



Lesson 18

Living Sacrifices

Romans 12-13

“Therefore... present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...”

Romans 12.1

We have now reached the practical application section of Paul’s letter to the Romans. However, we should note that the practical application only matters because of the theological doctrine found in the first 11 chapters. In other words, all of the instruction for godly living found in this section matters little unless viewed in light of the gospel. If God had not saved us through Christ, all the instructions found in this section would do nothing but give us a standard we could not reach. However, given that we can be righteous through faith in Christ (ch. 1-11) we can now offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices (12.1). As Cottrell says, “All doctrine is practical in the sense that it has implications as to how we ought to live; there is nothing more practical than sound theology. Also, all practical or ethical teaching is ultimately grounded in some theological truth such as the nature of God or the nature of man or the nature of salvation.”

Furthermore, we should note that this section completes some thoughts found in the earlier theological section. Recall these statements:

- Romans 1:5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake,
- Romans 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
- Romans 7:6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

How was their faith to obey? How are we to walk in newness of life? How can we now serve in the newness of the Spirit? This section shows practical ways we can fulfill these charges.

One final word, you will note throughout this section that commands are given. These are not suggestions, or things that Christians should try to do. No, they are commands. Those who have faith in Christ will aim to obey all that God has revealed in this section. They don’t think doing so earns them God’s favor, rather they are continuing to mold their spirits after God’s Spirit (see discussion on chapter 8).

Living Sacrifices (12.1-2)

1. “Therefore” is a key word. It links what’s coming to what’s already occurred. Significantly, chapter 11 concluded with praise and wonder at God’s plan for redeeming both Jew and Gentile. The closing exhortation was, “to Him be the glory forever. Amen.” The practical applications that occur in this section are all part of giving God the glory He deserves. And what He deserves is us giving ourselves to Him completely, sacrificing our lives to the gra-

cious God who sacrificed His Son.

2. Vs. 2 defines what is meant by “living sacrifice”. Those who are being transformed will not be conformed to this world, but will be transformed as their minds are renewed by what the Spirit has revealed. Furthermore, we see that having our minds renewed isn’t a simple matter of knowing what God says, but “proving” that will in our lives through our actions.

Sound Judgment Regarding Others... And Self (12.3-8)

1. Many Christians fall prey to the danger of “comparative religion.” Doing so leads to over-valuing self and dismissing the worth of others. Paul says there is no place for that in the body of Christ.
2. His first point is that we are all members of the same body, and no two members of a body serve the same function. So differences in ability are to be expected... and appreciated!
3. Paul’s point in vs. 6 is significant: “we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...” Any gift we have is a matter of God’s grace. So, there is no room for boasting in front of others. Rather, we should focus on using our gifts, whatever gifts we have, to give glory to the Father.

Genuine Love (12.9-13)

1. At first it seems that this section doesn’t have a common thread, but I think it best to see this entire paragraph as expounding on the concept of “Let love be without hypocrisy.” Simply put, Paul is calling for true love for God, a love seen in real commitment and action.
2. True love for God does the following:
 - It hates evil, wants nothing to do with it (vs. 9)
 - It hold fast to anything that is good (vs. 9; cf. Phil. 4.8-9)
 - It puts the needs of others first (vs. 10-11,13)
 - It keeps its focus on God, even in times of trial and distress (vs. 12)

Being At Peace With All (12.14-21)

1. A variety of personal relationships are pictured in this passage: outside persecutors, brethren, enemies. God has instructions that should govern each and every relationship.
2. The key thought of this section is found in vs. 18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Peace depends on two parties, but what God demands of His people is that they strive for peace.
3. Perhaps the most difficult teaching is found in vss. 19-21, teaching that echoes Jesus’ words in Matthew 5.38-42. Vengeance feels like a natural right, but God says it belongs to Him. Thus, He wants us to mimic His behavior by loving our enemies (see 5.8)

Responsibility To Government (13.1-7)

1. This section is difficult for many Christians, particularly as we see our own government

move further away from godly principles. What must be kept in mind is that our submission to government has nothing to do with the merit of our leaders, but with honoring the will of God.

2. Rulers are ministers “of God to you for good,” (vs. 4) is a general principle. We know of many governments that oppress their people, but the general rule is that governments exist to administer justice among the people. This is the function that God has given them, and why they exist.
3. A Christian’s primary allegiance is to Christ (Rev. 1.5), so if rulers make laws opposed to His will we must obey Christ (Acts 5.29). However, if it’s simply a matter of government making rules we don’t like, we must obey and even honor rulers because our King says to do so.

Responsibility To Society (13.8-10)

1. “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law,” (vs. 8). Significantly, the final four Ten Commandments follows this, being tied to our love for others. Moral commandments are given because God is concerned with the effect our actions have on our own souls, and on the lives of others.

Behaving Properly As In The Day (13.11-14)

1. I have no doubt that Paul was referencing the Lord’s return in this section. He felt the nearness of the Lord’s return, even though he gave no prediction for when it would occur. That’s exactly how we should view His return: near, but not knowing when. Almost 2000 years have passed, but it is still true that “salvation is nearer to us than when we believed,” (vs. 11).
2. We are children of light, but we live in a dark world. Paul says for us to walk in the light, living as were in the Day.