



## A SOBER SELF-IMAGE

*SERIES: GUILT, GRACE, AND GLORY*

Catalog No. 1212

Romans 12:3-8

24th Message

Gary Vanderet

September 10th, 2000

In the opening verses of Romans 12 we learn that the way we grow as Christians is first, by presenting our bodies to God. Paul writes, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom 12:1, NASB). We must offer our bodies to God to use them as he sees fit. We will go wherever he wants, we will do whatever he wants. And second, we grow by refusing to conform ourselves to the value systems of the world: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). We must allow the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to change us from the inside out, to conform us to the character of Christ and transform our thinking. Our behavior is based upon our thought processes. As we allow God to transform us we will begin to think the way he thinks. As Paul puts it elsewhere, we begin to have the "mind of Christ."

The remainder of the book of Romans is a description of this "mind of Christ." It's remarkable to note how many of the apostle Paul's exhortations refer directly or indirectly to the teaching of Jesus (15 references alone in chapters 12-15). Here we find described how God looks at the world and what our minds will be like when they are conformed to him. One of the first things Paul says is that when we begin to think like God thinks, that is when we will begin to think differently about ourselves.

**For through the grace given to me I say to every man 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.** (Rom 12:3, NASB)

It is worth noting what Paul is not saying. He is not saying we should not think highly of ourselves. The problem is, we tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Paul could just as well have said to avoid having too low an estimate of ourselves. Many Christians struggle with feelings of insignificance. In these verses he addresses the opposite but equally destructive problem — that of an independent spirit. Some believers feel they don't need others in the body, that they can function on their own. Both sides, those who think they are inferior and those who imagine they are superior, err in their view of themselves.

We need to see ourselves as God sees us. He created us in his image. We are the most nearly God-like beings on the earth. Though we are fallen creatures we have

been redeemed by God's grace. He loves us deeply and delights to give us gifts that equip us to serve. Denigrating ourselves is not a sign of humility. Being humble is recognizing who we are and what God intends to do through us. We can agree with the psalmist that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Maybe you don't like your body very much, but God made it and you are very special to him.

Paul goes on to say that God sees us as uniquely gifted individuals.

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

As members of the body of Christ, Christians have certain gifts and privileges that come with that membership. Paul's favorite analogy for the church is the human body. If you want to see what the church is like, don't look at our church building; stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself. You are one body. You are not multiple bodies. In the same way, there is only one church. All Christians belong to it, whether they have a denominational label or not. If you have been born of the Spirit of God, you are a member of that one church.

The second thing that will strike you as you look at your own body is that it has members. It has arms, legs, feet, toes, fingers, eyes, ears, and a number of other interesting parts. These parts are quite diverse. They have different functions. But there is unity, too. There is diversity in the midst of unity. Though the members are different, they all serve one another. The eyes don't do what the feet do and the mouth doesn't do what the ear does. The members of your body are all different

Our bodies have several extremely critical systems that are invisible to the naked eye, things like the circulatory system, the nervous system, the immune system, the digestive system. Our bodies have all kinds of functioning parts. They are often unseen and unthanked, but they are absolutely essential to our good health. Paul says that is how it is with the body of Christ. We are all different. We tend to gravitate toward the more apparently prestigious members and gifts, but that is not the way God views them.

The body is designed to work in a cooperative fashion. On our recent trip to the Philippines we had a very intense basketball schedule, playing 26 games in 16 days. On occasion many parts of my 50-year-old body were really tired. They protested when I got up in the

morning. But even though they were reluctant to function, they didn't let me down. They didn't refuse, and demand the right to sleep more. That is because the different parts of our bodies don't compete with one another, they cooperate. Even when a certain part of our body hurts the other parts immediately compensate and rush to their aid. During one of our games I fell while I was passing out tracts and got a painful gash in my shin. The rest of my body felt so bad about it that it sat up most of the night to keep my shin company!

We are one body. We belong to each other and need each other. While we are not the same, our differences are God-given. What a terrible caricature of the body it would be if we were all an eye. But that is how we think at times. We all gravitate to the prominent positions in the body, but God has a different way of viewing things.

Paul has a word to describe these differences. "Gifts," he calls them. He goes on to explain what these are and how they function.

**And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, (Rom 12:6)**

That is what is different about us. And we can see that we are different. We have different personalities and different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. But the fundamental difference between us in the body of Christ is that we have different gifts. The word comes from a root word that means "grace." It is a graciously given gift of God. It is important to understand that Paul is not referring to natural talents, things like athletic or musical ability. All of us, whether we are believers or not, have natural abilities, but spiritual gifts are given only to Christians.

"Gift" here is a supernatural capacity to serve the needs of others in the body of Christ. We are not told when they are given. We can assume they are imparted when the Spirit himself is imparted — at conversion — but we don't know. But spiritual gifts are given only to Christians — and no one is left out. Every Christian has at least one and probably more. God's blueprint for the body of Christ is so marvelous and beautiful that he has arranged an infinite variety and combination of gifts.

Here we find a sampling of spiritual gifts. It is not an exhaustive list. There are a lot of gifts, some of which may not even be listed in the New Testament. We do, however, find four lists of spiritual gifts in the NT: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. No one list is exactly the same as the other, which leads me to think that we do not have an exhaustive list of gifts. I think that God has an infinite amount of gifts to give out — and he is a lavish giver.

Paul now goes on to list a sample of the kinds of gifts that God bestows.

**And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; (Rom 12:6)**

Some people define this gift of prophecy simply as

the gift of preaching. But if we look at this gift biblically, we see it is a little more narrowly defined. Deuteronomy 18 sets out the requirements of a prophet. Moses prepared the people before they entered the land of Canaan, because they would likely face many false prophets, so he gave them some information to distinguish between a true and a false prophet.

A prophet must meet three requirements. First, he must be a Jew. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him" (Deut 18:15). Second, he must receive direct revelation. It's not just a matter of studying the Scriptures and making proclamation. Moses continued: "and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." And third, a prophet must be able to predict the future with 100% accuracy. Moses declared, "And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deut 18:21-22). A prophet must be 100% correct in his predictions.

A biblical prophet was one who spoke under divine inspiration. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:20 that apostles and prophets are the foundation on which the church is built. Given these criteria, there are no prophets today who speak with the same divine inspiration. Prophets were needed in the early church, before the Canon of Scripture was complete, but now that we have a completed set of Scriptures they are no longer needed. This means that Joseph Smith was not a prophet; neither was Mary Baker Eddy.

However, it is possible that Paul is referring to a lesser prophetic gift that is subordinate to that of the biblical prophet. Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to test or judge the words of prophets in the church. If that is the reference, then the regulation that Paul places on the exercise of the prophetic gift is important: *according to the proportion of his faith*. There is a definite article before the word faith, thus it could be translated, *according to the proportion of the faith*, or *in agreement with the faith*. That is, the prophet is to make sure that his message does not in any way disagree or differ from the Christian faith.

**if service, in his serving;**

We get the word deacon from this word. This is one of those often-unseen gifts. A person with the gift of service quietly helps others who have physical needs so that people are built up and blessed. Some months ago we set aside a number of men and women as deacons to care for the needy in our body. Their ministry is one of the most exciting ministries in our church. When I hear their monthly report of all the things they are doing among us, I get goose bumps. This is one of the most worthwhile things going on here among us. You will

notice that Paul puts this gift right in the same breath with the more prominent gifts. It is a special gift. If you have it, use it!

**or he who teaches, in his teaching;**

Teaching is the ability to make the Scriptures understandable and clear. We tend to glamorize and exalt teaching, but here it is listed after serving.

**or he who exhorts, in his exhortation;**

This is a wonderful gift. The verb has a wide spectrum of meanings. Literally, it means, someone who moves in alongside. It involves encouraging, exhorting, comforting or consoling. It can be exercised publicly, through the gift of stirring speech, or through writing. When I was high school pastor, a man on my volunteer staff had this gift. Every night he would reflect on the day and write notes of encouragement to people. His notes were used by God in mighty ways. He is still doing that to this day.

The gift of exhortation can be used privately in counseling, in coming alongside one who is hurting, or giving hope and courage to one who has lost heart. Barnabas (his name means, the son of encouragement) had this gift. His name was Joseph, but no one called him Joe; they called him Barney. In the Scriptures Barnabas is always found with his arm around somebody's shoulder, encouraging and comforting. This is a marvelous gift. If you have it, start using it.

**he who gives, with liberality;**

This is the gift of giving money. Paul exhorts those with this gift to give with liberality. That is one possible meaning for that word. Another, perhaps better meaning is, with simplicity. This word is also used in the NT for a simple act. It means, give without ostentation, without calling people's attention to what you're doing. Don't make a big deal out of it. Don't give with strings attached. Don't be like the Pharisees who had a trumpet sound whenever they gave. And one other thing: you don't need to be wealthy to have this gift.

**he who leads, with diligence;**

If you are a leader, then lead diligently. The gospel doesn't completely remove authority, it softens it. Leadership is still necessary in the body of Christ. The word means someone who "stands before others." If you have an up-front position of leadership, realize that is a gift. Don't become casual or careless, but see those abilities as a gift and use them diligently.

**he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Mercy is showing pity on the helpless. It is the ability to express compassionate, loving action and lift up one who is hurting. Those with this gift have hearts filled with mercy for the weak, the helpless, the poor, the sick, the handicapped.

This is not an exhaustive list of gifts. The apostle's point is this: if you have the gift of service, then serve! If

you have the gift of teaching, then for goodness sake, teach! Part of making your body available to God is using the gifts he has given you. We worship through service.

Perhaps you don't even know what your gift is. You can attend a conference and pay a lot of money to discover what it is, but I will tell you for free how you can discover it. Let me ask you a question, using the analogy that Paul uses. How did your hands and feet learn to function? How did you learn to walk? Nobody had to teach you. You simply started using your feet. What class did you take to learn the intricacies of using your hand? When did your parents lecture you on the advantages of the opposing thumb? You simply started trying things and it worked.

If you are a believer, you have a spiritual gift. No one was behind the door when the gifts were given. You have at least one, and probably many. How do you find out what your gift is? Start by getting involved in the needs of other people. Start loving people. Ask yourself how you are burdened to love people. It is important to note that every passage on gifts (1 Cor 12, Rom 12, Eph 4, 1 Pet 4) is followed by a discourse on love. The purpose of our gift is to benefit others. Spiritual gifts are the means by which we love other people. And each of us loves differently. Get involved in the needs of people around you, on campus, at home, here in our group.

You might also gain some insight into your gifts by noticing the type of people you feel burdened for. Be willing to do anything. Don't give up if you fail at something. Gifts take a while to develop. Like talents, they may lie undiscovered for years until a certain combination of circumstances brings them to light. Soon you will know that you either have a certain gift or not. And if you don't, you can try something else. Seek input from others in the body. They can tell you how you minister to them, so ask — and listen.

It is not leadership but love that makes a church impressive. The way to demonstrate the power of the Spirit in the world is not through the powerful exhibition of these more prominent gifts. It is not through impressive programs, as important as these are. The way to demonstrate the power of the Spirit is to love: bringing meals to the needy, mowing lawns, giving financial assistance, counseling and encouraging each other. These are the things that count. All the gifts of the Spirit are to no avail if they don't help us love each other. We need to learn to do that in tangible ways, and the proof of that love will be found in the extent to which we realize that we are all members of one body and we belong to each other. We share a common life. What other motivation do we need to start giving of ourselves in acts of service and love, caring for one another?

© 2000 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino