

Boxing Day – Ready for a New Year

Thomas Robinson, *The Great Gift Exchange* 6, December 30, 2012

Romans 12:1-11

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies** as a **living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual worship**.

² **Do not be molded to the shape of this age**, but be **transformed** by the **renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may **discern what is the will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the **grace** given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to **think with sober judgment**, each according to the **measure of faith** that God has imparted.

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another.

⁶ **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us**, let us use them:

if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith;

⁷ if **service**, in our serving;

the one who **teaches**, in his teaching;

⁸ the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation;

the one who **contributes**, in generosity;

the one who **leads**, with zeal;

the one who **does acts of mercy**, with cheerfulness.

⁹ Let **love be genuine**. Abhor what is **evil**; hold fast to what is **good**. ¹⁰ **Love one another** with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in **showing honor**. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be **fervent in spirit**, **serve the Lord**.

Ephesians 4:4-8, 11-13

⁴ There is **one body** and **one Spirit** – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – ⁵ one **Lord**, one **faith**, one **baptism**, ⁶ one **God** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But **grace was given to each one** of us according to the measure of **Christ's gift**. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." [Ps 68:18] ...

¹¹ And **he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers**, ¹² to **equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ**, ¹³ until we all attain to the **unity of the faith** and of the **knowledge of the Son of God**, to mature **adulthood**, to the **measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴ But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**, ⁴⁵ so that you may be **children of your Father who is in heaven**. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

⁴⁸ **You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**"

Boxing Day? – What’s that?

The day after Christmas, a British/Canadian holiday. First of the 12 days of Christmas ending with Epiphany (Jan 6), Since the late 60's, the first day of Kwanzaa. Day to give a “box” to the needy. Big sales in stores. Day of returns. Box up those presents.

Great gift exchange: We have focused on Jesus as the inexpressible, surprising gift of God, embodying God’s heart – love. That gift creates a life of grace, generosity, gratitude.

Close the series and the year with a passage that expresses that vision: We give ourselves in response to God’s gift of himself in Jesus. We receive God’s own life in the Holy Spirit.

Giving Our Best Present

Paul starts from wide-spread temple worship (Jewish/pagan), bringing gifts/sacrifices to God – an animal offered. But God has given the only meaningful sacrifice. We present our best, our living selves/bodies. This is spiritual/reasonable (*logikos*) worship – from the center of who we are. Every part of our being. God delights in that whole individual.

This living gift is a whole life challenge. We are continually pushed and pressured to to the pattern of an ever evolving modern age. We’re shaped by pop culture, education, peer pressure, business advancement, music, models of success, etc. Always with the allure of the new. But it’s an old story. We want self-realization, individuality, but find ourselves cookie cutter imprints. Impossible to completely resist. We are in the world.

Metamorphosis into Something Really New

Transformation (*metamorphoun*) comes from something a modern age never tries. A Mind made new to discover the Creator’s will/purpose in giving each of us the gift/gifts of life. A mind that is open, searching, unintimidated, knowing that anything true is from God. That renewal of mind throbs in every sentence of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Learn to see differently, think differently. Things really are different from how our age tells us.

Our age tells us that God is a private opinion, a flight of personal fancy. Sober judgment leaves God out. But no truly sober judgment is possible without God, the center of all reality. Sober judgment means thinking with faith so that we see the heights and depths of our human existence, and take seriously God’s real involvement, God’s gifts.

A Community of Faith – God’s Gifts come to Life

The “body of Christ” is a community that seeks to receive that new mind embodied in Jesus. Sober judgment about our strengths and weaknesses, faith in God’s power, gifts, and love. People who have received God’s grace and want to let God’s gifts work in life. This is not individualistic, mystic fancy, but real community and love, serving others.

Use the gifts! Trust God. Try out his gifts in practice. See how they work. See what they mean. Experience how they satisfy. Learn how you grow to trust God more and more. Real community grows: genuine love, mutual honor, passionate life, fervent in Spirit.

Challenge yourself more and more. Testing, Discerning. Transforming. The aim is the mature fullness of Christ himself. Go back to Jesus’ teaching. Listen again: *You’ve heard it said, but I say to you...!* Jesus keeps working in us toward the day when his command and promise can be fulfilled, *You shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!*