

# The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow-Christians - Part 1

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 12:3-5

**Preached on:** Sunday, August 26, 2012

It is always such a joy to hear you sing the great songs of redemption. And now it is our joy to open up God's Word and look into it and see what he has to tell us from Romans chapter 12. So if you will turn there with me as we continue to make our way verse by verse through this amazing epistle that speaks so profoundly to our lives.

I have entitled my discourse to you this morning, "The Christian's attitude Toward Fellow Christians." And, actually, we will be looking primarily at verse three, but I would like to read to you verses three through five so that you will get a sense of where the apostle Paul is going. So follow along, Romans chapter 12 beginning with verse three.

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.<sup>1</sup>

I would like for you to ask yourself a question before we examine this text more thoroughly this morning. Ask yourself this. Is God pleased with my private devotion to him and my public service for him? Ask it a different way. Am I truly a living and holy sacrifice to him? And this is proven by my active and faithful ministry within his Church.

And perhaps I can ask you this question. How has God uniquely equipped you to serve him? And where has he commissioned you to serve him within his church? Most Christians have a very warped understanding about their relationship to God that we studied last week and their relationship, their attitude toward fellow Christians. And when we have this kind of a warped perspective people end up not knowing, really, how to function in the local church. And this will ultimately lead to failed churches. It will lead to useless Christians who forfeit divine blessing in their life. This is Paul's concern here. Christians really have a wrong attitude many times and when they have these kinds of attitudes they end up establishing what you might call a man centered church that really mirror the corporate world rather than a God centered church that lives out God's plan and purpose for his body.

For example, the corporate model goes something like this. The pastor is seen as the CEO. He kind of runs the show, so to speak. And then you have got the deacons and the elders and they are basically the management team. And then you have got a handful of volunteers, usually about 10, 20 percent of the church that do most all of the work and those are the employees. And then all of the rest of the folks are consumers. They are customers that you have to make happy. And about half of all of the money that comes

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:3-5.

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into the church comes from a small percentage of these customers. And the rest of them are just freeloaders and you kind of write them off as bad debt.

Of course, the goal of this corporate model is to make a profit. And in order for the church to make a profit you have to have numerical growth. You have to have lots of people. And so the key to that is to offer the consumer a product that is both appealing and cheap. Customer service is very crucial. You have got to keep people happy. The customer is always right, remember. So you have to offer them an appealing product. It has also got to be a product that is competitive with other churches in your area or else your customers will go over to them. So you have got to be entertaining. You have got to be fun. You have got to be creative. It helps to have a Starbucks somewhere in one of your buildings and, of course, you have got to be relevant. That is the key word. In fact, it helps to really conform to the culture. You certainly don't want to confront it. You might lose business. And you have got to make people feel good about themselves. You have got to be able to come in and just feel right at home, like they belong. And so in order to do that you have got to make sure you don't make God too holy nor them too sinful.

Of course, it has to be a democracy, too. Every man has to have a vote. The majority rules, after all. And in order to really make the corporate church work the way it should, you can't have any doctrine, because that is too boring, too divisive, no long sermons. Keep them short. Keep them funny. No expectations on the people. No requirements, no accountability, no authority, no disciplining sin. My goodness, you will lose people quickly that way. And there you have it. That describes most churches in the United States of America.

From God's perspective, however, that is not a church. That is a club. There is a big difference. All this stems from Christians having a wrong attitude about God, a wrong attitude about themselves and certainly about fellow Christians. And you will remember that Paul has just stated that Paul's mercy toward the elect has consequences. It has implications, expectations, applications. That is what we have studied in verses one and two. He did not save us so that we could live for ourselves, but to live for him. Paul urges the saints at Rome that by the mercies of God we are to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. Beloved, please hear this. The gospel demands sacrifice. It expects that. Unfortunately that is foreign to many Christians, maybe to you.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23:

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is all about self denial, not self gratification, not self fulfillment. We are to be God absorbed, not self absorbed. We are called to a whole hearted total commitment to

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the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is our loving master. We are his willing slaves. God wants the sum of all we are, the sum of all we have, the sum of all we want to be. He wants us to totally surrender our wills to him. He wants to be the preoccupation of our heart. And when this is true, our sacrifice proves, according to what Paul says, what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

So, in other words, that kind of sacrifice manifests itself when his will becomes our will, when we love what he loves and hate what he hates. And then our lives become the very expression of his nature. When we are a living sacrifice we will want to do what he wants us to do. That is our spiritual service of worship as he has said in verse one of chapter 12.

So please hear me. This means that the unmistakable proof of a man or a woman who is a living and holy sacrifice will be their faithful and fruitful ministry in or through the local church. If it does not describe you, if you simply kind of hang around the edges of the church and you show up on Sundays as a spectator, you would be what I would call a Sunday saint. This is a Christian who has no real desire, no real commitment to be an integral part of the church, to serve the church, to serve Christ in some capacity. And, dear friend, I would humbly say to you on the basis of the Word of God that such an attitude is totally foreign to Scripture. And yet it is common place in evangelical Christianity as we will see.

To say it differently, a Sunday saint is not a sacrificial saint. In love I would say to you if this applies to you that you really have no basis to believe that you are a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. How can you be a living sacrifice and be inactive in service? How can you say you love the Lord but don't obey him?

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked his unfaithful disciples:

“And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”<sup>3</sup>

It doesn't make any sense. If I am really your master, you would do what I ask you to do.

And here in Romans 12 verse six he admonishes every believer to exercise the spiritual gift that God has given them. And while gifts will vary, as we will see, according to the grace given to us, we are all under obligation, according to verse six, to exercise them on his behalf and in his power. Like cells in the human body that serve very unique and very important functions within our physical bodies in order for us to live and carry out what we are to do, the Holy Spirit has endowed every believer with special abilities to function within the body of Christ to respond to its head who is the Lord Jesus. Yet most Christians have no conviction in this area.

Well, you know, that is just not for me.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 6:46.

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Oh, really? It is if you are a Christian, if Jesus is your Lord. I ask you. On what basis has God given you an exemption? Ask yourself that. Beloved, you are not more exempt from using your spiritual gift in the church than you are exempt from being a living and holy sacrifice. The two are inseparable. Why would you even want an exemption? Given all that Christ has done for you? Have you no appreciation for the mercy that God has shown you?

I have had to struggle with these things. And now you are going to join with me in struggling with them. These are very basic and fundamental truths that typically we don't talk about that much, because, after all, we don't want to lose business, right? Well, in truth, a Sunday saint is a self centered saint, not a God centered saint, not a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God. I would also hasten to add that just serving in the church is not necessarily a guarantee of whole hearted sacrificial service. Some who are very actively and faithfully serving in the church have a very superficial love for Christ. I would humbly call this saint a shallow servant. There is no real devotion to Christ, no loving and knowing him, being the longing of their heart. Being pleasing to him and living for his glory really doesn't occupy their thinking all that much. It doesn't motivate their decisions all that much. There is really no measurable spiritual growth in their life. There is no hungering and thirsting for righteousness, no depth of character. They just kind of go through the motions of doing their thing in the church as they always have or because mommy and daddy always did. So they may be actively serving, yet their private devotion to Christ is as shallow as the morning dew.

It is frightening. I have had pastors and missionaries on numerous occasions over the years, people who have served Christ faithfully for years come to me for counsel and say, "I can't stand the masquerade any longer. I have nothing more to give, because God just seems so far from me. I am not sure if I have ever really known him."

Beloved, out of my most sincere love and concern for all of you, whether you are a Sunday saint or a shallow servant, your life is dishonoring to the Lord and it is a hindrance to the church, to the body of Christ. Your branch is not bearing any fruit. Therefore it is sapping energy and strength from others that are.

Now we should all be feeling the stain of conviction right now. All of us. For, indeed, the sting of the lash is on all of our backs. So what should we do? Now that we all feel sufficiently convicted at some level, what should we do? Aren't you thankful that God doesn't just tell us to do things and then just leave us hanging? He tells us how and why and so forth. So Paul gives us many answers here in chapter 12. Let me give you a review. Where do we go? How do we start? What should we do here?

Well, first of all, you have got to have the proper attitude toward God. That is what we studied last week. That is where you have got to begin and he has already told us how to be a living sacrifice in verse one and two. Make sure you start there. Otherwise, your service is going to be sham. Don't allow the world to conform you to its image, but

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allow the Spirit of God through his Word to renew your mind and transform you day by day into the image of Christ. And when you are fully committed to God, when you are truly surrendered completely to his will, the world will be powerless in squeezing you into its mold and you will become so transformed by the Word that serving him will become your greatest joy and the passion of your heart. It will not be something you will do out of duty, but out of desire. Frankly, nothing else in life will really matter.

And as this process of sanctification occurs you will find that serving Christ will be automatic. It will be spontaneous. It will be joyful. In fact, serving him will basically be an overflow of the doxology of your heart as you reflect upon the mercy that God has shown you.

Ah, but I just wish I had more time to do these things, pastor.

Beloved, please hear this. Serving Christ is never a time issue, never. It is a heart issue. Stop fooling yourself. It is an issue of priorities. Admit it. Your priority is self, not Christ. It is as simple as that. So first we must grow in the realm of whole hearted, total surrender to Christ, develop a proper attitude toward God and only then will we develop a proper attitude toward fellow believers. That is where we are going this morning as we look at verses three through five, primarily verse three.

And as we look at these verses three attitudes will emerge. Paul will help us understand having an attitude of humility, an attitude of oneness and an attitude of service. And we will look at the attitude of humility here this morning. So let's bring our lives to the text and allow the Spirit to renew our minds here this morning that we might be transformed, that our outward appearance might radiate the glory of Christ within us that we might blossom into a rich and rewarding servant that would bring unimaginable joy to each of us and great glory to our God.

So what is this attitude of humility? Notice verse three. He begins by saying:

“For through the grace given to me...”<sup>4</sup>

This is referring to his divine calling and gifting to be an apostle as well as his authority to reveal the Word of God.

“For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul begins this section of exhortation by gently drawing our attention to his apostolic authority, the gracious gift from God. He says it is the grace given to me.

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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Throughout Paul's writings we see this deep humility in the apostle Paul given to us over and over again despite the fact that he is an apostle. For example, in 1 Timothy one beginning in verse 12 he says:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

So here we see Paul's humility, but, again, as we look at verse three here this morning, we must remember that while Paul's humility endears us to him, nevertheless, beloved, he was an apostle. Do you realize that? He was a divinely authorized messenger sent by God who acted on God's authority. This is how he is speaking to us. In other words, this is God speaking to us through his servant. He is not merely offering us an opinion. He is an envoy of the most high God. In fact, in Romans one verse one he described himself as, quote:

"...a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God."<sup>7</sup>

Later in verse five he states that through Christ he had received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name's sake among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.

And I want to begin here by grabbing your attention. If I can put it to you strongly, it is time to set up, shut up, listen up, sober up, all right? Because God is speaking to you from his apostle here. And I would also add that while apostolic authority is without parallel in the church today, when the apostolic era came to a close the office of pastor teacher emerged as the highest level of church leadership. And my undeserved calling and gifting to preach to you the Word of God and to call you to repentance and to shepherd you along with a plurality of elders within the church is therefore important to consider. So we all need to very carefully listen to what God is saying in these passages that many times we just kind of breeze through without ever taking to heart. So listen up. Be sober minded.

If I can put it this way, there needs to be almost a breathless anticipation to what God has to say to you this morning. This is not a group led Bible study where everyone shares

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:1.

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their opinions and enjoys a nice religious conversation. This, my friends, is the authoritative teaching of divine revelation whereby God is speaking directly to you through his servants.

So Paul is now going to begin with this issue of humility. I often hear people say, "You know, I am just trying to discover God's will for my life."

Well, great. Do you know what? It is his will that you be saved, first of all. And here even in the text that we have been studying since last week, we are to be a living and holy sacrifice. That is God's will. And it is also God's will that you don't let the world conform you and it is also his will that you be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And now what you are going to hear is that it is God's will that you deal with your pride.

Oh, boy, ok. Notice what he says here. He says:

"... I say to every man among you..."<sup>8</sup>

Obviously this is an issue that is not exclusive to some, but to all of us, all right? It was obviously an issue in the church of Rome. He says:

"... I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think."<sup>9</sup>

So what he is saying here is we all have a problem in the way we think. The Greek word φρονεω (fron-eh'-o) Paul uses this root word four times just in verse three. And the term emphasizes one's attitude. It is interesting. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul uses it and he says:

"When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child."<sup>10</sup>

He also uses it in Philippians 3:15 and it is translated attitude. He says:

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude..."<sup>11</sup>

Which is the attitude in that context of pursuing the prize of Christ likeness.

But the term that is used here in verse three is strengthen. It has a prefix huper in front of it which means over or beyond. So he is saying here, "Don't overly think about yourself. Don't have an attitude of being overly proud."

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 12:3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:10.

<sup>11</sup> Philippians 3:15.

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The point here is we all have a thinking, an attitude problem. We think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. So this is the issue of pride, the opposite of humility. Many times in the past when my children who are now grown and have their children, when they were naughty I would say to Nancy, "Honey, I think one of the—I won't use a name—needs an attitude adjustment, ok?" And now even with my grandchildren sometimes they are over at the house and they need an attitude adjustment. That is what Paul was doing here. We need an attitude adjustment. See, God knows that this is a problem for each one of us. We are all prone to having an elevated view of our importance. In fact, in 1 John two verse 16 John describes the boastful pride of life which is one of the dominant characteristics of this evil world that is raised up against the knowledge of God and holds men captive to Satan and his deceptions.

So this is arrogance. This is haughtiness. This is a life defining sin that flows from the poisoned well of our unredeemed humanness. And this poison of pride, my friends, can be devastating in a church. Can you think of a situation recently where pride has reared its ugly head in your life? Don't show your hands. If you can't, let me help you a bit. Think of the last time you were really angry with someone. Chances are there is a very high probability that at the root of your anger was your own pride. Think of the last time you spoke ill of a person, maybe in your family, perhaps in the church where you demeaned them in the eyes of others, where you slandered them, where you gossiped about them or you tried to get others to agree that what this person said or this person did is really bad and we just really need to avoid them and what they said is really stupid and can you believe that?

Do you know what fuels that? Exactly what Paul is talking about here, our own pride. You think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. So we need an attitude adjustment.

It is those things that come from our heart that say, "I am more important than you. Do things my way. My {?} are right. Yours are wrong. Treat me with respect. Stay out of my way. If you cross me, I will have nothing to do with you." And all that is, is seeing the speck in your brother's eye and not seeing the log in your own. And when we think this way, beloved, we fall victim to self deception. Paul said in Galatians 6:3:

"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."<sup>12</sup>

You know, we live in an age, in a culture that is absolutely obsessed with individual rights. And the result is we have got the biggest bunch of whiners in the world here in the United States of America. We are now the most litigious society in the history of the world. Why? Because of pride. It has gone wild. And this go ahead and make my day kind of attitude has crept into the church. Think of the difference between that and what Paul said in Philippians 2:3. He says:

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 6:3.



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Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.<sup>13</sup>

Well, let's come back to the text. Notice what he says here again in verse three.

“I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment.”<sup>14</sup>

This literally means to be in one's right mind, to think with a sound mind, to think soberly. In fact, the metaphor suggests intoxication. We might say that your inflated opinion of yourself is out of touch with reality. We could maybe put it this way. My, you are smoking something. You are on something. You are living in a parallel universe here.

You see, self conceit is here basically equivalent with insanity, with intoxication. It is a severe issue. Well, this was obviously a problem in the first century church, not just in Rome, but we look through the New Testament see if it was in many other churches as well. It is in our church. It is in every church, because we are all sinners. We all struggle with these things. Pride and arrogance were great problems in the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians one in verse 18 they were badmouthing Paul and he says, “Now some have become arrogant.” And in chapter five you remember there they were excusing extreme wickedness in the church and in very two he says, “You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead.” And in chapter 13 he addressed a huge problem concerning believers who had miraculous gifts and they were trying to be show offs and in verse four he says, “Love does not brag. It is not arrogant.” And even here in chapter 12 we are going to see later on in verse 16 he admonishes the saints saying, “Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly, in other words, the poor, the down and out, the humiliated. Associate with the lowly. Do you not be wise in your won estimation.”

So this was a problem then as it is now. So for this reason Paul says to us that we need to think so as to have sound judgment.

I want to digress for a moment to help you see this maybe in a little bit different light. One of the great deceptions that has slithered into the Church is that notion that most people struggle with what is commonly called low self esteem, a concept that you never seen in Scripture. Of course, this is why every child gets a ribbon, you know, and a lot of educators don't want to give Fs anymore because that says failure and it might say to the child that you are a failure. We can't have that and all of this type of thing.

Now certainly there are children who are abused and they are filled with fear and I

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<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:3.

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understand. That is a little different category. But what I am talking about here is frankly nothing more than wounded pride. Poor self esteem is typically product of wounded pride. We read in Proverbs that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from them. Foolishness basically says, "I can be happy if I have my own way." Isn't that how our children think? Isn't that how we think many times? That is pride. And we have to discipline them to help them understand that no, sweetheart, the world does not orbit around you. It should orbit around God and his glory and so forth.

Well, when we don't get our way then we pout and the lip, you know, they step on their lower lip and then as we get older it looks even more grotesque and eventually we can cower in anger and defeat and walk around and, oh, I just really got low self esteem. And when I look like this, this is my cue to you to show me sympathy and get me to feel better which is pride. That is how it works.

If you want to see this in perfection, go into our nursery and you will see our little ones living out this part of our human depravity called pride.

You see, folks, we are desperate for affirmation. Let's admit it. That is how we function. We are desperate for applause. We demand attention. This fuels everything from Facebook to garage bands, from club sports to child beauty pageants, from American Idol to pornography. We worship self. Just watch how parents act at little Leonard's basketball game. If something happens that makes him look bad, I have seen with my own eyes sheriff's deputies standing around the basketball court to help escort the referees out of the game after it is over to protect them from the parents. Boy, there you see low self esteem at work, right? No, that is just pride. That is all it is. You see, the reason people feel badly about themselves is because they have arrogantly tried to establish their self worth based on who they are in and of themselves, rather than acknowledging their utter worthlessness and finding their true value in a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where you find true self worth.

So people see themselves as deprived rather than depraved. They don't have the right attitude toward God. They are not, therefore, living in holy sacrifices acceptable to God. They are living in unholy sacrifices acceptable to self. They become totally self absorbed. So they develop an interpersonal style of relating, designed to solicit sympathy and to get others to worship them or to worship their children or to worship the parent through the child and on and on it goes.

Isn't it amazing? Think about it. Parents will spend thousands... I talked with them. I know this to be a fact. Parents will spend thousands of dollars in countless hours to drive little Maynard to his soccer team to let him play in some other state and yet they will make virtually no effort to bring up their child in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord. Parents will take off work and drive to other states so Maynard can have a few minutes of playing time in the soccer game and yet they won't drive 20 minutes to church on Wednesday night so their child can come to discovery kids and learn what it means to

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find real life in Christ. Why is this? Parents aren't living sacrifices. They just don't get it. They are conformed to the world. They are filled with pride. They foolishly believe that little Maynard is going to get a scholarship that he will make them look good and, of course, if Maynard looks good then momma looks good and here we go.

You see, we live in a culture that is self absorbed, a culture of ego maniacs demanding that people worship us and demanding that you treat me in such a way that I can feel good about myself and if this doesn't happen, I am going to be angry. I can even become violent. I can become severely depressed and if nothing else works, I will just kill myself.

In his book *Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology*, professor William Kilpatrick writes, quote, "Extreme forms of mental illness are always extreme cases of self absorption. The distinctive quality, the thing that literally sets paranoid people apart is hyper self consciousness. And the thing they prize most about themselves is autonomy."

By the way, remember what Proverbs says? Foolishness bound up in the heart of a child. I can be happy if I can have my own way. Nobody is going to tell me what to do. There it is.

He goes on to say, "Their constant fear is that someone else is interfering with their will or trying to direct their lives," end quote.

So, again, beloved, the problem is not poor self esteem, low self esteem. It is rather we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We are not using sound judgment.

I will give you an example. Imagine the outrage if a Christian politician were to stand up in front of the world and say, especially to the American populace, that we need to have college curricula now for public educators to include a biblical course that would help us understand the sin nature of our children and the myriads of ways that it can manifest itself. Can you imagine the outrage? I mean there would be marching in the streets. There would be violence. To suggest that a child's human nature is so depraved that he lives under the curse of divine wrath would be considered the very worst form of child abuse, such a cruel doctrine would do irreparable damage to the child's fragile self esteem, is fragile self image.

My friends, in truth we in ourselves are absolutely nothing. But in Christ we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, Romans 8:17. You know if you feel defeated, if you feel discouraged. If you feel ashamed and undervalued do you know what that is? That is God's loving way of drawing you to himself.

In Matthew chapter five verse three Jesus said:

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“Blessed are the poor in spirit...”<sup>15</sup>

Those who acknowledge their helplessness and their hopelessness.

“...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>16</sup>

That is how we come to Christ. We have nothing to offer and that is where we find life and we find it abundantly. And Jesus says in John 10 verse 10:

“I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”<sup>17</sup>

There is where life is at. There is where Steve is at. So stop trying to find life on your own terms. That is pride. Instead, humble yourself and come to Christ bringing only your sin, because that is all you have to offer.

In Matthew chapter 16 verse 24 Jesus said:

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself...”<sup>18</sup>

Deny means to strongly renounce one's self, to reject one's self. My agenda is out. My ambition is out. All of that is out. My esteem is out. He says:

“...and take up his cross, and follow Me.”<sup>19</sup>

In other words, this is a call to full surrender, even if it costs you your life. And he goes on to say:

“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it.”<sup>20</sup>

Beloved there is true self esteem. Our esteem, our boast is Christ, not ourselves. He goes on to say:

“For what will a man be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”<sup>21</sup>

So, yes, discipleship is costly. We are to be a living and a holy sacrifice, but, my, the value of following Christ is infinite. And this is at the heart of Paul's admonition here in verse three. But notice what else he says. He says:

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<sup>15</sup> Mathew 5:3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 16:24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 16:25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

# The Christian's Attitude Toward Fellow-Christians - Part 1

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 12:3-5

**Preached on:** Sunday, August 26, 2012

“I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”<sup>22</sup>

Allotted could be translated assigned. In other words, God has assigned a particular ability, a specific responsibility for each of us. Now the word faith here does not refer to saving faith which every believer possesses, but rather to the idea of spiritual gifts, the kind and quality of faith that he gives us to exercise our spiritual gift. He is speaking of the various ways that believers can be a blessing to other believers in the body. He is speaking about the particular ways now that we can use our spiritual gift that God has endowed each of us with in association with our faith. You see, without faith spiritual gifts cannot be received. They cannot be exercised. In fact, this is really equivalent to that expression in the epistle to the Ephesians in chapter four verse seven where Paul says:

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”<sup>23</sup>

And this corresponds to the grace that Paul has himself received from God as an apostle and so forth. And Peter tells us in 1 Peter four verse 10:

“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”<sup>24</sup>

So, again, your spiritual gift as pastor Miller said earlier, it is not for you. It is for the rest of the body. We all have a stewardship responsibility to serve one another with humility, with love. That is the opposite of pride.

So to each member of the church in Rome and to each of us, God has given a measure of faith. He has allotted to each of us a special ability and a special function within the body. He has given us all that we need to effectively and fully use our uniquely bestowed gift. And sound judgment here, as Paul is telling us, really acknowledges this issue, this divine allotment that would cause us to set aside our own agenda and to serve Christ completely.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul describes the various spiritual gifts. Pastor Miller read that earlier. In verse four he says:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.”<sup>25</sup>

In other words there are varieties meaning there are distributions, allotments, apportionments. There are varieties of gifts. Charisma is the plural for gifts. In other

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<sup>22</sup> Romans 12:3.

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 4:7.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Peter 4:10.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4.

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words, there is a multiplicity of divine gifts and these are supernatural abilities distributed to each believer at salvation by the Holy Spirit to every believer, gifts to equip us to minister in a supernatural way to others, primarily those within the body of Christ. These are supernatural endowments you might want to say bestowed among members of the body of Christ to ensure that this divine organism of the body of Christ functions efficiently and effectively. And in 1 Corinthians 12 verse seven he says:

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”<sup>26</sup>

So you all have a gift. It is not for you, but it is for the common good. And by implication here if you are not using it you are robbing the body of your abilities and robbing God of his glory. Is that fair to say? Of course it is.

Verse 11 of 1 Corinthians 12 he says:

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”<sup>27</sup>

As a footnote, please notice spiritual gifts are never to be sought after. I know of churches that offer courses in learning how to speak in tongues and learning how to develop your own prayer language. Beloved, all of those things are totally contrary to Scripture. That is false teaching of the worst sort.

Now let me digress for a moment to avoid confusion about spiritual gifts that Paul, by the way, is going to go on to describe and we are going to examine that in days ahead. There are basically 18 general categories of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament and we are going to examine these later. Some of these gifts are operational today. Some of them are not. But you must understand that these gifts are like colors on an artist's palette, colors that can be mixed and matched. And our glorious God, the master artist does this with each of us to paint the masterpiece of Christ on the canvas of the Church.

So be careful trying to make distinctions about gifts. In fact, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between God given natural talents and God given spiritual giftedness and there is no need to do that. What we find through Scripture and what we are seeing here in Romans 12 is simply this. Be a living and holy sacrifice, all right? As I said earlier, that is where you begin. And the result of that is you will begin to serve Christ. And in the sweet providence of God he will begin to direct you into those areas of service where others will affirm you and you will find yourself blossoming in that realm of service, whatever it might be within the context of the body and there is your gift.

People say, “Well, how will I know?” The question is fair and my answer is very simple.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:11.

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Others will affirm you. It is going to come natural to you. You are going to enjoy it. God is going to be honored.

By the way, don't ask momma or daddy or somebody in your family, because they are biased. Be affirmed by other people. All right? And you will see this happen? You will begin to understand more of what God has allotted to you. And we want to be careful. If you try to classify yourself into some of these categories and get very precise and very specific, you are going to end up very confused, very frustrated, because even as you take those basic colors on the artist's palette, you can mix and match them in a myriad of different ways and that is what the Lord does with us. So don't go on some kind of a gift hunt. Just be a living and holy sacrifice. Get involved in the battle, the battle for the kingdom. Look for affirmation from others. And then you will cultivate what God has allotted to you. Otherwise you are going to end up very confused, very frustrated.

John MacArthur says, "When our lives are on the altar of sacrifice we will have no problem discovering or using our spiritual gifts. They cannot be recognized except as we use them. When a believer walks in holy obedience to the Lord filled with the Holy Spirit and serving God, it will become apparent to him and to others what his gift is and how it blesses the body of Christ," end quote.

So as we wrap this up this morning in an effort to strengthen his admonition of we as believers to have the proper attitude of humility he introduces this matter of spiritual gifts. And he is going to elaborate on this more in the following verses. God has allotted to each a measure of faith. We are all gifted by grace alone and for God's glory alone and this should humble each of us because without the Spirit's supernatural endowment, we are nothing in our flesh. We have no power in and of ourselves.

So ask yourself. How can I make the best use of what God has allotted to me? How can I most effectively and faithfully honor what God has given to me to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ? So, folks, get serious again about your wholehearted committed commitment to Christ and then you will have a proper attitude towards God and you will begin to develop a proper attitude of who you really are and how you should function within the body. And then this attitude of humility as well as oneness and service will blossom.

I close with this thought. The godly American preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards understood what it meant to be a living and holy sacrifice. He understood how this kind of attitude toward God would reflect upon his attitude toward fellow Christians. And I know as pastor Miller sent out some of what I am going to read to you here in closing to the students this week with respect to some of his resolutions. Jonathan Edwards was 18 years old when he made many resolutions that impacted his life and you young men and women, please hear this. This is what we long to see develop in each of your hearts even by the age of 18. Here are but a few that I would leave you with this morning.

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Number one he said resolved that I will do whatever will most glorify God, what will result in my spiritual growth, pleasure and well being throughout my entire life without any consideration of the time or effort now or in the future. Resolved to do whatever my Christian duty might be, whatever my Lord might desire and whatever will result in the greatest good for other people. Resolved to do this no matter the personal cost, difficulty or time.

Number two, resolved to be continually striving to discover new ways to encourage resolution number one in my daily life.

I will give you a few others. Resolved to live with all my might while I do live. Resolved never to lose one moment of time, to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another. Resolved never to do anything out of revenge. Resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

Beloved, challenge yourself along these lines and watch what God will do in your life for his glory. Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these amazing truths that bring conviction to each one of us. Lord, obviously you know our hearts better than we do, because, indeed, you are our Creator. Lord, I pray that the conviction that we experience here this morning will translate into confession and repentance and that we will see a great revival break out in this church beginning this day. Lord, as we anticipate all of the advancement in various ministries within the church and as we see all that you are doing in our body, Lord, it is so obvious that we need every saint to be a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to you using that which you have allotted to them in this life. So, Lord, bring conviction and clarity to every heart and, Lord, finally for those that do not know you as Savior, I would cry out to you that today would be the day that they will recognize your wrath upon them and that they will seek you out and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. May today be the day that the experience the miracle of the new birth. I ask all of these things in the precious name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.*

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