

Reasonable Thoughts. Romans 12:3-8

Remember the Merv Griffin Show? (for you younger adults, he was the 60's version of Konan) One day, Merv had a body builder on the show. He came out and sat down wearing little more than body oil, a Speedo, and a smile. During the interview, Merv asked, "Why do you develop those particular muscles?"

- The body builder simply stepped forward and flexed the muscles of his chest his arms, his legs... even his calves. The audience applauded. And he sat back down.
- "And what do you use all those muscles for?" Merv asked.
- Again, the guy got up and flexed his biceps and triceps. The audience again applauds, and he again sits down.
- "But what do you USE those muscles for?" Merv persisted.
- The body builder looked at Griffin and said nothing. He just had this bewildered look on his face. He didn't have an answer.

Here in Romans 12, Paul is saying that we also are body builders, with the specific purpose of using our muscles to build up both ourselves and one another within the BODY of Christ.

In other words the church is not just a collection of people rattling around inside a building. Spiritually, we are ONE BODY (the Church, the Body of Christ here on this Earth). In a very real way – by the Holy Spirit that dwells within each of us – we have been knit together, into one unity, to serve God by serving each other. We now belong to Christ and – surprise!- we belong to each other. And just as every individual part in our physical body needs to work together with all the other parts, both for its own and the entire body's health, so also we need to work with and for each other using our various gifts/abilities to serve each other so that the church, the body of Christ, functions properly.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Let's back up and get a running start at this thought.

Remember 2-weeks ago, we began reading through Romans 12 (*and I do hope that you are going home and reading not just each week's few verses, but these entire chapters, 12-15, again and again, letting their instructions settle deep into your hearts. Because these are the application portions of Paul's greatest letter and he has much to share with you*). We started the just the first two verses, which is Paul's summary application to the entire book. Here again is my paraphrase of the first verse.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters,
because of all God has given to you,
I plead with you to give yourself
completely back to Him, living the
holy life that He wants you to live.
This is your only reasonable way
to serve God. Romans 12:1 (*paraphrased*)

And what you especially need to remember from this portion of scripture is that “**living the holy life that God wants us to live**” is the only **logical** response that we can give back to God, in view of all that He has done for us.

Then in verse two, Paul summarizes the process by which we begin to live that holy life...

living a holy life – that honors God
by refusing to be squeezed into the world’s mold,
but being transformed
by renewing of your mind.

Romans 12:2

Now here is the most important thing you need to notice about today’s portion of scripture, verses 3-8 in comparison to these first two verses:

- Immediately after telling us that the only logical thing we can do is live our lives honoring God,
- and then telling us the process by which we begin to live that God honoring life, ,
- Paul next starts talking about each of us being a vital and gifted participant in the life of the church, both a needy and needed member in the body of Christ.

Don’t miss the connection between these thoughts. Paul is saying **the only way we can live for God is by being an active member of a church! You and I need each other and every other member in the church to help you and me be holy!** Think about this for a moment.

In other words, I cannot live a holy life; I cannot be fully transformed or renew my mind without the active help of other believers.

- I cannot really understand what scripture teaches apart from dialog with other believers who are reading the same scripture.
- I cannot live the life of a disciple apart from a community of believers who encourage me, pray for me, and set an example for me,
- I cannot see the blind spots in my obedience to Christ without the aid of other believers to gently point them out to me; to lovingly offer correction and restoration. (Application Commentary: Romans. Pg 407)

Hilary Clinton famously pointed out *that it takes a village to raise a child*. The Apostle Paul is saying that **it takes a church to raise a Christian**. This is why Paul connected our **holy living** together with the Church’s **body life** using this caution in verse 3 to bridge these two ideasbecause we just cannot do the Christian life alone:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you ...

Do not think of yourself
more highly than you ought,
but think [of yourself] with sober judgment,
each according to the measure of faith
that God has assigned (verse 3)

Now we know that Paul was writing to Roman Christians in the first century, but his caution to them is even more applicable to us living in 20th century America where the western individualist tradition has reached its ultimate expression. The mold that culture is attempting to squeeze everyone into is the "ME" mold (basically self-idolatry). Everything focuses around me and what I want: my home, my things, my values, my rules, and my goals. **We are a generation of Lone Rangers. So it is not surprising that many Christians think they can live out their faith the same way.** Paul is saying: *don't fool yourself, take a hard look at your life and know that you need other's help to be transformed and renewed.* As the Blues Brothers sang: *Everybody needs somebody. And I need you, you, you. Everybody, Everybody!*

I am amazed at the number of people who claim to be Christian but who do not bother to be a part of any Church. Here is Paul's reply to that mindset

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

Romans 12:4-5

As Paul explained to the Corinthian Church: *You are not your own. for you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In that verse Paul was only referring to your individual body living a holy life. But Paul often uses this word "body" interchangeably and inclusively, as he does here in Romans, to refer to your individual body, the Church's corporate body, and Christ's spiritual body all at the same time!

As I stand here and you sit there, we are members of four different bodies: my body, the church's corporate body, the spiritually formed body of Christ, and your body. As another song names this truth: *I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.*

Now here is a second important lesson not to miss (*this might even blow your mind*). Perhaps you didn't even notice that I just said every Christian is spiritually connected with four different bodies at the same time: your own body, the church's corporate body, Christ's spiritual body and MY BODY! That is what Paul meant by writing that **individually we are members one of another.** In other words as a member of the body of Christ, I have a very real connection with, responsibility towards, and need for

each one of you individually, just as you need me the same way, and every other individual member of this church the same way.

How can I make this even clearer to you? In order to grow and stay spiritually healthy each one of us needs to be connected with and supported by each other one of us both individually as well as corporately. Paul wrote this same instruction to the Corinthian Church, but since they seemed a bit slower on the uptake, he added this further explanation ...

If one member suffers,
all suffer together with it;
if one member is honored,
all rejoice together with it.
1 Corinthians 12:26

The three Musketeers may have coined the phrase: but **one for all and all for one** – is a spiritual reality and necessary relationship that we have with each other within the body of Christ. So how does this change your attitude towards that other Church member that you are having such a hard time getting along with? **We need both to serve and be served by each other in order to grow up in Christ.**

This is also why “television church” is not really church. Even though thousands of people around the country may listen to the same sermon, there is no interconnected responsibility and mutuality – there is no “body life,” that each and every Christian needs to be a part of in order to be transformed, renewed, and to live a holy life. If you are homebound a televised service may be comforting, but it is not really a substitute for being an active and cared for member of a community. And that is why every month we contact and go out to visit our shut-in members of this Church, so they continue to be connected to the larger group.

This then is your main take home for today. If you don’t learn anything else today, remember this.

- Look at the person beside you and say and say to each other: ***you need me and I need you ... to be holy.***
- Now turn to the person on your other side and say to each other: ***you need me and I need you ... to be holy.***

Having gotten that thought solidly in our minds, now let’s look at some of the special gifts God has given to each one of us so that we can help each other be holy.

In his various letters, Paul wrote out four slightly different lists of “gifts,” according to the topic he is currently discussing (c.f. 1 Cor. 12:7-10 & 28, Eph. 4:11). The list here in Romans, is specifically of those gifts that we as individuals have been given to serve each other within the Church (remember: *one for all and all for one*).

Not all members have the same function ...

We have gifts that differ

according **to the grace** given to us: Romans 12:5

First, you should notice that both of these words “**grace**” and “**gift**” come from the same Greek root for the word “**charismatic**.” And I know that the word “charismatic” gives some Presbyterians a cold shudder. We hear that word and we think of overly emotional people fainting, speaking in tongues, and doing other strange stuff; which is just a bad stereotype of how some people may abuse God’s gifts.

But the word “charismatic” means to be “given a gift,” which each one of us has been given by God’s Holy Spirit, who resides within us, connecting us back to God and connecting us to each other in the body of Christ. The Spirit knows my needs as well as every other member’s needs within a church and thus doles out spiritually empowered abilities to each so that we may serve the others within this body of Christ.

Thus Paul’s caution that we should not get an inflated opinion of our individual abilities, but each one of us should carefully consider how we may serve God by serving the body of Christ; both according to our current level of faith [or maturity] and according to the gifted ability we have been given – just for this purpose – of serving the body of Christ.

Apostleship

Prophecy (*in accordance with the faith*)

ministry

teaching

encouraging

Generosity

leadership

compassion

Romans 12:6-8

Paul’s gift was “**apostleship**” – he was a “sent one” to share and be a witness to the truth of the Gospel. It is not on this list, but he referred to it when he said, *by the **grace** given to me*

And I am standing here “**prophesying**” to you --- not in predicting the future, but by opening up the Scriptures to you, explaining, and helping you apply God’s word to your life. Notice that this gift also comes with a specific requirement. Your Bible may read that I should only *prophecy in proportion to my faith*, but I think a better translation would be that I should *prophecy in accordance with the faith*. In other words, what I tell you God’s Word says, had better be what it is saying, rather than me leading you astray with my own ideas. But how will you know this unless you are also studying the Bible for yourself.

Deacons, pay attention, this next gift of **ministry** is your gift. It is the ability and desire to “serve”, to minister to the individual material needs of your fellow church members. Whether it is visiting shut-ins or replacing another’s rotten back door. While we should all be serving each other. Those who have the gift of ministry just can joyfully do so with a lot more people.

Like the woman who telephoned her friend to ask how she was feeling.

"Terrible," came the reply "my head's splitting and my back and legs are killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are simply driving me crazy."

The caller said, *"Listen, just go and lie down, I'll come over right away and cook lunch for you, clean up the house, and take care of the children while you get some rest. And then I'll fix dinner for Sam when he gets home from work."*

"Sam?" the complaining housewife replied. *"My husband's not Sam."*

"Oh dear me, I must have dialed the wrong number." exclaimed the first woman

There was a long pause then... *"Does that mean you're not coming over?"*

We could all use a bit more Ministry in our lives.

And after ministry comes **teaching** – passing along the lessons of our faith. All about Noah and Moses and Eutychus – and why you should not fall asleep during the sermon especially if you are sitting in a high place (Acts 20:9-10). Teachers: thank you.

Next comes **encouraging** – your Bible may say “**exhorting**.” This is that person that always has a kind word for you. That person who can pick you up when you’re feeling down; and help you to see that you really can do what yesterday you knew you couldn’t.

After that comes the gift of **generosity**. Yes we are all supposed to be giving of ourselves for each other’s needs. But there are a few wonderful individuals who seem to find much joy in sharing whatever they have; great or small (We don’t need to be rich to be generous). You are very blessed, if in a time of need God brings such a person into your life ... which is exactly What the Spirit seems to do in our times of need.

Of course the **leadership** types are encouraged to neither abuse nor neglect their gift but to use it diligently (which is another word for rightly, appropriately)

And finally there is the gift of **compassion** the ability to understand, and comfort, and counsel, those going through difficult times.

So here we are, together in this church: preachers and teachers, servers and leaders, givers, encouragers and counselors -- each one of us gifted individuals given to serve all of us. And all of us given to serve each one of us. So that every one of us can honor God by being transformed and renewed as we live and serve within the body of Christ.

That is what Paul would teach you today.

The big question is, what will you do with it tomorrow?

Let's pray about this.