

Romans (72) **The Beginning of the Transformed Life**

We have entered the portion of the Epistle to the Romans in which the Apostle Paul set before his readers the manner in which their Christian faith was to shape and direct their lives. The content of their faith, that is, the One in whom they had placed their faith, Jesus Christ, would transform their lives as they thought through and applied the truths of their faith to their lives. He had written to them,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

The Christian faith, here comprehended in the expression, “the mercies of God”, in which Paul was referring to all that he had recorded in Romans 1 through 11, was to shape the understanding of his readers as to who they were as Christians and “the mercies of God” were to instruct them how they were to live as the people of God. Sound theology will result in solid living for the one who meditates upon the truth that is in Jesus Christ and who looks to that “faith” as providing the principles by which to live. God transforms the one who strives to know the Word of God and who applies what he knows to his life. The mature Christian is the one who has over time ordered his life according to the faith, having determined what is true and false, right and wrong, and good and evil by the standard of the faith, or by extension, the rule (canon) of the Holy Scriptures. As the writer to the Hebrews recorded of his readers who were immature:

“You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food (i.e. substantive biblical teaching) is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb. 5:13f)

And so, as we grow in our understanding of “the faith”, and as we employ the faith as the determiner of what we believe and how we are to live, the Lord transforms us. He thereby directs us in His will and we will be able to know by experience that His will is good, acceptable, and even perfect.

After introducing this section of his epistle, Paul gives his first word regarding the application of the faith to the life of the Christian. We read in Romans 12:3-8 the next paragraph of this epistle:

³For 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. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

The first word of instruction that Paul gave to these Christians, instruction that he believes would transform them into fruitful and mature Christians, had to do with the Christian’s view of himself. How you view yourself as a Christian has implications for how you view the purpose for which God made you and saved you by His grace.

First, we see that *the Christian is to view himself/herself in humility before the Lord*. Paul wrote,

³For 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.

It is the tendency of a sinful man to think too highly of himself. He is proud of heart, thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think. "Pride consists in coveting or exercising a prerogative that does not belong to us."¹ Pride is at the heart of most sin. God hates the proud. It is clearly stated that this is so:

¹⁶These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: ¹⁷**A proud look**, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. (Prov. 6:16-19)

God sets Himself against the proud and has determined one day to humble the proud in judgment. The prophet Isaiah revealed this about God:

For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up--and it shall be brought low; ¹³against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; ¹⁴against all the lofty mountains, and against all the uplifted hills; ¹⁵against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; ¹⁶against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. ¹⁷And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. (Isa. 2:12-17)

The proud man is an independent man. He believes that he is self-sufficient, independent, not dependent on anyone, even of God. Paul exhorted the Christians in the church at Rome to be humble. God is sympathetic with and ready to help the humble, which is an incentive to abandon pride. As Peter wrote, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Pet. 5:5).

When Paul exhorted his readers to be humble, he expressed himself in terms to indicate that it was God guiding him to instruct them in this manner. Paul in effect *humbled himself* even when exhorting the Christians of this church to be *humble*. He wrote, "**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." Paul viewed his authority to instruct these Christians had been due to the grace of God having been given him. Here "grace" is the privilege, ability, and the responsibility that God gave him to instruct these Christians at Rome. Paul did not view his authority as inherent in him or due to some quality or ability in him, but solely due to the grace that God had given to him.

The very nature of the faith teaches us to think of ourselves in the manner in which the apostle prescribed. When God came to save us from our sins we were guilty and helpless, under the just wrath of God. But God in His love purposed to save us. He chose to save us in His mercy, saving us by His grace, regenerating us, enabling us to repent of sin and believe the gospel of His Son. We had nothing through which we were commended to God. Our salvation was and is wholly of grace. This means that we have come to salvation and have come among the people of God with nothing to commend us to God or them. There is nothing about any of us to exalt himself or herself above any others within the church.

Paul used the sovereign grace of God in salvation to humble the Christians in the church at Corinth, some of which who had become proud which had resulted in division and difficulty in the church. Paul wrote,

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹**that no flesh should glory in His presence**. ³⁰But of Him you are in Christ

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, p. 117.

Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God-- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- ³¹that, as it is written, ***“He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”*** (1 Cor. 1:26-31)

There is nothing that anyone of us possesses or anything that anyone of us has done or anything anyone of us has been or anything that anyone of us has become, that may be regarded as a ground of “self-esteem”, or pride, by which anyone of us may esteem our self superior to any other. All we are and all we have are due wholly to the mercies of God by the grace of God that God has given us by His sovereign grace.

Later in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul wrote,

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. ***7For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*** (1 Cor. 4:6f)

Paul showed that both he and Apollos had their ministry given them by the grace of God. Therefore no one should have reason to exalt either one of them as somebody to show special regard. The mercies of God and the grace of God are a great leveler of God’s people. Not one of us is above another. Not one of us is below another. For each of us is what he is due solely to the grace of God. And so, pride among the brethren is sinful.

He, therefore, who covets a higher or another standpoint and sphere of activity in the community, and is not contented with that which corresponds to the measure of faith bestowed on him, evinces a willful self-exaltation, which is without measure and not of God.²

Looking down on another or feeling above another within the Christian church is wrong, ill-founded, and sinful. And so it is that Paul first exhorted in the light of the mercies of God, in order to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, one must be humble in the Lord among the Lord’s people: ***“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...”***

How is one to think of himself as a Christian? “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.*** To think with sober judgment is to think and believe of oneself according to the truth of the grace of God that we have in Jesus Christ. **Matthew Henry** said it well:

Pride is a sin that is bred in the bone of all of us, and we have therefore each of us need to be cautioned and armed against it.—Not *to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.* We must take heed of having too great an opinion of ourselves, or putting too high a valuation upon our own judgments, abilities, persons, performances. We must not be self-conceited, nor esteem too much our own wisdom and other attainments, not think ourselves to be something (Gal. 6:3). There is a high thought of ourselves which we may and must have to think ourselves too good to be the slaves of sin and drudges to this world. But, on the other hand, we should think soberly, that is, we must have a low and modest opinion of ourselves and our own abilities, our gifts and graces, according to what we have received from God, and not other-wise. We must not be confident and hot in matters of doubtful disputation; not stretch ourselves beyond our line; not judge and censure those that differ from us; not desire to make a fair show in the flesh. These and the like are the fruits of a sober opinion of ourselves.

Every Christian is to view himself ***“according to the measure of faith”*** that God has given to each of us. The “measure of faith” is not to be understood as the “saving faith” that each true believer possesses. Here, rather, the measure of faith refers to differing spiritual gifts that God has given His people. God has given to each of His people a “measure of faith”, that is, God has equipped each of His people to serve in the church in a specific and special manner. Verses 4 through 8 make this clear:

² Meyer as quoted by Murray in ***Romans***, vol. 2, p. 117.

⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Now this is language of which most of us are probably familiar. But let us stand back and consider what the Lord is teaching us here. In verse 2 we were told, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” And then the first word of instruction that the apostle gives is that none of us is to think too highly of himself, but to see himself according to the spiritual gift that God has given him so that he might serve his brethren in the church. If I put it another way, in desiring your own transformation, ***the first area of thinking that needs changing when you become a Christian is that you are no longer to see yourself primarily as an individual, but rather as a gifted person who is a vital member of a new community, the church.*** This is the major theme and the very first point of teaching and emphasis that the apostle presses upon the people of God in the light of the mercies of God that has been shown them. **The ESV Study Bible** asserts this in that it identifies this section of the epistle as “Marks of the Christian Community” (12:3-13:14).³

And so, if you desire to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, at the heart of the matter, the first priority for you is to see that ***God has called you by His grace to be a member of His church, serving other members of the church through the gift that God has given to you.***

The church, as defined and described in the Holy Scriptures, is the heart of God’s sovereign work of bringing salvation to His chosen people. Of course when we speak of the Lord’s church, we must distinguish between the universal church and the local church. We should understand the universal church to be comprised of all believers of all times who will be saved through the salvation that God brings through Jesus Christ. The church, therefore, is not to be viewed narrowly to be only true believers from the crucifixion or Pentecost to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, as is commonly believed and taught by evangelicals, but rather our Reformed tradition has rightly defined the church to be comprised of all of the elect.

The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.⁴

But it is ***not*** our identity and service in the universal church that Paul was referencing here in Romans 12. He was saying that ***the first area of thinking that needs changing when you become a Christian is that you are no longer to see yourself primarily as an individual, but rather as a gifted person who is a vital member of a new community, the local church.*** It is only within the setting of the local church that the each of us may serve others “***according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.***” And so, again, if you desire to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, at the heart of the matter, the first priority for you, is to see that ***God has called you by His grace to be a member of His local church, serving other members of that church through the gift that God has given to you.***

We tend to be individualistic, even selfish, in that we think in terms of “me and mine” first and foremost. This is the result of the entrance of sin into the world. Before Adam had sinned, he had truly loved his wife and had served her. And before she sinned it may be assumed that she did so also. But upon the entrance of sin, it was “every man for himself.” After sin entered the world and the human soul, Adam was concerned primarily for himself and Eve was primarily concerned for herself. They each became truly individualistic. No longer did Adam fully perceive her as “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23), but rather, he saw her as the cause of his problems. He told God as an excuse for his sin, Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12). And so, because of sin we were born into the world selfish and desiring independence, and we desire to be served by all about us.

³ **The ESV Study Bible** (Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 2179.

⁴ **The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**, Art. 26, par. 1.

Our American culture does not help us in this matter. We claim that we are not a monarchy, but actually every consumer is king. Everything about us wants to sell us a product without which we cannot be happy, or we are told. You are offered throughout each day what claims to be the best product to give you the most pleasure or service for the cheapest price. You are the sovereign one, determining whom or what will serve you. And then American evangelicalism doesn't always allow an escape from this world in which we live, but rather the churches think and operate according to worldly ways and values and they also vie for your "business." The churches, too, offer you what they claim to be the best product to give you the most pleasure or service, and that for the cheapest price—its free. And what often results is a church service and message being little different from a short, crass, and bawdy, appeal to meet your needs, but actually they desire and aim to separate you from your money and therefore pander to you, knowing what it is you want. Oh yes, they will provide it for you, or so they claim. And so people attend churches, essentially selfish in outlook and attitude, reinforced in a culture that they are supreme, they come to church with the chief unspoken question, "What is in it for me?" and often leave saying something like, "I didn't get much out of it", as though that were the measure of all things.

Paul was asserting that if you desire to experience a transformed life, you need to stop seeing yourself individualistically, but you are see yourself as one whom God has determined in His mercy to be a member of something much larger than yourself, that is more important than you as an individual, but to which if you give yourself, you will experience life from God and the life of God that will surpass your every expectation and give you greater fulfillment than what you could ever receive by living for yourself. The local church is at the center of God's purposes in history. He has formed for Himself a community into which and through which He manifests His presence and power to the members, and through them to the world. The church is the temple in which He dwells and manifests Himself. And when we speak of the church, we are of course not speaking of the building in which we meet, but in the collective membership of the local church. To the degree that we purpose to think and behave as the body of Christ, Jesus Christ will manifest Himself to us and through us. And God through Paul is exhorting you (and me) that when you come to church, you are to see yourself as a member of this body, and you are to come with the primary desire and intention to serve that body, not to be served by that body—"What's in it for me?"—but with the primary desire and intention to serve the body—"What may I do for them, for us?"

And so, this is the ABC's of biblical Christianity, the beginning of becoming transformed by the renewing of your mind. See the wonder and glory of the truth and reality that God has taken you out of your little self-serving world and delivered you from the tyranny of you always wanting, demanding, and being disappointed that the world is not serving you. And God has placed you in a place in which you can realize the purpose for which He made you and thereby enjoy the joy, peace, and satisfaction of seeing what God intended you to be, to become realized in your life. The best benefit that you can bring to yourself as a Christian is to stop with the longing and insistence of being served, and dedicate your life to the service of the people of God, within the local church of Jesus Christ. This is what it is to be and to live as a Christian. It is a transforming way in which to live.

What Paul declared here in Romans 12, he essentially said elsewhere. Consider Philippians 2:1ff: "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy,..." Is that not an appeal to the mercies of God as in Romans 12:1? He then gives instruction flowing from the mercies of God: then "fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phi. 2:1-4). This is essentially the same word of instruction that we find in Romans 12:1ff.

Consider also the essential teaching of Ephesians 4. Paul wrote concerning officers in the church and to where they were to lead the people of God.

⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says,

"When He ascended on high
He led a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men."

...¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ ***from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.***

¹⁷Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus,²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt ***through deceitful desires,***²³ and ***to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,***²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵***Therefore,*** having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, ***so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.***²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, ***but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.***³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.³² ***Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.***

^{5:1}Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

Paul declared here that the leaders of the church are to lead the people of God to live no longer as they formerly lived, essentially, for themselves and their own “deceitful desires” that they thought would bring them fulfillment and happiness to them, but rather that they would be “renewed in their minds” as evidenced and manifested in their merciful and loving treatment of others within the body.

Let us return to Romans 12. In **verses 4 and 5** we read of the metaphor of the human body which illustrates the nature of the church in which we are members. ***“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”*** Here we see that our identity as Christians would be tied to our relationship with other believers in Jesus Christ who are living and serving in the same church. Now many, when they see the expression, “the body of Christ”, believe that the subject must be the universal church, not the local church. But although this is true of the universal church, it is also true of the local church that belongs to Jesus Christ. Every legitimate local church is a/the body of Christ. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: “Now you (2nd person plural) are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27). [By the way, some argue that membership in a local church is not biblical or important. Here we see membership is biblical and is important.] The point is this, the members of a local church of Jesus Christ are dynamically and spiritually united to one another in one spiritual body.

In **verses 6 through 8** Paul delineates the different ways that different members of the body are gifted by God to serve the body.

⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Here is a list of spiritual gifts. These are gifts given to Christians by God's grace. These are not talents brought over from our pre-Christian days. These are spiritual gifts that the grace of God has given to His people. Every Christian has at least one gift. There are other lists in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 12:8-10 (9 gifts); 1 Cor. 12:28f (8 gifts); Eph. 4:11 (4 gifts)). Let us consider these in turn:

1. "if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;"

Prophecy was spiritual gift that had a unique role in the early church. The gift of prophecy was God enabling a man or woman to discern spiritual truths or future events before they happened. Paul wrote of prophecy, "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge..." (1 Cor. 13:2). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:8, "whether there are prophecies, they will fail." And historically, the revelatory gifts, the ones that communicated the Word of God directly to an individual that was then delivered to the church, disappeared toward the end of the apostolic era.

2. "if service, in our serving;"

This would be a special gift to render practical service. It would be natural to see this to be a special aspect of the diaconate (and their wives, as they are to serve as a team). But this gift need not be restricted to deacons, of course. I wonder if the Lord has not given me this gift in a measure. He seems to have given me the ability to fix things. I enjoy doing so for people, especially when it seems that He enables me to "see" the nature or identity of a problem and solve it rather easily. Some say I have "the touch"; I would say, it is a gift.

3. "the one who teaches, in his teaching;"

Whereas the prophet had received direct revelation from God, the teacher instructs in what God has already revealed, and that principally through Scripture. The one with the gift of teaching should be busy teaching, just as someone who has the ability to serve, should be serving others.

4. "the one who exhorts, in his exhortation;"

Some people are gifted encouragers of other people. Their presence and their words just seem to influence others for good. They inspire action and promote righteousness in people. They encourage the downcast and warn the indifferent and the careless. Apparently Barnabus had this spiritual gift.

5. "the one who contributes (gives financially), in generosity;"

Although all are to give, some have the spiritual gift of giving. I have known a few of these gifted people over the years. They delight in relieving needs and they greatly delight in seeing their stewardship advance the cause of the gospel. The gift of giving need not necessarily be seen in the amount that one gives. Let us remember the poor widow of Luke 21.

And He (Jesus) looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, ² and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. ³So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; ⁴for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." (Luke 21:1ff)

Someone recently sent me a card and it contained a \$5. Knowing its source bill, I commented to Mary, "It looks like the two mites to me."

6. "the one who leads, with zeal;"

Perhaps Paul gave this instruction to lead with zeal suggests that leadership sometimes may tend toward laziness. We are to lead by doing and that with enthusiasm.

7. “the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

The one who has the gift of mercy seems to see and feel the hurt of others keenly. I suppose one with this kind of gift could become rather morose, so Paul exhorted the ones who do acts of mercy purpose to do so with cheerfulness. People not only need sympathy in their suffering, needing to be “bound up”, but they need to be cheered up as well.

As we conclude today, let us ask ourselves some questions, questions that I have posed to us in the past. Let us ask ourselves several questions which may betray whether or not we have been transformed by the renewing of the mind in the realm of our membership and our identity as members of our local church.

1. Do we love the church as Christ loved the church?

The church of Jesus Christ is an easy target to shoot at. She is imperfect in so many ways. She still has many flaws and wrinkles. She is not yet without spot and without blemish. She is not yet presentable as a bride should be on her wedding day. She is a work in progress. But Christ loves her even now, as should we. How can some say that they love Jesus Christ, and not love the church that He loves?

We sing from our hymnals:

I love Thy Church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end.

Beyond my highest joy
I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise.

Do we desire for the church what Jesus Christ Himself desires for her? Do we long to see her to be admired, respected, and praised? Do we long for her purity? Do we desire her maturity? Are these pressing concerns of our hearts? Do we even pray that these things that are so important to our Lord be realized in His churches?

2. Do we give ourselves to the church as Christ gives Himself to her?

Are we committed to achieving for the church that Christ has given His very life to obtain? He serves His church continuously to make her into all that she could and will be? Are we fellow-workers of Jesus Christ seeking through concrete practical ways to see His desires for her realized? Paul loved the church. 2 Tim. 2:10, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” We serve our Lord Jesus by serving one another within the church. We are to seek to accomplish in the church the same goals that our Lord has purposed to do for His people.

I would venture to say that there are few within the churches that have the concerns that Christ has for His church. Some would even oppose this work that Christ is conducting. They resist conforming the church to His Word and will, “for that is not how we have always done it.” They resist the purifying of the church by not

endorsing, or even opposing efforts to discipline church members who not simply fail (we all fail), but refuse to depart from sin and refuse to be a part of the ongoing life of the church.

The point we are making is this. We should seek to understand the ideals and goals to which Christ has respecting His church. We should seek to identify these and then purpose in whatever and in as many ways as we can to see these realized within our own body. Does our Lord desire to see our church pure and holy? Then let us strive to be so. Does Christ desire His church to be responsive to Him as a bride is to her husband? Then let us do so. In every way let us give ourselves to the church as Christ gave Himself for the church.

3. Do we see ourselves as “the church”, a single entity for which and to which Christ gives Himself?

Again, one of our weaknesses as American Christians is our individualism. We tend to identify ourselves as individual Christians only. We tend only to view ourselves as individual Christians to the exclusion of our identity as a corporate body. We come “to church” but do we think of ourselves and identify ourselves as “the church”? Do we view our individual selves as we are in truth, individual parts of a whole, and dependent on the others of us in order to function properly before God? Or do we see ourselves only in terms of individual Christians? No, rather, we tend to see the church as only a place “I go to worship”, rather than the church as a single body of believers through which Christ manifests His life. The New Testament does not present a Christian living in isolation of other believers. Christians are to be in churches.

4. Do we see ourselves as part of a “church” whose individual lives are either blessed or adversely affected by the spiritual condition of the church body of which we are members?

The Lord does indeed see us as individuals, but He sees us as a single entity as well. He sees us as a “local church.” Recall the letters that our Lord sent out to the churches that are contained in Revelation 2 and 3. He spoke to these seven churches as seven individual entities. As the individual church went, so went all the members. If the church was approved, all within the church had part in His approval. If the church was rebuked, all had part in His rebuke and His temporal judgments.

Do you recall the defeat of Israel at Ai? God did not bless Israel because one man, Achan, violated the command of God and therefore through His sin forfeited God’s blessing on the nation of which he was a part. To the degree our church has the blessing of God, will be to the degree that our members as individual Christians will potentially experience the blessing of God.

5. Do we model our understanding and belief in Christ’s love for His church and His churches love for Him through our marriages, in the roles through which He has ordained that we serve Him? How do we show forth as individuals the relationship of Christ to His church? We manifest this relationship in the way that we order our marriages, in the way we fulfill our roles as husbands and wives.