

Hallmarks of the Transformed Life... Exercising our gifts

Intro: Paul in Romans 12 having exhorted believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice explained to them how to do so. Don't be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

But what does this transformed life look like? What are the identifying features of a person renewed in his mind? Paul doesn't leave us to guess; instead he draws for us a beautiful portrait of the transformed life beginning in v. 3.

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

Here Paul tells us how the transformed disciple exercises his gifts!

A transformed disciple understands the interdependence of disciples!

The transformed disciple understands the nature of the body of Christ. The church is like the human body!

Just as we have many members in one body, so we are one body in Christ and individually members one of another!

Just as the members of our body do not have the same function, so do not all have the same function.

So today we must recognize the unity of the body, understanding that we are all connected by our faith in Jesus. And we must recognize the diversity of the body, that we are all dependent upon one another for our spiritual well-being.

The transformed disciple identifies in himself a gift to use!

Here it is important to read Paul's words through the lens of first century rather than 20th century experience. Here as in other passages in the NT we see that the early church experienced the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the reception of spiritual gifts.

Paul in a similar context in 1 Cor. 12 reminded the church of that experience mentioning there the nine gifts by name.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to

another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

In addition he urged them to recognize the diversity of the gifts and to use them for the good of all without attitudes of competition and jealousy but with love for one another (1 Cor. 13). Here Paul gives a similar exhortation.

The miraculous gifts of the spirit are described in various ways.

Sometimes they are described in terms of the role they fulfill (Eph. 4:11)

Apostles

Prophets

Evangelist

Pastor teachers

Sometimes they are describes in terms of the work or fruit they produce!

Prophecy

Service

Teaching

Exhortation

Giving

Leadership

Showing mercy

Though we no longer receive the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, we are endowed with the ability to do spiritual work for God! Christianity is not a spectator sport! Each of us can identify ways that we can do God's work.

The transformed disciple assesses his gift with humility!

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (Romans 12:3)

Paul wanted the Roman disciples to understand the importance of humility in the assessment of their gifts.

Paul did not want the Romans to think too little of God's endowment.

Such an attitude would cause them to be timid and uninvolved.

Paul did not want the Romans to think too highly of God's endowment, as if his gift was so all-important that others were not considered.

That humility comes through the recognition that the gift itself was based on an allotment of faith that came from God!

This intrigues me because we tend to think of faith as our own doing. This is our contribution to salvation. We are fond of speaking about "God's part in salvation" and "man's part in salvation" and such

*distinctions are valid. However, we need to remember that “our part” could not exist without God’s!
And that truth is important for recognizing that whatever we achieve for God is ultimately His doing!*

A transformed disciple puts his gift to work for God!

If it is important to assess our gifts as God’s doing, then it is also important that they become God’s doing, that is, that they are used and not just “hidden”.

From other texts we can see that it was possible for gifted people to allow their gift to become unused due to a lack of passion for God or fear of others.

And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (2 Tim. 1:6-7)

A transformed disciple exercises his gift with excellence and for the glory of God!

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8)

I’m intrigued by this conception. Paul wanted the Romans to understand that their spiritual work was product of God’s grace and not merely the product of their own natural endowments and efforts. It was not their talent being put to use for God, but God’s grace working through them!

Such an attitude has two profound results:

*Whatever we do for God will be marked by the quality of God’s favor!
If we give, it will be with liberality, the most we can give. If we show mercy, it will be with cheerfulness, with the most willingness! If we lead, with diligence, with the most effort! It will be the best we can give! It will be the most we can give!*

Whatever we do for God will be marked by the desire for His glory! If our spiritual work is about us and our self-glorification it is worthless. But if whatever we do we do for God, for His glory alone, then such work has the hallmarks of God’s grace upon it!

The transformed disciple give God his best and always for His glory!

Conclusion: Here is the first hallmark of the transformed life in our relationship to one another! Can people see that transformation in us? What has God done with you since the day you became a disciple? What are you doing now that demonstrates His work in you?