

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity, September 26, 2021**

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 398, 237:1, 409, 400, 412.

Lessons: Jeremiah 15:15-21, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12, Luke 6:27-36.

Sermon Text: Romans 12:11-21.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you all know that the two main teachings of the Bible are Law and Gospel. The simplest way to remember those two is that the Law of God Shows Our Sinfulness (SOS) and the Gospel Shows Our Savior (SOS).

Our sermon text presents another very important teaching of Scripture: Sanctification. This is certainly not the only place in Scripture that we learn about sanctification, but Paul was moved to write about sanctification after spending 11 chapters making it clear that we are not saved by obeying the law but by the grace of God as shown us in the Gospel.

Sanctification is used in both a wider sense and a narrow sense in Scripture. In a wider sense, it means to call someone out of the unbelieving world to be holy by bringing that person to faith, enlightening with the Gospel, and keeping in the true faith. In a narrow sense sanctification is leading the believer to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works.

Paul here is writing about sanctification in the narrow sense – ‘good works’ we are to do.

But when we talk about sanctification, we must present this teaching properly. Without Law and Gospel, anything that would tell us to try to live God-pleasing lives would be useless and only lead us to hell. Any teaching or encouraging to live good lives would be useless without the knowledge that I am, by nature, a sinful being and that God sent his son Jesus Christ to redeem me from sin and eternal death and the power of Satan, the ruler of darkness.

The Word of God is abundantly clear that *“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV) Right there you see the role or place of good works, good deeds, how a Christian should live, right after God emphasizes how it is that we have been saved.

So today, as we look at the last half of Romans chapter 12, we ask the question:

**HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN LIVE – AND WHY?**

- 1. The child of God wants to live in such a way as to honor his heavenly Father,**
- 2. To show his love and appreciation for all God has done.**

Paul has spent 11 chapters emphasizing how no one is saved by obeying law but by the grace of God. So how dare anyone now look at these words in chapter 12 and think: These are things I must do to earn God's favor!

Surely, these things will please God. But they must be fruits of faith, not something that would earn you a reward.

I once asked a woman how she was going to get to heaven. She said ‘I'm going to do the best I can and hope God rewards me.’ How utterly false that idea is! If you ever encounter such an answer, you must point out from Scripture that that is not how anyone gets to heaven.

If you are the kind of person who puts up a list of things you want to do, this would be a good list if you remember every time you look at it that it does not get God to reward you. Doing such things does not earn heaven for you.

Ok, so what do we have here? Is this a list of rules so you can get into heaven? Of course not. It is by faith in Jesus Christ that one gets into heaven. Paul plainly writes this about the Gospel when he writes in the very first chapter to the Roman Christians: ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”*** Romans 1:16-17 (NIV)

So don’t expect this sermon to say “do these things so you can be saved”. This sermon must emphasize to you “do these things because you have been saved”. James plainly tells us: ***“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*** James 2:17 (ESV)

When we look at our sermon text in different translations, we realize that some editors of Bible translations have given this section headings which tell the Christian ‘this is how you should live to get to heaven.’ Isn’t that the way that men would think? Men would think that if you do good things you get rewarded, or at least humanly speaking, you should be rewarded. But that is man’s thinking. Perhaps you have even seen the slogan – even on children’s shirts: “Being Good Gets You Stuff”.

That’s man’s way. But God’s ways are different. God’s ways are not our ways. God tells us through the prophet Isaiah ***“my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*** Isaiah 55:8-9 (KJV)

Such things as listed in our sermon text are fruits of faith, fruits of being saved, not the cause of being saved, not the reason we have been saved. Saint Paul here, writing by the inspiration of God, speaks of the way the child of God wants to live to honor his heavenly father.

So let’s look at some specific ways God commands us to behave toward others so that he may be honored.

In the first half of this chapter, before our sermon text, God has pointed out that believers are part of one body and are to work together in all they do to serve their fellow men. Especially when they are serving fellow believers, their love and expressions of love are to be genuine. Then in these words, God is very specific. ***“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”*** Do not be lazy or slothful or stubborn in showing your enthusiasm in serving the Lord. Be fervent, keep your spiritual enthusiasm alive because your whole life is to be serving the Lord.

Then we have three adjectives: joyful, patient, faithful. Such words are needed every day as we face struggles, not only worldly struggles, but also spiritual struggles. ***“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*** Only God can give us joyful hearts so that we are patient when things aren’t going well for us. How can this happen? What encouragement and help do we have to do this? Be ***“faithful in prayer.”*** This is exactly what Scripture is talking about when it says ***“Pray without ceasing.”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV) Let your life be a life of constant prayer, day after day, including prayers that we may be joyful and patient.

Then we have a verse that encourages taking care of one another, especially of the household of faith. ***“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”*** Some of us have been blessed with more material blessings than others. God provides many opportunities to help others, and the Greek word for ‘hospitality’ includes ‘love toward strangers’.

We are encouraged to have sympathy and even empathy when God says ***“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”*** Share our mutual burdens. He goes on: ***“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”*** Pride and conceit are some of the most pervasive of sins, infecting everyone in some way. Do not look down on others for any reason, and do your best to get along with others. We will always want to witness to the truth of God’s Word, but we dare not do it in an attitude of ‘I’m a better person than you.’

Scripture here speaks at length about not ‘getting even’. God tells us to ***“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*** And a little later: ***“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in***

*the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*” He repeats the idea of living in harmony, at peace with others. Don’t let human opinions and matters separate you.

Then God is very specific regarding evil done to us: **“Do not take revenge, my 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.”**

How often don’t we get angry when someone treats us poorly or worse, when we are ill-treated, mistreated, when people attack us, and especially when they attack us because of our faith in God. In our human natures, we want revenge. We want to get even. In our hearts we may wish evil upon them, and may even take out such thoughts in words, saying all sorts of evil things about them and even cursing them.

Children aren’t quite so guarded with their words as adults are, and how often haven’t you heard children – even when they are at play – say ‘I hate you’. That may often be a temporary feeling they have, but it is still an expression of sin and wickedness. Adults, too, feel that way. Hate is the opposite of love, and Paul in previous verses encouraged us to love one another.

Instead of wishing and even seeking revenge on those who wrong us, God tells us: **“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath.”** It is so hard to hold our tongues and to put thoughts of revenge out of our minds. Paul here even gives us a good reason not to take revenge: **“‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”**

Scripture here commands the alternative: **“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.”** Great words from God! But how hard to put into practice!

These words echo Psalm 37: **“Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.”** Psalm 37:1-7 (NIV)

All these things are written so that we may honor and praise God in all we do, to show honor and appreciation for what God has done for us.

So our text is not just moralizing. It is not just trying to give a list of things the Christian must do to earn salvation.

Be zealous and diligent, be ready and willing to live these good works, so that God may be glorified in all our lives! So in these words we see how a Christian lives and why: Every child of God wants to live in such a way as to honor his heavenly Father, to show his love and appreciation for all God has done.

Lord, lead us to serve you in thought, word, and deed every day! Amen.