

Romans Chapter 12 - John Karmelich

Title Salvation is free, but the "annual dues" cost us everything!

Chapter 12 to the end of this letter (other than Paul's standard "greet these people at the end the book") is Paul's instructions to believers! In effect, the first 11 chapters taught us how we're saved just by faith and we can't mess that up! The logical question is, "OK we believe that, now what?" How and why do we have to prove ourselves to God, if the only salvation requirement is believing the Gospel Message? In other words, Chapters 1-11 taught us "our works" don't matter, so how can we be lectured in the rest of the book on how and why our behavior matters! As I preach a lot, it is about why God calls us to be His disciples in the first place: To be a living witness for Him! The word living, (in the original Greek language of course) is a key word in this chapter!

In my devotional time this morning I was thinking about the verse in Luke 14 that says for us to be one of His disciples we must "take up our cross and follow Him" (Verse 27). The implication is we've been sentenced to death as far as this life occurs! That doesn't mean we're to suffer for the sake of suffering! It simply means our primary focus as Christians is to use our lives for His glory, and whatever happens in this lifetime to us is secondary to that purpose. I bring that up, because I'm trying to get point across that our behavior matters, even if we are ONLY saved by God's grace! That doesn't mean we get more saved by doing good works! The issue is about using our lives as a witness for Him. How long we live is His business. Praying daily for the Spirit to guide us and using our lives for His glory is what we are called to do and that in effect is the key point for the rest of Romans. Paul already spent 2/3 of Romans explaining how we are saved. To state my favorite two words for Christians, "Now what?" The rest of the book gives examples of that desire that God has for all of us! Obviously, there is more than what is in the rest of Romans or there wouldn't be a need for the rest of the New Testament, but that's the idea!

The first thing Paul says in effect is, "I'm not sticking a gun to your head but if it's your desire to live a life that God desires, and you want to "put your money where your mouth is" commit your life to serve Jesus!" Paul was probably thinking of all the animals killed that were offered to God at His Temple. In comparison to that we should be a living sacrifice. As most pastors will say talking about this passage, our problem with being a living sacrifice is we desire to crawl off that altar and do our own will! What I stated in last lesson (if memory is correct): "Becoming a Christian costs us nothing, living the life as a Christian requires annual dues that cost us everything!" (John MacArthur). Does that mean I can never have fun or spend time with family or friends? Of course not! It just means we are always on the clock as a witness for God! Will we mess up? Of course! Paul just wants us to keep in mind that living out a Christian life is a full time, round the clock "operation" for a lack of a better way to describe it.

That leads to the important question of how do we do that? Paul reminds us Christians that He gave us all gifts we can use to make a difference for Him! As I've joked my Christian life, "No one has the gift to take the trash out, but it must be done!" Even with that obvious statement made, hopefully you know what you're good at or enjoy doing. The things Paul lists are obvious examples. Others have gifts to do different things. I always like to ask people, "If money didn't matter, and you got all your traveling out of your system, what would you want to do all day?" That's usually when I learn what gift God gave to that person! If a person says for example, "I just want to play video games all day" I might discuss how to earn a living or see if they have a gift of encouraging others, but it's a conversation starter.

Speaking of encouragement, Paul lists that as an example of the types of gifts God gives us. Some have an extraordinary gift to encourage others. Others have a great ability to preach Jesus. Others can teach

well. A schoolteacher friend once said, "You know you're meant to teach when you desire to see those you teach do well!" For me, I saw a bible verse that said, "By now, you ought to be teaching" and I am sure God was speaking to me at that moment (Hebrews 5:12 if you care). Paul wants each of us to see ourselves humbly and how we can use our lives to make a difference. Verses 4-8 lists a bunch of ways Christians can make a difference to other believers and potential believers.

As I read this chapter a few times, I kept thinking about what John MacArthur said as he reflected back on his many years as a pastor. He saw many ways God has worked in his life to accomplish lots of the things on this list. He also saw ways he felt guilty about not doing enough! Just saying this should not be a negative list of "I'm a bad person as I'm not doing enough to make a difference!" I don't want this to be a "guilt lesson". Just a realization of what God desires of each of us myself included. Obviously, my gift is teaching, and I've been at it for decades! I also do my share of "taking out the trash" ministry and of course I fall short in many ways! All I desire is each of us study Paul's points in how God does desire we live as a witness for Him and think about your own life versus His desire for us!

Meanwhile, living the Christian life is more than do this and don't do that! One of the ways Jesus said that Christians would stand out is our love for one another! That means showing kindness to those who don't deserve it. It means showing kindness to people who treat us badly! (Obviously exceptions exist for abusive situations). Paul's point is simple. When we treat people badly, they expect to receive that in return! If by the Holy Spirit's power can rise about that and see people as needing Jesus in their life, then the issue is much bigger than being hurt or revenge. It comes back to what God called us to do, to be a witness for Him in the world around us! But John, aren't there wonderful non-Christians out there? Of course! The issue is to rise above the hurt and anger and realize, "Hurting people hurt people!" Yes, I am far from perfect and there are people I struggle with. Just saying the ideal that God desires is use the power of His love to share with those around us! In effect that's verses 9 to 12. Paul's encouraging us to be patient, have zeal to do the right thing and help those (especially believers) in need.

If you think this chapter is tough so far, Verses 14 to 21 can really hurt. One should see these ideas as a list of God's desire for our lives. It doesn't mean we'll ever be perfect at it! Again, think about our lives before we committed them to Christ. Read these ideas and ponder, "Amazing that God got me to where I am in life now". When you read some of these or other ways we are struggling as a witness for Him, I would say the main thing is to pray for change. It's a matter of telling God, "I'm struggling in this area, and without Your help, I'll never change!" Of course, a desire to change takes self-discipline but we've got this great power source at our disposal (Holy Spirit) who wants us to be a better witness for God. It is a matter of telling God, here's where I'm struggling, help me and let Him work on His timing!

As you read these verses, most of them ring true for Christians. To bless those who curse us, reflects a lot of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount! Rejoice with those who rejoice as well as weeping with those who weep is simply the idea of caring about other people! Paul argues that it should be the desire to live peacefully with all believers. I know as an older Christian I desire peace above all things! Verse 21 is a good summary when it says do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil by doing good things. In summary, all of this is about being a good witness for Jesus! As I said in the beginning it is about in effect, "Putting our money (or our time) where our mouth is!" Obviously, you don't have to do this to be saved. The important issue here is what are you doing WITH your salvation! That's why I'm preaching the John MacArthur quote of "Salvation is free, but the annual dues is EVERYTHING"! It's the Christian life in one thought. Of course, without the power of the Holy Spirit it'd be impossible for us to live that way! In closing think of it this way: If we believe God exists, and He wants us to use our life for His glory, then ask Him how we can better use our lives that way!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study and teach this and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you are always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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