

Holy Living by the Mercy of God

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Romans 12 (Joshua 6:12-21)

Heavenly Father, according to Your mercy, use us as instruments of Your grace by the power of Your Holy Spirit as sanctified servants of Christ our King for Your glory and honor, now and forever. AMEN.

Have you ever wondered how, within the conquest of Canaan, several cities that were “*devoted* to the LORD”, “destroyed” or put “under the ban”, such as what we read about today in Joshua 6:17-18, have relevance for us as Christians today? The word “devoted” (according to the NIV) in Joshua 6:17,18 and 21 that I am referring to is ‘*cherem*’, and there is a lot of complexity behind this concept. One scholar highlights that, “*herem* refers to removing something from human use. Joshua, in accordance with Yahweh’s command, effectively bans all of the land he acquires... because of what Yahweh intends to do with the land... What the *herem* of the Canaanite cities by Joshua tells us is that the new covenant’s equivalent of land must also be removed from [human] use and turned over to God for God to use as he sees fit. ...[I]n the old covenant the land was most importantly the place of God’s presence. In the new covenant believers both individually and communally become the place of God’s presence. Christians are supposed to surrender the right to make use of [our]selves as [we] turn [our]selves over to God for his own use. In the New Testament’s own language, the *herem* of the self is represented by...the argument of Romans 6:3-4, 13: ‘Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death. ...offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.’” -Walton, John H.; Walton, J. Harvey. *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant,*

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Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites (pp. 220, 222, 240, 241). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

We are not our own. We were bought at a price. We are God's. Using Paul's language in Romans 6:6, we are to drive out our 'old self', as Israel drove out the Canaanites, surrender our minds and bodies to the Lord as Joshua surrendered the land to God to be used by Him as He pleased, and embrace our new identity in Christ as children of God like Rahab by God's mercy. This will then mark out our lives as God's People who are holy, different, set-apart, from the rest of the world. What this looks like for the Apostle Paul is articulated in Romans 12-15.

Chapter 12 begins the practical application of God's electing mercy that we have been considering. In the previous chapters, Paul has demonstrated how both Jews and Gentiles are gracious recipients of God's overflowing sovereign mercy. Now, Paul urges us to live by God's mercy that enables us to serve Him as His People and to love others according to His righteousness. Our lives are to be holy and distinct from the world; because, God dwells in us, and we live according to His righteous standards.

Because of God's overflowing mercy, we can **Properly Worship God** in **Serving and Loving Others**, including even **Our Enemies** by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit Who fulfills the Law in us. Let's look at each of these.

1. Properly Worshipping God (READ Verses 1-2)

- a. Here, Paul addresses our personal responsibility for worship and personal transformation in view of God's undeserved mercy toward us.

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- i. "Therefore" indicates that Paul's urging is based on all that he has discussed in the previous chapters, but especially that which immediately precedes in chap. 11.
 1. It is "in view to God's mercy" as Paul discusses in ***Roman 11:32 (READ)***
 2. Paul urges, appeals, beseeches or exhorts us based on, with a view to, by, or through God's mercy.
 - b. To properly, reasonably or spiritually worship God means we recognize that we have been set apart, made holy, in Christ by God's sovereign mercy as His own possession. We are His; therefore, all that we do, we do to please Him. That's what makes our lives acceptable to God, and that only comes in and through Christ Who is our once-for-all perfect sacrifice.
 - i. In Christ, we are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God; therefore, we do not let sin reign in our mortal bodies within this present world, or age as we await Jesus' Return. We do not obey evil desires but offer every part of our lives as instruments of righteousness to God. (***Romans 6:11-13***)
2. **Serving One Another with Our Gifts (READ Verses 3-8)**
- a. When you think of worshipping God, what comes first to your mind? The Book of Common Prayer? Singing hymns? The Lord's Supper? Praying? The first example Paul gives of worship is how we treat one another as Christians.
 - b. Here is one of several representative, not exhaustive, lists of gifts God gives us, as His People, to serve one another. Such service is an essential aspect of our "holy, pleasing, true, and proper" worship of God.
 - i. Paul gives seven examples of grace gifts to be used to serve others. Again, this is NOT exhaustive.
 1. What is your gift that God has given you to serve Him by serving us, St. Patrick's, as His People?

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2. Are there aspects of your life, your body or your mind, that you think are off-limits to God, and therefore, unavailable for His People?
3. Are you serving in accordance with your faith?
 - a. "In accordance with the faith" in verses 3 and 6, I think, has to do with using our gifts for their faithful God-intended purpose of serving His Church; not for our own self-serving "human use" which based on a high view of ourselves rather than a view to God's mercy by serving others and their best interests in love. This is a sincere and self-denying love that has broad application.

3. Loving One Another, even Our Enemies (READ Verses 9-21)

- a. Love is the primary action toward others above all else; because, God's own unimaginable love toward us is what fuels our entire lives, body and mind, to be the living sacrifices we are called to be.
 - i. **READ *Romans 13:8-10*** Love your neighbor as yourself...but some of us love ourselves too much more than Jesus and His Body. Some of us "think more highly than we ought of ourselves without sober judgment [but are rather] proud and conceited" (*Romans 12:3, 16*). Perhaps this is one reason Paul reminds us to submit to authorities in 13:1-7; because, we tend to love ourselves too much and think too highly of ourselves, and this leads to prideful autonomy and individualism that foolishly submits to no one. Biblical love is sincere, sacrificial and self-denying. Are you a hand or foot overly infatuated with yourself and think you can properly perform your function apart from Jesus, our Head, and the rest of His Body?
- b. Notice the blurred recipients of our love, whether it be toward Christians or perceived enemies. There is no dividing

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line for those who receive our love; because, family, friends, foes and, especially, our forever family in Christ, are to be the recipients of our gifts through sincere loving service. Others “in Christ” who are Members of His Body are holy ones like you and me. So, while there may be differences and even conflicts among Christians, other Christians are NOT enemies! Even when we are confronted with genuine enemies, we do not respond to them with vengeance. Rather, we commend them to God and His just judgment. Why? Because, Jesus lovingly died for us when we were still His enemies.

- i. We must remember that the Body of Christ has different Members with different functions. We are not all the same; therefore, some Members will be different than ourselves, and, with that, comes misunderstandings, different opinions, individual idiosyncrasies, and discomforts, but this is for our good; our sanctification, so we don't become conformed to this world.
- ii. Your club, hobby, political party or professional organization are for people like you, but, here's the key, your identity is in and with Christ; not any other group, organization, culture, gender or race. Remember, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female in Christ.
 1. For example, Jacob is chess club president, and Thomas is a percussionist in his band. They are with people like them, but that is NOT their identity. They are Christians; therefore, they belong to God in Jesus. This means, practically, they do not conform to the pattern of these worldly groups and surrender their Christian identity by putting their group's needs and norms before Christ's and His Body. Instead, they are to

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be transformed by God's Word and Spirit to serve as Christian light and salt in these groups, which brings our Father glory. This is our proper worship.

2. With whom, or what, do you identify? One way to assess this is to clearly see who, or what, receives most of our time using our God-given gifts. How does the world identify us? How do we introduce or describe ourselves? Paul, the Apostle, calls himself a "servant of Christ."
- c. As one commentator stated, the Body of Christ "is a supernatural fellowship of people very unlike us, to whom we are bound with zealous family love" (Ash, p. 163).
 - i. After all, Jesus said that the world would know we are Christians by our love for one another, and that love expressed to one another will be seen in using our gifts for their God intended purpose to serve one another as Members of the Body of Christ. This is our reasonable proper worship that pleases our Lord.

This is **Holy Living by the Mercy of God**. The Holy Spirit IN us leads us in all righteousness through a transformative renewing of our minds; because, Jesus first fulfilled God's righteousness FOR us. God's overflowing sovereign mercy sets us apart (makes us holy) as His People in Christ where we are righteous, free and alive, so that we may live lives pleasing to God by reflecting His righteousness. This is the present sanctification of our minds and bodies as God's People who are purging the evil from our midst; because, we are God's Holy Dwelling. God, in His mercy and by the Holy Spirit, circumcises our hearts, so we may have the saving faith of Abraham in God's promises fulfilled in Jesus.

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Because the same Holy Spirit who circumcises our hearts also indwells Christians and makes us Holy Temples in Whom God dwells, that faith will bear fruit in righteous works. The point Paul is articulating is that “Christianity is not merely introspective individualism” (A.W. Tozer). “Faith has been made everything and obedience nothing. The result among religious persons is moral weakness, spiritual blindness and a slow but constant drift away from New Testament Christianity. ...saving faith is impossible without willing obedience.” The greater our faith in God’s mercy, the greater our love in service. The less we think of ourselves, the less hypocrisy when using our gifts. Rather than serving hidden self-interests out of self-importance, we humbly and empathetically serve others with our gifts as God intended. This is reasonable worship that brings about peace. This pleases God according to His will.

May we all live the holy lives we are called to live by serving and loving others, especially Christians unlike ourselves; because, this is what pleases God as our true and proper worship, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AMEN