

So What?

How the Apostle Paul instructs us to live out our life as members of the body of believers.

Introduction: Romans, Chapter 12,
Verses 1-2.

Introduction: Yielding (Romans 12:1-2)

A tire company recently ran a TV commercial I really loved. The premise of the spot was that using these particular tires on your car was like having a guardian angel on each wheel, anticipating and protecting against whatever hazards lie ahead. Flying over the car was an all-seeing spirit speaking into a Secret Service-style wrist communicator directing the other angels' activity. Most people who have been a passenger in a car I am driving seem to get out of the car convinced this TV commercial must depict a truth. I am an absolutely terrible driver. I am sure that it is only by God's mercies that I have not yet been in a terrible accident. I do not necessarily lack skill; rather, I am really bad at following the rules of the road. Though a typical by-way or highway offers plenty of challenges on their own, I find my own lanes and have uncustomary interpretations of some road signs.

One sign I find particularly annoying is the Yield sign. What is it really asking me to do? I obviously have permission to keep going without stopping, otherwise the authorities would have installed a Stop sign, right? Naturally, I interpret the sign to mean "do whatever you want as long as you don't crash with another car or person or pet." Recently, I was very directly informed by an armed and uniformed law enforcer that my interpretation was not entirely correct. He even gave me helpful written documentation spelling out exactly the consequences for my interpretation and kindly set up an appointment with an even higher authority should I want to discuss the matter more completely.

Not surprisingly, I approach living out my life as a Christian in much the same way. It is the Yield sign that seems to give me the most trouble. I am perfectly happy to be a Christian as long as living as one fits to the patterns of this world, the patterns I find comfortable. Thankfully, we have written documentation that clearly spells out the consequences of such an interpretation. Moreover, we have the ability to meet with a higher authority to discuss the matter more completely.

What exactly would our lives look like—how would we think and act—if we lived out our lives as deeply committed Christians? Initiating a relationship with God through Christ via the Holy Spirit is relatively easy, particularly since it is God who does the initial initiating! It is becoming the person God wants us to become that is hard. We "become a Christian" when God first reaches out and reveals himself to us and then by responding to his invitation. God's reaching out to us can take many forms. Sometimes it happens when we are invited to attend a sacramental service, such as the baptism of a child or a wedding. Or perhaps we receive an invitation to attend a

seasonal service, such as Christmas or Easter. Or when we attend a stadium crusade or tent revival. Maybe we are given a Bible or invited to a Bible study. For many people, God reveals himself via a class or process, such as R.C.I.A. in the Roman tradition, Catechumens in the Orthodox tradition, or a confirmation class, Purpose Driven Life class, or Alpha Class in the Protestant tradition. However God reveals himself to us, all Christian traditions agree what our response should be: "...**confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved**" (*Romans 10:9*.) Virtually all traditions then go on to teach that water baptism is the standard rite of initiation into the Christian faith. Indeed, many traditions hold the sacrament of baptism so highly that they teach a seeker must be baptized *within their tradition* for it to be legitimate (i.e., Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and the Orthodox Church). So we can become a Christian in a relatively short period of time by responding to the invitation God has given us by simply saying we are sorry to Him for our wrong choices, confessing Jesus as our Lord and savior, and by being baptized.

But "being a Christian" is not a steady state or a one-time event. On the day he was raised up into heaven, Jesus instructed his followers to "...**go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**²⁰**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded**" (*Matthew 28:19-20*). Thus a disciple is someone who is not only baptized but also obeys everything Jesus commanded. So what did he command?

Many of the books of the New Testament were written specifically to answer the question, "what do I do now that I have been baptized and am a part of a Christian body" (i.e., a church). For instance, the Gospel of John was written as a document to be given to the recent convert as a road map for truthful living. As such, it is an excellent first-read for the new Christian.

Whereas Christian theologians stress that the turning point in human history were the events surrounding the coming, teaching, dying, and resurrecting of Jesus, secular historians stress that it was actually the conversion of the Saul of Tarsus that changed the course of history. As a Jewish Roman citizen and Greek scholar, the Apostle Paul, as he later became known, was uniquely qualified to fulfill the Great Commission (the verse from Matthew 28 above). He could travel anywhere in the known, western world and wrote and spoke the universal language. After his conversion, Paul was trained by Christians in Damascus and in Antioch in the basic teachings of Jesus for a period of between 3 and 8 years. He then set out to fulfill the Great Commission by starting new churches. This method of evangelism, now referred to as church planting, has been the primary method of Christian evangelism for the past 1950 years of Christianity. Beginning in his home province of "Asia," (modern day Turkey), Paul followed the major highways and sea routes westward, starting new churches in strategic cities and eventually making it to Rome. His primary method, which is well documented in the

Book of Acts, was to arrive in a new city, share the Good News with Jews in the local synagogue that Jesus is the long anticipated Messiah, and preach and demonstrate via the scriptures a message of salvation via Jesus as Lord through the repentance of sins. He then would disciple the new believers, i.e. "teaching them to obey," and raise up leaders to shepherd the new churches. After a period usually of 1 to 5 years, Paul would move on to a new city.

From the new location, Paul then wrote letters back to these churches he had started to instruct them further in codified detail on **how** to be the church. Nearly all these letters, which are collected and form the bulk of the work of the New Testament, follow a pattern. After a formal greeting typical of letters of the day, Paul would raise a given issue or concern peculiar to the addressed church. He then would answer the concern by restating the Christian teaching or theology that applied. Virtually all of his letters conclude with a phrase that begins with a word that in English is translated, "Therefore..." It is in these seminal phrases that we find the answer to the question, "how do I live out my life as a deeply committed Christian?"

Beginning with Romans, Chapter 12, this work will look at some of the great "therefore" passages that conclude Paul's arguments in his major letters to new believers ensconced in new churches. In addition to the passage in Romans, we will explore the following: Hebrews, Chapter 12; 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13; Galatians, Chapter 5; Ephesians, Chapter 5; Philippians, Chapter 4; and Colossians 3:12-17. In so doing, I am hopeful we can answer the question, "So what?" So what if I am forgiven, redeemed and saved by Jesus...what is my life supposed to look like now?"

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. From Romans, Chapter 12

As I shared above, I hate the Yield traffic sign. I simply don't want to, as the same sign reads in England, "Give Way" to anyone or anything else. If I had written Frank Sinatra's famous song, I would have sung, "I want it my way." Yet Paul concludes perhaps his most comprehensive work by saying we must sacrifice or give way all of who we are—our very bodies and minds!—to God. Other English translations of the passage above render the word "offer" as "yield" or "sacrifice." Indeed, according to Paul, true worship of God is not simply singing loudly a great hymn or praise song, giving a generous offering, and treating others as we want to be treated. Rather, it is the handing over—sacrificing and yielding--of all that we are to God.

Until July of 1788 when U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights was ratified, virtually the entire world operated under a feudal system. It is hard for Americans to comprehend such a class or caste system these days. Though the titles changed from culture to culture, essentially a

monarch ruled a country through provincial appointees called dukes. Dukes appointed earls to rule cities. Earls appointed Lords to rule manors. Lords, in addition to producing the lion's share of the gross national products via agriculture, raised up militias of knights and soldiers. The knights were the sheriffs during peace time and front-line officers during times of wars. Knights oversaw peasants or serfs, who formed the agriculture labor during peace-time and infantry during war. The vast majority of people were serfs. America is essentially populated by serfs who fled the feudal systems of Europe, Asia, and today, Mexico.

In a feudal system, a serf has no legal rights. Indeed, the legal system was set up for and only responded to the level of lord or above. In other words, whether a serf lived or died, ate or slept, was educated or oppressed was entirely up to the lord. A serf swore allegiance (or was born with an allegiance) to a lord. Only lords owned the land—the serfs simply worked it on behalf of the lord. Serfs were bought and sold by lords as the labor needs dictated. Drought in one area of the country could lead to mass migration as poor lords sold serfs to rich lords in well-watered areas who needed more labor. Serfs had no say on which estate or manor they served and often had no idea a migration or redeployment was imminent. Moreover, all of the produce of the land belonged to the lords, who then would pay taxes to the earls, to the dukes, and to the monarch. Therefore, if a starving serf were to grow his own potatoes or kill a deer in the woods near his house, he would be guilty of poaching, which was a capital offense! Regularly, peasants were executed for what today we would consider common offenses—petty thefts.

For the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans, Paul lays out his most systematic and comprehensive theology of Christianity. Knowing that he was near the end of his own life, Paul wanted to codify Christian theology for posterity. He used the same imagery that Jesus used to explain the Christian argument—the feudal system. His argument goes like this:

1. There is a righteous and just Lord of the manor—Yahweh, the Lord of the Jewish people.
2. He is the Lord of not only Jewish serfs, but all serfs. In other words, we are all serving on the same manor; or, as the Psalmist says, "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it"
3. All of us serfs are guilty of offenses, some petty and some major, against the Lord of the manor.
4. The just and legal punishment of our offenses is death.
5. All people, both Jews and non-Jews, are treated under the same legal code. In other words, you will get no special treatment in the court of the Lord of the manor based on your ethnicity.
6. However, the Lord loves his serfs and therefore has fulfilled the just requirements of the law by putting someone to death—His own innocent son instead of us, the offenders.
7. All lives of all serfs, though already the property of the Lord of the manor, are now doubly owed to the Lord, who could have executed all of us serfs because of our offenses.

Hence the need to render over to God all that we are—our lives have been bought with a price! So we worship (or serve) the Lord of the Manor—the God of the universe and our earth—by giving over all that we are to Him. Moreover, we are to no longer conform to the pattern of

this world (continued offenses against the Lord of the manor). Rather, we are to renew our minds so they become in sync with the purposes of the Lord of the manor on which we live. Then we get the most amazing benefit: the Lord of the manor, who has no legal or moral obligation to reveal to us surfs his intentions for us, will actually let us know his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Want to know the will of God for your life? I do. According to this passage, we can know it by rendering all that we are over to God (yielding or giving way to his purposes). Jesus said it like this, "render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Jesus meant our hearts, which the ancients understood to be our personhood—the very will, spirit, and character of a person.

So the first step for the new Christian? Understanding our lives are to be lived entirely for the benefit of the Lord of manor. He loves us, cares for us, and leads us. Earlier in the work of Romans, Paul foreshadowed the benefits of giving ourselves over to the Lord of the manor (note the feudal language):

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then can condemn? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans, Chapter 8

In sum, each of us, like all others on this planet, were born not as a lord of our own manor but rather a surf on the manor of the Lord. Through Christ's work on the cross, however, we are made entirely free from the life of a peasant. The purpose of our life, therefore, becomes one in entire service to the Lord, not because the law requires it or as a result of our station of low birth, but because we want to yield to His path for us. In other words, we are now free to drive down any metaphorical highway or byway of life. Or we can instead willingly yield ourselves to God and his path for us. In so doing, we accomplish our purpose on earth—glorifying the God of the universe by our the actions of our

lives. As we do, God who cares for us empowers us with new gifts and abilities (which we will explore in the coming segments in this series) and directs us into His perfect will for our lives.