

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans

Overcoming Evil with Good

Lesson #12 for December 23, 2017

Scriptures: Romans 12&13.

1. In Romans 12-16, Paul dealt with the practical applications of the teachings that he had given in Romans 1-11. This is where the rubber meets the road.
2. Many modern Christians suggest that all that is required for salvation is faith. (See the story of the Philippian jailer including Acts 16:31.) This is true when understood correctly. But, Paul made it very clear that faith works! Would you tell your physician: "I trust you, that is, I have faith in you; but, just don't ask me to do too many things to get well"? If you follow your physician's instructions exactly, are you being a legalist? Does it depend on the motive?
3. The man of faith may actually work harder than the legalist! The difference is that instead of legalistically following the rules as he chooses to interpret them, he follows God's guidance and sees the resulting transformation in his life. So, what did Paul turn to first when talking about the practical applications of Christianity?
4. Read Romans 12:1-2. Before moving on in his presentation, Paul used the Greek equivalent of the word *therefore*, reminding us of what he had taught so far in Romans: 1) Everyone is a sinner. 2) God chooses to show His mercy to everyone who will accept it. 3) None of us can tell Him what to do. 4) He does not owe any of us anything. 5) The plan is His and His alone. 6) May He be praised. So, what does that have to do with faith? By faith, do we take advantage of God's gracious offer? Do we really understand what faith means? It means trusting God. God wants to be our Friend. Are we willing to accept God's plan for our lives? Are we willing to listen?
5. Having summarized his points, Paul moved on to say that Christians should present their bodies as "living sacrifices" to God. Dead lambs and dead pigeons never were God's ideal! But, wasn't that the plan in the Old Testament? God was trying to impress upon us the truth that sin leads to death. God first taught that at the gates of Eden. In the Christian era, He is asking for "living examples" who are following the rules that Jesus laid down. Paul suggested that doing so is an act of "reasonable service." (KJV) These two words are very interesting in the original Greek. The word *service* is not the usual word for the service of a slave or even the service of a free man. Instead, it is the service of a religious leader. It means "religious service" or "worship."
6. The word *logike* or *reasonable* is found in only one other place in the New Testament. (1 Peter 2:2) The "milk" Peter talked about in 1 Peter 2:2 is pure *logike* milk. It is "spiritual" milk. This is the word from which we derive our English word *logical*. So, Paul was suggesting that when we come to the Lord, we should no longer bring dead pigeons or dead lambs, but that we bring our own lives ready to live in ways that are a tribute to God, (Matthew 5:16) a form of real, spiritual worship. Was the Old Testament worship understood correctly? (Micah 6:6-8) This worship is rational, intelligent, and reasonable. The *New English Bible* suggests that it is a "worship offered by mind and heart." Do we recognize God's real worth?
7. No doubt, Paul was addressing the gnostics of his day. Remember that gnostics taught that there was a very big divide between whatever is spiritual and whatever is material. They taught that the spiritual is always good and the material is always evil. Paul was saying that correct, true, complete Christianity has to do with the dirt and grime of everyday living. If your religion does not impact everything you do, it is not true religion. Our service to God is not a means of appeasing His wrath or somehow a payment for our sins; it is a way of life—not just a weekly service in a church somewhere. The gnostics had a religion of profession and claims but no action.

8. All through the Old Testament, the prophets had taught that again and again. Micah (6:6-8), Amos (5:18-27), Isaiah (1:2-20), and even David (Psalm 51) stated forcefully that what God wants is true, intelligent, thinking, rational, religious worship. No more dead pigeons please! Through Christ's death, we have already had the ultimate demonstration of the fact that sin leads to death. We do not need the daily or weekly death of lambs to remind us!
9. What this means is that works are part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to depreciate works; in chapters 13 to 15 he gives them strong emphasis. This is no denial of what he has said earlier about righteousness by faith. On the contrary, works are the true expression of what it means to live by faith. One could even argue that because of the added revelation after Jesus came, the New Testament requirements are more difficult than what was required in the Old. New Testament believers have been given an example of proper moral behavior in Jesus Christ. He, and no one else, shows the pattern we are to follow. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in [not Moses, not Daniel, not David, not Solomon, not Enoch, not Deborah, not Elijah] Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 2:5*).
- The standard doesn't—*can't!*—get higher than that.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath, December 16. [Original includes italic type and content in brackets.]
10. What would we do if Jesus suddenly opened the back door and entered our class? If He sat down at the front, would we ask some of our class members to rush out and gather some large stones to make an altar while others gathered sticks to burn the offering and someone else caught some pigeons so we could sacrifice to Him? What would He say? We would not think of doing such a thing! But, isn't that what was commonly thought and believed in the Old Testament? Paul was telling us that God wants us to come before Him in our best possible condition—not falling asleep because we have been working so hard all week without adequate sleep or a good diet! Not dozing because we ate too much for breakfast or because the pastor is boring because he has nothing important to say!
11. What kind of a Person is God? What does He want? What did Jesus mean when He said to the lady in Samaria: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"? (John 4:24, *RSV*) Wasn't Jesus suggesting that God is an intelligent, thinking, rational Being. What kind of worship would such a Being want from His children—even His friends? (Isaiah 1:18; John 15:15) Isn't God asking us to come with our minds sharp and clear, seeking to understand things the best we possibly can? After quoting Romans 12:1, Ellen White said:
- Men, then, can make their bodies unholy by sinful indulgences. **If unholy, they are unfitted to be spiritual worshipers and are not worthy of heaven.** If man will cherish the light that God in mercy gives him upon health reform, he may be sanctified through the truth and fitted for immortality. But if he disregards that light and lives in violation of natural law he must pay the penalty.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*,* vol. 3, 162.3. [Bold type is added.]
12. **What does health reform have to do with thinking, intelligent, spiritual worship? Notice that even though she had no knowledge of Greek, Ellen White understood this verse absolutely correctly!** God wants us to come to worship Him and to speak with Him in the best condition possible. He knows—as we should know—the best way to care for our bodies. Are we willing to accept His directions by avoiding health-destroying practices such as smoking, drinking alcohol, overeating, or eating unhealthy foods? In order to give God the best possible service, we should be in the healthiest condition possible. Contrast this kind of service with the kind of worship Egyptians gave to crocodiles, flies, or beetles! Would a fly expect intelligent worship? Many of the ancient Egyptians were subsistence farmers; their very lives depended on the reproductive capacity of their crops and animals. Those creatures

were worshiped because they were very fertile!

13. When a visitor comes to one of our classes or even to one of our church services, what does s/he see? Is s/he impressed by the intelligent, rational approach we take to our God? Do our church services seem like a lot of mumbo-jumbo? Is there a lot of repetition? Does God appreciate repetition? Pagans often try to impress God by repetition. Read Revelation 4:8-10. Does God ever get tired of hearing His creatures cry: "Holy, holy, holy"? Is there a huge stack of crowns around Him because they keep casting their crowns before Him and never bother to go and pick them up? Those are word pictures. We need to understand what they mean.
14. Read Romans 12:2. In what sense does God transform us inwardly by a complete change of our minds? This word *transform* comes from the Greek *metamorphosis*. When a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, there is a radical change. Is there an obvious radical difference between the people of the world and us? Is that transformation obvious? Do we demonstrate what is "the will of God" and what is "good and acceptable and perfect"? The word *prove* in this verse is the Greek word for testing. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1.) God asks us to test everything.
15. So, Christians are expected to have well-disciplined minds—minds that have been sharpened and matured by thinking about God, trying to understand the Scriptures, and living lives of purity and self-control. How does the media picture religious people? Aren't they pictured as bigoted and dumb? Where did that idea come from?

In the Bible the will of God is revealed. The truths of the Word of God are the utterances of the Most High. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes in every sense a new creature. He is not given new mental powers, but the darkness that through ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding is removed. **The words, "A new heart also will I give you," mean, "A new mind will I give you."** A change of heart is always attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. He who gives the Scriptures close, prayerful attention will gain clear comprehension and sound judgment, as if in turning to God he had reached a higher plane of intelligence.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* December 18, 1913, par. 8; *My Life Today** 24.2; *2MCP** 447.2. [Bold type is added.]

16. So, how do you see it? Is everything that is said of a religious nature at church, in Sabbath School, and on television perfectly clear and obviously true? Why do so many religious leaders ask us just to accept things "by faith"? Is that an intelligent, rational approach? Who would lose if we demanded a careful investigation of the truth? The truth is always on God's side, never on the Devil's side.
17. **There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.**—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors** 35.2.

The subjects which we present to the world must be to us a living reality. It is important that in defending the doctrines which we consider fundamental articles of faith, **we should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound. These may avail to silence an opposer, but they do not honor the truth. We should present sound arguments, that will not only silence our opponents, but will bear the closest and most searching scrutiny....**—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers** 299.3; *Evangelism** 166.2; *CW**

40.3; compare 57* 708.1.

If every idea we have entertained in doctrines is truth, will not the truth bear to be investigated? Will it totter and fall if criticized? If so, let it fall, the sooner the better. The spirit that would close the door to investigation of points of truth in a Christlike manner is not the Spirit from above.—Ellen G. White, 1888* 186.2-187.0; 9MR* 216.4; *Ibid.** 327.4.

Some have feared that if in even a single point they acknowledge themselves in error, other minds would be led to doubt the whole theory of truth. Therefore they have felt that investigation should not be permitted; that it would tend to dissension and disunion. But if such is to be the result of investigation, the sooner it comes the better. **If there are those whose faith in God's word will not stand the test of an investigation of the Scriptures, the sooner they are revealed the better; for then the way will be opened to show them their error. We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished. There is but one who is infallible,—He who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.** [John 14:7]—Ellen G. White, *GW92** 125.2. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

18. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe the time is coming when the Devil will exert maximum effort to deceive, misrepresent, and challenge everything God says. Will we be ready to stand firm, tall, and straight to face the Devil with clear, convincing arguments, proving that his statements are not according to Scripture? Can you imagine yourself facing the Devil who will be claiming to be God or an angel and telling him that what he said is a lie? Are we absolutely dedicated to discovering and teaching the truth as an act of worship? There is nothing that God wants more.
19. **I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind away from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God's word. I am afraid of it, I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come in as to set everything in a disorderly way.** *Manuscript 115,** 1908; *Pacific Union Recorder,** December 31, 1908; *Selected Messages,** vol. 2, 41-47; *Ibid.** vol. 3, 362-378; "The Ralph Mackin Story," *Review and Herald,** August 17, 1972. [Bold type is added.]
20. Is this why God tells us that we need to grow up? (Hebrews 5:11-6:3; Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 5:48) Are we growing up? Can we give good reasons for what we believe? (1 Peter 3:15)
21. Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). In this way the Apostle describes (Christian) progress; for he addresses those who already are Christians. The Christian life does not mean to stand still, but to move from that which is good to that which is better.—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans** 167,168.
22. In Paul's day, many of the pagan religions and the mystery religions got their spirits (alcohol) out of a bottle or, more likely, out of a goat skin! Paul made it very clear that such was not God's plan for His followers. True health reform is never legalistic. God just wants us to be in the healthiest condition possible; and so, He gives us instructions to that end.
23. Read Romans 12:3-8. If our minds are clear and we are thinking intelligently, we will recognize that there is nothing for which we have reason to be proud. Every person in the Christian community has been given gifts. Those gifts are from God and are to be used for the betterment of the whole community.
24. In the process of salvation, many seem to believe that we just need to surrender to the Holy

Spirit. But, is there anything for us to do?

Your energies are required to co-operate with God. Without this, **if it were possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influences of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven.** The stronghold of Satan would not be broken. There must be the willing and the doing on the part of the receiver. There must be an action, represented as coming out from the world and being separate. There must be a doing of the words of Christ. The soul must be emptied of self, that Christ may pour [305] his Spirit into the vacuum. Christ must be chosen as the heavenly guest. The will must be placed on the side of God's will. Then there is a new heart, and new, holy resolves. It is Jesus enthroned in the soul that makes every action easy in his service.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,* December 28, 1891, par. 2; *HL** 304.5. [Bold type is added.]

25. So, what is our part? What do we need to do? We need to open our minds as we study the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to work with us in an intelligent way. Do we need to understand why God has done what He did? Why did God send the flood? Why did He destroy the firstborn in Egypt? **If we have real faith, do we ask more questions? Or, fewer questions?** What is implied by *an intelligent faith*? And how should we pray to an intelligent God? Does God ask us just to repeat worn out phrases as the heathen do? To an intelligent God?

26. Christians will also be humble.

Paul here shows how that love is to be expressed in a practical manner. One important principle comes through, and that is personal humility: a willingness of a person “not to think of himself more highly than he ought” (*Rom. 12:3*), a willingness to “give preference to one another in honor” (*Rom. 12:10, NASB*), and a willingness not to “be wise in your own opinion” (*Rom. 12:16, NKJV*). Christ's words about Himself, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (*Matt. 11:29*), catch the essence of it.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, December 18. [Italic type is in the original.]

27. Read Romans 13:1-7. Paul was living under the terrible government of Nero. How could he suggest that all authority—including government—is from God? Not long after that, Nero gave the order to cut off Paul's head!

28. But, as far as possible, we should live in peace with all around us. Christians who are constantly “stirring the pot” will not have time to focus on what is most important. Yet, we know that at the end of time, laws will be passed making it illegal to be a faithful Seventh-day Adventist. What should we do then? The advice of Peter is still valid: “We ought to obey God rather than man.” (*Acts 4:19, KJV*)

29. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation....

We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 69.1; compare *6T** 394.2-3.

30. The question of how we are to be good citizens and good Christians can be very complicated at times. If someone were to come to you seeking advice

about standing for what he or she believed was God's will—even though it would put him or her in conflict with the government—what would you say? What counsel would you give? What principles should you follow? Why is this something that we should proceed toward only with the utmost seriousness and prayerful consideration? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions' den emerges unscathed.)—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, December 22. [Original includes the content in parentheses.]

31. Read Romans 13:8-10. In these verses we see several of the Ten Commandments mentioned. But, some are not mentioned. Many of our Christian friends take this verse to suggest that especially the Sabbath commandment is no longer binding on Christians. Is that what Paul was trying to say? What was Jesus suggesting when He said that love to God and love to our fellow man are the two great commandments? (Matthew 22:34-40; Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5) Jesus also suggested that we should render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. (Matthew 22:15-22) Are we doing that? Are we putting God first in all that we do?
32. Which commandments did Paul cite as examples that illustrate the principle of love in law-keeping? Why these in particular? (Romans 13:9-10)
33. Read Romans 13:11. Is it not true that our salvation is nearer than when we first believed? If we keep preaching that the second coming is near, is that like crying, "Wolf"? For more than 170 years, we have been saying that the second coming of Jesus is near. But, the statement is still true. Isn't it? Paul thought that the return of Jesus Christ would be very soon. Was he wrong?
34. The Lord ... is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud: "Homeward bound!" We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 8, 253.1; *ST*,* April 19, 1905, par. 8; *AG** 354.4; *Mar** 311.4; *ML** 343.5.
35. Although Paul doesn't deal much in the book of Romans with the Second Coming, in the Thessalonian and the Corinthian letters he covers it in much more detail. After all, it's a crucial theme in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Without it and the hope it offers, our faith is really meaningless. After all, what does "justification by faith" mean without the Second Coming to bring that wonderful truth to complete fruition?
- If you knew for certain that Jesus was coming next month, what would you change in your life, and why? If you believe you need to change these things a month before Jesus comes, why shouldn't you change them now? What is the difference?**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, December 21. [Bold type is in the original.]
36. In this lesson we have learned that God is an intelligent, thinking, Individual. He is asking us to look carefully at the evidence and to make an intelligent choice about Him and His government and to serve and worship Him because He is worthy in an intellectually satisfying way, involving both mind and heart. If we follow God's advice in all things, we will respect the government as far as possible and always be kind and loving to those around us. That has always been God's plan and will be so for eternity.

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