

WHAT IS OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD'S MERCIES?

Romans 12:1-8
Phil de Martimprey

10/21/2018

Growing up, the last thing I wanted to do was my chores. Taking out the trash, washing the dishes, feeding the dog etc. It was inconvenient and obnoxious. It always interrupted what I actually wanted to be doing. And without fail my parents would always remind me of just how much they had done for me, and that me taking out the trash wouldn't even scratch the surface of the work they did. I imagine it was probably the same with you. But, as I grew up my mentality changed, especially as I had children of my own. I began to see and understand more and more just how much my parents had given up for me (and my 5 other siblings) to be successful in sports, school, church, and life. As this truth sank deeper into my mind, the things I used to dread, became a joy to do. I am now happy to help with whatever I can when I am with my parents. Dishes, trash, pets, whatever it is I am eager to help with whatever I can. It is because I now have a truer understanding of the love and service that defined my parents life toward me. My response of joyful service is the only proper response when they ask something of me. What we will see in our passage today is that when we properly understand God's mercies toward us there is only one proper response.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S MERCIES WITH A SUITABLE SACRIFICE (12:1)

For the last 11 chapters Paul has explained very deep and profound theological truths about humanity, sin, God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Justification, Sanctification and so much more! In chapter 12, Paul takes a new direction with his teaching. He transitions from what we should believe to how we should behave. Though they are different in their thrust, the behavior Paul is going to be prescribing for believers is inseparable from the foundation build in the previous 11 chapters. That is why he begins with "therefore, brother, by the mercies of God", referring backward to chapters 1-11, and I believe particularly to 11:32, where God has used the disobedience of both Jew and Gentile, to bring mercy to both Jew and Gentile. Viewing these mercies of God as the foundation, Paul urges believers to a very striking behavior. They are to offer their whole selves as a sacrifice; living, holy and acceptable to God. This would have been particularly shocking to the original audience who would have been very familiar with animal sacrifice. Both in the Jewish world and the pagan polytheistic world of the gentiles, sacrifices were commonplace. But this sacrifice Paul is calling for is quite a bit different. Christ's "once for all" sacrifice for sins fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifice system. Our new sacrifice isn't something we bring and give, it is our very selves, living, holy and acceptable. Living, in that there is no death and finality in our sacrifice, rather it is living and continual. Holy, in seeing ourselves as set apart for God's desires and designs. And acceptable to God, being just what he requires of us His children. When we present our entire self before God in this way, this is our true and spiritual and continual act of worship. This is our Suitable Sacrifice.

IN ORDER TO BE A SUITABLE SACRIFICE, WE MUST BE TRANSFORMED (12:2)

Offering ourselves as this suitable sacrifice isn't something that just happens to us. Nor is it a simple three step process. It is something that we choose to do continually and it takes a radical transformation. This transformation is accomplished by the "renewing of our minds". Paul makes it clear that we can no longer be conformed to this world. This is our old way of viewing God, ourselves and others. Until one is rescued by the grace and mercy of God through Christ, we are shaped and molded by the pure self centeredness of our world and culture. Even the "good" things we do are an extension of that self worship. What Paul here is saying, is that we need to think in a new way about God, ourselves and others, particularly with regards to the local church family as we will see in the next section. As we begin this mind renewal, and

we are transformed into the suitable sacrifice that pleases God, we will begin to behave in certain ways that will test and approve God's will for our behavior. Behavior that is good, acceptable (to God) and perfect.

TRANSFORMATION BEGINS WITH OUR THOUGHTS ABOUT OURSELVES (12:3-8)

The battle for transformation clearly takes place in our minds. How we think determines how we behave and who we are. So it is no surprise that in verse 3 Paul uses the word "think" 3 times. What may be surprising to us is what Paul is asking us to think about. Paul is calling believers to think soberly and humbly about themselves, and to think about themselves in relation to the part they play in ministering to the church family. He makes it clear that God has given out "grace gifts" to each member of this body and each member is responsible to "use them" to minister to the church. Paul seems to be saying that not only has God given out a diversity of "grace gifts", but that He has also given out the necessary faith for each gift to be used properly. Our "grace gifts" aren't just a little add on to our lives to help the church keep its doors open. What God is communicating through Paul is that a huge part of our identity is bound up in the local church family and ministering in and through the family with these "grace gifts". This flies in the face of our culture's radical independence. We are told we answer to no one but ourselves, that the best place to be is in total self reliance, and that to "need" anyone else is a form of weakness. This is an absolute lie! We are all part of the body of Christ, and have each been given a specific gift(s) that God desires us to use to minister to our church family. Far too many of us are missing this truth in our lives, and we have become conformed to this world. We have become content to be mere spectators in the ministry God is doing in the lives of our church family. We come to church to be blessed, ministered to, taught, and served, RATHER than to bless, minister to, teach and serve! It is not an act of humility to not know your grace gift(s). It is a proud and self-centered way of thinking, thinking that we don't need anyone else and they don't need us. A proper understanding of our identity in the local church family will not lead to pride but toward humility and service. Paul makes a point of identifying that he speaks out of "the grace given to me" and that these "grace gifts" are "given to us". God is their source, and to Him is the glory for the work He does through His children. Recognizing these are gifts we have received from God, will hedge against becoming prideful or arrogant in our service. Paul then goes on to show the diversity of these "grace gifts". This is not an exhaustive list, but a short list to show there are a wide variety of gifts given, and that they need to be used properly for the building up of the body. There is no way to bring ourselves as a living, holy and acceptable sacrifice, without understanding who we are in the body of Christ and how God has graciously gifted us to minister to our brothers and sisters.