

Cartoon Christianity: Personalities

Romans 12: 1-8

Psalm 139: 13-18



One of the most celebrated TV personalities of all time is the great Ed Asner.

He's known for playing the character Lou Grant on the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* and its spinoff drama titled *Lou Grant*. He's actually one of the few people in television history to play the same character in both a comedy and a drama series.

He also holds the record for the most Primetime Emmy Awards, of which he won seven during his career.

He also had a prolific movie career. He played in numerous western films, and has portrayed Santa Claus in several films, most notably 2003's *Elf*.



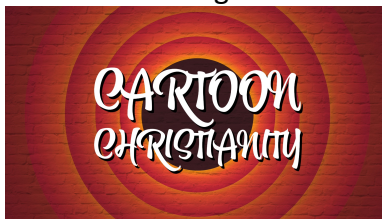
But he also had one more aspect to his career: he was a very popular voice actor for cartoons. From Batman to Superman to Spider-Man to Spongebob to Pixar's *Up*, Asner has lent his voice to many popular franchises.

In fact, he's been quoted as saying, "I've never stopped loving cartoons. I loved cartoons as a kid. I can still look at them and enjoy them."

He's not the only adult that never lost his love for cartoons. I, for one, am right there with him.

Why is that?

I think part of it is that cartoons can do some things better and bigger than real life.



And that's the point of the next three weeks of sermons. We're going to be looking at cartoons. Of course, we'll have some fun on the way. But we're also going to see how we can apply some of the ideas we see in cartoons to our walk as Christians.



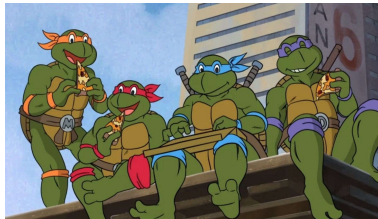
One of those things we can find displayed so well in cartoons is personality. Cartoons have a way of accentuating and bringing out a character's personality in a way that real life doesn't.

In fact, cartoons do this so well, that often a single aspect of a character's personality *becomes* the entire character.

Think about it. What would Charlie Brown be without his awkwardness? What would Bugs Bunny be without his smart-alecky nature? What would Mickey Mouse be without his wide-eyed innocence? Or what about Donald Duck without his temper?

The personalities are the things we love about these characters.

As I was thinking about personalities this week, one particular cartoon stuck in my mind. It probably wasn't the first cartoon I ever watched, but it is the first I remember watching.



In the 1980s, a new gang of superheroes known as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles burst on the scene. They caused a craze and a hysteria that isn't often replicated, and their popularity has lasted to this very day.

The Turtles are also a great example of how a simple cartoon can present such strong personalities for its characters.

Each of the four turtle brothers have their own distinct personality. Michealangelo is the light-hearted and funny one of the group. Donatello is a tech genius. Raphael is strong and wears his passion on his sleeve. And, finally, Leonardo is the born leader.

Now, on their own, these personalities are good things. But every once in a while, we get to see how the Turtles operate on their own – without the rest of the group.



One of the best examples of this was a 2007 movie simply titled *TMNT*. This movie starts out with the turtle family broken, each of the brothers on their own. And what we see is that, regardless of how strong their personalities are, they are each lost in their own way.



Mikey's jovial nature hasn't gotten him very far. In fact, the only thing he's been able to do is become an entertainer for children's birthday parties, complete with a large foam turtle head.



Donatello, for how good he is with tech and gadgets, has also found himself in a job he hates: telephone tech support.



Raphael's passion has erupted into anger, and he's decided to go out crimefighting on his own. But his methods have become questionable and he's seen as more of a villain than a hero.



And Leonardo, with nobody to lead, has gotten lost trying to find somewhere his talents can be useful, and he's blinded himself to the fact that perhaps his family needs him the most.



Personalities are a beautiful, God-given gift to each of us. No two of us are quite the same, yet Scripture tells us we are all created in the image of God. What makes each of us unique is a beautiful testament to the full image of our Creator.

But we have also been born into a world tainted by sin.

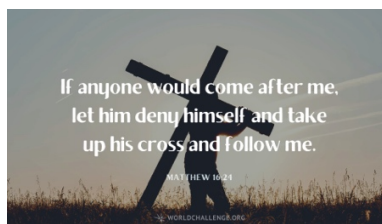
Our personalities, those wonderful things that make each of us uniquely who we are, in a fallen world also draw us to our own sin.

Some of us, because of who we are, struggle with sins of pride. Some of us struggle with our temperament. Some of us struggle with sins of the flesh. We can go on and on, but the point is that our personalities can lead us astray.

So when our personalities become our main driver before we follow our Creator, we end up lost.

So what's the answer to all this?

Well, we can always look to the teachings of Jesus for answers. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."



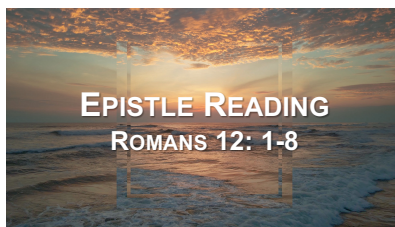
What does that mean – to deny ourselves and take up our cross?

In its simplest form, it means there are things we desire that will pull us away from God. We need to learn to identify those things, and in faith learn to tell ourselves, "No."

Those very facts that we have already established – that we each have a unique personality, that we are born into a sinful world, and that those personalities draw us to certain sins – that all says that there will come times when each of us will have to set aside the things we desire.

If we are to follow Jesus, there will be times when we will need to root out those things we might think are harmless, those things that might even feel really good, and we will need to decide we want to follow Jesus *more* than we want those things.

But here's the thing about denying ourselves: when we stop being driven by our own personalities, when we instead offer ourselves to God, we start to see how our God-given personalities fit into His kingdom.



Let's read from Paul's letter to the Romans, the first eight verses of the 12th chapter:

***12** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.



That Turtles movie that I mentioned earlier, it doesn't end with them still separate, relying only on the gifts their own personalities can give them.

They end up back together, working as a team – a single unit – once more.

So what got them to that point?

They finally started listening to their master, in this case the wise old rat named Splinter. He had been trying to make them see how they are each unique and that each of them bring their own gifts to the table.

But they can only function as a unit when they put aside themselves and start working for that bigger purpose. Their personalities remain intact. Denying themselves doesn't mean they lose what makes them unique.

Denying themselves helps them see how they can contribute their gifts for the good of the team instead of the good of themselves.

I think we have a Master that wants us to see the exact same thing. I think that passage in Romans is spelling out the exact same idea.

When Jesus called his twelve disciples, he didn't call twelve of the same people. He called very different people, from very different walks of life. I have to believe that he did this because he knew these people would each bring a necessary gift to the Kingdom of God.

We aren't intended to be a boring, homogeneous mass of flesh, giving up all of ourselves to the point where there's nothing special about any of us.

We are intended, however, to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, to stop desiring those things of the world our personalities pull us towards, and to discern how God has intended our personalities to be part of one body working towards His glory.

You have a personality, which means you have things about you that are both unique and necessary in the work we are called to do.

Who would have thought that a team of cartoon Turtles could illustrate for us such an important Biblical truth?

And yet, here we are.

Donatello is able to design gadgets and tools that help the team.

If you are able to make things work, the Kingdom of God needs you like the Turtles need Donny.

Raphael is strong and passionate.

If you are able to show others why you are so excited about the Good News of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God needs you like the Turtles need Raph.

Leonardo is a born leader, a natural at shepherding those around him.

If you are able to lead and help grow a group of people, the Kingdom of God needs you like the Turtles need Leo.

Michealangelo's main gift is that he can make people laugh. It may not seem like much, but sometimes the team needs to break the tension.

If you are able to simply encourage people, if you have the ability to welcome them and make them smile, the Kingdom of God needs you like the Turtles need Mikey.

And those are just four things. The possibilities are as limitless as the number of different personalities and gifts and talents that God has created.

And in the Kingdom of God, there is no personality that is too big or too small.

Our personalities can lead us towards sin if we allow them, if we fail to deny ourselves and take up our cross.

But our personalities can also contribute in amazing ways towards the Kingdom of God.

Praise be to God that He has a place for each of us in His Kingdom.

And all of God's people said...