

Romans 12:1-13

Righteousness in Conduct, Focused on the Congregation

A. Notes on the Text

Verse 1

For a discussion of the context, see Main Thoughts, below.

"Therefore, I urge you...": Paul speaks as an apostle, with the authority of his office in the name of Christ, who sent him.

"Urge" is: urge strongly, because God demands Christian conduct.

"Brothers": the Greek plural form includes the sisters. For in Greek the plural for brothers (*adelphoi*) is almost the same as that for sisters (*adelfai*). If both are spoken of, the Greek uses the masculine plural only (*adelphoi*). Therefore, in all our Bible translations it should always say: brothers *and* sisters.

"In view of God's mercy": God showed mercy in Christ's mediating work. These mercies are the source and cause, the incentive for and the motivation of Christian conduct.

"Your bodies": the body as physical appearance of the total Christian, external and internal. It means that you must give yourself completely to the New Testament priestly service.

"As living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God": not a sacrifice of atonement (Christ has fulfilled everything!), but a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Paul refers back to the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings, and points out their spiritual significance. The person bringing the sacrifice must give himself in faithful service to the LORD. Christian conduct and way of life is the sacrifice of a person and all he has to the LORD.

A "living" sacrifice: we speak with our mouth, work with our hands, think with our mind, etc. It is all "living." It must be "living" for the LORD.

A "holy" sacrifice: holy means, negatively, fleeing from sin, and positively, dedicating oneself to the LORD. That is how the thank offering we may bring is acceptable to God.

That sacrifice is "your spiritual act of worship": "spiritual" is sometimes rendered as "reasonable", but not in the sense, according to reason, to the rational mind, although we must of course act and conduct ourselves wisely and sensibly.

Some think that "reasonable" means: what one fully endorses oneself, what one does out of full conviction.¹ Literally it says "verbally" (*logikè latreia*; *logikè* derives from *logikos*, which is related to *logos*, word). If we compare v. 12 to 1 Peter 2:2, where the apostle directs the believers, like newborn babes, to the "pure spiritual milk," that is, the milk of God's Word, which nourishes and strengthens, then we see that the reference to the word in Romans 12:1 is to God's Word. Thus it is the worship service which is controlled by God's Word.

Verse 2

The actual sacrifice of the Christian has to stem from the renewed and good, and, therefore, Christian, mind.

Hence the admonition: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." That means: the Christian may not have the same walk of life as the people of this world, who are without God and without hope. (For "the world" see 1:18ff., where a sinful way of life is portrayed). Speech and action, habits and dress, in short, the whole appearance of the Christian, and his whole way of life, must show a distinctive style, the lifestyle of the believer, which is focused on Christ and his service. (See Glossary #35.)

This distinct appearance and lifestyle of the Christian stem from the following: "but be transformed [changed] by the renewing [conversion, rebirth] of your mind [your whole inner being: heart, soul, spirit, etc.]."

Conformity to the world in the Christian stems from the fact that he has not been renewed by the Spirit of God. When the Christian makes himself equal in outward appearance to the men and women of the world, in pomp and finery, in revealing clothes, excessive makeup, etc., the question is whether he has really surrendered his heart to the LORD. To confine ourselves for a moment to women: a woman who fears the LORD will not want to resemble a woman of the world (e.g. Isaiah 3:16-4:1; 1 Peter 3:3-6).

It is truly regrettable that church members have had such a hard time showing something of the Christian lifestyle through the ages. Unfortunately there are all too many worldly things in Christian life. A good item for discussion!

The apostle shows the purpose and the gain of the inner conversion to God and inner renewal by the Spirit of God with these words: "then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Thus, the believer must test (i.e. discern, test and confirm) what pleases God, what God's will is for life. You can also read this, as suggested by D. Holwerda: so that you may discern what is God's will, etc. The aim (in order that) simultaneously points to the result and the fruit (so that).

¹ *Ed. Note:* This view is held by D. Holwerda and R. Schippers.

That is why the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 34-44 explains very broadly the law of God in the part of "Thankfulness." For the law seeks to regulate the life that has been set free. It was already given in paradise to that end.

Verse 3

"By the grace": by the gift of grace of the apostolic office, through which Paul speaks with authority.

"Every one of you": all individual church members. Paul admonishes them to "think of yourself with sober judgment" i.e. each person must be humble and not think of himself too highly, which is a sin (just as not thinking well enough of oneself is, 1 Timothy 4:4; cf. Psalm 131).

"In accordance with the measure of faith God has given you": everyone has his own gifts of grace: natural ability, strengths, character, way of life, etc. Strength of faith and certainty of faith differ. There are "strong" and "weak" believers (14:1ff.). Each has to consider his own gifts and strengths. Do not reach too high!

Verses 4, 5

These verses are linked to v. 3 by pointing out the various functions of the different members of the human body, as an example for the body of the church. (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; 1 Peter 4:10).

Verses 6-8

Paul mentions some of the many gifts (*charismata*): prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, showing mercy. Note carefully that Paul does not list the special offices here, nor all the gifts. For each gift he indicates how it is to be used by everyone in the church.

Example: prophesying in proportion to our faith. On a certain occasion someone will point out the word and will of God and explain it as the way that God's church should go. He must do so according to the analogy of the faith, as it says literally. That is, in accordance with the contents of the faith pursuant to God's Word. We might say: the content of the sermon must agree with the content of Scripture and with the content of the Scriptural confessions. (Refer to other commentaries for further detail.)

Verses 9ff.

Suddenly the apostle is speaking about love (cf. 5:5). It means: none of the preceding admonitions and exhortations can be followed except through love (for God and for the neighbour; for love, see 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 5:2; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:14; also see Glossary #21).

"Sincere": not hypocritical, but open, true and real.

"Brotherly love": In Greek: *filadelfia*. Sisterly love is included in this (see Notes to v. 1).

"Spiritual fervour": literally, boiling, under pressure of the steam of the Spirit (God's Spirit).

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