

## Epiphany 2, 2018

### Godly Gifts

Romans 12:1-16

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*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:1-2a).

Words so aptly spoken and yet so unheeded and disregarded. Do you see yourselves as living sacrifices unto God? Do you find yourselves moving forward day by day in the edification of our Lord that others may see and believe? We live in a world where worldly gifts are mainstream while the gifts of God are considered barriers to proper success. As Christians we are not called to live up to the aspirations of our neighbor's materialism but yet, we do seem to move in that direction.

Maybe you have seen in the news recently, where a 17-year-old Chinese boy went under the knife to sell one of his kidneys on the black market so that he could purchase the latest Apple Ipad and Iphone. Incredible enough by itself but worsened by the fact that the surgery did not go well and now this young man may be bed-ridden for the rest of his life. What part of your body is worth sacrificing for the material gifts of this world? I know that most would never go to such extremes to satisfy their material needs but, for many, the debt to income ratio tells a different but similar story. What do we say to the person who frets over paying their bills yet feel entitled to overextend for an extravagant vacation because 'they deserve it'? Is materialism simply an avenue that fills a gap left from our inadequate use of the gifts of the spirit; worldly gifts replacing the spiritual gifts of God?

The pain of feeling like you have to keep up with worldly standards tugs on our conscience in a way that pulls us from what God Almighty is calling us to do. If we would only grasp on to the gifts God has endowed us with our contentment would prevent our discouragement

and save us from so many heartaches...we must, as Paul proclaims, renew our minds and acknowledge our membership with one another in the body of Christ! It is here, in this fellowship, where true satisfaction can be realized.

In today's Epistle Paul exhorts us to use the gifts that we have been given by the grace of God and herein we will find true fulfillment. We, as the body of Christ, are called to prophesy, to minister, to teach and exhort, to give to those in need and to show mercy, to love one another and to abhor evil, to be affectionate, not to be slothful in business, to be fervent and patient in prayer, to be joyful, hospitable and a blessing to others. We are not to condescend ourselves to the low estate of worldliness nor are we to be wise in our own conceits (paraphrase Romans 12:6-16). To the world these are not gifts at all...but to the wise, who understand these things, they are the greatest gifts that can be offered.

All this is so much easier to understand when Christians grasp the fact that we are already living eternal lives! And what does that mean? It means that if we are experiencing a longing for better things, a joy that the world cannot satisfy then we only have to turn our thoughts Christward to understand the mystery of life...that we are meant for a better place and are being prepared to once again be in communion with our God. Christ Jesus has paid the price and overcome the debt we could not. We live in a physical world yes, but we must embrace the life of the spirit if we are to face the truth that will set us free in this life. And what is this truth? Simply this, living solely for worldly aspirations will pull us down while living within the love of God we will be raised to everlasting life where the gifts of God bring rewards worldly promises cannot comprehend...and that starts now!

Happiness and contentment are short lived in an Ipad, an Iphone or anything else that is about the 'me, myself and I'. So how do we live for Christ spiritually in a world that has such a strong physical pull? For this answer I turn your attention to what Paul has to say to Timothy. *"This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterance which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith, among them Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they*

*may learn not to blaspheme. First of all, then, I urge that Supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men” (1 Timothy 1:18-2:1).*

I hope all of you are in agreement with me that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings are far superior to being delivered over to Satan. It is after all our worldly inclinations and desires that prevent our conscience from truly seeking God. When we live solidly within the body of Christ and heed the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will find contentment in peaceful lives even within the storm that rages around us telling us we can sell our kidneys in order to increase our joy.

Paul reminds us through his instructions to Timothy how important prayer is in the battle of which we are engaged both physically and spiritually. Our happiness and joy do not come with material things but with every inclination of a heart toward God. And it is a heart toward God that prays. When we offer a prayer of special request on behalf of someone who is doing God's work, when we pray in praise to the proper use of the gifts of God by those in authority, when we intercede for those whose dire circumstances bring us to our knees and when raise our hands in thanksgiving for the goodness of God to answer our prayers we will find a fulfillment not possible in any worldly enterprise.

If we are to deal with the whole of reality then we cannot rest in only the physical aspects of the world but we must cultivate spiritual lives that bring us closer to God and thereby closer to each other, where true joy and satisfaction are possible.

*“If ye then be risen with Christ, Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-1).*

Keep your kidneys but give your prayers and be transformed by the renewing of your mind and you will find that the gifts God has given you will bring you the greatest joy.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.