

Humble Evaluation and Faithful Cooperation

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[0:00] Romans chapter 12 and I'm going to read starting with verse 1.

! We've already covered verses 1 and 2, but it was a couple of weeks ago. And really what we're going to focus on tonight is so crucially linked to our understanding of what Paul declares in verses 1 and 2.

Alright, so before we move into verse 3 and following, let's put it all together here tonight, alright? Might help if I was in the right place.

Not Luke, but Romans. Alright? Seems you were listening and I was not. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

[1:37] For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

In prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith. For ministry, let us use it in our ministering. He who teaches in teaching. He who exhorts in exhortation.

He who gives with liberality. He who leads with diligence. He who shows mercy with cheerfulness. Alright? So we're going to stop right there.

In fact, we're not even going to get that far tonight. But, again, we want to take the great declaration and, really, exhortation of verses 1 and 2 and allow that to propel us into the verses that follow that. In fact, I would say to you that these few verses that I read a moment ago, starting with verse 3, following, as well as those that I did not read on to the end of the chapter, as well as everything Paul writes all the way to the end of the letter, all of this reveals to us what presenting your bodies a living sacrifice looks like.

[3:03] That's what we need to understand here from this point on throughout to the end of the letter. Paul is going to instruct us, teach us, exhort us.

He's revealing. God is revealing to us what this whole thing looks like. This presenting your bodies a living sacrifice. Or, may I, I guess I should add this disclaimer, what it should look like.

What it should look like. I mean, really, Paul, we might ask, what should that look like in practical terms? We've already come to understand that Paul's early New Testament readers would have understood, rather, exactly what Paul was getting at when they read these words, present, bodies, sacrifice, holy, acceptable, service.

All those words appear in these two verses. They would have understood exactly what he was getting at. Or at least they would have understood the imagery that Paul intended here.

Whether or not they understood the application of it, or whether or not we understand the application of it, it is another matter. But they would have understood the imagery here. These were all very, again, very familiar terms to them.

[4:31] These words were all tied to the Old Testament sacrificial system. They would have understood these words in that context. And yet, we would have to admit that the imagery is a little unfamiliar to us, really.

Even though I've tried to explain it, and I think it's not beyond our understanding. But to really embrace it and understand it as the original readers understood it, it would be a little bit difficult for us.

So let me put it in these terms. Imagine the Apostle Paul coming here to Bartlesville, and he contacts all of the true believers in this community.

I don't know how he would do that. Send out an email, or a letter, a mass mailing, or whatever.

Maybe multiple forms. And so the Apostle Paul has come, and he has contacted every true believer, every true follower of Christ, and he is informing us that a special rally is going to be taking place at Sooner Park on such and such a date at a specified time.

And at the appointed date and time, we all turn out for the rally. I mean, we're all there. Every single Christian is there. We're all there. I mean, it's the Apostle Paul.

[5:48] You know, he's having a rally, and we're going to show up. We're going to be there. And so there we are, and Paul is there, the great Apostle, and he stands before us, and he announces that we have all now joined with him in a new campaign for Christian living.

He's made that announcement to us. Christian living in the world, we've all joined him in this grand campaign for Christian living. And he's our leader, and we are all so excited.

And then Paul raises above his head our campaign banner. But he's kept it rolled up for us because it's ready to be revealed, you know, in some grand presentation of our campaign theme that will be revealed on the banner, our campaign banner.

And he's got it up above his head, and we're all excited, waiting for, to see the banner. And then, suddenly, the banner is unfurled there.

And on it is our campaign theme. And it says, Die for Christ. Wouldn't that be exhilarating?

[7:07] What a campaign theme. Die for Christ. And we all go, yeah! Yeah! Let's, you know, die for Christ. Is that our campaign theme?

Now, I know that's a bit silly, but that is what these New Testament readers would have understood when they read what Paul wrote in verses 1 and 2.

Again, let me remind you. When he said, when he wrote, I urge you, literally, he was saying, I beg of you to come alongside with me and join me in this thing.

To present your body as a living sacrifice. That's what they would have understood. This is tantamount to saying, die for Jesus. At least that would be their initial understanding and reaction. And in reality, that is what would happen to many of them. It did happen to many of them and they understood that. To follow Christ in those days in the first century very likely meant death.

[8:17] It's very much like that in some Muslim countries in our world today. where Christian missionaries lead someone to Christ and, you know, many of them they never see again because they're dead or in prison.

And so this is what they would have thought. But now, in reality, and this is why we have to read on from verse 3 on, even though, even in verses 1 and 2, Paul gives us a glimpse of what he's really talking about here.

But in reality, Paul is not telling us to die for Jesus. Though that might happen. That's not the idea here. That's not his point. Now certainly, Paul is borrowing these words from the Old Testament sacrificial system.

He's doing that for a purpose and so forth. But there is one word that doesn't, strictly speaking, doesn't fit. What word would that be? Living.

You're right. That's the word. Living. Living. Living sacrifices. And, you know, on the face of it, this seems to be a contradiction of terms.

[9:36] Living. Dead. Dead. Living. I'm not talking about the latest lunacy from the sci-fi channel. You know, the living dead. Anything like that. But that's what he's saying.

And so it seems to be a contradiction so this living part doesn't fit the motif here or the imagery of Old Testament sacrifice.

Now, if all Paul is talking about is dying for Jesus, now follow me here, if that's all he's talking about. Presenting yourself as a sacrifice, dying for Christ, if that's all he's talking about. If dying for Jesus is all that is required of us as believers, then Christianity would be a pretty simple thing.

I know death doesn't seem very agreeable, isn't agreeable to us. Certainly not death in the context of martyrdom, but if that's all that's required, then that's pretty simple.

[10:44] we would just simply trust Jesus and die. But believe me, what Paul is talking about is much more difficult, much more challenging, and much greater sacrifices required.

To explain that, I want to use an incident from the life of the Apostle Peter. Peter. If you have your Bibles there, I want you to look at Luke chapter 22.

Luke 22 and verse 31. And right off, as soon as I start reading, you're going to remember this story. Famous story about the Apostle Peter.

In Luke 22 and verse 31, the Bible says, and the Lord said, Simon, Simon, indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.

Remember this story? But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren. But then, here's Peter, you know, so typical.

[11:59] And he said to him, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death. Bold.

That's who Peter was, of course. And then he said, Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you have denied three times that you know me.

We know that story. We know the outcome of it, don't we? Now, what Peter declared sounded pretty good. Didn't it? I mean, just considering, you know, he's willing to go to prison?

Willing to die? Sounds pretty good. Sounds pretty spiritual. But did you notice that something is missing? If he was ready to go to prison, he was ready to die for Jesus, but he wasn't ready to live. to live. And we find that out a little bit later when here, the great Peter, ready to go to prison and die, and he denies even knowing Jesus three times.

[13:14] You see, it's a fairly easy thing to say, well, okay, I'll go to prison for Jesus. I'd be hard, not something I want to do, but I'll do it.

And though it may not make sense to you at this moment, may not fit necessarily in your thoughts, but it'd be a fairly easy thing to just die for him. It's quite another matter to live.

A lot harder to live for Jesus. But I want to take this just a step further. it's not enough even to say, I give my heart to Jesus.

I know that's, you know, a very common expression, and, you know, on the surface it seems right and seems good, and when you mean the right thing by that, it is good.

Because whatever has your heart has you. But just to simply say, I give my heart to Jesus, that's not enough because He wants more than just your heart.

[14:25] You say, I don't know if I quite understand that. You know, for us today in our culture it's fairly safe to give your heart to God. Because, you know, that does not necessarily mean in our way of thinking sometimes what it ought to mean or what it should mean.

And what I mean by that is this. You can sometimes think that your Christian life is a private kind of devotion. It's a matter of the heart.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone like that? Maybe you didn't know they were saved. I've had this conversation with people and sharing the Gospel or you have a kind of a start out with some kind of a diagnostic question about where they are spiritually and they say, well, I'm a Christian and that's just a private thing with me.

And so they're saying, my heart belongs to the Lord. But apparently nothing else does. And that doesn't fit.

That's a contradiction. You might find yourself thinking only in terms of your personal relationship with God. That's another kind of buzzword that we use a lot.

[15:41] And when it's supplied correctly, there's nothing wrong with that. But in some people, with some people in their mind's eye, a personal relationship with God is just simply another way of saying I have a private kind of devotion with Him.

Or sometimes someone who professes Christ can simply relegate Christian living to a Sunday event.

Or just a simple, simply a Bible study kind of activity. That's their relationship with Christ.

And so consequently, the so-called personal relationship with God might feed the mind, the intellect, through Bible study.

And so we just keep feeding it in, putting it in, and our fund of knowledge of God and His Word grows and grows and we're enamored by it and excited about all that we know about God and about Scripture and so forth.

[17:01] That's how some would describe their relationship. or if it's just a Sunday event or a corporate worship kind of event, that's all your Christianity is in essence, then it stimulates the emotions.

I mean, it makes you feel good and makes you feel holy, but it does not connect nor does it impact other parts of the life.

there is this appalling disconnect between a profession, a commitment, what we say is our commitment, our personal relationship, an appalling disconnect with many quote, believers, between that and everything else in life, everything else they do. and so it makes no change in the way you live. Now, this is an important introduction into what Paul is going to teach us from here on out in the book of Roman.

Our Christianity must make a change in the way we live. Well, it's not real. I mean, how you live with your wife, live with your husband, how you live with your children, how you live at home, how you spend your leisure time, how you live at work, how you live with others around you.

[18:38] And so you can feel very satisfied because, you know, you have a quote, personal relationship with Jesus Christ and you feel close to God on some basis.

And you have nice thoughts about God. But your Christianity has very little impact on the rest of your life, everything else you do with your life, your body.

Someone has called this disembodied spirituality. Now, think about that for a moment.

disembodied spirituality. Dear people, the church in the West, in specific, particularly America, is sick and dying from disembodied spirituality.

where the spirituality is just something done here on Sunday or some other private kind of thing, but it never affects the mind, the hands, the feet, the body, every other context of life.

[19:58] Now, Paul is not allowing for that here in this letter. He's not allowing for that. There's no room for that here in the Christianity that the Bible teaches and Paul is teaching us here.

Because he wants true Christianity to invade and pervade every aspect of the believer's life from the inside out, heart and mind and body, hands, feet, eyes, ears, mouth, mind, all these things.

Now, he's going to instruct us on that, on what presenting your bodies a living sacrifice should look like. And the first thing he's going to do is show us what that looks like in the fellowship of the church.

That's what we have in verses 3 through 8, maybe a little beyond that. The fellowship of the church in the body of Christ, the church. And the first thing that we see, is something.

I've lost my note. Well, the first thing we're going to see is how he applies this to the church. Did I already say that? All right, I already said that.

[21:18] So whatever else I had planned to say, I'm just going to skip that and go on to the next thing, okay? It's probably a piece of paper that I crumpled up and it's laying on the floor of my very messy office.

All right? Let me ask you this question. What makes a great church? The people?

That's a good answer. Some would say it's the size. Now, we know that's not true, right? Because if that's the case, then there aren't many great churches because there aren't many huge churches.

We think there are, but there aren't. Did you know in Southern Baptist life that the average size Southern Baptist church is around 50 members? Actually, I think it's a little bit less than that.

That's the average of all the churches in the SBC. Now, I know SBC, that Southern Baptists are not the only churches out there, but size certainly is not what makes a great church.

[22:21] How about its pastor? You know, he writes books, has a radio and TV ministry, leader in the SBC, maybe he's been elected president of the SBC, and his church is a great church by virtue of his greatness.

Well, you know that's not true. How about its facilities? That makes a great church. Nah. We have great facilities. We've got some that need to be repaired, some of it, but we've got great facilities. God has really blessed this church. That doesn't make us a great church. How about the ministries? Ministries and programs? Well, certainly it's not that those are important. That's not what makes a great church.

How about its good reputation? Does that make a great church? You know, a successful history, effective history, maybe the word effective would be better, or spiritual legacy.

You know, I always think of First Baptist Dallas, Texas, and the great George W. Truitt was pastor for umpteen thousands of years.

[23:37] Then along comes W. Criswell, and he's there, you know, a thousand or more years. You know, it seems. Great legacy, great preaching, great ministry, great reputation.

Is that what it is? Well, it doesn't make a great church. Now, you know, it may not make a great church, but it surely can hinder one from being great.

It's hard to overcome a bad reputation. But what makes a great church? Is it its cultural savvy?

What's that? You know, just so alert and informed about the culture and designing the ministries to, you know, to reach all various aspects of the culture and so forth so that everyone kind of feels at home and wants to be here.

Kind of a cultural alertness and savvy. Or maybe it's church growth expertise. That makes a great church.

[24:47] church. Or really the implementation of the latest church growth techniques and principles. And there are some good ones out there. I'm not just foo-fooing all of it.

Or maybe it's marketing. Marketing yourself as a church, you know? Knowing how to market your product.

I hate to even put it in those terms. There are many who would put it in those terms. Is that what makes a great church? Now, admittedly, there is some value in some of these, many of these. Some value, some things to consider. But I would submit to you that what makes a great church is the wrong question. The question is, the right question is, what makes a healthy church?

That's what Paul is going to talk about here in these verses. What makes a healthy church as opposed to a great church? Greatness is really often superficial.

[26:00] It's a facade. It's something that's easily propped up with ingenuity and techniques and money and different things.

We can kind of fake that. It's superficial, it's surface, but healthiness is deep, deep inside. It's the real story of a church, regardless of its size and facilities and pastor and all these other things. Greatness then is external and healthiness is internal, though it greatly enhances the external. And where does a healthy church begin?

Back to what Mike said a moment ago. It begins with its individual members. Individual members. And that's where Paul is going to begin.

It begins, a healthy church begins with individual members who have made a commitment to God a whole life, a full body commitment.

[27:08] Heart, mind, soul, body, all of it. That's what makes a healthy church. And in that regard, he begins with, number one, a humble evaluation of self before God.

Yeah, we finally got to point number one. A humble, honest evaluation of self before God.

Look at verse three. And let me quote it from the ESV because I just like the way it's worded here.

For by the grace given to me, Paul begins here, for by the grace given to me, and really what he means is, the idea here is that God's grace is the only way you and I are ever going to be able to do what Paul is going to say to us.

This is what he says, I say to every one, every single one among you, not talking in terms of group, not saying I say to you church collectively, he's talking about the individual, he says I say to every one among you, not to think of himself, we could insert or herself, not to think of himself or herself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Now, I purposefully emphasized a key word in that, as I quoted that passage, and what word was that? You weren't listening. Think.

[29:07] Now, I'm not telling you to think, that's the word. Think. Look at it. 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.

The word think. And it is the word in the Greek language is *phroneo*, and in various forms it appears in the verse four times.

Four times. It's there in one verse. It's almost redundant. In Paul's first use of the word, he gives the word, but he attaches on the front of it a preposition.

Preposition. That's what they did in the Greek language. They didn't separate the prepositions.

They attached it to the word. And so in the first sense, it is *hupere phroneo*.

Not two words, one word. *Hupere phroneo*. *Hupere* is a preposition. And it means on or above or high. Sometimes it can be translated that.

[30:19] And then *phroneo* means to think. *phroneo*. And you put these two together and you have this idea. Holding too high an opinion of oneself.

And that's pretty clear from the text. In fact, the phrase in verse 3, to think of himself more highly, that's six words in the English.

That's a translation of one word in the Greek. Six words in English, one word in the Greek. Hupere phroneo. Now, the next two times occurrences of the word appear in the simple form.

Phroneo. To think. To think. So, don't hold too high an opinion of yourself when you think, but think. So, just the simple use. Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think. And then Paul's fourth use of the word in English is translated soberly.

[31:29] Or if you have a different translation, in ASV it says sound judgment. ESV sober judgment. Now, you're saying, Pastor, I thought you said the word think appeared four times.

Well, it does. It's not translated think all four times. In fact, this fourth time is translated a little bit differently because it means something a little differently though thinking is still involved.

First, he presents the wrong thinking, huper phroneo, thinking yourself better than you really are. And then he's going to introduce the way we ought to be thinking which is the word so phroneo.

So phroneo. I say to every one of you to think of himself more not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think with sober judgment.

So phroneo. And it means simply to be in one's right mind. Not in the sense of mental you know that sometimes some people might not be thinking right.

[32:34] You know they not in their right mind. I'm that way some days. A little bit crazy. That's not the idea. It means to think correctly.

To think accurately. And in this case it means to evaluate accurately. And so that's the idea. It's to distinguish between the wrong kind of thinking with the right kind of thinking.

Huphefroneo. No, no, not above thinking, but so franeo. And the difference is the difference between super thinking in regard to oneself and sober thinking in regard to oneself.

Now, pride, of course, comes from super thinking in regard to oneself. That is over appraising yourself and praising, but appraising, over appraising, you know, blowing your own horn, bragging about your own accomplishments, basking in your own supposed greatness.

Having a higher estimation of yourself than is in reality true. We all understand that.

[34:01] Pride is the result of that. Humility, on the other hand, is the result of sober thinking.

Remember those two. Super thinking, sober thinking. Super thinking leads to pride.

It's hard to say if pride is the beginning point or the ending point, and I would venture to say it's both. It begins there and ends there. It begins at a certain level, ends at a higher level of pride.

But humility is the result of sober thinking. And humility is simply knowing who you are before God, who you really are before God.

we should all exercise the ancient maxim, know thyself. That's a good maxim for life.

Know yourself. And that's what Paul is getting at here. Know thyself, he says. You need a humble, honest evaluation of yourself, especially in the context, specifically in the context of spirituality.

[35:11] And even more specific in the area of spiritual giftedness as you function within the body of Christ. Know yourself. And do this according to what guideline?

We'll look at what Paul said. Think soberly, that is, perform an honest appraisal, as God has dealt, or in accord with the way God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Or in agreement with God, as He has dealt to each one, each individual one, a measure of faith.

The measure of faith is just simply a reference to spiritual giftedness. And He's dealt that, dealt with each one in regard to that, dealt that out. Spiritual giftedness.

And so we're to think soberly. We're to have an honest evaluation, an honest appraisal of ourselves that is in complete agreement with God as He has dealt to each one of us spiritual giftedness to be used in the body of Christ.

[36:25] And so here's the idea. Your appraisal of your role, your value, your place in the body of Christ must match, should match, will match the spiritual giftedness God has graced you with.

And it's different for each one of us. So we need to discover it, if you haven't already. Discover your spiritual gifts.

This is basically what Paul is saying, ultimately what he's saying. And he's also adding to that, don't evaluate yourself above where God has gifted you. Or in some area other than where God has gifted you.

Difficult to put the spiritual gifts in and above one, above the other, because they all function perfectly and equally and no spiritual gift is better than another.

They all function to make the church a healthy church. But don't evaluate yourself based upon what you perceive would be the better gifts or maybe the better role or perceiving yourself to be better

than you really are.

[37:42] So Paul's talking about where a healthy church begins and it begins with individual members through each one's personal whole life commitment to God.

First, a humble evaluation of self before God. And then second, and we'll end with this tonight, a faithful cooperation with others in the church.

A humble evaluation of self, a faithful cooperation with others in the church. Verses 4 and 5.

For I say through the grace given to me, excuse me, verse 4, for as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

This is really very simple, isn't it? The church is like a body. I mean, this is not the only place in Scripture where that analogy is used. We're like a body.

[38:49] We have many parts with many different functions and all are functioning together, but we are all functioning together for a larger purpose. That's the church.

Not the church universal in some sense of that, but the local church. That's who we are. That's what we are. Members of a body with differing gifts, differing functions and roles, and we're all functioning together in complete cooperation, faithful cooperation for a larger purpose that touches this world, but it goes even beyond this world.

And Paul is given this marvelous analogy. Just think about your body. I don't really like to think of mine very often, but think about the body. All right? Just the body.

Just in principle. Your body has many parts, doesn't it? Right? Members. That's the word that Paul used. Members. Both visible and invisible.

And every part is important. And every single part of your body depends on every other part.

[40:04] It does. things. Just think about the last time you had a toothache. We don't even think about our teeth until they hurt. You know? And then, when our teeth hurt, we can't think of anything else but our teeth.

It can't even be hard to function. When you have a really severe toothache, see, all parts work together and they all affect one another. And it's the same with the body of Christ, the church.

And so get this down. A healthy church is one that is made up of all kinds of people from many different backgrounds, many different journeys they've been on, and with differing spiritual gifts who have been joined together to use those gifts based upon a common faith in Christ Jesus.

That's a mouthful. We don't have in the same, share the same politics, do we? We don't like, all like the same kind of music.

Personally, I can't stand country music. I hope some of you won't think bad of me. Some of you might like country music, some of it. We don't all have to like it.

[41:27] We don't all have to eat the same food and like the same food. There are a lot of things I don't like. In fact, most things I don't like. I'm just a very basic kind of guy, but some of you out here will just eat about anything.

And that's okay. We're all different. We have different tastes, different appetites, different likes and dislikes when it comes to food and clothing and all kinds of other things.

But we do share the same love for Jesus Christ. And hopefully the same love for the body of Christ. All the members of His church.

I love you. You love, I can tell, love one another. This is a great fellowship of people who love one another and love Jesus.

And we also share the same love for His Word and for His work. Though we are hopefully progressing in our commitment to that work as we go.

[42:29] And we all work together for the cause of Christ. Now that's what makes a healthy church. And we're not quite through with it. We're through for tonight. But it's individual members who have a whole life commitment to Christ.

That's what makes a healthy church. A humble evaluation of self before God. A faithful cooperation with others in the body of Christ.

Each one of us gifted in different ways. And all working together. It's a great scheme of God's. Not scheme. Great plan of God.

And it works. And then there's another one and we'll look at this next time. An individual participation. And this is where we examine the whole issue of spiritual gifts and look at some of those specifically.