

“Prerequisites to Transformation”
Romans 12:3-8
Dr. Jerry Nelson

READ Romans 12:1-8 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. 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. ⁴ 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. ⁶ 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.

The Apostle Paul ends his instruction in this paragraph with several illustrations of what the Bible elsewhere calls “spiritual gifts.”

When Christians begin to learn about “spiritual gifts” one of the first questions they ask is, “What are my spiritual gifts?”

To the best of my understanding of the Scriptures, “A spiritual gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to you grace for effective spiritual service.”

We’ll come back to that definition later but notice that here Paul cites seven such gifts: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership, and mercy.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul indicated that these “gifts” are given by the Spirit of God to strengthen the church, the people of God.

1 Corinthians 12:1-7 “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers... there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good.**”

Paul will teach that same concept here but I get ahead of myself.

Why is Paul talking about “gifts?”

Let’s go back to verses 1-2 which we looked at most closely,

last week.

We saw that these two verses form the bridge between the first eleven chapters of Romans and the last five chapters.

In those first eleven chapters Paul has spelled out the great truths of salvation – how we may have a right relationship with God.

Please remember this is an issue of utmost importance.

If God exists and we are alienated from him, there is no hope for us.

But the Gospel, the good news, is that God has reconciled us to himself, so that now we may belong to the God of eternity by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Following that lengthy and powerful affirmation of the Gospel, Paul then sets forth what should, quite obviously, be our response:

Romans 12:1-2 “**Therefore**, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The obvious and necessary response to God’s awesome grace is to offer our bodies, our very lives, as living sacrifices to God.

As we saw last week, that comes, over time, by no longer being conformed to the pattern of this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

At that point, Paul immediately launches into two fundamental, essential ideas, that we must know and practice if our minds are going to be renewed thereby, day by day, transforming us to be more like Jesus.

These two ideas are very closely related.

1. The first, in verse 3, is about an attitude of humility.
2. The second, in verses 4-5, is about our very necessary relationship to each other.

Verses 6-8, about specific spiritual gifts, are then

illustrations of those two ideas in practice.

What I will say next, is I think very important : Paul knows that relationships are the means and the manifestation of transformed living.

Living in relationship to each other, in humility and service to each other, is a primary means God uses to bring about the transformed lives he desires.

AND the way we live in relationship to one another is a primary manifestation of transformed lives.

So first, Paul writes in Romans 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.”

How are we to think of ourselves? Paul responds with three things:

- “Not... more highly than you ought”
- “but rather...with sober judgment”
- And that sober judgment is “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

The main point is that we are to think of ourselves with “sober judgment” or with a correct understanding of ourselves.

And what is that “sober judgment,” that correct understanding?

Paul says it is “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

Now this is a little nuanced, but I will see if I can explain it:

The word "Measure" (“metron”) can mean either the measured amount (like a lot of something or only a little of something) or it can mean the measuring device (like a yardstick or a thermometer).

So we could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the “amount” of faith God has given you (meaning that you recognize that the faith you have is a gift from God, regardless of how much faith you have, and thus not a source of pride).

OR

We could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the "standard" of faith God has given you," (meaning that the faith you have is the same faith any other Christian has (faith is the measure, the faith measure) and it is from God and thus no reason for boasting).

I think the second is better; we are to judge ourselves by the grace common to all of us, meaning we have all become Christians the same way – by the faith God has given us.

But it is interesting that Paul ends up making the same point either way.

A prerequisite for being transformed into the likeness of Jesus is simple but true humility.

Turning it around, the 18th century Englishman William Law said, "Humility is nothing else but a right judgment of ourselves."

To **live** the Christian life we must start at the same place we did in receiving the Christian life to begin with - humbly.

For you to become a Christian you had to recognize your utter dependence on God.

In Romans Paul has repeatedly made clear that we have no right, we have no worth, no merit, by which we can expect God's favor.

We come empty handed, deserving wrath but finding mercy.

Jesus spoke of it as coming to him as a little child.

A child is not only dependent but a child knows that he hasn't achieved anything that makes him worthy.

In our case, even our desire and ability to believe have been given to us by God.

250 years ago, Augustus Toplady wrote that now historic hymn "Rock of Ages which speaks to the same issue: "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling..."

Now to **live** the Christian life we must have the same attitude – sober judgment, humbly knowing that everything we have is by grace..

In order for us to be transformed we must begin by letting go of the natural ideas of rights and entitlements.

Imagine the difference it would make in our relationships if we fully recognized and acted on the truth that everything we have is a gift from God.

We don't deserve it, we have no right to it and we don't "own" it.

Any understanding we have the Scriptures, any relationship we have with Christ, any abilities we have even to breathe and work each day, or to serve others, is by the grace of God, to be used for the glory of God.

All ground is level at the cross.

No Christian is superior to another.

As one person put it, "We are all beggars telling other beggars where there is bread."

I know that flies in the face of modern psychology's obsession with self but Paul said to think of ourselves with sober judgment, correctly.

And God says though we were wonderfully made, we are deeply fallen and **only by his grace** are we now deeply loved.

Humility is the starting point for all spiritual growth.

Over 200 years ago John Wesley captured the right sense of humility when he prayed the following:

"Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all **idolatrous self-love**. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me to serve not my will but yours. I know that the very essence of the devil is having a will contrary to yours. Help me against this most dangerous of all idols. Enable me to feel the full evil of my sin and sinfulness and then let me be fully content when all others think of me as I do of myself.

"O Lamb of God, who both by your example and teaching instructed us to be humble, give me grace this day and throughout my whole life, in every thought, word and action, to imitate your humble ways. Help me understand that I am nothing and have nothing and that I deserve nothing but misery and punishment. Grant

it Lord that I may look for nothing and claim nothing and that I may go through life not seeking my own glory but only yours.

“Let me never speak any word that may tend to my own praise unless the good of my neighbor requires it; and even then let me beware, lest to heal another I wound my own soul. Let my ears and my heart be shut to the praise that comes from others. Give me a dread of applause in whatever form and from whatever tongue it comes.

“O Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men, when I am slighted by my friends, disdained by my superiors, ridiculed by my peers or contemptuously treated by my inferiors, let me know that it is only then that I begin to be your disciple, following in your steps. Let me thankfully accept, and faithfully use such occasions for the improving of a humble attitude. Let me acknowledge that your goodness is letting me experience this training and let me beg for mercy for those physicians of my soul that administered your instruction to me.” Edited from A Collection of Forms of Prayer 1733)

Now with that attitude of humility we can move on to understand better what Paul is saying in verses 4-6a.

Romans 12:4-6a “Just as each of us has one (physical) body with many members (arms, legs, eyes, etc.) and these members do not all have the same function (reaching, walking, seeing, etc), so, in Christ, we who are many form one body (the church), and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.”

Here Paul uses a simile or metaphor to show that just as the human body has many members with differing functions, so the church has many members but it is one body.

And just as importantly notice he also says that **each one belongs to all the others.**

Now this is where the humility comes into play.

- Pride says, I’m saved, what more do I need?
- Pride says, I don’t need anyone else; I can make it on my own.
- Pride says, I don’t need to help anyone else; they can take care of themselves.

Something very unhealthy has developed in the evangelical church over the years – something we have adopted from the culture.

That unhealthy something is an excessive “individualism” and it has resulted in an “individualistic Christianity”.

We have reduced Christianity to a private affair between God and ourselves.

William Willimon has written, “American Protestantism often impresses observers as a highly individualized, privatized, psychological affair... Individual conversion experiences (in which individuals are saved from individual sins in order to have individual relationships with Jesus) are viewed by some evangelicals as the end rather than the beginning of the life of faith. The church becomes (little more than) a conglomerate of like-minded individuals who find it useful to congregate in order to keep the flame of individual religious experience alive and to foster it in others.” (Willimon in [What's Right with the Church](#) 15)

I think he’s right.

We speak and act as if getting our personal sins forgiven and getting our own ticket to heaven is the sum of what it means to be a Christian.

And furthermore we sometimes think the only reason for church is to tell others about their need for getting their sins forgiven and getting to heaven.

Church gets reduced to an assembly of individuals emphasizing an individual religion.

But as Willimon points out, individual, personal conversion is not the conclusion of the life of faith but simply the beginning.

We are converted, saved, born again, **into a community** – a community of faith, the body of Christ, the church.

An Asian Indian by the name of George David, wrote an excellent little book entitled, *The Eclipse and Rediscovery of Person*.

We are so intent on being individuals, having autonomy, that we have sacrificed our personhood.

George David, following Paul Tournier and others, makes an important distinction between being merely an **individual** and also being a **person**.

The very word “individual” speaks of number – you are one, alone, separate from.

That word “individual” emphasizes autonomy, freedom, independence.

In and of itself, being an individual is not wrong but when it excludes the more important aspect of what it means to be “person” then individualism is harmful.

We are not just individuals; we are, more importantly, persons.

You say that just sounds like semantics.

Listen, and I think you will hear a real difference in the distinction.

As I just said, the word “individual” refers primarily to number – the number “one,” and by definition “individual” emphasizes our separateness from others.

The word “person” speaks of relationship, and “personhood” doesn’t exist apart from relationship.

Listen to David, “The ‘I’ can have no real knowledge of itself apart from others. When two selves interact mutually they develop common attitudes, interests, beliefs and goals. When the interaction is such that the individuality of each is not lost but rather respected by the other, they (each) develop a relational self. It is (this relationship) that transforms an individual into a person... A person possesses not only an individual self, but also a relational self, which is possessed in common with another, making them persons to each other.”^(David 43,44)

Yes, God made us individually but he created us to live in relationship.

Genesis 2:18 “The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.

God created human life to live in fellowship (not just alongside but in relationship) with him and with others.

Derek Kidner writes, "A person) will not **live** until he **loves**, giving himself away to another..." Derek Kidner Genesis 65

"Sober judgment," correct thinking, humility, means, I am not only still in need of God; I am also in need of God's people.

Several years ago a friend of mine moved away from Denver and away from this church.

He wrote to me some months later saying that he wasn't in a church, because he had discovered that it felt sufficient to just read his Bible and watch religious programs on television.

Ironically, in the next paragraphs he lamented his weakening spiritual condition and the battles with sin he was losing.

The problem with my friend was that he had somehow been led to believe that he would grow as a Christian if he just somehow on his own did enough of the right things. But it wasn't working!

What was missing? He was trying to go it alone.

God didn't design us that way - it won't work.

As Doug Moo wrote, "Television church is not church." (Romans, NIVAC, 407)

Christianity is a relationship with God and with his people. You can't have one without the other.

Spiritual growth takes place in community!

The crucible of Christian growth is relationships.

250 years ago John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, understood this principle better than any other for many years before him.

If a man or a woman declared their faith in Jesus they were asked to join a "class meeting.

The word class didn't denote only a teaching time but, just as importantly, a small gathering of believers (8-12 in size)

"The classes normally met one evening each week for an hour or so. Each person reported on his or her spiritual progress, or on particular needs or problems, and receive the support and prayers of the others. Advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels were

made up, misunderstandings removed: and after an hour or two spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving." (Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 55)

Someone, years later, commented, "the kind of (community that the believers) experienced in the class meetings had the express warrant of Holy Scripture...

- How for example could they exhort one another daily?
- How could they comfort and edify one another?
- How could they provoke one another to love and good deeds?
- How could they confess their faults to one another and pray for one another?...
- How could they bear one another's burdens?
- How could they weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice

all of which are commands of God to us on each other's behalf, if they never meet together for the purpose of (talking about their spiritual lives) and the state of each other's souls?" (Snyder, 56)

Transformed lives are built in community! Are you in community?

Are you in a relationship with other people that allows for

- the care for your soul?
- attention to your spiritual well-being?
- openness for sharing your burdens and joys?
- a trust where you can confess your faults?
- interaction about the real things of life that can allow for your growth in understanding of God's word as applied to life?

When Jesus was on earth and if you had been alive at that time, where would you have looked to learn about Jesus and how he lived?

Obviously, you would have observed him - learned from him.

If you want to see Jesus in action today, where do you need to look?

Yes, at the people of the church.

Imperfect as they may yet be in many cases, those who are truly Christians are nonetheless a reflection of Christ.

We come together in our groups to see Jesus in each other, to learn from each other, to be loved by each other in spite of our differences, to care for each other.

Some time ago I sat toward the back of the auditorium during a Sunday morning service.

I was not expected to be here so I was not leading.

As I sat there that morning I could not help but notice you from a different perspective.

I saw so many of you whom I have known for years.

As I sat there I realized afresh that I love you.

I have been with some of you through your joys and your hurts, your victories and your failures.

I have been with you through marriage and through birth; through death and through divorce.

Honestly, with many tears, I said to myself - this is the church.

It is not programs, or facilities, or organization (as necessary as all those things are)

The church is you.

And I love you not only because of who you are but also for what you have taught me.

In many of you I have met Jesus.

- You have modeled love in the face of hostility.
- You have shown perseverance in the midst of pain.
- You have demonstrated forgiveness in the absence of repentance.
- You have responded to attack with gentleness.

God inhabits his people - we learn about him in community, in each other.

The change that God says he will do in us, renewing our minds and transforming us to be more like Jesus, starts with humility and continues in the context of the people of God.

Now in verses 6-8 Paul illustrates how that works itself out in our life together as Christians.

Romans 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.

I clearly don’t have time to develop this whole idea of the gifts of the Spirit.

But I don’t think that was Paul’s intent here either.

It is developed much more fully in 1 Corinthians 12 and I have given you additional notes on this subject in your bulletin and online.

But to close the sermon where Paul does in the text, I remind you again, “A Spiritual Gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to Christians grace for effective spiritual service.”

A spiritual gift is a “special work of the Holy Spirit”

It is not just our natural abilities - though he may use our natural abilities.

The “gift of gab” is not necessarily a spiritual gift though the Spirit of God may use someone’s natural or learned ability to articulate well, to effectively minister to others.

This “special work of the Holy Spirit” is just that - it is the Spirit of God intervening supernaturally to enable the Christian to serve effectively.

Having said that, it then stands to reason that **the gift is not just in what the Christian is enabled to do but in the change the Spirit brings about in the one being served.**

Things happen in others because of the exercise of that gift.

God does a work in someone’s life through you.

How do you know what your spiritual gifts are?

In your bulletin and online I have given you seven thoughts you can use to help determine how God wishes to use you to effectively serve others – how to use your spiritual gifts.

But please don't be concerned about naming your spiritual gifts.

As I have studied the various passages that teach on this subject I have noticed that many of the definitions of the words used to describe the gifts seem to overlap.

It is most likely that God never intended to give a complete listing of all the spiritual gifts but gave us enough to show us that there are probably as many gifts as there are needs to be met.

In fact I do believe that is the most significant issue when it comes to using our spiritual gifts – not so much knowing what they are as using them.

I don't agree with Robert Schuler on many things, but on this I do:

“Find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it.”

Do **something** and let God do his work through you.

“A Spiritual Gift is a special work of the Holy Spirit whereby he grants to Christians grace for effective spiritual service.”

Helen Keller who died 40 years ago this summer, was the first deaf/blind person to graduate from college.

She wrote, “I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_humility.html

God has called each of us to use the opportunities and abilities he gives us to be the means he will use in each other to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Our life together is both the means and the manifestation of a transformed life.

It starts with humility and an understanding of our need for each other.

It continues with our serving each other in whatever ways God gives us opportunity.

Romans 12:1-8 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. 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. ⁴ 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. ⁶ 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.

Additional Notes:

Romans 12:3, 6

In verse 3 Paul has not yet introduced the concept of "gifts." He is setting the stage for it, to be sure, but I think he is first of all laying out some ground rules for the discussion: namely that humility is a necessary prerequisite for being transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is of course also a prerequisite for understanding our role in the use of God's gifts to serve others.

"Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Paul has used this word "faith," thus far in Romans, consistently to refer to our basic response to the gospel.

For him to now suggest that God gives some people more of this kind of faith than others doesn't make any sense.

And if Paul already has in mind the differing gifts that God gives to his people (not introduced until v6) then "grace" not "faith" would be a better way of saying that.

"Measure" ("metron") can mean either the measuring device (the standard) or the measured amount.

So we could translate it this way: "Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the (amount) of faith God has given you (meaning that you recognize that the faith you have is a gift from God, regardless of how much faith you have, and thus not a source of pride)

OR

"Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the (standard) of faith God has given you," (meaning that the faith you have is the same faith any other Christian has (faith is the measure, the faith measure) and it is from God and thus no reason for boasting).

I think the second is better, we are to judge ourselves by the grace common to all of us whereby we are Christians.

But it is interesting that Paul ends up making the same point either way. The prerequisite is humility.

Vs 6 "let him use it in proportion to his faith"

"proportion" or "in right relationship" are both equally valid translations.

As in v3 it could be a reference to an "amount" of faith, but I think more likely it means in relationship to your faith - remembering that it is all of God.

So Paul's instruction is not about an "amount" of faith but that the prophet's words should be consistent with his faith in Jesus.

Again, regardless of the technicalities of these different possible interpretations, the point is the same, we are to live with an awareness that all we are and have is by grace (even our faith is by grace) and we are to use any "gifts" God has given us to help others because we belong to each other.

Twelve Ways To Humble Yourself

1. Routinely confess your sin to God. (Luke 18:9-14) All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. However, too few of us have a routine practice of rigorous self-honesty examination. Weekly, even daily, review of our heart and behavior, coupled with confession to God, is an essential practice of humility.
2. Acknowledge your sin to others. (James 3:2, James 5:16) Humility before God is not complete unless there is also humility before man. A true test of our willingness to humble ourselves is being willing to share with others the weaknesses we confess to God. Wisdom, however, dictates that we do so with others that we trust.
3. Take wrong patiently. (1 Peter 3:8-17) This has been a difficult one for me. When something is unjust I want to react and rectify it. However, patiently responding to the unjust accusations and actions of others demonstrates our strength of godly character and provides an opportunity to put on humility.
4. Actively submit to authority...the good and the bad! (1 Peter 2:18) Our culture does not value submission; rather it promotes individualism. How purposely and actively do you work on submission to those whom God has placed as authorities in your life? Doing so is a good way to humble yourself.
5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously. (Proverbs 10:17, 12:1) In the Phoenix area, a local East valley pastor was noted for graciously receiving any negative feedback or correction offered. He would simply say "thank you for caring enough to share that with me, I will pray about it and get back to you." Look for the kernel of truth in what people offer you, even if it comes from a dubious source. Always pray, "Lord, what are you trying to show me through this?"
6. Accept a lowly place. (Proverbs 25:6,7) If you find yourself wanting to sit at the head table, wanting others to recognize your contribution or become offended when others are honored or chosen, then pride is present. Purpose to support others being recognized, rather than you. Accept and look for the lowly place; it is the place of humility.
7. Purposely associate with people of lower state than you. (Luke 7:36-39) Jesus was derided by the Pharisees for socializing with the poor and those of lowly state. Our culture is very status conscious and people naturally want to socialize upward. Resist the temptation of being partial to those with status or wealth.
8. Choose to serve others. (Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11) When we serve others, we are serving God's purposes in their lives. Doing so reduces our focus on ourselves and builds the Kingdom of God instead of the Kingdom of self. When serving another costs us nothing, we should question whether or not it is really servanthood.
9. Be quick to forgive. (Matthew 18: 21-35) Forgiveness is possibly one of the greatest acts of humility we can do. To forgive is to acknowledge a wrong that has been done us and also to further release our right of repayment for the wrong. Forgiveness is denial of self. Forgiveness is not insisting on our way and our justice.
10. Cultivate a grateful heart. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) The more we develop an attitude of gratitude for the gift of salvation and life He has given us, the more true our perspective of self. A grateful heart is a humble heart.
11. Purpose to speak well of others. (Ephesians 4:31-32) Saying negative things about others puts them "one down" and us "one up"...a form of pride. Speaking well of others edifies them and builds them up instead of us. Make sure, however, that what you say is not intended as flattery.
12. Treat pride as a condition that always necessitates embracing the cross. (Luke 9:23) It is our nature to be proud and it is God's nature in us that brings humility. Committing to a lifestyle of daily dying to self and living through Him is the foundation for true humility.

Alfred Ells, M.C. in "What does the Bible Say about Humility"

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