

## “Gifts of the Spirit: What’s Your Place?”

### Romans 12: 1-8

Week three in our series on “Gifts of the Spirit”

Recall our definition:

*Gifts of the Spirit are special abilities given by Christ through the Holy Spirit to empower believers for the ministries of the body.*

We have learned how the Gifts of the Spirit are to build up the ministries, to build up the Body of Christ. We have learned how they are not about our ego and securing our place of personal honor. We have learned that they can surprise us if we simply submit ourselves to Christ in all we are and do.

Today’s passage is similar but has a different focus and emphasis. It is rather unique and intriguing. It is about each of us personally and individually.

Remember as a child we were always battling the issue of conformity. Do we conform to the practices and habits of our peers? Do we decide to follow a certain set of practices because our peers do it? Are we going to be a carbon copy of the people we hang out with? It often showed up in the hair styles we used or the clothes we bought or the people we ate lunch within the school cafeteria.

Then we grew up!

And just became more sophisticated about the way we conform as adults. We did as others did because it enhanced our profession. We had kids involved in all kinds of school activities and extra-curricular activities as other parents did. We bought the latest vehicle that was hot. We joined certain clubs and organizations because our good friends were there, and it would not hurt our status. We bought our house in a fashionable neighborhood that fed a great school.

All of which were acceptable practices and patterns. Actually, there was nothing wrong with those actions which we took.

Until we read the passage of scripture from Romans for our text today: Romans 12: 1-2:

*I appeal to you therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

If this is not a Presbyterian passage of scripture, I do not know what is! It talks about logical worship and it talks about renewing of the mind! Let me walk us through it.

In verse 1, Paul talks about spiritual worship. Yet the Greek word that is “logical,” not spiritual in some mysterious or mystical fashion. He, of

course, is making reference to the sacrifices which the Jewish people would make in their worship. Those sacrifices were animals without blemish that were sacrificed on the altar.

Paul in referencing them is simply making a logical statement that if we present our bodies to God, we are alive and not being sacrificed as the animals. He is declaring that we are even able to do it because of the mercies of God. By God’s mercies, we are able to present ourselves fully and totally so that our lives are fully committed and given to God.

That is his basic argument. We no longer give dead sacrifices but because of God’s grace and mercies, we can live all of our lives as a sacrifice for the God of the universe. Which means that we will come up short at times. We are alive and we are always having to make decisions about how we shall live. How we will be a life lived sacrificially for God:

-Shall I speak the truth in love to a friend who decides to live with his significant other and not get married?

-Shall I restrict my children from certain aspects of the internet or let them learn the hard way.

-Shall I dedicate at least 10% of all of my income to the work of the church as a statement of faith?

-Shall I not be honest about my feelings with someone who has offended me?

-Shall I do as my classmates at school do and not be completely honest about what I am doing when my parents are not home?

-Shall I keep from my spouse some news about my health that is not very positive news?

-Shall I take the bold step to take the car key from a parent before something really bad happens?

You see Paul is declaring that our spiritual or logical worship is that all of my life is a sacrifice. Everything I do. Every action I take. Every word I utter is making some kind of declaration to or about God. My life is called to be fully submissive to God...and that means 24/7.

Yet Paul goes on to further define what he is declaring in verse 2:

*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind!*

If that is not Presbyterian language, I do not know what is! Our lives are transformed by the renewal of our minds versus being conformed to the ways of this world!

You see we are always between a rock and a hard place. What shall I do: the ways of the world or God’s way? My way or God’s way? My desires or God’s desire?

Paul makes, according to Paul Achtemer’s commentary, a challenge to us to be conformed not to this world but instead to the mercy and grace of God. That we if our minds are renewed, our lives are transformed based on the mercy and grace of God. Not on being conformed to this world.

Achtemier goes on to reword verse 2:

*Do not let yourselves be shaped by what everyone else does but rather let yourselves be transformed by a whole new way of thinking so you can discern what conforms to God's will, namely what is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Now that would create a whole new paradigm, a whole new dynamic. Instead of making decisions initially by

=what makes me more money in the stock market OR

=going along with the crowd in belittling someone OR

=accepting the political "spin" about comments about leaders in our society OR

=remaining silent in family conversations about the elephant in the room OR

=simply not saying something at work that you know just is wrong.

What if our mental filter was God's grace? God's mercy? God's goodness? God's forgiveness?

What if we just hesitated and wondered if our actions or our lives reflected the grace of God that enables us to be living sacrifices or we just falter and go with the crowd? What if we declared in our life that we would abide by a new set of standards: the grace of God? The Mercies of God? The Love of God?

I contend it will not be easy. It will take a change of heart and mind. It will mean having a new set of glasses or lenses through which we view the world. It will be a challenge.

Yet the freedom it will give us will empower the ministries of the body. It will give us the internal fortitude to take a courageous stand. It will enable us to be faithful. It will help us build a new world with a new purpose.

When you stop to think about it, that is what Jesus did. He ushered in a whole new way of thinking, a whole new point of view of how to live life. He called us to be servants, not masters. To be concerned for others more than for self. To be willing to be last to know the real meaning of life.

His death and resurrection which we celebrate today through the Lord's Supper is a tangible reminder of the meaning of this passage. His brokenness helped to make us whole and complete. His spilled blood healed our wounds and heartaches. His example empowers us to use the special abilities he gave us through the Holy Spirit for the work of the church.

A new mind.

A new life.

A new spirit

All a gift.

All by the grace of God!