

THE VALUE OF EACH

By SCOTT GRANT

When I was a reporter, I enjoyed doing stories on people who were retiring after a long career in one place. For one such story I interviewed Joe Rosenbaum, who was closing down his liquor store in Redding after 30 years. It wasn't an easy interview. He chewed on his cigar as I tried to coax memories from him, but he wasn't the reflective type. Finally, he said, "I'm going to miss the good people that I see in here—maybe some of the creeps, too." I used that quote.

If old Joe can value the creeps, the church of Jesus Christ can learn to value each of its members. Church life, though, is never as easy as we'd like it to be. We bump into people who are different from us in many ways. The words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:3-13 help us to appreciate the differences instead of complaining about them. God sends his Spirit to renew the minds of his people so that their community reflects his likeness into the world.

The first word in this passage is a small but important conjunction that relates it to Romans 12:1-2: "for." The personal transformation that Paul calls for in verses 1-2 is seen to be for the sake of others in verses 3-13 and in all of Romans 12-16. In Romans 12:3-8, the value of each person (verse 3) is seen in the spiritual gifts God has given to the church (verses 4-8) and in the way its members love each other (verses 9-13).

Romans 12:3-13:

³*For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*

⁴*For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

⁹*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*

Sound thinking

Paul, speaking with the authority as an apostle commissioned by the Lord Jesus, advocates a way of thinking. The verb translated "think" in verse 3 is related to the noun translated "mind" in verse 2. The renewing of one's mind results in the kind of thinking

called for in verse 3. This way of thinking applies to “everyone,” a word that Paul frequently uses in this letter to refer to both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church.

The admonition in verse 3, just as like the command of verse 2, has both negative and positive aspects. Verse 2: Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Verse 3: Don’t think in one way but do think in another way.

On the one hand, Paul says, don’t think too highly of yourself. Paul has already challenged the tendency of both Jews and Gentiles to think of themselves as superior to the other group (Romans 2:17-24, 11:11-24). Everyone should think highly of himself, just not too highly. On the other hand, everyone should think in a “sound” way based on the understanding that God has “allotted to each a measure of faith.” If God has given something to each, then each is valuable. Paul is not saying that the measure of faith differs among believers but that each has been given faith. Faith—the belief that Jesus is Lord—is not only the great equalizer in the book of Romans, it is the great unifier (Romans 3:27-30, 4:24-25, 10:9). Faith means that Jews and Gentiles are part of the same spiritual family.

Paul is thinking in Romans 12 not only of the tendency of particular ethnic groups to deem themselves superior to other groups but also of the tendency of individuals to think of themselves as superior to other individuals. Because God has given faith to everyone in his family, all its members should think highly of themselves, but not more highly than they think of their brothers and sisters. God’s love for us makes us special. We don’t need to conjure up anything else to make us more special.

Think highly of yourself; think highly of others. You’re valuable; so is everyone else. You can build a community on such thinking.

One body, many members

Believers constitute not only the family of God but the body of Christ. The word “body” implies function. The body has a purpose: to allow Christ to live his life through it. We mediate the presence of Christ to each other and to the world. Sound thinking appreciates both the unity of the body and the diversity of its members.

We may want to think of ourselves as superior even to others who share the same faith, but Paul says that everyone has a “function” in the body of Christ. We may want to think that the importance of our function diminishes the value of others, but each contributes to the ministry of the body. If each contributes, then each is valuable. We’re not just members of the same body; we’re “members of one another.” This definition transcends the language of function. We don’t simply appreciate others because they’re useful but also because we’re connected to them. We’re bound together supernaturally. We belong to each other. We’re dependent on each other. We must value everyone regardless of what he does and even if he does nothing. Others in the body—their pains, their joys—affect us, whether we recognize it or not. Sometimes on a Sunday morning, I feel this supernatural connection in a profound way when the Holy Spirit makes me aware that I belong to these people and that they belong to me.

Mostly, I think, we remain oblivious to the supernatural connection between us and take spiritual community far too lightly. When I was on vacation a few years ago, I attended a church that had lost half its members after its popular senior pastor left for another assignment. After the worship service, I shared lunch with some of the longtime

members of the church. It was evident that this was their community and that it pained them that others had left simply because the senior pastor had left.

God has embedded desires to belong and to contribute deep within us. It is fundamentally human to be part of a community and to make a difference. Diversity is necessary for unity, and unity gives diversity purpose. Each of us is different and therefore special, but in our uniqueness, we are part of something. We are part of something and therefore belong, but in belonging to something, our uniqueness is essential. Your uniqueness is designed to fit in. Furthermore, it's designed to be effective. Because you're different, you may think you're not supposed to do anything. On the contrary, because you're different, you're supposed to do something. The body of Christ needs your uniqueness.

Because of our insecurities, we often get things out of balance. If we want to feel unique, we may overemphasize diversity and distance ourselves from community. If we want to belong, we may overemphasize unity and gather with only those who are like us. Because you may not appreciate diversity on the one hand or unity on the other, you may want to flee from the body. People enjoy talking about how unity and diversity work together, but they find practicing what they preach to be a different matter when they come face to face with different people. We're often uncomfortable being dependent on others and being connected to them, especially if they're different from us.

The fact that we are one body "in Christ" unifies us in our uniqueness and gives us purpose. Because we love Christ, we come together in his body and live out his life together, proclaiming and living out the good news of his victory over sin and death. This allows us to appreciate our differences instead of being threatened by them. The passage encourages us to appreciate our uniqueness, the uniqueness of others and our interconnectedness brought about by our mutual love for Christ. Paul challenges us to appreciate all our brothers and sisters and to cultivate a positive, hopeful way of looking at them.

If we want to know how unity and diversity work together so that each person's value is appreciated, we can do no better than to consider God himself. He is one God, but he is also the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The members of the Trinity have roles, but they're connected to each other. God exists in a relationship that takes action for the sake of love. The Father creates. The Son redeems. The Spirit empowers. Each member of the Trinity has value that is recognized and appreciated by the others. When we in the Father's family unite under the lordship of his Son so that we may by the power of the Spirit honor God and fulfill his purposes, we reflect his likeness to the world. We reflect the Trinity, which embraces both unity and diversity.

Observe the gifts

The presence and use of gifts that God has given to members of the body illustrate the value of each member's uniqueness and contribution. Just as Paul, as an apostle, was able to exhort the Romans "through the grace given" to him, members of body have gifts that differ "according to the grace given" to them.¹ The uniqueness of each person's gifts shows up in the use of the gifts. That's why Paul speaks not only of gifts but also of the manner in which they are used: "if prophecy, according the proportion of his faith," etc. In calling attention to his own gift as an apostle, and in using his gift even as he writes, Paul serves as an example of how gifting is revealed when one serves.

In verses 6-8 Paul is not instructing people to use their gifts, although he is well capable of doing so (2 Timothy 1:6). Furthermore, he is not instructing them to identify their gifts. Nowhere, in fact, does he command believers to identify their gifts. He's not commanding but describing.² His point is to urge upon the Romans sound thinking: an appreciation for both the unity of the body of Christ and the diversity of its members. When members of the body employ their gifts, their unique contribution to the body becomes evident. It is more important, therefore, to serve than to identify one's gifts. If you serve, your contribution will emerge even if you can't connect it with particular gifts.

What's happening in the body, whether we know it or not, is that people with different gifts are serving differently. Paul would have us observe what is happening and be inspired. The tendency is to look for what's not happening and be discouraged. If you look carefully, you will see many different people serving in different ways. It's inspiring, and it should encourage each of us in our uniqueness to contribute what God has invested in us according to his grace.

The list of gifts has a random, unstructured quality to it.³ It's not a complete list of gifts; Paul writes about additional gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Because he does not see fit to list all the gifts in any one letter, we're left to assume that it's not important for any one church to know about all the gifts. In fact, we have no way of knowing whether all the gifts are mentioned in the scriptures. Furthermore, Paul does not define the gifts. He doesn't say, for example, "Here's what the gift of service is, and here's what it looks like." In fact, many of the gifts he mentions, both in Romans and elsewhere, defy precise definition. The mention of both the gifts and their use illustrates for Paul that "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given us," which further illustrates the value of each member's uniqueness and contribution to the body of Christ.

Elsewhere, Paul defines the gift of prophecy as receiving and communicating revelation from God (1 Corinthians 14:26, 30-31; Ephesians 3:5). It is not necessarily an exhaustive definition, however. The gift of prophecy is to be exercised, literally, "according to the proportion of the faith"—that is, in agreement with the faith. Some "prophets" speak on their own initiative and misuse or even contradict what God has revealed in the scriptures.

The exercise of the gifts of service, teaching and exhortation are consistent with the gifts themselves.⁴ Perhaps these attendant attitudes are necessary for the proper exercise of these particular gifts and can be seen by others when those gifts are exercised.

God has gifted each person in the body to contribute uniquely. Some, however, are bound to feel that their contribution is insignificant. At our church, we emphasize the scriptures, and rightly so. However, in emphasizing the scriptures, we are aware that we have inadvertently communicated to some of our members who aren't gifted in studying and teaching that they are less valuable.

A few years ago I read of a study of 1,000 believers from a variety of states and countries. It showed that 6 percent thought they were gifted as teachers and that 30 percent thought they were gifted with mercy. If you're gifted with mercy but think that what's really important is to study and teach the scriptures, you might feel marginalized. I'm not sure how we go about correcting the impression that we have left other than to say we're sorry and that we want to do better. Each person is valuable, and each person has a valuable contribution to make.

Let me share with you how a former member of this body contributed to my life. John Schreiner moved away a few years ago, but many of us still share stories of how he

blessed us. John has a disability that slows him down a bit, both physically and mentally, but his heart is soft toward God. He often makes insightful observations that are arresting in their unpretentiousness. When I first joined the pastoral staff at PBC, John was wondering whether he was a “real Christian.” I was convinced of the genuineness of John’s faith. We talked on a few occasions, and at some point John put the question to rest.

Some years later I sat across the table from him at a lunch in Fellowship Hall. I asked him what the Lord had been showing him. He answered, as he always did, with arresting honesty. I knew what was coming next. You can’t ask John to tell you something about himself without his asking the same question in return.

“What’s the Lord been showing you, Scott?”

Any answer that wasn’t revealing simply wouldn’t do. “Well, John, I think I’ve been doubting God’s love for me, and I think he’s been trying to show me how much he loves me.”

A look of shock came over John’s face. “But Scott, that’s what you taught me! You taught me that God loves me! That’s what you taught me!”

Who was the teacher in this exchange? Many years ago, I taught John that God loved him. Some years later, John taught me that God loved me. Each of you is valuable, and each of you has a contribution to make.

Love sincerely

In verses 4-8, Paul demonstrated how each member uniquely contributes to the body by doing certain things in a certain way according to his or her gifting. However, one is not left with the impression that someone cannot, or should not, do certain things because he or she is not gifted in a certain way. For example, one should be merciful, even if one is not gifted that way. Nevertheless, in verses 9-13, there is a shift in emphasis to what everyone does, or what everyone should do, regardless of gifting. What everyone must do, regardless of gifting, is love sincerely, without hypocrisy. God, in his love for us, reconciled us to himself through the sacrifice of his Son. Now he wants love to characterize his family. In the context of Romans 12:3-13, sincere love is not selective but recognizes the value of each member of the body. It also takes action in practical ways, demonstrating that it values each member.

Love is purified in us as we “abhor what is evil” and “cling to what is good.”⁵ Paul issues another two-part command. Once again, it echoes verse 2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” God’s will is “good.” Now we are to cling to what is “good.” Abhorring evil and clinging to what is good is one of the ways we renew our minds.

We recognize evil, which is opposed to sincere love, for what it is so that we might have a proper, and hateful, attitude toward it lest we submit to its influence. But it’s not enough to hate evil. The reason we’re attracted to evil is because we think it will profit us. If we don’t replace our attraction to evil with something else, we will repeatedly submit to its influence. What really profits us is not what is evil but what is good, particularly God’s will, which in these verses bids us to love each other.

We might think that Paul, after admonishing us to hate evil, would now exhort us to love what is good. Apparently, it’s not even enough to love what is good. The

influence of evil is so strong that we must also “cling” to what is good, holding onto our belief in it even when it seems ludicrous to do so. If we cling to what is good, it will cling to us. Hating evil and clinging to what is good purifies us so that we love sincerely, not hypocritically. We don’t need to be friends with everyone. Indeed, it’s impossible in a church this size. But we do need to appreciate everyone.

God’s will, which is good, then works its way out in the body of Christ in the way we treat each other, as seen in verses 10-13.⁶ Paul exhorts us to 10 related actions. The first two and the last two concern actions in the context of our relationships in the body of Christ. The middle six concern actions in the context of our relationship to God. The way Paul presents the exhortations ties together relationship with God and relationship with others. Relationship with God and concern for others are mutually reinforcing. Relationship with God motivates concern for others. Likewise, concern for others motivates relationship with God.

When speaking of our relationship with God, Paul develops themes he has touched on earlier in the letter. He exhorts us to:

- Be diligent instead of lazy.
- Be fervent, no doubt inspired by the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:6).
- Serve the Lord Jesus Christ as opposed to sin or any other lord (Romans 6:13, 19).
- Rejoice, regardless of current circumstances, because of a confident expectation of our future with God (Romans 8:24-25).
- Endure suffering, in that it is our vocation as God’s children to suffer in light of future glory (Romans 8:17-18).
- Devote ourselves to prayer, even if we can’t perceive its effectiveness (Romans 1:9-10).

Regarding our relationships with each other, Paul exhorts us to:

- Devote ourselves to one another in brotherly love, in that we’re all part of God’s family.
- Honor one another by giving preference to each other.
- Contribute to the financial needs of other believers (Romans 15:16).
- Practice (literally, “pursue”) hospitality for the sake of others in the body of Christ instead of being passive about it.

Paul, especially in Romans 5:1-11, has already demonstrated that God has loved us, honored us, met our needs and shown us hospitality. He’s made us part of his family. Paul isn’t asking us to do anything that God hasn’t already done for us. Nor is he asking us to do anything that God won’t, by his Holy Spirit, empower us to do. In fact, the Holy Spirit often empowers us by showing us what God has done for us. What Paul asks us to do—love each other sincerely in practical, tangible ways—will enrich the community of God: his family, his Son’s body. The Father wants sincere love to pervade and permeate his family.

The challenge to be hospitable comes with a particular emphasis. It is the last in a series, and its literal phrasing is slightly different from the other admonitions. Paul says to “pursue” hospitality. The word (*diōkō*) can also be translated “persecute,” as it is in the next verse. It is a strong verb that calls for action. Our approach to hospitality, however, tends to be passive. Paul would have us be more aggressive—in a winsome way, of course.

What prevents us from reaching out and welcoming those we don't know well or don't know at all? In one way or another, fear holds us back. We may consider new people an intrusion, or we may worry what they will think if we reach out to them. Also, we simply may not know how to be hospitable. Our culture does not value hospitality, and few of us grew up learning about it. We may not know how to converse with newcomers, and we don't know how to welcome them into our community and our lives.

None of these fears is insurmountable, however. As with most changes, becoming more hospitable starts with a small step. Develop a simple plan. Even a commitment to introduce yourself each Sunday to someone you're sitting next to is a good start. You may not be able to eliminate self-consciousness, but you can act in spite of it. You can decide that you're willing to look foolish.

Consider inviting people to your home for a meal. Meals provide the setting for many of the gospel stories. "Daily meals with family, friends, and guests, acts of hospitality every one, are the most natural and frequent settings for working out the personal and social implications of salvation," writes Eugene Peterson. "It is virtually impossible to be detached and uninvolved when we are sharing a meal with someone." Peterson suggests that we "take the meal with as much gospel seriousness as we take our Scriptures," that we "take the kitchen to be as essential in the work of salvation as is the sanctuary. Meals are front-line strategies countering the inexorable deconstruction of hospitality that is running amuck in the Western world today." [214. 217. 220]

The call to hospitality will challenge those of us who have been sucked into the vortex Silicon Valley hyperactivity. Many of you return from work well past dinnertime. For motivation, you may need to set aside a regular day—once a month, once every two weeks, once a week—in order to invite people over. Instead of trying to endlessly coordinate schedules with people you'd like to have over for dinner, put a date on the calendar and then start looking for people to ask over and don't give up until you find someone. You don't cook? You're not domestic? Not a problem. If you can read, you can cook. Soup, salad and bread make a great meal. Or invite people over to help you cook. Or order out. Never underestimate the power of your home or your dining room.

I've noticed that sharing a meal with people in our home has strengthened the connections among us. I've also noticed that I've had to work through some fears in order to invite people I've just met over for a meal, knowing that they may be thinking, "This guy's weird."

Whatever you do, think it through and do something. Hospitality is not an option. How a community treats newcomers is a good gauge of the health of that community.

If this church became as known for its hospitality as it is for its Bible teaching, in time we would not recognize it. Love would be spilling out of us, and the world, which is starved for love, would find its way to our door. I'd go so far to say that if one in 10 newcomers to PBC couldn't get out of here on a Sunday without being invited to someone's home for a meal, we'd be leading more people to Christ than we'd know what to do with. If God calls all of us to be hospitable but gifts only 6 percent of us to teach, then Bible teaching should inspire hospitality more than it inspires more Bible teaching. The church is God's countercultural community. In our part of the world, hospitality is countercultural if nothing else. If we're hospitable, we'll be noticed. When we're hospitable, going out of our way to welcome people into our community and into our lives, we're emphatically declaring that each person has value.

One Sunday last summer, a young man by the name of Eusebius, who had just graduated from college and moved into the area, came to worship with us for the first time. He thought the service began at 11 a.m., not 11:15 a.m., so in actuality he arrived 15 minutes early. He sat by himself in the patio. A man by the name of Raphael, a longtime member of this church, noticed the newcomer sitting by himself and approached him. He introduced himself and his family. He talked with him until the service started. Eusebius was looking for a friendly church, and before he even attended our worship service, he thought he might have found one. He says that Raphael's hospitality was one of the main reasons he decided to make PBC his spiritual home. Eusebius now serves as a leader in the Young Adults Fellowship. Small, simple courtesies can make a big difference.

Observe and love

Taken as a whole, Romans 12:3-13 encourages us to do two things: Observe and love. If we observe the body of Christ, we will see spiritual gifts in action; we will see that each person is valuable. If we love each other sincerely, we will show that each person is valuable.

April 22, 2007

Discovery Publishing © 2007, the publications ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. To receive additional copies of this message or a tape (a complete catalog is also available) contact: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Phone (650) 494-0623. Fax (650) 494-1268. www.pbc.org/dp. We suggest a 50-cent donation per printed message to help with this ministry. Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE ("NASB"), © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

¹ The word "grace" in verse 6 does not mean, as elsewhere in Romans, God's unmerited favor in Christ. In this case, grace is connected to the specific gifts God imparts to members of the body. God, in his grace, gifts his people.

² The sentence that spans verses 6-8 is an awkward one. It contains no finite verb. The words "each of us is to exercise them accordingly" are assumed by translators seeking to convey Paul's meaning, but these are not Paul's words.

³ Paul mentions two gifts—prophecy and service—and alludes to five others in speaking of gifted people: teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership and mercy. Paul, who didn't plant the Roman church, has incomplete knowledge of how God has gifted its members, which may explain, at least in part, his use of the word "if" in four cases: "if prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith," etc. The gift of prophecy is exercised "according to" the proportion of faith, while all the other gifts are exercised "in" something. Gifts two through four are exercised in the specific use of those gifts ("if service, in his serving," etc.), while gifts five through seven are exercised along with some kind of attendant attitude ("he who gives, with liberality," etc.).

⁴ For example, people who have the gift of service serve. The exercise of the gift of giving is accompanied by "liberality," or "generosity"; the gift of leadership is accompanied by "diligence," or "zeal"; and the gift of mercy is accompanied by "cheerfulness."

⁵ What appears in verse 9 as a second sentence in the New American Standard Bible translation is actually a continuation of the first sentence. A more literal translation would be: "Let love be without hypocrisy, abhorring what is evil, clinging to what is good."

⁶ Verses 10-13 are a continuation of the sentence that began in verse 9.