**The Gift of Gracious Living**

From the time God created mankind, He has showered us with gifts: Companionship, food, clothing, shelter. “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (James 1:17). In fact, before the foundation of the world, He devised a plan to offer the greatest gift of all: The sacrifice of His only Son to pay the ransom for our sins to make it possible for us to be eternally reconciled to Him!

But God has given us another powerful gift. He has taught us how to live joyful meaningful lives while we are here. Moses told the Israelites that God’s statutes were “for our good always” (Deuteronomy 6:24). Paul told Timothy that “godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). God’s precepts are not arbitrary restrictions and tasks, they are keys to the best life possible.

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12 that saints should value every member of the body as they considered the proper use of miraculous gifts in the first century church. In Romans 12, he makes a similar appeal to the value of every member, but in that text, the list of “gifts” he uses contain many that have nothing to do with miracles and everything to do with exercising gifts of gracious living. Prophecy was certainly miraculous, but consider the rest of the gifts. He admonishes the Romans to exercise service, teaching, exhortation, liberal giving, leadership and showing mercy!

Now scan the rest of chapter 12 and you will find a wonderful list of other keys to gracious living: Love without hypocrisy, brotherly love, deference to others, diligence, serving the Lord fervently. He includes joy, perseverance, prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints and hospitality and humility. He even emphasizes the importance of loving our enemies.

The greatest gift parents can give their children is to help shape them into loving, generous, humble, diligent adults who love the Lord with all their hearts. Those parents are presenting society with citizens who are a blessing to everyone they encounter. What a contrast to some who seem to leave a swath of pain and heartache and destruction wherever they go.

The good news is that God doesn’t care who your parents are. He is offering every single individual a life of grace and peace and joy and confidence, but you must allow Him to change you from the inside out. None of us determined where we came from, but it is up to every one of us to decide where we go from here.

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