

July 8, 2018

## ***Be Transformed***

***"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer 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."***

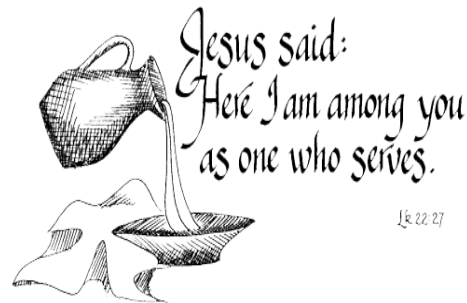
Romans 12:1-2

If I have surrendered my life to God's absolute control how will I live that life? For those who choose to follow Jesus this is the challenge. How does a living sacrifice live before the world? Our answer to this question is where many of us take grace off the table. Instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our lives we begin to formulate rules and regulations which we must follow...and very quickly add "...in order to be saved..." to those rules. We are transformed because we have received grace, not so that we might receive grace.

In this letter, as in all of his writings, the Apostle Paul is trying to show us what a grace-changed, sacrificed life looks like. The sacrifice comes first and then the life changes. We cannot get there by trying to do it the other way around.

He will write, ***"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...in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*** (12:3-8) Those who have become living sacrifices through God's grace will come to understand themselves in a different way.

Before we chose to live sacrificially we were self-centered and sought only to gratify our own desires. As those who have chosen to become living sacrifices we begin to see ourselves as part of something bigger and far more important than we, individually, are. As believers we have become a part of the body of Christ. As believers we have gifts and talents given us by our Creator. As living sacrifices we honestly take stock of those gifts and willingly use them as functional parts the body of Christ before the world. We do this because we no longer belong to ourselves, but now we belong to all the other members of Christ's body.



And again Satan trips us up. Because we equate the body of Christ with the building in which it sometimes meets we focus the use of those gifts and talents within the gathered church and especially within what happens within that gathering. We even call our meetings 'services' so that those who lead singing, or serve the Lord's Supper, or teach a Bible class, or preach a sermon, or even just attend, are fulfilling their service to God.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. As living sacrifices who have surrendered our lives to the will and direction of God, as those who have been added to the body of Christ, we become that body at all times and in every way.

When Paul challenges us to take stock of our gifts and talents he is not, I am convinced, suggesting that those things only be used to serve the other parts of the body. We are called to be the body of Christ in all ways and at all times. As believers we are never not part of the body of Christ.

So, if your gift is service, we need to serve in the world. If your gift is contributing, contribute to the world. If your gift is encouraging, encourage in the world. Jesus' ministry was not restricted to those who met in the synagogues. He moved among the crowds of his world. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, and he preached to the lost where and when he saw the need

So, the Apostle writes, *"Love must be sincere...be devoted to one another in brotherly love...honor one another above yourselves...be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer...practice hospitality...bless those who persecute you...rejoice with those who rejoice...live in harmony with one another...do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position...do not repay anyone evil for evil...do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."* (12:9-21) These are not rules we try to keep, but the constant practices of those who are being transformed because of grace.

