

Be Holy

Romans 12:1-2

When I was a kid, there was a Bible story that made me very uncomfortable. And I had to come to terms with it again as a parent.

Paraphrase Gen 22:1-18.

Over time this story has helped me evaluate my commitment to God. Is there anything or anyone I hold more precious than my relationship with God? Can I trust God with all - my wife and children and even me? In the case of Abraham, God blessed him and his descendants when he passed the test. Today's passage calls us to commitment in response to blessings the Lord has already begun. We are to be a people-gripped by God's mercy.

Pray

The Gospel of God is unpacked. The fifth GT from Rom 8 was: Spirit-led. We understand that God's righteousness and mercy has been revealed through Christ and is received by faith (1:17). We know that no one deserves God's mercy because no one is righteous. Yet God did the unthinkable to rescue us from sin's clutches. God so loved the world that He gave Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. Blood had to be spilled while we were yet sinners (unable to merit any help). And so, the rescuing work on the cross can only be received by faith: a repentant, believing heart. But

the extent of this rescue is beyond our expectations too. God makes an exchange (His righteousness for sin) guaranteeing a verdict of 'righteous' at the final judgement; upon belief, we are transferred in ownership from sin to God (Adam to Jesus); we are reconciliation with God (no regrets), receive God's indwelling presence (Holy Spirit), and a completely new identity (died, risen and adopted in Christ) forever: *children of the living God*. R 9:26 And it's not because we're cute, handsome or handy.

God's Gospel classes under the Apostle Paul have been building to this very point (315 verses). Some teachers would say, now that you understand...go into the world and live it. But no, first comes an appeal to commitment. A very strong case has been made that God is righteous and merciful. And God is calling for a response.

We will find out why some believers are experiencing God's purpose, peace and love while others...not so much. We will discover that when we surrender to God's work in us, all our relationships follow the pattern of the Spirit (not the world). It is **the Power of the Gospel**. Today's focus is that Spirit-led believers are empowered to **be holy**. Committed to God above all.

I. Basis of Commitment

Read 12:1a Amazed at God's Mercy

As your pastor, I too appeal for you to consider that it has taken 116 weeks or 812 days for us to arrive at this passage together. We've spent much time learning from the life of Christ. My hope is that by drawing from His sacrifice, we might be gripped by the wonder of God's mercy. And while it can be heart wrenching, it is vital to remember (Communion). Some struggle with going back to that scene because it makes them angry. Some struggle thinking... "But I didn't ask God to do this for me." Please don't believe the lie that you are past redeeming: "I'm not worth it." Jesus looks straight at you and me with those eyes so deep with truth and love and says, "Yes you are!" Our sin is exposed for what it is when we consider what it does to our Savior. Our sin brings God's wrath as blood flows from Jesus' shredded back, punctured head, ripped beard, impaled hands and feet, while suffocating in His own blood on the cross. And that's only what appears on the outside. Deeper are the bruises and tares. Deeper still the betrayal and abandonment from His own; false accusations, blind hatred and mocking from His fellow countrymen and Gentiles alike. The crowds who once surrounded Him...yearning for truth

and healing, are fickle. They are turned against Him to cry out, 'Crucify him!' And there is a dimension to Christ's suffering we cannot so easily imagine...the suffocating stench of the evil one's presence. Gloating.

What did Jesus do in the face of public humiliation, torture and execution? Jesus interceded. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34)

While being insulted by the soldiers and the others hanging in execution, Jesus promised eternal life to the criminal who exercised belief (Lk 23:36-43).

While He strained in pain for each breath, Jesus provided for His mother-committing His most faithful disciple to care for her.

Ominous darkness came upon the land in the middle of the day (6th hour). It must have seemed like the powers of evil were in complete control. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

What a moment, as the sins of all humanity lay heaped upon Him, blood dripping and nailed to the cross.

I think the Passion movie does believers a great favor (I didn't want to see it at first either). It brings us face to face again with God's righteousness and mercy. *For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.* R11:32

Christ's sacrifice is a magnet drawing us to deepest commitment.

II. Character of Commitment 12:1b Total and Appropriate

The character of this commitment is *total* and *appropriate*. **Total:** God wants all of us. Paul uses the dramatic language of sacrifice to convey total commitment. Remember when Isaac asked his dad, "where's the lamb for the burnt offering?" God will provide. God has provided. He rescued us! We are *living* in newness of life (R6:4) to show the world God's love through Jesus (Jn 17). We have been chosen by God for His glory. Though to His own, Our Father gives many good gifts. Total commitment is **appropriate**. It is true and proper to offer our all to God for the rest of our lives. Whether we are in the chapel, at work, rest or play - the time we have here, to live out our days is a chance to say 'thank you, Lord for saving me.' The King James Version sticks to the simpler Greek translation of *logiken*: *which is your reasonable service*. This is a logical appeal. When I studied worship in seminary, I had to come up with a definition for worship. Worship is an appropriate response to God. Giving God our all...heart, mind, soul and strength is the only rational course to take when we realize who God is. To hold back a portion for self is an irrational relationship. Like you, I must

make a real effort to renew my commitment, to sing some of those words we sing together. Sometimes I'm like the child who groans at the task from my Father...but comes around later. Better than the one singing for show but never really obeying the Father's will. How can we be holy and pleasing to God? We please God when we are Spirit-led into God's good, pleasing and perfect will. We want to obey God when we love Him. This sets us aside as His holy people.

The Spirit brings our body, mind and soul in tune with God's love and purposes. *And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.* (R 8:11) And by the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of the body (R 8:13). Though we be weak vessels, God uses us for His good.

III. Demands of Commitment 12:2a 'No' to evil, 'Yes' to the Spirit

The first command is stated in the negative. Don't get suckered into the schemes of this passing evil age. It's the thinking that undermines total commitment to God:

A. Commitment is situational. If things get hard it's fine to drop, switch, put on hold, retract or reject later.

- B. Commit to your dreams. Putting you and your interests first, makes you a better person and therefore a success.
- C. If commitment isn't agreeable to you, find a way to receive the benefits from those who do.
- D. Bad things happen to God's people. (Be fearful)

Life-long commitment is unlikely for any of these individuals. A is lazy B. is self-centered C. is a sponge D. is fearful

God takes commitment seriously. It's not a show to impress others. In the very first church a couple tried to trick the church into thinking they had sacrificed everything to help others...but secretly held some back. God made them an example. He struck both down dead (Acts 5). At that time, God chose a dramatic way to purify His church and establish the authority of the Apostles. Today, we have His living word. And in God's timing, things will get very dramatic again...and we will see Jesus.

The second command is to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Spiritual birth happens when we first believe. Be we remain in the world to continue in that belief. Our obligation is to follow the Spirit's lead in Rom 8:12-14. To be transformed is to be made into something else (Greek: metamorphosis – like caterpillar to butterfly).

Jesus' glory shining through His skin at

the transfiguration is a biblical example. Notice God doesn't say 'transform yourself'. Don't read the bible as a self-help book. It's the way to know God and experience His work in us.

It is an act of surrender to receive a new mind. What kind of a mind? The mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). His saving purpose (Lk 19:10) humble and obedient perspective (Phil 2:5-8), compassion (Matt 9:36) and prayerful dependence on God (Lk 5:16). Ultimately, the metamorphosis is being changed from a slave to sin to the image of Jesus (2 Cor 3:18).

The Holy Spirit 'turns on the light' of understanding God's truth and how to live for Him.

The Effects of Commitment **12:2b Knowing God's will**

Don't we all just want to know what we ought to do? There is always going to be mystery, waiting and trials...because they are necessary. But I mean assurance we are living within God's will. The way to knowing God's will is commitment – with all of our being. Our motivation for commitment comes by considering God's mercy for us. Commitment demands that we say 'no' to worldly schemes and 'yes' to the Spirit, who renews our mind...from slave to sin to Christ-like. We see this world, our friends and family, His church, our enemies...more like Jesus. Life is put

into perspective...a short time to bring God glory. Jesus promised *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* Matt 11:28-30

When I want to be laser sharp about God and His ways, I look to Jesus. Right after Jesus rebuked Peter for saying he was crazy to follow God’s plan to suffer, die and rise again, Jesus...*called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* Mk 33-38

“Woe, preacher. That’s for people in full-time ministry.”

I think back to that day I decided to ask Darlene to marry me. I was talking it over with my youth pastor and I remember coming to the point where it just struck me...why wait any longer to commit? Darlene is the one. The part I had to get over was my doubts about being the man she deserved. The one thing I knew was that once I committed, there was no turning

back. It’s for life. I had to figure out being the man she deserves along the way. We’ve been married 30 years and I still haven’t arrived. I’m glad I didn’t wait. I would have missed all those years of love and growing together.

God has the means to make us all He wants...and we won’t be perfect till we get to heaven. All who are gripped by the wonder of God’s mercy...are called to be God’s holy people. Students, teachers, loggers, welders, administrators, business owners, homemakers, hairdressers, pharmacists, bankers, janitors, servers, managers, retired...and missionaries and pastors.

Live with the pulse of wonder at God’s mercy every day and you will find the resolve to follow where He leads.

When you consider all that God has done to redeem you: Do you trust God enough to sign your life over to Him? Give Him a blank check...that represents your life. Sign the check that says, “Father, do with me what you will – I am yours.”

Benediction: Rom 11:33-36

Research help from Kent Hughes (Romans: Righteousness from Heaven) and Chip Ingram (True Spirituality).