

Use Your Gift

Mike Shultz

Romans 12:1-8

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1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform 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.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

I know that it is not Christmas time yet, but I know that when we bring up the idea of Christmas, one of the first things people

think about are gifts. We can't wait to see what is waiting for us under the Christmas tree. Perhaps, it is that new tool kit that we needed. Maybe there is a new video game console for us. Perhaps we will have some beautiful new clothes. Whatever the case may be, there is so much anticipation. The possibilities are limitless. My favorite gift is not something that came from under the tree, but rather something that goes on the tree. Let me explain.

My mother-in-law was trying to be mean to me, and it backfired. My in-laws have this tradition of having a special ornament that gets placed on the tree as high as you can reach. When they tried to get rid of me, my mother-in-law gave me some terrible jingle bells that were all broken. She figured that I would see it as an insult, but instead, I saw it as acceptance into the family. That was just the first time that it backfired. When she realized that I was not going anywhere, she decided that she would give me a new ornament. She bought this pack of cards that came with four identical ornaments. They were teddy bears. She picked the ugliest one out of the four hoping that it would make me mad. It had an eye that was not quite painted on right. I took one look at that bear, held in my hand practically crying, and said, "Oh, you found a bear with a crooked eye like I have." I just saw it as something that represented me. My mother-in-law was flabbergasted. We have a huge laugh out of it now. In fact, my in-laws tell me all the time how much they were

thankful to be proven wrong. They are fully my family now and that has expanded to the extended family as well.

Now, as great as that present is to me, that doesn't compare to the gifts that God can give. Let's turn our attention to that now. Starting with verse 1. ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship.*** Right away, the most important words to me from this verse are "living sacrifice." This should stand out for two important reasons. The first is that we know that Christ sacrificed Himself for us so that we can be saved from our sins. He was a true living sacrifice in every essence of the word. He willingly gave Himself up even though we didn't truly deserve it. He was completely innocent yet had to die the most barbaric death imaginable. They beat Him, stripped Him, and nailed Him to the cross to die a slow and painful death. They mocked Him while He was up there. They cast lots for His clothes. They did everything imaginable to make fun of Him. No matter what they did, He still managed to pray the most important prayer on our behalf. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He asked for us to be forgiven as we continued to mock His death. Even today, people still mock this death. Some don't even believe that it ever happened. He did it, though, out of love for us.

The second thing to mention is how this should remind us that we will be called to sacrifice as well. We will lose family

members. We will lose friends. We will lose comfort. We may lose some financial security. We will be called to give when we think that we have nothing to give. Following this life is not easy. Being adopted into sonship is certainly easy but living out that sonship is not. When you look back, can you see things that you have lost? Can you see things that once meant everything to you have somehow become meaningless? I know that I have.

I won't spend much time on verse 2, but here we go. ***Do not conform 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.***

We know that this world is broken. We know that this world is selfish. We know that this world has begun to hate Christians because of our beliefs. They see us as uptight. They say things like "Ain't no hate like Christian love." This bugs me because it tells me that the world doesn't properly understand what love is. Love is honest. Love is encouraging. Love calls us to want to protect each other. The world sees that as offensive. The world rejects it and tells us, "Pretty sure the Bible says that you are not to judge." That is the go-to phrase for them. However, we are to actually judge, we are just not to judge someone for doing the exact same thing as us. If we are struggling with alcohol, then we should not be passing judgment on someone else who is an alcoholic. If we are being hypocritical with our judging, then we will be judged the same way that we are judging the other individual. If we follow the ways of the world, however, we

would be casting judgment. We would be full of racism. We would be full of sexism. We would be full of selfishness. We, instead, are called to rise above that. We are held to a higher standard because we represent the Savior of the world even if the world rejects Him. When people see us then they should be able to see Jesus in us. If we cannot get out of the way and let Jesus work, then we are of no use to the spreading of the Gospel. We have gifts of how to spread the Gospel; we just need to be observant enough to know how to put them into use. Those gifts include the ability to preach, to teach, or even to know how to give comfort when someone is grieving. There are some gifts that we are given that we don't even know we have until they are put into practice. Open your eyes and allow yourself to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 3-5. 3 For by grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We all need each other. Being here in person is a gift to all of us. We can't do this without you. Church doesn't happen unless you show up. We can see God more the more we gather together. Your voices when you sing praise to God means so much more the louder we can become together. Your heart

when you look around and notice who is missing helps the church to be held accountable. Your grief allows the church an opportunity to show that they care and support you. Your knowledge helps to make us all understand the Bible better. Your laughter helps us feel the joy of being a Christian. Your praises and prayers help us feel the presence of Christ so much more on Sunday mornings. We need you here for it to feel like Church. Your humility helps us to understand that we are no better than anyone else. We know who the perfect one is. We serve the perfect one. There is no competition in trying to get to heaven first or to be the better servant. We all serve in various ways that all bring the church up as we are called to raise each other up. We are all involved in that process. It doesn't matter if you are on a committee or not, you matter for this church to thrive.

Those of us who can willingly wrap our arms around someone who is grieving represent the hands of God Himself holding us close. When we go to visit our shut-ins, we represent the feet of Jesus. When we are willing to sing together or offer words of encouragement that is based in Scripture, then we are using the mouth of God. When we see the hurt in this world and decide to help, we are looking with God's eyes. There are so many parts that we use without ever even knowing it.

Verses 6-8. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it

is teaching, then teach; & if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. We all have a role to fill. We may not always know what it is or how to use it, but it is there regardless. God would not put us here without a reason. He would not have created us without a purpose. Seek what that is. Seek someone in charge and see if they see a need that can be fulfilled. I know of a few things that were needed and people immediately stepped up. Those who work with the children for Sunday School are willing to take my children so that Sarah can enjoy being in service, I thank you from the very bottom of my heart. You saw a need for us and immediately jumped up. We thank those who clean the church, we thank you for helping make this place presentable for us on Sunday mornings and during the week. Your job may not always be seen or acknowledged, but it is absolutely necessary. Those who are willing to visit the sick represent the church in the best way possible. Those who are involved in the community, people can look at you and see the heart of our church praying for them. When they see that, then they can see Jesus working through us. So much gets done and I thank you. Continue to serve knowing that whatever you do for the least of these, you do for Him. This is why we are here. We don't come here on Sunday mornings because that is the ministry. We come here on Sunday mornings to be refreshed to go out and do ministry. We come here to receive tools. We come here to feel renewed. We are coming here because it should feel like a

vacation. We can relax. We can soak it all in. We come here to breathe from the stress of the previous week and can gain new energy to take on the next week. I hope you are ready because like it or not, Monday is here tomorrow.

When Jesus rose again from death, He made a promise. He promised that we would receive the Helper. That helper is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who bestows these gifts upon us by the will of God the Father. The first visit of Jesus has come and gone, but He will return some day. When we use our gifts, we can be on guard watching for Him. He will see what we are willing to do to serve Him and others. He was the greatest servant ever. He is our model. He used His gifts to help us. He healed. He forgave sins. He taught. He was a leader. He was everything that God has planned in regard to a Messiah. He is the example of how we need to use our gifts. Are you willing to take on that challenge? Are you aware of what your gifts even are? If you don't know, then I encourage you to spend time at the altar before you leave here today. Find out what your gifts are and then find a way to put them into use. He is here and waiting. Don't leave Him hanging. Come to Him. Receive Him if you haven't already. After that, then let's get to work. There's lots to do.