

Holy Communion!

January 31, 2021

Overview

In Romans 12:1-2, the Apostle Paul calls us to give our whole selves to God because he gave His whole Self to us. In view of God's mercies, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices and our minds to renewal by the Holy Spirit (see Titus 3:4-7). This is the core from which all other transformations flow.

Paul then teases out what these transformations look like, beginning with our self-concept. We become radically humble (12:3) and radically helpful (12:4-8). We realize that we are deeply connected to God and each other. We are "in Christ." We are the body of Christ. *Holy communion!* This thing we call church—this "communion of saints" as the Apostle's Creed puts it—is crazy deep and wildly significant. It is nothing less than our identity. It is who we are.

The Reality of Our Body

"In Christ" is a monster term. It occurs over 160 times in the 100 pages that comprise Paul's writings in the New Testament. Being "in Christ" is by definition what it means to be a Christian. It's the reality in which we live and move and have our being. We are members of Christ—not in the sense of a club or organization, but of a *body*. Like arms and legs, eyes and ears.

We have to keep being reminded of this. That's why members of Willowdale renew their covenant every year. You don't have to do this with your physical body. You don't have to ask your arm if it is still attending and serving. But arms don't have minds of their own. People do. And living sacrifices tend to crawl off the altar. So we're always calling ourselves back to the body, because the body of Christ is real; it is less of a metaphor and more of a literal description of who we are.

The Vitality of Our Body

Our body lives by the ongoing sharing of our spiritual gifts. As gifts flow, grace flows; God's Spirit himself flows! This is the most powerful force in the universe. Grace is what saves us. Grace, applied by the Holy Spirit, takes dead people and makes them alive *forever*. And grace sustains that eternal life day by day. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says that each gift is a "manifestation of the Spirit." No matter how dramatic or mundane, how out-front or behind-the-scenes your gift is, it makes the Spirit of God real and visible and tangibly experienced by those who receive it. Just think about that!

The Mentality of Our Body

In this passage, Paul is not trying to teach spiritual gifts per se. He doesn't go into any detail defining or explaining them. He simply assumes them. He is less concerned with what the gifts are than the attitude and mentality with which they are shared. So he says, "If you serve, then *really serve*." If you teach, then *really teach*. Be wholehearted and sincere. He uses adverbs like generously, diligently, and *cheerfully*— a word literally meaning "hilariously." There is a deep, abiding joy in sharing our gifts. We don't *have to* serve each other, we *get to!* All God's graces and mercies flow to us; and all God's graces and mercies flow through us. It's a privilege to serve each other and the world with these mighty, *Spiritual* resources.



Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

1. The message started off with a recap of our FAST21 project. Share some of your experiences.
 - What was the hardest thing about the fast?
 - What was the best thing about it?
2. Think about the *REALITY* of the body of Christ. Romans 12:4-5 says, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”
 - Is there anything there that could make you exclaim, “*Holy communion!*”?
 - If these verses are true, how is a Christian different from the typical person in the world?

The Bible maintains a dynamic tension between the individual and the communal: We’re individuals—but not rugged individualists. “Each member belongs to all the others.” We’re communal—but not so much that we lose our identity or individuality.

- How does this challenge your self-concept? What is one way this is calling you to think differently about yourself?
3. Now think about the *VITALITY* of our body, the life that is exchanged as we share our spiritual gifts.
 - Share together what gifts you see in each other. What strength(s) does each person bring?
 - Do you think your gifts are context-specific, or are they the same wherever you are?
 - What do you find striking about the fact that your gifts communicate God’s grace and manifest his Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7)? *What does that really mean?*
 4. Finally, think about the *MENTALITY* of our body as we live with and serve each other. As the sermon said, Paul is less interested in teaching what the gifts are, than how they are to be shared. It’s the spirit, attitude, and mentality that counts.
 - Look at Romans 12:4-8 again. What words or phrases describe the mentality Paul is advocating?
 - Give some examples—from your group or the church as a whole—where you see this lived out.
 - What is one way you are challenged to change your attitude about your ministry? (Do you even think about your contribution to the church and the world as your *ministry*?)
 5. Share your bottom-line takeaways, then pray for God to animate your group, and the whole church, with the truths of this passage.

“Ministry happens when divine resources meet human needs through loving channels to the glory of God.”

Warren Wiersbe