

How We Should Then Live

Romans 12:1-8

September 4, 2011

A few decades ago a theologian named Francis Schaeffer, in looking at the scripture, the state of the church, the changing culture around him wrote a book on Christian ethics and living. The title of the book was a question, How Shall We Then Live?. This morning we begin to look at Paul's answer to the same question. For some time now we have been making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans. He began by saying he was committed to the Gospel because it alone has the power of God unto eternal life. Ever since then we have been following his argument as he demonstrated how far we have fallen, how much God has done to redeem us, that we are only redeemed through what God has done, and that all of this is true of the Jews as well as the Gentiles so neither side can boast or look down on the other. It has all been a theological tour-de-force of Paul's laying out the basics of the Christian faith.

Some have been concerned because, in all of this talking about what God has done to provide eternal life, I have not said much about our behavior, God's demand of holiness, or sanctification. I left these out, first, because the texts we were dealing with didn't mention them. We are saved by God's grace, offered through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, in which we find forgiveness for our sins. This has been Paul's point. He has been actively trying to prevent us from looking to anything about ourselves, and only to God's sovereign choice, for our salvation. I also did not talk about sanctification and holiness because I knew the rest of the letter to the

Romans was coming. Paul has reminded us why we need to be saved, how we are saved, and that our salvation has nothing to do with us. For the rest of the letter he is going to set before us what this means for our behavior, and what our sanctification should look like. In other words, the rest of our time in Romans, except for the last two weeks, will answer the question, "How shall we then live?"

This morning's text begins with the word, "**therefore.**" Everything that follows in the next several chapters is based on everything at which we have looked in Romans so far. What Paul has to say from here on out is based on the power of God to salvation that is found only in the gospel. Paul's teaching going forward is informed by the evil and depravity of the sinful nature and by the forgiveness of sin that is found in the cross of Christ. The rest of Paul's teaching grows out of the facts of God's gracious election and His absolute sovereignty. What we are about to learn over these next weeks come from the truth that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, come to God on the basis of His grace and in no other way. All our attempts to establish and follow a law fail. All our struggles to make ourselves presentable to Him count for nothing. God will save who He chooses to save and He will surely keep His promises!

"Therefore," Paul says, "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 spiritual act of worship." (v.1) Everything we have talked about up to this point in our journey through Romans has involved God's mercy. It is God's mercy that makes salvation possible in spite of our sin. In light

of this truth, we should offer ourselves to God. Jesus died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we might be washed clean and be declared holy by God. Paul encourages us to offer our bodies back to God. Jesus died so we could live. We ought to **live** for Him.

Offering our bodies to God and living for Him means being holy and pleasing to Him. Again, our behavior cannot make us acceptable to God. Once Jesus has made us acceptable, however, our behavior can please Him. How we live our lives has a spiritual dimension to it. We are not spirits trapped in bodies that do not matter spiritually. What we do with our bodies is **worship**. We use our bodies to worship ourselves, the world, or God. Paul directs us how to worship God.

“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.” (v.2) Our lives must not look like the lives of the people around us. We are not to fit into the pattern of the world. God has always expected His people to be different. We are to stand out and not blend in. We are not to act like we did before we came to Christ. We are to be holy and blameless.

How do we change our behavior? How are we to no longer conform to the pattern of this world? The only way is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. If you want to change the way you act, you must change the way you think. The only way to change our thinking to bring it in line with what God wants for us is to have our minds renewed by the Holy Spirit.

There is another word for what we are talking about here. When we decide we will no longer be conformed to the world, but will instead do things God’s way, that is **repentance**. When we repent we change our mind about who we are, what we have been doing, and what we ought to be doing. We change direction. We change course. We stop getting drunk. We stop doing drugs. We stop having sex with people to whom we are not married. We stop watching pornography. We stop being selfish with our time and resources. We stop gossiping. We stop holding onto our anger and we learn to forgive. We stop looking out only for ourselves and we start looking out for each other. We begin to search God’s word. We begin to spend time with His people. We begin to truly worship Him, not just on Sunday but through our lives on a daily basis.

These things do not happen all at once, and they are not things we generate in ourselves through the strength of our will. Repentance is a continual, **daily** thing. God gradually takes away the things in us that look like to the world and replaces them with behavior and thinking that look like Jesus.

These things will happen, however. If we repent, if we are in Christ, then God will change us and we will give up the sinful habits of the world. If we are not being changed, if our behavior does not demonstrate the transforming work of God through the renewing of our minds, then the Holy Spirit is not in us and we have no part in Christ. As John the Baptist pointed out those who come to God should bear the fruit of repentance.

The result is a total shift of thinking and acting. As we are transformed by God’s work in our minds we

will be able to discern what God wants. We will be able to know His will and approve of it when we see it around us. We will come to know and love, not the things that seems good to us, but the things that are good, perfect, and pleasing to God. As God transforms us, these things will be pleasing to us as well.

That is a lot of time on just two verses, but it is important that we spent that time. We are moving, as we said, from what God has done to what our response should be. This is a major shift and so these verses mark a very clear division. Paul moves on with some detail as to what this renewing of our minds looks like.

“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 judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” (v.3) One of the first things a renewed mind gives us is a clearer view of **ourselves**. We tend to be arrogant and self-centered. It is part of the fallen human condition. As God rescues us from our sin and its effects, He also rescues us from this focus on ourselves. We emphasize the things about us we think are good and try not to think about the bad. We easily convince ourselves that we are better than the people around us. Paul tells us to adopt a more realistic view. Without the grace of God, we are not better than the people around us. You are not better than the person in the next pew or on the other side of the sanctuary. God may have declared you holy and washed you clean, and that is something in which you should rejoice, but you must acknowledge that it had nothing to do with you. Be grateful for God’s blessings and gifts to you, but

remember they are blessings and gifts and not things you have earned.

As you grow in faith one of the things you will find is that you become more aware of your sin and what a wretch you are outside of God’s saving mercy and grace. It is one of the paradoxes of the faith. The better, more holy, and more transformed one becomes, the more **humble** they get and the more sorrow they feel over their sin. As we grow closer to God and get more holy we stop asking why bad things happen to us because we become more aware of why we actually do deserve it. We also become more aware of God’s mercy and grace toward us and, instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, we find ourselves rejoicing in the midst of suffering because we know our suffering here is only temporary, God is using it to work His good will in us, and in His mercy God is withholding the far worse suffering we deserve.

The last couple of chapters have been looking at the relationship of the Jews to God in light of the new covenant. It was one of the primary issues Paul was addressing, and so it makes a good illustration of what we have been talking about. The Jews are God’s chosen people, so they thought they deserved a place of priority in the church. The church should be run by the Jews. After all, Jesus and all the apostles were Jews. The Gentiles in the church saw that the majority of the Jews missed the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and were, in fact, the main reason the church was being persecuted. If the Jews could have so much prophecy about the Messiah and still miss Him, then perhaps the Gentiles who did recognize Him should be in charge of the church. Each group found it easy to look down on the

other and to raise themselves up. Paul put a stop to it. Instead of vying for power, they should take God's viewpoint.

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” (vv.4-6)

God intends to have differences in the body of Christ. We are all to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and we will all start to look like Jesus, but that does not mean we will all do and say exactly the same thing. God has different **jobs** for different people to fulfill. We are to be united in the truth because it is the truth that sets us free and makes us holy. There is a difference between unity and uniformity, however. We are united in Christ. We are held fast in His truth. We have different functions in the body. We all belong to each other, but we have different gifts. Just as God decides who to save, He decides what He will do with us once we are saved and He gives us gifts accordingly. These are not differences in what we believe. They are differences in how we live out those beliefs for the glory of God and the work of the church.

Paul lists several of these gifts. The first is prophesying. This is declaring what God says. This is the ability to look at God's word and declare what God is saying to His people. The next is serving. This is helping others in Jesus' name. The next is teaching. This is helping people know and understand the truth. The next is encouraging. This is helping people through difficulties and problems, providing strength through the

Holy Spirit, the word of God, and the body of Christ. Next Paul mentioned giving. This is meeting the needs of those around you by letting go of your resources so they may be used to help others. Next is leadership. This is setting the course and direction of the church and helping the church know what to do in the situations that confront her. The last gift Paul mentions here is mercy. This is showing forgiveness and reaching out to others, especially those who don't deserve it.

In all of these we are instructed to do what God has called us to do, with the faith God has given us to do it, and to do it with a willing, generous, and cheerful attitude. We hold nothing back from God because He has held nothing back from us. We are to give Him our best because He gave us Himself. This brings us back to where we started. How are we to live? We are to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices to be matured in our faith and used for His purposes.