

Doing Good: Service – Romans 12:1-2

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Evil comes to us in so many forms. There is the evil that drugs and alcohol do on our streets and in the homes of our communities. There is the evil of a terrorist government taking over a nation and driving out or even killing all the Christians. There is the evil of people who exploit disasters, from the looters breaking into evacuated homes when fires threaten communities, to people who run off with the funds raised to help after an earthquake or typhoon.

Yes, all these things are evil, and sadly, we have them in our world today. God is challenging us to overcome these things by bringing his goodness into each of these situations.

Sometimes evil is harder to spot, but we see its effects. Last week I was with 46 campers from across our Church District, some from the churches, some from daycares run by the churches. The children, ranging in age from 6 – 12 years old, were all so amazing. It is easy to see why Jesus said the children have a special place in the heart of God. (cf. Matthew 18:10)

Yet we see evil touch even their young lives. Some children know the pain of a broken family, moved back and forth from mother to father on a weekly basis. Some have parents, but the parents have little time for the children. One of the campers said that spending time with dad meant playing video games with him. Family meals was out of the question for most kids.

Some of the children knew what it was to be a refugee, having to flee their home country because of evil governments or politics. Some have experienced the problems of drugs or alcohol abuse in the family. Some have experienced death of a parent. Many knew first hand the dangers and trauma social media can produce.

And so it was a joy to be part of the good that was overcoming some of that evil – at least for a week. What a privilege to be part of a small part of God’s people who overcome evil with deeds of love and kindness and grace. At the head of our little army was our camp director, Marianna Medina. Yes, hugs flowed freely at the camp, and kind, encouraging words and lots of patience as needed.

Overcome evil with good....

How this can be accomplished in our lives without slipping into the false religion of trying to earn our way to God has been the journey we started on two weeks ago, and we continue today.

We saw how doing good was impossible before a holy God if we are sinful people. Sadly, all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. Yet God is merciful, and he provided a cure for our sin problem, by sending his Son, Jesus, to take on himself the punishment we deserved. As we confess our sin, repent and turn to God through faith in Jesus we are made good. Now we can do the good God has called us to do.

Next we learned that to truly do good in this world we need to surrender ourselves fully to God. There is no such thing as a part time Christian, or a casual saint. We are either all-in, or we are

not in at all. We also noted that surrendering everything to God opens the door to all the blessings of God in our lives. We truly come out ahead as we surrender everything to Jesus.

Today we come to the next part of what the Apostle says in Romans 12:1. He says,

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”¹

The King James Version renders this:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”²

Today we focus on that phrase rendered “spiritual act of worship” and “reasonable service.”

The Greek word the Apostle Paul uses here is *latreia*. It originally meant work done for pay. It was not the work of a slave, but work someone chose to do. Since it was a task that benefitted others, that is why they were willing to pay for the service, it was referred to as serving.

The word *latreia* soon took on the idea of long time service, something one was so committed to they would dedicate their lives to it. It was not a passing fad or hobby on the side. Like the great painters, sculptors, or composers of the past, this was something they dedicated their lives to.

Finally the word became used in a religious sense, and pointed to the things done in service for God. In fact, this word is often found in the Bible, and always it speaks of service rendered to God. This service was seen as an act of worship.

This is why we have two translations using two different words here. Both are correct. It speaks of acts of service offered up as worship to God.

This is why the Message Bible paraphrased this portion in this way:

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”³

What we must understand in this is that worship is far more than what we do on Sundays between 10:30 am and 12 noon. Everything we do should be seen as an act of worship to God, from selling cars to building skyscrapers, to serving coffee or going to school. Can you imagine what would happen if Christians really believed that all they did could be an act of worship to God? What if they truly believed that they worked, not for the company, but for God? What if they realized that how they treated their brothers or sisters, or the people around them, is also an act of worship?

¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 12:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#). (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Ro 12:1). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ro 12:1). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Last week as I spent time with the kids at camp, this too was an act of worship. When one camper could not swim across the designated swimming area and started to call for help, and I had to jump in to “rescue” him, it was an act of worship.

And when the camp nurse had to deal with dehydration issues, it was an act of worship.

And when the cooks prepared those lovely camp meals for us three times a day, that too was an act of worship.

And, of course, there were the times we gathered in the chapel to sing songs of praise to God, and to hear again the Gospel story from the scripture and testimony of Marianna. Though most of the songs they used for the week were new to me, songs coming from a newer Vacation Bible School program, there was one song we sang in every chapel, which we had twice a day, which I did know, and I suspect you know: “The Old Rugged Cross.” This was a part of our act of worship.

The Apostle Paul started this verse by imploring that we remember the mercy of God that provided the way of salvation for us.

He then calls us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, to offer everything back to God. He says the sacrifice we present should be holy and pleasing to God. The only way that can happen is if we let God purify our hearts by faith. But that is what he promises to do for all of us as we open our lives to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Peter would give an account to the Jerusalem Church of what God was doing among the Gentile believers. There were some in Jerusalem that believed non-Jews could not be saved. What Peter said is recorded in Acts 15:8-9:

8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

This is how we can be a holy and acceptable sacrifice to God – the Holy Spirit must be at work in our lives, exposing all hidden sin and ungodly attitudes so that we might be a holy people.

This surrender to God is our reasonable service, our spiritual act of worship.

Marianna, our camp director, shared her testimony with the kids in the chapel times, leading them to respond to Jesus as she did when she was just five years old: it was then she invited Jesus into her life.

Now, many years later, she stood before a camp full of kids, teens and adults, telling of the wonderful things God had done for her and in her. This was an act of worship and service.

What would be your response to a God who saved your life against all odds? You would likely be willing to trust him and serve him all your life. It seems a reasonable service after what God had done for you.

That is how Marianna feels. She gladly serves Jesus today because he saved her twice – once from certain physical death, and once from spiritual death.

You see, Marianna should have died at birth – and almost did. When she was born there were two umbilical cords, the second one wrapped around her choking off the blood flow to her body. When she was born her arm was dead, and it needed to be amputated. However, she was too small and weak to survive such a surgery. Nonetheless, the father convinced the doctors to try to save her. You know they were successful, for she was our director.

Yet offering up her life in worship and service of God did not happen automatically or easily. She grew up with one arm, which meant she would be rejected by some, laughed at and teased by others, and judged as less than capable by most people.

Still, she gave her life early to Jesus, and she was disciplined by her mom and her church. She finally came to the place where she would surrender all to Jesus, and offer all she did as an act of worship to Him.

I first met Marianna in the kitchen of her church in Surrey, called Legacy Church. I was on a District Board and Marianna preparing a snack for us, making coffee, and doing our dishes. She was always so happy and ready to help. It was clear this was her service and worship to God.

She was hired by the daycare run by the Legacy church where she simply loved the kids day after day – her reasonable service. Recently she was hired by the church as well to run their children's ministry, much as Cecilia runs ours.

And last week she took on the monumental task of directing a kids camp in a new location after a year and a half of lock downs. Add to that the fact that she did not know we could have a camp until the end of June because of COVID restrictions. Yet she still brought joy, and love and her deep faith in Jesus to share with the kids.

It was her reasonable and spiritual service and worship to God. During this week of camp evil was replaced with good in the lives of those campers. They were loved, they had fun, they made friends with other children and adults who cared. They were pointed to Jesus, the only One who can change them for eternity. Evil was overcome by good. At least for a time. God wants to see this happening every day, through every believer in Jesus who is willing to serve and worship in response to all He has done for them.

This morning we have spent a lot of time looking at basically one word to decipher what it meant and how it applies to our lives. Worship through service.

Now you know what you should do, what will you do about it? Now that you know the only reasonable thing to do in light of all God has done for you is to give your live back to him in service and worship, what will you do? You do not have to tell me – but you must tell Jesus.