

The Second Half of Romans

Romans 12:1

Thirty-five years ago this month I was married. That same year, a few months later, I was ordained as a minister of the gospel. Those two events have defined my identity ever since. Clearly, 1987 was the most important year of transition in my life, the most obvious and significant turning point. All that went before that year served to prepare me for all that would come after.

I mention that this morning because we reach a similar turning point in the book of Romans today. This is the single great transition in this great epistle which Paul has written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All that has gone past now becomes the background and foundation for all that follows, and if you were outline this whole book, there would likely be only two main headings. Chapters 1-11 would be the declaration and explanation of the gospel. And chapters 12-16 would be the application of the gospel. Sometimes it is very helpful to keep things that simple.

Actually, the relationship between the declaration of the gospel and its application to our lives is anything but simple, at least if you keep up with the debates and disagreements among God's people. The relationship between the law and the gospel has been a continual subject of conversation and debate in every generation, in every century. How are they to be balanced? Which is to receive the emphasis? Which is more important? Which should I preach? The declaration of the gospel or the applications to our lives which we commonly call the law? How do the law and the gospel relate to one another? Surely that question could be referenced to the wisdom of Solomon in,

Eccl. 12:12 "And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of

making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh."

I have always thought that that relationship is actually very simple. And straightforward. I believe that I have varied somewhat in emphasis somewhat over these 35 years of preaching that gospel to God's people in five different churches, but I don't think I have changed my answer to that question nor ever been the least bit uncertain about that relationship between the law and the gospel. The promises of God in the gospel are the foundation of everything. They are crucial, and in a certain sense, they can never be under-estimated. Unbelievers need to hear the promises of the gospel in order to be saved, in order to find eternal life, to know God and to trust in Jesus. I could never say that enough and I can never ignore or diminish the importance of all of that. Believers need to hear those same promises, too, regularly, repeated, for comfort, for encouragement, for confidence and assurance.

But those gospel promises must also be applied to life, thus the well and good use of the law of God, his revealed will. Unbelievers need to hear the law in order to convince them of their sin and drive them to Jesus for the forgiveness of those sins. And believers need to hear the law in order to teach us how to live; or more personally, how to love God. In other words, the relationship between the law and the gospel is the inseparable connection between the declaration of the promises of God as the foundation for the exhortations of obedience to his law.

And the one single word that connects those two things is the word "therefore." The word "therefore" establishes the foundation of the gospel as it introduces the applications of that gospel. So we read in,

Eph. 4:1 "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to

walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The first three chapters of Ephesians describe and define that “calling”, the work of God in the salvation of those people whom he has called to himself and saves, by grace through faith in Jesus. The final three chapters, following that word “therefore,” are a continuous exhortation to “walk worthy” of that calling. We find the same pattern in this book of Romans. So this morning, we transition from all that we have studied in the first 11 chapters in 38 sermons to the beginning of a five-chapter summary of what it means to live the Christian life, as we often put it. And that Christian life has a very noteworthy definition.

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: A SACRIFICE.

Now, if you were a faithful Jewish recipient of this letter from Paul, you would exactly what he means. You would know what he is referring to, namely the whole of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Old Testament is just filled with descriptions of sacrifices, all those sacrifices which required of his people. And those sacrifices were central to the whole Old Testament religious system. That is what the worship of God was all about—sacrifices. Offerings. Most often animals. And, I should state the obvious—dead animals. Lots and lots of them, with intricate and detailed descriptions and regulations. With lots of blood. And you know one of the main principles of that Old Testament sacrificial system,

Lev. 17:11 “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

The book of Hebrews quotes that verse with these words, Heb. 9: 22 “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Let me read more of the context,

Heb. 9:18 “Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.” 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

So the blood sacrifices were necessary to satisfy the debt of God’s wrath and justice. Sacrifices paid the penalty which covenant breakers had incurred because of their sin. But there were other types of sacrifices. Not just the sin offerings or the guilt offerings, but there were others. Interestingly, a point I often emphasize, is that that first category of offerings were non-sweet-smelling, those that were offered as the payment and penalty for sin. They didn’t have a pleasing aroma, or to use words carefully, they didn’t bring pleasure to God. But other sacrifices did. For example, the burnt offering.

Lev. 1:1 “Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, 2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock...8 Then the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; 9 but he shall wash its entrails and its

legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.”

Likewise,

Lev. 1:12 “And he shall cut it into its pieces, with its head and its fat; and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; 13 but he shall wash the entrails and the legs with water. Then the priest shall bring it all and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.”

Num. 28:3 “And you shall say to them, This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. 4 The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, 5 and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. 6 It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.”

The sweetness, the pleasure, if you will, that God enjoyed was in the pure act of devotion. The burnt offering is also called the whole offering because the whole thing was offered to the Lord. Nothing was held back. It had a pleasing aroma. And the Lord enjoyed it.

I admit that I ordered some valentines flowers which were delivered on Friday, noting that Valentines Day is tomorrow. I don't say that get any other husband in trouble and certainly not to brag, since I do plenty of things wrong. But I think that the sweet-smelling aroma of Valentines roses is a good example of this idea so clearly stated in the Old Testament sacrifices, since that aroma is especially pleasing to many wives—and not just the

smell, but what that smell represents in terms of loving devotion.

And here is what Paul says about the Christian life. It is to be a sacrifice. But notice his words. No longer do we kill animals to offer as a sacrifice. Instead the New Testament sacrifice which we offer is,

A. A living sacrifice.

In other words, our whole lives. Or as Paul puts it even more graphically, our bodies.

v.1 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice...”

That's the Christian life. A living sacrifice. And, like the the Old Testament offering,

B. A whole and complete sacrifice.

Lev. 8:18 “Then he brought the ram as the burnt offering. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, 19 and Moses killed it. Then he sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. 20 And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. 21 Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

The whole animal was given to the Lord for his enjoyment. So it is to be our lives, our bodies. A living sacrifice of your whole life. There are lots of examples, to be sure. Paul makes frequent mention of the need for sexual purity, and this is the context, the whole of our bodies given in devotion to God. The Bible also warns about those things which damage our bodies through the absence of self-control, including both drunkenness and gluttony.

And there are more general exhortations in the Bible as well, such as Paul's familiar declaration,
Phil. 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ..."

Or Jesus' familiar words with reference to the greatest of the commandments,

Mat. 22:37 "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment."

That's the living sacrifice of the whole our lives, and that is the sacrifice which is so pleasing to God. And, let me emphasize this as well, Jesus' sacrifice of his own life was not only a sin-offering which was non-sweet smelling, it was also his own burnt offering to his father with a sweet-smelling aroma.

Eph. 5:2 "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

So I beseech you, people of God, to offer your lives, your bodies, as such a living sacrifice for the honor and pleasure of the God who has saved you. And that, then, gets at,

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: HONOR TO GOD.

We are so self-absorbed in our day, so focused upon our own needs and desires. And Paul has something quite revolutionary to say in that context. The purpose of our lives is not, and cannot be, defined in terms of ourselves. Rather, the very reason for your existence, the broadest, overall purpose for your life must be found in the desire to honor and please God. Notice how Paul puts that. He mentions first,

A. Holiness before God.

It is the first word he uses in verse 1 to define this living sacrifice. Holiness means to be separate, separated. Specifically, for the Christian, it means to be separated from the world, separated from the evil of the world. Never is that clearer than in,

2 Cor. 6:16 "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.' 17 Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 18 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.'"

Then, in the very next verse, he gets very specific.

2 Cor. 7:1 "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Similarly, noting that sanctification and holiness are the same thing, we read in,

1 Thes. 4:1 "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy

Spirit.”

It is such holiness, then, that Paul says is,

B. Acceptable to God.

You could translate that, “pleasing to God.” Again, reference those sweet-smelling sacrifices of the Old Testament. Pleasing to God, that’s the purpose of the Christian life. That’s the demonstration of the living sacrifice of your life, living for the pleasure and approval of God, for his honor and for his glory. That he might be pleased with you.

Do you see how all-encompassing this is? It is not just a list of do’s and don’t’s, a few simple rules to observe in order to make yourself look good. No, it is the whole of your life, everything. Every aspect of your life. Every detail. Every area. Everything. Lived out as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God. And, as Paul would then put it, “your reasonable service.” Sometimes that is translated your “spiritual worship” or “spiritual service of worship.” Without being too technical, I think the right idea is contained in all those translations. Your worship of God is your service to God. They are one and the same. And it is offered wholeheartedly, sincerely. “Reasonably.” Literally, rationally, which means that it is offered as an act of your will, an intentional, purposeful commitment your...

C. Devotion offered to God.

It is rational in contrast with what is mechanical and automatic. In other words, we don’t worship God with mere external forms, outward actions that are separated from the conscious choice of your mind and will. Simply performing ceremonies outwardly is not what we have been called to offer God. But rational, thoughtful, whole-hearted and whole-souled devotion is our duty and responsibility. Offering such worship to

God is the very purpose for our lives.

And then, to go back to where I started, let me emphasize motive. The intention and desire of the heart.

III. THE MOTIVE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: GRATITUDE TO GOD.

And so the motive, the only proper and acceptable motive for living out this life of loving devotion to God is gratitude to God which comes from,

A. The constant awareness of God’s saving love.

His mercies, according to verse 1.

v.1

Again, my emphasis here is motive. What is it that will motivate you to offer your whole life as a living sacrifice? What is it that will motivate you to be holy, to put sin to death, to seek always to live in such a way as to be acceptable to God? What motivation is sufficient for such a lofty goal?

I would propose to you that fear of condemnation is an insufficient motive in this regard. Oh, it helps initially, in leading the unbeliever to Christ as the only hope of escaping God’s wrath. And there is even some value for believers to consider the warnings of God, especially in order to be constrained from persistent, on-going sin that so easily besets you. But that is not the greatest motive, nor the highest motive. It is not the most effective motive.

I would call this sort of fear an immature motive, such as the dread of a young child who fears punishment if he does wrong. That is where we start in life to be sure, but it is not the goal of maturity. The goal of maturity is to develop and nurture this great

motive of gratitude to God that grows out of this awareness of God's saving love and mercy.

Related to that is,

B. The constant awareness of the promises of the gospel.

Here is where I want to emphasize again that word "therefore."

Because that word takes us back to the foundation of the gospel so wonderfully presented in Romans 1-11. So, dear people of God, never forgot the promises of the gospel, which is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."

Rom. 3:22 "For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Never forget that,

Rom. 5:1 "...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Never forget that,

Rom. 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Never forget that,

Rom. 8:32 "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand

of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Rom. 8:38 "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing can "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's where real motivation come. That's where gratitude is nurtured. And that is where loving devotion is to be found.

So take everything you know about the promises of the gospel, and meditate deeply upon them. Think often, and deeply, of the riches of the glory of the gospel of God's saving grace that is offered to you in Jesus. And then,

v.1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."