

Study 13 – The epistle of Paul to the Romans, by Neville Clark 2017

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Reading: Rom Ch 12

The Righteousness of God in Practice

As we commence Ch 12, we are, of course, commencing the final major section of the book, which runs from Ch 12v1 though to Ch 15v13, which we have entitled here, the Righteousness of God in Practice. This is the practical section of the epistle to Romans, and, you know, it is a logical way to complete the book from Paul's point of view. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, as you now know, we've got Paul's doctrinal treatise on the subject of the atonement. In this final section, he now concludes the epistle by dealing with the practical matters that should issue forth in our lives, as a consequence of that doctrine, or at least, as a consequence of understanding that doctrine. And what was that doctrine this doctrine of the Atonement? Well, it was the means, of course, by which a righteous God could take an unrighteous man and make him righteous without compromising God's own righteousness.

The problem began way back in Rom Ch 1 where the Apostle describes the universal failure of mankind. And his exposition then winds its way through ten more chapters until you get to Ch 11 where by the time you get to the end of the chapter, it results in God's mercy being shown to both Jew and Gentile. If I could put it this way, the universal salvation of all mankind, not you understand, that everyone is saved, but that because God's plan is so all-encompassing, everyone can be saved. And the point of Ch 12, then, is given all that God has done for us, there should be a response from us. If we understand the significance of what has happened in these previous eleven chapters, there ought to be a response from us in Ch 12. And this is how that section from Ch 12 through to Ch 15 breaks up.

Responsibilities in Christ

Ch 12, we have moral responsibilities of the believers, Ch 13, our civil responsibilities, that is in daily life, before man, and Ch 14, our ecclesial responsibilities. And you will notice that I have broken Ch 12 into three sections, we've got the first couple of verses which are very familiar to us on being a living sacrifice, there's the, if you like, the philosophical reason the Apostle commences with in this chapter. That is followed by another section v3-8 on right conduct in ecclesial life. And can you see that springing out of that section of right conduct in ecclesial life comes Ch 14 which is our ecclesial responsibilities. And the last part of Ch 12 is from v9-21, right conduct in daily life, and springing out of that comes Ch 13, our civil responsibilities in daily life. So you see, Ch 12, really is the foundation for all the rest of the practical section that is going to follow. Ch 12, before the ecclesia and before the world; Ch 13 before the world, Ch 14, before the ecclesia. And then the last chapters of the book, halfway through Ch 15 to the end, some of which we have already considered, the final consequences of this epistle as far as the Apostle is concerned, his future travel plans, greetings from himself, greetings from other people, as we saw in the first study.

Well come to Ch 12 then and v1. What do you make of this? "I beseech you, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." So there's my first question. "I beseech you therefore," that is, on the basis of the foregoing, on the basis of everything you have read, "I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God." Why the mercies of God. Well, the simple answer is, he beseeches us by the mercies of God as opposed to the compulsion of the Law of Moses. You see it is all a question of motive. Law could force you to act in a certain way but God is looking for a different response. He wants a living sacrifice and he wants the exhibition of that sacrifice to be a voluntary response, and the basis of that the Apostle says is "the mercy of God."

The mercy of God

Now why? That is my question, why the mercy of God? And the answer is very simple because that is precisely how Ch 11 concluded. Look at v30-32 of Ch 11, "For ye Gentiles who in time past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through the Jews unbelief. Even so these Jews also now not believed that through the mercy shown to you Gentiles they may obtain mercy, for God concludes all mankind in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." "I beseech you therefore by the mercy of God," that is the mercy God has shown to you, what is your response, what is your practical relationship with the doctrine of the Atonement, given what God has done for you, given the chaos that mankind found himself in Rom Ch 1; the resolution he is brought to in Rom 11, what will you do about that, Rom 12v1. You see the power of that? The doctrine of the Atonement after all is a doctrine of mercy isn't it, it is a doctrine of mercy,

because there is nothing we possibly can do to earn salvation. If God doesn't have mercy then none of us will be saved.

Well based upon the mercy of God, therefore he says, I want you to present your bodies a living sacrifice which is your reasonable service. And straight away you have got an impossibility, how do you become "a living sacrifice." Under the Law there was no such thing as a 'living sacrifice,' the Law could only produce dead sacrifices. In fact on the two occasions where the Lord tried to project the idea of a living sacrifice it had to use two animals. On the day of Atonement in Lev 16, two goats were used, one was killed, and the other was set free, it was called the scape goat. And in Lev 14, and the cleansing of the leper, two birds were used, one was killed, and the other was set free, and in each case, those two animals represented two aspects of the one sacrifice. That was as close as the Law could get to a "living" sacrifice, where, in a manner of speaking, half of the sacrifice was still alive, but of course, pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, killed and raised from the dead. But when we talk about the practical application of righteousness, or the righteousness of God, in our lives, this is what it means. The sacrifice of Christ was a representative sacrifice. That is to say, he doesn't just die, and we put our feet up and do nothing, we've got to participate in the sacrifice, we've got to also die daily, we've got to copy him, otherwise he is a substitute, isn't he? Otherwise he doesn't represent us at all, we've got to copy Christ and his sacrifice.

You want to see how it works? You come back just a couple of pages, to Ch 6v11. We've got to become "living sacrifices," how do you do that? This is how, in Rom 6v11, "Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves, to be dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." There is a "living sacrifice," dead to one way of life and alive to another, that's what he is talking about in Rom 12v1, and he says, that on the basis of all God has done for us, that is your "reasonable" service.

Your reasonable service

Now the word 'reasonable' is the Greek word *logikos λογικος*, for which of course, we get the English word logical. What's my point? My point is this, when we talk about, before God, what is our 'reasonable' service, we are not using the word 'reasonable' in the sense of being 'fair,' or 'appropriate,' this is a 'service of reason,' or a service which has been reasoned out. It is a service of logic, a service that makes sense, you see. What he is saying, is on the basis of what God has done for you there is only one way you can now conduct your life. 'Think about it logically,' he says, 'what else would you do for God, but what I am telling you to do here.' It is our logical response to the mercy of God, to become a living sacrifice, you see, that is what he is saying. But of course there are implications in becoming a living sacrifice, this service of reason is going to require two things. It is going to require No 1, separation from the world in which we live, and No 2, separation to the will of God, and of course, all of that begins in the mind. V2, "Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The word 'conformed' here in v2 means to be fashioned like something, or to be made like something. Here's JB Phillips translation of v2. Now Phillips, of course, is a free translation so I am not quoting you this because of textual accuracy, but I think he captures the picture that is being painted in v2. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould, but let God remould your minds from within." Or as the Apostle says in the AV, "Don't be conformed, be transformed." So I have told you what 'conformed' means, what about 'transformed.' Well, there is a story here isn't there, because the word "transformed" in the Greek is the word *metamorphou μεταμορφου* from which we get the English metamorphosis. So think about metamorphosis, this is the story of the grub to the butterfly. What is that saying? Well, the metamorphosis that we have undergone is substantially greater than what you read about or what you see in the animal kingdom. Now this word *metamorphou, μεταμορφου* is translated in Matt 17v2 in the life of Christ, as the word 'transfigured.' And the whole purpose of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ was to give him a taste of immortality ahead of the crucifixion. So that is the transformation that we are talking about here that is going to happen to us. From mortality to immortality.

Now you think about the lifestyle of that butterfly. It begins with an egg, grows into a caterpillar, then to a cocoon, to a pupae and then finally to a butterfly itself. Now think about the meaning of that simple natural story. The caterpillar, now here we are, born as grubs, downward looking, very unattractive, raw human nature, that's how we come out of the womb. But we've come to a knowledge of the truth and we become the pupae, and onto the next stage. We are baptised and we cocoon ourselves in an ecclesia, protected from the influences of the world and a transformation begins. We are now going to change the kind of people that we are. One lifestyle is going to die and another lifestyle is going not emerge. We are, if you like, remoulded from within. That is exactly what is happening to that grub, it disintegrates completely and is rebuilt, isn't it. And then the butterfly, at the appropriate time it emerges, a creature of the heavens, I mean, it began as a creature of the earth, and it has now, as it were, migrated to a creature of the heavens hasn't it.

Clothed in, as it were, the beauty of immortality, transfigured into incorruptibility. This is one of the marvels of creation, of course, teaching a lesson of the marvel of the creation to come. But it all begins with a renewing of the mind, a renovation of the mind, a complete change of the mind for the better, say's

Everything starts with the mind

Thayer. Everything starts with the mind, why does it start with the mind? Well, of course, Prov 23:7 says "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Everything begins with the mind, and that was the problem with the Law of Moses, you see, because the Law of Moses never ever affected the mind. I mean, it could, if you allowed it to, if you learned from it, but of itself it would never affect the mind. It was the Apostle Paul again in Heb 9v9 that says, "That the sacrifices of the Law of Moses could never make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience." The Law of Moses could never change your mind, whereas the mercy of God could, and that's his point here in the opening two verses. It could and it should, but even if it starts with the mind, even if this transformation we are speaking of, starts with the mind, it doesn't finish with the mind, you've got to prove, he says, at the end of v2, the will of God, you've got to prove that acceptable will of God. Now the word "prove" means 'to examine' or 'to put it to the test.' And the word 'acceptable' means 'well-pleasing.' Very similar comment, in fact, in Eph 5v10, "Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord." So you have got to get your Bible out, examine what God wants, that is, what he wants you to do, and you've got to understand why he wants he wants you to do it. You've got to prove it for yourself, you've got to examine it for yourself, this 'acceptable' will of God, because that's the only way you will renovate your mind, that's the only way it is going to occur.

It sounds so easy, but it only happens, in fact, really, through tribulation. I've got a couple of quotes at the bottom of the screen there, in daily life tribulation comes upon us. Acts 14v22 says, that we must "continue in the faith and that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." So this is how this grub disintegrates and gets rebuilt, there is enormous tribulation going on inside that chrysalis. And even in ecclesial life "There must needs be heresies among you," he says in 1 Cor 11v19 "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." It is not meant to be a bed of roses this side of immortality, in or out of the ecclesia, he says. I mean, Oh that it were different, but this is how the grub is transformed, you see? That is just the way it is. Now let's come back to the story about the butterfly, let's imagine, you go outside and you see this little chrysalis, you've been watching it for a week, and all of a sudden you see it start to open. There is a little rip in the chrysalis, and you see this creature trying to claw its way out into newness of life. And there is a burst of activity and then it rests, catches its breath, another burst of activity and it rests again, and you say to yourself, 'Perhaps if I could just put in a little rip, just open that hole a little wider, I could help the thing out, which if you were to do so, it would kill the butterfly, because unless it struggles like it does it never ever gets blood into its wings, and unless it gets blood into its wings, it will never fly. You help it, you remove the tribulation, it will never ever leave the ground, it is remarkable. Now I have taken a little liberty with the analogy, but you see the point, even in tribulation as unkind as that might feel, there is purpose in the same way that that animal struggles into newness of life.

Right conduct before God

Well, there is the opening section, you see, there's the principles upon which the rest of the chapter is going to be based. Right conduct before God, the response that we ought to have before God, for all that he has done for us, if we understand anything about the significance of the doctrine of the Atonement. The rest of the chapter, as we mentioned a moment ago, breaks into two parts, v3-8, Right conduct in ecclesial life especially in relation to ecclesial functions, and v9-21, Right conduct in daily life, especially in relation to love. So, as I say, v1-2 is the Theory, v3-21 is the application. Here is the first point in v3, since your mind has been renewed you ought not to think too highly of yourself, v3, "For I say," says Paul, "through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith." Now he says here, that this comment is based upon the fact that grace has been given to him. What does that mean? Well, in simple terms, the word "grace" means 'gift' and this is the gift of his apostleship. So he is simply saying, 'On the basis that I am the Apostle, this is what I am telling you.' Now we know that because Eph 3v7, for example Paul says, "I was made a minister according to the gift of grace given unto me." So on the basis of my apostleship, I am telling you not to be inflated by the abilities that God has given to you. And now in v3, we've got a major play on words. Three times the word 'think' occurs in this verse in one form or other He says, "don't think more highly than you ought to think" The word 'think' in the Greek is the word *φρονεω*, and the word 'think highly' is *υπερφρονεω*. And the word 'think soberly' is *σορφρονεω*. So you see what he is saying here, "Every man that is among you not to *hyperfroneo*, more than he ought to *froneo*, but to think *sofroneo*. So three times, as I say, the word 'think' occurs in one form or other.

The measure of faith

So what's the point? The point is, don't get carried away with your own importance. Have a realistic assessment of your abilities. "According," he says, "as God has dealt to every man, the measure of faith." Now that reads, if you just read it like that, that reads as though God has created some of us more faithful than others, now that would be a problem wouldn't it, because Heb 11v6 says, "That without faith it is impossible to please God." How can God therefore create us, intrinsically, some of us, able to please him more than others. Now that's just wrong, that's not possible. Think about this word 'measure.' We've been given certain beliefs according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. Now this word 'measure,' it is the Greek word *μετρον* from which we get metre, but just think about the English word 'measure.' A measure can mean one of two things. A measure can mean a quantity of something, like a measure of liquor, it could be quantity of something, or a measure could be measuring instrument like a measuring tape, that's a measure, it could be one of two things, and it is the second meaning here that must be correct. "Have a humble view of yourself," he says, "using the measuring tape of faith." Measure yourself against the plumb line of Scripture, don't inflate your ego, that's what he is saying in v3. Here's JB Phillips again, this free translation which is so vivid. "As your spiritual teacher, I give this piece of advice to each of you, don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all." No ambiguity there, is there? Don't overrate yourself.

So what is the problem in this ecclesia, why are we even saying this in v3? Well, of course, we've got people thinking more highly than they should. Who, who in this ecclesia, thought more highly of themselves than they ought to have? Well, in fact two groups, the two groups, be they Jew or Gentile. You may remember way back in Ch 2 of Romans, and v19-20, the Jews said that they were "Guides of the blind, the lights of those in darkness, the instructors of the foolish and the teachers of babes." That's what the Jews thought of themselves, that's likely to become a problem in the Ecclesia. But, you know, it is not the Jews that the Apostle particularly has in mind here in this verse, it is the Gentiles. V3, you see, this verse is very similar, if you just come across the page to Ch 11v20, Rom 11v20, "Because of unbelief," he says, "the Jews were broken off, and thou Gentiles standest by faith, be not high minded but fear." Don't think more highly than you ought to think, be not high minded...the Gentiles were prone in Ch 11v20, to be "high minded," and what about this, look at Ch 12v16, "Be of the same mind one toward another, mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate, be not wise in your own conceit," and compare that to Ch 11v25, "For I would not, brethren," Gentiles, "that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceit, blindness in part hath happened to the Jews until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." See the Gentiles were prone to be wise in their own conceit, they are the key target of Rom 12v3.

Not that the Jews couldn't be like that, but there was a significant pre-disposition in the Gentiles to be like that, based on their understanding of their position before God as compared with the Jews. So now, having said that in v3, he emphasises the diversity of the ecclesial body, that everybody had their part to play whether they were Jew or whether they were Gentile in that they would have to work together v4, "For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many are the one body of Christ," he says, "everyone members one of another." There is no such thing as Jew or Gentile, don't overthink your capacity. You have got certain gifts given by God, they are there for the benefit of the ecclesia, not for the elevation of your pride and Gentiles, I am speaking predominantly to you, he says.

Esteem others greater than self

Well having now in v3-5 dealt with our own estimation of our abilities, v6-8 now deals with the conscientious exercise of those abilities. And what you have mentioned now in these next 3 verses are 7 ecclesial positions, or 7 ecclesial functions. Look what he says, v6, "Having then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, he that exhorteth on exhortation, he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity, he that ruleth, with diligence, and he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." Now I have put it on the screen, there are the 7 functions of the ecclesia that he particularly draws attention to in Rom 12. You've got to note that 4 of them have specific qualifications. For those with prophecy, do it according to the faith. Those who are inclined toward giving, do it with simplicity. Rulers, do it with diligence. Mercy, do it with cheerfulness. Now I will discuss each of those, but what's happening here in this ecclesia? Well, it appears as though there were people who were no longer conscientious about fulfilling their various ecclesial responsibilities. They had grown tired of Bible study, evidently, and had begun to express their own thoughts rather than the balanced thoughts of God. They had become lax in their administration of the ecclesia, people had become lazy.

So he speaks now about these various ecclesial roles. "Prophecy," he says in v6. Prophecy, the word means, 'exposition,' prophecy doesn't just mean 'to foretell,' it means 'to forthtell,' from which we would derive, 'exposition.' And in ecclesial life, there are, frankly, two problems that can happen with expositors. The first is the problem where the expositor, tries too hard, he wants to find something new. And so, of course, you get creative interpretations of Scripture. This is an expositor, there is no question, he does his hours, he certainly spends time preparing his work, but he finds it hard to give a standard interpretation, because everybody else has already given the standard interpretation, so he dives off on a tangent and completely misses the point of the section. What he says might not be wrong, but it is just not relevant.

And the second problem is, the opposite extreme, the lazy expositor, So this brother doesn't do his work, he relies instead on his eloquence, but the problem is that what comes out is really what the Bible says at all, and you stand back and you analyse what's being said and you wonder whether the moral that's being espoused is really a moral of God's word, or perhaps, instead, a moral of humanism, because it is not stitched clearly to what the text says. And what Paul says here is the expositors should expound according to the proportion of faith. The NIV says, "In agreement with the faith." The Apostolic Bible, "According to the ratio of the faith." They need to present a balanced picture of the character of God. It can't be all about God's mercy any more than it can be all about God's judgment, but above all, it has got to be based on Scripture. If your expositors aren't going speak to Scripture, they are no use as expositors.

"Ministry." Ministry, the Greek word ministry here is the Greek word *diakonia*, *διακονια*, from which we get 'deacon,' that is practical service in the ecclesia. Phoebe, the sister Phoebe in Rom 16v1 who carried the letter to the Romans to Rome from where she lived in Corinth, is called a deaconess of the ecclesia. And perhaps there are the sort of people in the ecclesia who don't have the ability to express themselves verbally, but they do it with their hands and their feet, and of course we have people like that in this ecclesia, after the meeting concludes, or perhaps whatever meeting their might be they are extremely busy like in a bee-hive running around from person to person, whereas others aren't. There are people like that. Teaching, with teaching he says, he that has the ability of teaching, teach, he says. The word teaching means to instruct, it is different to exposition, these are public lectures, these are Sunday School teachers, these are tutors of baptism candidates. These are teaching on fundamentals as opposed to exposition perhaps on non fundamentals, and you've got to be careful here too especially at lectures, very tempting, I find it myself, very tempting when you are giving a lecture on a common subject to want to put something in there for the poor Christadelphian in the audience who has heard this talk a hundred times before. The problem is that as soon as you do that, you might lose the interested friend, or perhaps the young people who are also trying to learn. Teachers, he says, focus on teaching, get the message across.

Exhortation, the word means 'to call alongside' not necessarily from the platform, although it could be, but the purpose the exporter in this verse is to encourage or to renew the fervour and zeal in people. On the platform of course, exhorters need a measure of eloquence, of course, they are on the platform, they need to be able to speak, but if they are not on the platform, they don't need to be eloquent, they need to be enthusiastic, they need to have a zeal, they need to have a commitment to the things of the truth, and they need to be able to impart that to other people to other people, that's exhortation that's 'coming alongside' people. Giving, now I have just said, here, 'welfare,' of course the giving is probably only to those in need, it could be money, it could be time, it simply could be company, but there is a qualification on giving isn't there? In v8, he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity and there is a qualification. The word 'simplicity' means honesty or sincerity, or singleness of heart. And the point is that if you are a person inclined to giving, do it without reservation, do it without grudging. 2 Cor 9v7 says that "God loveth a cheerful giver." Luke 6v38, "Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over." That's the spirit of the truth isn't it, give abundantly, give liberally.

Well, what about ruling? Well, once again, we've got a qualification. The word 'ruling' literally means 'to stand in front,' this is committee work, not just arranging brethren committee work but any committee work. You've got responsibilities, the problem of course, is that when you do stand out in front, you are very conspicuous, everybody can see you, everybody can see everything about you, and your deficiencies become very plain, because, well, you are out the front. If you are lazy, or you are apathetic, or if you are an indifferent committee member, you are not meeting your obligation to your ecclesia or to God, he says. Ruling, do it with diligence. It has got to be done diligently. And finally, mercy, the word simply means 'to have compassion,' that is to help those in distress, not everybody is good at that, not everybody is even credible in some circumstances showing mercy. This is the ability to feel a fellow-feeling with others, or to feel sympathy for other people's plights whatever they might be, and again, there is a qualification. If you are going to show mercy, you've got to do it with cheerfulness. Now that seems strange, because why wouldn't you be cheerful

if you are showing mercy, or compassion, well, because often in the back of your mind is lurking the fact that, 'Really, they've done it to themselves, and judgment might really be due.' Think of Job's friends, they came to show compassion, they came to show mercy, there's no question about the sincerity of Job's friends, but cheerfulness wasn't really a major part of their approach, was it? And it is interesting, you know, these are the 7 ecclesial functions, and of the 7 mercy was the last one, and it was the mercies of God in Ch 12v1 that has provoked this entire discussion, on the practical outworking of ecclesial life. Were it not for the mercies of God where would we stand? And are we cheerful about that, well, of course we are. Well, he says, then do the same, learn from it and go and do it. Now it will be obvious to you that Rom 12 is a very small exposition on subject of ecclesial functions, the spirit gifts and so forth, and that the comprehensive exposition on the subject of the ecclesial body really comes in 1 Cor 12. I don't intend spend any time on this slide except for completeness to show you how everything fits in.

Diversity of Gifts

What I have said here is 1 Cor 12 speaks about the spirit gifts, about the different parts of the ecclesial body. There is a comparable section, very small section here in Rom 12 and there is another one, a very small section, in Eph Ch 4. But the way the Apostle describes this issue in Corinthians, he says there are 3 classes of gifts that God has given. There are diversity of gifts he says, in reference to the spirit gifts, the 9 named gifts of the Holy Spirit, but there are also diversities of administration, now these are not spirit gifts, but these are ecclesial positions, and there are diversities of operations, also not spirit gifts but ecclesial positions. And the reason that I put that up is, well you can see that he is talking about the diversity of the body here to make the point to Jew and Gentile that he who thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think, doesn't understand that there are many limbs, or many organs in this body, each of which need to be there for the healthy and harmonious working of the body. The question I have to myself, brothers and sisters and young people is, is this a section on the spirit gifts or not? And if I remind you of these 7 functions, I didn't suggest that any of them was a gift of the Holy Spirit, but you might look and say, 'Well, prophecy is clearly a gift of the Holy Spirit,' and I used to think it was, and I am inclined to think now, to be honest with you, that the prophecy here that is being spoken of is probably just exposition, it is not the gift of prophecy, because none of the other functions in Rom Ch 12 are the nine named Holy Spirit gifts. You see that? So I put prophecy there on the line where it exists in those chapters, but I happen to think that prophecy here is probably not the gift of prophecy, from 1 Cor 12. You may like to disagree, but there you are, that's how the whole section fits together, and that's Paul's small slice, if you like, of 1 Cor 12 in Rom Ch 12. The abiding point, however is this, we have different abilities in ecclesial life. These should not be a cause of self-elevation but they should be used for the benefit of the entire ecclesia and whatever ability we have, whatever it might be, we should exercise it conscientiously and faithfully in the service of both God and man.

A more excellent way

having said that, there is one point from 1 Cor 12 that is worth making. Now when the Apostle finishes with the spirit gifts in 1 Cor 12, he says at the end of the chapter or the start of Ch 13, he says, "And now I will show you a more excellent way, that the gifts would fail, the spirit gifts would fail, because they were limited, but love would never ever fail because it was unlimited. And there's a contrast between Chapter 12 and 13 of 1 Cor, between the limited gifts and unlimited love, and that is exactly the point he makes here next. Having described these various ecclesial functions, in v3-8, that we operate within the limits of our various abilities, he now describes from v9 to the end of the chapter, the characteristics we should all have irrespective of what part we play in the ecclesia, and the basis of his exposition of the rest of the chapter is the subject of love. Look at v9, "Let love be without dissimulation, abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." As a consequence, therefore, what you find is if I were to map 1 Cor 12 against Rom 12v9-21, we've got an enormous amount of correspondence between the practical exhibition of love as you see it in the latter half of this chapter, and the characteristics of love in 1 Cor 12. So what is he saying in v9? Well, v3-8, "Exercise your gifts or your abilities within your limitations, and exercise love without limitations." In fact, he says, "Let love be without dissimulation." The word 'dissimulation' means 'hypocrisy,' make sure your love is sincere. And why does he say that? Well, because the first thing love has got to do, is abhor the evil and cleave to the good, if it doesn't do that, it is not love. As Bro John Carter says in his book on Romans, "Love is not a mutual indulgence, it never condones evil and it will never enter into a mutual indulgence with those who do. 1 Cor 13v6 says, "Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth." So love hates evil and loves good, that's what love is like. What that means, of course, is if you hear the cry for more love at the expense of biblical principle, it is not love, it is just not love.

Unfortunately I have seen this in ecclesial life in my time, more than once, more than twice. The question comes up, there is a clear biblical answer to that question, but the answer might not be convenient, and what we are told is that we've got to show love to our brethren, by which they mean, you've got to disregard the

Bible. You can call it compromise, you can call it capitulation, but don't call it love, and certainly, don't call it biblical. Unless it abhors the evil and cleaves to the good it is not biblical love, it is as simple as that. And he says, be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour, preferring one another. Once again, you've got a couple of interesting words here, the word 'kindly affectioned,' is the Greek word, philostorgos, φιλοστοργος a love of family relations, that is, if you like, flesh and blood, intimate family, a love of family relations. And of course, brotherly love is the word philadelphia, φιλαδελφια a love of the brethren and no surprise that you read something like v10, because, of course, the ecclesia is a family, so it follows therefore, that our relationships in the ecclesia are family relationships. Well here is the question, what is it about the ecclesia that makes us family members? Answer, our relationship to the father of the family. What is the Greek word for father? Pater, πατερ. What is the Greek word for family? Patria, πατρια, you see, a family is only a family because of its relationship to the father. Families are all descendants of the same father and generally speaking, natural families all bear the stamp of their respective fathers, well the ecclesia is a family in the same way. We are all children of the same God, in that sense.

Integrity of the family

But problems can occur if the individuals of that family begin to no longer bear the stamp of the family father. So think about this, here's the nation of Israel, they did exactly that, in Deut 32v5, "They have corrupted themselves," says Moses, "their spot is not the spot of his children." Well, the RSV says it like this, "They are no longer his children because of their blemish." So you see, they have corrupted themselves, the nation of Israel we are talking about, they were clearly the children of God, the descendants of Abraham whom God had called, they are no longer part of my family, he says, because they don't look like my children, they have corrupted themselves. What's the point? The point is this, the whole integrity of the family is based on our mutual relationship to the father, and that relationship is based solely and squarely upon this book. The moment we depart from this book, is the moment we cease to be a family. There is one other thing about families, families naturally speaking, perhaps you can find an exception, but generally speaking families have a lot of sympathy for their own family members. They make allowance for their own family members, they give each other the benefit of the doubt, so when differences arise, family members often talk the same language. And if you are a third party looking in, you might observe a conversation and think, well it is pretty clear what should happen here, and that's not how the family sees it, because they understand different things, perhaps, by the same words, because they are part of the same family. Well the ecclesia has got to be exactly the same, doesn't it, so that when differences do arise, you've got to be careful to try to understand each other. "In honour," he says, "preferring one another," or the RSV "outdoing each other in showing honour." Let me tell you, it is not always an easy thing to do, but that is how families should act.

"Not slothful in business," v11 says, "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, not slothful," he says, 'don't flag,' 'don't be sluggish, in business.' This is not talking about your career, this is talking about your activities of the Truth, any kind of business. So be fervent he says, be zealous, bubbling over with activity. 1 Cor v58 says this, "Always abounding in the work of the Lord, for ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." So there is a reward, you see, to being zealous in the Truth. It counts before God, to be zealous in his Truth. V12, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." Now "rejoicing in hope" here, ought to be "the hope," the article is present, "rejoicing in *the* hope." It is the same as we read in Ch 8v24, "We are saved by *the* hope." "Patient in tribulation" he says, and once again not an easy thing to do, not easy at all, in fact, especially if it appears that the solution to your tribulation is in your own hands, perhaps within your power to control. One of the hardest things about tribulation, as you will know, is enduring it, and if you are going to fight it, to fight it lawfully. But the answer, I think, comes in the next clause, "Patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." The word 'instant' here means 'constant,' 'be constant in prayer.' And the thing about prayer is it has a remarkable self-policing effect, for example, how can you pray, "Lead me not in temptation" and then walk where you shouldn't. Would you do that? You'd probably stop praying, you wouldn't say the prayer at all. If you consciously plan to go somewhere or do something or say something that you ought not to say, or do, or be, you wouldn't make that a matter of prayer. You wouldn't pray, "Lead me not into temptation," well it is the same in tribulation, God can often pull out a much better solution to the tribulation than we can, but we will never know if we don't pray, and pray constantly.

V 13, "Distributing to the necessity of the saints, given to hospitality." Now the word 'distributing,' doesn't mean distributing, I mean if it did it would be really easy, just throw money at the problem and you have solved v13. The word 'distributing' is the Greek word koinoneo, κοινωνεω, it means 'fellowship,' and fellowshiping is something altogether different than 'distribution,' fellowship means 'sharing,' and sharing is something practical, it requires a relationship doesn't it, and once again, the key to the solution is in the next clause, "given to hospitality." That's how relationships are made in the ecclesia, isn't it, that's how relationships are made in the ecclesia, isn't it? That's where relationships begin, in hospitality, but he doesn't

just say, notice, he doesn't just say, 'be hospitable,' he says, "be given to it." And the word 'given' here means 'to pursue,' or 'to run after,' or 'to chase something down,' if I could use this language, he means be aggressively hospitable. So this is the sister that doesn't leave on a Sunday until any visitor who doesn't have a place to go for lunch has been sorted out. This is the brother on a Sunday evening, for example, if we have visitors who makes sure he talks to the visitors. I don't think, as an ecclesia, we are all that good at some of those things, but that's what he says to do here.

Bless and curse not

V14, "Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not." Now read that carefully. He doesn't just say, well, I wish he did, but he doesn't just say, "bless them which persecute you," he says, "Bless and curse not," Why? Because you could bless them through clenched teeth, couldn't you. What kind of blessing would that be? "Bless," he says, "and curse not." You might think he ought not to have needed to have said it, but clearly he does, clearly he does. "Rejoice," v 15, "with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep," now this was peculiarly a Jewish problem, they would hire merry-makers at weddings, "rejoice with those that rejoice," they would hire mourners at funerals, "Weep with them that weep," and it was all completely superficial. He is talking here about really entering into the feelings of others, but you know, that even then there are complications. It is relatively easy, for us to "weep with those who weep" because we stand in a certain degree removed from their sufferings. Perhaps, therefore, superior to that situation, but what about "rejoicing with those who rejoice," in that case we stand in a comparatively inferior position, don't we, they've achieved something, they've been successful at something, they've been commended in some way, they've got something to rejoice about, and perhaps we don't. How do we feel now? "Rejoice," he says, "with them that rejoice."

V16, "Be of the same mind, one toward another, mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." So this is an exhortation to mutual respect no matter what station a particular brother occupies, don't form cliques, is what he is saying, don't form cliques, mind not high things. This is the talk, the ambitions, the plans of worldly achievement. You can get carried away you know, talking about expensive homes, renovations, things that perhaps other people can't afford, trips here there everywhere, traveling in this certain class on an airplane, only eating this sort of food, knowing about these sort of restaurants, only the very best coffee. Really? Don't forget Isa 57v15, "God dwells with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit, and if God dwells with him, perhaps we should too, because it might be that where we find God, mightn't it? All this tinsel in life, what is it really worth, give me the brother any day that loves the Bible, and lives it, and you can keep the rest.

General rules for living

And when we come to v17, we now embark on this last section of the chapter, and what you have now are general rules for living in society, not just society, but society in the ecclesia. V17, "Recompense to no man evil for evil, provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Now just read that carefully in v 18, what do you make of that, what would you like to make of that. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." You almost get the impression as you read as you read it like that is that this commandment has a qualification, as if, when you have finally run out of patience, that will be okay with God. The RSV says, "as much as lieth in you," as far as it depends upon you. So what is he really saying? The answer is this, we've got to try and live peaceably. If there is an altercation, then we've got to be able to say, that we have done all we can to prevent it, so far as it depends upon us, so that if peace does not ensue, and it may not, it depends what it requires to bring peace, but if peace does not ensue, we can still look Christ in the eye and say, 'we tried the best we could, we did not cause the problem, the problem came from the other side.' But if we love the brotherhood, we will not provoke that, but if it is provoked as sometimes it will be, then the problem is not with us, because you are not necessarily in control of making peace on every issue. And he finishes up v19-21, knowing that conflict may come because of other men, it could be in the ecclesia, it might be outside of the ecclesia, but if conflict's going to come, this is what you do, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is writing, Vengeance is mine, I will repay" saith the Lord, "Give place unto wrath," the NIV says, "Leave room for God's wrath." I've looked at this myself, more than once, what does it mean to "give place?" Does it mean 'open up a vacant space,' that is have no place for wrath? Or does it mean as the NIV says, 'leave room for God's wrath.' And the answer must be the NIV is right, because the verse concludes, that God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." The RSV, "Leave it to the wrath of God," that is what he says, "Avenge not yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God," he says. Now this quotation, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," is a quotation from Deut 32v35, and what the Apostle is simply saying in v19 is, 'Make it a matter of prayer, and leave it to God.' John Carter says on this, 'If we are sure, that our wrong is real and that punishment is richly deserved, then God can punish better than we can, leave it to the wrath of God.'

But v20, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of God on his head."

Overcome evil with good

Whilst the wrath of God may inevitably come, there is one last thing you can do, and I am going to suggest that this last thing you can do in v20 might avert the wrath of God. Now this is a bit of a wrested verse and there are different opinions about what this verse must mean in v20. Let's get some definitions. What are the "coals of fire," well the coals of fire simply are the wrath of God, Psa 18v13, "Yahweh thundered in the heavens and the Highest gave his voice, hailstones and coals of fire," they are the judgment of God. Psa 140v9 "As for the head of those that compasses me about," says the Psalmist, "let the mischief of their own lips cover them, let burning coals fall upon them." So coals of fire are judgment, it might be the judgment of God, but it could be any judgment, you can see from those Psalms that that is what it is. So what does the verse mean in v20 well there are two options, the first option is this that by plying them with food and drink, we increase their guilt and bring down the wrath of God upon their heads. I mean that would be one way to read v20. I don't agree with that, I think this is better, the second way of reading it. By bestowing favour upon our enemies, be it food and drink, whatever, we strike in our enemies, such a burning conscience, that it might well lead them to repentance, and thereby avert the ultimate wrath of God.

Now which one is it and how would you decide. Well, it turns out that v20, as I have got on the screen, is a citation from Prov 25v21-22, "If thine enemy be hunger, give him bread to eat for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and Yahweh shall reward thee." Now Paul stops short of saying the whole verse, he doesn't say, "And Yahweh shall reward thee," here, but why would God reward you if the whole purpose was so that God could judge somebody else. In fact the reward would be more likely to come if you have averted judgment upon somebody else. What I am suggesting v20 means is, that the objective is to soften a hard heart or ignite a stubborn conscience with burning shame. In that case, the coals on the head are self-inflicted, the person judges himself, and if they are in the brotherhood, may well avert, the ultimate judgment of God. And that would seem to be proven by the final verse, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Give food and drink to your enemy may overcome evil, you see? And he concludes, you know, in v 21, he concludes the section, he concludes the chapter, by the very way he began the section, we've got good and evil in v21, and we've got and evil in v9, and a right discrimination of good and evil was the perfect biblical definition of love in v 9, you've got the perfect application of loving your enemies, therefore, in v20-21, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

That, you see, is our service of reason, that is the conduct of a regenerated mind. So what have we learned? Well, firstly, that the mercy of God ought to cause us to react to God in a way we never would have under the Law. That is our logical response to God for his goodness to us, for his mercies toward us. Next, that in the practicalities of ecclesial life, we have abilities which have been given to us for the benefit of the ecclesia, not for the development of our own pride. We ought to work within the limits of those abilities with our utmost diligence, he says. And when it comes to moral issues of course, whilst there might be limits to our ability, or limits to the functions we might occupy in an ecclesia, when it comes to moral issues, there are no limits any more than there was any limit to love compared to the gifts of the spirit. We should love good and we should hate evil, that's a fundamental Biblical definition of love. We should act in sincerity in whatever we do, we should pursue peace, we should avoid conflict, but if peace is resisted, if there is nothing we can do to achieve peace, then let it not be caused by us. So that when the Lord finally does come to his household, we might stand before him blameless in that matter. But perhaps, perhaps there is a way to avert ultimate judgment. as the chapter concludes, by treating your enemies in such a way that their own conscience smites them, and causes coals of fire upon their head, that, and understanding that, brothers and sisters and young people, is as the Apostle would say, our service of reason.

Transcript by Fay Berry, 2017.