

Romans 12:3-8

Intro. Measuring personal growth and development in your faith can be encouraging if (1) it is actually happening and (2) you are using the right metrics that point to the supernatural power of the gospel. There is a vast difference between enjoying God at work in your life and you at work to promote and protect your way. The gospel, understood through the Bible, focused on the magnificence of Christ and delivered in power by the Holy Spirit changes a person's life. That person is said to be reborn, given a new heart, lives a new life and thinks a new way. Our attention is drawn in this series of sermons to answering the question, are you growing and developing in your faith?

Over the next four Sundays as we study Romans 12, it would be helpful for you to keep two factors in mind as you assess your personal development in Christ and then establish a plan toward continued growth. First, keep in mind how long you have been saved by God. How long have your eyes been opened to the truth and your heart made alive by the power of the Spirit? A second factor in addition to how long your relationship with Christ has been, is to have a solid, biblical set of metrics or measurements to use in your assessment. If we become careless, we find ourselves evaluating ourselves with ourselves and the standards that we have become accustomed to honoring.

Romans 12 provides 4 metrics for our assessment and obedience that define essential characteristics of the growing follower of Christ. We hope to address these through the next few weeks together.

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| 1. Personal transformation. | 12:1-2 |
| 2. Community participation. | 12:3-8 |
| 3. Love for people. | 12:9-13 |
| 4. Conflict management. | 12:14-21 |

The first metric that we consider is that of personal transformation as taught in 12:1-2. As we might expect, when the scriptures address life transformation it is not simply cosmetic, superficial or accomplished by human effort or discipline. We are drawn to life and heart change that can only be attributed to the power of God through the power of the gospel. That act of God described in R1:16-17.

Personal transformation . . . how has the gospel of God powerfully transformed your life . . . verses 1-2 teach us to assess and define transformation in three foundational ways:

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| 1. Does the gospel move you? | 12:1a |
| 2. Does worship consume you? | 12:1b |
| 3. Does thinking right challenge you? | 12:2 |

Community Participation . . . the growing, responsive follower of Christ has a change of thinking about people, especially other followers of Christ. This metric of spiritual maturity, participation with other believers in the life of the church, has fallen on hard times. Both the appeal of individualism and pragmatism has dulled our hearing to the simple beauty of being a participating member of Christ's body, the church. For various reasons, the local assembly of believers has been set aside in the thinking of many as irrelevant, in need of complete renovation, untrustworthy or not really making a difference.

This second metric taught in Romans 12:3-8 simply establishes that your effective and humble participation in a community of believers is evidence of gospel empowered growth in your life. God is at work in you if you are becoming more and more fascinated by and committed to participation in gospel ministry with other believers.

The passage before us teaches us to change our thinking about the nature of the church as well as our participation in the church. This metric causes assessment in thinking and participation.

1. Change your thinking about Christ's church. 12:3-5

This is a strong and authoritative command to evaluate and align your mindset, thinking and attitude. Verse 3 causes us to perk up and listen intently as the Apostle appeals to his own commission from God as the basis for this teaching. One of the first areas in our lives that the gospel transforms and renews (12:1-2) is our exaggerated self esteem. The values that we are so accustomed to of measuring our value, worth and importance have been completely reset in Christ. So the command that radiates from the mercies of Christ is to stop thinking so highly of yourself and align your thinking with the assigned grace and faith that God has given you.

When a person becomes a follower of Christ, a number of transformational events take place as God gives and applies the work of his Son Jesus to a life. A part of what happens in that new birth is that the Holy Spirit places you into the Body of Christ, seals you in with his presence in your body and gifts you in special ways to display the glory of God by serving and equipping the people of God. A saved person is saved and equipped to function effectively in a community of believers to magnify Christ (our Head) for God's glory.

Note three mind changing truths in these verses drawn from the analogy of the natural body and the body of Christ . . . Christ's church glorifies God through it's:

- Unity *though many, are one body in Christ* 12:5; 1Cor.12:3-5

There are no independent, unconnected, self sustaining followers of Christ. Just as with a human body, all the various members/parts are viewed as united, one body. The unifying factor is the head. You are interconnected, joined and united to every other believer in these supernatural ways:

You are ruled by the same Lord. V. 5 one body in Christ Col. 2:18-19

You are gifted by the same Lord. V.3 measure of faith Eph.4:16; Col. 2:18-19

You are sustained by the same Lord. Col. 2:18-19

- Diversity *do not all have the same function 4 gifts that differ 6*

Just as the members of your physical body are designed and assigned quite differently, the individual members of Christ's body represent a vast God assigned diversity.

Note 1Cor. 12:17-20 to view diversity in function (17), strength (22) and honor (23).

Note R12:21 – this contrast of unity and diversity motivates sober self reflection.

1. Change your thinking about Christ's church. 12:3-5 Unity Diversity

- Mutuality *and individually members one of another* 12:5

Note that each member of Christ is related/connected both to Christ the head and to each other.

Mutuality is best lived out or evidenced in dependence and cooperation. Both feet are necessary to run. All fingers must cooperate to use a keyboard. The hands are dependent on the eyes.

1Cor.12:21-25 teaches that this interdependence was designed by God so that there would not be any divisions or sub-groups developed. Verse 25-26 describe mutuality in the very intimate terms of caring for one another and entering into the life and experience of other members. The example includes the experience of suffering and rejoicing.

The point of the body is that you as an individual have been assigned and gifted to fill an important role/responsibility in the community of believers that enables that community to set on display the glory of God, the fullness of Christ. You cause the body to suffer when you choose to not participate for various reasons.

2. Grow your participation in Christ's church. 12:6-8

Again we find the expectation that right, Christ exalting thinking will produce humble Christ exalting behavior. The mercies of God in Christ are displayed in your life through your humble participation in the life of Christ's community. This passage teaches us to grow our participation in Christ's church in these three ways:

- Humble self evaluation. 12:3

The answer to the self-exaggeration and self-importance that feeds independence rather than interdependence among believers is to acknowledge God's grace that both saves from sin and assigns roles/responsibility in the body. Think of yourself in terms of what you have been given . . . enormous grace and mercy for the purpose of exalting Christ with others.

1Cor. 12:7,11 What is the gift(s) assigned to you by the Spirit?

1 Peter 4:10 Do you think of yourself as a manager/steward of service gifts given you by God?

Phil.2:3-4 Are you sobered by the experiences and needs of others?

- Primary commitment to Christ's church. 12:5

The nature of the unity, diversity and mutuality of Christ's body supports the importance of commitment to a local group of believers. While the local group of organized believers is not the Body of Christ, they certainly are viewed in the scriptures as a functioning representation of Christ's global and universal body. So the question becomes, what group of believers, what gospel community are you primarily committed to and committed to primarily?

KSBC Membership Covenant:

We do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, solemnly and joyfully enter into this covenant with one another as one body in Christ

To give it(this church) sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin;

Does your commitment to this church or a church reflect the design, assignments and functional purpose of the body of Christ?

- Functional ministry. 12:6-8

Note the 7 grace gifts the Apostle lists to demonstrate the richness and strength found in the diversity of gifted people in the community of faith.

Each gift has a special function that allows individual members to channel nourishment and encouragement throughout the body resulting in growth that is for and from God. Teach through 6-8.

Every believer (3) is to serve functionally in the body. V.6 – ‘let us use them’

Two core concerns: Are you relationally connected and functionally serving?

Community Participation

1. Change your thinking about Christ’s church. 12:3-5

Unity Diversity Mutuality

2. Grow your participation in Christ’s church. 12:6-8

Humble self evaluation. Primary commitment to Christ’s church. Functional ministry.

Take Aways

1. Evaluate and identify areas of necessary change in your mindset about church participation.
2. Seek assistance from more mature believers and/or church leaders to evaluate and grow your participation in magnifying Christ among his people.
3. Make participating in Christ’s community a primary focus of yours in the new year.

Study Questions

1. Read Romans 12 together. What are the major themes addressed and how are they related/connected to verse 1 ‘by the mercies of God?’

2. Share a story from your spiritual journey about personal transformation. When God saved you . . . what did he change quickly, what did he change recently, what has changed slowly, what still needs severe changing? Testify to your fellow body members of the power of gospel transformation.

3. Review the first sermon point regarding changing your thinking about Christ's church. Which of the three foundational truths/characteristics captured your attention the most and why?

4. Evaluate and discuss the following statement from the notes. What does it mean and how does it impact your thinking about church?

The point of the body is that you as an individual have been assigned and gifted to fill an important role/responsibility in the community of believers that enables that community to set on display the glory of God, the fullness of Christ.

5. Review the second point regarding growing your participation in Christ's church. What are some of the most common reasons for minimal or not participation in the life of the church?

6. Which of the three ways to grow in participation did you connect with the most and why?

7. Using Romans 12:3-8, how would you explain to someone that it is wrong, inconsistent and perhaps selfish to be a professing Christian and not connected relationally and serving functionally in a local church?

8. What do you want to do, use or remember from this study? How can your fellow members pray for and encourage you toward obedience in this area?