

SABBATICAL CELEBRATION

Giving Thanks

ROMANS 12

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. **Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.** Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. **You'll be changed from the inside out.** Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, **God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.**

I'm speaking to you out of a deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. **The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.**

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. **Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around.** The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, **let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.**

If you preach, **just preach God's Message**, nothing else; if you help, **just help, don't take over**; if you teach, stick to your teaching; **if you give encouraging guidance, be careful** that you don't get bossy; **if you're put in charge, don't manipulate**; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and **be quick to respond**; if you work with the disadvantaged, **don't let yourself get irritated with them** or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. **Be good friends who love deeply**; practice playing second fiddle.

Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. **Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder**. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck up. **Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody**.

Don't hit back; **discover beauty in everyone**. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. **"I'll take care of it."**

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. **Your generosity will surprise him with goodness**. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

We have much to be thankful for as God's church. What good gifts are you thankful for in this sabbatical season?