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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Starting Right"
Romans 12:1-8**

During the years when diamonds were first being discovered in Africa, a farmer was intrigued by the promise of great wealth. Only one thing stood in his way. His farm had to be sold before he could set off in search of the diamonds that would make him a wealthy man. At last the deal was done and he was free. Free to pursue his dream.

The search was long and painful. Trekking mile after weary mile across deserts and plains, through jungles and mountain passes, the farmer searched for the elusive diamonds. But none could be found.

Finally, penniless, sick, and utterly depressed, he took his own life by throwing himself into a raging river.

Back home, the man who had bought the farm carefully tilled the land. One day as he was planting a crop, he came across a strange-looking stone. Carrying it to the farmhouse, he placed it on the mantel.

A visitor to the farmer's home saw the unusual stone over the fireplace, examined it, then turned to the new owner of the farm and said, "You have found one of the largest diamonds ever known to man." Further investigation revealed that the entire farm was literally covered with similar magnificent stones. The farm sold by the first farmer turned out to be one of the richest, most productive diamond mines in the world.

One hundred years ago, Dr. Russell Herman Conwell travelled the United States telling and retelling this story. One hundred years later, we still need to hear it. You see, just like that farmer, too few of us take the time to investigate and polish what we already have.

In our disappointment with the way things are, in our quest to get ahead, we fail to recognize the wealth in our own backyard. **And we end up walking over untold riches every day.**

While speaking in a farming community recently, Phil Callaway met Andrew. A successful insurance and investment consultant, he spent the last twenty years of his life searching for diamonds. Eighteen months ago, he made his way back home. But by then, his house was empty. His wife of twenty-three years had taken their teenage son and daughter and moved 1,000 miles away, leaving Andrew with a sprawling ranch, two speedboats and an antique car collection. "I have absolutely everything," he told me. "It's all paid for. But I've never been so empty. I didn't realize what I had, until it was gone."

Yes, no value can be placed on our relationships, because relationships are what last forever.

It is not just true in our personal, family, church life, and other relationships we have at school, at work, and in our neighborhoods, but also in the business world.

I received recently a magazine called INSIGHT on Christian Camping. It is full of great articles regarding various aspects of camping and how to improve one's camp and the camping experience of those who attend the camp.

One of the articles was entitled, "Supporting Group Success – Strategies To Help Your Customer's Fill Up Their Retreats."

After a short introduction to the article, the first heading read:

"Strengthen Relationships." Relationships are the key to success. During difficult economic times, customers are more alert to how they are being treated. As leaders of Christian organizations, we should exceed the hospitality guest experience at secular resorts, hotels or conference centers. We have a higher calling and a deeper awareness of and concern for the spiritual impact of our guest group events than other venues. We must

be prepared to serve guests in a Christ-like manner. Make every effort to deepen your relationship with the guest group leader to promote loyalty.

Of course, relationships are not our idea. Relationships are what God has created. He created us to be personal people who thrive on good relationships because the biblical God is a relational God.

He desires that we have a harmonious relationship with Him, and a harmonious relationship with others who are part of our lives.

Since relationships are the most important aspect of our lives, I thought for the next few weeks we would look at different aspects of the relationships that we have with the Lord and with one another.

Our text today in Romans 12:5 sets forth for us one aspect of our relationships.

The verse reads, "So we who are many, or one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

In the context, Paul is writing about the church, the ekklesia, the called out ones, the body of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ world-wide, and the local church which is part of that great body of believers in Jesus Christ.

All those in the true church of Jesus Christ are individually members one of another.

Let's ask some questions as we consider that statement.

I. What does the word, members" mean?

The word, "members," means to be part of the physical body. It is one part of the physical body, which along with other members of the physical body makes up the whole body.

Put in the spiritual dimension, those in the body of Christ, His church, are each members, part of that greater body of Christ, and of the local church.

II. What does it mean to be individually members of one another in the body of Christ?

Since each person in the body of Christ is a member of that body then . . .

1. Each person is spiritually related to the other.

John puts it this way in his first letter.

"What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3).

Believers in Christ have the same spiritual relationship with each other horizontally, because they have the same spiritual relationship with their heavenly Father vertically It is an eternal relationship horizontally and vertically.

Each believer, each member of the body of Christ, has the same life of God within him or her. They are in Christ and Christ is in them. Members of the body of Christ are brothers and sisters in the Lord spiritually, vitally connected to Christ and each other.

Paul in Ephesians 4:3-4 penned, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

2. Each person's spiritual position is the same.

What does our verse say? "Many are one body **IN CHRIST**."

The words, **IN CHRIST**, are the key here, words coined by the Apostle Paul used many times in his epistles. Why? It is the position of every believer in Jesus Christ" **Paul also wrote to the Galatians**, "There is neither

Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

Of course, some today like to say that this means all differences of race, status and gender lose their distinctions.

However, that is not what the verse is saying. The verse is teaching that regardless of one's race, status and gender, every member of the body of Christ is one, now notice, **IN CHRIST**.

IN CHRIST is the key here, as in our verse, Romans 12:5. That is the position of each member in the body of Christ – each one is IN CHRIST, and all members in the body of Christ are IN CHRIST.

Being in Christ each believer in Him is a son or daughter spiritually of the Creator of the universe.

Each believer is clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; redeemed – the penalty of sin has been paid; justified, declared righteous before God; reconciled -made a friend of God rather than being an enemy of God; and sanctified, set apart to God as His possession.

Every disciple of Jesus Christ has that position regardless of his or her status in life, what's in one's wardrobe, what's in one's bank account, yes, regardless of the house one lives in, or the car one drives.

We have the tendency to look at the outward appearance, for the old Adamic nature is bent on judging that way, but God looks past what is on the outside, and looks directly at the heart.

Certainly a disciple of Christ will seek to have an appearance that glorifies the Lord, but God looks beyond the man and woman in their Sunday best, and the man and woman whose clothes may not be in style, and sees what is going on in one's inner life in relationship to Him. (Read James 2:1-13).

Thirdly to be individually members of one another in the body of Christ,

3. Each person has the same identity.

A disciple of Christ is not just in Christ – his or her spiritual position in Christ, the believer in Christ also receives His identity from being in Christ, for Christ now lives in the believer as well.

The human approach to life is to get one's identity from one's job, or from possessions, or from some position, from one's background, or from one's family, or from one's friends. Adults and young people can struggle with who am I. But the identity that lasts is the believer's identity from the Lord. **He or she is a saint, salt, light, a chosen person, a royal priest, a holy person, a person of God's own possession (cf. I Peter 2:9).**

Disciples of Christ are Christians, Christ's ones. Each one receives his or her identity from Christ.

If you would like a great book to read on this matter, I recommend to you "Living Free In Christ," by Neil Anderson. He does a superb job with amplifying this subject.

One man after understanding his identity in Christ said to Neil,

"Neil, what blessed news to hear your teaching on our identity in Christ. I am no longer a product of my past, I am a product of the work of Christ on the cross. I know who I am now. I'm a child of God, and the basis for my acceptance is in Him, not in man. I got the chills when we sang the words of the theme song of your conference, "In The Beloved," accepted am I. Risen, ascended and seated on high; Saved from all sin through His infinite grace, with the redeemed ones accorded a place. "In The Beloved," God's marvelous grace calls me to dwell in this wonderful place. God sees my Savior and then He sees me. "In The Beloved" accepted and free."

No longer does a believer in Christ need to be threatened by others nor compete with others. The believer is in Christ secure and loved eternally.

Neither does the believer have to strive to be someone or to be somebody else. The believer in Christ already is somebody – he or she is identified with the Creator and Redeemer of the world.

Which means

4. Each person has the same significance.

All of us at different times have had negative experiences. Some have childhoods that are not pleasant, even abusive. Guilt comes in. The blame game. We feel like failures. Individuals feel not wanted and unloved.

However the disciple of Christ realizes that he or she

- (1) Has been created by God in the first place – made in His image with eternal significance, eternal value.
- (2) Has through faith in Christ been redeemed by the blood of the eternal Lamb of God, and placed into the forever family of God with all the eternal riches of Christ put on his or her spiritual ledger. One is spiritually significant.

To base our self-worth on our performance, disappointment is going to come. If we live our lives controlled by our past, we will be constantly miserable, or if we are always worried about what other people think of us, we will be insecure. But when we are convinced of our eternal significance in Christ, all of that changes.

For the believer's life is not based upon his or her performance, or one's past, or what other people may think of a person, the bottom line is how God thinks about the believer, and He says that I am eternally significant – His son or daughter forever. I am a child of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

How we need to hear that as we see biblical Christians being continually marginalized in our culture today.

5. Each person has differences.

In that unity, in that sameness of spiritual life, position, identity, and significance the believers have in Christ, there is also diversity.

(1) We have differences of personality.

Different approaches have been taken to describe the four basic personalities – The choleric, more the driver type of person, the melancholy – more analytical and perfectionist; the sanguine – the outgoing person, the phlegmatic- the more reserved – easy going person,

All of us have a little of each of these in our personality, but one trait is usually more evident in one's personality. Each of the personality types has its own strengths along with weaknesses.

It's been said that the "hard-driving Choleric produces the inventions of the genius-prone Melancholy, which are sold by the personable Sanguine and enjoyed by the easy-going Phlegmatic."

God puts all of these personality types in the body of Christ, and that is where we have the opportunity to learn and work together with Christ to build His Church. That's why we can rub each other the wrong way at times, and we have to forgive one another, and learn to accept one another.

(2) Differences of talents and abilities.

All of us have different abilities that God has given us. We have different employment, or have had employment according to our training and abilities. Our students are educated to develop their abilities.

(3) Differences of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:4, 6-8).

This is what our text is referring to when it reads in Romans 12:4 that there are many members in one body, and all members do not have the same function.

Like the physical body which has different members that have different tasks to make the body function as one, so in the spiritual body of Christ's church the different members have different tasks or functions.

Romans 12:6 reads, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us."

The word for gift is "charismata." Grace gift. It is actually a God-given ability bestowed on the believer for serving the Lord. I believe that the grace gift or gifts are given to the believer at the time he or she accepts Christ

as personal Savior. The grace gifts are different from inherent talents and abilities. These gifts are supernaturally given to the believer by the Holy Spirit as He wills (I Corinthians 12:11). Some of the grace gifts are given here in our text. More are given in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

One writer has divided the gifts into **Support Gifts** – Those given for the purpose of equipping the church, like the pastor/teacher gift and the teaching gift, which gift is mentioned here in Romans 12:7. Then there are the **Service gifts** which a number of them are mentioned here (Romans 12:7) – such as serving, exhorting, giving, do it with liberality, leading or administration – do it with diligence, and showing mercy – do it with cheerfulness.

Then there are also **Sign Gifts** which for the purpose of authenticating the gospel message- such as miracles and healings.

This is a whole other study, but suffice it to say that all of us here who know the Lord personally have a grace gift and probably more than one grace gift.

Obviously, from what has happened and is happening in this body, grace gifts are being used. It is evident in the diversity that there is the unity of the body in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If a believer is not sure of one's grace gift, the best way to find out one's gift is to start serving, to start showing mercy. If one is in good health, one can not be a pew warmer.

e should be using the grace gift the Holy Spirit has given him or her so that God can be glorified in one's life. For the ultimate purpose of God giving believers grace gifts is that His church in diversity might show forth the unity of the Spirit to the glory of God (cf. I Peter 4:11).

God wants each believer in Christ in His church to have eternal fulfillment and blessing. It happens as the believer in the power of the Holy Spirit uses the grace gift or gifts that He has provided.

But there is one more question we need to ask about our text today.

III. How can the individuals who are members one of another in the body of Christ maintain the unity of their relationship in the diversity of their personalities, abilities, and grace gifts?

The answer to that question is found in this classic passage of God's Word, Romans 12:1-3. Let me put it together this way.

1. Know who God is. `

The text reads, "I beseech, I urge, (continually – present tense) you by the mercies of God."

Paul has just finished writing about the greatness of God and how He has provided the gospel for all peoples, both Jew and Gentile, through the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact God has set aside the nation of Israel because of its unbelief so that Gentiles – all peoples - who accept Christ may be grafted into Christ, into His church. Still, in God's time, the nation of Israel will once again turn to their Messiah and Savior Jesus Christ. As Paul ends chapter 11 of Romans, his mind is overwhelmed at the unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways of God.

He gives God the glory for who He is. He is God.

Starting chapter 12 of Romans, Paul realizes it is only because of who God is that such is happening now and events will still take place in the future.

Only the merciful God would have a plan like that for each individual and yet for the entire world.

What is the mercy of God? The mercy of God is not giving us what we deserve. What do we deserve for disobeying God, and going our own way? Condemnation, judgment.

But God sent His Son Jesus to take upon Himself our condemnation, our judgment for disobeying God. That's what He was doing on the cross, being made sin for us who knew no sin, He died, was buried and rose again bodily the third day. Now God can show mercy to the one who accepts Christ as personal Savior – provide His forgiveness and eternal life.

Paul in his life never got over the mercy of God (this is some 25-30 years after his conversion on the Road To Damascus.

In I Timothy 1:13, he told the young pastor Timothy, "Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted in unbelief."

What was the difference between pseudo righteous Pharisee and the publican – the scoundrel tax collector?

The Pharisee thanked God that He wasn't like the swindlers, the unjust, the adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

The Tax Collector wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That man knew he deserved God's judgment. But he called out to God to not give him what He deserved. He cried out for mercy.

Who did Jesus say that God declared righteous or justified? Of course the tax collector.

God responds immediately to the heart that calls out for His mercy – His forgiveness and grace.

I trust you have made that cry out for God's mercy and you know Jesus is your personal Savior today, for His Spirit bears witness with yours that you belong to the Lord forever.

When we have some understanding of the mercy of God it gives us a better appreciation for the unity we have in the body of Christ, our relation to one another, our position, our identity, and our significance, and then the diversity we have, for it's only by the mercy of God that is possible. It is nothing we have done. Christ has done it all for us.

2. Know who we are.

Romans 12:1 tells that we living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices.

- **Living – means that we are alive physically and spiritually in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
- **Holy – means that we are set apart to God as His property, and He sees the believer accepted in Christ.**
- **Acceptable – means that we are approved by God.**
- **Sacrifice – refers to an offering.**

In the Old Testament times the people brought an animal to be sacrificed for their sins. It was a covering for their disobedience to God. There were different sacrifices for different sins. When Christ came, He was the completed, once-for-all sacrifice, offering for sin. Through His death, burial and bodily resurrection, He paid the penalty for our sin which is death, and won for us His forgiveness and eternal life through our faith in Him.

Now since the final offering has been made for sin, believers in Jesus Christ in His church are the living, holy, acceptable offering.

What a unique description is that of the believers in Jesus Christ. – a living, holy, acceptable offering.

What are we to do with ourselves as a living, holy, acceptable offering?

3. Do what God wants us to do.

(1) We are to present our bodies, our entire persons to the Lord in worship.

"Present your bodies a living and holy acceptable sacrifice to the Lord, which is your spiritual worship.

"Present" is a once for all idea. The believer in Christ is to present his entire being body and spirit to the Lord in worship, giving Him His worth. It is really telling the Lord that you love Him with all your heart, mind, and soul, and you worship Him in spirit and in truth.

You are giving Him your entire life to be used by Him in whatever way He desires. You bring all that you are to Him in worship, even all the baggage that needs to be taken from your life. You're laying on His altar for him to help you take care of it.

Even though this is a once-for-all decision, it is well as Christ tells us to take up our cross daily and follow Him, and Paul says that he dies daily (I Corinthians 15:31). That means each day when we start the day we recognize that we have given our selves to the Lord, body and spirit to be used for Him that day. We want HIM to be the Lord of our lives, and selfishness not to prevail.

(2) We are not to be conformed to the attitude, thinking, and lifestyle of the culture of this world in which we live.

Negatively, "Do not be continually conformed to this world." (12:2).

This is a present command, telling us that the temptation to be conformed to the world system in which we live is an on-going daily challenge. The opportunity for lust, deceit, jealousy, pride, immorality, slothfulness, is all around us. The attraction is to think that is the way to go for the majority seem to think so.

As one paraphrase has, "We are not to let the world squeeze us into its mold."

Peter is the only other New Testament writer who uses the word conform (I Peter 1:14).

(3) We are to be transformed by the supernatural power of God through His Word.

(1) The present command.

Positively, "We are to be continually transformed." (a present tense command).

Transformed is a great word. **We get our word metamorphosis from it.** It means to be changed from the inside out. Like the rugged looking cocoon becomes a beautiful butterfly. It is also used of Christ in his transfiguration (Matthew 17:2), and again by Paul in II Corinthians 3:18).

(2) The place for the transformation.

What brings the transformation in our lives?

"By the renewing of your mind."

Renewing means: renovating, making new, recently made.

For transformation to take place in the life of the believer in Christ, in the body of Christ, something must happen in the mind, in one's understanding.

We all have a physical brain. But spiritually, we have a mind, yes, an emotion and will. These are corrupted by sin. So as we think in our lives so are we, says the Proverb (23:7). In order for us to change from the inside out, and not be conformed to the thoughts and ways of the world which lead to destruction, at the time of our accepting Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit giving us the life of Christ, gives us a new spiritual mind, the mind of Christ.

This mind of Christ is developed as we expose ourselves to the written Word of God and through prayer to our Heavenly Father.

That's why Paul writes in II Corinthians 3:18:

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed, metamorphized, into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

How are transformed, changed, as we have been given the mind of Christ? Beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord.

What is the mirror? James tells us that it is the perfect Law of Liberty, the supernatural word of God (James 1:21-25).

If I glance into the Word of God, supernatural changes will not come. If I gaze into the Word of God on a daily basis, God's Word will supernaturally change me, change you, into the image of Christ.

(3) The results of letting the Word of God transform us.

"that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The believer will know what God's will is for his or her life, in personal relationships, in the family, in the church family, at work, at school, and in the neighborhood. The believer will also in God's timing receive direction about the greater issues of life such as a mate, a job situation, or where to live, for God wants to provide direction for those who love and follow Christ.

(4) We have God's way of accepting ourselves and one another (Romans 12:3).

This verse certainly follows what Paul just wrote in Romans 12:2.

In fact the rest of our text and the rest of Romans comes out of these first two verses in Romans 12.

The believer who has his or her mind transformed into the likeness of Christ's mind has the proper view of himself, not arrogant or prideful, but is humble before the Lord and others, and every other believer should be the same way.

Then in dealing with one another in relationships, competition, comparison, intimidation, jealousy, covetousness, have no place.

In fact, we are to put away self interest as Paul tells the Philippians, and use the selfless mind of Christ. This is not putting one's self down but recognizing the value of one another in the sight of God.

That's why Romans 12:1-2 is the basis, the secret for enjoying the unity in the body of Christ – our being related to one another spiritually, having the same position, the same identity, and the same significance, while using our differences to blend together to demonstrate to the world that we are one in Christ as we serve the Lord as a team in His kingdom.

For God wants us to have heavenly harmony in our relationships with one another in the body of Christ. We are all at different levels of maturity, but if we all moving in the direction of becoming more like Christ we are glorifying HIM.

Let me finish the story of Andrew who I mentioned at the beginning of this message.

Phil Callaway continues with the account.

Six months ago, suicidal and desperate, Andrew fell to his knees and prayed, asking Jesus Christ to change him. To forgive him of the past and help him face the future. "This may sound crazy," he told me, "but since that day I've experienced more peace than I had during all those years of success.

In a lot of ways, my life is the most chaotic it's ever been, but every morning I take my worries and concerns to the living room and I spend an hour on my knees trying to leave them with God. Sometimes I find myself picking them up again during the day, but I'm learning to trust Him to take care of my family just like He's taking care of me."

Today Andrew is doing all he can to reconcile with his wife and children, but he knows the road ahead is steep. "I thought I was giving them everything they needed," he says. "I guess what they really needed was me."

When I told Andrew about the book I was writing, he said, "Tell people about the riches of relationships. I was so busy building an empire I forgot to build a home. I was so busy working on multi-million dollar deals that I hardly had time to buy my friends a cup of coffee. I'd trade all this stuff in a heartbeat for a good marriage."

I wish I could turn the clock back for Andrew. And sometimes I'd like to turn it back for myself. But like Andrew, I'm learning that it is relationships, not ranches, that make men rich. I'm learning that we don't make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give

May we not step over treasure this week. But may we start right by presenting ourselves to God, not being conformed to this world, but be transformed by the Word of God so that we can continue to develop lasting relationships in this body of Christ and in our families to the glory of God.