

Unity in Diversity

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[0 : 0 0] So for a little while this morning, we're going to look at verses 3 to 5. We looked at verses 1 on its own, then we looked at verses 2, 2 and 3.

And now we look to verses 2, sorry, and then now we're going to look at verses 3 to 5. And the trouble with doing something like this is that you feel the necessity of just summarizing the previous weeks.

But the trouble is by the end of the chapter, we'll be here for about three hours because you'll just be repeating. Or the temptation is to just be repeating everything that we've looked at so that we get everything in context.

But I'm not going to do that. So if you haven't been here then, I'm really sorry. But you're also probably mightily relieved that we'll not be going through two sermons before we actually get to this one.

But just to put it in context very briefly, this is a great chapter because it comes at the end of 11 chapters that are full of strong deep theology, truth about God, truth about ourselves, truth about salvation, truth about the nature and character of God.

[1 : 1 0] So we've got all these deep theology and then at the beginning of chapter 12 says, therefore, because of all of that, this is how we should live. And so he's making a very strong, God's making a really strong link between knowing Him and then how we live.

And that obviously is the case. The less we know God, the less we understand about Christ and salvation and about our own hearts and our need for a Savior, then the less that we're going to live for Him and follow Him and understand Him.

So that's really what chapter 12 and indeed the rest of Romans is about. And I think I also mentioned that sometimes there'll be a little bit of overlap so that and there will be today, a little bit of overlap.

So if you weren't here last week, that's fine. If you were here last week, I'm sorry, there will be a little bit, just a little bit of overlap because last week, if you saw in verse 2, it spoke about the renewal of our minds.

Our whole bodies, verse 1, as a living sacrifice and that came about by the renewing of our minds. And really in some ways, this verse, these verses, verses 3 to 5, explain a little bit about what it means to have our minds renewed as Christians, as followers of Jesus, as people who trust in Him.

[2 : 2 3] And one of the things it means is a really good self-awareness. It's important that we are aware of ourselves before God. It's like the Scripture and our relationship with Jesus Christ is, in a sense, it's like a mirror.

It's like a mirror to ourselves, and we find it's where we find our identity, and it's where our identity as believers blossoms, as individuals, it's where we blossom.

And it also, not only where we blossom in relationship to God who made us, who wants to be in relationship with us, and for whom sin breaks that relationship and why Christ comes, but also in our relationships with one another.

So there's this radical transformation of our bodies, of all we are, and of our minds, both in relation to God and in relation to primarily our place in the Christian community, and that's what it's going to be spoken about in the next few verses.

Because what Paul is assuming here, and he's inspired by the Holy Spirit for us, is that being part of the church of Christ is simply assumed.

[3 : 35] It's not even necessarily explained, it's just assumed that if you're a Christian, you're part of the body of Christ. You belong to Christ's family, and that's described and illustrated in different ways.

That's the only pattern there is. There's not really any teaching about being rogue Christians or lone ranger Christians galloping away on our white horse, all on our own, because nobody else is good enough.

But rather we come into a body of failed and fallen believers who are redeemed by grace, and we're part of that. And so we find the New Testament constantly speaks about the importance of the local church, the importance of the family of God, of the spiritual leadership and oversight, humbly reflect in Christ, the making of disciples and the making of disciples in community.

And that's a really hard truth for us to take, I think, is very often very... it's one of the things we'd like to leave behind, especially in the individualistic age in which we live.

Church can be so full of angst, it can be so full of tension, we have the ridiculous cult of celebrity preachers, the unhealthy measuring of one another against each other.

[4 : 57] Who's the better Christian? Who's the better denomination? Which church is the most converts? So much competition flying about to get nudge further up the church ladder.

So many riddles... In churches, so many riddled with guilt because they don't feel that they meet the standards of the people around them or the demands from the pulpit. There's so much stereotyping of what a good Christian looks like, so much unbiblical things go on in church so often.

And sometimes the emphasis is on uniformity rather than unity. So there's this pressure all to look the same and act the same and yet not realize that God has made us very different and that we are to be united but not uniform.

You see the difference? Not all to be the same but we are to be united in Christ. And so we have that tension but we also have the beauty of the church and the beauty of Christian fellowship and relationship and the attraction of that which is important for us to remember and to consider and to give thanks for in our lives.

But what is Paul saying here about ourselves and also about our church or about the church as it were? And I don't just mean this... I don't really just mean the Sunday gathering but rather the reality of a community of believers, whether it's local or whether it's something we have in common with believers throughout the world, which in the summer we get a great sense of in St. Clummas because we get so many visitors from and Christians from all over the world, all over Scotland, England, UK and the world.

[6 : 48] It's amazing. But what is Paul saying here in verses 3 to 5? For the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of himself but to think with sober judgment each according to the measure of faith God has assigned.

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 in Christ and individually members of one another.

I think he's reminding us it's a message for every believer, every single believer. He says every one of you, you know, every one of you, it's not just to the leaders of the church, it's to every single believer.

This letter to the church in Rome, this early church was going out to all the... to the whole church, to the whole family and he's giving foundational truths that apply to every single believer.

And so these are truths and the first eleven chapters with all that deep theology, that's for every believer as well. It's for every single believer. And no one is left out.

[7 : 53] The Holy Spirit brings a message to all of us as believers. And if you're not a believer then the challenge is to consider even the message that goes out because it is still relevant as someone who has been made by God, who deep down recognizes that and who one day will face God.

And so we're called to consider him. It's God's breath, God breathed these words in.

He has no favourites, there are no exemptions, there's no hierarchy here under the Apostles of authority, Paul is speaking through... God is speaking through Paul to the whole church.

And he's saying, only in Christ can we truly know ourselves. He says and reminds us in verse four for as in one body, many members and the members of the same function, so in Christ.

So we, though many, are one body in Christ. And that is a really important truth, is he's speaking of this reborn reality that every believer is in Christ, that we've all had our eyes opened and we are beginning to or seeking to live uniquely as we were created to do.

[9 : 15] And that involves rooting out some of the deadness and the corrosive, destructive ways of selfishness and lovelessness and our sinful independence and seeing our true potential in Jesus Christ.

Seeing what it means to live to the full in Jesus Christ. And he's reminding us that it's in Christ that we truly can begin to know ourselves.

And he goes on, I think, to explain a little bit of what that means, it involves thoughtful self-reflection for by the grace given to us, to every one of you not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.

So we're going back there to the previous verse which is talking about thinking again. There's to be thoughtful self-reflection. Paul's not saying that we are worthless.

He's not saying that we are not to think about ourselves. He's saying we're not to think about ourselves more highly than we are than we ought to think. We can think highly of ourselves, but not more highly than we ought to think.

[10 : 29] So there's a balance to what he's saying and there's a balance to our thinking. There's a right level, in other words, of self-love. It's going to be impossible for us to love anyone else if we don't love ourselves.

The Bible is absolutely clear about that, but it's not a love of self that enthrones self and puts self above God or above other people.

We're image bearers of God. We matter to God. And we are to be thoughtfully self-reflective. We have a huge task as Christians.

Remember it took Christ, the Son of God, to be nailed to a tree, to deal and to face God's wrath with the Father's wrath and the power of hell to set us free.

There's a huge task of deconstructing the darkness and disfigurement that sinful selfishness and that God rejection has plunged us into.

[11 : 24] There's a deconstructing of that and there's a reconstructing in righteousness, putting the love of Christ and the grace of Christ right at the very heart and core of our lives.

And that's what we are being encouraged to do, thoughtful self-reflection. So as I mentioned last week, we're to be heart philosophers. We're to be thinkers. Four times in this verse, Paul uses that verb, thinking.

If you were translating it absolutely from the text, you could translate it, don't think high thinking, kind of proud, but think sober thinking.

So it's four times, he uses that word very good. Don't think high thinking, but think sober thinking. That is sober thinking, there is sound, moderate, wise thinking.

And so he's wanting us to think. That's what he wants us to do, his believers. He wants us to be thinking believers. It's so easy, isn't it, to go through life without thinking. And he wants us to stop at least daily, I'm assured of that, and analyze our heart, analyze our thinking, our attitudes, our decisions, understanding ourselves before the living God and what he wants from us in our relationship with Christ.

[12 : 49] How he wants us to respond, how he wants us to think about Him, and to pray through some of the lack that we may have in our lives and to ask Him for His grace and strength and truth.

To consider how we responded in conversation and to consider whether we could have done things differently. And that's a practice, that's an ongoing reality, and there's so many distractions to that.

I think I mentioned last week we have access to a whole lot of knowledge, a whole lot of information. There's never been so much information available to the whole world. Our brains are fried with all the information.

And we now have the attention span generally of gnats in our lives. But we are losing the ability to think, to stop and meditate.

We live so much for the moment and we're asked to consider how we live and the consequences of our thought process, of our conversation, of our responses and to think about our future.

[13 : 56] So it's important to think. And it's important to think with balance, with a certain perspective. And that is through the measuring lens of the cross.

That's what I believe He means here. There's different interpretations where He says, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Now I think what that means is that He's given us a measure by which we are to think. He's given us a standard by which we are to make consideration.

And that standard is the death of Jesus Christ, that we have come by faith to believe in and to understand. That's the gospel.

That is His only measure. And that measure says we can't do anything on our own.

[14 : 51] It says, as we've often said here, we're more wicked than we ever could imagine, but we're more love than we could ever hope for. It says that we need Jesus Christ.

It says that that is the measure. That's the measure that we use. And it is by faith that we can ask for more of from God that is the lens by which, the balance by which we measure ourselves.

And that's so important because it keeps us from pride, doesn't it, from thinking too highly of ourselves, and it enables us to think with sober reflection.

And it's a great balance because it reminds us how precious we are as individuals, how important we are that God the Son would leave glory and live the life we couldn't live and die the death we deserve.

It makes our lives worthwhile and significant. Even if you come this morning and you think, you just feel nobody has any interest in my life or any concern for me, or would know whether I lived or died.

- [16 : 05] We have a Savior who's gone that far in order to redeem us. That's how precious, that's the balance that we have along with the challenge of the darkness and the rebellion that keeps us from Him and that makes us stick our fingers up at Him and say, I don't need you, I can go my own way, I'm good enough without God.

And so it gives us, the cross gives us that balance, the cost that was paid to set us free. It helps us to understand grace and the gospel and ourselves.

So we look at that through the prism of the cross, through the mirror of the cross, and we find that it gives us the right balance to think about ourselves, not too highly, but with sober judgment, sober reflection.

And that's very important. That sober reflection is really significant because it reminds us of our fragility and our need for His protection and strength.

If we try and live the Christian life on our own, or intellectually, or ritualistically, or outwardly, then we will be destroyed.

- [17 : 18] It will destroy us. It's just simply impossible. And we'll probably destroy others along the way because we'll be judging them and we'll be comparing ourselves with them and we'll be trying our best or we'll be critical and we'll take that place of judgment.

You know what it's like when we rise above our station as it were and fail to consider our vulnerability. When we've done too much in our own wisdom, or we've drunk too much, or we've said too much, or we've lived as if it's just all about me and my needs, my hurt and my abilities, my health and my popularity.

He wants us to think with sober judgment in the light of the cross and in the light of God's glorious grace. So that sober judgment, it's a great phrase really.

It's a critical eye, grace-filled critical eye, but not at others. It's think of ourselves with sober judgment.

It's exercised internally. What we often do is we exercise it externally. We use sober judgment, or we use judgment, maybe not that sober. We use judgment on everyone else's motives and everyone else's behavior and everyone else's hearts.

- [18 : 33] And that allows us to ignore the complexities and the idolatries and the mixed motives of our own hearts, because that's much tougher, right? But the great thing is it's a healing examination, because as we go and as we see what's there and we see our motives, we just cry out to the living God for forgiveness and for challenge and for change.

That's why He says that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we live Christ-like lives.

It's a lifelong surgery towards healing. That's a great way of describing it. We're forensically, as it were, legally before the judge of all the earth, we are forgiven.

We are made clean from the moment we accepted Christ as our Savior. Paid in full. So if I died this moment, I would face the judge and it would look down and he would say, paid in full by Jesus.

But there's an ongoing healing in our lives that our circumstances dictate often how our responses will dictate how we deal with these circumstances.

- [19 : 48] We're called to be Christ-like. So that's the first thing. There's only one other thing. Policy and only in Christ can we truly know ourselves.

And the second thing he says here, he says it's always in the context of belonging. It's always in the context of being part of the family of God.

It's simply not an option to be someone who is living the Christian life individually alone.

There must be individual elements, but he says for, in verse 4, for, as in one body we have many members and the members do not have the same functions. So we, though many, are one body in Christ.

And individually, yes, members of one another. That is a radical transforming truth for us. It's not optional. It's absolutely critical to our understanding.

[20 : 50] It was the first desperate, brutal, horrible reality of sin as it was passed down from the beginning.

It was a cane set of able. Am I my brother's keeper? Do I care about my brother? Am I interested in my brother?

The jealousy, the division, the anger, the sin that was crouching at his door broke that family in a desperate and brutal way.

And that's why I read that passage, because in Christ we are called to be renewed and to not just maybe internal or natural family relationships, which may be very difficult, but we are called to be renewed to our Father and therefore also to His children.

We are one body. Christ is our head, Christ is our Father, Christ is our King, and we are all together. Every believer is part of the body of Christ the church. And it's the reversal, not of individualism, because we know we're all individuals, but it's a reversal of divisive, sinful individualism, and it's bringing to...

[22 : 13] It's the reality that we're calling Christ to live a transformed community, because that's what He's calling us to. That's what we're going to enjoy in eternity.

We're not all going to have our own individual pods in heaven. I don't know what I'll be like, but it will be a community. There will not be a lot of closed doors, there will not be a lot of castles, there will not be a lot of selfish, sinful...

I'm going down a really difficult path here, because who knows what heaven's going to be like, but it's going to be a community of love and fellowship and joy together. It's beyond what we can ask or even imagine. It's very hard for our remaining sinful heads to imagine it being great, being with other people.

Really? Sorry. I just gave away my own heart there. It's going to be great being with Jesus. It's always great being with Jesus, because He'll wipe away every tear, but eternity with every people, whew.

There's going to have to be some transformation for me to be there, that's for sure, and for you to love me there even more so. But that sinful individualism looks for ways to repel other people, doesn't it?

[23 : 25] And to maybe attract people on our own terms, people we're comfortable with, people that we are not overawed by, people that don't make us look bad. And we often... That sinful individual makes the church an optional thing, or thinks of church just as something where you go to with your mates, the people who are like you, and you'll only commit to a church that's like that.

And we're all like that. We all feel like that. But Christ is radically different. We're actually all part of one body. And we're not to see the church as a redundant body part, like an appendix, which we wonder what value it has, and if we cut it out of our lives, it wouldn't make much difference.

I think sometimes that's how we think of the church of Christ. Christ is our head. We are organically, spiritually related to one another as those who are Christians.

And it can be such a beautiful place, and we're called to be such a beautiful place. You know, one of the core foundational realities we've always sought here, and it's going to be even more core and foundational.

I hope and pray, but when I move to leaf, is the importance of community, Christian community. Now, people say, ah, there's that net, there's other things. But today, it's such a powerful indicator of our radical, transformed community, is what a Christian community, with all its diversity, with all the differences, who still love one another, who forgive one another, who don't bitch at one another, who talk courageously and comfortably and encouragingly, but honestly, with one another.

[25 : 10] It's not shallow, and take it or leave it. I think there's a world of isolated, lonely, desperately sad people in this world looking and searching for it in all kinds of ways.

But it will be found when we reflect Jesus Christ. And in that community, Paul's not naive, God is certainly not naive, we all have different gifts.

We're all very different, and we'll speak about that more in the coming weeks, though we are many, and we all have different gifts, he says, we are members of one body.

It's like an orchestra, it's like the body parts, different roles, different gifts, different faces, different characters.

It's so easy for us to shoehorn one another into something we're not stereotyping, typecasting Christians all to be the same, keeping guilt on them when they're not, not recognizing the wisdom needed to see what some people will think and do differently from us.

[26 : 21] We don't all have the same gifts. We're not all leaders. We don't have the same levels of faith. We don't all have the gift of hospitality. Some of us do, some of us don't.

We're all called to love people. We're not all evangelists. We're all called to share the faith, but not all of us have the gifts of evangelism. We're all called to give a reason.

We're not all theologians, but we're all called to know God and to learn about God and to value the diversity that God has placed within our community. It's important to stop grading one another and keep the judgment for our own hearts and for the transformation that's needed in our hearts because if the church is rubbish and if the preaching is rubbish and if your experience is rubbish, probably the most important thing to do is to ask God to help you deal with that, to change your attitude towards it, to start praying maybe, more about being receptive to even the frail exposition of the word or to be forgiving of those who don't treat you as you think you should be treated as a Christian or whatever it might be.

As we start living out the Christian life, then that measure of judgment is much more challenged to ourselves than to other people.

And I think that's important because today, if a church community is critical and divided and unwelcoming and uninspiring and dull, then if it's shallow, if it's not self-aware, if it's not reflective, then it'll just be another community jockeying for position and popularity.

[28 : 21] It'll not be radically transformational. It'll not be grace-filled. And it'll not be powerful in the kingdom of God. And that's what we're looking for.

And each of us are looking for that. And I know it's a great challenge in St. Columba's because we're a city center gathered community. We don't rub shoulders with one another all week.

We don't interact with one another all week. That easily, it has to be intentional. And you've done a marvelous job at that over the years.

And you've to continue to do that with all the change, with all the transformation, with all the transience of the congregation, with new people coming in. We keep living that way. We keep pointing others and pointing ourselves to Christ.

And to this truth, this transformational truth, it's radically different. We need Christ to live this way. And that is how we will live lives that are honoring to God.

[29 : 23] And we will live our best life that way. Because that is how Christ intends us to live in relationship, in dependence on Him, thinking people, rational, thoughtful, considerate, dependent people on the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we ask that you would help us to live this way. We're kind of repeating ourselves a lot in these early verses of Romans when we look at it in such detail.

But yet, we feel, I feel we could look at it forever and learn new things. And there's so much to take in and so much to be challenged by in our own lives to allow your word to transform us, the truth, to change us, to be people who fall in our knees and cry out, Lord, please.

I'm not coming to you with the answers. I'm not coming to you with my life and with my example and with my effort and with my faith. I'm coming to you in weakness and in need, crying out for help.

And Lord, we rejoice that in our weakness that You are made strong and that our strength is indeed paradoxically revealed in our dependence, childlike, not childish dependence on You.

[30 : 51] So Lord, help us, we pray, speak into our lives today, speak into the life of everyone here today. You know our hearts. You know our needs.

You know how we have come today. You know what we face tomorrow. You know what we need to consider and to think about and to deal with in our lives.

Lord, we thank You, we come to You that You know, and we rejoice in that. So help us to be encouraged and built up under Your Word, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen.