

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS #12

Scripture of Lesson: Romans 12: 1~21

In verse 11: 29 Paul declares that God's gift and calling of His elect are done without revocation/repentance. God chose the people of Israel as His chosen people; He gave a covenant of blessing to Abraham. And He does not revoke these acts of past. Accordingly, Israel will come back into God's grace in the latter days as Paul predicted. All things are of God, through God and to God's glory [v. 11: 36]. Now in Chapter 12 Paul encourages the Christians in Rome to live as living sacrifices so that they honor and glorify God.

1. Our lives as living sacrifices to God: v. 1~8

What does it mean to "present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God? [v. 1]" How should we live to present an acceptable service before God? One guiding principle is "to not be conformed to his world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind [v. 2]." This can occur as we spend quality time (QT) with God daily to learn of Jesus, who is meek, lowly in heart.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. [Matt 11: 29-30]

Now that we have come to correct understanding of the salvation plan of God, Paul is encouraging the readers to "live out" the faith in Christ in our daily lives as "living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God." That is expected of Christians by God. In a natural family children come of age and come to full grasp of how they are a part of the family where there is love, care and protection. They are thankful for all they have as provided by their parents through love. And the parents teach them how to clean their rooms, take good care of themselves and be a help to the parents with the chores of the house and family. Good children want to do the things expected and guided by the parents to please them and to express their gratitude and love towards their parents. Likewise, Christians live out their faith and gratitude through their living.

Christians have diverse capacities and roles in a church community. Paul cites teachers, prophets, missionaries, and various ministering capacities. Christians should fulfill their roles and responsibilities in simplicity, diligence and with cheerfulness [v. 8]. We certainly see a perfect example in Jesus, who lived as the oldest son of a carpenter family, then later worked as a missionary, teacher and in serving capacity with a humble spirit. And He gave Himself wholly to God's mission of human salvation. Most of the disciples came from Galilee area and were intimately familiar with Jesus' previous life. James, along with others, was one of Jesus' relatives and he later wrote, "Faith without works is dead." He knew Jesus lived out His faith with His life. James saw and witnessed that with his own eyes.

Serving as a Christian in a family, church, or community is an essential aspect of living sacrifice, which is rightly rendered to God in response to God's amazing grace and mercy. The prodigal son said to his father, "Consider me as one of your hired servants." He was willing to serve in a humble, lowly status. He learned the lesson well. America has been a model example of Christians who serve the community, the country and the world in their needs. Today there are many people around the world hungry, in pain, without shelter and without hope of decent life. There is much need in this world

and God calls His people to various serving roles. We should respond in humble gratitude, without fanfare, and in simplicity of heart.

Discussion topic: Do you believe you are taking part in Christ's sacrifice in the way you live as Christians? What does 'living sacrifice' mean in your life?

2. Instructions for sound Christian life: v. 9~20

When a person has been converted and become a Christian, one of the first questions she asks is, "How am I supposed to live?" She knows she has said "Yes" to Jesus as her Savior and Lord. From now on Jesus is my King and Lord. But the pudding is in details – give me some guidelines! So, here they are in Romans 12: 9~20. All of them are relevant to us in the 21st century as they were in the first century. This is not the most comprehensive list of guidelines for Christian living but a fairly good set of guidelines to live by.

V. 9 speaks of love without dissimulation – that is, genuine love without hypocrisy or fanfare. In America people talk of love a lot but often to show off or without genuine truthfulness or sincerity. In numerous public figures who speak of their love, we note they give up on the love a few years later. Churches have espoused Christian love as one of their guiding principles and yet they have killed other Christians over some petty differences in theological doctrine. Whereas Christ died for all sinners, let us at least show tolerance without hypocrisy.

V. 11 speaks of "not being slothful in business." This speaks of proper attitude that all Christians should hold in their occupations – to be diligent and creative as recipients of talents from God. Whether we are serving the country as public servants or running a private business employing people, we need to put genuine, diligent efforts in our responsibilities, holding forth the sound principles that God teaches us through the Scripture.

V. 19 speaks of not taking vengeance in our own hands but leaving it to God. If we pay back the wrong we received from others, there will be an endless cycle of revenges and hatred. That is what has been happening around the world among various peoples. God has been watching how nations treat other peoples and nations. He will do vengeance as He sees fit. This is an important thing to take into consideration in our national policy. How much of responsibility should the U.S. take upon into our own hands when we see evil acts being done in the world? What is the difference between keeping the bad actors in check and punishing them in revenge? May God give wisdom and divine guidance to our nation's leaders as they formulate and execute our national policies!

V. 21 sums up a very important principle of Christian living, "Overcome evil with good." Saul, before he was converted, sought to persecute the disciples of Jesus, doing much hard on the budding Christian community. But when he met Jesus on the way to Damascus, he came to see himself as an evil actor working against the Son of God. He had seen the Christians, such as Stephen, turning the other cheek to the enemy. He came to learn from the meek and lowly Christ. He came to learn that there is a part God plays and another part that His people plays. When the creation lifts their hearts towards God, He brings them down and humbles them. That is how the tower of Babel was brought down and the great flood of Noah's days destroyed the entire world but Noah and his family. God's principle is contrary to the world's principle. In this world people put themselves first before others. In God's kingdom Christians humble themselves and serve others and are glorified when Christ returns.

Discussion topic: Discuss how each of these instructions of Paul is relevant today.