Christians to live out our lives for Jesus. Not just part of our lives but our all, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice and dedicating ourselves to serving our Master.

May God bless you. Amen.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on The Epistle to the Romans – Duties. How to live soberly, (in oneself) Chapter 12, talk number T1179.

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