

9/17/23 - Rom. 12:1-8 - "We are His Church" (Fall Kickoff)

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[0 : 00] We're in the book of Romans today, chapter 12. We'll read the first eight verses. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

[1 : 56] Amen. Romans 12 is a powerful section of passage because it's, if there's any stick shift drivers, often in biblical writings, you'll be shifting gears.

The author will shift gears. Paul shifts gears uniquely and very characteristically in Paul's writing. He goes through literally 11 chapters of teaching about the gospel, how they're set apart and things like that. Now he's getting into more of the exhortation side of his letter, and chapter 12 marks that, from teaching to exhortation.

And Paul began to push against the individualized culture of the Roman day that was invading the church.

And for that, the book of Romans is a letter very suitable and applicable to our day today. I mean, after all, you and I are Gentiles.

[3 : 16] I don't know if there's any Jewish joined here today, but I apologize for seeing over you, but I'm just a Gentile. And when I read Romans, it hits me to the core, especially when he talks about the Gentiles being grafted into the family of God.

That's good news. And for that, I was studying the book of Romans. You're probably wondering, why are we in Romans? Well, I believe that the Lord is leading us to Romans today.

I was reading and studying Romans with my wife, and we came across chapter 12 in the past weeks, and the Lord did impress upon my heart to share this passage and to remind us and encourage us of the conviction of our strivings, why we're doing what we're doing.

It's completely detached from core values and mission statements and purpose statements and all these plans. But I want us to be reinforced according to the word of why we do what we do.

Let me put it this way. Some of us are motivated by things that are kind of like on the foresight and coming in time. Maybe in your career, you're looking at advancements.

[4 : 35] It keeps you engaged in your careers. Maybe you're excited about your purpose or maybe receiving some recognition. Some of you might be, like, really excited about the volunteer appreciation because you feel undervalued and overworked, just like everyone, right?

And you might be motivated by some sort of recognition, or you might be motivated by security or maybe some wages or money or interest, whatever have you.

But when adopted in the mindset of the church, when the church adopts that mindset, it's fine for the world. They can do whatever they want. But as far as the church is concerned, when we forget

this, we forget the gospel because we realize that the gospel has some implications for the future, but it's founded upon the past of what Christ did for us, which propels our Christian lives. it's not about advancements, recognition, or purpose, and all these little things. You see, the church is individually called each one of you individually together by God's grace. But we're also vocationally equipped uniquely to serve this church body. Look around you. This church body to display the gospel.

[5 : 58] And so, what I hope to do today is to reinforce what it means by the phrase, we are His church. And that is the sermon title so that this can be a grounding effort in the life of this church today.

I don't mean to spiritualize things or over-spiritualize things. We obviously have to spiritualize a lot of things, but I don't want to over-spiritualize the fact that it's brought to my attention that Satan is having a heyday in a lot of individual lives within this church body.

Family issues. personal struggle, family crisis that everyone seems to be walking through. And not only that, I believe that it's trying to breach its walls, breach the walls of this church, and so to divide.

But for that, it cannot go unaddressed under my watch and care. Truth is, when Satan seems most busy at trying to distract our lives, our marriages, our families, and all of that outside of the church, it is a time to dig our heels in corporately because it's funny, when Satan does attack, it often serves as dual confirmation that it's time to dig in, to lock arms, and stand together united.

And so I do pray that today we acknowledge this season of struggling in the church. because when we do, we find the courage to stand and fight united, locked arms together.

[7 : 53] This is a call essentially to arms when we say we are His church. The devil doesn't want us to be. And so Romans 12 will definitely give us a great description of what that looks like and how to root ourselves in the gospel.

I want us to pray before we go into this message, but I will break it up into two sections for you, and I invite you to join me in prayer. Father, thank You for Your Word today.

Thank You for the fact that You're at work. even though Satan is going to stand opposed to Your work and try to stick things along our pathway to get us off track, to distract us, to create discouragement in our lives, in our families, in our church, or even in our faith.

The devil's schemes are not new, nor is Your Word, but it is breathing, it is active, it is sharper than a double-edged sword.

So whatever way you have to swing Your Word today, Lord, let it cut anything that's not of You so that Your church may be pruned, producing health in a season of struggle.

[9 : 19] And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So the first section that we have today is a church community individually called.

And the passage started out as it was read, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship, and so the thrust of this verse, verse 1, is a transition statement coming out of all of that teaching that has just happened between chapter 1 and chapter 11.

Verse 1 is saying, now that I've taught you the tenets of the gospel that you've been called in everything, Paul is saying, upon the past, now it's time to propel our lives and send us forward.

And you see, the only adequate response to God's grace is to offer our entire self to God.

It's a condition of realizing the wretchedness of our sin and that we have nothing to boast about and everything to be lamenting about in our spiritual states.

[10 : 42] Romans chapter 1 all the way to Romans 11 should humble us that God has saved us. He's done the work.

And so, who are we to stand and say, I'm going to do what I want to do? Keep in mind the Roman individualized culture of that day. He says, he contends here, to die to self.

It's not I that matter, but to die to self. That's our spiritual worship, not I, but Christ. And in verse 2, in sort of a continuing that appeal, he contends that they not only be conformed, not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of their minds.

It's a direct pushback from the cultural status quo of his day. Back in his day was Roman stoicism philosophy, where it's a cultural solution of how to achieve lasting happiness based on a variety of virtues.

And Paul was pushing back against the fulfillment of the individual and emphasized the larger proximity of gospel transformation. In other words, it's less self-centered and much more about self-surrendered.

[12:12] And so, as Paul pushes back against this culture, he implies that the church should cooperate in this transforming work of God.

Because of what God has done between chapter 1 and chapter 11, it should bring us into a renewal, transformation process in our Christian lives.

God's transformation reverses the process of the world. It's completely counter to the world, and this verse serves as a reversal of chapter 1, verse 28, where human beings did not deem it worthwhile to acknowledge God, or so, God handed them over to a worthless mind.

for the church, though, our minds are not worthless. We are responsive to the transforming Spirit of God to desire to obey Him, to be sanctified, to be set apart.

There's a borderline between the world and the church. and may our desire be to die to ourselves and not fixate on what we are missing on account of that holy surrender.

[13:33] the gospel humbles us. It's a story of us unworthy of anything in this life but death.

Before Jesus Christ, we were all on the road of Romans 1. No one seeks God. No one's acknowledging God.

We trade the infinite God for created images. We idolize. We step in the place of God. We run our lives as if we are God. And the gospel completely takes that on its head.

It is not I but Jesus Christ who labored on my behalf. He saved me from the pit and He brought me out of that water to eternal life and forgiveness, freedom from sin.

If you think today that you are working your way out of that pit, I've got to hand it to you. The gospel is not about how much we labor to achieve forgiveness.

[14:39] It's about how much Jesus Christ accomplished to obtain that forgiveness. You cannot do it in your own work. Your best works are filthy rags. This is a gospel plea for you to understand, to be brought into this good news and this transformation work in Steel Valley as we kick off fall.

Paul continues in verse 3, for by grace, by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, do not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Verse 3 provides a practical example of what he's talking about in verse 2. Did you catch that? He's saying, I'm saying this, this is how you do it.

You know, a believer to die to self, doesn't that give you no reason whatsoever to boast in anything regarding what you're accomplishing in your life, even your sanctification?

He instructs the church to think with humility, with sound judgments about their role within the community of God. And you see, church, as the Spirit of God continues to transform our minds and our lives, we become conformed then to His.

[16:17] And that the faith that God appropriates to us individually is indeed intended to sustain us corporately. I think you understand the saying when I say it this way, that there's no such thing as sidelined Christians.

And if there's no such thing as sidelined Christians, there's no such thing as sidelined church members. Right? If the practical implication of verse 3, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, do not think of himself more highly than you ought to think.

In other words, to think that you can achieve happiness in your goals in life that are according to your way, but to think in sober judgment, how do you think in sober judgment?

You go to the ultimate judge who's worthy of distinguishing truth from falsehood, and each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Well, there's many things, like we said, that can motivate people to commit and endure advancements, purpose, recognition, blah-de-blah. Well, the church community ought to be the easiest place to commit and endure.

[17:39] Why? Romans 12, 1-3. What propels the world forward? There's incentives ahead.

And what propels the church forward? The gospel that lays behind, that because we have been saved by grace, it's propelling us into a future, and now I want to qualify that because we do have an inheritance, as Paul says in other letters, but that's not the emphasis here in this section of passage.

He's emphasizing that the gospel is propelling us forward. Not living your best life, not all these virtues within Roman culture. It's the gospel that propels us and slingshots us forward into this transformation work.

And yes, you might be like, well, I'm going to text him after the service because he's not mentioning our inheritance that lay waiting ahead like he says in Philippians. There is something laying waiting ahead, but we don't get into a marriage to marry somebody for their money, and we don't get into a relationship for Jesus Christ to marry him for his forgiveness.

We don't want this for the wrong reasons. We want Jesus because he saved us. He pardoned our sin. Right? We've gotten this wrong at some times.

[19 : 04] And within the context of the church is a community that is individually called by his grace. If you're sitting in here and you're saying, I know that he saved me from that pit, you have been individually called by his grace.

And here, we find the most supreme expression of the greatest advancement that we could ever have from dead sinner to life. We find the greatest purpose to live for the glory of Jesus Christ alone.

We find the greatest recognition that we don't deserve to be known by anyone, only the name of Jesus Christ. We find the greatest security that God saves us, he seals us, he pardons us, and in him alone we're secure.

If wages are concerned, well, guess what? Our devotion is rooted in the wage that he paid for us and he bought for us. Interest, if that's involved, our minds find their greatest interest in him. alone. Nothing can deviate a Christian from that if you have been internally called and individually called. We are his church means that our collective union is established not by programs, not by amenities, but by the grace of God through Jesus Christ here at SVC.

[20 : 29] humility. The gospel sobers our pride and enhances humility, gives us robust humility, no reason to boast. And guess what?

Those he called, he equips as well, which leads us to the second section. A church community vocationally equipped.

And we see this in verse 4 through 8. He says, for as in one body we have many members and the members do not have all the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

Paul brings this illustration here, it's got to be his favorite illustration of the church community. He shares it in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, and his emphasis is here that we're diverse and it's okay to be diverse.

We're not looking for a community that's all looking like Brent. That would be scary. And you should probably let the president know. You don't want a community that's looking like you, people like you, talks like you, dresses like you, serves the way you serve.

[21 : 56] There's a unity in diversity that we're all not the same, and for that, this illustration of us being members of one single body, this reminds us of 1 Corinthians 12, specifically.

And it also reminds me of a story from Mark Dever in his little book, What is a Healthy Church? Between an interaction between nose and hand. Let me give you some insight into this little interaction that goes along with this illustration.

It all started with nose and hand sitting in the church pew talking. The morning service, led by ear and mouth, had just ended.

After the service, hand was telling nose that he and his family had decided to look for a different church. nose on the trail of discernment.

He said, really? To the news that hand was bringing. And he asked, why? Hand said, oh, I don't know. Looking down, he was usually slower to speak than other members of the church body, pun intended.

[23 : 03] I guess because the church doesn't have what Mrs. Hand and I are looking for. Nose said, well, what are you looking for in a church?

And the tone of which he spoke was words of sympathy. And Hand had to think before answering, and he and Mrs. Hand liked Pastor Mouth and his family and the minister of music, ear, meant well. But Hand just stammered, well, I guess we're looking for a place where people are more like us. We tried spending time with the legs, but they didn't connect with us.

Next, we joined the small group for all the toes, but they kept talking about socks and shoes, which didn't interest us much. Nose sat there in genuine dismay.

Aren't you glad that they're interested in socks and shoes? And Hand said, sure, sure, but it's not for us. Then we attended the Sunday school for all you facial features, but everyone just wanted to talk and listen and smell and taste.

[24 : 19] It felt like you never wanted to get to work and get your hands dirty. Anyway, Mrs. Hand and I were thinking about checking out that new church over on the east side. We hear they do a lot of clapping and hand raising, which is closer to what we need right now.

Nose replied, hmm, I see what you mean. But in the end, it was hard for the hands to put their fingers on it, but they finally decided that the church wasn't for them.

And so Nose thanked the hands for talking and taking the time to talk and continued to express sadness for their departure, and so they left. Who needed the hands?

Apparently, they didn't need them. This story, taken from a little book that we have laying around What is a Healthy Church by Mark Dever, I think it highlights the problem that has been created in Western Christian culture that has replaced worship of God for worship of self.

What you need, what you desire, and it is sinful. In verse 5, as Paul continues here, we see the universality and the particularity of the body here, that many members are part of one united system, one body, one nervous system, one skeletal structure, and that while we are all united in one another in Christ, our union to one another ought to be as enduring as our relationship and our union with Jesus Christ.

[26 : 13] That's what the Lord's Supper is all about. God's love. Shouldn't a church find hope in one another just as we do in our hope in Jesus Christ?

Why do we fall for the ways of the world to conform our lives to our needs rather than His will? You see how we're getting this wrong in Western Christianity?

God's Word is clear. The problem is not God. You can blame God all you want. It's not God.

It's not the community of God. The problem is us. The problem is, what is it, 12 inches below your brain?

It's your heart. It's a heart problem. And Paul brings into view practical application of this illustration. He brings gifts about this diverse body, but how they function together, filling roles that God has equipped us for, and exercising humility in God's gifting of our ability.

[27 : 23] And so, Paul lists seven gifts with the, if you know English terminology, it's a dative description of each preposition. And so, this is important because it's almost like doubling up an effort to emphasize something.

You could say that, oh, Brent is, Brent went golfing as he's golfing. It's like, I like to golf as I'm golfing, or I like to eat as I'm eating.

It's like a double emphasis of a preposition, and it's emphasizing that you're equipped to a task. In your doing, you're going to do, and there's no way around it.

And we could talk about that maybe in house churches this week a little bit more in depth. I don't want this to turn into some intellectual institution talk, but I don't want you to miss this.

I don't want to under-emphasize it, I don't want to over-emphasize it, but Paul goes into an application of a healthy, functioning church. And I think it's best to look at it as in two things, four things, and then one thing.

[28 : 36] The two things are sort of this general two gifts that he lists in this passage, the gift of prophecy and the gift of service. These are general in nature because he mentions it as like a corporate endeavor, our.

He mentions our. But then he goes into four other gifts of teaching, exhortation, contributing, or sharing, or leading, and these are saying to the one.

So it's like he's saying, in general, the gift of prophecy and the gift of ministering ought to edify and provide all of our needs as a church.

And then he gets into that functioning. Some will be a teacher, some will be gifted in exhortation, some in sharing, and some in leading. And I believe that is chronological, we'll call him chronological Paul.

Paul, in a lot of his writings, he'll usually emphasize the last thing. And there's the seventh, and I don't want to over-spiritualize the number seven, but I don't want to go there.

[29 : 47] But it is the seventh in a list of gifts. And very often what you'll find is that's the one you need to pay attention to, which directly connects to the context of verse one through three, the gift of mercy.

All of these gifts are instructional. They're all of serving, outward focused to another. And then he gets to this instructional mercy, a mercy that describes genuine love towards other.

A love that's received by the mercy of God is now reciprocated and bestowed to others. And he actually goes into what this looks like in the following verses between verse nine and verse twenty-one.

twenty-one. And you see, upon these seven functions within the body of Christ is a united but diverse vocational call that God assembles in His church.

God calls and God equips. God has called Christians from the pit. They're entered into this transformative work by the renewal of their mind, and guess how it's done?

[31 : 00] God has called by His gifting and equipping. If you're a Christian in this room, you're part of that. Because practically speaking, within the constructs of the church, we are renewed and edified and provided for.

There's nothing like it as anything in the world, even Disney. Nothing like it. And the world is waiting for us to get this right.

The gospel transforms an individual believer, and this transformation power leads a community of people to serve in order to diversify the body.

Not to pack up and find that you don't fit somewhere. This transformation power cuts our pride to the core.

It humbles us as Christians. So as we kick off this fall, I want to ask you simply, how will you be part of this transformation process?

[32 : 11] Sunday isn't enough. It's not. Ask any pastor. You don't have to take a 36-year-old pastor's word for it. Ask somebody who's seasoned and a veteran pastor.

Sunday just isn't enough. How will you prioritize this coming fall, the community of God? How will you die to self and die to passivity in church life and live in this vibrant, transformative renewal process that God desires in all of our lives?

I don't think it's extreme at all to say that the community of God is more important than even my individual family, more important than your friends, more important than your careers.

Because we're unable to conform our lives fully to family life. We're unable to conform our lives to friend life or career life. No. The renewal process takes place within the community of God being conformed fully to Jesus Christ and one another.

Now, family is an important construct, but it's under the umbrella of the church. Take that, Western Christianity.

[33 : 29] All life flows from the river that runs from the body of Christ. If your family is concerned, if you're in a crisis as a family, guess what? You ought to be turned into the church to help.

If you're in need and in financial constraints, you better turn to the church. church. The church is the river that all life flows from.

And so your first exhortation today, first of three, is to not lose heart in this renewal process.

Renewal comes with struggle, and we may allow discontentment to win over our hearts, causing us to be discouraged even at Steel Valley Church.

If you're not discouraged here, you're going to be discouraged at the next place, and the cycle will continue. Don't allow Satan to convince you to abandon God's renewal process.

God has each and every one of us here for a reason and a mission that we are part of. You're equipped for the work. You've been called to the work. The second exhortation today is to compete for the gospel, not for the glory.

[34 : 42] In the next paragraph, Paul says how the church ought to outdo one another in showing honor. That this showing mercy is a theme that carries the context going from verse 8 and on.

Compete for the gospel, not for the glory. And the third exhortation is, may the strong encourage the weak. And this is really important.

If you're in your, if you in your life and your circumstance in life, you seem to be like, man, nothing's really going wrong. I'm, you know, things are clicking. God's really doing, like, stuff.

I feel like I'm on a mountaintop. Well, I'm going to plead with you to encourage your weaker brother or sister in the faith within this community.

If the Lord seems to be sustaining you to serve through simple means of prayer, encouragement, reaching out, setting a card. And if you want to join in that, if you're part of that and you're, you feel specifically sustained at this, time and period to serve, I would call upon you to speak up.

[36 : 05] Talk to me after the church serves. Talk to Les. Talk to Rick. Because there's a lot of people going through a season in their families, in their lives. There's people across the United States right now with family members who are dying.

There's crises within families regarding all sorts of things, from addictions to just abandonment. This is going on right now.

Come alongside those in need of prayer and love and support, because there are many. And make yourself known if you want to help in that endeavor. We are His church means that the body of Christ finds her individual calling, vocational equipping, beautifully expressed in the corporate life of the church.

This is how it is expressed. There's no sideline in this renewal process. And so, may this fall, 2023, be a mark of renewal process for all of us to get involved in.

Dig in, church. Get busy. And if you're hurting, reach out to us. If you're strengthened, reach out to us.

[37 : 22] Either way, reach out and get in the game here. Be open. Be honest and transparent. Nobody's judging you here. Be honest about your struggles.

Have conversations. Commit to the gathering each and every week as a time that we assemble.

Commit to serve within the gathering according to your calling and your skill sets and desire.

Endure together as the family of all families. Being the family of God. We are His church. And I pray that we continue to be so.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.