ONE BODY IN CHRIST

Romans 12:1-21
Key Verse: 12:5

“...so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Last week, we studied Romans chapter 12:1-2 with the title, “God’s Perfect Will for You.” We learned that we cannot know God’s will for our lives through reasoning or calculation. We can know God’s good, pleasing and perfect will only when we first submit our bodies to God as living sacrifices. Then God can free our minds from the dead-end pattern of the world, and renew us according to the life-giving example of our Lord, Jesus Christ. St. Peter expressed this transformation perfectly in 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” When Peter considered the grace of his Lord Jesus, who let his body be abused on the cross for him, he was ready to offer himself as a living sacrifice for the early Christian church. Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection from the dead has opened the way for all men to be healed and live for God’s righteous will for world salvation. Today’s passage contains many exhortations and difficult teachings regarding our attitude toward one another and towards the evil people of the world. In this way, Paul describes for us the kind of spiritual battle we must undergo in order to fulfill God’s will for our lives. Most of all, we learn that we are members of one body in Christ. May God bless us to know how to live and work together as the body of Christ in this generation!

I. The body of Christ (3-8)

First, sober judgment (3). Look at verse 3. “For by the grace given me I say to everyone 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.” Up until chapter 12, Paul has engaged the Roman believers in a question and answer dialogue.
For example, chapter 6 begins with the question, “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Ro. 6:1-2). In chapter 11, Paul anticipated a feeling of unfounded pride among the Gentile believers in Rome: “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.” In this way, Paul demonstrated that he understood perfectly how man’s sinful mind works when faced with God’s truth in the gospel. He was addressing the believers who were standing by grace at the present time. They were the remnant and hope of God for world salvation. But they were not safe from the spiritual struggle. Indeed, at any moment, they were susceptible to the devil’s temptations of rebellion and pride. For this reason, Paul, having thoroughly explained the gospel and God’s world salvation plan, now directs his attention to the intensive spiritual battle currently engaging the Roman believers. And he engages in this battle by speaking to the Roman believers and to us directly. By what authority can Paul speak to the spiritual battle that you or I are undergoing at present? Only by the grace given him that called him to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look again at verse 3. “For by the grace given me I say to everyone 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.” In fighting any battle, the soldier must know his strengths and his weaknesses. A soldier who thinks that he is invulnerable will quickly be shot down. A soldier who doesn’t realize the power of his weapon cannot drive back the enemy, or advance into enemy territory. In short, a soldier who does not know himself is useless in battle. In the same way, a Christian cannot effectively engage in the spiritual battle or advance the kingdom of God without knowing himself and what he can and cannot do. In Paul’s estimation, the most common mistake of any Christian during the spiritual battle is thinking of oneself more highly than he ought.

When Saul son of Kish was a young man, he was very shy. He lived during the time of the judges, under Samuel. But the people were unhappy to follow Samuel, even though he had led them into
repentance and had helped them to reclaim the ark of the covenant and much territory from the Philistines. They complained that they would be better off with a king. Samuel chose Saul, who was a head taller than any other Israelite. But when they looked for Saul, no one could find him, because he was hiding among the baggage. God sent his Holy Spirit upon this bashful and unassuming young man, and raised him up to be the leader of his people. Saul became great, and organized the Israelites against the aggressive Philistines and other Canaanite nations. However, Saul began to think that he was the king of the Israelites by his own power, and not by God’s sovereign will and grace. Once, Samuel instructed Saul to wait for him for seven days before offering the sacrifices and preparing for battle. Seven days passed by, and still there was no sign of Samuel. Saul began to panic because the men were deserting. He took matters into his own hands, and offered the sacrifices himself. Just then, Samuel arrived and saw what Saul had done. Samuel was not happy. He said, “The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command” (1 Sa. 13:14). Another time, Samuel told him to defeat the Amalekites, God’s enemies, destroying everything, including sheep and cattle. But Saul thought he had a better plan. He used the plunder from their victory to reward his men, and they offered sacrifices to God to appease him for having disobeyed. Samuel heard the bleating of the sheep and rebuked Saul. “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel?...Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king” (1 Sa. 15:17,22-23). But Saul did not repent. Instead, he became full of human thinking regarding his most loyal general, David, and tried to cling to his kingdom through violence and treachery. He fell in battle with the Philistines by his own sword. Saul forgot that he stood as king of his people by God’s grace. He trusted in what his own hands could do more than in what God could do for him. Saul’s story reminds us of Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”
The second part of verse 3 reads, “...rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” What is sober judgment? In the light of Romans Bible study, it is to see ourselves against the standard of God's judgment. Romans 2:6-8 says, “God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.” In short, our view of ourselves should not be based on what we imagine our qualities to be, but based on what we do. We may well imagine that we can get straight A’s every semester, but our performance as a student is measured by our GPA. To see ourselves with sober judgment is to know that God is not fooled by our words; he expects results in our life of faith. In short, God looks at the fruit, and so should we.

But a fruitless life is not a reason for despair or self-hatred. Paul says that our judgment must be in accordance with the measure of faith God has given us. What does it mean? It means that whether we bear fruit or don’t bear fruit is not a matter of ability, but a matter of faith. Not everyone has the same ability. But everyone can have faith in God. Consequently, everyone can bear fruit for God! We must simply repent that we depended on ourselves and on our abilities, when we had to turn to God and depend on God for fruit in our spiritual lives. And as we grow in faith in what God can do for me and through me, we can bear more and more fruit in our spiritual lives, and take pride in what God has done through us. It is really good news of great joy that anyone can bear fruit for God, and therefore, take pride in who they are in God.

One young man was the son of a wealthy bank lawyer. He was a math genius in school. But in his pride, he didn’t bother to develop himself as a human being, and quickly became viewed as a social misfit, and eventually as a threat to society, a potential Unabomber. Belatedly, he tried various ways to make himself fit in, through sports and physical development, but nothing worked. Finally, in desperation, he turned to God. Through Bible study with one spiritual lady, he began to see that he was created for a good purpose in God. He decided that
he wanted to know that good purpose, and made a commitment to
grow as a shepherd and Bible teacher for College students. Still, he
felt self-conscious because of his awkwardness. How could he bear
fruit for God as a Bible teacher? He tried his best to meet everyone’s
expectations of him. But he only felt a sense of impending judgment
because he could not measure up to others’ standards in one way or
the other. The old sins of anger and frustration began to well up again
in his heart. But then he heard the message of God’s judgment in
Romans. In particular, Romans 3:23-24 says, “for all have sinned and
fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace
through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Then he could
begin to understand God’s heart for sinners. God judges our sins, not
to punish, but to set us free. God is ready to justify and glorify those
who trust in his grace of “no condemnation for those who are in Christ
Jesus.” When the young man believed in God’s grace that called him to
be a shepherd and Bible teacher for American college students, he
could begin to overcome his self-consciousness, and serve college
students through Bible study by faith. And a miracle happened! For the
first time, he could take care of three college students at once. It may
not seem like much to worldly people. But in fact it is the grace of God
in this young man’s life. What is important is not the number of
students he has, but the realization that whatever he does for God can
only be accomplished by faith in God’s good purpose for him.
Therefore, he has a clear spiritual direction for his life. It is to grow in
faith in God’s word, until he can fulfill God’s good purpose for his life in
every way, and to the end. May God bless each of us with the faith to
fulfill God’s good, pleasing and perfect will for our lives! May God fill
our hearts with joy when sober judgment testifies that we are growing
in faith in God’s purpose and hope for our lives!

Second, one body—many members (5-8). Look at verses 4-5. “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.” When we have a
sober view of ourselves, then we can begin to see ourselves with
God’s hope. Not only so, but we can begin to see the hope of God for
others. And therefore, we can see the hope of God in his remnant
church. In the New Testament, the remnant church of God is called,
“the body of Christ.” We, who are individuals with an individual purpose and hope in God, are called to belong to one body and to the other members of that body, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Just as the members of a body work together to maintain the body and allow it to function in the world, so the members of the body of Christ must commit themselves to the body of Christ, to build it up, and to Christ’s mission in the world. For this reason, God has given each of us gifts in his wonderful grace to us. It is not to exalt ourselves or put ourselves above others, but it is so that we can contribute to his body on earth, and reap from the harvest that will be gathered at the end of the age.

Look at verses 6-8. “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If one 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.” We have been given gifts for the sake of contributing to the body of Christ. But, what is my gift or your gift? That is a good question. One very bright young lady sat in her room for hours on end, wondering exactly what her gift in Christ was. Sometimes, she was very hopeful; other times, quite sad. Finally, someone suggested that she get out of her room and come and help serve sheep and the worship service. It was a revelation. She found that she had many gifts. She was also sorry that she had hidden her talents for so long. Now, she can joyfully develop her talents for the glory of God, and for the blessing of her coworkers in Christ. In many ways, we can think of one to one Bible teachers as God’s talent scouts. We ourselves were found by someone who had faith enough in God to believe that we could offer our talents and gifts to God, and patiently served us to develop our talents and help us to use them for God’s glory. Now, we have been sent out to call people from among all nations to come and use their talents for the glory of God, so that God’s kingdom may advance, and so that they might have a share in the harvest to come. What a joyful task it is to help others develop their talents and gifts in God! Andrew Carnegie was a very wealthy man, who is responsible for many libraries around the nation. But he didn’t find much joy in using his wealth on himself. He found great joy in helping very ordinary men to develop their talents as
managers, salesmen, etc. He saw his life's purpose as to use the wealth he had gathered for the sake of developing talents in others. We can learn a lot from Andrew Carnegie.

But the best at developing others' talent was our Lord Jesus Christ. He told his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the very ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It was an impossible command for a bunch of hillbillies from Galilee. But Jesus had faith that when the Holy Spirit came upon them and filled them with God’s power, then they could be used by God for world evangelization. And Jesus' faith was proved right. The gospel is the power of God to make ordinary men the greatest in the kingdom of God. The gospel is the power of God to transform those who lived in slavery to their sinful nature, and make them useful instruments of God's righteousness for the sake of his holy name.

II. Overcoming evil with good

First, we must love others in Jesus. (9-13) Look at verse 9. "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." Many people think that because we are Christians we must condone others' sins and evilness. But they are greatly mistaken. Our love in Jesus must be sincere. Paul says, "Hate what is evil." If we love God we must hate God's enemies. If we love God we must love those who love God as our own brothers. The single most important factor in the body of Christ is love. But love must be sincere. When we want to love others with sincere love we must learn how to love others in Jesus.

In verse 10, "be devoted to one another in brotherly love," means that we must make a commitment to the body of Christ. Commitments are not vague; they are specific. Christians should be committed to the particular body into which God has led them. Church tramps, who go here and there looking for human or spiritual benefit, never making a commitment to a particular church or community of believers, can't please God or learn what it means to be a Christian, for they are always getting, never giving in Jesus.
Christians should also be aware of their influence in the body of Christ. So we should not live by our feelings. We should never be lacking in zeal, but keep spiritual fervor; we should be faithful in prayer, and be joyful in hope. Gloomy faces are not a good influence on others. We should share freely. We should be hospitable. We should welcome one another in Jesus. (11,12,13) Without spiritual fervor, our love is powerless. We must love one another fervently and in practice.

Second, we must not take revenge. (14-21) In this part, Paul tells us how to live a life of faith in a world that is in rebellion against God in which we can expect to be persecuted and misunderstood. We must bless those who persecute us. (14) We are misunderstood, but we must be understanding. Especially we must learn how to rejoice with those who rejoice. (15) We must live in harmony with believers, so as not to invite the scorn of the non-Christian world. We must not be conceited or self-righteous, but humbly associate with all kinds of people in order to share the gospel with them.

Usually when we live sacrificial lives of faith we expect some respect from common people. Contrary to our expectation, they unconditionally offend Christians and do many evil things to us. (17) But we should not take revenge on them.

Godless people are always out to condemn and judge others. But the children of God should not judge others because we believe that God is the Judge. So we must leave room for God's wrath. Read verse 19. "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." Not only do we not take revenge on them, we must help our enemies. Verse 20a says, "On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.'" We must prove ourselves to be God's children, by doing good to those who wrong us. While we may suffer to do so, the body of Christ will triumph. So, we must transcend the individualistic human battle and engage in the spiritual battle as one body with our brothers and sisters in Christ. (21)

May God bless you to live as members of one body in Jesus Christ. May God help you to find your talents when you offer them by faith.
May God grant you joy, patience and hope while you serve in this world, and give you overcoming faith to keep your peace while living in this wicked and sinful world.