

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part forty-one

Sunday, October 6th, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2162

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

LIFE IN THE BODY AND THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

Romans 12:3-5 - "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. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Last week, as we began studying **verses 3 through five**, we saw the way Paul can only picture spiritual people - people with renewed minds - in their connection with the rest of the church. Spiritual people aren't loners. Spiritually renewed people are in the church. They are **defined** by their connectedness to other people. And **those** people are defined by **their** connectedness to still **other** people in the church. The church is where the Holy Spirit places people in the renewing of their minds.

But Paul rarely leaves any concept just hanging as a **mere** concept. He constantly presses into more and more details. All his doctrinal statements are **leading** somewhere practical. In today's text Paul is still untangling our deepest spiritual need and revealing what God plans to do about it. Our deepest spiritual need - the **mark** of the degree to which our minds are still **unrenewed** - is our tendency to "**think of ourselves more highly than we ought**"(12:3). You and I may not think of this as our biggest spiritual problem, but that is irrelevant. God does.

So as God goes about His work of **renewing our minds**, key to that whole process is getting us to "**think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned**"(12:3b). That word "**sober**" is very telling. On my own I tend to assess my own self with the perceptiveness of a **drunk**. I'm not dealing with reality in my own self-evaluation.

And the mistake I make is I **elevate myself**. It's not that I think I'm perfect, or that I run around all day with a hand-held mirror, preening over my own magnificence. It's not that kind of pride Paul's talking about. He means I am more blind than I should be about all God still wants to do in my life. I'm blind to the **nature** of my own deepest needs and I'm blind to the **means** God wants to use to renew my mind. I'm blind (usually manifesting itself as **resentment** to people and situations God may use) as to **how** God wants to keep doing that renewing work.

So, to help keep the renewal of my mind moving ahead, God places me in the church. This is what we studied last week. He places me in situations where I will constantly have to **apply** what I read in His Word and pray about in my personal devotions. The church is God's workshop. It's where He chisels and files and scrapes the old self out of my mind and carves in the shape of Jesus Christ.

Now, in today's text, Paul continues to work out more of the details of this community-based process for the renewal of the mind:

1) **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE GOD GIVES HIS REDEEMED PEOPLE? WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE?**

Those seem to be reasonable questions. We all talk and sing and pray about the work of the Holy Spirit. We speak of being given "**spiritual life**," or "**eternal life**." What is the **nature** of that life. What is it **like** What does it **do**?

And, of course, when we begin describing it, we begin by talking about **ourselves**. **I** have been **redeemed**. **I** have been **forgiven**. **I** am going to go to **heaven**. **I** have peace with **God**. And so on, and so on. It's all good and true as far as it goes. But is there something else? And to make the point that there **is** something else, Paul begins his description of us by comparing **spiritual** life with something very **physical** - something with which we're all very familiar:

Romans 12:3-5 - "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. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Notice a couple of things. **Verse 3** starts the ball of Paul's thought rolling by saying renewed minds must begin to think differently about **themselves**. We're not to think of ourselves as we **used** to think of ourselves.- "**more**

highly" than we ought. But we are to think "**soberly**" about ourselves. In other words, spiritual life manifests itself by a certain **kind of self-think**.

But then, immediately after telling us how we're to think about ourselves as **individuals**, Paul gives the illustration of the **many members** of the physical body. And the message in this intentional disconnect is clear. If in thinking about **myself** I'm **just** seeing myself, I'm not thinking spiritually at all. I'm not getting the **point** of God's action in my life and in our world.

And here's how important all of this is. The fact is God **created** you and me with **physical bodies** when He didn't have to do so. He could have created us more along the lines of angels and other spiritual beings. If He created **those** beings without physical bodies, why did he not do the same with **us**?

And, while I can't **prove** it, I think one of the main reasons He created you and me with physical bodies is so we would never be very far from the actual **meaning** and **goal** of our redemption. We **know** what Paul means about the members of the body being made **not** for themselves but **for** each other because we carry around the proof of that in our **own** bodies each day of our lives.

Which of your ten fingers do you consider expendable? Would you rather keep your right eye or your left. Is it your heart that's important, or is it your lungs. And if it's your lungs, which one? And the whole point here is **there are no good answers to those questions**. And there's no good answer because you can't apply those questions to a **body** the way you can apply them to a collection of dolls or marbles. **Every** one of those parts in question is important because each part doesn't exist in and of itself. Each part exists as a living **member** with the other parts. **Solitary life and health for a body part is impossible**.

Jesus came and died and rose again to redeem you and me and give us eternal life. But the **nature** of that eternal life is illustrated in these very bodies Jesus died to redeem. And here's what we learn. **Kingdom** life is like **physical** life. **Salvation is always a communal venture on God's part**. It is never **solitary**. God doesn't save you apart from the church anymore than your body is a functioning reality if it's just a foot and nothing else.

And because God never wants me to forget that, He makes my daily physical existence **depend upon a body** so I'll never overestimate my spiritual survival apart from the rest of the church.

2) THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE BODY EXPLAINS HOW WE TEND TO THINK "MORE HIGHLY" OF OURSELVES THAN WE OUGHT

Romans 12:3-5 - "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. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Verses 4 and 5 are the **remedy** to the **problem** described in **verse 3**. They hold the **cure** for thinking of ourselves "**more highly than we ought to think**." The picture of the **body** also **defines** the kind of pride Paul is describing in **verse 3**. There are primarily **two kinds** of spiritual pride Christians can exhibit - two manifestations of a deeply persistent **unrenewed mind**:

- a) **First, I can chart my spiritual agenda blind to my vital, living dependence on the local church**. This is the obvious error Paul confronts in his picture of the body - "**For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another**"(4-5).

And the correction that is gently **implied** in this passages is **thundered** in another: **1 Corinthians 12:18-21** - "**But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [19] If all were a single member, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. [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."**

While the body parts in Paul's picture have no actual physical capacity to "**say** they don't need each other, members of Christ's body frequently **act** like they don't need the church for their spiritual survival. It's a huge, blind, arrogant mistake. And it's becoming increasingly common in evangelical Christianity today.

After all, Christians have their upbringing, they know the doctrines, they have and read their Bibles, they

pray. They keep the commandments. And when they fail, they take their sins straight to Jesus. It seems we can go for miles on that kind of spiritual life.

But we can't. Even with all these life-giving disciplines an isolated member will live about as long as an eye plucked out of its socket. Have you even seen one of those medical dramas on television? Have you ever seen a team scrambling madly down some hospital corridor with a container supposedly transporting a human liver to some prepared patient on an operating table? They hurry because they don't have much time. That liver will be useless faster than anyone can imagine. Only the **body** can keep those organs alive.

I said Paul's picture of the body is designed to expose and correct **two** manifestations of an unredeemed mind. This first is the lie of spiritual **independence**. Here's the second:

- b) **Second, there is the delusion of my own pre-eminence in the body of Christ.** Paul makes clear that all the members of the body are **different** - **Romans 12:4-5** - "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, [5] so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

If all the members had the **same** look and the **same** function we would have the problem of **competition**. If there was only one **role** - one **job** - for everyone, we would naturally compare ourselves with the other members to see who was doing the job **best**.

But such is not the case. Paul says we all have **different** functions in the body. And you'd think that would solve the problem, but it doesn't. Now, instead of comparing who is **doing** the best work, we compare who **has** the best role.

Again, the picture of the human body is Paul's (and the Holy Spirit's) corrective. True, some parts of Christ's body may be more **prominent**. They are more **visible**. More **up front**. And because of that we can make quite a fuss about them. But Paul's illustration should cause us pause. My **nose** is more **prominent**. People may think I have a beautiful nose: "**Did you see pastor Don's nose Sunday - right up there on that big screen? Isn't it a lovely thing?**" I'm sure you hear it said about me every Sunday.

But you've never seen my liver. I've never had anyone come up and say, "Boy, Pastor Don, what a great liver you have. It's beautiful - a real work of art!" That's never happened. But the fact of the matter is I could live longer without my nose than my liver. There's a difference between **prominence** (my nose) and **significance** (my liver). And we must never lose sight of this in the body of Christ.

So how do we apply all of this to our church? First, **resist the modern Christian tendency to consider your relationship to Jesus apart from your commitment to your local church**. You've all heard the witty repartee about how you don't have to go to church Sunday night to go to heaven. Genius.

But here's what I know for sure. I know there is no Christian alive who has damaged his relationship to Jesus because he loved His church too much. And I know there are going to be multiplied thousands of **professing** Christians who will end up far from Jesus because they just **dated** the local church without ever **marrying**.

Second, resist the temptation to either pride or despair from comparing your role with that of someone else in the church. Don't confuse **prominence** with **significance**. You have your own gift (as we will study next week). And you are only responsible for **your** service, not that of anyone else. Keep unity alive through a servant's heart.