

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PORTRAYED BY BELIEVERS

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

In chapter 12 Paul begins to show how God's righteousness is to be portrayed in the lives of the believers to those around them. First, Paul used the **mercies of God** (12:1; cf. 11:32) to implore believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. Second, he told them not to be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of their minds so they could know the will of God for their lives (12:2).

Paul informed Christians how they should live to model the righteousness of God to believers in the church where they attend (12:3-16), then to the enemies that persecute them (12:17-21), next to the political leaders in their country (13:1-7), also to their neighbors around them (13:8-10), and finally to those who practice the works of darkness (13:11-14).

I. God's Righteousness Portrayed by Believers in Their Church — 12:1-21

A. By the Mercies of God — 12:1-2

Believers were to show the righteousness of God in their church by offering themselves as living sacrifices to God and by having transformed bodies. The mercies of God would make this possible.

1. Portrayed by being a living sacrifice — 12:1

12:1 — After a lengthy presentation of important doctrines that every Christian needs to know (Rom 1-11), Paul applied these doctrines to the lives of Christians for them to practice.

"Beseech" — Paul pleads with all believers to respond positively to God's kindness to them. This is not a command, but an urgent appeal.

"The mercies of God" — Paul spoke of the mercies of God as the foundation for living a godly life (11:32). Paul had written of the gracious and rich mercies of God to save and sanctify us (Rom 1-11). We cannot earn God's favor by our good works, because they are like filthy rags to Him (Isa 64:6). We need God's mercy to be saved from His wrath (1:18; cp. Jn 3:36). He showed His mercy by sending His Son to die for our sins and raised Him from the dead to give us power to quit our sins. The mercies of God have blessed us in many ways, but the greatest act of mercy was to save us when we believed and called on Him (10:9-13).

"Present" — This word is translated "yield" in 6:13. We were bought by Jesus' blood from the slave market of sin to belong wholly to Him. We are slaves of Jesus Christ, a perfect and loving Master; we should yield our bodies to Him to do whatever He tells us. When we do this, we show that we are slaves to God. He will enable us to obey every command He gives us because the Spirit of God dwells in us (1 Cor 6:19-20).

"A living sacrifice" — The Jewish believers presented a dead animal as their sacrifice to God, but we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which has several implications. First, it is a personal sacrifice in our worship of God. Second, it is a life-long sacrifice, not a short-term sacrifice that needs to be repeated again and again. Third, it is a sacrifice that can be made only by those that have received the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for salvation.

Note three characteristics of this living sacrifice. First, it is to be "holy" which means we are to be set apart from the sins of the world so we can live a righteous life before God (cf. 6:19). Second, it is to be "acceptable" to Him, which means we are to walk in love as Christ did. This will please God and make us attractive to Him (Eph 5:2). Third, this life of holiness and love is the true way to worship God.

2. Portrayed by having transformed bodies — 12:2

12:2 — This verse will tell us what we need to do to have a transformed body. It will also tell us what it means to have a transformed body.

"Conformed" — It means to be "fashioned" into the likeness of another person or to take on the characteristics of an animal or bird. Positively, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (8:29). Negatively, we are not to be conformed or fashioned by the world system (cp. 1 Jn 2:15-17), because it is controlled by Satan. For example, God says His children should not be tattooed for the dead (Lev 19:28). It was a form of evil; it was satanic. Paul told the Christians to abstain from every form of evil (1 Thes 5:22). Some Christians say tattoos are culturally accepted today, so it is okay for Christians to have tattoos. The Word of God, not culture, must determine how they live. Tattoos are still used as a form of evil; satanic symbols and Satan himself are emblazoned on the bodies of his followers. We have to be honest and ask ourselves, "Why would Christians want to have a form of evil on their bodies, when God says not to do it?" If we want to be a witness for Christ, we must not be conformed to the world. We must be conformed to Christ.

"World" — This word also can mean "age." It is best comprehended when this present age (Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 4:4) is contrasted with the coming age (Heb 6:5). Our plans and way of living must be made in light of the coming age, not the present age (2 Cor 4:16-18).

"Transformed" — This means to be metamorphosed, which is what happens to a caterpillar that is changed from a worm into a beautiful butterfly. It is the same word that was used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17:2). Positively, we are being transformed inwardly so we can be more like Christ outwardly (2 Cor 3:18). This action is accomplished by God as we renew our mind by the Word of God. It is important to realize that the Holy Spirit's ministry in sanctifying the believer requires a knowledge of God's Word – it does not occur in a vacuum (Eph 4:23).

"Prove" — The mind that is renewed by God's Word can "test" the validity of God's will. We will be able to discover that the will of God is good, acceptable (well-pleasing), and perfect. Nothing is better than God's perfect will for our lives.

B. By the Gifts of God — 12:3-8

As believers in a church we are to show the righteousness of God by our use of His gifts that He has given to us.

1. Portrayed by the humble use of God's gifts — 12:3-5

12:3 — A fundamental attitude in using our gifts from God is humility. We ought not to think of ourselves better than other believers because we have received one or more gifts from God. We should be thankful and use them to glorify God and not ourselves.

"Think soberly" — Think with a sound mind about the gift(s) that God has given us. We must ask God how He wants us to use our gift in our church and we need to make every effort to use it.

"God has dealt" — God has given at least one gift to every believer (1 Pet 4:10). He wants us to use our gift(s) for edifying (building up) the church, not magnifying ourselves (cp. 1 Cor 12:14-31; 13:4; 14:12, 20).

"Measure of faith" — God gives us gifts according to our faith. He knows what we can do by faith in Him. This is not saving faith, but serving faith. Therefore, we should not depend on ourselves, but each of us should pray, "Lord, increase my faith" (Lk 17:5). Faith is increased by an increased knowledge of the Word of God coupled with obedience. Serving faith enables us to use our gift(s) according to the will of God (12:1-2).

12:4-5 — "One body" – The context is that of the local church in Rome. It was one body having many members with Christ as its Head (cf. 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12-13, 27-28; Eph 1:22-23; 2:15b-16; 4:3-6, 11-13, 15-16; 5:22-30; Col 1:17-18). Paul established a church in every city where he

ministered, which was the body of Christ in that locality. Christ was the Head of the seven churches in Asia Minor and dealt with each body of believers individually (Rev 2-3). The importance of the local body of believers indicates all believers should belong to a Christ-honoring local church that obeys the Bible as God's Word. A local church should be a temple where believers worship God. It should be a family where believers learn to love and strengthen each other. It should be a school where believers are taught the Word of God so they learn how to serve Christ effectively. It should be like an army where believers are trained to defeat the enemies of God. They must learn to serve by faith in His power, not by their own power. After they are trained, He may send them to other places to serve Him.

2. Portrayed by faithful use of God's gifts — 12:6-8

12:6 — "Gifts" – A local church has many members with a variety of gifts. All are given at least one gift when they are saved. They will need training to use their gift effectively in their church. Then they will need to be given a place in the church where they can use their gifts in obedience to Christ. He is the Head of each local church and the members are like the different parts of the body. All members must humbly submit to His authority using their gifts for His benefit, not theirs. Each member has a significant and distinct place to serve in their local church. All members need to use their gifts in harmony with the other members. That means the members need to see how their ministry relates to that of the other members in the church to work effectively with each other. When members do not use their gifts, the body does not live up to its full potential in serving Christ.

A gift is a God-given ability (whether natural or supernatural, temporary or permanent) for service within the local church (1 Tim 3:15; 1 Cor 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12). Paul lists seven different gifts in this passage but there are more (cf. 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28; Eph 4:11). Normally, the gifts are divided into two divisions: temporary and permanent gifts. Temporary gifts were those given to Christians primarily when the churches were founded. These gifts were important in the Apostolic period (tongues, healing, miracles, etc.). Permanent gifts are those needed for edifying and sustaining the churches during the whole church-age (teaching, preaching, administering, etc.).

"Prophecy" — This is the first gift that Paul mentioned in this passage. This gift can refer to foretelling: new revelations of future events where Christ is prominent; or to forthtelling: new truth from God to edify the believers (see 1 Cor 14:3, 31). This gift added truth to the truth already revealed to them. This gift ceased when the New Testament was completed.

12:7 — "Ministry" – This has the idea of serving in the church and perhaps has reference to the ministry of the deacons.

"Teaching" — It is the gift which enables a believer to clearly explain the Scriptures in a harmonious manner and apply the truth so the believers know how to live a godly life. This is the work especially of the pastor, but includes other mature believers with this ability.

12:8 — "Exhortation" – It means to call alongside or to encourage. The pastor takes the Word of God to encourage the weaker believers to remain steadfast. He lovingly encourages and strengthens these believers in spiritual growth. However, this gift is not limited to the pastor. If we have the gift of exhortation, we must not be fearful of the repercussions that we might face as we use it. Moses was afraid at first to exhort Pharaoh to let God's people leave Egypt, so God sent Aaron to help him.

"Giving" — Giving a tenth of their income is the responsibility of every believer but some can give more than a tenth. They are to give liberally with "simplicity" which means with singleness of heart, not having mixed motives. They are not to be proud as to the amount of money that they can give or seek special recognition or favors for their financial contributions (cf. 1 Jn 3:17-18; Acts 5).

"Ruling" — Refers to godly leaders who will keep the church focused on sound evangelism and discipleship preparing its members to witness at home or abroad. This requires diligent oversight.

"Mercy" — A special reference to the needs of the poor and sickly. Many may have this gift but are not exercising it. This gift must be exercised with cheerfulness. If we have the gift of mercy to encourage people, we need to make the effort to visit and befriend lonely people and to comfort those that are sick. Reading the Scriptures and praying for them will bless their hearts greatly. We show our love for people when we listen to them. So, discipline yourself not to do all the talking.

C. By the Grace of God — 12:9-21

As believers in a church, we are to show the righteousness of God by our love for the believers. We need to show love, even to our enemies that persecute us, by our attitude and actions toward them. We will need to depend on the grace of God to love others sincerely.

1. Portrayed by love for believers — 12:9-13

12:9a — The major governing disposition between believers should be that of "love" (1Cor 13; 1 Jn 4:19-21). Love may be defined as wanting the best for another. This love is to be a genuine concern for others (Gal 5:22).

"Dissimulation" — This is an archaic word for hypocrisy. Unfortunately, some "Christian" love is hypocritical because it is given for selfish purposes (2 Cor 6:6; 1 Pet 1:22).

12:9 — Love, if genuine, will manifest itself in proper conduct. Love is pure and therefore it hates evil. It is wedded (clings) to that which is good (1 Thess 5:22; Phil 4:8-9).

12:10 — Love is not only an ideal, but it should be expressed in everyday life. We should be devoted to one to another in brotherly love (Heb 13:1). We must discipline ourselves to prefer others above ourselves and not be self-centered (Phil 2:3).

12:11 — We must not be lazy ("slothful") in doing the Lord's work, but be diligent in building His church in our community. We must be fervent in spirit, sharing our good news from God. We should serve the Lord with a sincere excitement.

12:12 — "Hope" is the anticipation of our future blessings which will free us from our present tribulation. We must not let present difficulties cloud the glory of our future (2 Cor 4:16-18; 1 Thess 4:13; 1 Pet 1:7, 8). Hope is the basis for our joy.

"Patient in tribulation" — We must endure tribulation with steadfastness (5:3-4). These tribulations are the vestibule to our glory.

"Continuing instant in prayer" — This is the means by which we can hope and remain steadfast. Prayer is God's ordained way of supplying His grace when we are needy (2 Cor 12:7-10).

12:13 — When believers are in need, we must not forget our responsibility to express our love to them by sharing our provisions to supply the things they need.

"Hospitality" — It is one of those kind deeds we can show to other believers. Hospitality in Bible times probably related to the housing of God's ministers as they travelled in the Gospel ministry (Mt 10:1). It also may have involved the opening of one's house for the meeting of the church (16:5, 23).

2. Portrayed by love for enemies — 12:14-21

a. Attitude toward enemies — 12:14-16

12:14 — Christians should expect some enemies (Phil 1:29, 2 Tim 2:12), but our attitude is to bless our enemies, not curse them (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:28). This blessing should come from hearts and lips of love for their souls.

12:15-16 — We should be friendly with our neighbors and unsaved friends. We should share in their joys as well as their sorrows. We must show concern for unsaved people, even the lowly unwanted sinners (Lk 19:10). We must never think that we are better than they are.

b. Actions toward enemies — 12:17-21

12:17-21 — Paul gives several principles that we should follow. First, we are not to return evil for evil (Mt 5:39). Contrariwise, we should provide good things to those who harass us. That will force us to give careful thought in our response to persecution. We should follow that which is good in our response to persecution. We must be willing to suffer rather than letting our old nature retaliate (1 Thes 5:15; 2 Cor 8:21). Second, we should attempt to be at peace with all people (12:18); however, we must not yield to sin to maintain peace. It is better to hold on to the Word of God than to keep peace. Third, our attempt to keep peace may allow some unbelievers to take advantage of us, but we are to leave all vengeance of the wicked in God's hands (Heb 10:30; Rev 2:5,6; 20:11-15). Fourth, we must pursue peace actively by showing kind deeds to our enemies (12:20; Prov 25:21, 22). The coals of fire we put on the head of our enemies are not our fiery words and threats of hellfire, but rather kind words and gracious deeds that we show to them. This will afflict their conscience with shame and remorse like burning coals (Mt 5:43-48; 1 Pet 3:14-16). Fifth, by such a course of action we will not be conquered by evil but we will conquer evil by our good. Also, our action might save other believers from the persecution that our enemies would normally thrust against them.

II. God's Righteousness Portrayed by Believers in the World — 13:1-14

A. By the Believers' Submission to Government — 13:1-7

As citizens of the country, we must submit to its rulers, its taxes, and its laws, except when it makes demands contrary to God's law (13:1-7; cf. Acts 5:29).

13:1-4 — This passage is most appropriate for believers if any look with disdain upon government. It must be admitted that no human government is perfect but it is better than no government at all. When there is no government, it leads to anarchy. There are ways to cooperate with the government to try and improve its rule. The basic principle is that believers are subject to the rules of any government if it does not violate the rules of God. God created humans and gave them authority to rule themselves under His ultimate authority. He establishes nations and destroys them through enemy nations when they no longer serve His purpose. He is the rightful owner of the earth. He made it and has the supreme authority over it. (13:1; Gen 9:1ff; Dan 2:21; 4:17, 35).

Logically, if we refuse to submit to the rules of any government, we are rebelling against God, and we make ourselves liable to the penalties of that government (1 Pet 2:13-17). God has appointed human or civil government for a two-fold purpose. First, government is not to destroy good works but to help maintain and protect the good of society (v. 3). Second, the civil government is to punish criminals; hence, it bears arms to do its job (v. 4). The state is God's appointed means of punishing evildoers. When nations no longer protect the righteous and promote the unrighteous, those nations are doomed for destruction. The longsuffering of God and His mercy keep it from happening immediately.

13:5 — Two reasons are given for a believer to be obedient to civil government. First, disobedience will bring wrath from the government. Second, disobedience will violate his conscience. By virtue of divine revelation, we have a clear concept of God's plan concerning governments.

13:6-7 — We should obediently pay our taxes because the government needs income from its citizens in order to carry out its God-ordained ministry. We also should have a proper respect for those entrusted with carrying out civil affairs. They might be the highway patrol, the police

officers, the internal revenue, etc. Several important truths should be remembered. First, we can carry on legal constructive attempts to better organize the government. Second, it is sin to lie or defraud the government in tax returns. Tax evasion is sin, but tax avoidance (through legislative regulations) is proper. Third, it is sin to support groups who advocate unlawful activity (tax evasion, civil disobedience, hate crimes). Fourth, our duty to God has priority over our duty to the civil government. We do not exclude civil government, but we must obey God before we obey government officials (Acts 5:29).

B. By the Believers' Love for Their Neighbors — 13:8-10

As citizens, we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves (13:8-10).

13:8-10 — "Owe no man anything" does not mean a Christian should never borrow money. While that may be good advice in one sense, it is not the sense of the passage. It is better applied to those who do not pay back their debts (whether taxes or loans). The Bible does not forbid the borrowing of money (Ex 22:25; Mt 5:42). So, we are to keep current on the repayment of our debts. The only debt we have is the debt to love others. How does love fulfill the law? Perhaps Paul meant that love satisfies all the demands of the law. In other words, the one who loves biblically, fulfills the commands concerning human relationships (v. 9). This can only be done by a Spirit-led believer (8:4; Gal 5:22, 23; Lev 19:18). The result of loving our neighbors as ourself is that we will work no ill toward them.

C. By the Believers' Concern for the Ungodly — 13:11-14

As citizens, who are concerned for the ungodly, we must prepare them for the Lord's coming when He establishes His righteous Kingdom on earth (13:11-14).

13:11a — "Salvation" — This refers to the time when the Church will be saved from the wrath of God in the Tribulation (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rev 3:10-11). During the Tribulation God will destroy all of the wicked people on the earth (Ps 2:1-9; Rev 6:19) so that Christ can establish His Kingdom on the earth (Zech 14:9). Then the righteousness of God will cover the earth. The Church will be saved from the Tribulation when Christ takes His Bride, the Church, to Heaven in the Rapture (1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Thess 4:13-17).

13:11b-12 — Paul makes an urgent appeal for the believers to put off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Jesus said we are the "light of the world." He told us to let our light shine before lost people so they may see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven. We need to be concerned about our lost neighbors and do our best to bring them to Christ for salvation. Then they will be saved from the hour of Tribulation. Paul makes a similar appeal to the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:1-11) and he admonishes the believers in Corinth to be busy serving the Lord while it is day because their labor for the Lord will not be in vain (1 Cor 15:58). We are on the brink of a new day and our work should be energized by this great truth.

13:12-14 — In light of the above facts, we should live a holy life. This is shown by the dark / light contrast (Eph 6:12-13). We should conduct ourselves at all times (privately and publicly) as those who walk in the light.

"The works of darkness" — This may refer to subversive activities against government (13:1-7).

"Walk honestly" — means we are to live honorably or becomingly as Christians. Our conduct should not include alcoholic consumption, sexual misconduct, or quarreling. Note the progression of sin. Instead we should be like Christ (v. 14). The figure of clothing is used and literally means to appropriate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in our personal life (Rom 6:1ff; 12:1-2; Gal 3:27; 1 Jn 3:3). When we do, we will not be making provision for our flesh to fulfill its lusts (cf. Rom 7).

In recapping Romans 12, Paul used the **mercies of God** to plead with believers in Rome to present their bodies as a living sacrifice (12:1). He exhorted them to be transformed by a renewed mind so

they might know the perfect **will of God** (12:2). He told them the **gifts of God** were to be used humbly and faithfully to edify their church (12:3-8). Paul concludes chapter 12 with instructions that show believers how to love each other (12:9-13) and how to love their enemies (12:14-21).

In reviewing chapter 13, Paul exhorts believers to be subject to government because their authority comes from the **power of God** (13:1-2). Believers are to respect, honor, and submit to rulers that make laws and collect taxes for they are the **ministers of God** (13:3-7). They are to love their neighbor so as to fulfill the **Law of God** (13:8-10). They are to put off the works of darkness, making no provision for the flesh, and put on the armor of light and put on the **Son of God** (13:11-14).

God promised Abraham many blessings after he was justified and Abraham believed God would do them. God has already fulfilled or partially fulfilled six of His promises to him. First, He promised to make his name great (Gen 12:2), which has happened. Second, He promised to bless the world in him (Gen 12:3). This is being done by his seed, Jesus Christ, in saving sinners (Mt 1:1; Gal 3:16, 26, 29). Third, He promised to give him a son by Sarah in their old age and it was fulfilled (Gen 17:19; 18:10-15). Fourth, He promised to make his children as the stars in the heavens, which is happening (Gen 15:5-6). Fifth, He promised to make a great nation by his children, which will occur in Christ's Millennial Kingdom (Gen 12:2; Zech 14:9,16). Sixth, He promised to give him the land of Canaan as a permanent possession for his nation, Israel (Gen 13:14-15, 17; 15:7-21; 17:8). This has been partially done, but it will be fully done in Christ's Millennial Kingdom (Ezk 48). He promised to make him the father of many nations, which is already true (Gen 17:4, 6-7). He had nothing but the promises of God that this would happen, but he believed God would make it happen.

If we believe God's promises as Abraham did, we will be blessed by God with Abraham.