

The Surrendered Life
Lesson 8 Romans 12 and 13
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In this week's lesson, we have reached a pivotal change in Paul's address to the Romans. Our passage begins with the word, "Therefore." In Scripture, as in other literature, such a word ties together the previous words with the ones to come. One Bible teacher told me, "You should always check to find out what the therefore is, there for." So, in day one of our study this week, we did a little review of the previous eleven chapters. Did that review pull together for you how far we have come?

Paul had dealt with so many of the major doctrines of our Christian Faith that we might have shied away in fear if we had realized the depth our study would take, before we had begun!

In chapters 1-11 we have learned that:

1. God's Eternal plan for salvation was established before the time of creation.
2. God wanted people to have internal belief from the heart, not just external works which, in chapter 3. could never attain to God's standard of holiness.
4. But God showed us that it is by faith that He credits people to have righteousness.
5. That faith must be in the finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ; we are justified by faith in Him.
6. Then, we can demonstrate that belief, by identifying with Christ's death and resurrection through baptism.
7. However, we will still struggle through the dilemma of our old wants and desires as He sanctifies us, day by day.
8. But he holds no condemnation for us as we are in Christ Jesus.
9. Although the people of Israel failed in their attempt to be saved by their works before God, and stumbled on Christ Jesus, the corner stone,
10. it is the faith that is Christ-based that gives us salvation.
11. And God's call to salvation is irrevocable as are his gifts, for all who believe in Him. All of this is summed up as "God's mercy." (Romans 12:1)

Therefore; in light of all this, what should we do? "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship." [Romans 12:1]

Now, for us the illustration of giving ourselves as a sacrifice doesn't fall in to the commonplace example that a sacrifice would have been to the first century believers. They gave regular sacrifices. The Jews would be well familiar with the thanksgiving, sin and atonement sacrifices offered on the altar in Jerusalem's temple. The Gentiles also gave sacrifices of meat and produce as offerings to idols. But we do not offer such sacrifices today.

So let's consider a Biblical example to help us understand the word- illustration Paul offered here. Paul had used Abraham as an example of faith in previous chapters of Romans. He was given the promise that he would be the father of many nations through his descendants. In keeping that promise, God enabled Abraham to father a son when he was 100 years old. Isaac was the son of promise.

But in Genesis chapter 22, verse 2, God tested him, "Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'" Scholars believe from the context of the previous chapter, that Isaac was now an adolescent. As a teenager, he would have the physical strength to resist his aged father, if he didn't agree with what his 100+ year old father wanted him to do.

As they approached the special mountain God revealed to Abraham, Isaac and his father left the servants behind and climbed up to the sacrificial site together. Verse 6 through 8 record their interaction on the way: "Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'" You see, Isaac was familiar with offering sacrifices to God along with his dad. "Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together." [Genesis 22:6-8]

Now the most extraordinary thing happened. Isaac helped his dad build the stone pile that would be the altar. He helped place the wood onto it. Then, he allowed his father to tie him up and he laid down onto that altar. He watched as his father pulled out the knife and raised it above his head. But perhaps he closed his eyes as he saw the determination of Abraham to start the arch that would plunge the knife into his own heart.

But God intervened, saying, “Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’” [Genesis 22:11-12]

God did provide a ram that day for them to actually sacrifice. But Isaac didn't know that ahead of time. He laid down on that altar, ready to be the sacrifice God required. What do you think went through Isaac's mind as he lay there? I think that was the moment of faith that God counted as righteousness for Isaac, as well as for his father Abraham.

In Hebrews 11 Abraham is commended for this faith, in verses 17-19. Abraham believed that God would keep his promises about his descendants, and so at the moment of offering his only son, Isaac, “Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” [Hebrews 11:19] So too, Isaac by offering to be a living sacrifice, demonstrated his faith, and trust in God.

This example of the willing, living sacrifice is what Paul described in verse one as holy and pleasing to God, and our true and proper worship. [Romans 12:1] Some versions translate the true and proper worship as being “our reasonable service.” (KJV) MacLaren described it as our “rational” service, because it “is the act of the inner man, and so is called 'rational' rather than 'reasonable'...And so the sum of the whole is that the master-word for the outward life of a Christian is sacrifice. That again, includes two things, - self-surrender and surrender to God.”

This two pronged surrender follows the example of Isaac. Rationally, he considered his own will must be surrendered and he chose to align his will to God's will. The rest of our scripture describes these two parts of surrender in the life of a Christian today.

First, a believer must cease to be surrendered to our old nature. “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” [Romans 12:2]

Eugene Peterson paraphrased this verse in these words, “Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” [Romans 12:2 in The Message]

The pull of our culture is all pervasive and extremely strong. Everywhere we turn, we are told to take care of yourself, love yourself and treat yourself “in the manner to which you would like to become accustomed.” But that is opposite of the mind-set God desires for us. His way is one of thinking of ourselves humbly, soberly, and as Christ has established for us to be positionally, in His body. Christ has placed us together with other believers in a unified group, we call the church. He described it in verse 4 as “one body with many members. [Romans 12:4]

Each one of us has a function in this body. But it is not so that we feel happy and comfortable. Rather, we are to minister, or serve each other. God has given each of us gifts. But they are not so we will become self-important, but rather so that we will help others grow in God's will. If God has gifted you in showing mercy, leadership/administration, giving, encouraging others, teaching, serving, or prophesying, do it with all you have.

Isaac didn't step up and say, “Well, just a minute here dad. Remember, I am the promised child. I'm the one that God promised would start a whole nation. Now, how can I reach my potential after I die on an altar???” No, rather, he submitted his own will, his own desire for fame and importance onto that altar. He submitted because he believed God had a better plan for him than he might have for himself. He was right.

Paul described the plan God has for us all in verses 9-10: “Love must be sincere, Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” [Romans 12:9,10]

Imagine how exciting it would be to hear nothing but the following when we got together with other believers: “I'm so excited to see you! How are you doing in your walk with the Lord! I love the way you always help filling up those communion cups and passing out bulletins! Your smile is always so encouraging when I see you! Even when I've had a hard week, I know you will greet me with a happy smile and a hopeful word of encouragement.

“I'm so glad that you asked about how things are going with that prayer request. I know by that, that you have continued to pray for me. Thank you for the offerings of money and food that you so faithfully give. You have helped so many people by what you have given so generously! And thank you for having us over the other night. We could never repay you for your kindness.”

Paul put this scenario this way: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the

Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” [Romans 12:11-13] These actions are the life-giving reality of the believer who has sacrificed their “self” on the altar. They are raised up to a new life in Christ which blesses everyone around them.

But this self-surrender is but the first step in our sacrifice. We also must surrender to God's will. Our part in the body of Christ includes a touch of sincere love for fellow believers because of our regenerated lives. But we also will change the world around us. Paul continued to describe the believer as he influenced non-believers for God, around them as well.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” [Romans 12:14-16] This is the supreme goal for believers, to react to opposition with love rather than with anger.

It is easy to react to kindness with kindness. It is easy to keep up our enthusiasm when we think of coming to People of the Word where friends show such care and concern for us; keeping our love sincere when it is returned with mutual love.

But if someone does evil to you and curses you, are you able to show them this same type of love? There are three main words in Greek that we translate “love” in English. One is “eros” and this is a physical love, the love meant for marriage. The second is “phileo” which is what we would call “brotherly love”. I love to be with you, because you and I like to do the same things.

But the final word is “agape” love. This is the love of one, without expecting return. This is the love God showed when he gave his only Son to die for sinful mankind. We could never give back that same type of love. It is beyond our capacity. It is only through the Holy Spirit that God can love like that through us.

The first, natural reaction we feel when someone is mean to us, is to be mean in return. Or, we may not want to spend time with the one who is in the pits, experiencing deep grief for the loss of their loved one. Or, we may tend to avoid that person who is down and out financially, because we feel guilty that we should help them, and we don't know how.

But as we mature in Christ, our love, like a muscle, can grow outside of the love that is “returned in kind.” How amazing is the impact of a Christian forgiving and asking for leniency for the one who is found guilty of a crime against your family. How strong is the one who can

stand firm and unshaken under the onslaught of false accusation, and turn to love their accuser to genuinely want what is best for them.

Paul took it a step further by saying, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” [Romans 12:17,18] How can we possibly get to that point? MacLaren reassured us that we can grow in this amazing love. He said, “it is the measure in which we, receive into our minds 'the mind of Christ Jesus', and look at men as He did, that we shall come to love them all honestly and purely.”

The mind of Christ Jesus was such that he loved us while we were his enemies. Remember what we read in Romans 5, verses 7 and 8? “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” [Romans 5:7,8] So, while we are transforming ourselves by the renewing of our mind, we should seek to see others as God sees them, and love them anyway. This is surrendering our will to God's will.

This will play out as a change in our attitude toward our enemies: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” [Romans 12:19-21]

Pointing to the possibility of taking action toward the purpose of peace with others, Paul charged us to “leave room for God's wrath.” When we ignore God's admonition and try to take our own revenge, we are trying to do God's job. Doesn't the almighty, all-knowing God know the best way to deal with those who have harmed us? Isn't He the best judge of people's intentions? No one can con Him, because He can see into people's hearts.

He knows the best form of justice and mercy to bring about true repentance in each of our lives. He knows exactly the right amount of “coals” to heap onto someone's head to bring blessings rather than cursings. Now this figure of speech is somewhat mysterious. In the context of “leaving room for God's wrath”, we might think that this phrase, “heaping coals”, would be a punishment brought in justice to someone who was an evil doer.

But most commentators seem to take this phrase in a different direction. Barnes commented: “The apostle is speaking of the natural effect or result of showing him kindness ... So the apostle says that the 'effect' of doing good to an enemy would be to produce pain. But the pain will result from shame, remorse of conscience, a conviction of the evil of repentance....People will resist wrath, anger, and power; but goodness they cannot resist, it finds its way to the heart.”

MacLaren describes the same interpretation; “It is clear that the 'coals of fire' which are to be heaped on the head are meant to melt and soften the heart, and cause it to glow with love....the true goal of kindling the fire of love in his alienated heart.” Therefore, Paul sums up these actions of our renewed mind, by “Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” [Romans 12:23]

When my daughter was in elementary school, we lived just down the street from Richman Elementary school. So, when she got into upper primary classes, we let her walk to school. A neighborhood boy began to cause her grief everyday on the way to school, blocking her way and trying to knock down her books. She finally told me what was happening, and I realized that this was the youngest son of our neighbor right across the street, I knew we had to do something. Bullying is never acceptable. But, I couldn't walk with her and be her shield every day.

So, we decided that this was an opportunity to put this section of scripture into shoe-leather. Having grown up as the only sister to four brothers, I recalled how my brothers would use anything they could find as a mock weapon. They loved to “fight” and be warriors.

Deborah and I had grown a small row of corn that summer. The corn stalks were now dry, but still standing. So, I suggested that we could offer those corn stalks to our neighbor's son so he could play with them. Deborah was lagging behind me as we came to their door and I explained that we just thought her son would have fun with the corn stalks. We passed them through the door and left.

It was not much of a bribe or gift, because we didn't have much to offer. And as I stood at our neighbor's door, I feared that they might take it wrong, and I worried that this gesture might be a stupid way to handle this situation. But we had prayed that God would take care of this bully with the kindness we were showing. And, by God's grace, that boy never bothered Deb again.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” [verse 23] The Jews in Rome were facing a bully who was much more adversarial than our neighborhood bully. The government demanded emperor worship. Soon it would become a matter of life or death. Under Nero, Jews and Christians alike were blamed for the fire that burned Rome itself. They were hunted and crucified or burned alive just because they would not bow down to worship the emperor.

In God's amazing fore-knowledge, He inspired Paul to include our chapter 13 in the context of overcoming evil with good. God wanted his people to be blameless before this antagonistic government. So, giving two reasons, he commanded: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

The two reasons are found in verse 4, “For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong-doer.” [Romans 13:4] First, God has placed people in authority for the good of the citizen. Having law and order in a society keeps that society from the chaos criminal minds would love to cause. So, God allows people to have an orderly society, by establishing civil government. Willingly submitting to our rulers, gives us the structure in which we can prosper. Therefore, we pay taxes so these authorities can work for our good.

But, there are those who do not keep the law. So the second reason for having government, is to punish law breakers. When criminals break the law, the authorities are there to bring just punishment, rather than the chaos of vigilantism. Good people do not need to fear the authorities. But if people break the law, they know that the authorities are ready to bring them to justice.

Now, we have novels and books whose plots describe how innocent people get blamed for things they did not commit. Certainly Christian martyrs are a good example of twisted rulers misusing their authority or of an ineffective government, allowing evil to continue. God will repay those who are supposed to help society, but hurt it instead. Our job is to love all people. We pay taxes and fees we owe, but leave the rest in God's hands.

Even if we feel our government is doing a terrible job with the tax money we have grudgingly paid, we must continue to pay our taxes. Our recourse to change such abuse must be

through the law. We place our hearts in line with the authority God has ordained. We obey the law, in His name. We willingly surrender our will to God's will living under the rules and regulations above us, as people of faith.

The one debt we can never completely pay, though, is to love others. “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” [Romans 13:8] Can you see how loving others keeps one from breaking the ten commandments? If you “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you would never steal their goods or seduce their spouse. If you “love your neighbor as yourself,” you couldn't physically harm them or verbally lie about them!

As we observe the admonition to love others as ourselves, we will want what is best for others, just like we want what is best for ourselves. But we do get weary of chasing this standard of love sometimes, don't we? We try to surrender ourselves. We work to surrender our wills to follow only God's will. But sometimes we feel there is no return for all of our effort. But Paul closed this portion of Romans with the reminder that our reward is coming!

“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” [Romans 13:11,12]

Our final reason for living the surrendered life is that the Lord is coming soon! We feel it don't we? We look around the world and recognize the signs of lawlessness. We see the crooked despots ruining their countries and the lives of their people. We feel the danger in our own cities where our authorities are not keeping the trust we have placed in them. The evil one is attempting to turn God's established authorities toward destruction. The world groans under the curse of sin.

So we know that Jesus must be coming soon. The time is near. He will open the clouds and step out with the sound of a trumpet and call us to be with him forever! Will you be ready? He has called us to believe in Him. Have you accepted his merciful salvation? He has commanded us to surrender our hearts and minds to Him. Have you surrendered yourself to him? He has given us gifts for ministering to others. Are we sacrificially serving in His name? He has commanded us to live law abiding lives. Are we living lives of loving obedience and respect for others?

The only debt He wants us to continue owing, is the debt of loving others. Are we working hard to pay that debt? “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” [Romans 13:14] When we are “transformed by the renewing of our minds,” (12:2) we are seeking to have in ourselves, the same mind as Christ has. And His thoughts are always bound in love.

In Philippians 1 verse 9-11, Paul encouraged believers with this prayer: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.” [Philippians 1:9-11]

Let's look for ways to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.” Let's seek constantly for opportunities to use the gifts he has given each of us for the benefit of the body of Christ. Let's do good to everyone, even those who are not being kind to us. Let's be good citizens and law abiding members of our society. Let's keep paying off our debt of love to others, because soon Jesus will be here. That day of His return is nearer today, than it was yesterday.

Let us surrender each day of our lives to Christ, as if we were standing before Him already.

Let's pray