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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: Unity Through Humility**

**Transcribed Message**  
**November 13, 2022**  
**Romans 12:3**

It was the 4<sup>th</sup> century church father Augustine who was asked on one occasion to list the top three Christian virtues. Augustine was supposed to have answered and said humility, humility, and humility. Some people think he may have been a real estate agent at some point in his life. Those of you that don't know that joke when you ask a real estate agent about buying a piece of property what they say is location, location, location. It wasn't that funny the first time I heard either. That was Augustine and he's not going to get any push back from Paul because we're looking this morning at Romans 12 and verse 3 and Paul basically is going to say the very same thing to us. If we had asked the apostle Paul what is one of the three greatest Christian virtues, he might have said humility, humility, and humility. As we look at this verse this morning, let's see this together: To act right you have to think right, and right thinking begins with thinking right about God and thinking right about ourselves. We're not going to be able to act right if we're not thinking right. That of course is what we've been looking at for the last couple weeks.

Two things to remember as we step into this again this morning. The context and the setting. As I was thinking this past week, it occurred to me that life for the Christian in Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is really not that dissimilar, not unlike life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for a Christian living in America. I say that because here we are 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians living in the United States and we're studying the same book, the same truth. 20 centuries later, we're opening the word of God just like those Roman Christians heard Romans for the first time as Paul presented it to them. We're Christians living in a superpower. They were Christians living in the epicenter of what was the superpower of its day in Rome, influencing the world in many ways, some obviously for better than others. But here we are in a culture in which we ourselves are trying to live out our faith

and our faith is increasingly viewed as being hostile to the world culture. we see that in so many ways in our day and time.

Just this past Tuesday at the election, as people left the polling place and they're asked to give some sense of how they voted and why, on many of these exit polls the second most mentioned thing was the right to an abortion. Just think about that. Of all the things happening in this country, of all the things that people could have said is of supreme importance to them, the second in many of these exit polls was I want to have the right, somebody in my family needs to have the right to be able to have an abortion. We know what can only be described as tragic in the state of Montana, the referendum, the initiative that if a baby is born alive after an attempted abortion, this referendum, this initiative said medical people would be required by law to step in and give medical care and attention to this child. They voted it down. They rejected it. They said it's okay for medical personnel to walk away from the baby born from a botched abortion without any repercussions. That's the world we live in. This is the world that God has called you and I to be a part of. We are here for such a time as this. The similarities between us I think and the 1<sup>st</sup> century Romans is not that dissimilar. It's not that much different I don't think. So we want to do that.

And the way we can do that secondly, is to realize that the call of God is to be a living sacrifice. This matter we've been looking at now in these opening verses is really one that changes everything. We've sung about it already this morning. It literally does change everything. I say to you again this idea of a living sacrifice makes no sense at all. It doesn't even make sense. There's no such thing as a living sacrifice apart from the gospel. When you talk about presenting yourself as a living sacrifice, there is no living sacrifice. Sacrifices are dead ... except for the gospel. When we step into the realm of the gospel and every day we get up and we say Heavenly Father, I'm presenting myself as a living sacrifice to You today. What are we doing? We're dying to self. We're dying to self, to our dreams. to our plans, to our wants, to our desires. We're saying, God, I'm Yours. I don't know what the day holds, but I'm offering, I'm presenting myself as a living sacrifice. I suggest to you that changes everything. It is that person who is a fully devoted follower of Christ who presents himself as a living sacrifice. And then as Paul goes on in these verses immediately following, he says and by the way, don't be

conformed to the world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Why? So you can step into and enjoy the good and perfect and acceptable will of God. That's what He has called us to.

Now when we come to verse 3, it is like Paul says let's get specific. Let's get specific. Let's look at what a renewed mind looks like. What does a renewed mind look like? Here is what a renewed mind looks like. The first thing that I want you to see is he's talking to us as believers in the church. He's talking about life in the church. That's obvious. Yes, it's obvious, but it needs to be stated. We're going to state it again as we go through these verses together. The church is scattered. We're largely scattered all during the week all across the Metroplex. We're scattered all over the place. Then Sunday morning, here we are. We're all gathered. We gather together and we come together here. As this gathered community that has been scattered for the rest of the week comes together, it's here that we open the word together. It's here that we submit ourselves to the word. It's here that we speak words of encouragement into each other's lives. It's here that there is a sense of accountability that we're to have to each other that is a part of this Christian experience.

The New Testament does not know of a Christian life experience that is separate from the church. We can try it. We can experiment with it. But when you're reading the New Testament, it is speaking about that gathered community of people and their accountability and their responsibility to each other. That's why in those opening verses Paul is going to tell us how it is now that we relate to each other. Those opening verses were really to focus on our relationship with God, more the vertical. Now we step into the horizontal. We're going to start talking about spiritual gifts. We're going to talk about what it looks like to love each other. We're going to talk about what we do when we don't love each other as much as we should. What do we do when there's opposition within the family. That's what he is going to be talking about. He's going to be talking about how we relate to each other as we step into these truths.

The first thing up in this area of practical application of what does it look like to not be conformed but to have your mind renewed is we're talking about how we see ourselves. Look at verse 3 again: "For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with

sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Just a couple of observations before we dive into the verse itself. The first thing I want you to notice here is the first thing that he talked about with regard to a renewed mind is thinking right about something. What is it that he starts off and says we need to think right about? We need to think right about ourselves. We need to think right about ourselves. How it is that we see ourselves. I don't know. What do you say to that? How do you respond to that? Of all the things that Paul could've stepped into after giving to us this initial teaching of these opening 12 chapters of all things, all the subjects, all the different matters, are you surprised that the first thing that he brings up is we start with how it is that we see ourselves. We need to understand first and foremost how it is that we're looking at ourselves.

He just said don't be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you can work out this perfect will of God. The next thing that he says to us is you've got to be thinking right about yourself. You've got to be thinking right about God. You've got to be thinking right in terms of this perspective of how you see yourself in this world. So very significant. So very important. I can't think of anything that is more relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century America. First admonition. First evidence of a renewed mind. You have a proper evaluation about yourself.

Folks, I don't need to tell you. we live in the most self-sufficient, self-absorbed, self-centered, narcissistic society maybe in the history of the world. This is where we live. This is who I am. I've got a feeling it is probably where you are. We know that because we want people to know everything about our life every moment of every day and we've got the perfect platforms available to us to do just that. It's called social media. What is social media? I don't want to paint it with too broad of a brush. Yes, I do. I don't want to paint with too broad of a brush, but so often all social media is narcissistic. Look at me. Look at my life. Look at what I'm doing. Look at where I am. Look at what I'm eating. Look at who I'm with. Look at what I'm wearing. Hey, who cares? Don't applaud. The very first thing Paul says though is you've got to get a proper perspective about yourself before you can ever move into the next things. You've got to get a handle on who you are and what you are.

Now the second thing that I want you to see about this third verse, just the structure of this verse. It is very similar to verse 2. There's going to be a negative and there's going to be a positive. It's introduced with this little word "for". This little word "for" functioning as a preposition is an explanation. It is an illustration. We look at this and the second thing I want you to see – the one thing we all need is a right attitude. We all need a right attitude. Or, as we would sometimes say around our house many years ago (not recently) somebody here needs an attitude adjustment. Just put your hand up briefly. Did anybody come this morning and maybe even in the ride here need an attitude adjustment? No, don't put your hand up. Occasionally we need an attitude adjustment. Look at this.

Paul begins with himself. He begins with himself and he begins with grace as the starting point. we're not surprised by that. Paul says, "For by the grace given to me, I say..." What is the grace you think that Paul has in mind? When he says for the grace that has been given to me. What do you suppose is in view? What grace is that? It would be really easy to say the grace of salvation. For by grace we have been saved through faith, not of ourselves. It's the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. So certainly, that would be a good answer. I don't think that's the specific grace that Paul has in mind here. I think the grace he has in mind is the grace not only that saved him, but here in this context the grace that allowed him to be an apostle. I know that to be the case, or I think that's the case, because he says it in about 10 passages. He starts off in the book of Romans in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter and says in verse 5 "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name." Over in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter and verse 15: "But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles."

Paul was not just blown away by the grace of God that saved him. He never got over that and nor should we. We should never get over the fact that the grace of God has broken into our life and brought to us salvation. But in Paul's case, I think specifically he's just amazed that God would pick him to be an apostle. As he said, an apostle born out of due time. An apostle that should never have been chosen to be an apostle. He was a persecutor of the church. He was a hater of Christ. He was a hater of

Christians. And yet he's amazed at the grace of God. That's where he starts. If you want to center in and get a proper perspective of yourself, follow Paul's example. Step into the wonder of the grace of God at work in your life. Think about where you would be apart from the grace of God. That's what Paul's doing here when he says "I say to you". That is apostolic in nature. He's not just offering a suggestion. This is not just his opinion about how to do something. He is coupling this idea with what he has just spoken of as it relates to his apostleship. we could understand this as Paul saying this is the will of God for your life. For I say to you, I say this as an apostle to you. He models the attitude that he is exhorting these Roman Christians to follow.

Now he does so because of this. Because the problem that he's dealing with here is a universal one. The problem that he's dealing with is universal. I say to everyone. That's what he said. I say to everyone among you. In other words, no exceptions to what I'm going to be speaking to you about. It's true of all of us. It's true of all of us. Everybody in this room from the teacher to every listener, to those that are watching online, this is true of all of us. Now wouldn't it be nice as we get into this if Paul had started off this and said now if you need to have an attitude adjustment, then this is for you. If you need it. If you like. Remember in Ephesians 4:28 when he said, "Let him who steals steal no more." In other words, to those of you who are stealing, stop it. That is not what he does here. There isn't any "if" in front of this. He's making a universal declaration because he says everybody that I'm writing to, everybody that is reading this, everybody that is hearing this – you qualify. You're in this circle. There are no exceptions. This isn't a cultural issue. This applies to everybody.

Paul says there's two errors in our thinking. There are two sins that he wants us to understand and both center around this beginning issue that he now brings to our attention. Both of these sins that he is going to confront flow out of the sin of pride. They flow out of the sin of pride. That is what he is talking about when he says to us for the grace of God given to me. I say to everyone, understand that you have a pride problem. Understand that I have a pride problem. Pride. The very first sin that broke into God's created order. Lucifer, the highest of all of God's created beings, the highest of all of the angels, and at some point in the mystery of God's working, sin entered into the heart of Lucifer and he said I want to be like God. In the garden, Adam and Eve and their

response to the temptation of the serpent was we want to be like God. We want to call the shots. We know what's right. We know what's good for us. That's the point here. It's the first of all of the sins. It is the first listed in Proverbs 6 when God says there are seven things that I hate. The very first one. I hate it when I see a proud and haughty look in the eyes of my people. Think of it this way. Paul spent 11 chapters talking and expounding on the doctrines of the sovereign grace of God. 11 chapters setting forward our need, our lostness, our absolute inability to do anything to please God. 11 chapters he spends expounding the doctrines of grace. And then he comes here to the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter and he is saying to us, the very first evidence of a renewed mind is you're thinking correctly about yourself. You have a proper estimation of yourself. He is going to say to us here it is an overestimation of who we are that gets us into trouble.

Look at what CS Lewis said: "There is one vice of which no man in the world is free, which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else, and of which hardly any people except Christians ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular and no-fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves, and the more we have it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others." What does Paul say? Paul gives us a command. The command that he gives us says start here and here's what we need to do. The very first thing he says is here's what not to do. Don't do this. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. The verb that he uses here is *phroneo*. That word is used four times. There's a wordplay in this third verse. The word "think" is used four times in this verse. We only see it three times in our English translation. But you see it first of all he says not to think, and then he says you ought to think, and then he says to think, and the fourth one which we don't see in our English translation because it's translated sober judgment is really the word sober thinking. He tells us here that we are to have a right estimation of ourselves. We're to think right. Then he adds a prefix to it and the prefix that he adds means above or beyond or more than. He's saying here's what not to do. Do not think more of yourself than you should think. Do not have a greater estimation of yourself than you should have.

There's a company that started in 2006. See if you can track with me on this. a company started in 2006 and they made available logos from sports teams and vinyl

wall designs that you literally stuck on a wall. Big ones of maybe a favorite player or a favorite team or a sports logo. You know what the name of that company is? Fatheads. This is a little bit of a loose Carlonian translation here, but Paul is saying don't be fatheads. Don't have an over estimation of yourself. Don't think of yourself greater than you should. There are no big shots in the church, Paul is going to say, when we get into this next section about this matter of gifts and serving. That's our natural bent though. Pride is the air that we naturally breathe every day, thinking of ourselves more so than we should. William Cooper, who was the poet and hymn writer, put it like this: "When I would speak about what You've done to save me from my sin, I cannot make your mercies known, but self-applause creeps in." we can even be proud of our humility, can't we? Paul says we are not to have an over estimation of ourselves.

Now here's what we are to do. The opposite of overthink is not underthink. The opposite of overthink is not underthink. There's a second error to avoid. The error of false humility. The idea that we can recognize and see pride. We all agree on that. We can see pride very easily sometimes in other people. We don't always see it in ourselves, but we're pretty confident we can see it in somebody else. The words they speak, what they do, how they say things, how they present themselves. But here he's saying to us there's another side to this. It is a false humility. It's the "aw shucks" person. I'm not very good at that. Aw, shucks. What do they want? What do we want when we take on that false humility? We want somebody to step in and say no, you're great! You're good looking. You're beautiful. What are we thinking? Say more. Paul says avoid that. The opposite of overthink is not underthink.

The opposite of overthink is right thinking. Look at that. Sober judgment. Sober thinking. Literally it reads like this: to think continually with sound thinking. To think continually with sound judgment. The little prefix on here of this word has the idea of being sober minded. It's the word for sane. When someone is in their right mind, we say they're sane. When they're not in their right mind, we say they're insane. Here is the word for sane. Paul uses this exact expression in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 13. Listen to how he says it: "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. If we are in our right mind, it is for you." Same word. We're in our right mind. We're thinking soberly about the things that we see within ourselves.

How do you suppose you function with a right mind? Not overthinking and not under thinking. How do you suppose you think soberly? You think rightly. I think the answer is right back in the verse before. We have our mind renewed. Every day we open the word and every day the word of God speaks to our heart, our soul, our mind. It is giving us a proper perspective of ourselves, a proper perspective of our God, a proper perspective of our world, a proper perspective of people in our lives. That's what a renewed mind does. A renewed mind is not given to pride. A renewed mind is not given to false humility. A renewed mind is thinking rightly about who we are and about what God has done.

Then Paul adds to the end of that verse: each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. There is a difference of opinion about what that means and we're not going to try and go through all of those different views. I think because it leads right into the discussion of spiritual gifts. I think he's talking this measure of faith is a unique way that Paul is speaking of what's coming in this matter of spiritual gifts. The first part of the verse looks back to verse 2. We need this renewed mind. The second part of the verse is looking forward to verse 4 and this matter of spiritual gifts. The church is made up of many members of many different parts as Paul is going to say. Each one has been gifted and each one has been given a measure of faith and each one has received a spiritual gift sovereignly by the Spirit of God as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12. All for his glory and all for the common good. We'll, Lord willing, be able to look at that in greater detail next Sunday. To act right you have to think right. To think right you have to begin thinking right about God and yourself. God says to do that is to have a proper estimation of oneself.

What do we take away? The more occupied I am with the cross, the more I am occupied with Christ, the less occupied I am with myself. It's really simple. One of the most amazing verses in the Bible when it says that God gives grace to the humble. God gives grace to the humble. Don't you want to be the daily recipient of the graces of God in your life? God gives that to people who are humble before Him. But one of the most sobering verses in the Bible is the one that says but God resists the proud. He resists the proud. O God, give me a humble heart. Keep me from being in a stance, position, attitude, frame of mind, heart that You have specifically said You're resistant of. God

resists the proud. He gives grace to the humble. Keep me focused on the cross. Keep me focused on Christ. Keep me walking in grace.

And that's where it all begins. It all begins at the cross. It all begins with Christ. It all begins with grace. And what is it that the gospel does? What does the gospel do to our pride? The gospel vacates any pride. It's the gospel, the embrace of the gospel that causes me to say to God, I've got nothing to offer You. I've got no works that are worthy to be offered to You. I don't have anything. There's nothing in my hand I bring, but simply to the cross I cling. It is the gospel that causes us to have this proper estimation of ourselves. It is the gospel that I commend to you again this morning. If you do not know of what it means to be in a personal relationship with God, maybe you've been in a life mindset that has been told and taught that good people go to heaven. People who do a lot of good things get there. People who do bad things don't make it.

The reality is there isn't any of us that can do enough good things to measure up to the 100% requirement that the righteousness and holiness of God requires. It's incumbent upon us to acknowledge before God that I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God, You've told me that in grace You will give me eternal life if I will believe that what Jesus did on the cross was all that needed to be done. I receive and accept that by faith.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we're thankful for this amazing gospel. Lord, this gospel that that has called upon us every day to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to You, holy and acceptable to God which is the most reasonable thing we can do. Father, I pray that if there is anyone listening, anyone watching, anyone here this morning who has not yet understood the wonder of the freedom of sins forgiven and the grace of God coming into our lives simply by virtue of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, when we acknowledge that that's our greatest need, Father, You meet us at that point. You forgive our sins. You give us eternal life. We are so thankful for that. In Jesus's name, amen.