

## Unity in Diversity Romans 12:4-5

As we come to this passage of Scripture we saw in verses 1-2 that we are to present our whole selves as living sacrifices to God, and we do that by not having our minds transformed by this world, but by the renewal of our minds through the Scriptures that we might know and accomplish the will of God. But what does it look like to have that renewed mind? How does it function and act and think? Well, that is what the other verses in this chapter and the commands that follow are about. They describe that renewed mind and that changed life.

And as we started in verse 3 last time we were together, we looked at what Paul said, and the first thing that he begins with is combating pride and the need of the believer in cultivating humility in each of us. Look at verse 3, **“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”** Notice Paul uses the word “think” here twice. This is the renewed mind and it does not think more highly of self that it ought. The common tendency is to have a big self and a small God. But what goes along with that, is others are small of insignificant compared to me. But what are we to have - “sober judgment.” We are to think properly realizing that God has assigned all of us a measure of faith. And this measure of faith as we will see through this passage is that we are all different. There is not one of us who is the same as the other. We see that in our physical appearances. Some are tall and some short, some are slender and some are husky, some have long noses and others do not. We all look differently. God has made such a cascade of different people that your appearance is absolutely unique from others.

But so is our measure of faith as far as our spiritual capacities and gifts. God has made it that way that we might not only be dependant upon him but also every believer in the body of Christ. And the church has fallen on hard times of late. People are suspicious of the church and anything that has a structure and especially accountability to it. And people say that you do not have to join a church to belong to the church, and they are absolutely right. We are joined to Christ and to other believers the moment we believe on Jesus Christ. But you cannot obey and really be renewed in the mind and grow in Christ-likeness unless you are structurally and visibly joined with other believers. In fact, this passage makes no sense, as many of the commands make no sense. Let me just give one small example how the church is needed in your life. Do you think he would have given pastor-shepherds if you were able to shepherd your own life or if you could just have a Bible study with some friends and call that the church of Jesus Christ? And if God has given pastors because we need to be shepherded then can we be led and fed and cared for if we do not have a relationship with a pastor or pastors that has a real relationship with accountability?

We look at all the difficulties in the church, and all the infighting that goes on, and we even look on some occasions of pastoral abuse, and some come to the determination that I am better off without the church - its relationships, functioning and accountability. And the church does have warts and blemishes. But here is why Paul tells you not to think more highly than you ought and to realize that God has not given us all the same measure of faith - the same strengths and weaknesses, and that is

we need on another. We need the visible body of believers and the functioning body of believers in our lives. Yes, you can be hurt by others and you might have struggles in the church, but it is God's ordain entity in this day and age where his grace will be delivered out to you and me through the diversity of believers. So let me ask you this morning: how important is the church to you? Is it a take it or leave it entity? Or do you think rightly about the body of Christ you think rightly about yourself and you see your need of the church of Jesus Christ? God has established the interdependency of the church for our good. And I want us to see that point in two ways this morning.

1. We need to see the difference in functioning of the church. V.4.

One of the reasons why so many churches divide and why there is such conflict is because of pride. It is because we have not applied the gospel and obeyed verse 3. We view others as opponents and not as gifts of God's grace that he has given for the building up of the body and faith. We think that we have arrived and if everyone was like me and thought like me then the church would be great. But we do not see our need, and our need is not that people would be like me but that they would be unlike me. They build what is lacking in my life.

So look how Paul begins verse 4 with a "for." "For" is explaining why you should not think more highly of yourself and realize that God has given a different measure of grace to each, which we will see next week is our spiritual giftedness where we bless others and minister to them and they bless us through their giftedness. So Paul says, **"For as in one body we have many members."** He is going to talk about the church even though he does not name the church, but uses one of the most popular designations of the church and that is the body. We are the body of Christ. And he uses this metaphor to teach the truth about the diverse functioning of the church. There are many members in each human body that allow it to exist. We have eyes, hands, feet and a mouth just to name a few. And it is amazing to look at the complexity of the body and just the wonder how God has constructed the human body. It is a marvel of God and displays the wisdom and power of our Creator God. If any of these members are missing it is never a good thing going but a detriment to the overall functionality of the body. We would not be able to do our function the way that God intended us to function. Paul explains that in 1 Corinthians 12:17-20, **"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."** And we need to marvel at the many members that belong to the church of Jesus Christ and all the differences that exist.

But look how he goes on and ends off the verse, **"and the members do not have the same function."** Other members in the body of Christ function differently than you. And you need that difference of function or else the church cannot magnify Christ and we individually cannot grow into the image of Christ and we cannot help others grow in magnifying Christ. Paul again says in 1 Corinthians 12:21, **"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"** That is the humility of having a renewed mind is to realize that

God has given me a measure of faith but has not given me everything as far as my sanctification. I need others. I am not an island all on my own but one who needs the interdependent relationships of the church of Jesus Christ.

And let me make a couple of observations about this. One is that we are not the end all of what people and individuals need. If they only came to me, sought out counsel or discipleship from me then they would be all that God intended, as if we were the only gift given to the church and we have the full measure of faith that others need. Even those who teach in the church, I am amazed the vast difference yet the same Lord and at the core the same message. I love hearing John MacArthur, and his straight forward handling of a text, and true uncompromising clarity that he brings to the text. I love hearing Paul David Tripp and how he makes the Word of God so applicable and so necessary to any and all my hearty struggles. I love hearing John Piper and being challenge with the bigness of our God and how we ought yo enjoy the God of our salvation. All of these men are teachers but there is such a wide variety in their teaching that God has made all of their teaching necessary. I love to hear Mike, Jim, Jeff and Richard and others teach. There is such variety and all are necessary.

And here is my point, we can be so puffed up and so absorbed with self that we think, although we wouldn't say it this way that we are the only gift to the church. I can remember several years back I was trying to help someone out with a particular struggle in their life. We seem to be getting no where, so I asked if someone else could help. And the same truths were presented but just in a new and fresh way, and they laid hold of that person's heart and turned their life around. Never think that we are the only gift and the full measure of giftedness even if we have a strength in a particular way. God has given us the multifaceted church of Jesus Christ. Even when God uses us in the life of another, most often it is not just us, but others around that person.

But the second observation is never think that because of my talents, or the grace given me or my knowledge of the word that I do not need any other. Arrival is a dangerous spiritual state to be in. It causes us to look down on the uniqueness of others and how God has chosen and can use others in our lives. A transformed mind and a maturing Christianity knows that they are interdepend upon other Christians. Immature Christianity doesn't even recognize how much you have regressed when you isolate from others rather than seek to grow with others and even through others. If it is all about you giving and never receiving ministry from others, you are in a dangerous place. Do you recognize your need of others in your life? Do you even seek to be taught and learn from others? Do you even speak to others and confess that you have not arrived, and that you still need to learn from others? Do you accept the ministry of others? Do you even seek it out? Do you thank others for how God has used their ministry in humour life? None of us have arrived. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. Realize the need of others members of the body of Christ.

## 2. We need to see the unity of the differing functions. V. 5.

The whole point here is to think of the unity of the body through the diversity of operations. And you might not even realize it because we seldom do, but as you sit in your place this morning and hear the message being preached, there is a complexity of things taking place in your body that allow you to listen from this message and hopefully profit from it that you might not even think about or be aware of. It could be

your lungs filling up with oxygen to your heart firing to your eyes seeing, to the operation of neurones that allow you to think and comprehend. But there is a unity and a marvellous diversity taking place in your body right now to allow it to function for your benefit and your profit.

And it is to this illustration that Paul moves and says, **“so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”** When Paul says “so we” he is giving us the application of the metaphor of the body and giving us the glorious truth of the ones body of Christ. At the moment of our salvation we are all joined to Christ. He says something similar in 1 Corinthians 12:12, **“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”** We belong to what is known as the universal and invisible body of Christ. All believers are bonded to Christ, placed in him forevermore. And if all believers therefore are forevermore joined to one another because they are joined or united to Christ. So in actual fact, there is only one church and one body of Christ, not many. We are members one of another. It shows not only our union with one another but our need of one another. Now, the Scriptures use the word church and body of Christ not only to speak of the oneness of all believers in Christ but also the many churches that are visible and physically gather in a geographical location to honour and serve God in a body or corporate setting. So Paul can speak of a particular church at a particular p[laces such as in 1 Corinthians 1:2, **“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”** And it is in the local church that we see the functionality and the diversity of the body of Christ lived out. We see here that the renewed mind is expressed and acts.

And there are a couple of things that we should take away at this: one is that we should marvel at the complexity of the church and its different functions. Whether it is on a given Sunday, where we have various Sunday School teaches, nursery workers, sight and sound, music leaders, but even behind the scenes with someone paying the bills and others giving, people cleaning, others doing maintenance, and still others planning out our services, and then the preacher himself. And then there are those who come and participate through fellowship and listening to the message. But all are involved in any given Sunday. Then we have others who minister through phone calls and texts and emails. There are others who bake meals. Still others that are involved in discipleship and counselling. Some of these ministries are seen and others are unseen, but the whole body is functioning. And sometimes I think we have to step back because we can be involved in a certain aspect of serving, and that is all we see, but just like there is so much going on in our bodies that we do not see, there is so much going on in the body of Christ. And who has orchestrated all of these various different functions that are not warring against one another but working in unity? None other than God who gives each a measure of grace. So often we do not see the beauty and glory of God’s grace in the here and now because we just do not notice. And in all of this his saints, his beloved grow into the image of Jesus Christ. That multi-faceted and interconnectedness causes us to grow more and more in the image of Jesus Christ. Show me a believer that is unconnected or very loosely connected to the church and I

will show you a person who is not growing and cannot grow because he is not connected to a body of believers to cause and encourage him or her to grow.

And the another thing that we see is has two parts. One is that you belong. So often when individuals come to Christ or when they have had severely struggled with sin problems in their lives, they think that they do not belong. But you do belong. None of us deserve to be in the body of Christ. That is why we need the salvation that comes through Christ. But you do belong because Christ has placed you in the body of Christ. You are there and do belong because he has placed you. Never think that you do not belong. And the other aspect that goes along with that is: if you do belong then you have a reason or a functionality in the church of Jesus Christ. God has placed you in the body of Christ for a reason. You are not just here to receive or to be a taker or to get all that you can get from others, but to be actively functioning for the welfare of others. And all that means is that we need to be intentional in being active in the church of Christ, seeking to reach out. It does not mean that I have to be like others but God has made you uniquely different from others that he might use your strengths and struggles, your gifts and weaknesses in the lives of others.

So many ask many times: what can I do? And many times it is just looking around, and befriending another, or going out to coffee to encourage another. And ministry ends up finding us when we are willing. God has purposely given you as a grace gift to others. Seek, not to be someone else but just yourself. Look for ways that you can bless others, and the amazing thing about ministry is that when we are willing, ministry finds us. We are one small cog in this glorious body of Christ in which he is going to be magnified. Why wouldn't we want to not only profit from the body of Christ but be active also? Seek to live out your new reality in Jesus Christ.