

## **Romans 12 - How Are We to Live Now**

“For now Paul turns his attention to the actualization of justice in the way of life of the messianic cells that have begun to emerge in response to the messianic message (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 177-78).”

This is the “now what” of Paul’s argument. Since God has enacted justice so decisively in human history we are able to live in a way that is free from the power of sin to demonstrate our ongoing being-made-just. This reality is lived out in our relationships with one another, even our enemies. It is this way of life that is a direct reflection on our being adopted into the messianic promise and reality.

“In fact, it would be better to regard all that we have read to this point as a prologue to Paul’s real concern: to show how justice takes shape ‘apart from the law.’ For if it does not do so, then there is no viable alternative to law-based social orders; there is no justice based upon gift that actualizes, in this now-time of the messianic, the call and claim of justice (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 178).”

### **Romans 12:1-13 - The Messianic Body**

#### **Romans 12:1**

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [rational] worship.”

“These words may be read as the initial summary statement for that is to follow. ‘Therefore’ links it to all that has gone before. Now we come at last to the heart of messianic politics: the justice that comes otherwise than as law (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 178).”

The phrase “spiritual worship” can also be translated as “rational worship.”

“But what is rational worship? What is the way of honoring the divine that corresponds to right reason? It has to do with our **bodies**. The body is the way we are in and of the world, the way we are available to one another, the way we engage the world and one another. It designates what Heidegger might call our comportment: the shape of our interaction with others, all others (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 179).”

This is the sacrifice...

“What justice calls for is precisely ourselves, our way of being with one another... The call of the divine has to do not with religion but with a rational way of responding to the divine, a way that governs all our interactions with another and the world - that is, our bodies... What we shall hear is that the rational way of honoring God is doing what honors our neighbor (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 180).”

**Romans 12:2**

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect [fully realized].”

“For we live as those who have passed from death into life. Thus, we do not play by the rules of the old order: we are not conformed to it and its all too predictable regularities (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 181).”

“That which corresponds to the will of God is here called the good, the pleasing, the fully realized. These categories appear first of all as pagan or gentile terms... This means that Paul, in addressing pagan or Greek culture, has no difficulty appropriating the highest aspirations of that culture for purposes of his messianic project. The messianic takes these terms and their associated aspirations into itself, thereby indigenizing the messianic into the heart of the Greek aspiration (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 181).”

“Three centuries later in arguing for the plausibility of the Christian proclamation of the incarnation of the word, Athanasius could still point to the dramatically different forms of life that characterized Christian communities - their fearlessness, nonviolence, generosity - as decisive evidence of the truth of the gospel (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 182).”

“In the next few sentences, Paul will offer pleas about what we might call the internal life of the community, to be followed by sentences that address the way in which this group interacts with those outside, even with those opposed to the messianic mission... It is not our life alone but our life together that concerns Paul (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 182).”

**Romans 12:3**

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment [self-assessment], each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

“Faithfulness is not conformity with the world; it is also not conformity with one another. It is distributed within the group in diverse ways, and this diversity is to be affirmed and carefully nurtured (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 183).”

### **Romans 12:4-13**

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

“It was precisely the astonishing generosity of Christian communities in the next few centuries that served to win over larger and larger elements of the general population. In his *Rise of Christianity* [73-94], Rodney Stark uses the example of the care of the sick in plague-ravaged cities of the empire to show how Christians’ selfless service to others accounted in no small measure for the outward movement and growth of these messianic communities (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 185).”

“...Outdo one another in showing honor.”

“Similarly for Paul, the competitive character of the the Roman social order is turned on its head: instead of competing for honor, they compete to show honor to the other, every other (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 185).”

The Roman empire was run on honor and status. It started with emperor, the father of the empire, and worked its way down into every aspect of life within the empire. It was a competitive stratification.

### **Romans 12:14-21 — Overcoming Evil with Good**

#### **Romans 12:14**

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”

“Here and a few sentences later, we have a vigorous emphasis upon the love of the enemy, even the enemy in a position of power such that they are capable of persecution of the vulnerable body taking messianic shape in their midst (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 186).”

“The community does not separate itself from the world, but the world draws the dividing line by means of persecution. The ‘body’ is separate from the ‘age’ only by the opposition of the age. As body, the messianic intends inclusion of all, but the age reacts to this inclusiveness through persecution (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 186).”

**Romans 12:16**

“Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.”

“Those who are adopted heirs of God orient themselves toward the lowest in imitation of the messiah... For here, Paul is exhorting all in the community to associate themselves with the humble, the humiliated, rather than to look out for their own advantage (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 187).”

**Romans 12:17-21**

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

“The justice that takes shape here is not retributive or distributive but creative. It seeks to bring about now the messianic goal of peace that flows from justice, a justice that flows from generosity (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 187).”

“Indeed, it goes further than what we later find in the Sermon on the Mount, since it specifies what it means to love not only the neighbor but also the enemy: give food, give drink. The citation from Deuteronomy [32:35] is deployed to indicate that the fate of the unjust is to be left to God... Once again the idea is that the justice practiced by the community is unpredictable because it does not conform to the worldly notions of justice... What seems involved is that the surprising action of the messianic community aims at the transformation of the unjust or, perhaps failing that, leaves them without any pretext or excuse for unjust behavior (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 188).”