

Living Sacrifice -- Romans 12:1-21

Paul is writing to the people of Rome. The church in Rome was mostly filled with Jews who converted to Christianity during Pentecost. Many Gentiles (non Jews) were also part of the church. Although he had never been there, Paul considered the people in the church in Rome to be his brothers and his sisters – fellow members of the body of Christ.

In many ways, the Book of Romans is Paul's own testimony of his personal faith. It is a book rich with theology and sound teaching.

Today we are going to have a look at what Paul has to say on the topic of Spiritual Gifts which God has given us.

Some of you may remember when we talked about **Love Languages**, the work of Gary Chapman, who says there are 5 love languages. Most of us have 2 but one is stronger than the other. The same can be said of the spiritual gifts that God has given us. Most of us have a few, but usually, one is stronger than the others.

Before he begins his treatment of **Spiritual Gifts**, Paul first lays out the body/mind criteria for his listeners.

About the body he says, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

About the mind he says, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable, and perfect.

We could spend a great deal of time on both of these directives, but we will leave this for another day.

Then Paul extends a caution to be humble – not to be arrogant and think of ourselves more highly than we ought. He follows this with a reminder about which we spoke last week ... the Body of Christ and how each one of us are members of it, each with a unique function, all working together. Again, a reminder that we started this series with Paul's teaching on love which must be the foundation for all we do.

Now to the topic of gifts! There are many, many different gifts which God gives his people. Paul lists a few of them. Prophecy, Ministering, Teaching, Exhorting, Giving, Leading, Being Compassionate, Being Cheerful.

Much has been written on this topic of Spiritual Gifts and the information varies, depending on who's work you are reading. In this week's bulletin which Jennifer sent out earlier this week there is a link to a web site where you can go on line and complete a spiritual gifts inventory. There are many inventories on this subject. I did mine, very quickly and was pleasantly surprised with the results. As your minister, I hope you will be relieved to know that my most prominent gift is Shepherding, then Mercy, followed by Administration. Seems like a good fit for ordained ministry.

The people who put this inventory together suggest that Spiritual Gifts come in 3 categories. Keep in mind, this is merely their presentation of gifts. There should be no assumption that the gifts of Category one are

any more valuable or more important than the gifts in either of the other two categories :

Category One – The Miraculous Gifts – generally known today as charismatic gifts – apostles, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and miracles.

Category Two – Enabling Gifts – which all Christians have the ability to develop – faith, discernment, wisdom, and knowledge. Some scholars also put prophecy, teaching, wisdom, exhortation and hospitality in this category.

Category Three – Team Gifts – service, ministry, task-oriented ministries.

I hope you will take the inventory and find out what your top 3 gifts are. See if it makes sense to you. It is free. It takes less than 10 minutes, and I would be very happy to speak with you regarding your results if you like.

Paul concludes chapter 12 by saying that, perhaps contrary to popular belief, we are to bless those who persecute us, not curse them. Again, the foundation of love is essential here to be effective members of the Body of Christ. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We are to live in harmony with one another. We are not to be haughty. We should associate with the lowly. We are not to claim, or perhaps pretend to be wiser than we are. We are not to repay anyone evil for evil but think about and do what we would consider the noble thing to do. If our enemies are hungry or thirsty, we are to feed them and give them something to drink. Contrary perhaps to our first inclination, we are to overcome evil with good.

Wow! Lots to consider there. Challenging to say the least! We really need buckets of love in our hearts, in order for us to be the people God is calling us to be. It is important for us to know what our gifts are, and to use them as we are able.

What I want to focus on today is not the individual gifts that we are given by the Spirit of God, but the importance of our attitude toward whatever gifts we have, and whatever gifts others in our congregation might have.

Paul was a big advocate of grace ... by the grace of God, we have gifts that we have been given that we did not earn ... they come to us freely – unearned – undeserved. It is with an attitude and awareness of the grace which God has given to him, that Paul wants to enthusiastically encourage us, to be cautious about judging and considering others less than ourselves and ourselves, better or more capable than anyone else. All gifts are important. None more valuable than another. Paul reminds us that we are many different members of the same body ... the body of Christ. We have different gifts. Each gift is essential to the working of the body. I can't emphasize that enough.

In over 34 years of ministry I have witnessed so much grief among congregants who have disregarded this Biblical edict.

I remember a young couple with whom I was in a study group. They were new to Christianity and very excited about their faith. The husband would speak openly about his perception that he was growing faster in his faith than his wife. That may or may not have been true. But he came across with a certain arrogance and condescension toward his wife. It was hurtful to her. His extroversion and her introversion did not help the optics of what he was saying. They were both lovely people. The problem was that he did not fully value the amazing gifts that God had given his wife. He was of course very aware of his strengths. But her gifts were different from his and he did not appreciate their value. It led to an uneasiness in the study group and tension in this couple's marriage. She almost left the church because of it. Precisely opposite to what Paul was preaching about on this topic.

We cannot help but be aware of the differing gifts and the differing personality types within our congregation. Extroverts live out their giftedness very differently than introverts. It is so easy to forget that God has given us each a variety of gifts, and that collection of gifts varies from person to person. We need to continue to remind ourselves that it is God's desire that we fully appreciate that reality, and that we live together as members of the same body.

Many of us never hear about the **Trinity Prayer Team**. They minister behind the scenes. They take their ministry very seriously. They communicate with each other frequently and they pray with such earnestness for anyone they know about who is struggling or suffering.

We never get a report from them as to how many hours they spent in prayer. We never hear from them the ever-growing list of people whose names they are lifting up in prayer. They just quietly, humbly, devotedly, go about their ministry engaging the gifts of prayer, mercy, and intercession that God has given them. We may not see any of

these people out sawing off limbs or chopping down trees in the orchard. We may not see any of these people up singing, or preaching, or leading a study group. We may not see any of them setting up tables and chairs for a church event. Do we therefore assume that they and their gifts are not as valuable to our congregation as others? Paul reminds us, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought ...”. Our self perception, our self esteem should never be based on our comparison to others. So many people are using their gifts in ways that we never see or even hear about. We must not assume that others are not active in various ministries just because we don’t happen to know about it.

There are 3 things that I hope you take away from today’s message –

1. That you identify your spiritual gifts – ask those who know you best, take a spiritual gifts inventory, reflect on your own personal history ... what themes reoccur?;

2. That you find ways to constantly remind yourself that you are a member of the Body of Christ and that all other members, ALL other members are your brothers and sisters. ; and
3. That with humility, you acknowledge that all gifts are essential for the Body to function efficiently and that no gift is above any other gift.

May you continue on your journey, knowing your gifts and using them well to bring blessing to all. To God's glory.

Amen