

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

The Fruit of God's Mercy

Romans 12:1-8

2000

Introduction

Romans 12 represents a major transition in the book of Romans. In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul addressed the doctrine of salvation – how a man or woman can be reconciled to God simply on the basis of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. In chapters 12-16, Paul spells out some of the ways our faith and doctrine should be demonstrated in our daily lives.

In fact, the more we understand what God has accomplished for us in the sacrifice of Christ the more we find ourselves saying, “Wow! Lord, in light of what you have done for me, what can I do to serve you?”

I God's Mercy Leads To Transformation

Paul's appeal for a transformed life is based on the *mercies of God* -- mercies that have been demonstrated in a thousand different ways – mercies that are most notably evident in His love and forgiveness to us who deserve His wrath and punishment. In Eph 2:3-6, Paul said it this way, “... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved.”

Application:

Many people attempt to do good in order to avoid hell and win God's favor. But for the person who has properly understood the magnitude of the gift of God, the motivation for faithful, obedient living is not the threat of discipline or loss of reward, but overflowing and unceasing gratitude for the marvelous mercies of God.

A. We are to offer our bodies as **living** sacrifices to God [Verse 1a]

Offer = A technical term used for the ritual presentation of a sacrifice by the high priest on the altar of God to atone for sin.

The Old Testament demanded animal sacrifice as the means by which man could atone for sin. But this sacrificial system was merely a foreshadowing of the perfect and once for all sacrifice of Christ made on the cross to pay for the sins of those who accept this great gift of God by faith. For the New Testament believer, God no longer requires animal sacrifice. Instead, He desires us to be “living sacrifices” which is an act of gratitude and praise for His great mercies showered on us in Christ.

It is worth noting that God asks for our bodies. If you have accepted Him as not only Savior, but also as Lord, then he already has your inner man. But He is not satisfied with that alone. He also wants the outer man. As we discussed in Romans 7 there is a continual battle between what our renewed inner man desires and what our earthly flesh desires. It is because our bodies are unredeemed that we must continually offer them up to the Lord.

Application:

The problem with living sacrifices, of course, is that they have a tendency to crawl off the altar of sacrifice, which is why Jesus said in Luke 9:23 that, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The lifestyle of a believer requires a choice!

Illustration:

“When Luciano Pavarotti was a boy, his father, a baker, introduced him to the wonders of song. He urged him to work very hard to develop his voice. He began to study voice with a famous tenor in his hometown of Modena, Italy. At the same time, he also enrolled in a teachers college. On graduating, Luciano asked his father, ‘Shall I be a teacher or a singer?’

“‘Luciano,’ his father replied, ‘if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair.’

“I chose one. And now I think whether it’s laying bricks, writing a book—whatever we choose—we should give ourselves to it. Commitment, that’s the key. Choose one chair.”

(<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/c/commitment.htm>)

Everyday we are faced with a spiritual choice. Which chair will you choose? Either you will choose to serve yourself and lose your life, or you will serve God and save your life.

1. Holy and **pleasing** to God [Verse 1b]

Holy = Hagios = “Set apart as sacred”

Pleasing = Euairetos = “Fully agreeable or acceptable (to God)”

Eph 5:8-10 “... find out what pleases the Lord.”

Application:

Unfortunately, many Christians are like the people of Israel who were rebuked by the prophet Malachi in Malachi 1:8 for bringing God their blind, crippled and diseased animals for sacrifice. They gave God their leftovers and in doing so they failed to please God.

If you want to be holy and pleasing to God, you must be prepared to give God more than your leftovers -- your leftover time, your leftover energy, your leftover money, your leftover devotion. He wants it all! And in return, He promises abundant life in this existence and eternal life in the one to come!

2. This is our spiritual act of **worship** [Verse 1c]

Spiritual act = Logikos latreia = “Reasonable service”

In light of God’s mercy, a life of total surrender and service to God is our only reasonable response.

2 Cor 5:14-15 “[Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

Application:

To fail to offer God everything that we are, in light of who He is and what He has done for us, is totally illogical. So when we live a half-hearted life for Christ it really is a reflection of our ignorance of 1) The magnitude of our lostness and 2) The magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice for our forgiveness.

Here’s the truth: The more we know and understand of who we are in Christ, the more eager we will be to offer ourselves to God in worship. However, the less we know about God and what He accomplished for us at the cross, the more reluctant we will be to offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices.

That is why as we grow in the knowledge of God’s mercy we will find ourselves progressively more surrendered and more yielded with every passing day.

Offering our bodies as living sacrifices has logical consequences.

B. We aren’t to **conform** to the pattern of this world [Verse 2a]

Conformed = Suschematizo = “To be fashioned in the same pattern”

Philips translation: “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.”

Application:

It is sobering to realize that the lives of most Christians are indistinguishable from unbelievers.

1. Christians expose themselves without even blinking to the same ungodly entertainment industry that is corrupting our culture: Television and movies that are filled with sexual innuendo, violence and antichristian themes.
2. Christians are as deeply in debt as unbelievers due to their constant desire to live beyond what God has provided – always lusting for more.
3. Christians have a divorce rate that is equal to, or slightly higher, than unbelievers. And the list goes on.

I'm afraid we have allowed ourselves to be pressed into the world's mold.

James 4:4 "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

1 John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

C. We are to be **transformed** by the renewing of our minds [Verse 2b]

Transformed = Metamorphoo = "To change or transfigure"

We derive our English word "metamorphosis" from this Greek word

It is the same word used to describe the transformation of the tadpole into a frog, or a caterpillar into a butterfly.

This word is used only two other places in the NT:

1. It is translated as "transfigured" in the transfiguration of Jesus in Matt 17:1-2.
2. In 2 Cor 3:18 it is used of believers "being transformed into the likeness of Christ with ever increasing glory."

In the Greek, the verb "transformed" is in the present, passive, imperative meaning, "continue to be transformed". First of all, transformation is an act that requires a force or power outside one's self. Second, transformation should be an ongoing gradual process or conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

So, how does this transformation take place? Through the renewing of your mind!

Renewing = Anakainosis = "Renovation"

The question then is this: How can we renew our minds? **Through God's Word!** God's Word is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to renew our minds, which in turn, results in transformed living.

Col 3:10-11 "... have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Ps 19:7 "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul."

1. Then we will be able to **test** what God's will is

Test = Dokimazo = "To discern, examine, or try."

1 Thess 5:21-22 "Test everything. Hold on to the good."

Philippians 1:9-10 “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ ...”

2. Then we will be able to approve what God’s will is
Eph 5:15-18 “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”

Application:

One of the most common questions I’m asked as a pastor is, “How can I know God’s will for my life?”

1. Offer up your body as a living sacrifice to God
 2. Refuse to allow the world to press you into its mold
 3. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind
- a. His will is good
Good = Agathos = “Beneficial or commendable”
- b. His will is **pleasing**
Pleasing = Euairetos = “Acceptable or satisfying”
- c. His will is perfect
Perfect = “Complete, excellent, without flaw”

God’s will is always good, pleasing and perfect for us, but I can only fully appreciate the beauty and glory of His will when my life is fully surrendered to His purposes and glory.

II God’s Mercy Leads To Humility

- A. We aren’t to think of ourselves more **highly** than we ought [Verse 3]

Think more highly = Huperphroneo = “To esteem oneself too highly”

If we were to put it into the vernacular we might say, “Hey, no get big head!”

Our culture considers low self-esteem as the root cause of just about every social evil in existence. But here Paul warns of the opposite—we must not have too high an estimation of ourselves. As fallen, sinful creatures, we are prone to be lovers of money and lovers of pleasure. But above all else, we are lovers of self (2 Tim 3:2, 4).

That’s why the scriptures repeatedly exhorts us to humble ourselves before God (1 Peter 5:6), to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5), and to consider others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

1. Think of yourself with sober judgment

Sober = Sophroneo = “To be of sound mind, to be in right mind”

Gal 6:2-5 “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.”

Application:

Frankly, the only way I have ever managed to look very good in my own eyes was when I was busy comparing myself to someone else.

2 Cor 10:12 “When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”

On the other hand, as I measure myself, not against others, but against the perfect standard of Christ, I will be protected from either overestimating or underestimating my worth as God’s son.

2. Think of yourself in accordance with faith

1 Corinthians 4:6-7 “[Do not] take pride in one man over against another. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

B. We are to recognize the **corporate** body of Christ [Verse 4]

1. There is one body

Eph 4:4-6 “There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

2. There are many members

1 Cor 12:12-27 “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

a. With different functions

Function = Praxis = “Office or work”

3. There is corporate responsibility

For the proper functioning of the church, we have to stop thinking individualistically and begin to think corporately. We must see ourselves as corporate members of the body of Christ, rather than as isolated, separate parts.

Eph 4:15-16 “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held

together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

III God's Mercy Leads To Service

A. We have been given different **gifts** [Verse 5a]

Gifts = Charisma = “A (spiritual) endowment”

Spiritual gifts are simply “tools” that enable us to carry out the vital functions of the ministry as members of Christ's body. Every believer is given at least one gift for the building up of the body of Christ.

1 Peter 4:10 “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1. According to God's grace

Eph 4:7-8 “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”

B. We have a responsibility to **exercise** these gifts [Verse 5b-8]

Spiritual gifts are not given so that we may set ourselves above or apart from the rest of the body. In fact, we will be incapable of properly using the gifts God has given us until our life-focus shifts from being self-centered to God-centered – from being self-centered to others-centered.

1. **Prophecy** - 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; Eph. 4:11

The God-given ability to proclaim truth from God, in order to exhort, edify, or console believers, and to convict the unbeliever of the reality of God. It can be predictive in nature, but is primarily manifested through the proclamation of God's Word.

2. Service - 1 Tim 3:8-13

Service = Diakonia = From which we get our English word, “deacon.”

The God-given ability to demonstrate love in very gracious and practical ways.

3. **Teaching** - 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11

The God-given ability to search out and communicate biblical truth in such a manner that other Christians grow in their knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

4. Encouraging - Heb 10:25

The root word means “to come alongside and give courage.”

The God-given ability to move believers on in their walk with the Lord, especially in times of personal distress, by encouraging and comforting them. It can also take the form of warning, advice, counsel and encouragement.

5. **Contributing** to the needs of others - Romans 12:12-13

The God-given ability to share liberally and cheerfully with others in order to meet specific needs. Generously should be translated “with simplicity” which touches on motive. We are not to give with ulterior motives or hidden purposes – but with sincerity and love.

6. Leadership - 1 Cor. 12:28

The God-given ability to understand clearly the immediate and long-range goals of the Body of Christ, and to devise and execute effective plans to accomplish those goals. The role of leading is not to be done half-heartedly and in a sloppy fashion, but with excellence and diligence.

7. Showing **mercy** - James 2:12-13

The God-given ability to feel and express genuine empathy and compassion in a practical manner to people experiencing personal need and/or distress.

Cheerfulness = Hilarotes = From which we derive our English word, “Hilarious

So this vital ministry of mercy is to be exercised with great joy – not as serving men, but as serving the Lord!

Spiritual gifts are not really all that complicated. If you do not know your spiritual gift and ministry, here are three practical suggestions that may help you identify and exercise your spiritual gift.

1. Offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice, out of gratitude for His mercies to you. Give yourself to serve Him sacrificially, selflessly, through serving others.
2. Study the Scriptures to have a better understating of the various gifts and how they are to operate. You might be helped by purchasing a tape series I did several years ago on the Gifts Of the Holy Spirit.
3. Look for needs, and seek to meet them. Spiritual gifts are given in order to meet the needs of others – to build them up in their walk with the Lord and to equip them for service.

Conclusion

1. First, have you received God’s gift of eternal life? Have you been born again? If not, then I want to invite you today to receive God’s gift of forgiveness and begin a new life in your relationship with God.
God is calling you today to choose whom you will serve. As Luciano’s father said, “If you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For Life, you must choose one chair.”

2. If you are already a Christian, is your life a reflection of your gratitude to God?
Have you offered your body up as a living sacrifice?
Are you resisting the pressure to be conformed to the pattern of this world?
Are you allowing God to renew your mind through the study of His Word?
Are you using the gifts He has given you to build up the body of Christ?
You too, must choose your chair! Will you live a life of self-protection and self-centeredness, or will you live a life of total and unreserved surrender to God who gave everything in order that you might have life.

*Copyright, Bob Hallman, 1996-2021, All Rights Reserved.
Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the
New International Version ©1984 by International Bible Society.*