

The Mindset of the Gospel Life

Romans 12:14-16

The book of Romans is about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel is all about Jesus Christ the Son of God (Romans 1:1-4) who became a man on earth to be the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins by willingly laying down His life on the cross. But the grave could not keep Him as three days later, He rose from the dead and is exalted at the right hand of God the Father. Now we proclaim this gospel, that we can be justified, made right with God, through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us and was raised again.

In chapters 1-11 Paul helped us to understand this gospel: that we need to be saved because we are all sinners and enemies of God (Romans 1-3); that we are saved by God's grace through faith by believing in Jesus Christ (Romans 4); that by faith we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection so that we could live the righteous life that Christ gives us (Romans 5-6); that although sin still dwells in our flesh we have victory over it by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (Romans 7-8); that God is working His predetermined plan to save all people who will believe in Jesus Christ (Romans 9-11); and that this is all for God's glory (Romans 11:36).

That is the gospel. **"It is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,"** (Romans 1:16). Now in chapter 12 Paul shows us that we are not only saved by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we also live by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Chapter 12 is not just a list of rules for ethical living, it is how we live the gospel life, a life of faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel life is lived by faith as we offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices. It is lived by faith as God renews our minds through His Spirit and His word. As God transforms the way we think, He changes how we live. Our mindset is changed. We see things differently; desires have changed; longings are for Christ and not the world.

That is why our lesson today is called, *The Mindset of the Gospel Life*. Our text is Romans 12:14-16:

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

At first glance these three verses seem to have little connection to each other. Verse 14 tells us how to deal with persecution, blessing not cursing. Verse 15 encourages us to sympathize with the feelings of others—to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Verse 16 is a command to humility. Steven Cole points out some helpful connecting factors between these three verses. First, each of these commands reflects a transformed mindset. They are all the result of the renewed mind. Look back at Romans 12:2. Paul said, **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** This new mindset is so different from the way the world thinks. It blesses enemies who persecute them, it sympathizes with others in their joys and sorrows and it demonstrates genuine humility.

The second connection between these three verses is that they all are rooted in selflessness. This new mindset is an attitude of self-denial. We can only bless our persecutors and not curse them if we are thinking more about their eternal welfare than about how we feel about our suffering. We can only rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep if our focus is off ourselves as we truly care about others. We can only be of the same mind with one another and not be haughty or wise in our own opinion if our eyes are on the Lord and others, not on ourselves. Selflessness is the thread that ties all three verses together.

1. The mindset of the gospel life is blessing, not cursing (12:14).

Paul states his point positively and negatively. **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”** This verse assumes that we will face persecution as believers. As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”** The reason people persecute Christians is that people hate God, and we represent God to them. Jesus said,

19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:19-21)

Persecution can come in many forms. The word persecute literally means to pursue, to chase after. In the North American setting, persecution may appear as opposition or being snubbed or being overlooked for a promotion or harassment or overt, hostile criticism. We've not seen much of the open, violent persecution common throughout the world. That's the other extreme of persecution. Hardly a week passes that I do not read a story of Christians being hunted down, run out of their homes, their homes and businesses destroyed, churches destroyed; believers or their children beaten, raped, maimed, and killed.

Paul tells us in verse 14 that the Christian should respond exactly the opposite from the way the world does. The world curses those who hurt them. Cursing is calling for harm to come to someone, like calling down a curse from God on him. Instead of cursing, we are to bless those who persecute us. Blessing means to express the desire for good to come to that person. We are to ask God to bless him with good.

Blessing and cursing are mutually exclusive; we can do one or the other but not both (James 3:9-10). We cannot seek blessing for someone and at the same time seek his harm. God is not content to allow the Christian to merely tolerate his persecutors. We must actively desire and seek to bless our adversaries. Jesus gave specific ways this should be done:

(Matthew 5:11-12) **11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great [is] your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

(Matthew 5:44) 44 **"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

(Luke 6:27-29, 35) 27 **"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 "To him who strikes you on the [one] cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold [your] tunic either. ... 35 "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.**

The reason we should seek to respond to persecution by blessing our persecutors is that we are seeking to reflect the character of Christ to them. We want God to be glorified as we reflect His grace and love to sinners.

A great help in obeying this command is to keep in mind that God was gracious to me when I was a sinner. He continues to be gracious to me when I sin, even as His child. And so I should be gracious to those in Satan's domain of darkness, who are slaves to sin. My blessing those who persecute me may be the startling behavior that opens them up to the Savior.

The mindset of the gospel says, "Because God was merciful to me when I was His enemy, I will bless those who hate me and wrong me."

Next,

2. The mindset of the gospel life is sympathy with others (12:15).

Romans 12:15, **"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."**

There could be a connection between verses 14 and 15 in that we are called to rejoice with and weep with those who are persecuting us. That does have a gospel-ring to it! Yet I don't think we are to limit it to that arena. Instead, this matter of empathizing is particularly more evident in our daily relationships. Paul's exhortation here is plain, simple, and clear. We are to sympathize and empathize with those who are rejoicing or those who are weeping.

We might immediately think that the first part of the verse is the easiest, to rejoice with those who rejoice. But really, it is often more difficult because of our natural tendency toward coveting, envy, and jealousy. Think of Joseph's brothers. Did they rejoice when their father gave him a beautiful, multi-colored coat? Were they happy when they heard his dream about his future success? No, They were jealous! They seethed! Out of their embittered spirit, they looked for an opportunity to do him harm.

Envy, pride, and a spirit of competition can keep us from rejoicing with those who rejoice. If you think that you deserved the success or blessings that they are enjoying, it takes selflessness and grace to truly rejoice with them. Self is always the major problem that we must battle.

If your friend celebrates a birthday, if he gets a promotion, if they have a baby, if their daughter graduates from high school, if their grandson scores two touchdowns, laugh with them, cheer with them, smile with them. Share their joy. Don't be a party pooper.

When those moments of victory come, share their joy. And don't mutter under your breath, "They don't deserve it." Of course they don't. None of us deserve any of the blessings we receive from the Lord. It's all of grace. But oh, how sad to go through life as a crotchety, mean-spirited grump who douses water on the happiness of others. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Weeping with those who weep means that we enter into their sorrows, hurts, pains, and trials. Instead of keeping others at arms' length, we engage, comfort, and seek to be a friend to those in trials.

A little girl lost a playmate in death. One day she told her parents that she had gone to comfort the grieving mother. "What did you say?" her parents asked. "Nothing," she replied. "I just climbed up on her lap and cried with her." She was a wise comforter!

Now, why is this important in the church? It goes back to verses 4-5, as Paul describes us as "**one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**" As Lloyd-Jones reminds us, "*We are not only delivered from self [by the gospel], we are also identified with others. . . . whatever happens to the other is really happening to you.*" Another's triumph is your triumph. Another's success in business or education or family is your success; another's sorrow is your sorrow. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:26 "**And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**"

The mindset of the gospel sympathizes with others both in joys and in sorrows.

3. The mindset of the gospel life is humility (12:16).

Romans 12:16: "**Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**" Paul keeps hammering this theme. As I pointed out preoccupation with ourselves, selfishness, keeps us from doing verses 14 and 15, blessing those who persecute us and sympathizing with others in joy and sorrow. Here in verse 16 we see the opposite of selfishness. Humility is the antidote for selfishness.

It starts in the way we think. "**Be of the same mind,**" implies a unity of thought: about the gospel, about living out the gospel, about common commitment to gospel work, about the church as the body of Christ. Paul is not insisting that we all think alike or agree on every issue, which isn't going to happen in this life. Rather, he is calling us to unity based on our common salvation, our shared purpose in the gospel, and our shared hope in Christ. Particularly, same-mindedness means that instead of self-preoccupation, self-infatuation, and self-exaltation, we join in Christ-preoccupation, Christ-infatuation, and Christ-exaltation (Piper).

And this will change the way we deal with other people. You see that in the next phrase of verse 16, "**Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.**" We can say it more directly. Don't be a snob! Don't think you are too good to hang out with people who are not in your social class. One translation says, "Make real friends with the poor." When you meet people who may be beneath your economic or educational level, reach out in love and make them feel accepted. Put yourself on the same level and relate graciously to them as you would want to be related to if you were in their shoes.

James writes,

(James 2:1-4) 1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory, with partiality. 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

"Do not be wise in your own opinion" comes from Proverbs 3:7, **"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil."**

Paul is warning us about pride in the way we think about ourselves. This was the sin that Adam and Eve fell to in the garden, when they thought that by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they could be like God (Gen. 3:5-6). It is the sin that Paul referred to in Romans 1, of those who "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." **"Professing to be wise, they became fools"** (1:22).

The mindset of the gospel is humility.

Now I could give you many examples that would illustrate this passage, but only one is needed. Jesus Christ demonstrated this gospel mindset all of His life on the earth and especially in His death on the cross.

(Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV) 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, [and] coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to [the point of] death, even the death of the cross.

(1 Peter 2:21-25 NKJV) 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed [Himself] to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The mindset of Jesus was humility, considering the needs of others before himself. Blessing those who nailed Him to the cross. Taking our sins upon Himself and giving His life on our behalf. Do you have the mind of Christ?