

## **Community Functions Romans 12:1-13**

### **Intro**

Continuing our series on CG - small groups where we gather for prayer, fellowship, and mission. A community that is for the community.

We are a blood-bought community, disciples who seek to make disciples in community.

This morning we begin to drop down into our fellowship

How do we define the contours of our fellowship? We look to Jesus Christ.

### **Our Christian community must be a living reflection of the crucified Savior**

Not a pure exposition of Romans 12 - drawing out some principles - three defining marks of our fellowship: Sacrifice, Service, Shelter

#### **I. Sacrifice**

A. "I appeal to you by the mercies of God to present yourselves as a living sacrifice"

1. Before we talk about what we do - we must consider the mercies of God.

a) What are these mercies? Romans 1-11

**[23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:23-25a)**

**"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; [8] blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (Romans 4:7-8)**

**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)**

**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Romans 5:6-9)**

2. Oh how great are his mercies!

a) Jesus Christ willingly became our sin-bearing substitute, exhausting in himself the wrath of God in our stead.

b) Jesus is the great sacrifice for our sins

(1) In light of his sacrifice - we are exhorted to live our lives sacrificially - a "living sacrifice"

(2) Not to gain God's mercy - don't get it reversed - seeking to please him because of his mercy already extended to us in Christ.

**There is no greater incentive to holy living than a contemplation of the mercies of God. (John Stott in *The Message of Romans*, p 321)**

**Illustration:** In the OT - lamb brought to the altar - throat opened up - blood poured out - burned as a sacrifice - pleasing to God. We are living sacrifices - we open up our lives, our calendars, our wallets, our homes - all for the glory of the One from whom we have received infinitely great mercy

B. We often think of "living sacrifice" as personal holiness - fighting lust, anger, etc.

1. It is that - but Romans 12 helps us to see that it is far more than a privatized Christian experience.

a) Paul begins to spell out what it means to be a living sacrifice

(1) V. 2 "Do not be conformed to this world" - this age, the pattern of life that we see in this world.

(a) "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind" - the Word in the power of the Spirit changes the way we think about reality so that we know how to live in a way that's pleasing to God.

(2) V. 3 - God through Paul makes the move to talk about how we use the gifts God has given us to serve the church - "living sacrifice" has to do with how we live our lives in community - how we love others

(a) If we think our minds are being renewed but we don't think about people differently, than our renewal is deficient.

i) If I master lust, anger, and covetousness but don't have love - my godliness is a sham.

**By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)**

C. Application

1. Consider ways that we might be conforming to this present age

**Ex.** Modern suburbia - garage door goes up and down - often isolated from our neighbors in our fenced in yards. Sports, Movies, video games, iPhones, - good gifts - all can shut out other people - intentionally or unintentionally

2. How do the mercies of God, the cross of Christ reach into the way that you view other people, your time and resources?

3.

a) Romans 15 Christ did not please himself but sacrificed himself for us

b) His sacrifice orients us to give our lives to sacrifice

(1) Some pain - still struggle with the old man - Things have to die

4. Because of his sacrifice for us, self-sacrifice for others is a defining mark of biblical community.

5. Appeal to unbelievers

a) Would you consider Christ's sacrifice on the cross? Your sin was so great that nothing less than - his sacrifice is so great that all your sins can be washed away. He is risen from the

dead and he invites you into life.

Sacrifice is a defining mark of our fellowship because people who get the mercies of God live sacrificially - we are transformed to be more like Jesus **“The transformation of character is seen especially in our relationships with one another.” (Douglas Moo in NICNT: Romans, p 759)**. Christian transformation in light of the mercies of God in Christ, through the renewing of our mind by his Word through his Spirit leads to a life dedicated to serving others.

## II. Service

- A. Paul proceeds out from consideration of the mercies of God that leads to giving our lives over to God as living sacrifices and illustrates what the sacrificial life is all about - serving others
- B. But we don't leave the mercies of God and move on - we begin with a consideration of his mercies - we never stop our consideration. One commentator - “We never move on from the cross, only into a more profound understanding of the cross”

**But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)**

1. V. 6 “having gifts that differ...let us use them”

a) Examples of gifts - not exhaustive

- (1) Prophecy
- (2) Service - different than the general category that we all embrace - you know it when you see it
- (3) Teaching, Exhorting, Leading - with faith and zeal
- (4) Acts of mercy - all called to it - some have special grace – sweet

2. God has assigned each of us gifts to be used to serve others and build up the church.

- a) We are one body but our individuality is not abolished in Christ. The gifts that God has given us are heightened and sweetened through use in his church.
- b) God has so put together his church that our various gifts and personalities are used by him to establish a vibrant, healthy community.
- c) We need each other at Living Hope. We will need each others gifts to function in our Community Groups if we want to be a healthy biblical community.
- d) This serving one another in fellowship has the capacity to reach out beyond our community groups to reach our neighbors

**Illustration:** Talking with on CG leader who suggested inviting over his neighbors at the end of the meeting in order to pray for the CG to pray for them

- C. If you are a creative type, an artist, musician - You have a wonderful gift that can be used to serve the church and reach our communities
  - 1. Open mic - CG goes to support - connects with folks in the community

## D. Application

1. What are your gifts?
  - a) Maybe you know and you are functioning – grateful
  - b) Maybe you are on the sideline - If you don't know - ask folks around you - try serving in different areas and find out what you're good at.
2. We can tend to think that everyone else thinks like us - leads to frustration
3. The church is a unity of diversity - God has assigned our church to be full of variety in order that this church would be built up and our communities blessed with the love of Christ.

## III. Shelter

- A. V. 9-10 Love each with genuine, affectionate love
- B. V. 11 “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord”
  1. Doug Moo - “be set on fire by the Spirit”
  2. Our zeal for serving the Lord leads us to love others to care for others to serve others. Healthy, godly enthusiasm is appropriate.
- C. V. 13 “Contribute to the needs of the saints”
  1. God has designed his church to be a place of shelter for his people - we take care of each other's needs - physical and spiritual.

**And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45)**

2. We want our CGs to be a place of shelter - rest and refreshment - a place where we carry each other's burdens
3. Eating together in CGs - feed each other not only spiritually but physically

**May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, [6] that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7] Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:5-7)**

- D. Oh how Christ has welcomed us! So we welcome others into our lives and homes.
  1. Consider his welcome - we were filthy, pitiable, enemies - he came to seek and save us. “Once your enemy now seated at your table”
- E. V. 13 “seek to show hospitality”
  1. Certainly with each other
  2. Biblically - hospitality has very much to do with helping the stranger in need
    - a) We get the word hospital from hospitality - a shelter and help for the sick

- b) In our fellowship, in CGs, our homes become gospel way stations in the world where weary travelers find shelter - refreshment and refuge and burdened sinners find a Savior, find a home.

I love you, O LORD, my strength. [2] The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:1-2)

**Illustration:** The wood of the cross makes for us the only shelter for our souls - we invite others in

#### F. Application

1. Let us open our lives and our homes to each other and to our neighbors.
  - a) "Seek" to show hospitality - pursue it - look for ways to do it
  - b) My house is messy - people don't care about stuff as much as you thing - it is not the perfect house that will bless folks - it is the house where there is the aroma of Christ - and maybe a little Febreze
  - c) Three meals a week with other people - gathered with folks - celebrating God's good gifts - you can build a missional community on that
2. Welcoming unbelievers - different values - can get messy - we will learn to navigate together - embrace messiness with compassion, love, and grace. God will lead us by his Holy Spirit - he will preserve us as we obey his call to love our neighbors.

**Those who avoid the contamination of sinners are like the Pharisees. Those who earn the label "friend of sinners" are like their Savior. (Tim Chester in *A Meal With Jesus*, p 27)**

3. Our CGs are places of shelter for the sin-sick and the needy - for that is who our Savior is.

**Jesus has come for losers, people on the margins, people who've made a mess of their lives, people who are ordinary. Jesus has come for you (Tim Chester in *A Meal With Jesus*, p 30)**

#### Close

**Our Christian community must be a living reflection of the crucified Savior**

Sacrificial community - Christ Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for our souls

Serving community - Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many

Community of shelter - We have been welcomed by Jesus, once his enemy now seated at his table, anticipating the wedding supper of the Lamb. Extending grace, refuge, refreshment, shelter to those around us

These are defining marks of our CG fellowship because these things are a reflection of Jesus Christ.

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