

Romans 12:3-5 "In Christ, We Who Are Many Form One Body"

Romans 12:3-5 ³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Keep in mind that Paul has started this portion of his letter with the exhortation to worship God and to present our lives, our bodies, to Him as a living sacrifice.

He goes on to say how we can continue to grow in our relationship with Him as we move further and further away from the old man or the flesh, and move closer and closer to what is most important; the things of God which feed the new man or new creation we are in Christ.

That transformation, as Paul touches on in verse two, takes place as the Holy Spirit takes His word with which we feed the mind and He causes it to touch the heart, and in turn enables us to understand what the will of God is and therefore to walk in it in the power of the Spirit of God.

But, there's always that temptation, if we're not keeping a proper biblical view of our salvation, to see ourselves as being something special in and of ourselves. In other words, we can forget from whence we came and begin to view ourselves as people who are above others and we treat the world as a second class group.

This danger has played itself out as some in the church have assumed a self-righteousness which we might call a "holier-than-thou" attitude. And with that attitude comes an unbiblical separation from people in the world.

By that I mean, we don't dispose ourselves to unbelievers to help them see Christ. It's true that the company you keep will affect your life, but the Scriptures don't command us to forsake the people in this world.

The scriptures command us not to become like the world and pursue the things of this world. But until Christ takes us out of the

world we are commanded to go to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To disassociate ourselves from that harvest field is to miss the point of Christ's great commission to go out and make disciples of the world. Jesus Christ Himself went to sinners without promoting or involving Himself in their sin.

Prostitutes, gamblers, drunkards, adulterers, and the like, all came into personal contact with the Son of God. But Christ commanded them to come into fellowship with the living God as they forsook the very thing which cut off that relationship; sin, and embrace the One who took the penalty of sin for His people.

No unrighteousness can enter into the presence of God, and no self-righteousness can either. Only the righteousness of Christ put to our account by faith. All of us fall into that category of being in need of a Savior. And even after we've been given Christ's righteousness we should never think that we're better than other people.

Paul speaks of such a haughty attitude. In fact, in this very letter in two places, he addresses this.

Rom 11:19-20 "You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid."

Rom 12:16 "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

The church is not a country club where Christians can get away from the people of the world. The church is a refuge where we invite others to come and find life in Christ as we worship our great God and Savior. This does not mean that we become undercover Christians participating in the deeds of darkness to fit in with and identify with the world to entice them to Christ.

Jesus was very up front with the lost. His message was, 'Repent and believe in Me and receive forgiveness and the hope of eternal life.' We don't need to fear a negative response from people who might reject such a message, we need to fear God and love Him enough to be His witnesses in this world; not forsaking the lost because we think we're above them, but to love them knowing that

we could still be lost ourselves had it not been for the grace of God.

This is what Paul meant in our text when he said in Rom 12:3 "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Paul says, 'I give you this message, because it was given to me by God, and I received it by grace. I didn't deserve it, I didn't earn it and neither did you. So approach the throne of God with thankfulness and sober judgment. And rejoice that even the faith you have in Christ was a faith that was given to you by God as He has given you a measure of faith with the express purpose of exercising that faith in the Body of Christ.'

Two quick things about this idea of "the measure of faith" in verse 3.

1) Faith in the context here is not primarily speaking of having a faith in receiving Christ, in other words a saving faith. That is assumed and understood. Faith here is referring to the faith which God gives us to be a servant of God.

You see, even our service to God must be done by faith. Because only by faith can we please God and only by faith can we walk and exercise our gifts in the Body of Christ.

2) There is a false notion that this "measure of faith" is given to the world at large and they only have to put that faith to work so that they may believe. In other words, every lost person in the world has the potential, in himself, to come to Christ, because this gift or measure of faith is there just waiting to be used.

That's not the case. First, we must understand that, according to the word of God, we are by nature dead in our trespasses and sins. We are by nature children of wrath. That means we have no ability to seek God on our own. That's what Paul meant when he wrote in Rom 3:10-12 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." [Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20]

Having a measure of faith which is distributed to the world-at-large is not what Paul means here. Remember who he's speaking to and

what the context is. He's speaking to Christians in Rome and he's about to tell them how that faith is meant to be used to encourage other Christians.

Another quick side note. Some Christians might complain or become jealous because they feel that their measure of faith is smaller than someone else's. Though we're told that there is a gift of faith in 1Co.12:9, which suggests that it's a greater measure from God, we are also told that every believer's faith has the ability in Christ to grow.

2Th 1:3 "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing."

But again someone might argue. But my faith is so small, how can I ever walk in that faith as I ought? Well, I can answer that with these two thoughts.

- 1) The faith God has given you to believe and walk after Him is infinitely more than you had previously in your lost state.
- 2) Even, what we might refer to as a small measure of faith is more than enough to trust God and accomplish His will to His honor and glory. That's why Jesus could say in Luk 17:6 "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

Jesus' point here was not that we seek a ministry of casting mulberry bushes into the sea. His point was that the faith He gives us, whatever measure, even as small as a mustard seed, can and will be more than enough to accomplish the task He gives us in this world to honor Him.

And so Paul continues as he encourages the believers in Rome to seek the privilege of being Christ's servants as we exercise that faith; not with the idea of puffing ourselves up or thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, but realizing that wherever Christ puts us and decides to use us we should be humbled and desirous of just wanting to please Him wherever we are.

Rom 12:4-5 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Two words need to jump out at us as we come to this portion of God's word. ONE and MANY. Paul started this part of his letter with the notion that our individual bodies should be dedicated to honoring God.

Now Paul takes the concept of the body and brings it into the sphere of Christ's church. Your individual body is to be a living sacrifice, and in a sense the individual members which make up the Body of Christ are to be consecrated to God to the extent that the many which make up the whole is seen as consecrated.

In other words, the church as a whole should be seen as a consecrated living organism which goes where the Head takes it. The Head being Christ.

The reality is that the "Church" is often seen as something less than consecrated. The temptation then is to disconnect ourselves from the Body and try to live as a living organism separated from the Body.

Now it's true that there are individual churches that do not consecrate themselves to Christ, and in those cases we may seek out a church which does. But never does Christ ask us to seek to serve Him apart from the Body He formed.

Of course the argument from some goes: 'We all make up the Body and as part of the Body, wherever I am, I am the Body and therefore if I decide to be out on my own, not connected to an organized church, I'm still part of the Body and functioning as the Body.'

We're going to see that Paul and the word of God would not agree with that position. Keep in mind too that whenever the word of God addresses the church, or the Body of Christ, it's always in the context of individual local churches.

True, the word of God identifies the church as being universal, being everywhere in this world, but even in this letter, Paul is addressing the church at Rome, or when writing to the Ephesian church or the Corinthian church, or any other church of any city, it's referring to a local body.

When Christ wrote to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, He specifically identifies individual local churches. And yet, the truths given to those local bodies are meant to be instructive to the church worldwide.

And so, when Paul addresses this church at Rome he is instructing them that though they make up a whole Body for Christ in Rome, it is still made up of individuals who are meant to work together as one Body.

He does not encourage them to separate out of that Body unless it's to go out from that Body (ie. as a missionary) to bring others into the Kingdom of God through Christ. And yet, even in that situation they would be instructed to come under the authority of the Body from which they were sent out. And then, if Christ called them, to form another local Body in which individuals could be a part.

And what Paul is about to do is to demonstrate why Christ has formed the Body to function in that capacity.

Rom 12:4-5 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

A physical body, your body, is made up of many members. You have arms and legs and organs that are designed by God to work in conjunction with each other. They cannot work if they are disconnected.

Your gall bladder works best when it remains attached. Your arm functions as an arm only while it's attached to your shoulder. To suggest that an arm is a functioning member of the body if it's unattached is to miss the point of how a body works.

The picture of the body here that Paul paints is not meant to be an exact representation of the facts. This is known as a simile. For you English majors you know that's a comparison between two different things using the words like, as, so is, just as. And so the body of Christ is like the physical body in certain respects. But it's not a one-to-one correspondence.

And what Paul wants us to understand is that we are united to each other in this particular body, for example, even though we're not all attached at the hip.

But we're part of a particular body with the express purpose of functioning as one unit, even though we're many. Though we may not be physically attached to one another, we are spiritually attached because Christ is the one who has attached us to one another.

Those who identify themselves with Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte do so because this is where Jesus Himself wants an individual member to grow and be part of the Body to help this particular Body grow and stay healthy so that we may be effective servants for our Lord.

You as an individual member, or part, are vital to the spiritual health of this Body, and in turn the other members, or parts, are vital to you so that you can continue to grow as Christ wants you to grow.

I've known people over the years who have separated themselves from the Body for a variety of reasons. And though most of those people would testify that they've grown in their relationship to Christ they can never grow as God designed spiritual growth, being separated from the Body, any more than my hand can grow severed from my wrist.

Again, please understand that this analogy that Paul uses to the Body is not an exact representation. And so, for example, God may use a severing to cause growth. Joseph was severed from his family to be taken captive into Egypt.

Many Jews were severed from Jerusalem in the first century after believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and scattered throughout the regions of Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world.

And there are many other examples where that kind of severing was designed by God, but in those cases they were always meant to reunite the body not to have it continue to be dismembered.

Joseph was reunited to his family in Egypt and the nation of Israel came out of that situation. The Christian Jews who were scattered in the first century formed many individual local bodies and were used as foundations where the gospel was taken out to the rest of the world.

In contrast, where the individual takes it upon himself to sever himself from God's designed plan, we see that God will always point that one back to the original design which God intended. Jonah comes to mind, the rebellious nation of Israel comes to mind and even Paul who had a mind of his own at times, was shown that moving in a direction other than God's was not right and he was directed back to the plan God originally intended.

On one occasion Paul wanted to go into Asia and preach the gospel; something which we would all agree is a good thing. But

the Holy Spirit had something else in mind and so He told Paul not to go into Asia at that time but rather go over to Macedonia.

The point is that when God has given the direction of His will then we must not assume that we can divert our paths to go in a direction contrary to His will.

In this case God says the Body is where individual members must be attached and that Body finds its expression in local churches. Some churches will obviously be better than others just from the standpoint that some seek to serve God uncompromisingly while others may not.

We see this in the seven churches Jesus addresses in Revelation. But we must never use the excuse that simply because a particular church is not moving in a biblical direction that I must permanently detach myself from the Body of Christ. Find another church where the Body is healthy or at least in a state of becoming healthy.

If someone finds a church where its health is 100%, 100% of the time I'd like to see it. No church like that exists because people make up the church. And people are sinners. Even though saved by grace people are still prone to sin.

And that's one of the reasons Christ designed His church to be a Body where we're attached to one another, so that we can encourage one another to grow in grace and His strength so the Body will always be growing stronger. But, that will never happen if we're all separated, doing our own thing.

Now in verses 6-8 Paul begins to shed some light on how individual members who make up this Body are designed by Christ to help the church grow.

Rom 12:6-8 "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Paul reveals a great truth here. Not everyone has every gift. And not everyone has the same gifts. Now he equates different gifts to those different parts of the Body.

And since gifts are given to people, different people must be attached to the body using the gifts God has given. By the way, this list of gifts is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather Paul's point is to show how the diversity of gifts distributed among all the members are designed to serve the whole.

There are other areas where Paul lists certain gifts.

1Co 12:4-12 "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. 12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."

Eph 4:11-16 where Paul is speaking of Jesus Christ... "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

When individual members are growing and the Body is functioning properly then that Body will be effective in reaching out to the lost to bring them in to the Kingdom of Christ and start that process whereby they are now able to grow and become responsible functioning members of Christ's Body to His glory.

The only part of this equation which is perfect is the Head of the Body. The members serving the Head, our Lord and Master, are always in the process of growing in sanctification. Our perfection will only come in glory. Some people expect to see that glory in the Body today and they will always be disappointed.

We should seek a Body which is sold out for Christ and my prayer is that this Body is always moving in that direction. We should not accept sick members of the body as being the norm. And by sick I mean figuratively, sin which is tolerated in the Body. One part of the Body will affect the other parts. We must always be striving to help the other parts of the Body with the gifts Christ has given us so that we may all be built up together.

Paul said in Eph 2:22 "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

What I want to do next week is to go over some of these gifts that Paul mentions in Romans and explain what they are and how they're used in the Body of Christ today.

But let me leave you with this. Whatever part we play in the Body it is meant to unify the Body. But even that is not an end in itself. To be one in Christ and serving Christ in that unity is designed to show the world that it is Christ who is the Head and that all men are called to come under the Headship of our Creator to love and serve Him forever in a relationship which starts today.

Jesus' prayer, before He left this world, includes you and me. Here was His prayer to the Father.

Joh 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

The Body of Christ, with its many members, has the function of lifting up the name of Christ to the world. That begins as we become living sacrifices which is our reasonable service of worship.

His grace, His strength, His love, His Son. We are all united to God by faith in Christ and we will all be able to grow together as we submit to Him in the unity of the Spirit according to His word.

Many members, one body. May this Body which Christ has formed honor Him and be presented to Him blameless at His coming.

That was Paul's prayer for you and me. I'll end with that.

1Th 5:23-24 "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."