

# Romans

**Scripture reading:** Romans 12:1-8

**Sermon Title:** Thinking and living by grace in Christ's Church

**Sermon Text:** Romans 12:3-8

**Key verse:** Romans 12:3

<b>MAIN IDEA:</b> Make it a priority to apply three principles in our spiritual service of worship.
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By grace, think soundly of ourselves (v.3)

By grace, present ourselves as members of one another (v.5-7)

By grace, exercise our gifts accordingly (v.6-8)

***NOTE:** This manuscript is provided as a courtesy. It is not followed word for word during the message. This document is not developed for publication; there may be grammatical errors throughout. Unfortunately, there is not always time to proof read. I choose to use my available time for studying, finding ways to explain the truths of Scripture while keeping a balance of time for visiting and discipling people in the church. Thanks for understanding.*

Chapter 12 begins by urging us to obey two major commands to obey as a result of the gospel. The commands are considered our reasonable worship.

- 1) **Present our bodies** as living, holy sacrifices.
- 2) Don't be conformed to the world but **be transformed** by renewing our minds in alignment with the will of God.

How do we present ourselves as living holy sacrifices? How do we renew our mind to the will of God?

If you were asked these questions what would be your answer? What would you say is a priority?

In Romans 12:3-8. Paul gives three ways to respond: ① be humble and stop thinking too much of your selves, ② be committed to one another, ③ and use your gifts for God's glory.

The Apostle desires the Romans not only know the gospel, but they know how to live according to the gospel.

If the gospel truly impacts our life and we desire to live according to the gospel we will make it a priority to apply these three principles in our spiritual service of worship.

The first principle we need to prioritize as important for our spiritual service of worship is:

## 1-BY GRACE, THINK SOUNDLY OF OURSELVES (v.3)

**Romans 12:3-8** <sup>3</sup> 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.

The main point of our passage this morning is the command in verse 12:3, "regard yourself with sound judgment." The rest of the chapter flows from this viewpoint.

When we see ourselves rightly, we will worship God rightly. If we think too much of ourselves, we will not live as we ought in view of the mercy of God.

When we see ourselves rightly, the rest of the passage will fall into place.

The first step in renewing our mind is a step to humility by doing a sound judgment of why we are a Christian in the first place. You and I are not spiritual giants. We are saved by grace. We need a Savior. Never, ever think more highly than we out to think.

Notice closely how the verse tells us how to apply sound judgment to our thinking, "as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

There are two ways to interpret this.

One way is to interpret this as saying, “Make sure we think about ourselves in accordance to the amount of faith God has given us. If you have great faith, think at a greater level and if you have a little faith, think according to your little faith.”

There are many commentators, some very good ones, who believe this is the right interpretation.

However, I do not believe this is what the verse means and let me tell you why.

- 1) How are we to measure the amount of faith God has allotted? What Scriptures would we use to tell us how we may determine the amount of faith we have? There are none.
- 2) Somebody might think they have a lot of faith and think more of themselves than they ought. Someone may think they have little faith, so they use that as an excuse to not be involved. They say to themselves, it is better to think less of myself so I am in obedience to Romans 12:3. I would love to help, but God hasn't given me enough faith. How would we correct either person? We can't see in their heart or mind to know how much faith a person possesses. It is impossible to shepherd.
- 3) Listen to Ephesians 4:4-7. This passage uses the same phrase when talking about God's grace. <sup>4</sup>*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* <sup>5</sup>*one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* <sup>6</sup>*one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* <sup>7</sup>*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Same word in the Greek, according to the *metron*, the portion. Does Christ's gift of grace vary in measure? No. God's grace abounds. We receive grace upon grace.
- 4) Faith brings righteousness (3:22); justification (4:1-5); promise of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:14); and grace (5:2). We have full justification, abundant grace, the indwelling of the complete Holy Spirit, and the righteousness of Christ. We are not lacking in any of these but have them all in full. If our faith was given in small or large quantities it would seem righteousness and justification would be precariously provided. However this is not the case.
- 5) How much faith do we need? Jesus said the faith of a mustard seed, a very small measure. That is all the faith needed to move mountains.
- 6) Lastly, one might argue that in 14:1 speaks of being weak in faith. I believe when scripture speaks of being weak in the faith it is talking about those who have been given faith, but are not exercising it as they should. Faith is like a muscle. Not using it or not having the right diet makes our faith weak. There is a direct correlation with having weak faith and having a poor spiritual diet or living in sin.

Therefore, because of these reasons I interpret *God has allotted to each a measure of faith* as God has allotted to each a measure of faith, the same amount. If we have faith, we have the same measure as anybody else who has faith. If we have faith, it is only because God gave it to us.

I also interpret this as thinking of ourselves in view of our faith, in view of each of us needing a Savior.

There but by the *grace of God* go I. There but by the *faith from God* go I.

The reason to spend so much time on understanding the correct interpretation is it will impact our walk from a practical perspective. Proper interpretation leads to proper application.

How then are we to think as a believer?

How am I to think of this, me, Allen Burns? If I stand here in this pulpit, I have no greater faith than the person working in the nursery. I have no greater faith to withstand persecution.

I do not stand here thinking God has given me great faith and I am trying to make your faith like mine.

God has given me a measure of faith to stand here and proclaim I need Christ. We all need Christ. God gave you a measure of faith to sit there and agree we all need Christ. It takes no more faith to stand in the pulpit and proclaim salvation in Christ alone than it does to sit in the pulpit and believe salvation in Christ alone.

If you are sitting there thinking, "Oh, I wish I had the faith Allen has," you are not thinking with sound judgment. There are no spiritual giants nor are there spiritual weaklings. God gives us all the same measure of faith.

How are we to measure ourselves as Christians? Measure yourself in view of Christ's work on the cross. See yourself kneeling at the foot of the cross begging for mercy. Let that give you the perspective you need to think with sound judgment about yourself.

Part of the responsibility of being an elder is to protect believers from false teaching. False teachers are enemies of the cross. Enemies of the cross teach wrongly about faith. It shows up three ways.

- 1) The first enemy of the cross is the Christian who runs around thinking they are God's gift to the church. They are the spiritual superman lone-ranger. They are filled with pride about their Christianity and think they have great faith and others will benefit from their great faith. They don't need the church, the church needs them. For them, it is the cross plus their great faith. They become self-appointed teachers. They are not teachable because of pride.
- 2) The second enemy of the cross is the person who believes they have little faith. They are the spiritual Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. Poor me. They have a pity party and wish they could have more faith so they could do something for Jesus. For them, the cross was not enough for them to be more than conquerors in Christ and instead think they are not needed and their contribution to the cause of Christ is little.
- 3) The third enemy of the cross are those in the prosperity gospel crowd. They are the spiritual hyper-faith people. They believe success or failure rests upon the amount of faith not on Christ's work. If the healing didn't take place, not enough faith. If you have more faith you can get that new job. Just believe. If you have more faith you will prosper like Abraham, a rich man. The faith is in a positive outcome, not faith in the person and work of Christ. Instead of the cross being the escape from the world the cross becomes the door to the treasures of the world.

Beware of these enemies of the cross. Don't fall into the trap of measuring the amount of your faith; instead think and live as having received the measurement of faith you need. God is generous and a good Father and always gives the perfect measure.

Faith is a gift and is not as a result of works; so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Think with sound judgment and yourselves. See yourself as needing a Savior. A right view is only a very humble one.

If we grasp this principle, we can move to the next principle we need to prioritize as important for our spiritual service of worship.

## **2-BY GRACE, PRESENT OURSELVES AS MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER (v.4-5)**

**Romans 12:4-5** <sup>4</sup> For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

The human body is a great metaphor for understanding the church. It is a favorite metaphor for Paul.

The body displays great diversity in functionality. It would be useless for the members of our human body to have all the same function and the same goes for the church body.

Even though the members of our body are different, they are unified. Our face, forearm, fist, finger, femur, and fibula all very different but all joined together as a part of the body. Our face and femur don't decide to stay home while our body goes to work. In unity, these diverse members of the body leave the house together and work together for the same purpose.

The church is like the body. We all have different functions and we all are to be in unity with one another.

We are in unity when we present ourselves to "one another." There are around 50 references to "one another" in the Bible.

- Don't forsake assembling with one another (Hebrews 10:24)
- Do not speak against one another (James 4:11)
- Seek the good of one another (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
- Abound in love for one another (1 Thessalonians 3:12)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)

The reason for our commitment to one another is so we may be of the same purpose; which is to evangelize and make disciples.

If I say to those of you who are already committed to the body, "we need the body," you understand the need to humble yourself and present yourself as members of one another. You already know you need to be faithful and demonstrate commitment to other members.

To those of you who hear the Scripture proclaim the need for having a mutual commitment, which is the majority of people listening this morning, I encourage you to continue.

Thank you for being members of one another. Thank you for seeking unity. I sincerely thank you because you help me and others mature in Christ.

Together, we are blessed by one another. You make being a member of the body of Christ a joy. Together, we remind one another of the hope of Christ's return and God works all things for good and we are saved by grace.

Through fellowship in the Holy Spirit we help one another imagine what heaven will be like. In the trials and difficulties of life, we look to our left and right and have one another to share in our sorrows, to provide comfort and encouragement, and to give strength to persevere.

This passage is here to encourage those who are members of one another.

*AND* This passage is here to rebuke those who arrogantly live as an independent believer.

Christianity is not an independent journey. No part of the body grows apart from the body. The body does not exist for the member, the member exists for the body.

No one is such a spiritual giant they have no need for the body.

Unfortunately, in our culture, there are far too many who call themselves Christians but are not committed to a local body.

If you are not participating in the body you are a Christian in name only. This passage is addressing you. You are living as though you don't need others. You think far too highly of yourself. You don't have sound judgment.

The world tells us to have self-esteem and be independent. The world says a mature person is the one grown to the point where they no longer need others. Living without need for the body is thinking conformed to the world.

Christian maturity is depending on others. A wise grown-up Christian knows they need the body of Christ. Renew your mind. Transform your thinking from independence to dependence.

Please, if you call yourself Christian, be obedient by presenting yourself as a member of the body of Christ.

Two applications:

First, if you are living independently of the church, please, listen carefully.

Second, if you know someone in this church or outside this church who are independent of the body, Please listen to this plea and have a conversation with them.

Ask them "Why do we care if you are living outside the will of God? Why do we care whether or not you are members of the body?"

- 1) We care for you. If you are a Christian, you are missing out on a great deal of what God has for you. It is very sad to know you are struggling when you don't have to. A lone ranger Christian is a lonely ranger. You are missing out on God's design.
- 2) We are jealous. We are not jealous for your lifestyle but jealous for the church. We are jealous of what you are holding back from us. We desire your fellowship. We desire your input and your gifts. We desire to see your face and hear what you have to say about our Lord.
- 3) We have imagination. We imagine what an amazing church we might be if we were operating at full capacity. Imagine every person in this room who calls themselves a believer as being fully committed to one another. Imagine it. When we have sorrow, we all sorrow together. When we rejoice, we rejoice together. Imagine all of us setting out to fulfill the will of God for the Upper Valley. If we are all committed to one another with Christ as our Head, do you think God would be pleased? Would we bear fruit? It would be heaven on earth.

Catch the vision!

The third principle is like the second, make it a priority:

### **3-BY GRACE, EXERCISE OUR GIFTS ACCORDINGLY (v.6-8)**

The passage ends with encouraging each of us to exercise our gifts accordingly.

How do we present ourselves as members of one another? By exercising our gifts for the nourishment and care of the body.

The Greek word used here, is *charisma* which combines *ma* which means manifestation of, and *charis* which means grace. Gifts are manifestation of grace.

When we see gifts as being manifestations of grace, we see how this fits well with the rest of the passage. Like faith, our gifting is not earned but given to us by grace. We did not merit, earn, or even develop our gifts. They are given to us because of God bestowed them to us.

There is no reason to brag about any gift or ability we have.

God gives us gifts for the purpose of accomplishing His will. When we use God's gifts for our own gain, it is against God's will. When we use them for the purpose of the church, for the proclamation of the gospel and the building of Christ's Kingdom, then we are pleasing to God.

The main teaching of these verses is, instead of being puffed up feeling superior or instead of envying and opposing others as they exercise their gifts, we should diligently and humbly work together for the good of the body, and not for our own advantage.

The list of gifts in this passage is not exhaustive, but are representative.

The first gift encouraged to be used is that of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:3 explains prophesy well.

**1 Corinthians 14:3** But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

The purpose of prophesy is to build people up in the faith; challenge them to obedience; and comfort people in the time of need. Prophecy in this context isn't telling the future. It is a gift of proclamation ("forth-telling"), not prediction ("fore-telling").

To prophecy means to "speak forth" and declare God's will and to make known the truth of God so people may live according to the ways of God.

Those that prophecy are to do so according to the proportion of their faith. The word proportion is *analogia* in the Greek. It is where we get the word analogy. The word expresses the idea of a relationship or agreement. This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. It may also be translated, "in agreement with the faith" which I believe is a more accurate translation.

If the word meant, in proportion as in measurement of the amount of faith one has, (if you have a little bit of faith then only prophecy a little bit) it would be impossible to determine how one should determine how much to use their gift. It goes back to the question of trying to determine the amount of faith a person might have. Scripture provides no guidance for such a measurement.

What it means is, If your gift is speaking God's word, make sure what you say agrees with the Christian faith. This is why 1 Corinthians 14:29, teaches that those who prophecy are subject to have their prophecy scrutinized by others with the same gift. Whenever we hear someone say, "thus sayeth the Lord", we should know and search the Scriptures to see if it is analogous to the faith.

This interpretation is in keeping with the rest of the passage which urges everyone to zealously participate in exercising their gift. We are never to hold back our gifts. For someone to say, "I would exercise my prophecy gift more if only God would give me more faith" is laughable.

It is like saying, I would show more mercy, but God hasn't given me the compassion.

The other gifts listed here are more easily understood; service, teaching, exhorting (encouraging), and leading and I don't need to spend much time on explaining what they mean.

If you have one of these gifts, and you are exercising it, great. If you are not exercising it, then get busy.

We are to show mercy in a way that is not grudging. This is hard. Often, acts of mercy are very sacrificial in nature. It may be hard emotionally or take up a lot of time. The recipient of mercy should never feel as though we are showing mercy as an act of duty or that we are being put out.

If we are put in situations we are to show mercy, ask God for the strength and the grace to, not just show mercy, but to do so cheerfully.



While we are talking about gifts it is worth mentioning that we need to really understand what God's gifting is all about. If we only see spiritual gifts from God as something like tongues or healing, we need to rethink what spiritual gifts are all about.

Notice many of the gifts are highly practical, such as leading, teaching, hospitality, giving, and showing mercy. Gifts are for the benefit of others.

The point of the passage is clear. Each of us is to exercise our gifts as members of one another in the body of Christ.

## SUMMARY

How do we present ourselves as living holy sacrifices? How do we renew our mind to the will of God?

If you were asked these questions by someone, you now have the answer.

Scripture provides two priorities for the believer.

- 1) Take a good look at ourselves. Let's not think more highly than we ought. Instead, we are to think with sound judgment. We are to see ourselves at the foot of the cross in need of the mercies of God. With all humility regard one another as more important than ourselves.
- 2) Living as a holy sacrifice is done in the context of the church. God desires we present ourselves as members of one another. Christ is the head of the church and we are members of one another in subjection to Him. We are diverse and unified. As members of one another, we are to zealously exercise our gifts for the furthering of God's Kingdom.

If this is not what you are practicing and you are not presenting yourself or your gifts to the body, I urge you to obey scripture. Ask me or the elders how you may humble yourself and present yourself as a member of the body and use your gifts for the glory of Christ. You will be glad you did. Don't miss out on the blessings of God.

If you are on board with this already in your life, if you are diligently seeking to please God by being a humble Kingdom servant within the context of the body of Christ, praise God. Give Him the glory for equipping you and helping you. Perhaps you might encourage someone you know who calls themselves a Christian but is not part of the body. I thank you and others thank you for your obedience and responding wholeheartedly to the mercy and grace of God. God is glorified as He uses you as a vessel to bring glory to Christ.

## BENEDICTION

God has given us grace abounding so that we have all sufficiency to accomplish every good deed. Furthermore, God is completely able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power of His Spirit at work within us. Because of this we all say to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

## QUESTIONS FOR HOME FELLOWSHIP

Questions to ensure understanding and right application of the passage:

1. Do you have questions about the church family meeting?
2. How do we present ourselves as living holy sacrifices? How do we renew our mind to the will of God? If you were asked these questions what would be your answer? What would you say is a priority? (was your answer different before the message)
3. Do you understand why it is important to interpret the verse as being God has given to each of us the same measure of faith?
  - a. Do you find yourself ever thinking you have more or less faith than someone else?
  - b. How does having “the perfect amount of faith” impact your thinking?
  - c. Do you see those who teach “get more faith” (prosperity gospel) as enemies of the cross? Why or why not?
4. Has there been a time in your life when you did not see yourself as members of the body of Christ?
  - a. Do you know of others you may encourage to be more in alignment with God’s will in this area?
  - b. How have you seen yourself grow in needing others in the body?
  - c. On a scale of 1-10, how instrumental has the body of Christ been to your maturity? Share how you have been blessed.
  - d. Have you ever imagined what it would be like if everyone who attends our church committed to the body and gave of their gifts for the glory of Christ?
5. What do you see as your spiritual gift?