

Romans 12:9-21

God created Adam not only to be in perfect fellowship with him, but to make a community (“be fruitful and multiply) of people who would serve God and love one another in such a way that they would reflect the glory of God back to God. But Adam turned his back on God and the possibility of this community was destroyed. As you read through Genesis you see the effects of this as Adam’s own son Cain murders his other son Abel. God describes what man is like when his back is turned on God “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

God judges the earth and wipes out mankind with a flood, starting over as it were, with Noah and his family. But it is not long before men gather together in hopes of making a name for themselves, rather than God, by making a big tower. The ultimate goal of community in rebellion against God is self-glorification and that was what they wanted. God put an end to it by scattering the people- by “disunifying them.” God then raises up Abraham as his solution. He tells Abraham that he will reverse all of this evil through him and his family “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonor you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). In what way is Abraham and his family going accomplish this? God explains how it is supposed to happen in Genesis 18:19 “For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” This means that the Lord’s plan is to bless the world and bring about the salvation of the world by Abraham and his descendants doing righteousness and justice.

What has all of this got to do with Romans? Well in Romans we get “the rest of the story.” You see, in Romans 1 we found that, like Adam, men have continued to exchange the glory of God for the lie of self-glorification. In Romans 2:3-20 we found that religious people who know about God but live as hypocrites are just as guilty as those who have never known about God at all. But all of this is terrible news. It seems as if we are in the same spot as we were when God killed everyone by a flood or scattered the people at Babel. In Romans 3:21-5 we find that the solution to sin, guilt, and alienation (from God and man) is Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death in our place. In chapters 6, 7, and 8 Paul tells us that as we trust in him we find that we are no longer ruled by law and sin but by grace and righteousness. It is not laws that set us free and empower us to live for God, but rather it is the Spirit of God purchased by the sacrificial death of Christ. In chapters 9-11 Paul tells us that this God is absolutely trustworthy and just in sovereignly giving mercy to whomever he desires and hardening whomever he desires. That is he can bring anyone in to this Abrahamic family that will bless the world that he wants... Jew or Gentile. Finally, in chapter 12 we find that Paul is ready to show us exactly how the salvation we need and the God glorifying community God had planned to build fit together. We find out how Abraham and his descendants, which we are...we are the true Jews who walk in the faith of our father Abraham (Romans 2:27-29, 4:12)..., will be a blessing to the world.

In the text before us today we have a list of commands. Anywhere between eight and thirteen different commands depending on how you break them down. They are amazing commands. They tell us how we will form that ideal community and how we, the children of Abraham will be a blessing to the world by doing righteousness and justice. But we have to know or remind ourselves how to handle God’s commands as Christians.

In Christianity- real, Christ-centered, Gospel focused, grace saturated Christianity, the indicative always precedes the imperative. That is the way we used to say it in seminary. What that means is, what God has done for us must be the foundation upon which God’s commands to us are built. Remember, “We obey because we are accepted.” Every other religion on the planet says, “We are accepted because we obey.”

The commands are a way OF life only once you HAVE life. They are not the way TO life nor are they the fuel FOR life. The Gospel is the way to life and it is the fuel for life and God's commands simply tell us where we need to go once we have it. Never come to a command of God without first thinking and feeling the gospel.

So the last two weeks I pointed out two main things.

1. Romans 12 begins by pointing back to the mercies of God, the gospel, spelled out in Romans 1-11. Paul then grounds our efforts in living for him...in sacrificial behavior...in the mercies of God (12:1). "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."
2. Paul tells us to view ourselves in light of "the standard of faith" (v.3) (aka- the mercies of God or the gospel) in order to have a transformed view of our place in the body (interdependent) and in order to serve in a transformed way in the body (serve others rather than self) (Romans 12:3-8).

Therefore, everything we DO and think should always flow from the Gospel and it is this foundation that will make us into the kind of community that glorifies God. The kind of community that practices righteousness and justice and blesses the world.

Now we find ourselves with this amazing list of laws. I have boiled them down to eight commands.

1. Love Genuinely
2. Love all Christians and show them crazy honor
3. Diligently and passionately serve the Lord
4. Have a disciplined and fruitful secret life
5. Sacrifice your comfort pleasure and privacy
6. Sacrifice your right to justice and love your enemies
7. Sacrifice your time and emotions
8. Sacrifice your status and reputation

Let's go run them one at a time and although we could spend an hour on each one of them I will spend the most time on just two of them...

1. Love Genuinely

v.9 "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

This means that you, truly and from the heart, hate what God hates and you love what he loves. Think of what a tall order this really is. It means that I genuinely hate my sin rather than simply knowing I shouldn't do it. It means I love what is good and right rather than simply knowing I should do it.

2. Love all Christians and show them crazy honor.

v. 10 "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

This means we have to love people and honor people who are unlike us and who irritate us. This command leaves no room for judgmentalism and critical spirits. If we obey this command we will be constantly looking for evidences of grace in people rather than for their faults. You will always be looking for Jesus in others and telling them when you see the slightest glimpse of Him in them!

3. Diligently and passionately serve the Lord

v. 11 "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord."

Externally: Don't be lazy, get stuff done! But it is not enough just to be type A coffee drinker. Internally: Be passionate about what you are doing- be a poet! But it is still not enough to be a type A coffee drinker and a poet. You have to do it FOR God, not for man or self.

4. Have a disciplined and fruitful secret life

v. 12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

Active trust in the promises of God for the future

and the goodness of God in present difficulties.

Pray freakishly often.

5. Sacrifice your comfort, pleasure, and privacy

v. 13 “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

Give your house, your food, and your money to God’s people (and your enemies v. 20).

This one of the chief evidences that Christianity is real and one of the primary tools God uses to cause people to come to Christ and to grow in Christ. The following is a quote from Emperor Julian, known as Julian the Apostate reigned and wrote around 360ad. Julian hated Christianity and passionately pursued revitalizing Greek religion. Here he is writing to Arasacius, one of his right hand men:

“Why do we not observe how the benevolence of Christians to strangers... has done the most to advance their cause? For it is disgraceful that... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their poor but ours as well, while everyone is able to see that our own people lack aid from us”

Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (260 A.D.) wrote:

“[During the great epidemic] most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead... The pagans behaved in the opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled even from their dearest, often throwing them into the roads before they were dead...”

This willingness to share our money, our houses, and even our lives is one of the greatest evidences of the supernatural nature of Christianity. How are you doing with this? Are you only giving out of your excess? That is good, but Jesus says we are to give out of our need. Are you only willing to be hospitable when it is convenient? The command says that we are to SEEK to show hospitality. That means we should be actively looking for opportunities to give away our money and share our homes!

Michelle and I love our space and comfort. We know we love it too much.

Consider praying with us asking God to give us a greater love for Him, the gospel and people than for our space and our comfort. Then, give us opportunity or open our eyes to opportunity to sacrifice those things for Christ.

6. Sacrifice your “right” to justice and love your enemies

v.14, 17-21 “Bless those who persecute you...” etc.

Why does he use six verses to say this same command six different ways? Because our sense of justice and fair treatment runs that deep. It is like a hunger...Hebrews 12:17

7. Sacrifice your time and emotions

v. 15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep”

This means we must show genuine sympathy. Rejoice with someone when he gets promoted above you or someone succeeds at what you are failing at. Weep with someone, even when their sorrow is caused by their carelessness or rebellion.

8. Sacrifice your status and reputation

v. 16 “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight”

You might very well have a reputation with outsiders that would be damaged by hanging out with a person with a bad reputation or no reputation. You might think (but never say out loud) that you are better than some classes or kinds of people. We need to humble ourselves and count the cost.

Let’s close with a real life story where we see a sacrifice of time, emotions, and reputation:

Adapted from a Piper Taste and See article

(http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/1991/2827_Charles_Wesleys_Radical_Fruitful_Risk/)

On July 18, 1738 Charles Wesley spent the week witnessing to inmates at the Newgate prison with a friend named “Bray,” who he described as “a poor ignorant mechanic.” One of the men they spoke to was “a black slave that had robbed his master.” He was sick with a fever and was condemned to die.

Wesley and Bray asked if they could be locked in overnight with the prisoners who were to be executed the next day. That night they spoke the gospel. They told the men that “one came down from heaven to save lost sinners.” They described the sufferings of the Son of God, his sorrows, agony, and death.

The next day, the men were loaded onto a cart and taken to Tyburn. Charles went with them. Ropes were fastened around their necks so that the cart could be driven off and leave them swinging in the air to choke to death.

The fruit of Wesley’s and Bray’s night-long labor was astonishing. Here’s what Wesley wrote:

“They were all cheerful; full of comfort, peace, and triumph; assuredly persuaded Christ had died for them, and waited to receive them into paradise. . . . The black . . . saluted me with his looks. As often as his eyes met mine, he smiled with the most composed, delightful countenance I ever saw.

We left them going to meet their Lord, ready for the bridegroom. When the cart drove off, not one stirred, or struggled for life, but meekly gave up their spirits. Exactly at twelve they were turned off. I spoke a few suitable words to the crowd; and returned, full of peace and confidence in our friends’ happiness. That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life” (Journal, vol 1, 120-123).

Charles Wesley and Bray sacrificed their time and emotions as well as their reputation, not to mention risking their lives being locked up with condemned criminals. They spent time talking to and weeping for these men. They were probably busy and had other things they could have been doing, more pleasant things.

But God’s mercy caused them to be willing to give these things up...to offer their bodies as living sacrifices and be a blessing as God intended them to be. How about you? Are his mercies motivating you to walk in the way of his commandments, these commandments?