

Our Reasonable Service
Romans 12:

1 John 3
Galatians 5
Responsive Psalm 146

This morning we are going to be in Romans chapter 12. A few weeks ago we looked at the first half of this chapter in which we can see that Paul is laying out some applications to the lessons he had been writing in this book. He begins this application by an exhortation, an encouragement, in verse 1, he says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Websters dictionary describes beseech as, "to beg for urgently, or anxiously, to entreat, or implore, to ask, request, plead and petition." So Paul here is saying, I urgently plead, and implore you, by the mercies of God, to live a life worthy of the calling of which you have been called, your body is not your own, your life is not your own for you have been purchased by the blood of Christ, called to a higher purpose within his kingdom to will and to do that which is for his good pleasure. Not to gain merit or favor before him, not to earn glory, but rather to shine forth his glory through living in such a way to bring honor to him. For this is what it means to be a follow of Christ, that we lay down our lives for others, just as he laid down his life for us. Knowing and recognizing that all good gifts flow from the Father, he one who provides for us, cares for us, loves us, and keeps us and who works all things for the good to those who are the called according to his purpose."

In the text that we will be looking at today, in the last half of chapter 12 Paul dives deeper into this concept or idea of what is our reasonable service as believers and followers of Christ. What does that look like, and how are we as his now adopted children, if we are indeed his adopted children, conduct ourselves in the church, in our families, with our neighbors, and society at large. It would seem that among those who confess Christ there is 2 main schools of thought that prevail. 1. Is that we must justify our faith, and work out our salvation through good works, recognizing much of the law that was written for Israel doesn't apply to us, yet we co-opt in pieces and seek to apply it to our lives as a guide, or general principle pointing to how we should live. Striving to upkeep portions of the law that we believe have carried through to now. The other predominate view, it would seem is the stark opposite, It can be best described as a sort of hyper-grace concept, though I don't necessarily like using that terminology, because one can not get or have more grace then what God has given, but the concept is that God's grace is so merciful, that it lays no requirement upon us. We can live our lives, do as we please, for this life has little meaning of bearing upon God, and well...he paid for our sins anyway right? So there are many who confess a belief, but by their lives and their actions reflect something entirely different then what scripture describes as those who follow Christ.

So we have on opposite ends, 2 extremes, and it seems that much of what is known as Christianity today falls in either one of those schools of thought. Either you strive to earn merit and credit before God through good works and ministry, or you don't really concern yourself that much about sin, because in the end everyone who believes in God is going to go to heaven anyway. Each school of thought produces disciples and followers that don't honestly reflect the biblical believer's life. The one produces within itself a sort of prideful, haughty, arrogance which believes oneself to be just a bit better Christian then someone else who doesn't quite meet the mark set by someones own arbitrary understanding of what a Christian life should be.

The other creates an apathetic, careless, person who has little understanding of scripture, whose life is inseparable from the world around them, that is there appears to be no real difference, other than some words of a claimed belief. For anyone who spends even a little amount of time reading God's word, it's easy to see that a person whose life does not reflect the God that they claim, is not a person who truly believes. Making a claim has no more bearing on reality, then if one was to claim the sky was green. No matter how much you say it, no matter how much you try to convince others, everyone else can look at the sky and see it clearly is not green. Likewise it is with a person who claims Christ, but lives a life reflecting the world, a person can claim belief all they want, but without the works which reflect Christ, those words are empty and meaningless. As James wrote, "faith without works is dead." And that is what Paul is beseeching, imploring his readers to understand, it is to live out your lives as one who reflects the attributes of the father you claim to be a child of. This does not mean a set of rigid rules and regulations, but rather out of love for the father you love one another and those around you, and by doing so you will fulfill the will of the father. This is our reasonable service, to reflect the love which was first given to us, share the hope that we have in Christ, so that others may come to see, understand and believe upon him.

We are to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, so that by the ministry of how we conduct ourselves to the world around us, we may reflect Christ. The puffed up, arrogant, pride filled believer who strives to earn merit before God does not reflect the mercy and grace of God to those around them, but instead reflects judgment through their conduct, being focused upon the failures of others, standing as self righteous authorities of what one must practice, or do to be worthy of God's love. Paul warns in verse 3, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." There is no room for arrogance and haughty pride in the life of God's children. And likewise the hyper-grace person may reflect the mercy and grace, they do so at the expense of excepting sin and rebellion, without understanding the other side of God's mercy and grace also includes his wrath and judgment. In the end these people look and act no different than the world around them, being caught up in the same behaviors, living the same lives as those who also deny God. Paul says in verse 2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As often is the case and I have said over and over about various things, the answer usually lies in the middle. Between the hyper-grace, and the legalist striving and pushing everyone around them to be worthy and to earn God's love, stands a spot which seeks to balance the 2 extremes. Understanding God's mercy toward the lost sinner who has been saved by grace, yet also understanding that God can not abide, or tolerate sin so there is also an element of judgment and wrath, but that judgment and wrath is not poured out on those who are unable to earn God's love, for no one is able to be righteous outside of the righteousness of Christ which is laid to our account, but rather it is the judgment for unbelief, and a life given over to sin and rebellion. But likewise, without such a, may I say, hyper grace of a God to love us while we were yet sinners and rebels, then there is none who would be saved. We are not to conform to this world, but rather stand upon what the word of God says is true, as society continues to fall, the societal moral compass falls with it, morality and rightness with God is more than just being moral by the world's standards, for those standards shift and change...look at where we are now in a society, calling what once was bad good, and good, bad. Therefore we must not conform to the moral compass of this world, but instead stand firm upon the truth or God's word, warning of the judgment of sin, and offering the message of mercy through the blood of Christ.

And doing so, is that reasonable service that Paul mentions in verse 1, a life given over to God, who has been saved by the blood of Christ, through the grace and mercy of the Father will reflect that reality, for it becomes an intrinsic part of who we are. For we have the traits of our father, 1 John 3:7 “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” We who are Christ's have inherited the traits of the father, and they become an intrinsic part of who we are as we live our this life. And if we have not these traits, it calls into question our claim of salvation. For as Jesus says in the book of John, chapter 8:42, speaking to the pharisees, who claimed a belief in God, and to love God, but Jesus says, “If God were your father, you would love Me. For I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of myself, but he sent me. Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to listen to my word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. HE was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear because you are not of God.”

The religious leaders, these believers in God were being called the sons of the Devil because their lives reflected a life of deceit, pride, and arrogance, which are not the traits of God, therefore they were unable to hear and unable to understand for it was not given to them to do so. And such is each and every one of us before that work of grace and mercy of God calling us to himself, reconciling us in his blood. We stand condemned, searching and grasping to earn righteousness, but it does nothing more than to build up our pride and arrogance, making that striving itself a sin, so even the righteousness we believe we build is as Luther called it, a pile of dung. Without God's mercy toward us, and his loving grace given we would remain sons and daughters of the devil, but through Christ, by the will of God he has chosen to adopt for himself children out of this fallen mass of humanity, and those who are his hear is word, and reflect the love and mercy given to us. Which brings us to our passage this morning, the last half of chapter 12 in the book of Romans. In the first half of this chapter Paul implores his readers to present themselves as living sacrifices, which he said is our reasonable service, and to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, through prayer and the reading of Gods word. And here in the last half he is showing what this will look like, the inherent traits of God in his adopted Sons and Daughters, as we live out their lives on this earth awaiting his return. Let us go ahead and read starting in verse 9 to the end of the chapter. (READ 9-21)

Often times when I am working on sermon prep there will be a verse, or passage that comes to mind that I want to reference or quote, but I don't know exactly where it is found in the bible, so I will go to google and type in the passage that I am thinking of to find the verse. Well, now google search has the new AI feature that gives like a paragraph definition of things that you search for, and I find it interesting because a lot of times when searching for passages of scripture it will explain it, in context and its usually pretty good. For example, as reading through our passage this morning what came to mind is the parallel between what Paul is saying here, and the list of the fruits of the spirit in Galatians. Not knowing exactly where that is found, I searched for it, and this is the answer I got which I think is a perfect match to what Paul is saying here in Romans.

According to Galatians 5:22-23, the fruits of the spirit are
Love, which is a deep affection and concern for one another.
Joy: A sense of happiness and contentment that comes only from a relationship with God.
Peace: A state of calmness and tranquility that comes in the midst of turmoil.
Forbearance: The ability to tolerate and put up with difficult situations and people.
Kindness: A willingness to show compassion and generosity to others.
Goodness: a moral excellence and integrity that reflects God's character.
Faithfulness: a commitment to remain loyal and true to God and others.
Gentleness: a humble and gentle spirit that is willing to listen and serve others.
Self-control: the ability to manage ones emotions and desires in a way that honors God.
The conclusion, "These fruits of the spirit are not a list of things that we can do to earn God's approval, but rather are the natural outcome of a life lived in relationship with him."

This is the same thing that Paul is saying here to the Roman's, Love without hypocrisy, a love that is a deep and affectionate concern for one another, not being self serving, but in all things show kindness and gentleness showing compassion for one another through a humble spirit willing to listen and serve others. Having the mind of Christ, as the adopted children of God, we, like our father, should abhor what is evil, seek to cast what is evil from our lives, and live as those who are a reflection of God's character, displaying in our lives these fruits of the spirit which should be the natural out-flowing in the life of one who is in Christ. As this is our good and reasonable service toward the one who first loved us, we are to cling to him, that which is good and in all ways he shall direct our path. Seeking his good pleasure and will as we strive to be a reflection of his love and mercy to this dying sinful world.

One of the main driving points that Paul makes in this book, is that the believers in Christ are both Jew and Gentile, and though they come from differing backgrounds, they are united together in Christ, who has made from the 2, one nation under God. Where previously there was animosity, in Christ, and through Christ there should now be love. Where previously there was an arrogance and pride, there is now acceptance and humbleness before God. So in verse 10, Paul instructs his readers, this mix of Jew and Gentile believers to set aside the things that make them different, and to be united in Christ, together in love, being kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, honoring one another by giving preference to one another. This is a far cry from the standard default attitude of the Jewish people, who being the physical descendant of offspring of Abraham, who through many prophets and by God himself was given the ordinances and traditions to set them apart, now must see and recognize that God has united all under the blood of the messiah. And likewise the Gentiles, must not make the same mistake in arrogance and pride, for they being without hope, having been given this hope are not better then the believing Jews. That was the whole point of the illustration of the olive branches, being grafted into the tree, God has grafted in both the natural and the wild branches to make for himself one tree, for his glory and purpose. It is he who prunes, and he who grafts, and the branches of themselves are nothing but recipients of the life giving sap of God's mercy and grace.

So we are to treat one another, as brothers and sisters, united under the blood of Christ which was shed for each and every one of us giving a preference for one another, reflecting and living out the loves which was first given to us. Paul goes on in his exhortation, together we are to rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and continue steadfastly in prayer. What Paul describes here is a bond between God's people which is like that of a family, we rejoice together, we strive together through tribulation and persecution by lifting each other up through support and love, and we come together to worship as one, he who has giving us hope to rejoice in, and mercy through tribulation.

Verse 15, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, be of the same mind toward one another. Together, as a family who is one in Christ we suffer, and we all rejoice together, bearing one another's burdens, and likewise rejoicing in celebration of God's blessings. These are the traits which should define us as a body of believers, full of love, and mercy, so that when the world looks at us, they see a reflection of God's love and mercy, and it is this that defines us as his Children. Paul continues on, saying the same thing but from a different angle, since we are to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, reflecting the fruits of the spirit expounded upon in the book of Galatians, we are to Repay no one evil for evil, but rather have a regard for good things in the sight of all men. God in his grace and mercy does not repay punishment for your sins, for that price has been paid on the cross, where once was punishment and judgment, we now find love, and peace. Likewise we should show such grace and mercy to those who hate us, for we hated God, and yet he loved us. Look what Paul says here in verse 18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." As we know this is not always possible, but let the fault be on the other, not on you, for as much as depends on you, do what you can to strive to live peacefully with all men. Now some take this verse to mean acceptance, even of sinful behavior, but how can we who are to abhor evil, be party to, and accepting of rebellion against our father? Paul is not talking about accepting the sins of others, but rather through mercy and grace be patient and kind in our handling and understanding of others. You can both conduct yourself in a loving and caring manner while presenting the truth of God, to this lost and fallen world.

Let the anger and hatred come from those who are still yet lost, it should not be found in those of us who claim Christ. As much as depends upon us, live peaceably with all men. Verse 19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath: for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will be repay." Says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good. We have all heard the idiom, Kill them with kindness. This is essentially what Paul is imploring his Christian brothers and sisters to do. Do not meet anger with anger, and wrath with wrath, it is God who will sort it all out, we are to live as ones who reflect his mercy and grace, not his vengeance and anger, such things are to be left to God, and God alone. Just how he shows us mercy when we deserve punishment, so to his how we are to react to the world around us. As much as possible and depends on you, live peaceably with all men, and in doing so you will heap coals of fire upon their heads, for God will judge them in the end. Vengeance and wrath is not our place, we are to respond to evil with goodness and mercy in the hopes that through that ministry some may come to see God.

And that is the entire point, all of this that Paul writes as instruction, in how we are to conduct ourselves in this world and toward each other, is so that the goodness and mercy of God is reflected into a dark and dying world as a minister to the hope that is found only through Christ. This is our reasonable service, to live as living sacrifices for God, so that others may see God and come to know and understand and believe, through the ministry of our conduct and through the preaching of the word of hope and life, may God be pleased to bring many more to him.

