

The Epistle to the Romans - Duties How to live godly – (to God) Chapter 14

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

It is a fair while since we considered most of the earlier sections of The Epistle to the Romans, so let us remind ourselves what we have considered previously with a brief summary of the main points so far.

It is well accepted by Bible students that the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives us the height or topstone of Christian teaching. It is equally well accepted that his letter to the Christians at Rome gives us the very foundation of Christian teaching.

There is much material in Paul's Letter to the Romans that can be used in either personal witness to the Christian Gospel, or in public preaching. Still, it is well worth reminding ourselves that The Epistle to the Romans is not so much the preaching of the gospel to the sinner as the teaching of the Gospel to the Christian saint, that is, the believer on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are now towards the end of a series which demonstrates the way in which the apostle Paul outlines in the 16 chapters of Romans what we need to know about God Himself, and also what we need to know about ourselves. This is with a view to our taking stock of ourselves before God and applying what we learn about ourselves. That will enable us to be assured that we are right in our personal relationship with God and become and sustain ourselves in right relationships with our fellow men and women.

By the way, I will not be saying anything in this talk that hasn't been said before. There might, indeed, be nothing that some of you haven't heard before. Well and good! One of the reasons that we have for giving these talks is to consolidate what we may well have already heard several times before. A very good Christian teacher helped me a lot once by saying, "Don't be afraid of repetition, but beware of recitation." It is well worth thinking about the distinction between the two. I leave them with you. We would do well to act upon that very good remark.

Now, there are three well known, much used words, which summarise the main layout of The Epistle to the Romans. Doctrine; Dispensation; Duty. Generally speaking, chapters 1 to 8 of the Epistle or Letter to the Romans give us the Doctrine of Christianity. Chapters 9 to 11 outline important Dispensational truth. Chapters 12 to 16 remind us of the Duties of those, Jew or Gentile, who have already become Christians. That is, chapters 12 – 16 as a whole emphasise and assert our Duty, the practical answer incumbent on the Christian, in the light of all he or she has been taught in the Epistle up to that point. That is, they tell us how to behave in the daily lives we live.

It has to be said that while chapters 12 to 16 have a clear connection between them, it is even clearer that there are very definite comparisons and important relevant connections between chapters 12, 13 and 14 as a sub – group.

We cannot avoid accepting Romans 12:1 as a heading for and introduction to both the whole section of chapters 12 to 16, and a good lead in for chapters 12 – 14 as a particularly important group. In this connection, it is well worth noting that Romans 12 verse 1 is the third important 'therefore' in the Epistle (see chapters 5 verse 1, chapter 8 verse 1 and chapter 12 verse 1). Each emphasises the response that is appropriate in those who are privileged to have a relationship with God and have received a revelation of God from God.

Back to Romans 12, 13 and 14, they cover three aspects of our lives, each involving a relationship and concentrating on that one for emphasis.

Chapter 12 emphasises what we are 'In ourselves.'

Chapter 13 takes account of what we are 'Towards others.'

Chapter 14 takes account of what we are 'Towards God.'

Let us consider a few very lucid examples from the texts which emphasise the point.

Summing up: in chapters 12, 13 and 14, the scriptures are explicit.

Chapter 12, particularly verse 3, says:

"I say ... to every man ... among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

In chapter 13, the fundamental message is emphasised, in particular, as verses 7 and 8 say,

"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man anything."

And, again in verse 13,

"Let us walk honestly", that is, towards others.

Romans 14, highlighted in verse 8, says,

"Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's".

In considering consistent scriptures like Romans chapters 12, 13 and 14, I personally find it helpful to study them alongside what I consider to be parallel if relatively short statements of other scriptures. An obvious one is Paul's Letter to the younger man Titus. In chapter 2 verse 12 he says: "We should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." That is a grand heading and summing up of what we read of in detail in these chapters of Romans. Let us consider them for a moment.

First of all, it is a clear instruction to a youngish man who has grown into and proven himself to be worthy of helping the great apostle Paul to take the strain involved in serving the Lord during the early years of the present Christian dispensation. Let us read Titus chapter 2 verses 11 to 15 as a whole and in their own context.

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority."

Paul is anxious to remind Titus that the salvation they believed was available to all who heard the gospel message but was only effective to those who believed it. Then, in developing what he has to say, he impresses upon Titus the three major aspects of blessing that salvation brings in its train. That is, the three major aspects that Paul is also bringing before the Roman Christians.

I consider that the exhortation “we should live soberly”, given in Titus chapter 2 verse 12, can be taken for an excellent heading for Romans chapter 12 as a whole. Similarly, the exhortation given in Titus chapter 2 verse 12 also says, “live...righteously”, a more than adequate heading and pointer to the fundamental message of Romans chapter 13. Then, to complete the trilogy of brief but pithy statements, Paul exhorts the younger man to “live...godly” in this present world, as detailed in Romans 14.

Summing up, the same trend that Paul brings before the Romans as a group is presented to Titus as an interested individual. As with the Romans, Paul concentrates the renewed mind of Titus to realise that the blessing into which he has been brought will undoubtedly, and needs to, affect every part of his being and conduct of his life. Putting it into the words of the text, Titus needs to live soberly (self-ward, that is in himself), righteously (towards others with whom he comes into contact), and godly (most importantly, in his personal relationship with the God Who has saved him, putting it briefly, God-ward). What a happy position to be in and has been available to each one of us since we first trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour because we have been brought to realise that, for those who trust Him, our sins are forgiven for time and eternity, and we have been brought into God’s great salvation.

Let us never forget that Paul never exhorted others to do what he wasn’t prepared to do himself. He practised what he preached, hook, line, and sinker.

Before conversion, he was wrong in himself, wrong towards his fellow men and particularly wrong towards the Holy God he claimed to serve. As to detail, he was insolent and overbearing in himself, a persecutor of others who served the true God, and a blasphemer towards God Himself.

Summing up the chapters 12, 13 and 14, the scriptures are explicit. Titus, as well as the Romans, was taught by the apostle Paul in Titus 2 verse 12:

- How to live soberly (in oneself) is amplified in Romans chapter 12 verse 3.
- How to live righteously (to others) is amplified in Romans chapter 13 verse 13.
- How to live godly (towards God) is amplified in Romans chapter 14 verse 8.

We must not forget the richness of this trilogy of Christian teaching, but we must really enjoy the thought that the climax of the three chapters relates to the enjoyment of our positive relationship with the God Who has saved us from the eternal judgment of a holy, righteous God and prepared us to begin now in the enjoyment of all that His eternal love has wrought and brought us into.

As we move away from these fascinating scriptures, let us not forget that there is a similar portion in Micah chapter 6 verse 8. It is interesting to see that, even in the Old Testament, the same right, basic thoughts and ways of living are given. This was well before the Son of God came into the world to be our Saviour.

“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly (that is, towards others), to love mercy (in our own souls), and to walk humbly with our God” (that is, God-ward). How consistent is the God of our salvation!

So, let us move back and consider other matters that come to light in Romans 14, which is the main text for today. We realise that there are in it three major positive themes, Liberty, Lordship

and Love. That is, there are three major statements of principle, each followed by an exhortation. So, taking the chapter as a whole, let us take them one by one.

First, let us concentrate on the text of verses 1 to 9 while we read it, and then make our own judgment of the first theme I suggest, and also our own individual answer to it.

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

Principle 1: Liberty or Licence?

Verse 3 states that, unconditionally, “God hath received [every believer].”

Verse 4 makes it plain that “to his own master he (that is, ‘each servant’) standeth or falleth.”

Exhortation 1:

Verse 5 is clear: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord” (verse 8).

We are to acknowledge His Authority, His Control, His Power, His Lordship: “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (verse 9).

Verse 22 encourages us: “Have [faith] to thyself before God.” And verse 23 exhorts us not to doubt because such doubt equates to sin.

At all times, in all things, we are subject to His sweet constraint.

Moving on, let us likewise concentrate on the text of verses 10 to 14. While we read it, we should make our own judgment of the theme I suggest, and individually answer to it.

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

Principle 2: Individual privilege and responsibility.

Verse 10: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

Verse 12: "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

First of all, after The Rapture of the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ, there will be (in heaven) 'The Judgment Seat of Christ', at which all believers must stand. Their eternal salvation is secure, but they will be impartially assessed by their Master, as verse 4 has told us. Their lives and service on earth will be reviewed in the light of His perfect judgment. The account to be given at the 'Judgment Seat of Christ' will cover the whole of our lives, that is, before we were converted as well as our time on earth after we believed.

We shall, of course, be glad to have the Lord's perfect judgment on everything for which we have been responsible. He will declare His assessment of them and assign their proper reward. This will be followed by 'The Marriage Supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:7 – 9) at which there will be great joy. The Old Testament saints, who have already been resurrected at The Rapture, will be guests at 'The Marriage Supper of the Lamb', as friends of the bridegroom (Revelation 19:9 with John 3:29). Both 'The Judgment Seat of Christ' and 'The Marriage of Christ the Lamb' to 'The Christian Assembly, The Church of God' will necessarily take place after The Rapture of believers and before The Appearing of Christ in power and great glory.

Likewise, it must be acknowledged that "all" in Romans 14:11 includes all responsible persons, unbelievers, who have ever lived. These shall be judged, ultimately, at The Great White Throne for every responsible act of theirs (Revelation 20:11 – 15).

Exhortation 2:

Verse 16 asks us to consider the fact that what we do in all good conscience before God may upset another believer and be regarded as sinful.

Verse 13: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

Last of all, let us concentrate on the text of verses 15 to 23 while we read it, and then make our own judgment of the theme I suggest, and also the answer to it.

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

Principle 3: Construction not demolition.

Verse 15: We are all brethren and the Saviour died for each one of us.

Verse 17: The (moral) kingdom of God is not meat and drink about religious matters of what we do, or don't practise, but the essential issues of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Exhortation 3:

Verse 19: "Let us therefore follow after [pursue] the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."

That is, let us seek to build up, not pull down; construct, not demolish.

One final practical challenge to all of us as individuals, but especially to me. If I had been living in Rome at the time, would my name have been considered to be worthy of inclusion by such a servant of the Lord as the apostle Paul?

Our God is a holy God and a spiritual God. Our response to Him must also have a spiritual component. God must be given what He is due. Let us make sure that we take every opportunity to respond to Him in spontaneous praise, worship, adoration and thanksgiving for His wonderful love to us. Amen.

In the meantime, let me say, "Thank you very much for your patience and interest in listening to this Truth for Today talk number T1181, considering Romans chapter 14."

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