

Be the Body of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 July 2016

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Our scripture reading this morning is found in Romans chapter 12. Romans chapter 12.

And I'll read the first eight verses. This is your spiritual act of worship.

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.

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.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

[1:19] 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. If it is serving, let him serve.

If it is teaching, let him teach. 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. Who was Samson's best friend? Actually, can you tell me one person who Samson was friends with?

On the day of his wedding to his Philistine bride, he had 30 friends, all supplied by the Philistines. And I have a feeling, I'm not sure, but it seems likely that as you read that passage in Judges, it's likely that Samson ended up killing most of those friends with his bare hands.

And who did Samson use his gifts for? Who did Samson use his gifts for? You could say the Lord was using Samson. He certainly was. The Lord had purposes with Samson's gifts and the great strength he gave him.

[2:44] But who did Samson use his gifts for? Well, after his fiancée was given to another man, he said, This time I have a right to get even.

And I will really harm them. At his death, he stood between two pillars, you remember? And he prayed, Lord, help me save your people.

And he pushed those pillars and the temple fell down and killed 3,000 Philistines. Well, that's not exactly how it went, did it? He had his hands on those two pillars and he prayed, Let me get revenge for my two eyes.

And he pushed those pillars and the temple came down. And Samson got his personal revenge. Now, the thing about Samson is, is we can definitely hope that he did better when God's camera wasn't on him.

There's a lot of time where we don't know anything about what Samson was doing. So as he judged Israel for 20 years. So there's this 20 year gap where we can hope that he did better than the snapshots that we have in our Bible.

[4:02] But the scriptural portrait is of a loner. You can read it. Wherever he goes, he goes alone.

Even when he's going down to meet his wife, he doesn't go with his family. He ends up living in a cave by himself. He goes into foreign cities by himself.

He's a man that walked alone and he used his gifts for himself. Now, Romans 12, 3 through 8 was written because we all have that tendency to go Samson.

Samson, to be Samson's or to think ourselves that way. To go it alone, to use our gifts selfishly, for our whole orientation of our service for God as bent inward.

And that's why Paul wrote this passage to the church in Rome. He's not talking about theoretical issues. He's talking about the issues of my heart.

[5:05] He's talking about the issues of your heart. Because we all bend toward the Samson, thinking that we're one man teams, that God has given us everything that we need, that we are these self-contained Christians, living for self right in the middle of the body of Christ.

But Paul says, Brothers, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And when your mind is renewed, then you're going to be able to test and approve what God's will is, this good, pleasing, and perfect will. Some of you, we often do, we ask, What is God's will for me? What does God want me to do? Should I go here, or should I go there? Should I do this, or should I do that? What does God want from me?

[6:14] Now, if you are being transformed by the renewing of your mind, then more and more you're realizing the answer to that question is not so much a specific direction about going here or there.

What is God's will for me? He wants me to quit living the Samson life. He wants me to live more completely, more wholeheartedly, more fully in the body of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ.

He wants me to quit thinking that that question is all about me. That I'm the only concern that I have in that question. And realize that I belong to others, that I am in a body.

They need me, and I need them. And that's what you're going to see in this passage. We're going to divide it into three basic sections, three basic points.

And the first is that we see a necessary rebuke. A necessary rebuke. And then secondly, three fundamental truths. And then thirdly, now what should you do?

[7:21] So a necessary rebuke, three fundamental truths, and now what should you do? And so we begin with a necessary rebuke. That's verse three.

Verse three says, 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. Now he says, For by the grace given me, what he's talking about is, by the grace given me to be an apostle.

I'm not telling you to, but if you were to go back to the very beginning of Romans, Romans 1, he's beginning to write, and he says, Through Christ and for his name's sake, we have received grace and apostleship to call out from among the Gentiles those who to obey by the obedience of faith, and so on.

This grace and apostleship. So Paul saw himself as an apostle by the grace of Jesus Christ. And so now he's saying, For by the grace that was given me, now I'm standing here as Christ's representative.

I'm coming to you with Jesus' words in my mouth. So we're just saying, Lord, help me to see Jesus. Paul is saying, this is what Jesus has to say to you.

[8:41] Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment. In the context, it's clear what he means.

Christ says to us, don't think that you can do this alone. Don't think you have everything you need. Don't think you are so great.

Don't think other people need you, but you don't need them. Don't think that you're too big to fail. In our financial system, we have banks that have the title, they're too big to fail.

They're too central. They're too important. They're too tied up. They can't be allowed to fail because to take them down would be to endanger the entire system. Well, Jesus is saying to us, don't think that you are too big to fail.

Don't think that you are the linchpin in which this whole thing operates. None of you are indispensable. None of us are indispensable. Now, in one way, Grace Fellowship Church needs every single one of you, brothers and sisters.

[9:55] And in another sense, Grace Fellowship Church doesn't need any particular one of us. So let me say, if you feel like you can't say no when I come to you, when someone comes to you, when you see something that needs to be done and you feel like you can't say no, or you don't think that anyone could ever do the job as well as you could, well, then this rebuke is for you.

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought. And if I'm looking at myself honestly, I can say that while my gifts, while good and useful, are not the end-all and be-all, they're not everything that everyone needs.

The church is not just me being the pastor and you doing nothing. No, my gifts are good and useful, but they're not the end-all and be-all. And everyone else can say the very same thing.

It's good. Your gifts are good and they are useful, but I need a whole lot more than what I got. I need a lot more than what I've got, what Jesus has personally given me.

And the whole church needs a lot more than what I can offer, what I have. And so if you don't think you need your brothers and sisters, because your gifts are enough, this rebukes for you.

[11:17] But there's another way that we can say this. If you don't think you need your brothers and sisters in the sense that you aren't continually allowing them into your life, that you're not living the Christian life as a shared life, where you're undisclosed to them, disclosed to them, where you let them in on your troubles, where you let them in on your sins.

I saw a humorous, satirical article online, and the story, the headline said, Pastor asked church, everyone is doing fine.

He said, the article said, the pastor stood back at the end of the, you know, by the door, and he asked everyone how they're doing, and everyone said they're good. Everyone said they're fine. They knew some problems that some distant relatives had, but no one else, I didn't have any problems.

So, do you get what I'm saying? If we're the self-contained, secretive Christian, where we wear this invisibility cloak over our heart, where people can see our bodies, but we never let them see our souls, then this rebuke is for you.

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought. And we need to look at ourselves honestly. with sober judgment, with honesty, and honestly, sin is deceitful for me.

[12:52] Sin is tricky for me. Sin lies to me, and I fall for it, and I can so easily fall for it. Sin blinds me, and the biggest thing that it blinds me to is its own presence.

So, I can have deceitful desires and think that I'm telling, that they're telling me the truth. I can want something, and I can think that's a good thing, but in reality, it's a bad thing.

I can be angry and bitter and think I'm a happy, generous person. I can be, I can think I'm living for the right things, but in reality, I'm living for all the wrong things.

And that's why I need you. That's why you need me. That's why I need to let you in. So, when I'm looking at myself with sober judgment, I can see someone who's easily deceived.

I can see someone whose heart grows cold. For the grave, on the grave of John F. Kennedy, there's what's called an eternal flame, and it's just always burning.

[14:02] Well, I'm not an eternal flame. I'm not a self-feeding fire. I'm a coal in the fire, and when you, amongst all the other coals, and when you pull me out, I grow cold.

cold. That's what my heart is like. So, I can go from hot to cold. That's me. And so, that's what Jesus' words are to us. Don't think you're too big to fail. Don't think you're all you need.

Sin blinds you. And I have a heart that goes from hot to cold pretty quickly. Now, that's the truth. That's why I need this rebuke.

That's why you need this rebuke. Samson thinking is not honest thinking. It's not right thinking. It's not thinking about yourself correctly. It's not looking at yourself honestly.

So, that's the first point, a rebuke, a necessary rebuke. The second is, three, in verses four through six, we see three fundamental truths. Three fundamental truths that we need to take on board.

[15:04] Again, this is, this is what God's will is for you. Romans 12, one and two are not disconnected and like on a totally different chapter or page than what we have here.

This is what God's will is for you. To take these things on board. To embrace these truths. To embrace them in such a way that now you live them out. They become a reality in your life.

And so, we have two basic categories in a lot of our thinking. We have the Sunday school right answers. Is God good?

And we say, yes. And then, we have the real answers. The things that we really believe. And in that category, I say, God's not so good, so I'm going to complain. So, we have the right answers.

And the real answers. And what Romans 12, three through eight has to do is go from being the right Sunday school answers to the real answers.

[16:05] And then we live them out. And so, we have these three truths. The first truth is, Christian, you are a part of Christ's body. You're a part of Christ's body.

First, verse five, Paul says, so in Christ, we who are many form one body. Now, it's important to see that this is not something that we do.

It's something that is in Christ that is true. That we need to believe and hold on to. In Christ, we form one body. So, we didn't have some sort of Christian agreement to do this church thing together. No, in Christ. So, this is much bigger than my decisions. This is much bigger than me and my choices. Christ is in this. And so, you are not Samson going it alone.

You're not a pastor too big to fail, too big for myself. You're not Mr. Invisible. And you're not Miss Unnecessary, Miss Useless, Miss Worthless.

[17:16] There are no appendixes. Appendixes, plural of this little thing down here. They used to think that you could just cut those things out. They're just leftovers, vestigial parts from evolution.

Well, it turns out when God cooks, there's no leftovers. There's no leftover bit that's useless and pointless. And so, I would say to each one of you, you are a functioning, integral part of the body of Christ.

That's part of your identity. That's part of what should shape what you do. So, you're a mom and so you're a mother or you're a dad and so you act like a dad. You're an employee so you show up on time.

You go to work. You're a child of God. You're a justified sinner. But just as real, you have to feel this and this has to weigh on you, that you are a part of this body.

You are a part of the body of Christ. Now, how did you become a part of that body? Well, you didn't win it. You weren't born into it.

[18:20] You didn't age into it. Kids, no one just turns 13 and then joins the church. You didn't win the merit badge.

You didn't pass the SEAL team test. We aren't in the body of Christ by right or by heritage. We are in the body of Christ because Christ's body was broken for us and we were brought in through his wounds.

The reason that you are in the body of Christ is because he offered his body as a sacrifice for you. In love, his side was torn open and we were brought in through his wounds.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says in communion, you have to recognize the body of Christ. In that whole event, as we remember his death and as we see his death in some ways acted out, Paul says that you have to see the body of Christ.

you have to know that this isn't just about you and Jesus. It's not a one-on-one, so to speak, or just a one-on-one. You have to realize that other people are there. We're in it together.

[19:33] We stick together. We're sealed by his blood. That was the basic problem in Corinth. They thought they were all one-man shows. They didn't see each other.

So there was a bunch of Samson Christians and Paul in 1 Corinthians says that betrays the whole point of communion. That misses the entire point. Jesus didn't die just for you.

He died for them. He died for that person over there to make you one. Now that's the first fundamental truth. You can't be a Samson Christian because you're a part of the body of Christ.

The second fundamental truth is this, that you can't be a Samson Christian because you belong to each other. You belong to each other. I'll tell you what, this is a revolutionary thought if it gets into your head.

You see that at the end of verse 5. So in Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the other members.

[20:35] Now what a thought. Christian, who owns you? Who do you belong to?

Well, I have over a hundred owners in this room. A hundred people that I'm obligated to, that I belong to, that I can't think of myself as separate from.

So I'm obligated to them. And when we serve here in this church, we can't think that we are doing these people such a favor. And now that they're somehow in my debt, you belong to them.

You're obligated to them. And so when the hand reaches up and pulls something out of its eye, the hand doesn't think, well, now I got something on the eye and it owes me something. No, the whole reason the hand exists is to pull things out of the eye.

It belongs to the eye. And when the stomach sends food down to the legs, the stomach doesn't say to the legs, now you owe me. No, the legs aren't in debt.

[21:45] And that's why Paul says the only debt we should have, the only outstanding debt that we should have, is our continual debt to love one another. Now that tells us something, that tells me something, that I am obligated, just as I am obligated to pay my debts, I am obligated in an ongoing fashion to love my brothers and sisters, to care for them, to serve them.

And again, when we feel this, this has to weigh on us. We belong to each other. I am not living this isolated, alone life. I am owned.

And when we think about that, that tells us who our gifts are for. That tells us who we are to use our gifts for. So why did God give us these gifts?

Why did God give us God-given abilities to serve? Well, he gave us those God-given abilities to serve our brothers and sisters. They have no function other than serving those people out there. They were never meant to be some way bent in on myself and used for my glory. No, they're bent out for them. And so the eyes have the God-given ability to see.

[22:56] Why? So that they can keep the feet out of trouble. And the stomach has this God-given ability to break down food. It's the only thing in the body that can do what it does.

Well, why? Because it can feed the brain. And the brain has this God-given ability to direct and to control the whole operation. Not so that the rest of the body can say, oh, there goes the brain. He's great. He's the most important thing around. He's the best. No, the brain belongs to the rest and the rest belongs to the brain. The brain serves the body. It has its abilities for the sake of the body.

And so do you see the whole orientation is outward. The whole orientation is other. Too often, we're still inward-facing Christians.

And really, that's the world's way of thinking. The gospel just takes inward-facing Christians and turns them inside out, and so now they're outward-facing people.

[24:02] And so I belong to them. I exist for them. My gifts are for their good. That's the second fundamental truth. And here's the third one. You have unique gifts all your own.

You have a unique gift. You have unique gifts all your own. Verse four says, we have different members with different functions. that's verse four.

Verse six says, we have different gifts. We have different gifts. That means you, Christian, have a different gift. A different gift from all the other members.

A unique gift that is all your own. It's unique in the sense that you are unique. Now, what I mean is there's general categories of gifts.

But each one of us have a particular gift in the sense that no one can use that gift like you do. So I hope I have the gift of preaching. But I don't preach like any other preachers.

[25:07] I don't sound like them. I don't say things the way they say them. Because I have a different personality. I have a different experience. I have different life experiences. And so my personality and my experiences all go into how God wants me to serve.

And so the same is true for you. You have your own gift. God has been using you and equipping you and giving you life experiences and he's given you a certain kind of personality and he's given you a certain spiritual gift.

And so now you have your own unique gift. It's unlike anyone else's gift. It's not repetitive. It's not an extra.

It's not sort of like a spare tire that you keep under the car and it doesn't need to be used except for emergencies. No, there's no spare tires. Everyone needs to be going. Everyone needs to be attached to the car and going all the time.

You have your own unique contribution to make to this body. That's true if you're an old Christian.

That's true if you're a new Christian. That's true if you're a boy Christian or a girl Christian.

[26:14] It's true for all Christians. When God called you into Christ he called you to serve. And he called you with your gifts and he called you with your graces and he called you with your personality and your experiences because that's what the church needed.

It didn't need another one of me. One is enough. And it didn't need another one of someone else. It needed you. Do you believe that?

If you believe it you'll start using your gifts more zealously but if you don't believe it you'll just do nothing. That's the third fundamental truth.

You are part of Christ's body. You belong to everyone else. You have a unique gift that's all your own. Now what should you do? And this is the third big point.

What should you do? Well you should use your gifts zealously. You should use your gifts zealously. You shouldn't be afraid to use your gifts. You should step full force into them into service.

[27:21] You should dive in and use your gifts. You belong to the body of Christ so use your gifts. The body needs you so use your gifts. You have a unique gift all your own so use that gift.

And so Paul goes through it. If it's serving let him serve. If it's teaching let him teach. If it's encouraging let him encourage. Now we have to understand the tone of what Paul is trying to get across. He's not saying well if it's serving serve.

If it's serving then serve. Do it. Serve with zeal. Serve with love. That's what you see at the end. Generously. Diligently.

Cheerfully. It's not just doing it half heartedly. It's doing it whole heartedly. Doing it zealously. If that's your groove. That's where you fit.

Then be all there. It's okay to not be gifted like others. Do what God has for you. Don't fret that you don't have someone else's gift.

[28:20] You don't have someone else's experience. You don't have someone else's background. You don't have someone else's spiritual gifts. Do yours. Around 1700 there was a Christian woman named Jeanne Goyon.

She's from France. She was thrown into prison. She was a very wealthy influential godly woman and she got into trouble with the Catholic Church.

She got in trouble with the King of France and she went into the Bastille. Into the prison. Into the state prison. Now Jeanne was very influential. very thoughtful.

She wrote. She inspired a lot of Christians. But in she went. Now I don't want to talk to you anymore about her. I want to talk to you about her servant.

I couldn't even find her name. I didn't look super hard but it wasn't very obvious anyways. When Jeanne went into prison her servant went with her.

[29:23] daughter. And she herself was a godly woman. And she understood that this is what God wanted for her.

This was her field of service. Her job was to take care of her mistress. She wrote to her brother, God called me.

I was obliged to go. And so that was her field of service. Her mistress was famous and well loved and very influential. She could write, she could speak all sorts of good stuff.

But her field of service was to take care of her. The maid servant's field of service was to take care of her mistress. To go into the dungeon.

To live there with her. To be forgotten by everyone except for the Lord. And she did it cheerfully and she did it willingly and faithfully. Her brother pleaded with her to leave.

[30:26] You can imagine. Your sister's going there. She doesn't have to be there. So the brother is writing to her, begging her and pleading her, you can leave, go.

And she said, how can I? This is God's will. This is God's will. And she said, I'm happier doing God's will in this prison than disobeying him out there.

Now I just want to say, what a beautiful thing it is to do the thing that God has for you. If it's not great, that doesn't matter. The beauty is in doing it. And so it's okay to not be gifted like others.

Do what God has for you. No matter how obscure and unimportant it seems, remember, it's the field that your Lord called you to.

And the fact that he called you there makes all the difference. And so if he's taking your hand and he's walked you past other fields and he's brought you to this one field, he says, now do this.

[31:31] It does no good to look at other people's fields. Your Lord has brought you to this one.

And what you'll find is that when you're down there, Jesus is down there too. Washing feet, loving his disciples to the very end.

So again, I say it's okay to not be gifted like others, but it is not okay to not be useful. The health of the church depends upon it.

Grace Fellowship needs you. If the liver quits doing its job, if it quits livering, you know, energetically, faithfully, every day, enthusiastically, the body's going to suffer.

If the hands refuse to work and help the eyes and hands and feet and the body out, then the rest of the body is going to suffer. And so we don't need to ask, what can those people do for me?

We need to be asking, what can I do for them? That's the whole purpose. And then do it. You see, the renewed mind is thinking like Jesus thinks.

[32:38] The renewed mind is thinking like Jesus thinks, who came not to be served, but to serve. Who didn't say his life was his own?

Who didn't set his own agenda? He was after the agenda of his father, and the agenda of his father was to lay down his life for his people. And so Jesus didn't ask, well, what's best for me?

What's best for mine? He asked, what needs to be done? And he did it. And so a person with a renewed mind doesn't travel alone.

He doesn't think of himself as a Samson. He's more of a David Christian. It's amazing if you put David and Samson next to each other. Wherever David went, he went with people.

And he had best friends. When he was in trouble, he had friends with him. And when he fell really hard, he had a Nathan that could come to him and speak to him. Now, a renewed person is like that.

[33:40] A person with a renewed mind is a Jesus-like Christian. And Jesus shared everything with his disciples. You can think of his last nights as he's broken hearted. He wants his disciples.

He wants them there. He wants to pray with them. And he's discouraged that they're not with him. He shared everything with his disciples. He wore his heart for all to see. And in the end, he did everything for them.

And when the time came for his greatest gift of all, he gave up his life for them. That was his field of service. Take on the sin of his disciples.

Take the blame, the grief, the shame of their sin, the guilt of it, and he took it. And he held nothing back. And he set his face like a flint to do it.

He was determined that he was going to do it. And he fought manfully through it all. Why? Because he didn't come to be served. He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

[34:48] Brothers and sisters, he gave himself for you. He gave himself all for you. now here are some of his little brothers. And here are some of his little sisters.

And so my question is, what will you do for them for Jesus sake? What will you do for them for Jesus sake? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this rebuke. We thank you for these truths. we thank you for this direction. Pray that we would give up our loner lives and our hidden lives and our secret lives and that your grace would set us free to be clear and to be clean and to be forward and to be honest with ourselves and with others.

And that we would turn away from just using our gifts and using church for our own glory but that we would with all of our heart serve you and serve our brothers and sisters for your sake Lord Jesus.

We do pray Lord that you would have mercy on those who are strained those who are hardened

Those who are lost! We pray that you would have mercy upon them!

[36:13] for the brothers or the sisters who need to be honest with people and who need to not only be honest but start serving them I pray that you would break their hearts and redirect them and then build them up and build up the church we pray these things for Jesus sake Amen