

## One Body

Romans 12:1-8

Philippians 1:12-30

Philippians 2:1-18

Responsive Psalm 25:1-7

This morning we are going to be looking at chapter 12 in the letter written to the Romans. As we are now in the last few chapters of this book there has been a slight shift in Paul's writing, he is applying the lessons that he previously had been writing about. Throughout this letter he has made the argument about who are the elect of God. As we all know the Jews of Jesus time through themselves to be something special, being the physical descendants of Abraham, having been given direct from God the law and God at various times spoke through prophets bringing messages to the people of Israel. Paul does not argue at all the validity of these things, nor the fact that Israel isn't a special people but the problem is that they have done what they have always done in the past....turned to, or created idols. The things that God had given them to point to both their need of a Messiah, and the Messiah himself are the things that they worshiped, and in their lineage is past stories of glory days is where they laid their salvific hope. Paul himself being all too familiar with this mindset for he himself was as he described himself, a pharisee of pharisees. So he understands the unique nature of Israel, having a zeal for God, but not a belief unto faith for they have chosen the shadows, the law and traditions, leaning upon their heritage, and have rejected the Messiah, the promised Son of David who would come to establish his kingdom.

They were looking for a king to arise and free them from the oppression of Rome, to reestablish themselves as a powerful and sovereign nation on the earth like the glory days under King David. But Paul points out, that God did not send his son to merely bring Israel back into a world power, but instead establish for himself a heavenly kingdom of believers out of every nation and tribe throughout the world. One of my favorite studies that we had done years ago, was the study of type and anti-type. That is the study of examples, and fulfillment. Much of the old testament can be seen as examples of a greater and bigger truth revealed to us in the new testament. For instance, as Paul instructed here in chapter 4 about Abraham. Yes, Abraham is the Patriarch, the one in whom the nation of Israel was born, and God did indeed promise him that his offspring would outnumber the stars and the grains of sand in the desert, and the physical aspect of that promise and reality is true, God has been faithful in that, from Abraham and entire nation and people have been born, and throughout all of time it is an innumerable amount. But as Paul points out, the physicality of that promise and fulfillment is just one aspect, but rather what God had intended was much larger in scope, but the true fulfillment of that promise that was given to Abraham was that through his lineage, the Messiah would come, and he would establish a nation of the faithful, and they would be the offspring of Abraham's faith, innumerable and would be the heirs to the promises of God, that is, an everlasting life in the presents of God.

Look at chapter 4 here real quick, as Paul points out that years before Moses, and the law, years before the established temple worship and traditions that Abraham, the father of the Jews was justified not by works, but by faith. Verse 1, "What shall we say that Abraham our father found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Going down to verse 13, he continues. "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is of no effect "

So we see in Abraham and the promises that God had given him this type/anti-type, there is the physical fulfillment, the nation of Israel, and the spiritual fulfillment, the nation of the faithful. Even Israel itself is a fulfillment of this, for as the prophet Hosea wrote,, “I will call them my people, who are not my people.” A prophet of the old testament, revealing Gods greater plan of establishing an Israel of faith, pointing to the fact that not all who are the physical descendants of Abraham will be a part of that chosen people. Again the established physical nation of Israel through the offspring of Abraham is a picture, an example, a type, of the Israel established through the faith of Abraham, by the promises of God, ratified and sealed by the blood of the promised seed, Jesus Christ. Now, just think on the bigger picture here, God fulfilled both the physical, and the spiritual aspect of his promise, and the lesser, that is the physical is to point to the larger reality of the spiritual. Who is this God, who works for himself all things, even the birth of nations, and genealogies, and offspring to his glory and purpose? The wisdom, and sovereignty of God far surpasses our simple understanding, but we are given examples that point to this reality. God worked through generations, from Abraham, to Issac, to David, to bring us the promised offspring who would gather together then lost, bring forgiveness of sin, and reconcile a people to God. He was faithful through all of it, in the end proving out Abraham's faith, he believed in what God has promised and that faith was accounted to him for righteousness, and here we are, 1000's of years later and we have seen its fulfillment, in Jesus.

And this is what Paul was getting at in chapter 11, first having established this truth, that it was as Hosea said, “I will call them my people who were not my people, and as Paul points out in chapter 9 “IT is not as though the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but in Issac your seed shall be called.” Though being the physical offspring of Abraham, not all are heirs to the promise of faith, and indeed as we can see though all of scripture, the rejection of the promised one by Abraham's physical descendants. Therefore as Paul explains using the example an olive tree he said those natural branches which have become unprofitable, unfruitful because they do not believe will be cut off. Just because Israel is a part of the descendants of Abraham, it does not guarantee them a place in the promised land, that is heaven. For it is by faith Abraham was considered righteous, not of works, not of law, but of faith. So all those offspring who do not continue in the faith of the promised one who was sent to bring salvation to his people, shall be cut off, and God in his mercy has grafted in those of us previously considered outsiders. But it is not all doom and gloom for Israel, they shall not all be cut off, and in fact if they who have been cut off come to believe by the saving grace of Jesus Christ, as Paul says, they shall be grafted back in.

The whole key here is faith, and belief. In this example of the olive tree that Paul gives, Abraham is the trunk out of which all the branches grow, and faith is the life sustaining sap delivered to those branches. But the branches who's faith is dead because of unbelief, are cut off, and new are added in from those who were not a part of Abraham to become one, in that faith, as if they are. As Paul wrote explaining this in chapter 9 verse 25, “AS He says also in Hosea, I will call them my people who were not my people, And her beloved who were not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where I said to them, you are not my people, there they shall be called the sons of the living God. Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant shall be saved. For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the lord will make a short work upon the earth. And as Isaiah said before, Unless the Lord of the Sabbath had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.”

Paul concludes in verse 30, of chapter 9 “What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, and whoever believes on him, shall not be put to shame.” So as we get into chapter 12, we can see that Paul is talking to those who are grafted into this olive tree, being sustained by faith, becoming a part of the promised people of God therefore, he says, verse 1 of chapter 12. (read 1-8) We can see in context here that he is addressing the believers in Rome and this instruction, this exhortation to present your bodies as a living sacrifice he says is your reasonable service. Israel was given the law, and they believed that by keeping the law and the ordinances of God, through that work they could earn righteousness. But scripture teaches, that no man is worthy, and no man is able to keep God's law, but instead if was given to point to that fact, as Israel strived to keep it, and yet constantly fell short, they were to realize their need for the Messiah, the holy one sent from God to fulfill its righteous requirements on their behalf. But they rejected him, and stumbled on that stumbling block believing the law to bring about righteousness.

Paul here is not laying out some new law for the new testament believers, but rather explaining that this is the outflowing outcome of your faith. Jim has been teaching a series on worship, the outflowing of understanding God's grace and mercy toward us, understanding and knowing, that while we were enemies of God, lost in our sin and rebellion, he died for us, so that we may be granted faith to believe, and be given the power through the holy spirit to resist the devil, turn from our sin and rebellion and rest upon his mercy and saving grace, and our response, our reasonable service as being recipients of such a great gift, is a response of praise and worship, something that should flow out of us naturally as we meditate upon the love and mercy of our Father. This Christian life is not a cold, calculated following of rules and regulations, it is not merely a study and practice in theology, but it is about living out a vibrant, faithful life in Christ. God saved his people to serve him in truth, and in holiness and has Paul had been pointing out is the area in which Israel was lacking in their pursuit of righteousness. Therefore, living as faithful servants is not something we do to gain merit before God, but rather it is our obligation, or reasonable service as Paul calls it. God has given us all things through his son, he has called us to himself, forgiven our sins, and adopted us as his children and heir, how can we not strive to likewise give of ourselves in service of the mercy he has given?

Such a service, flows out of the love and worship we have for the father, and for the Son who gave his life so that we may live. Far too often we as humans feel the need to either pay back, or pay forward to earn credit, or merit but the reality is we can never pay back the debt we owe for what Christ has done, therefore even our debt has been wiped clean, not held against us as a thing that can be paid back or paid off, this reality alone should drive us to worship and how can we who have been given such a great gift, with no strings attached not tell the world? How can we who have been given such a mercy and grace not live in service of the one who has given it? And it is all of this that flows out of a believing heart, it becomes our natural response, where once there was rebellion, now there is submission, where once there was animosity, there is now love for we have become a new creature in Christ, and he has formed us in his image that we may be like him, just as my kids are like me, having traits of my personality, my looks, so to it is with us have been born of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, we inherit the traits of our father, these things become an intrinsic part of who we are, we show grace, we show mercy, we show compassion, and we stand upon the truth of God's word because these are the inherent traits of God's children.

Verse 2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable perfect will of God.” Building on what it is to be a living sacrifice, Paul instructs his readers to be shaped by God, presenting oneself holy, and acceptable to God, and not to be sucked into the lies and deceit of the world. It would seem to me that this verse needs to be shouted from the rooftops, someone needs to gather every pastor, elder, deacon, leader of the churches in this country and preach on this one verse, for the modern church in our society has done just that, many have conformed to this world, using worldly devices and schemes, even allowing and approving of sinful rebellion against God's created order and nature, creating for themselves a strawman God to worship, bowing the knee to culture and letting the influence of the world dictate and determine the ministry and conduct of the church. And in doing so, they invalidate their ministry for they are no longer a minister of God, but present a false gospel, portraying a false God. We are to be faithful and true to God's word and not let society, or social pressures dictate how we operate or what we believe. This exhortation by Paul not only applies to the corporate body of believers, but to the individuals as well. As Christians likewise we should not conform to this world, despite pressures and influences to do so, as Paul says, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable perfect will of God.

So how do you renew your mind? In the context of what he is saying here, being that he is writing those who already are believers I don't think that this is a reference to salvation itself, but rather as he is written to other churches, it is an exhortation to strive, to continue, to run the race that you are in. This is accomplished through prayer, by the reading of God's word, being reminded, renewed daily in the faith that he has given us. And as we grow in that faith, as we learn more about him through his word, as we lean on him more for understanding, we are being transformed to be more and more like him. Being transformed to be more Christlike, to grow in grace, mercy, and love, to put aside sin and temptation, and to be ministers of this hope we have been given is the definition of growing in faith, maturing as a Christian as we walk in this life. As we grow, and learn more, and trust more we must be wary of pride taking place of compassion, and arrogance taking place of understanding and I think that is what Paul is getting at here in the next few verses. For he follows up being transformed and renewing oneself, growing in understanding and grace, with 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.” It is our human nature to rank things, from best to worst, we do it in about everything we interact with, we have our favorite foods, favorite movies, favorite music, which is all fine and well, but when it comes to the christian family there should be no such distinctions. For we are all one, in Christ, each with our flaws, given various personalities and traits but if at the heart are ones who love God then that is the distinction that truly matters.

I think that the issue that Paul is likely addressing here specifically is the dynamic between believing Jews and Gentiles. The early church, especially the church at Rome to which he has written this letter would be a mix, and we need to understand at that time this would have been quite the profound thing, Jews, and Gentiles coming together as brothers and sisters? For generations there had been a hierarchy, The Jews believing themselves better than the gentiles, but now God has sent his Son and created all equal in his blood. This would definitely be an issue worthy of addressing, as Paul goes on to remind his readers that none is better than another, we are all just different parts of the same body, verse 4. “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” This distinction expands throughout the Christian life, there was the difference at that time between the Jews and Gentiles, Paul goes on to explain differing rolls within the body,

Some are teachers, some are encouragers, some are leaders, we each have been given a role to play in this christian community, and neither is more important than another for each supports and builds upon each other. We tend to want to put certain roles, or certain people up on pedestals, for as I said, establishing rank is a natural human practice, but the reality is, we have each been saved solely and only by the grace of God, and have each been given roles to fulfill within the family of God. WE should not envy another's role or position, for God has given that person the ability to fulfill that role, and likewise he has given you the ability to fulfill the role he has given you, and each is just as important as the last, for together we are knitted to be one body, supporting and lifting up one another in this faith. It's easy for us to look at another and desire their gifts...being a shy and introverted person myself often times I wish I could be more like Jim, but God has given each of us a measure of faith and I should not desire what God has given Jim, just as he should not desire what God has given me, but together we work as members of this one body fulfilling the roles in which God has given us, using what God has given us to accomplish that which he sets forth for us to do. This principle even extends into the roles of husbands and wives, God has made each to compliment each other, each given abilities and traits to help one another and accomplish God's intended purpose in their lives. Diana can do, and endure things in ways I could not even imagine, that doesn't make her better, or worse than me, for I have strengths that she lacks, and together we are built up supporting each other in love. Working past our sin, our shortcomings, striving together to be what God has intended.

There should be no partiality, nor favoritism, nor envy in the body of Christ, we, as Christians together strive to be a reflection of the one who has by his grace given us this faith, each fulfilling the role that God has given, through prayer, through encouragement, through ministering to one another, and it is all done in love for each other, and a mutual love for our savior. That is the driving force of all of this, that if God has shown us such great mercy and forgiveness, should we not also do the same? Remembering that we are each sinners, saved by grace, and we each have moments we fail in this flesh, but we through the mercy God has given each of us, should come to one another in the same mercy and grace, being quick to ask for forgiveness for our shortcomings, and quick to forgive. God has been good to us in this little church, as he has knitted us together, each different people, each with different backgrounds and experiences, each with different personalities, yet we come together in love, a mutual love for our Father and our Savior, and a mutual love for one another. May God be pleased to continue this ministry here, as we grow together in faith and in love toward him and towards one another.