

ROMANS: CHARTER OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
"Part XVII: God's Way Of Church Blessings For AMERICANS"
(Romans 12:1-8)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address, a charter of sorts of our American ideology on government, states that our nation functions "**of the people, by the people and for the people.**"

Accordingly, many Americans have come to believe that the **way** to be **happy** or *fulfilled* is to focus on meeting our **own** needs, our **own** goals and our **own** welfares as citizens of the United States.

However, in **practice**, that can be an elusive goal: years ago at a convention an associate of mine once attended, the seminar speaker asked for questions from the audience pertaining to needs of the people back in their home churches. One lady spoke up saying, "My husband and I don't have a church home. We have been looking for over a year for a correct church home, and everywhere we have gone we haven't felt at home. Nothing has met our needs yet. Could you tell us how to find a church home where we could be happy?!"

The speaker, sensing their great pain, immediately led the whole audience in prayer for this couple. He stated that finding a comfortable church home if you are looking is a very hard thing to do!

Well, if America is a land OF the PEOPLE, BY the PEOPLE and FOR the PEOPLE, should we expect to focus on meeting OUR OWN NEEDS when in the Church to be blessed of God? IF so, WHY then does spiritual fulfillment often seem to be such an ELUSIVE goal this way?

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "As Americans, we see our country is the land OF, BY and FOR the PEOPLE' to recall Lincoln's Gettysburg Address! So, in the CHURCH, are we blessed in heeding what is OF, BY and FOR ourselves, or what the majority of its members want? Why?!"

- I. **When Paul wrote the Roman epistle, he addressed believers who, like we Americans, placed a high value on themselves as a people.**
 - A. Rome's believers, like we Americans today, enjoyed their national government's **world domination** and subsequent **security**:
 1. Paul's epistle to the Romans was penned in A. D. 57 or 58 during the Augustan Empire, Bible Knowledge Commentary, N.T., p. 436; The Cambridge Ancient History: Vol. X, Preface.
 2. Rome's might caused other Mediterranean nations to fear conflict with her, so they submitted to Rome in a forced, stable peace, *Ibid*.
 3. Rome's "peace" so appealed to Americans especially during Teddy Roosevelt's era that we saw our calling as the "'trustee of the civilization of the world,'" E. M. Burns, West. Civ., p. 244-245 in citing Burns, The American Idea of Mission, p. 206-210.
 - B. So, keeping with their **government's** power, Rome's **believers** as America's **believers**, would have been influenced to think they had a divine **right** to enjoy **political** or **military superiority** over other men! (See Romans 11:19 with 11:25 where Paul addresses such thinking!)
- II. **However, as we learned in Romans 1-11, ALL who are justified by God are saved by His UNMERITED favor, Romans 11:30-32.**
- III. **Hence, ALL believers are to think and act in the Church in view that their NEW life is GOD-CENTERED, 12:1-21:**
 - A. Just **opposite** the belief that he was **owed** God's special privileges due to his background, Paul's reader was **NOT** to be **man-centered**, but see his need to live life **sacrificially** for **God's** interests, Rom. 12:1.
 - B. This **God-centered** outlook, though running **counter** to the **cultural** viewpoint of Romans (or us Americans via application), was to be observed through the spiritual renewal of the mind, Romans 12:2a,b:
 1. Paul's call of "do not conform" is a summons for believers not to be pressed into the mold of the world's perspective, Romans 12:2:
 - a. The order to "be not conformed" (KJV) comes from the verb "to be molded," Arndt & Gingrich, Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N.T., p. 803. It implies the need to resist being pressed into a mold by an external force, to resist an outside-in' conformity to the world.
 - b. With the verb's present tense annexed to a subjunctive negation, Paul's call was to **stop** something **already** in progress, UBS Grk. N.T., p. 563; Dana & Mantey, Man. Gram. of the Grk. N.T., p. 301. These Romans were then conformed to the world.
 2. Rather, they were to be changed from the inside-out for **godliness**:

- a. To "be transformed" (KJV, NIV) is from the Greek word "*metamorphousthe*" from which we get "metamorphosis," the process by which a caterpillar is changed from the **inside-out** into a beautiful butterfly, Ibid., UBS Greek New Testament.
 - b. Thus, counter to the **world's** external pressure, Paul's readers were to depend upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to **think in God's** ways, and **live out** that *renewed* divine viewpoint, 12:2.
- C. Paul described this **godly** view as one yielding to **God-centeredness opposite** the **man-centered** view of the Roman (or American) culture:
1. **In place of man-centeredness**, Paul's reader was to view himself as **part** of Christ's **Church** who *owed God* a **contribution of service** via the **spiritual gifting** given unto him by **GOD**, 12: 3-5.
 2. He was to use that gift to do **exactly GOD'S** will -- **not** his nor any other man's -- unto **others** in the body, 12:6-8. [The "proportion of the faith" phrase in 12:6b means **not** to go **beyond nor** to do **less than** what *God* wants, cf. John Murray, Romans, p. 123.]
 3. Lest his reader **object** to Paul's call to minister **God's** will *instead of* what he or other humans willed, Paul exhorted these efforts be performed **generously, diligently** and **cheerfully**, 12:8b NIV.

Application: (1) *We must believe in Christ as Savior to escape Hell and be GIVEN eternal life by God's UNMERITED favor, John 3:16. (2) Then, by dependence on the indwelling Spirit, we must NOT adopt our culture's view that the will of the people rules, but see ourselves as DEBTORS to GOD: (a) this directs us to fit INTO the local church, doing God's exact will, not ours or man's, and (b) to do so generously, diligently and cheerfully!*

Lesson: *Contrary to our CULTURE, we who are saved by God's UNMERITED favor are obliged NOT to live for MAN-BASED ideals, be they our own or those of men around us, but for GOD'S will. THAT will includes (1) our HUMBLY viewing ourselves as PART of the body of Christ so that we (a) fit INTO the local church (b) and build up other believers with what spiritual gift God gave us to use to do His will in this process. We are also (2) to DO so generously, diligently and cheerfully!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Dr. Stephen Olford, a former pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church of Manhattan, used to tell an illustration of the time two lady missionary candidates had with each other while attending a certain missionary board's candidate school.

One of the women missionary appointees hailed from Wyoming and the other from New York City. These two young women, set to serve the Lord with the same mission, were assigned to room with one another at the missionary candidate school.

This assignment at first appeared to be a disaster in the making. The cultural differences between New York City and the open spaces of Wyoming proved to be a huge dividing wall between these two women..

Eventually, both of them asked the missionary leaders of the school for assignments with other roommates. However, these leaders noted that if they were to become missionaries in a cross-cultural context, they were going to have to learn to get along with one another as a training ground.

Seeing the point of the leaders, both women decided to make a "new" start in their relationship. They committed themselves to follow the Lord's leading in how they were supposed to relate, and trusted Him to develop a new, spiritually-united rapport between them.

In time, the Lord so worked in their hearts and actions that they became good friends. When they were both assigned to a particular field, they requested that they be allowed to be together on the same missionary station!

What made the difference? Both of these ladies shifted from trying to serve and please **themselves** to serve and please the **LORD** in **HOW they related toward one another!**

Fulfillment within the context of the local church for the believer comes from SACRIFICING his OWN interests and agenda for GOD'S, and then submitting to GOD'S will with fervency, dedication and a focus on meeting the needs of OTHER believers around him. It does NOT come from being man-centered, but from seeing ourselves as a "living sacrifice" unto the Lord in accord with Romans 12:1 promotes.