

The Good and Acceptable and Perfect Will of God

If you would please turn with me to Romans 12. We will look at verses 1 – 8, a very important section and very important verses. We want to focus on these this morning.

Romans 12:1-8

Romans 12:1-8, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace which has been given to me, to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise, as God has dealt to each a measure of faith. For, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; thus we, being many, are one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other. But having different gifts, according to the grace which has been given to us, whether it be prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or service, let us occupy ourselves in service; or he that teaches, in teaching; or he that exhorts, in exhortation; he that gives, in simplicity; he that leads, with diligence; he that shews mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Let us pray.

Lord, we are so grateful we have the Word. I often think about it and often pray about it. Where would we be without Your Word? And where would we be without Your Word made alive? So, we are asking You once again, as we consider these most important eight verses, that the Holy Spirit would make alive Your words, which are spirit and life. This we ask together in that only name, in that mighty name, in that precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Well, we will begin today looking at the third section of Romans. You all know this; I have told you enough times, but I like repetition. Some of you think it is dreadful, but I know others understand that with repetition, eventually it might stick. And that is my hope. I know repetition was an important thing for me.

Chapters 1-8: The Mighty Works of God

I will mention a few things as an introduction. We looked at a few things in chapters one through eight, we called it The Mighty Works of God. Now, if you do not understand the first part of Romans, you will never be saved. You will never grow in the Lord; you will never know the Lord. These are works of justification. We have a righteousness that is not our own—it is His righteousness. It is the way we can know God, and serve God, and come into His presence.

But those were not the only mighty works. The mighty works of sanctification—you know, you can be saved immediately, you can be justified immediately, but you cannot be sanctified immediately. When you look at those eight chapters, it is a sanctifying process where the Holy Spirit actually makes you into what He wants you to be, into the image of the Lord Jesus. Only the Holy Spirit can do this. And that is also true for what we will cover today. And then there is glorification. Aren't you so glad He did not leave us with just justifying us and just sanctifying us? But we shall be with Him forever and be glorified as sons of the living God. That is what He is looking for. How marvelous! We will even have a new body. Let me tell you, I appreciate that thought. As this body gets more decrepit and older, I cannot wait for that new body of resurrection. We got the biggest amen out of our dear brother. How we need that!

Chapters 9-11: The Untraceable Ways of God

And then chapters 9 through 11 are The Untraceable Ways of God. How past finding out are His ways? Who could have thought all that God would do? We see His way of salvation. We see His way of election. We see the mystery that was behind everything God did in the past, will do in the present, and will do for the future, which is the mystery of election. How wonderful! At the end of that, we discover we are all objects of mercy when you look at that last chapter 11.

Well, today we are moving on, beginning to look at chapters 12 through 16. These are The Divine Will of God. Not only works that He does, but mighty works. Not only ways, we begin to discover His ways and all that He is. But He has a will for every one of us individual Christians and the assembly of God. We need to know the will of God; it is absolutely important. These last five chapters, 12 to 16, deal with this matter of knowing the will of God, and this message today I have titled from the verse in there, The Good and Acceptable and Perfect Will of God.

Three Aspects of God's Singular Will

Now I will tell you a little story. As I think about that title, sometimes we think of this as three wills. I am willing to do the good will of God. What is the least that is acceptable to you, God? I will get by with that. But many of us think, oh, we will never get to the perfect will of God. This is one will, described in three ways. I am a little bit of a tinkerer, and I build things and love to build things. I can get lost in building. I do not build so well, but I still like to build. I was at Home Depot the other day, struggling over this weather stripping to go in the door. In the renovation I did downstairs, or that Brian mostly did - I got in Brian's way, and Brian did most of the work, but he let me tinker. That is all you have to do with me. I remember looking at these three different weather strips, and it said good, better, and best. It is a brilliant marketing campaign.

You know me; I went for the "best." It ended up not working too well. So, I said, "Brian, I have this problem. What do you do here?" Brian straightened me out, and I went back and got other weather stripping, the "better," and it worked fine. This will of God is good for us, do not ever forget that. We often think, "oh, the will of God, the will of God. It is so

hard for us. It is so difficult for us. We can never do the will of God.” The will of God is good for us, the will of God is acceptable to God, and the will of God is the perfect will. That is altogether one will.

Verse 1. First, we will look at God’s Will for the Individual. It is very important. Every Christian needs to understand God’s will, knowing the will of God.

Verses 2 and 3. The second thing is God’s Will in Transforming. Aha, here is the problem. This is where we get into trouble. It is a transforming process, and we will go into that.

Verses 4 – 8. Finally, God’s Will in the Body of Christ. God has a perfect will for His church, and we are part of it. We need to know our place in it, how to function in it, and how to live in it. So, we will look at those three things.

God’s Will for the Individual

First, God’s Will for the Individual. I think that verse 12:1 is an exceptionally comprehensive verse. Now, I think most of you know what comprehensive means. It means “full.” It cannot be any fuller; it is complete, it is whole. Everything you need to understand is right there in this comprehensive verse. It says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service.” This is the divine thought of man contained in this one verse. This is more than that. This is the response that God is looking for in those who are saved. More than that, this is the cause of that response, why we can respond to God and do His will.

And this is the single act God is looking for in you and me, to live in His perfect will. A single act, you may not think it is that clear, but it is. I like to make things simple. It seems these verses we have heard so often are quite simple. This section is often described as explaining consecration. I do not have any problems with that. Consecration, I think, in a way, is right. But you need to take it further than consecration. Because I think that when we look at consecration, we often think of it as what we do. And often, I do not want to offend anybody here, I am speaking for myself, it is a hard lesson to learn. Our consecration that is in our own power and in our own strength and according to our own will. We hope the Lord accepts us. That is one idea of consecration.

The Purpose of Our Time on Earth

This consecration in Romans 12:1 is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a lifelong process. Now, let me say something. I remember I do not need to be so thorough today because Brother Lenny has already shared on this. I did not know he was going to share on this, but thankfully he shared on this and paved the way. I appreciate that everyone will remember what he said. Brother Mac surprised me; I did not know he shared on this. I thought, well, there would be nothing for me to share, these brothers have shared everything.

But still, we want to look at this process, this process of being brought into this place of consecration. You know, it is not something we do in our own strength. We need to yield, we do. We need to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we do. We need to allow the Holy Spirit a free hand to do His work. But do not ever go past what it means. It means for the rest of your life, this is the process you are in—this process of consecration, or really this process of transforming. That is what this is, it is a lifelong process.

I told brothers and sisters this past weekend down in Austin, Texas, you wonder why God did not just save you and zap you up like Spock, “beam me up.” You wonder why God did not just do that. It would have been much easier for us than to leave us here on earth, to struggle and find our way and determine what His will is. But no, He left you here for as long as your life is. Some of us, it will be long; some of us will be short. But He is doing that transforming work so you know and prove— which literally means to prove in your lifetime—what is the good, the acceptable, and the perfect will of God.

Sometimes our consecration can get us in trouble because we consecrate and then we give up, right? I remember the brother who led me to the Lord, a dear man, Worth Johnson. The little Assemblies of God chapel in Richmond is still there on Park Avenue. I was saved on February 4, 1972. I know it is a long time ago, most of you were not yet born. Usually, when I say that, people come to me and say, “I was not born then.” I know it was sort of the Dark Ages for you, but you got it from me. But this man told me a story about the wrong kind of consecration. It was a living story. I never forgot it. He actually preached in Tennessee for many years. I said his name was Worth Johnson, not that you will remember that, but what a dear brother, a dear man of God.

And he knew Elvis Presley personally. Now, I am really in trouble because none of the young people say, “Who is Elvis Presley?” He was the king of rock and roll, as they say. And Brother Johnson told a story I had never heard before and have never heard from anybody else since. He said that Elvis Presley would come to many church services, and he would come down to the front, get at the altar, and consecrate himself over and over again. And he said he would come down and do it with tears. But maybe the problem was, it was only to the next consecration. It can never be us. Unless the Holy Spirit is allowed to do this work, it will never be done. But when He does this work, it will be done. Well, you get the point.

The Mercy of God

The first thing to make this happen is an appeal from the Apostle Paul, which is God’s heart cry to us, “I beseech you.” You notice he did not say, “I command you.” That is the way we look at the word of God, as a list of commands: “I tell you to do this and do not do that.” He never said that. At the end of these two marvelous sections of the book of Romans; after seeing the mighty works of God and after seeing the untraceable ways of God, it was an appeal to the heart. This is the only way. This is the only way you can become that living sacrifice. It means to ask someone urgently and fervently to do something, to implore them, to entreat them. In other words, it is something we cannot do. But it is a heart cry of God that we would yield to that indwelling Holy Spirit and that

He would do it in us. Griffith Thomas said, “this is the true spirit of all Christian teaching and exhortation; this pleading, exhorting, attitude.” Well, may the Lord help us.

I remember when Paul wrote to his dearly beloved brother in the Lord, Philemon. All of you know the book of Philemon. It is one of the shortest books in the Bible. And of course, Paul called on this dear brother Philemon that he loved, and he said, “I beseech you.” He implored him about his runaway slave. You know the story in verses 10 and 11, his slave who ran away and happened to go to Paul. Paul led him to the Lord while in his bonds. This guy was forever changed. He said, “I beseech thee for my son, the son of my bonds, Onesimus, who was unprofitable to you.” Think about that. Most of us are unprofitable to God. In our natural state there is no profit to God. He was picking from the bottom of the barrel. You get it, I think. But Paul said, “who is now profitable to you and to me.” How wonderful! This is what the work of the Holy Spirit does. It takes us from being this unprofitable one and makes us profitable through the Lord’s great work in us.

I like what Newell says about this beseeching, this appeal, this divine appeal. “It is not duty—that would be law—but it is a great drawing power.” How wonderful! You are not commanded; you are not told to do this and do that and do not do this and do not do that. God is appealing to you to come to Him. If you come to Him and yield to Him, He will do His work in you. It is His guarantee. Well, I think that is rather marvelous personally, I do not know if it hits you the same way. This is the divine motivation, God is pleading.

Another thing we see is what that drawing power is. First of all, you see that word “therefore.” I think a lot of commentators have said this over the years. We need to understand what the “therefore” is there for. Do you understand? I talk slowly enough anyway. I tell people they ought to be able to keep up with me. We need to understand what the “therefore” means. Paul is looking back over those first two sections of Romans, and he looks at everything from chapter one to eight and then nine to eleven, and he says, “therefore, by the mercies of God.” This is what the “therefore” is. He saw all the mighty works of God as the mercy of God. He saw justification as the mercy of God. He saw sanctification as the mercy of God. He saw glorification as the mercy of God. He saw the mystery of election as the mercy of God. He saw us in the end as objects of mercy, as the mercy of God. How wonderful! That is the “therefore.” It is by the mercies of God.

If you have not seen the mercies of God, you will never be a living sacrifice. You will never go through this transforming process. If the mercy of God has not captured you, if you are not caught by the mercies of God, you can never live the Christian life. It is impossible. But once you see the mercies of God, once you see it is all according to the mercies of God, you then can yield, you then can cooperate, and you then can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is marvelous. The whole secret, the whole key is wrapped up, “by the mercies of God,” that it is the old King James, right?

My version says, “by the compassions of God.” This is one of my weak moments. I will say I like the King James better, far better, “by the mercies of God.” But I will give a little defense. The Bible I use and the four literal English translations I use all say, “the compassions of God.” But most of the English versions, I think, say “the mercies of God.”

What a difference mercy makes. "Mercy there was great and grace was free. Pardon there was multiplied to me; there my burdened soul found liberty." Isn't that wonderful?

Mercy is the key. This is the drawing power. This is the secret that unlocks the door for being consecrated, for being transformed, for being a living sacrifice. How we need to understand the mercies of God. This is a divine calling, "I beseech you by the mercies of God," that make this possible. Oh, when you see it, you are never the same.

Being a Living Sacrifice

When you see it, the second thing you have is a response. God is looking for a response. Now, you know, I have told you this story before. When I went back to school, I got tired of engineering courses and took this class, which was The Aesthetics of Jazz. The Appreciation, it was, in the Aesthetics of Jazz. I did not learn much, but I still like jazz. I will never forget that professor. He did this thing from a keyboard and played jazz. He would explain, saying, "What you have to understand is that the whole beginning of jazz was based on this idea of call and response." That was the whole thing. It is like the old African tradition. I have told you this story before. These are the ones that Linda says are on the cut list for being told before. But all of the Bible is call and response. God is calling; He is beseeching; He is crying out to us, and He is saying, "it is all according to the mercies of God." Then He is looking for a specific response. Well, look at the rest of verse one, "To present your bodies as a living sacrifice."

Now that is kind of serious. I wish he had not said that. That is like Jerry in that message "All in." That is not half-hearted. You know, we like to think of people, Christians, who are not wholly following the Lord as having one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world, right? That is the way we look at it. This is a whole all-in response. Present yourselves a living sacrifice? I do not know about that. That seems too hard for me and for you, and it is. A living sacrifice. Are you willing to be a living sacrifice upon the altar, consumed for God? That is when a lot of people may say, "I am leaving."

Are you willing to be a living sacrifice? Let me tell you something. If you are willing to be a living sacrifice, you will never regret it. You will never regret it because you will discover more and more of the wonder of the Lord, the beauty of the Lord, the fragrance of the Lord. So, this is the one response God is looking for, "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." This is our calling. It goes back to the whole burnt offering. Notice the word, "whole." The Old Testament describes the whole burnt offering; not part, not a hand, not a toe, it is the whole burnt offering. The consecration offering, if you read the Bible, was consumed completely on the altar.

God is asking you to do something you can never do. And unless you see the mercies of God, you will never do it. This is the secret of this chapter. By the way this is the practical part. We have seen all the doctrine in chapters 1 through 8. We have seen all the ways of God in chapters 9 through 11. But now we get to the part that is the practice of living the Christian life. And, oh boy, that is so much harder than just understanding doctrine and

even seeing something of His ways. Well, this, I believe, is the call and the response that the Lord is looking for.

I remember an old story. It is a story of mine. I do not know if Linda will remember this. She probably will not remember this one. That is okay. It was about a guy who discovered what it was to be a living sacrifice. It is a story called The Old Indian Too. Have you ever heard that story? The Old Indian Too. Now, I do not mean like these brothers from Hyderabad and sisters. I am talking, Linda, about a Native American Indian.

And this Native American Indian, the Lord called him. He was touched; he was moved. He began to think of what he could give to God. He said, "I will give you my wampum." Now, none of you know what wampum is. Only when you watch those cowboy and Indian movies I grew up on in black and white. It was their money. It was the beads, the strings of beads, made from shells. It was their currency. He was willing to give up his currency, his money.

Yet he had no peace in his heart. That old Indian was still troubled. He had a better idea, like most of us do. He said, "I will give You my squaw." Now, that is not politically correct either. As a matter of fact, they say, I think now in Wikipedia, that is a racist term. You cannot say that. Forgive me for saying that if I have offended anyone. Squaw is a derogatory term. They used to call them squaws on Roy Rogers and all that when I watched it. But apparently, you cannot do that anymore. My bride, that cleans it up a little bit, right? You can all accept that, his bride

"I am willing to give You, my bride." The old Indian chief had no peace. No peace. He did not understand what it meant to be a living sacrifice. And then, all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit came upon him, and he realized, and in tears, broken down, this old Indian chief said, "Old Indian too." That was it. This is a living sacrifice. Are you willing to be that one? To present your body as a living sacrifice? That is what God is looking for.

It says in the King James Version, "it is your reasonable service." Do you think it is reasonable? I think most of them say, "Well, that is not any definition of reasonable." I know it says in the version I use, "it is your intelligent service." This is the smartest thing you can do. A lot of us boast about being smart. We get it, well, if you got it, you would be the first to be a living sacrifice. It is the intelligent thing to do. Because in Christ, everything is provided for life now, and life forever. It is the most intelligent thing you can do.

And of course, a lot of you like the NASB, and it says, "which is your spiritual service of worship." We like to come to a meeting and offer a few words, and then go home and live the way we want to live for the rest of our lives, all for ourselves. But being this living sacrifice is your spiritual service of worship. And this is only possible through the Holy Spirit. Romans 12:1 is a comprehensive verse, full of depth and meaning.

God's Will in Transforming

God's Will in Transforming is in Romans 12:2 and 3. It says, "And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace which has been given to me, to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise, as God has dealt to each a measure of faith."

This is such an important verse. It deals with how God actually transforms us. This is how the work is done, that impossible work. First, we are told not to be conformed to this world. Now, there are two groups of people that fall into this problem. There is the whole world, the unsaved world. They naturally fall into this. When we were unsaved, we lived according to our own lusts, and for ourselves. It is natural, the world falls into this. But the biggest concern for God is that many of His people fall into this category. We are conformed to this world. It means after the fashion of this world. You know, the world is in fashion. We live according to the fashion of this world. And we are not living sacrifices.

The Call to Transformation

The second option is to be transformed. Only two options. Do not think there are sixteen options and I can take option B or door three or door six or whatever. As a believer, you only have two options. And as a believer, you do not want the first one. You can be conformed to this world, it does not mean you are not saved. We believe once saved, always saved. We do not believe God takes away His salvation from us. If we have believed in the Lord, we shall be saved is the word. Thank God for that.

But if you look at Corinthians, I Corinthians 3:15, it says you might be barely saved, but as by fire, when the work—speaking of believers—is tried, whether you built upon that foundation of Christ with gold and silver and precious stones, or whether you built upon that foundation of Jesus Christ with wood, hay, and stubble. Now, wood is the nature of man. The Psalms talk about man being as a tree planted by the water. Straw—you can think of Exodus and making bricks. Straw is like grass. You remember James said we are like grass that burns and is gone. Stubble is the same, it is just cut stalks. If we build with those things, they are the nature of man, they are the wisdom of man, they are man's will. But if we build with those things, it will be tested. Not at the Great White Throne. We would never have to go through the Great White Throne once we believed in the Lord. At the end, we go through the judgment seat of Christ. And the judgment seat of Christ is described in Greek as the bema. It is where family gathers, and at His footstool, He will say, how did you build? What did you build with? And you will suffer loss, but you will be saved.

A Maturing Process – We'll Be Like Him

Well, maybe you get that this transforming process is a lifelong journey. It begins with new birth in Christ. You remember Jesus said to Nicodemus, the finest of Israel's sons, "You must be born again." But being born again is only the start of the process. It is a lifelong process that we need to experience every day. As a matter of fact, it is a maturing

process. That is why it says in Romans 8:19 that God is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. We are to grow up from being little children, or just children, as John says in I John 2, to young men and even to fathers.

This transforming process for you and for me is a maturing process. That is why God left you on this earth. It is to shape you, it is to mold you, it is to make you, and to conform you into the image of the Lord Jesus, as it says in Romans 8, and to transform you from what you were to what He wants you to be. This is God's will in transforming.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, the Corinthian believers were a mess. I used to tell people that when we thought we were something, years ago, we thought we were Ephesus. Then we discovered we were Corinth. It says of Corinth that they were fleshly and carnal people in I Corinthians 3:1. "And I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly; as to babes in Christ." We understand God's divine plan when we read Hebrews 2:10, where He is bringing many sons to glory. These are mature sons; these are grown-up sons. These are ones, as Lance used to often say, who can take over the family business.

I have been reading for the second time, "Destined for the Throne" by Paul Billheimer. I recommend that you read it, as he categorizes everything we go through in this life into one category: eternal on the job training. This training prepares us to reign with Him forever and, as he says, for the ultimate event. I love this; he says it is so that our Lord Jesus may have an eternal bride. That is what our training is for; that is what this transforming work is for. That is what He is doing in your life in this present hour—practical things. Now, as sons, we shall be like Him. You know, John said that. He said, "Now we are children, but one day we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is." How beautiful! That is marvelous. I cannot imagine what a hope we have. The transforming work done, we will be like Him.

The Renewing of the Mind

Well, we have already talked a little bit about these two options. You only have two choices, not three or four or six. You can be conformed to this world, or you can be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Now, do you notice when he says the renewing of your mind? I will tell you another story about this. When I was saved, I had a problem with my mind. Now, many of you might think I still have a problem with my mind. I do not mind if you think that, by the way. I remember as a young believer, loving the Lord, caught by the Lord. I went to Brother Stephen and I said, "Brother Kaung, I am not sure I am saved." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "These thoughts, these thoughts they attack me, they paralyze me, they make me fear. These thoughts that come into my mind." And he said, "You are a new creation." Oh, I was relieved to hear that. But he said, "You have an old mind." You understand? The mind needs to be renewed. It is part of the soul.

Brother Nee, we owe so much to Brother Nee who understood that tripart being. He understood the spirit, soul, and body; and the soul is the mind, will, and emotions. I will never forget, Brother Kaung did offer me some comfort because these thoughts would fly

over my head, rest in my brain, and I could not get rid of them, and I was paralyzed. I was saying, “The blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus. Take away this thing.” And he said, “even though the bird flies over your head, you do not have to let him roost in your hair.” Do you get it? Oh, it was liberty to me. I was a new creation with an old mind, and that was encouragement to me.

And then he began to share with me how to yield to the Holy Spirit. I even thought my personality was so wrong. I said, “Brother Kaung, I wish I did not have this personality.” He gave me great comfort. To your chagrin he said, “Your personality is the way God made you. Your personality is what you are, God will never change your personality.” I said, “Really?” He replied, “No, He does not want to change that. But what He does want to do is bring you under the control of the Holy Spirit.” That is what the renewing of the mind means.

Do you know that only the Apostle Paul in the New Testament speaks about renewing? He is the only one. Do not believe me, check it for yourself, he is the only one. It is so important, while you are in this lifetime, for your mind to be renewed, for your mind to be changed, for you to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. And then you will be delivered from those agonizing thoughts. It was liberty to me.

Well, I better stop telling stories or we are all in trouble. This is a long process. II Corinthians 3:18 says, “But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.” Do you see who is doing it? Do you see that we are gradually being transformed from glory to glory? Now I want to tell you something even more remarkable about this verse in Corinthians. This word “transformed” is the exact same word used in Matthew 17 about the transfiguration of Christ.

You remember, He came in His human body, God with us, Emmanuel. And yet that hidden glory was in that human body. That day, on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He took those three to the mount and they looked at Him, He was transfigured or transformed before them, and that glory shone out. What a glory it was! And of course, Moses and Elijah were there. Oh, Peter said, “Let us build three tabernacles. Of course, Lord, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” And God could not stand it. God could not tolerate it. He said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him.” There is no one else; it is only the Lord Jesus. Well, that same word, when I discovered it, brothers, and sisters; that same word about the Lord being transfigured or transformed before them in His presence is the same word in Greek for you and for me. That inner glory of Christ, so hidden in us most of our lives, during this process of transformation, will eventually come out in all of its glory, and only Christ will be seen.

The Metamorphosis Analogy

Lenny referred to this transforming process very well, better than I can do. The Greek word is “metamorphosis.” Now, you know this is the caterpillar to the butterfly deal, right? The caterpillar to the butterfly, this ugly caterpillar. If you do not mind me saying, we were

pretty ugly in the sight of God when we were not saved. Oh, caterpillars are ugly things. I get sort of antsy when I see a caterpillar.

And yet God's mind for this caterpillar, born as an egg and then a larva, a caterpillar—I will start calling you larva if you do not like being called a caterpillar—and then in this, what is it? Chrysalis? Is that the state? In this tomb? It is dying to self. That is what it is. This caterpillar disappears into this tomb and dies. And then all of a sudden, it is transformed into this remarkable glory, and a butterfly emerges.

The long part of that is in that cocoon. You are in that cocoon right now. You have to learn to die to self, rely upon the Lord, and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. But believe me, if you do, one day you will be transformed into this beautiful butterfly. I do not think there is anything as beautiful in the world as this beautiful butterfly. They are the most beautiful things. This is the transforming work.

Ingredients for Transformation: Grace, Faith, and Humility

Well, you are beginning to understand that. I thank God. But then how is this renewing possible? It still seems a little abstract. Most of us would say it is abstract. But there are two things he talks about in verse three: grace and faith. Look at it carefully. Verse 3 says, "For I say, through the grace which has been given to me." The problem is we underestimate the grace that has been given to us. It is amazing grace. According to Paul's learning, as he learned, it was a grace beyond anything, it superseded everything. You know, he even said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." He talks about how that grace was in him and transforming him. He also mentions, "And yet I labored more than any man." Think about that. Grace makes us what we are, but we have to labor with the Lord to transform us. But then he says the most wonderful thing at the end of that verse. He says, "But not me, but not me, but the grace that was in me." Isn't that beautiful? This is Paul's own testimony according to I Corinthians 15:10.

There is another thing it says at the end of verse three, it says we need to think soberly. But then it says, "God has dealt to each a measure of faith." So, two things are essential: grace, the grace of God that can change us, the amazing grace; and the measure of faith. Every man and woman who has believed in Christ Jesus has been given this grace and given this measure of faith. You know, what does it say in Ephesians 2:8, "For ye are saved by grace." What? "Through faith." And then it says something most remarkable: "and this not of yourselves; it is God's gift." This is what makes it possible. This is the one thing Paul attributed it to: an amazing grace and a measure of faith. And through these divine provisions, I can forever be transformed. This is marvelous!

The last vital ingredient is humility. Oh, this is a hard one. You know, we Christians like to act humble, but most of us are not so humble. When it gets down to you, press us to the wall, and you will quickly discover the mask of humility falls off. But he said, do not think of yourself as more than you should. Why could he say that? He just said it was grace. It was through faith. That is the only way. So why should we think we are anything. At the end, our only testimony about this transforming work is going to be grace brought me

through, faith brought me through, and that faith was a gift of God. That is why Paul, when he wrote his, I think, signature verse in Galatians 2:20, said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." I do not like the version that says, I live by faith in the Son of God. I understand why people do, but I do not like it if it is something given. What a difference it makes. Oh, may the Lord find ones like us that can be transformed.

I remember Brother Kaung saying to all of us brothers, "You know, humility is not thinking less of yourself." You go up and talk to a brother or sister, and say, 'Oh, I am nothing.' Do not say that. Or do not say that I did a good job, do not do that. Sometimes it is false humility. Brother Kaung said something I have never forgotten. He said, "It is not thinking of yourself at all." Isn't that beautiful? That is how we can be transformed.

God's Will in the Body of Christ

Well, I always tell you, my last point is a short point. I know I have tested your patience this morning, and you are wondering, will he ever get to those last verses? Are you agreeing?

Notice in the last verses, it is God's will for the body of Christ. You know, the individual is in verse one. But the majority of what the Apostle Paul wanted to share with us is being in the body of Christ. Brothers and sisters, during this life on earth, this short life, you need to find your place in the body of Christ. Because the perfect will of God is not just that individuals could be saved and transformed and become living sacrifices. The perfect will of God is that He would have a church. And one day that church will be so transformed, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, as it says in Ephesians 5, it will be presented to Him a glorious church without any of those blemishes. I cannot imagine being blemish-free. The older I get, the more blemishes I get. I went to my dermatologist and said, "Doc, I have this problem. I start growing things." He calls them barnacles. That made me feel worse. Barnacles, gnarly barnacles, get on a ship and cling to the hull underwater. You go down and look underwater on your boat, if you have not pulled it out lately, you may have a few barnacles on it.

Functioning of the Body of Christ

But thank God there is a transforming process that, if we come into the experience of the body of Christ, this is the perfect will of God. It is not just that you would be saved; it is not just that I would be saved and transformed. However glorious that is, that is part of it. But there are those who can somehow live without the church. I could not understand it, and Paul could not understand it. So, what he spent most of his time talking about was the church and what is made available to the church. The church is that vessel through which Christ will be expressed. I think those verses in Ephesians talk about the body of Christ being the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Isn't that amazing? I was trying to think maybe the translators got it wrong. Surely, they mean Christ. But no, they did not. The body of Christ is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This is that transforming process.

The Seven Gifts for the Edification of the Body of Christ

He ends with seven gifts. We read the gifts. I am just going to take five minutes and touch slightly on those seven gifts. I was saved in the charismatic movement; I have told you that before. And we thought that I Corinthians 12, those nine gifts, the gifts of the Spirit, if you did not have the gifts of the Spirit, these miraculous things, then you did not really know the Lord. And besides, if you did not speak in tongues, then you did not have the Holy Spirit. I no longer believe that. As a matter of fact, that is the reason I left the charismatic movement.

I met people that were the Lord's, and they were filled with the Spirit. You may speak in tongues. Good. Paul said, "I speak in tongues more than you all." But his emphasis in the end in I Corinthians 14 was the functioning of the body of Christ. And that is what Paul's emphasis is. It says in verse four, "For, as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office." Now, I do not like this version. I have done it twice. Do not expect me to go too far to say that. I like the versions that say functioning because that is better. It is clearer. I used to go to an office. I went to an office for 50 years. I saw enough of that office. Matter of fact, one of my partners said the other day, "would you like to come back part-time and work 40 hours?" I said to them, "Do you think 50 years was not enough?"

The church is not an office. It is a living, functioning, breathing body of Christ where the Lord is expressed in this organic thing. That is the reason we have been left here for you to discover your place in the church. I will just mention these seven gifts. I like the fact that it is seven, and they are different from the ones in I Corinthians. I like the fact that there are seven here. By the way, seven is a perfect number. It is like Paul is saying this is what you need to build up the body of Christ. This is what you need to function in the body of Christ.

The Gift of Prophecy

Prophecy. I will never forget something Brother Kaung told us. He said prophecy is not foretelling the future. Oh, I used to think it was. Thus, saith the Lord, you will grow, have sixteen children, and you will be rich, and you will get what you know. We had all kinds of prophecies, I remember. But it is forthtelling the mind of Christ. That is the secret. Oh, that gets back to being redeemed, being renewed by the renewing of your mind. How we need prophetic ministry. We need more prophetic ministry that tells us who Christ is, that tells us what Christ is like, that tells us about His fullness and His enabling. That is what Paul meant by prophecy.

The Gift of Service

Now you notice service is different. Service, we all can serve. You may not have a prophetic word, but you can serve in the house of God. The wonderful thing about the body of Christ is that everybody has a place of service. Let us serve. If you have not learned to serve in the body of Christ, you will not be transformed. But if you do, you will be wonderfully transformed.

The Gift of Teaching

He talks about teaching. Oh, we absolutely need sound teaching. We ought to pray for those who can teach us clearly. We ought to pray that the Lord would raise up such individuals so that we can understand and unfold the word of God. Teaching is of absolute importance. The body of Christ cannot function without teaching.

The Gift of Exhortation

Exhortation, I love this one. You know, every brother or sister can exhort. Isn't that beautiful? It is a living word. As a matter of fact, when Paul spoke about the functioning of the body of Christ in I Corinthians 14, he spoke about edifying the body of Christ, comforting the body of Christ, and exhorting the body of Christ. We need to be ones who can give a word in private or in public and among the saints, that is a living word of exhortation. It will transform the body of Christ. I think this is absolutely one of the most important gifts.

The Gift of Giving

And then there is giving. You know, we do not think of giving as a gift necessarily. All of us should give, but this is giving. Let me read that again. "But he who gives, let him do so in simplicity." You know, God loves a cheerful giver. We are usually hounded by people saying, "Have you given your offering this morning? Have you given your 10% this morning?" Brothers and sisters, that is the Old Testament. God loves a cheerful giver. It is what he revealed to the Corinthian Church II Corinthians 9:7.

The Gift of Leadership

He who leads, let him do so with diligence. We need leaders. We need to pray for the body of Christ that people will be raised up who can lead by the Spirit of God and lead us into the fullness of Christ and lead us into this transformation of being a babe to being a mature son of God.

The Gift of Mercy

And then the last one. This is so wonderful. It is mercy, one who shows mercy. Now, do you think that it is an accident that it is there last? I do not think it is an accident at all. I said already, Romans 11 ends with mercy. We are all objects of mercy. Romans 12 begins with, "by the mercies of God." And so, Paul's thought is on mercy, "show-ers" of mercy. That is what it literally means, those who show mercy. Now, this is one of the most important gifts in the whole of the church. And brothers and sisters, believe it or not, every one of us can show mercy. This is how the church is strengthened. I would love to sit up here and name some names, but they would be mad at me, and you would not forgive me. But there are people among us that I look at and say, "Boy, they show mercy." They are "show-ers" of mercy. It says with cheerfulness. It literally means, in the Greek, hilarity. They do it with such joy. They are not thinking about themselves, and they want to build up the body of Christ. And they are willing to be the those who show mercy, a gift

of God, not of human compassion. And they can transform the body of Christ. If all of these things are done, we will see the body of Christ manifest and expressed.

Let us pray.

Lord, we are so grateful for Your Word, even when we have difficulty expressing it. We are asking You by the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. Lord, cause us to be these living sacrifices. Cause us to be among that number in our lifetime. Open our eyes to see the mercies of God that will change us forever. Lord, we want You to do this. Only You can do this work. We want You to do the transforming work. Change us, Lord. We believe that is why we are still here. We want to cooperate. We want to yield. We want to submit. But we want You to be free to do Your work. And then, Lord, You came for Your church. Ephesians 5 says You loved it and gave Yourself for it. Oh, we are praying that we find our place in the body of Christ, that we find every gift made available to us, and that we would be built up a holy habitation for God in the Spirit. We are asking You to do this, Lord, for Your glory and for Your sake. And we ask all these things in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

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