The Book of Romans

Chapter 12

 As we can see, Paul was quite organized in his writings and letters. This letter written to the Christian communities, Jewish and Gentile, in Rome; started off with the setting of Christian doctrine and recognizing the rift between the Jewish Christian community and the Gentile Christian community. Paul then addressed this at length during the middle part of this letter. Dr. McGee called this the section on dispensationalism, where the past, present and future of the Jewish nation and people was discussed.

 Just as a recap; if you recall, the Jewish people knew that they were the people of God, they knew their general history and their Covenant history, and as a result had become a proud and arrogant people no matter their circumstances whether as a great kingdom or as people scattered and in servitude among many nations. There were laws telling them to not co-habit with non-Jews and did avoid the mixed breed Samaritans. So when Jesus came, they could not, as a people, recognize Him as God of the prophecies, but there were those who singularly did come to faith, but that old arrogance kept getting in the way, and the Jewish believers put many burdens on the Gentile believers making them conform to Jewish Law.

 So Paul now having dealt with the Jewish pride and arrogance, returns to the Gentile Christians and in this section which we'll call duty or responsibility of the believer, we'll see Paul address what the real responsibilities are for the Christian, both Jew and Gentile. By now we note that Paul has put them on even footing and will use the Law that the Jews are fond of quoting, in practical purposes, wherein the Gentile Christians are not forced into Jewish thought.

 Do you see the outline here? Doctrine> Dispensationalism> Duty. These final chapters, then will deal with how a Christian should act, think and speak, and then discuss what the Spiritual Gifts are, and how to use these Spiritual Gifts. How does the Christian deal with those who are out to harm them, or destroy them? What should be the general comportment of the Christian especially in times of difficulty and stress. One thing we need to recognize today is, how do we act or react under stress? That is what God sees, don’t you think? And what others see as we face the daily challenges. Do people see Jesus in us?

 A] Romans 12: 1 and 2; (read)

 1] "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*

 First let me say; this is an exhortation for these Roman Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, to live a holy and acceptable life before God. The Greek Word here is "Parakalo" Para literally meaning to stand alongside, Kalo is more of an urging, which more or less illustrates Paul wrapping his arm around the shoulder and urging that person to come along. That we present ourselves, our personal bodies, as clean and wholesome before the Lord. Taking pride in who we are, and who we now represent.

 Now, may I say, that today, too many people have this need to mark up their bodies with tattoos or pierce themselves with metal studs, rings and similar objects, do you think this is what this are referring to? In part, I believe yes, but it also refers to what we put on our bodies and put into our bodies, how neat we keep ourselves.

 BUT there is also another thing which I have not seen from the scholars I study, bring up. Taking in context, the desire for the Jewish Christians to impose their laws etc. on the Gentile Christians, and this also included the sacrifices presented at the Temple. With Christ being the fulfillment of those Laws and Sacrifices, This, then negated further sacrifices, by being the final sacrifice, and it stands to reason, we should at LEAST present ourselves as LIVING sacrifices. We are now, as children of God, set apart or Holy and this is how we should present ourselves.

 2] “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

 WE are a changed people; we are not the same as we were before we accepted Christ. Now being a changed people, we don't want to think like we used to, or harbor ideas as we did in the past. We are new in Christ, so we intake new thoughts and ideas. This does not mean we should be 'uber' pious, but in our natural way, we think and do differently than we did before we were saved.

 Paul then, starts this section off with an admonishment that as we are saved, and made new in Christ, we need a new attitude, and new lifestyle. A new way of presenting ourselves, both to God and to the people around us. If we are truly saved, we should have the Holy Spirit to guide us, and THAT alone must make a difference, don’t you think?

 B] Romans 12: 3 through 8; (read)

 1] "*For I say, through the Grace given me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."*

 So, as we are to be changed in our behavior, we also must be careful not to be overbearing and self-important among the brethren. How many times have you seen or heard of folks who just have to run things because they feel led to run things? Many Churches are overrun with folks like this. But also, we should not be like the Jews of old who were stuck on their own importance because THEY were God's chosen people and the Gentiles were not.

 2] "*For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."*

 Paul is now speaking of the Church (ecclesia or gathering). Christ has mentioned that he will return for His bride, which is the Church collectively (Friends, we are the Church, not the building we come into), so this Church, the Bride, being one body, means we are all members of that body, the Church. Does that make sense?

 But Paul goes further by stating that as we are members of one body the Church, just as our own physical bodies have many members. This is an illustration I have used on occasion, wherein, I have a brick wall, and this brick wall being made up of many individual bricks with corners, lentils, jambs, sills, headers, and each has its own job to do. A lentil does no good, in the middle of a wall with no opening, nor does a sill do any good with no opening nor a jamb when there is no header to hold up. Each brick and specialty piece has its own job to do. So therefore, a hand does no good if there is no arm to hold it. A forearm is useless if there is no elbow to hold it.

 So what Paul is saying the Church has many members with varying jobs to do and each job has its own importance.

 3] "*Having, then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophecy in proportion to our faith, or ministry let us use it in our ministering, he who teaches in teaching, he who exhorts in exhortation, he who gives, with liberality, he who leads with diligence, he who shows mercy with cheerfulness."*

 We then, come to the qualifier. What is our talent or 'gift'? This is something Paul has stressed in some of his letters. We all have 'gifts' and the Holy Spirit, upon coming to us, brings to us gifts or abilities. Now before we get confused here, the 'prophecying' most probably alludes to preaching or preaching style, which would be different from teaching, or exhortation.

 But we all come to the table with different gifts and that is what makes a Church strong, friends. When all the gifts are put to use in a harmonious or organized way. It is nice when folks want to be of service in the Church, but when they decide to be of use where they do not have the gift to be, well sometimes it can get a bit confusing. Being of service means right down to the elderly. ALL of us can be of use to the Lord. I have mentioned this before, but it bears repeating. Many years ago, an elderly lady who was near ninety was distraught because she felt she was too old to be of any use to anyone. We spoke with her and asked her about being a prayer warrior. This did lift her spirits and gave her a job to do.

 Being in the military, we were tested to find what our basic skills were and that was usually where they put us wherein, we could do the most good for the team. So, in Churches some teach, many at different age levels where their capabilities are, some serve in many capacities for different parts of worship, as in leading worship, singing, playing instruments, some are true givers, some preach, some counsel, some really have a gift of lifting spirits or exhortation, and some have a great capacity for mercy and caring for others. And there are those who have the leadership capacity or administration.

 C] Romans 12:9 through 16; (read)

 1] "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."*

 Frankly, today, the word 'love' is bandied about like a badminton birdie and has come to mean so little. The word Paul uses here is 'agape' which is different from 'phileo', phileo being more of a friendship type of like. We have discussed, before, the word 'agape' and it is this agape love that binds Christians together in unity with God.

 So, Paul is saying, your love should be real and not words mouthed to impress others. And now that you have this love that is real, you want to steer clear of the evil that is all around us; and in your lives, show the world what 'good' actually means. As Paul stated above, you are all different now. And being different your life should show it. And the world watches very carefully what your life is all about. How do you react to adversity that is all around you?

 2] "*Be kindly affectionate one to another, with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality."*

 This is a tall order in any society. Do you find in a group setting, there is that someone who just drives you batty? Here is where you, the Christian witness, come in, right? When we line up for a nice gathering for a meal, as in a covered dish supper, who gets in line first? (Actually, funny as it seems, we all might defer to someone else and as a result no one gets in line) That fervency really is our hearts desire, now that I am the Lord's I really want to do all He asks of me. I know the hope or promise ahead for me and I also know that there may be a lot of pain or humiliation before I get there, and with that hope I will be patient and await the Lord's time. "Endeavor to persevere" (Outlaw Josie Wales)

 The one thing so many lack with each other is communication, and how much more so do you think it is with the Lord? I have to admit, my personal prayer life is weak and in need. Another thing that lacks in so many groups is a continual attitude of seeing to the needs of others. We may be good one time or two time givers, but so-so on a continual basis.

 3] "*Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."*

 This is a hard saying, and even harder to follow. But as the Apostles knew that their sufferings were not as terrible as the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and those that followed then should recognize that there will always be persecutors and understand Jesus suffered for us, can we do no less? Who are we that we should be exempt?

 Next; we should be there for others in emotion and in fellowship. If they are sad, we are there to comfort them and when they are happy, we are there to share in their happiness.

 4] "*Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.*

 Being of the same mind does not mean we are thinking the same thoughts, but we are all moving together in the same direction. We all think differently depending on our gifts and abilities, because we are all different, but that difference working together makes the journey easy. And, Paul adds, regardless of our place in life, we are all together in this so let’s not think of ourselves more highly that we should.

 When we go back and think of the various body parts, and their function, these are all controlled by the brain and are in harmony. The hand cannot just go off here or there, the finger doing it’s own thing. All movements are controlled by the brain, as the brain sees the job that needs doing or for the tongue, the words that need said. So it is with teamwork, the quarterback will guide the play as the members all have their assignments for the particular play. Does this make sense?

 D] Romans 12: 17 through 21; (read)

 1] "*Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."*

 One of the truisms of life is, we have this need to get even with someone when we are wronged. Either we want to punch it out, or do to them as they did to us, or just sue them. Did it solve the problem? Does an ‘eye for an eye’ give back the former’s eye? As Paul tells the reader, you are different now, and your attitude should be different, especially when we have the Holy Spirit within us. Our attitude should have changed and how we deal with our adversities, should be different.

 We should let the world see that we are different and seek what is right and good. This is our witness. And we try as we are able to live with our unbelieving neighbors in peace and with good witness.

 2] "*Beloved do not avenge yourselves, but rather give a place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." Says the Lord. (Deuteronomy 32:35)"*

 Let's face it, as I said before, it is most difficult to not turn the other cheek when hit, but Paul's point here, is God in charge of your life or are you? This is the real case of walking by faith, isn't it? Do I believe God will handle a situation, or not?

 3] "*Therefore, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so you will heap coals of fire on his head."(Proverbs 25: 21&22). Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."*

 What I see here is, the discussion of anger issues. If I allow myself to get angry, I defeat the Lord's purpose in my life. I have to also admit, My anger can and often does get the better of me, and in truth this is not so good for my physical health but my spiritual health suffers even more. When someone really pushes my buttons, a peaceable response can and does defuse a bad situation.

 I had a problem with, what was called a ransom virus, that seemed to have imbedded itself on a newer computer I had bought. This virus seemingly could not be detected by anti-viruses, and what it does is asks the owner to call a specific number and pay a specific money ransom or they will freeze the computer, which, evidently, they can, because they froze mine up. Who 'they are' is anybody's guess, but it is an expensive fix. I have had this come up three times and the last two times I took it to the shop to be fixed and it just popped up again. This set me raging during this time---but did it accomplish anything? Not a thing, but to get my blood aboil. I use this as a today example, suffice it to say, the problem was eventually solved, but it took patience and expertise by the proper technicians. Patience is something I and we can use more of.

 So, with this section, you will notice that I wrote this more for us today, than the way Paul wrote it to the Roman Christians, but by the way, meant the same to them. This is a timeless message, both then and now. Especially now. How many of us can say with any amount of certainty, this is the way we live and act? However, as I said at the beginning, the world sees us, and watches us. Closely!