

**“What Then Shall We Say About These Things”
“Body Love”
Romans 12:1-14**

EASTER 6

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Last year the Washington Post published an article reporting that the Alexandria chapter of the Washington Sport and Health Club cancelled the gym membership of Richard Spencer the president of the alt-right, white-nationalist National Policy Institute.

Apparently Spencer was pumping iron anonymously when Christine Fair, a Georgetown University professor recognized him and confronted him.

At first, Spencer denied his identity.

But she was sure it was Spencer.

According to witnesses, the professor lambasted him, yelling, “Not only are you a Nazi- you are a cowardly Nazi!

The gym cancelled Spencer’s membership after the altercation.

My immediate reaction upon reading the article was: “That’s what makes the church, the body of Christ , different from a club.

I probably wouldn’t disagree with the Georgetown professor’s characterization of Richard Spencer as a repugnant, cowardly Nazi

However, I would disagree with the professor’s call for his removal from the club.

A better solution would have been an invitation to the club we call the church- Christ’s living and loving body.

Richard Spencer is an unloving persecutor.

And that’s the problem, because in today’s text, the apostle Paul says that we Christians

are to bless those who persecute us
for it's exactly someone like Richard Spencer
for whom Christ also died.

From the outset, I am not saying that Nazi's
like Richard Spencer and Adolf Hitler
shouldn't be judged- I leave that task
to the one who truly can-God.

Be that as it may, how do we live out
the ethic of love, especially loving our neighbor?

That's the question and purpose of Paul's
transforming twelfth chapter from his
Letter to the Romans.

With this chapter, Paul marks the beginning
of a new section- the how- to portion that
usually is contained in the second part
of his epistles to congregations

"Therefore," Paul makes an appeal to Christian
living that stems from the knowledge of
and trust in the gospel he has been
explaining from the letter's first chapter.

The first two verses of our passage form
a summary of the whole of the Christian life.

What is the motivation for Christian living?

"Therefore," indicates that we give ourselves to
God because of all that Paul has been
teaching in the first eleven chapters of Romans,
namely, that we are justified by grace alone
through faith alone because of Christ alone.

The second word, "by the mercies of God."
essentially says the same thing.

The only sufficient motivation for the
Christian life is gratitude for God's grace.

In response to our gracious and merciful
God, we are "to present our bodies as a
living sacrifice."

Paul, here, is using temple terminology that
both his Jewish and Gentile Roman Christians

would understand.

The metaphor he uses is that of a worshiper
at a temple who comes in with an offering.
Now, some offerings in the Old Testament were
“sin offerings” in which the worshipers were
shedding blood and asking forgiveness.
But, according to Paul’s Letters to the Hebrews,
Jesus is our sin offering.
So the offering Paul is pointing to is not a sin offering.
A second kind of offering was a “whole burnt
offering,” which was a valuable animal
from your flock a purchased from a vendor.
It had to be without defect or blemish.
Why? Such an expensive animal demonstrated
that all you had was at God’s disposal-
you should not give to God from your leftovers.
Burnt offerings represented complete consecration
and devotion to God.

To be a “living sacrifice” is to be fully at
God’s disposal.
It means, actively, to be willing to obey God
totally in any area of life, and, passively,
to be willing to thank God for anything
God sends in any area of life.
Another way Paul communicates the idea of
totality or entirely is by urging his readers
to offer their “bodies”.
This was probably shocking to Greco-Roman
Gentile readers, who were raised to believe
that the body was negative and bad
and that spiritually only consisted of
cultivating the mind and soul.
Paul is saying that God does not want
a purely inward and abstract worship,
but a practical and total one.
God wants all of us, we are not to
give God the leftovers.

Part of being transformed in view of God's mercy
is to have the right view of ourselves.

Paul tells us "not to think of oneself more
highly than one ought to think" (v.3).

Paul tells us to avoid being "high-minded" about ourselves.

Despite all the warnings our culture gives about
the danger of low self-esteem,
the real danger is self-centeredness and egotism.

Most of the world's religions have identified humanity's
worst problem as originating from inflated views
of one's own importance, abilities, and rights.

Paul reminds us to be always on the lookout
for this danger.

We need to accept what we are not,
what we cannot do-which opens us up
to being able to rely on others.

As soon as Paul tells the Romans "to think with
sober judgement," he tells them to do so
"according to the measure of the faith that
God has assigned" (v.3).

He then proceeds to give them another way to think
of themselves, as persons with different gifts in one body (v.4).

This is how to think of ourselves rightly.

We are to think of ourselves as having distinct gifts
and abilities within the body of Christ.

We have the same standing in the gospel,
but we are different in our abilities
to minister to each other.

God has deliberately ordered the church as
God has ordered the human body, to be
inter-dependent and so that we belong to each other.

We belong to our church body; not to ourselves,
because we belong to Christ to do what
God has gifted each of us to do best.

Have you given your best gift on behalf of the body of Christ?

Next Paul talks about our relationship within

the church, our fellow believers, and then consider how Christians are to relate to those outside. Paul gives us three commands “Love genuinely... abhor evil... and hold fast to... good.” First we are told that our love must be sincere and true to our hearts. In other words, to be sincere, and not phony in our dealings with people. We are not to be nice. This is- to be polite, helpful, and apparently warm on the outside, while despising them on the inside. That is important because a culture of “niceness” can develop with the church. A veneer of pleasantness covers over a spirit of backbiting, gossip, and prejudice. There is an absence of “tough love”, in which people would love each other enough to confront problems and sins in themselves and others.

Second, we are told-both negatively (“hate”) and positively (“cling/hold onto”)- that our love must be true to God’s will.

Our love must operate on the basis of God’s moral order.

We must “hate” (literally “be horrified by”) what God calls evil and we must hold onto (literally, “glue ourselves inseparably”) to what God calls good.

It may seem strange to tell someone to love and to hate in the same verse, but that’s what Paul does.

This is closely related to being ‘sincere’ Real love loves the beloved enough to be tough. Any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is not really love, but a selfish desire to be loved. This kind of selfish love is afraid to do what is right if it risks losing the beloved’s affection

How, then, do we love the unlovely people, the

Richard Spencers whom we do not like
and yet still be sincere?

It is hypocritical to act loving when you despise
someone in your heart.

Yet it is unrealistic to insist that one's heart
be warm and kindly disposed before we do
actions of love.

So, what is the solution?

Here is Paul's gospel way.

The gospel is this: we are not loved because
we are intrinsically lovely or because we have
made ourselves worthy of love.

We are loved first by God- we love because
God first loved us.

Nothing we can do can make us worthy or righteous,
before God.

As a community of faithful believers, we are called
to "body love," loving those inside the body
of Christ-the church.

When we can learn to love those inside the body,
we can begin to love those outside the body.

Paul concludes this important chapter with
descriptions of what 'body love' is

Here are some example,

Real love is doggedly committed.

We should love one another as if we are related,
we are to be committed to each other as family members.

Real love means putting others first; concentrate more
on the needs of others than we do on our own.

Real love is patient, it does not give up easily on others.

To be involved deeply in people's lives is hard work.

We are to bless and not to curse.

Love builds up, hate tears down.

Beloved people of God,

the gospel reminds us of how patient God was
and is with us.

God is patient with us now, having forgiven

our ongoing flaws and failings in Christ.
The gospel is the way we think of ourselves
with sober judgement.
The gospel tells us that there is a judge,
who can be trusted to make all things right
We do not need to get even.
The gospel promises us justice, and reminds us
that we are not the ones who give it.
Living according to the gospel is not easy:
it is a “living sacrifice,” it is countercultural.
In body love, we are to love others
at cost to ourselves.
If the way we love on another comes at a cost
to ourselves, we have started to know and
experience what Christ-like love is.

Amen