

8-23-20

Sermon- The Gifts of God's People

Scripture- Romans 12:1-8, Psalm 124

Hymns- 96, 455

Theme- If God through the Holy Spirit is always "tweaking" us and honing our call to serve, then that means He is always working on our spiritual gifts through that same process. We are to be always maturing in our call, right up until the time He calls us home. Have you thought of that lately? How are you doing?

Introduction: We Are ALL Being Tweaked!

One Sunday after worship services, as the worshipers filed out of the sanctuary they greeted the preacher who stood by the door.

As one man shook the minister's hand, he thanked him for the sermon and said, "Preacher, I would have to say that you are smarter than Einstein."

Beaming with pride, the minister said, "Why, thank you, brother!"

But as the week went by, the minister began to think about the man's compliment. The more he thought, the more he became baffled as to why anyone would deem him smarter than Einstein, so he decided to ask the man the following Sunday.

The next Sunday, the preacher asked the man if he remembered his previous Sunday's comment about the sermon and the man replied that he did. Then minister asked him: "Exactly what did you mean that I must be smarter than Einstein?"

The man replied, "Well, Preacher, they say that Einstein was so smart that only ten people in the entire world could understand him. But you must be smarter than Einstein because I'm not sure that **anyone** can understand **you!**"

I am hoping that I am not too difficult to understand, especially as we have recently plowed through some very deep and complicated theological points that Paul has been making in his letter to the Romans.

I. As we begin our investigation of this section of Romans we will notice that it is the most practical of all the sections of the letter.

Some people over the years have wondered why Paul would bother with such practical stuff at the end of a letter that was so theological and doctrinal.

But such an attitude or question indicates a basic misunderstanding of Paul's letter to the Romans, and a basic misunderstanding of one of the purposes of theology and doctrine.

A. It is really all about our RESPONSE...WE ARE TO HEAR AND RESPOND!

In response to all that God has done for our salvation in Christ, how should we react and how should we live?

Here is Paul's initial answer: 1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul wants the Romans, and all of us, to live life "in view of the mercies of God." Our perspective on God and on our own lives needs to be seen through the lens of God's grace.

B. What do the Mercies of God Include?

They certainly include all that Paul has covered in the first 11 chapters of Romans.

Paul reminds the Romans that their sin and our self-will had left them alienated from God and doomed to eternal condemnation.

But then out of the goodness and grace of God's heart, He dealt with our sin problem through the death of Jesus on the cross, and now we can be declared righteous in God's sight through the righteousness of Jesus imparted to us.

Through Jesus and His righteousness we are set from slavery to sin, and we are adopted as God's children and can enjoy

victorious and abundant life here on earth, and eternal life and a glorious future in heaven someday.

C. So, with all of that mercy and grace in mind, what should we do and how should we respond?

What does God want from us in response to His mercies?

God wants us to offer ourselves to Him, so in line with God's will for all of us, Paul urges us to present (or offer) our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

Notice first of all that Paul says that we are to offer our bodies.

Why is it that Paul said "bodies" rather than offer your "lives?"

Perhaps it was to communicate that God wants all of us, including the physical and spiritual aspects of us as persons. Once we give ourselves to God, our entire being is to belong to Him!

God is saying to us: "I want to take control of it (your body), and use it as an instrument for accomplishing My purposes. I want your eyes to absorb My Word. I want your mouth to speak My praise. I want your hands to help others in need. I want your brain to lay plans that glorify Me."

When we offer ourselves to God, we can't hold anything back it needs to be our all – our whole selves.

D. Another thing we notice is that we are to offer our bodies as "living" sacrifices.

As new covenant Christians, we no longer offer "dead" animal sacrifices; rather, we now offer ourselves as "living" sacrifices.

Sometimes I think it would be easier to be a dead sacrifice than a living one.

At least with a dead sacrifice it is a one-time decision and it is done and over with, but a living sacrifice is on-going, and must be put into practice daily, or minute by minute.

E. In addition to being a living sacrifice, Paul also mentions that the sacrifice of ourselves is to be holy and pleasing to God.

Holy means to be set apart to God – separated to Him, belonging to Him.

Holy sacrifices are pleasing to God – they bring joy and delight to God’s heart.

God takes pleasure in the obedience of His children, just as an earthly parent does the same.

Paul completes the first verse with the phrase **“this is your true worship.”**

The NIV calls it “your spiritual act of worship.” The KJV calls it “your reasonable service.” Another version calls it “your intelligent service.”

The point is that the offering of ourselves to God as a living sacrifice of our entire selves and lives is the only reasonable and logical thing to do in view of who God is and what God has done for us. Paul says that we are to transform as God provides.

This transformation is like the process of a caterpillar being changed into a butterfly.

You don’t change a caterpillar into a butterfly by pasting wings on it, rather the caterpillar experiences a change from the inside out.

Our transformation isn’t just a change of outward behavior, it is a change in internal belief, attitudes and commitments that lead to changed behavior and a transformed life.

But it starts with our minds, because in the end, we are what we think. If we want to change the way we live, we have to change the way we think.

III. To change what we think, we must change what we feed into our minds.

A. So, what are we feeding our minds? What things do we read? What music are we listening to? What do the lyrics say? What movies and TV shows do we watch? Whose advice do we listen to? What do we tell ourselves?

All these things affect our thinking. If we feed our mind with the views and values of the world, then we will think and act like the world.

But if, on the other hand, we feed our mind with the Word of God and the things of Christ, and we listen to wholesome music,

watch wholesome programs, and listen to the advice of godly people, then we will have the mind of God and we will act more like God.

Then as we know and do God's will, we will enjoy the blessings of God in our lives.

B. In view of all of God's mercies, the only reasonable thing for us to do in response is to offer ourselves to God, and in so doing we should be resisting the world and renewing our minds.

I want to cover one more obligation that Paul says we have in view of God's mercies and that is to serve reasonably and faithfully in the church.

In verses 3-8, Paul reminds us that we live out our transformed life in community.

And central to our community life is a fair and sober estimate of ourselves in line with the Christian faith and the gifts that God has given to each of us.

C. Let's talk for a minute about the honest and accurate estimation that Paul says that each of us should have for ourselves.

Paul highlights and speaks against an inflated view of ourselves that we might be prone to.

I'm sure Paul was directing that especially toward the pride-filled Gentile Christians in the church at Rome – you will recall how he called them out several times in chapter 11.

Paul's overall desire is for all Christians in Rome, and elsewhere, to have a "renewed mind" that delivers them the self-centeredness typical of worldly thinking that causes us to think either too highly or too lowly of ourselves.

D. A right and realistic assessment of ourselves will keep us from being puffed up in the clouds or dragged down into the mud.

True humility is a right and true estimation of ourselves in God's sight. Pride comes from "super-thinking" about yourself, and dwelling on our own supposed greatness.

Pride and self-centeredness can also go to the opposite extreme where a person thinks too little of themselves and is constantly bad-mouthing themselves – usually in an effort to force others to focus on lifting them up.

When a person knows who they are in God – a loved and forgiven sinner, with some gifts – then a person doesn't need to brag or to beg, they can just be themselves.

And... when a person understands that who they are, and what they are, and what they have, all comes from God, then there is no room for thinking too highly or too lowly of themselves.

IV. Conclusion: God distributes His gifts according to His own sovereign will, and if God is the one who gives the gifts, then He is the one who should get all the glory for their use, not us.

A. What is Paul's main point? The Christian community at Rome is diverse, made up of Jews and Gentiles, but those diverse parts need each other and need to cooperate with each other.

Paul lists 7 gifts in these verses, but when you add the other gifts that Paul mentions in Ephesians and Corinthians the result is a total of about 19 different spiritual gifts.

But I don't think that Paul is trying to be exhaustive, and the 19 different gifts may just be a sampling or summary of the ways that God empowers and works through Christians.

B. Rather than going into the different kinds of gifts and talking about their use, we need to summarize some important basic truths about spiritual gifts.

First of all, everyone has a spiritual gift or gifts – everyone, therefore has a role to play in the body of Christ, and we all need to be open to the possibilities.

Second, everyone does not have the same gift – there are people who try to teach that everyone must have a certain gift or they are not a real Christian, but that is a false teaching.

Third, no one has all the gifts – that would be an amazingly gifted person, indeed.

Fourth, all the gifts are to be used to help the body, not just serve the individual who possesses the gift.

Finally, all gifts should be employed humbly, with dependence on God's wisdom and power, in order to bless the church and bring glory to God. AMEN? Let Us Pray...