

Living It – Romans 12:3-21 – Part 1

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Parade

1. The modern parade has its origin in what was called the *Roman Triumph*.
2. When a Roman general returned home after a successful campaign, the City of Rome would throw him a special celebration honoring his victory.
3. The whole city turned out, first decorating the processional route, then lining the wide avenue, cheering wildly as slaves, loot, & triumphant troops paraded past.
4. Last came the victorious general, riding in a special chariot drawn by white horses.
5. He was dressed in his finest amour, polished to a bright shine.
6. As he passed, the people shouted louder than ever, lauding his glory & power.
7. But the Romans were sharp & knew that praise is dangerous.
 - a. So they put someone in the chariot with that general to *counter* the pride that could ruin him.
 - b. It was a *slave*; one of those just conquered, standing in chains & humble attire.
 - c. The lesson was clear – Fortune is fleeting & fickle.
 - d. Today's victor can easily become tomorrow's slave.
 - e. And as they made their way along the processional route, the slave whispered in the general's ear – "This too shall pass, for you are mortal."

B. Today

1. What we're looking at today flows from vs. 1 & 2 & what we studied last week.
2. In the rest of ch. 12 Paul tells us what being a living sacrifice with a mind that's being renewed *looks* like.
3. He begins by dealing with the issue of pride because it's the key to the rest of so much of life.
4. Let's step our way thru this now, phrase by phrase . . .

II. TEXT

A. V. 3

³For I say, through the grace given to me,

1. Paul means his calling as an *Apostle*, someone who provided leadership & direction for the Church.
2. He's about to give specific instructions, so he reminds them of his role & ministry.

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you,

3. This is something *every* believer is to take heed to, from the apostle to the newest follower of Christ. **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.**
4. In other words, don't be proud & haughty. Especially, don't think yourself better than others.
 - a. Now, the fact of the matter is, some of us ARE better than others!
 - b. At → painting, singing, auto repair, wall-papering, skateboarding, knitting, flexing.
 - c. *All of us* probably have *something* we're better than many others at.
 - d. But excelling at doing something is not what Paul means;
 - e. He's referring to seeing one's *self* as of more value than others;
 - f. Of thinking we're better than others, not in what we do, *but who we are*.
5. This is a call to humility – but be careful to see what that means –

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

6. Humility does **NOT** mean to be down on yourself, to beat yourself up & count yourself as worthless scum.
 - a. True humility is to have an honest, accurate assessment of yourself.
 - b. How can we do that? By choosing to see & evaluate ourselves from God's perspective rather than the world's.
 - c. Does God value us? YES! All we have to do is look to the cross to see HOW MUCH God values us.
 - d. There's something else we learn when we look at the cross – God values *all of us the same*.
 - e. So there's no room for arrogance & superiority.
 - f. I've never understood how people who call themselves Christians could justify slavery by saying one race was better than another.
 - 1) The Cross first consigns *all people*, regardless of their color or ethnic origin under sin,
 - 2) Then lifts them from the pit of death by the love & goodness of God.
 - 3) There's room for no boasting save in one – the One who hung on that Cross to save ALL.
7. Humility is that form of self-knowing that draws its value from God, not the world.
 - a. The world is all about setting our worth by *comparing* ourselves to others.
 - b. And the comparisons are endless, from the color of your skin, to what car you drive, what music you listen to, & what neighborhood you live in.
 - c. Are the residents of Montecito *better* than those who live in Oxnard?
 - d. *Some* living in both places *think* so.
 - e. Does God love & value Oxnard, less than Montecito? Of course not!
8. Look at it again.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

- a. We ought to think of ourselves as sons & daughters of God who all come to Him the same way.
 - b. And if it were not for His gracious adoption, we'd all be lost, pathetic sinners destined for hell.
 - c. Who cares what you drive or wear on the way there?
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For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

9. To be sober means to be *clear-headed*; to have one's thinking unimpeded, *not* influenced by anything that would distort reality.
 - a. Paul isn't thinking of alcohol & drugs so much as a mind that's *unrenewed* & still captive to the world's ways of thinking.
 - b. It's important in renewing our minds to admit they **NEED** to be – that some of our ideas, thoughts, values, & priorities are downright goofy.
 - c. A good part of the arrogance that gets us into trouble is thinking we've got it all figured out.
 10. Here's a practical way we can put this into practice.
 11. Lynn & I recently attended an event in LA where well-known speakers were addressing about 700 pastors & their spouses.
 - a. There were some big-names there, celebrities, though most of them would probably try to duck that label.
 - b. It was a good time of informing the crowd of current issues & America's Christian history.
 - c. Between sessions, there was always a large group of people who wanted to get near the speakers to shake their hand & chat them up.
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- d. There was a lot of picture taking. It was the typical celebrity deal even though the people themselves did nothing to encourage it; if anything they seemed reluctant of all the attention.
 - e. Standing round the meeting hall were dozens of servers who worked for the hotel whose job was to serve the meals.
 - 1) They were attentive & did a good job throughout the event.
 - 2) I watched them closely to see what their reaction would be to what they were hearing.
 - 3) I was surprised to see no reaction at all, even though a lot of the material was inspiring.
 - 4) Then I realized the reason they weren't reacting was because they weren't listening; they were so focused on serving, they'd blocked out anything that might be a distraction.
 - f. What bugged me was the poor way the servers were treated by some of my peers.
 - g. They were ignored, run into, shooed away, & treated as bothersome objects.
 - h. Not often, but enough to be noticeable.
12. If we lived what Paul says here, we'd show as much attention, respect, & care to servers at a banquet as we do to the celebrity speaker.

13. So, **first** - A living sacrifice with a renewed mind is **humble**, it has a clear-headed estimation of itself.

14. And one of the things it knows is found at the end of the verse – God has portioned out to each of us, a specific measure of faith.
- a. This isn't referring to the size or quality of our **belief**,
 - b. The word 'measure' refers to something used to **portion** something, like a measuring cup.
 - c. What Paul means is that God has given each & everyone of us a ministry, a calling, a purpose in following Him.
 - d. He uses the example of the body to illustrate this . . .

B. Vs. 4-5

⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

- 1. The Church is often referred to in the NT as the Body of Christ.
- 2. Each individual believer is a part of that body.
- 3. Just as in our bodies, our health is determined by the strength of each part & each part's harmonious contribution so it is in the Body of Christ.
- 4. Each part of our body does something different, but no one part thinks it's any better than another.
- 5. When one part tries to live without regard for the other parts, that's called illness or disease.
- 6. It's only when each part lives in harmony with the others that the Body is healthy.
- 7. And so it is in the Church.

8. So **second** - A living sacrifice with a renewed mind **lives in harmony** with other believers.

- 9. Paul then gives some examples of the measures of faith God has portioned out.
- 10. This list isn't exhaustive, it's a brief review of a few ministries people are called to.

C. Vs. 6-8

⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:

- 1. The roles & ministries God calls us to are portioned out according to His grace, not our ambition.
- 2. There's been a lot of grief & frustration over the years caused by people **discontent** with their real calling because they **aspired** to do something else.
- 3. Some are given the gift of **helps**, but they **want** to be an evangelist & push like mad to make it happen. All it does is exhaust & disappoint everyone around them.
- 4. Others are called to **serve**, but they aspire to **lead**. Disaster.

5. If they would only embrace their calling they'd find the satisfaction they thought their ambition would bring.
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if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

6. If a person is called to speak for God, he/she is to do so within the sphere of their calling & experience of God's grace.
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*** Time doesn't allow for the kind of explaining of these gifts I'd like to give.

This coming Wednesday we start a study in 1 Cor.

When we get to ch 12, we'll come back to the list of gifts Paul gives here and do a fuller examination of them.

7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering;

8. The word means *service*.
9. Know, Jesus made it clear with the disciples that we're all called to BE servants.
- But the main point of Jesus' teaching about servanthood had to do with *relationships*
 - His followers are not to be hung up on authority & hierarchy.
 - They're to see themselves as someone who's role is to make the life of others better.
10. What Paul means here by ministry is the call God places on someone to serve, to take care of what needs to be done.
- We have some wonderful people here at CC with the gift of serving.
 - They spend many hours here doing what needs doing.
 - If we have an event, they show up early & stay late to help out.
11. Paul says, if you've been given the gift of serving, serve – don't try to lead.
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he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation;

12. Exhortation means *to call to action*.
13. Paul *pairs* teaching with exhortation.
14. Teaching aims at imparting knowledge while exhortation aims at putting that knowledge to work.
15. Some people are awesome at explaining the Scriptures or some aspect of the Christian life. And when their done, you go – “Hmmm, that's great!”
16. Others aren't so good at *explaining*, but once they've got it, man, they're able to sound out a rousing call that ignites hearts to put it into practice.
- Exhortation can be a bit *harsh* because some people need to be shaken from their complacency.
 - Other times it's *encouraging*, because the truth is so convicting it leaves people feeling low.

he who gives, with liberality;

17. Some are called to give of their substance so that other ministry can be carried out.
- These people are often immensely blessed in business & investments so they have the capacity to give.
 - God's abundant blessing is safe with them because they understand their role is to give it away.
 - [Pastor's Briefings]

he who leads, with diligence;

18. Any enterprise that has more than one person in it needs leadership, so in His grace God provides it for His people.
19. If you're called to lead – do it!

he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

20. This is the ability to empathize with someone in such a way that they know they're loved & cared for.
21. This is a special gift & one that's well used in a ministry like hospital & home visitation.
22. But Paul puts an important advisory on the ministry of mercy – it must be marked by a commitment to cheerfulness.
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- a. The needy & broken don't need someone to climb into the pit of despair with them.
- b. They need someone to gently lift them out.

23. Now, there are many more gifts & ministries; this is just a sample.

24. The important thing to remember is that, third—a living sacrifice with a renewed mind *recognizes he/she has an important role to play* in the Body of Christ, & has been equipped by God to do it.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Stop!

1. We need to stop right there, because seriously – this is a passage we need to heed the warning to not just be hearers but doers of.
2. So let's review, then I want to make a couple suggestions.

A living sacrifice with a renewed mind . . .

- o First - is *humble*.
- o Second - *lives in harmony* with other believers.
- o Third - *plays a specific role* in the Body of Christ.

B, Living It!

1. How are we doing with *humility*?
 - a. Ask yourself honestly → Is there anyone I think I'm better than?
 - b. Not at ping pong, or curling. I mean that you think you're a better person.
 - c. Do you consider yourself better because you're a Republican, Democrat, Independent, Green?
 - 1) Or because you went to college & have a degree?
 - 2) Or because you home-school – or have your children in public school?
 - 3) Or because you live in YOUR neighborhood.
 - a) You don't have to live in the hills to think you're better.
 - b) You can live in a ghetto & *pride yourself* on how where you live *doesn't* make you better.
 - 6) It's still arrogance that says, "I'm better because I'm not a snob about where I live."
 - d. This week, be sensitive to how you treat cashiers, janitors, counterworkers, busboys, waitresses & other servers.
 - e. Proverbs 16 says – Pride goes before destruction & haughtiness before a fall.
 - f. "Be humble or you'll stumble."
2. Are your relationships with other believers *harmonious*?
 - a. There's little that sounds more wretched than someone who's not singing in key.
 - b. When we're worshipping, I will often try to sing a harmony to the main melody & I admit, I'm not real good at it.
 - c. Sometimes okay, but often, just wrong – sounds like a car-wreck!
 - d. So when I'm first figuring out a harmony, I sing quietly because I don't want to cause others around me to become ill.
 - e. But man, when you get a harmony right, it sounds so sweet!
 - f. Love listening to choirs & vocal groups where there're 4 or 5 different harmonies going.
 - g. What can match the aural splendor of Handel's *Messiah*?
 - h. That's what we ought to sound like because our relationships are so harmonious, it brings beauty to the cacophony of this world.
3. Finally – what's your gift? What's the portion God's given you?

- a. The best way to discover what your gift & calling is, is to get plugged into a small group where you can develop closer relationships with other believers who can affirm your gifts.
- b. Notice that all the gifts are only meaningful & helpful in the presence of others.
- c. No one is given the gift of *isolation* or a gift that's for one's self.
- d. They're to bless & benefit others.