

## Romans

- I. Why the emphasis on holiness after all the talk about God's grace?
  - A. Romans 12:1-2 . . . Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. [2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
  - B. Prayer
  - C. I believe it is vital to understanding the whole of Romans that we take note of the fact that after spending so much time talking about God's grace, justification by faith, and eternal salvation being a gift from God, Paul now exhorts us to be holy ourselves.
    1. And he starts his teaching on Christian holiness in Romans 12:1, by urging us to hand ourselves over to God in a holy condition, because holy behavior in the day-to-day affairs of life is the foundation and the validation of true worship.
    2. Jesus said the same thing when He said that true worship is worship that is in spirit and truth, and that the kind of people God seeks to be His worshipers – that is, to present themselves to Him as living sacrifices – are those who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).
  - D. But there is more to holiness than validating that our worship comes from the heart, and is therefore genuine worship. And so I am going to give you three more reasons holiness is a vital part of the Christian life.
    1. First, holiness is both the commanded and only rational response to God choosing us, redeeming us, and graciously making us His children.
      - a. God, speaking through Moses said: "You are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26).
      - b. In the NT, Peter said: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all

- your behavior; [16] because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16).
- c. Now it is important to understand that God's grace and redeeming work through Jesus Christ do not change the fact that God is holy, and they do not change the fact that God requires holiness on the part of His people. What grace and redemption change is the way God deals with sinners who repent, and the way God deals with His own children when they sin.
2. The second reason God demands holiness from His people, and why holiness is the only rational response to His salvation, is that holiness is what enables us to see God, and to know God to the degree we are able to know Him, and to engage in intimate fellowship with God, and to understand the scriptures at the level we are capable of understanding them, and to see how to apply the truth of God's word in the most practical ways possible to our everyday relationships and circumstances.
    - a. David wrote in Psalm 24:3-4 . . . Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully.
    - b. And Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).
  3. Finally, God commands us to be holy because holiness of heart and life is the characteristic quality that universally sets Christians apart from non-Christians. In other words, just as there was a clear dividing line of distinctive differences between Jews and Gentiles in the OT, so in the NT, holiness of heart and life is the clear dividing line of distinctive differences between believers and unbelievers.

## II. Holiness – The Christian Distinction

- A. Though God's demand for holiness began with Adam and Eve, we get our clearest picture of the OT requirements of holiness from God's dealings with Israel.
  1. Among the many commands in God's law as given to Israel, we find that many of them dealt with what I am calling the holiness codes. And these holiness codes are made up of the commandments that told the Jews two primary things:
    - a. First, how to properly relate to God – who is holy.
    - b. Second, how live in the midst of a world filled with Gentiles in order to be identified by the Gentiles as God's chosen people.

2. Of course, the Jews had the unique sign of circumcision, but that was a hidden distinctive rather than a public means of being identified as God's chosen people. Beyond circumcision, it was the holiness codes that showed the rest of the world that the Jews were unique, that they were set apart unto God, that they were God's own possession.
3. Among the many holiness codes God gave Israel, there were three that Gentiles could easily observe and therefore be consistently reminded that there were distinct differences between themselves and the Jews. These three codes dealt with diet, keeping the Sabbath, and abstaining from idol worship.
  - a. The dietary codes affected what foods the Jews would eat, what animals they would raise, and what they would buy or sell in the market place. For example, Jews would not eat pork or shell fish, and they would not buy meat unless the blood had been drained.
  - b. The Sabbath codes meant not working on the Sabbath, which meant no selling or shopping or working the fields or doing anything else that would contribute to their financial well-being. Forsaking a day of potential income would have been a huge distinctive difference in a world that worked seven days a week.
  - c. And the codes about abstaining from idol worship obviously set them apart from the Gentiles living around them.
  - d. The point here is that God set up His laws in such a way as to give the Jews numerous outward manifestations of holiness, or of being set apart to God, in order to show they belonged to God.
4. For a modern day example, we can look to the Amish who have established a point in time which determines their outwardly observable and distinctive way of life – so that no matter where the Amish live or travel, they are recognized as Amish.
5. But God never intended for holiness to begin and end with its outward signs of distinction. Speaking through Moses, God make it clear that the Jews were to live a holy or separated life in their homes, in how they raised their children, in their business dealings, neighborhood associations, treatment of their servants, care for the poor and needy, dealings with sin – both personally and as a community, in their tithing, in their attitudes and the intentions of their heart, and in the way they worshiped of God.
6. Finally, God gave Israel a reason to keep His command for holiness by making it clear that keeping or failing to keep the holiness codes would have a direct effect on His dealings with them. To allow impurity to flourish in the nation would turn God against the land

and the inhabitants of the land. To protect personal holiness and the purity of the nation would bring God's blessing on the land and the inhabitants of the land.

- a. The holiness codes were so important to God that even an individual's choice to be unholy could negatively effect the entire nation. We see the truth of this in Achan's decision to take for himself loot from Jericho which God had said was to be turned over to the Temple as belonging to God alone.
  - b. And of course, a national choice or a majority choice within the nation to be unholy would result in national discipline or even punishment from God. We see this in the 70 year captivity of Israel by the Babylonians and the Medes and Persians.
7. For me, the most profound example of the holiness codes is the purity required of the High Priest in order to enter the Holy of Holies and live.
- a. If for any reason the High Priest brought impurity into the Holy of Holies, he would die right where he stood – which is why he never entered without a cord tied to his ankle.
  - b. The profoundness of this example is in its powerful reinforcement of the necessity of coming into the presence of God in a pure condition, or at least in a humble, repentant condition that is willing to accept whatever God chooses to do in response to a sinner being in His presence. Without question, this is a reason to take seriously what the NT says about taking communion in a worthy manner.

## B. Holiness in the Church age

1. Beginning with the ministry of Jesus, we see that God made changes to His OT commands for holiness, and in doing so, changed the emphasis of the way holiness was to be manifested. However, God made these changes without diminishing His own holiness, or changing His demand for holiness in us. So why the changes?
  - a. There are those within the church who think that God did this in order to break down the OT dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, and to remove the Jews arrogant attitude of hostility toward Gentiles so that the church would become one unified group, rather than two separate groups (Ephesians 2:11-22).
  - b. For example, under OT holiness codes, the Jews believed that eating with Gentiles held such a high risk of eating or touching something forbidden that they would not eat with Gentiles.

- c. In Galatians 2:11-14, there is an example of this OT attitude and practice being brought into the church. In this Galatians portion, Paul discredits both the attitude and the practice when he confronted Peter for eating with the Gentiles until some prominent Jews came to town, after which, for fear of being condemned as unclean, Peter would only eat with his fellow Jews.
  - d. This Galatians portion of scripture is seen as important because it reinforces the changes Jesus brought into the NT church – a church that was to be a mix of Jews and Gentiles who were to live together in peace – loving and supporting one another – in spite of their past differences based on the OT holiness codes.
2. So what is the primary difference between the OT holiness codes and the NT holiness codes as taught by Jesus and the apostles?
- a. In addressing the hypocritical use of the dietary codes, Jesus sums up the difference in Mark 7:14-23 . . . After He called the crowd to Him, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: [15] there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.” [17] When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. [18] And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, [19] because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) [20] And He said, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. [21] For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, [22] deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. [23] All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”
  - b. In other words, the significant difference between the OT and the NT holiness codes is that the OT codes emphasized guarding against being contaminated from without, while the NT codes emphasize guarding against contamination from within.
  - c. This is an important distinction in that the OT emphasis made it much easier for the Jews to focus on the outward manifestations of holiness while neglecting the inward reality of holiness, whereas the NT emphasis works against the all too common OT hypocrisy by commanding holiness within first, and then, out of

that inward purity, being holy without. You see, it is impossible to be hypocritical when holiness comes from within.

3. Jesus affirmed this problem of hypocrisy in the way the Jews practiced OT holiness in Luke 11:42 . . . But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”
  - a. This does not mean the OT holiness codes needed redefining or replacing – as if they were inferior. This is proven by Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which affirms that the OT codes taught the full truth, and that they were to be used to bring about inward purity as well as outward holiness.
  - b. Now I know it is important to the church in our age to keep affirming that there is nothing in the Law that frees us from the penalty of sin. Therefore, I want to be clear that payment for sin is only and forever accomplished by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.
  - c. But the failure of the OT codes to provide redemption does not make them inferior when it comes to holy living. There is nothing in the OT codes that infers that keeping the law outwardly makes it acceptable to participate in the inward impurities of selfishness and sin – as the Pharisees were doing in Jesus’ day. The problem of OT hypocrisy was the fault of those who interpreted the holiness codes in such a way as to feel safe in using them to gain God’s grace and favor while continuing to practice sin.
  - d. Which brings us back to the third purpose for holiness among God’s people – and that purpose is to set Christians apart from non-Christians so that the distinctive difference between the two groups is clear and undeniable.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Therefore, after urging us to present ourselves to God as a living and holy sacrifice, Paul then calls us to separate ourselves from the world’s evil influences, and to be transformed so that we live a life that is distinctly different from the way non-Christians live. Then Paul goes on to describe the transformed life, that is, the life that clearly shows the difference between believers and unbelievers.
- B. Therefore, in conclusion today, I am going to read just a few portions of Romans 12 in order to leave you with a scripture picture of why God’s

NT holiness codes put the emphasis, first and foremost, on being holy within, and then on manifesting that holiness without. In fact, it is impossible to consistently and universally live the transformed life without being holy within first.

- C. Romans 12:9-21 . . . Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. [10] Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; [11] not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; [12] rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, [13] contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. [14] Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. [16] Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. [17] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. [19] Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. [20] "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.