

## Body Life (Romans 12)

### Intro:

Whether the Romans really believe in Christ as their redeemer and Lord will be evident, according to Paul, by how they deal with one another as a church in their day to day lives and fellowship.<sup>1</sup>

- That is, we will know if someone has really “gotten” chs. 1-11 by how well they live out chs. 12-16.
  - That is, the litmus test of our soteriological orthodoxy is our ecclesiological orthopraxy.

*HOW* are the believers in Rome to “present their bodies to God” as an act of worship to Him in vv.1-2? The answer is given in verses 3 and following: we offer ourselves to God by offering our bodies to our brothers and sisters.

- It’s important to note that chs. 12-16 are lived out communally in the context of a local church.<sup>2</sup>

It’s amazing how ‘physical’ our ‘spiritual’ worship really is!

- Similar to John’s teaching, our love for God can be “seen” in and through our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - Cf. 1 John 3:10; 4:20, 21

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<sup>1</sup> I have adapted this idea from Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 637-38.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, one may note that Paul’s greeting at the beginning of the letter omits any mention to a local church, and that we can thus carry out these commands apart from any kind of commitment to, or membership in, a local church. That is, the “body” Paul has in mind is not a local church, but rather the “universal church.” Though initially this may seem legit, all one has to do is read the entirety of the letter, especially the final chapter, where Paul everywhere, both explicitly and implicitly, is addressing local churches, not just amorphous professing believers scattered around the world.

Interestingly, according to v.2, for those who are always seeking to know what God's will for their life is, Paul says that, at the least, God's will for every believer is to be an active participant in a local church.

Moreover, in language reminiscent of Paul's words to the Corinthians, believers are "not their own." That is, they are – according to v.5 – "members one of another."

- In ch.12, Paul uses the word "another" (*ἀλλήλων, allēlōn*) four times (vv.5, 10 [2X], 16), emphasizing the corporate nature not only of our worship to God, but sanctification together.

Not only do we as Christians belong to God, we belong to each other.

- And therefore, Christians actually "need" one another, kind of the way all the parts of a body need one another.<sup>3</sup>
  - That is, active participation and fellowship in a local church is not an "add on" option for those who may want that "kind" of super-sized spirituality.

According to v.2, the "mindset" of the world is that everyone exists for me, whereas the "mindset" of the gospel is that we exist for others.

- Not surprisingly, then, Paul's first command, which sort of acts as a generalizing principle for all that follows, is: "Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think with sober judgement."
  - Right thinking – i.e. right theology – is therefore absolutely essential for a healthy expression of God's reign, displayed in His redeemed community – namely the church – in the world.
    - ➔ This idea of thinking is used 4 times in v.3 and 3 times in v.16.
    - ➔ Cf. Philippians 2:1-5<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Paul uses this very analogy in 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul has received God's grace as an apostle (12:3; cf. 1:5) in order to<sup>5</sup> instruct the Roman Christians with regards to *how* they are to employ the grace *they* have received (12:6).<sup>6</sup>

Though there are many *expressions* of how we are to live out the grace God has given us, there is only one *motivation*: love.

- In 13:8, Paul “sums up”<sup>7</sup> the church’s new covenantal “body ethic”: “Owe no one anything, except to love each other (*ἀλλήλους, allēlous*), for the one who loves another (*τὸν ἕτερον, ton heteron*) fulfills the law.”
- Similar to Paul’s logic in 1 Corinthians 12-14<sup>8</sup>, love serves as the “bridge” between vv.3-8 and vv.9-21.
- Similar to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4, the church only and truly grows as each “member” in the body employs their gift together, “in love.”

Which is why, when the local church gathers together, she must ground herself in, and feed herself upon, the gospel of God’s mercies to us in Christ (v.1).

As the body – plural and made up of many members – remembers the gospel together, they begin to offer up a collective sacrifice – singular.

- God sees not a whole bunch of individual and independent sacrifices, but rather a corporate, interdependent sacrifice.

From our perspective, there are unique expressions of this (e.g. vv.6-8), but we must remember the divine perspective Paul gives us.

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<sup>4</sup> Intentional gospel thinking (*φρονέω, phroneō*) leading to corporate gospel living is a major theme in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (1:7; 2:2 [2X], 5; 3:15 [2X], 19, 4:2, 10 [2X]).

<sup>5</sup> Literally *εἰς (eis)* means “for” or “unto.”

<sup>6</sup> Paul uses the exact same Greek (*τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης*) in 12:3 and 12:6, replacing “to me” (*μοι, moi*) with “to you” (*ὑμῖν, hēmin*).

<sup>7</sup> Pun intended. In v.9, Paul says all of God’s commandments are being “summed up” (*ἀνακεφαλαιῶ, anakephalaioō*) in love.

<sup>8</sup> Spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12, 14) are useless apart from love (1 Cor. 13). In fact, many commentators believe that love is the central theme of 1 Corinthians.

- That is, no one's "sacrifice" is "more important" before God. They all fit and function together as a whole, which ascends as a pleasing sacrifice to Him.

This community life and obedience in the local church is "the good"<sup>9</sup> that every Christian needs to be busying himself or herself with.

It is not until we understand the "forest" of Paul's argument that we should then focus on the trees.

- Most Christians are more interested in the "what" than the "how" or "why" of "spiritual gifts" in the church.

Of course, we are to seek out and practice whatever "grace gift" God has bestowed upon us; but first says Paul, we need to understand how they all fit together as a singular expression in a local church walking in the Spirit/love.

### Application

1. Though Cyprian's statement, "Outside the church there is no salvation," has been abused by many "churches," it nevertheless carries some biblical truth to it, namely that it is in the context of one's committed life in a local church that Christians are to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).<sup>10</sup>

- Though our justification is indeed individual, the NT teaches, and even assumes, that our sanctification is corporate.

That is, it is impossible to become as holy as God would have us, unless we are active and intentional members of a local church.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul uses a definite article (i.e. "the") before "good" in verses 2, and 21, forming an inclusio, as well as in v.9, which is literally in the center of Paul's exhortation.

<sup>10</sup> Almost inevitably, the "your" in this verse is read through the lens of our individualistic North American culture. However, the Greek is in the plural, which means that this is not each Christian seeking to work out their salvation on their own, but rather the church proving that they indeed belong to Christ as they live out the gospel together in community. See Phillip Hawthorn's comments on Philippians 2:12 in the Word commentary.

- As one has said, the church is the greenhouse of our sanctification.
2. If we are indeed members one of another, who belong not to ourselves, but to one another, then the gifts God has sovereignly bestowed and entrusted to us are not for private use, but for the building up of others in the church.
    - Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7 – “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

By avoiding regular, intentional fellowship with the other members of this church, am I keeping God’s gifts and/of grace to myself?

- Cf. Philippians 2:3-4 – “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
3. In light of this teaching, do I see how I am not only robbing other Christians, but also myself, by not committing to regular, active, and intentional fellowship in a local church? Have I thought about the detrimental effects this has on the great commission of Christ?
  4. How often am I praying for God to show me opportunities to serve my brothers and sisters in this local congregation? How often do I “come to church” to be served instead of coming to serve?
  5. How can I biblically and graciously encourage maverick Christians to become a committed, active, and serving member of a local church?