

THE SHAPE OF A TRANSFORMED FAITH

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Sunday July 5th, 5:30 pm

The book of Ecclesiastes ends with these words:

“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13 - 14)

This is an important and direct reminder of where our priorities lie. In Matthew a lawyer challenges Jesus. Matthew 22:36–39 (ESV):

36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

With these foundational reminders of our responsibilities as Christians and the spiritual environment in which we are to function as followers of Christ, I'd like to take a look this evening at a well known passage from Paul's letter to the Roman church. As he did with a couple of his other letters, Paul divided the letter to the Romans into two major sections. The first 11 chapters of Romans is primarily doctrinal in focus while chapters 12 to 16 are more focused on practical application. Let's look at:

Romans 12:1–18 (ESV): 12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (*corporate*) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are

one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

While this text has many applications, I'd like to focus in this evening on 3 primary ideas and applications for us.

1: We Are to Be a Living Sacrifice to God.

Paul starts with some urgency here. He says, ***“I appeal to you, therefore”*** or ***“I urge you”*** or in the KJV, ***“I beseech ye therefore”***. In chapter 11 he's been focusing on God's wise plans throughout Israel's history and his plans for the Gentiles. He says, in 11:33, ***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!”*** In this context of awe and wonder, we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. As we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, a Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our “bodies” here - reminding us of Old Testament sacrifices, represent the totality of our lives as a vehicle of expression and action. But unlike the sacrifices in the Old Testament, which are slain animals, we are to be living sacrifices. And this sacrifice we are called upon to make is ***“holy”*** (set apart), and acceptable or “pleasing” to God. If you offer your body as a sacrifice to God, this is a sacred service to the Lord. How do we do this?

- A. Surrender your will and your life to God.**
- B. Reject sinful habits.**
- C. Honour God with your lifestyle decisions.**
- D. Serve in His church.**

Romans 6:12–13 (ESV): **“12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”** The Greek word translated here as “make you obey its passions” or evil desires, is “Epithymia” which is translated as “longings” or “cravings”.

How do we then surrender, reject sinful habits, make good lifestyle choices, and serve? I suggest that none of this can happen unless we have a willingness to examine our lives carefully through the lens of scripture and prayer. It’s also important to remember that as Christians we are part of the body of the church and we have others with whom we can study, pray, and encourage and exhort one another. More about that in a few minutes.

2. We Are To Renew Our Minds.

Paul continues after his reminder that we are to be living sacrifices by giving a prescription on how to get this underway! He says, “don’t be conformed to this world,” but do be “transformed by the renewal of your mind”.

Interestingly, the Greek word translated into then English “transformed” is the same word that is the root for “metamorphosis”, which means literally **“to change form”**. So mind renewal isn’t just a tweak or a minor adjustment. It’s not just having a positive attitude, or trying to look on the brighter side of things, although these are all useful.

By the way, a Greek scholar from Dallas Seminary says that the literal Greek says “keep on being transformed” which is a reminder that this is an ongoing process. And this is a totally transformative experience! Paul also expounds on this several places in his epistles. For example, in 1

Corinthians 2 he teaches about the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit, not by human wisdom.

He sums this up in verses 14-16: 1 Corinthians 2:14–16 (ESV): **14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”**

I’m not certain about you, but I know that to have the mind of Christ is so far from my natural carnal nature that it is only through the grace and mercy of our Lord that my mind can be transformed. To have the mind of Christ! What a gift and what a responsibility too!

And this leads me to my last point for this evening.

3. We Are Required to Contribute to the Body of Christ - the Church.

In our 21st century culture, our tendency is to think of our bodies and our minds and the godly work required of us - as our own, personal, individual things. But in Romans 12, that’s actually not Paul’s focus. After reminding us to be living sacrifices and to renew our minds, he then says, “for, by the grace given to me..” The text continues on to talk about the body and how each member or part of the body has a specific function. This is a theme he addresses elsewhere as well. Each one of us as members or parts of this body, has gifts and we are to use them for the glory of God and in service to others. The implication here is that your gifts and mine and our natural abilities are not of our own making - God has given them to us. And scripture reminds us, **“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”** (Romans 12:5) That’s us, church!

These exhortations from Paul are followed by some direct instructions:

- A. Love one another with brotherly affection.**
- B. Outdo one another in showing honour.**

- C. *Be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.***
- D. *Rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation; be constant in prayer.***
- E. *Contribute to the need of the saints and show hospitality.***

Let's read the rest of the passage again, from 14-18.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:14-18)

These are quite specific and important instructions and are part of being a living sacrifice!

While we are to be corporately responsible as members of the body, the church - we also need to examine ourselves first to notice where the Lord is guiding us to correct our thoughts, actions and behaviours.

(Personal example of avoiding someone) Serving Christ involves stepping outside of our comfort zones, sharing the gospel not only with strangers we meet but also serving those here in our church with whom we may not be comfortable. We too often congregate in smaller social groups based on age, or based on long term friendships, or the people we've known for years. Yet we are instructed to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and with sober judgement (12:3)

Do you enter the church and head straight to the sanctuary and to "your" seat? Have you ever considered looking for newcomers and welcoming them? Of course we have an official welcome team and that's great but maybe it's your responsibility too if you are able.

Do you ever notice someone who may be struggling in some way and say to yourself, "I hope someone talks with that person and prays with them."? Perhaps YOU are the someone who could do that. This church has lots of

volunteers who've done their security checks, have completed the Plan To Protect program, and who are scheduled to participate in specific ways at specific times. And we can be deeply grateful for these folks and for the program that helps that happen. But we are called by God to serve one another. Does the Holy Spirit convict you to reach out, to pray, to give an encouraging word, to step up when you see a need? Please don't fall for the excuses the carnal mind throws your way:

"I'm not good at praying out loud" or "I don't know my Bible well enough yet," or "I'm a natural introvert; let the extroverts do that", or "I don't have time right now; I've got to get to Swiss Chalet before all the tables are gone." The fact is that when you follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit, there is a peace and delight that flows from that. Stop making excuses; start taking action. I dare you.

I'd like to finish with two passages of scripture.

Philippians 2:3–7 (ESV): 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Mark 10:43–45 (ESV): 43 But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In closing, the New Covenant, unlike the old covenant in the Old Testament, doesn't ask for a perfect and slain animal as a sacrifice for our sins. Instead, God asks for willing, living people who recognize the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus, who took upon himself your sins and mine. And God wants you and me to be living sacrifices - obedient, sincere, and humble - as servants to Him and to his Kingdom.

Let's pray.