

"Live a God Pleasing Life"

Romans 12:1-8

If I were to ask you this morning 'Do you want to live a life pleasing to God?' I would assume almost everyone would say, 'Yes, I want to live a life pleasing to God.' But then if I asked 'Are you willing to live the life that God says pleases Him would we answer the same?' What we want to do is not always the same as are we willing to do. But the encouraging thing here is if we're hesitant to do what God asks of us, we need to be reminded that God is fully willing to enable us to do what He asks. So what does a God pleasing life look like?

As we continue in the book of Romans we come to a major division in the book here at 12:1. Paul started his letter telling the Romans (whom he had not visited yet) that he wanted to come and teach them God's truths so they can be mutually edified. His primary goal was to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. Everyone needs the gospel, Paul explained from 1:18-3:31 that everyone is guilty of sin and are separated from God and therefore can only be made right with God through faith in Jesus. Why Jesus? Because in ch. 3 Paul said God has held back punishing people for their sin because He was waiting to pay for their sins by sending Jesus to atone for their sins. Not that Jesus' death automatically makes everyone right with God. We each have to receive Jesus for ourselves.

But being saved doesn't automatically mean we are living the life that pleases God. Paul points out in ch.s 6-8 that we still battle our sin nature. So we need to stop yielding our bodies to sin by the help of the Holy Spirit who now lives in us. He introduces the need for us to have the mind of the Spirit in order to have victory over sin in ch. 8, but then he takes a break in ch's 9-11 to reassure Jewish believers that God has not abandoned His plan for them and to rebuke Gentile Christians who may have looked down on their Jewish brothers because Gentile Christians were beginning to outnumber Jewish Christians. You Gentiles were grafted in to the root of the tree of faith begun by Abraham. You didn't usurp the Jews. Rather, God has this glorious plan to bring the two together in Christ and this is where He picks this up in 12:1.

Now Paul wants to show how the two diverse people groups, now united in Christ, can live a God-pleasing life together, which will enable them to be more effective in the most powerful city in the world for the advancement of the gospel. And if Paul believed that if God's people would live God-pleasing lives that it could change the largest and most powerful city in the world how much more if we live God-pleasing lives here can change our own communities for Christ?

But the only way we'll see God change our communities is if we . . .

Change the Way We Live for God **(12:1-2)**

"Therefore" begins this new section as a hinge connecting what he has written before this to where he's going. Every time we see a 'therefore' we're to ask "What's it there for?" In order to instruct us on how we must change he gives us a motivator, "*by the mercies of God*". What's mercy? Not getting what we deserve to get. So what do disciples of Jesus have that we don't deserve?

- Our sins paid in full by Jesus. (3:21-24)

- Future hope in God's presence forever and present peace that assures us of that hope. (5:1-11)
- Freedom from being slaves to sin (ch. 6)
- Freedom from having to keep the Law (ch. 7)
- The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who helps us obey God's Word when our mind is focused on Him and who also interprets our inner groanings to God as prayer when we suffer. (ch. 8)
- Now called God's people when God turned to the Gentiles with the gospel (ch. 9-10)
- and grafted into the root of the Abrahamic promises (ch. 11)

Is it any wonder Paul ended ch. 11 with this doxology:

³³*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* ³⁴*"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"* ³⁵*"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?"* ³⁶*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Everything we have comes from God, everything we do comes through God's power and everything we do should be for God's glory because of His mercies so richly poured out on us. So if we're going to change the way we live so we can please God more we need to be . . .

Regularly reviewing His mercies in our life (v.1a)

We only reviewed the basic mercies all of us have received because of Jesus. What about those undeserved blessings in our life? Our families, our jobs, our health, where we live, our freedom . . . and every day we have to thank God for the ways He shows us undeserved blessings. By doing that we make God the focus of our life. That should change the way we look at our jobs, our family and friends, our talents, our interests and the lost. We'll come back to this.

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 your true and proper [or spiritual act of] worship.

The command to present our bodies is in an 'active' sense, something we need to do many times today and then tomorrow and the next day. Paul is using Old Testament sacrificial language. Under the Law you were required to express your devotion to God with a burnt offering. It was one of your own animals; you gave it to the priest; he killed it and then burned it completely to God. No one received any portion of it. This was your commitment offering reminding yourself that God is your God and He alone is worthy of your worship because of His great mercies.

Since Jesus paid the price for our sins we no longer need to sacrifice animals but we do need to sacrifice our wills as shown through our physical bodies; the way we live. If we're going to please God we have to change the way we live. ..

Remembering we gave up ownership to our life (v.1b)

. . . .when we accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Sacrifice means death. A living sacrifice means putting to death our desire to live for self in order to live for God.

^{6:11}*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* ¹²*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.* ¹³*Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who*

have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Our sacrifice must be acceptable to God. Animals had to be unblemished; without visible defect. It had to be your best animal. Likewise, God expects our best effort to serve Him not a begrudging attitude or a get-my-devotions-out-of-the-way-so-I-can-do-what-I-want attitude. This is our reasonable service or spiritual service/worship. The word translated 'spiritual' or reasonable is the word we get for 'logical'. To live sacrificially for God makes the most sense because of His mercies and is also how we worship Him. The word for 'service' is the word we get liturgy from. So Paul's mixing metaphors intentionally to show us that all of life is worship when we deny ourselves and follow Jesus. What does that look like?

Every day this week, maybe even this morning, we had a decision to make whether to obey God or do something we wanted. Which one did we say no to? What got sacrificed? Our desire or God's will? This happens daily. That's why we must take up our cross (death instrument) daily by denying ourselves and choosing to follow Jesus. Disciples of Jesus follow Jesus by doing what He says and living how He lived.

How can we best be a living sacrifice? We can't change the way we live if we don't change the way we think:

²Do 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.

Improving the way we think about our life (v.2)

Get rid of this by replacing it with that. We live in this present evil age but we have seen saved for the future kingdom age which has begun in our hearts and will come to fruition when Jesus returns. We **have** eternal life now which means we can live an eternal, spiritually satisfying life for God even though we are constantly pressured to conform to this present evil age.

The only way to change the way we think is to fill our minds with truths from God and then seek to obey them in spite of what the world around us is saying. And if every day we are surrounded by the pressures of this present evil age then every day we have to replace that with proper, eternal, godly thinking. Which means we have to change the way we look at ourselves. Too often we look at ourselves through our jobs and roles instead of who God made us to be. What would it look like if we centered our life around who we are rather than what we do? Then we would go to work or engage in our roles with 'I'm a child of God and a follower of Jesus sent into this job in the role of a _____ in order to show them who Jesus is and how there's a better life than this present evil age and its future consequences.

Our jobs and roles change in life, but they're not what defines you. If you identify yourself first and foremost by your job or role, you're off-centre; you're imbalanced and you won't live a sacrificial life and will say yes more often to your job/role rather than seeing what God wants to do through you in your job and role. Renew our mind means change the way we think. We can't change the way we live if we don't change the way we think and only then are we able to prove or discern what's of God and what is not. This 'will' of God is not God's plan for your life but it's the day to day decisions that make up our life when we need to decide whether we should say and do certain things based on whether it pleases God or not.

So in vv.1-2 Paul is saying that to live a life pleasing to God means I can't be settling for a **participant** role I must make a **commitment**. This is commitment language, not I'll participate if I have the time or if I feel like it, as if living for God is an option. Is living for God something you are a participant in or are committed to? This is what pleases God.

Yet vv.1-2 are a preamble to the rest of the letter. From 12:3-ch.15 Paul now takes this new way of thinking and challenges us to not only to change the way we live but to . . .

Change the Way We Live in Community **(12:3-8)**

The early church faced a unity problem because Jews and Gentiles culturally were opposites. So when they came together in Christ that division was difficult to overcome. So Paul moves in this direction that God saved us into communities in order to work together. The first thing Paul deals with in order to help the church family grow in unity is to have a . . .

Healthy view of yourself (v.3)

³For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought; but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Some saved Gentiles looked down at their Jewish brothers and sisters because so many of the Jews rejected Jesus and they were freer from all this legalistic background. On the other hand some Jewish believers looked down at their Gentile relatives in Christ because God chose us first. Paul ironically uses his own authority as an apostle as an example of not having a higher opinion of himself when he says '*by the grace given to me*'. In other words I'm saved by grace and God in His grace put me in a place of apostleship.

Sober judgment (clear minded) means the opposite of drunken judgment (clouded, exaggerated). Some people have misunderstood the phrase 'measure of faith' as if God has given each of us different amounts of faith. Every believer has been given the same standard of faith. The word for measure is a specific amount; it's where we get 'meter' from. It actually means 'You've all been given the same measure of saving faith therefore you should all look at yourselves as no better or no lower than any other believer. For 'by the grace given me' and the grace given you, God saved us, not by works lest any of us would boast.

So to elevate ourselves as better than others is pride and arrogance because all of us are undeserving of God's grace. But to belittle ourselves is to insult God who elevates us from lost, depraved sinner to grace-given and forgiven saint. So have a healthy view of ourselves by how we think. See how Paul told us to renew our minds in v.2 and then 4 times in v.3 uses the word think in the Greek. '*Do not think of yourselves with hyper-thinking but think of yourselves with sober-thinking*'. We will not change the way we live if we do not change the way we think.

Since we're to serve God as a community of believers we need a healthy view of ourselves and a

Higher view of our fellow believers (vv.4-8)

The reason why we struggle to fellowship or to serve God with others (doing more than we need to because we're too proud to ask for help or staying away from them because we think we're

better or something is below us) is because we don't have a healthy view of the community God has placed us in.

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts according to the grace given to us . . .

The different spiritual gifts God gives each of His children are designed so that each of us uses them for the purpose of helping each other grow in Christ and reach others for Christ. To think your gift or role is more important than others is to have an unhealthy view and arrogant view of yourself. We are all . . .

Equal members of the body of Christ (vv.4-5)

Our body of course is a great example. When one part suffers it affects everything we do. When you are feeling good everything works fine together. When you lose the function of one part you cannot function fully. Since we are all equal members of the body of Christ we are all equally necessary and needed to function to our fullest capacity as a church. So when there's an appeal for help (whether it's in the nursery or after church snack or Odd Job Squad) it's really a cry for the non-functioning yet essential body parts to do our part so we can all function to the fullest capacity God desires.

Paul's listing of some (not all) spiritual gifts is another reminder as to why we should have a higher view of each other. Because we are . . .

Diversely gifted to assist in our maturing (vv.6-8)

I'm not going to elaborate on any of these gifts because we often get sidetracked on what the gifts are rather than the point of this passage, which is; since you have a gift then use your gift! No one has all the gifts because then we wouldn't need each other. The reason we have different but equal body parts is because each part has a unique purpose that contributes towards what the body can fully accomplish.

The reason why God gifts us through the Holy Spirit is so we can serve one another. If you don't know what your gifts are then just start serving in an area you enjoy or think you can be helpful. We figure out our gifts when we serve and see how God uses us. Our gifts are uniquely tied to our desires and how God has wired us individually. To not serve is to rob the other parts of the body of what they need to mature in Christ.

God has not called us in **Isolation but in union.**

Many of you have heard of Aesop's fables. Aesop was a Greek who lived almost 700 years before Paul was born but listen to this fable called 'The Belly and the Members'

One day it occurred to the Members of the Body that they were doing all the work while the Belly had all the food. So they held a meeting and decided to strike till the Belly consented to its proper share of the work. For a day or two, the Hands refused to take the food, the Mouth refused to receive it, and the Teeth had no work to do. After a day or two the Members began to find that they themselves were in poor condition: the Hands could hardly move, and the Mouth was parched and

dry, while the Legs were unable to support the rest. Thus even the Belly was doing necessary work for the Body, and all must work together or the Body will go to pieces.

Each fable ended with a moral: The public is but one body and the prince the head on it; so that what member soever withdraws his service from the head is no better than a negative traitor to his country.

When we apply this spiritually to the body of Christ it has the same principle; refusal to serve with the other body parts is to rebel against the head, Jesus. Most likely we never thought of it in that way essentially because we rarely confess our selfishness as the sin it is. And that doesn't please God.

If we want to please God we need to change the way we live by changing the way we think; about ourselves, about each other, about the responsibilities God has given us all according to His grace. Let's make sure we're making a commitment to serve Jesus (and not just a participant when we feel like it) and let's remember we're called to live in unity with each other not in isolation by ourselves.

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