

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Romans 12	Title: Loving Bodies	Date: 07.01.18
Website Writeup: Today is a follow up to the week before where we explore four elements which help us to spiritually transform our social context.			

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Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

(TITLE SLIDE up during intros)

Romans 12:1-2 have been for us the stump we've tripped over repeatedly in this series, as if lost & going in circles in the forest. But we're not lost, God's making things clear through a concerted focus on them! As they urge personal submission to Jesus, what follows moves onto how the church is governed by love! Vertical loving connection with Jesus moves into horizontal loving connection in community. Let's recap last week....

Firstly, we talked of spiritual formation in the social dimension where **we must know Jesus as Savior & Lord**, as expressed in Ephesians 2:4-5 & 8-9, *4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions....8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.* A gracious act of God, producing our grateful response in relationship to him.

Secondly, in having experienced God's saving grace, **we're brought into the fellowship of the Body of Christ in it's local expression - the church.** ¹ Corinthians 12:27, *27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* Living in unity under the kingdom reign of God together, a glimpse of heaven on earth, however imperfectly reflected. An example to society as to the health & vitality found & practiced under Christ's loving guidance in the individual, extending to community.

Thirdly, in our pursuit of spiritual formation, we realize **relationships must also be transformed.** The Gospel's not an individualistic endeavor - we affect & infect one another's faith journey & ministry's largely done as a unit. It's never just me & Jesus. It's me, Jesus & you. We're either pushing forward, or holding back our faith community in our spiritual formation process & witness, positively or negatively. Remember, everyone's being spiritually formed, it's a question of towards Christ-likeness or not? If in the positive, as individuals practice Romans 12:1-2, we begin to see transformation of, not only individual, but also community - a communal loving witness of Jesus.

John 13:34-35, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* The sure mark of those spiritually formed in Christ - people who love one another. Specified in the idea, *just as I have loved you, you must love one another!*

A love beyond the normal expression in society, which lays down it's life for others (1 Jn 3:16) & extends even to enemies (Mt 5:44-48).

However, neglecting to live out the reality of Romans 12:1-2, we tend to practice some form of *Assault & Withdrawal* in relationships. From a position of wounded-ness we assault others when we act against that which is good for them, even when we have their consent in doing so. Or, we withdraw (another form of assault), when we intentionally disregard another's well-being. We're indifferent, don't care. Neither reflect the community God's building, nor do they bring life, rather death to us & relationships. 1 John 3:14b, ...*Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

To close this out, let's look at four major elements we can apply in order to experience life & see relationships transformed increasing our love for one another, and therefore, our witness as the local body of Christ.

The first - **to see ourselves as God sees us - whole.** To view ourselves differently in Christ than we may have before, not as the walking-wounded retreating & attacking, but as healthy, loved, safe & accepted individuals, engaging in healthy ways with others (even enemies). Whole people who don't need to compensate for past wounds. Thinking of ourselves as whole in Christ isn't a psychological parlor trick to put one over on our subconscious self. It's not psychological self-help.

Rather it's a reality, a spiritual truth. A real power. To view the Old Self with all it's putridity & wounded-ness as dead & gone as Scripture states. You're different. Paul wrote, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* (2 Co 5:17). The Old Self need not govern you any longer as Romans says, sin shall not be your master (Rm 6:14). You've died to it & been made whole & new in Jesus.

You may have heard the story of a man speaking to his grandson, saying. "A terrible fight between two wolves is going on inside us all.. One's evil – he's anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority & ego. The other's good – he's joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion & faith." The boy asked, "Which wolf will win?" The man replied, "The one you feed." Scripture calls us to regard that Old Self as dead & gone. Feed the New Self which is whole in Christ; a different way of looking at life.

Our lives in Jesus are whole & blessed, no matter what has, or hasn't been said, or done to us, or by us in the past. Seeing ourselves as whole in Christ extracts poison from relationships allowing us to practice love & forgiveness in them. Jesus' wholeness in the Father is the reason he could say while hanging on the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" (Lk 23:34) He was whole in that divine relationship, nothing they did to him could change his standing with the Father. Therefore, he could react in love & not anger or bitterness even when his life was taken.

Christ imputed his righteousness to you. His perfect record which satisfied the demands of the moral law of God, has been ascribed to you. It's made you right with God, that's what we call righteousness - Christ's righteousness is what God sees when he looks at you now. We've all stood guilty before the judge, he sentenced us to death for our sin. But in a strange twist, he took off his robe, stepped off the bench, embraced us & said, "I'll take your sentence upon myself," exchanging his perfect righteous record with ours.

Plenty of verses speak of his righteousness being lain upon us.... 1 Corinthians 1:30b, says Jesus has become *our righteousness, holiness & redemption*. Romans 10:4 states, *Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*. In Philippians 3:9 Paul states he wants...*to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith*. To name a few.

We're safe in Christ - Colossians 3:3, *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*. The Old Self dead, resurrected only at the behest of my own will, when I feed the Old Wolf. Which is why Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 10:13, *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it*. Even in temptation I don't have to feed the wolf, understanding we live in tension - *the spirit's willing but the flesh's weak (Mt 26:41)*.

This is foundational Truth - we're made whole in Christ. There are many resources out there to better understand it more deeply. *The Sonship Course*, developed by Jack Miller. Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace*, or *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Rose Marie Miller's book, *From Fear to Freedom*. Timothy Keller's, *The Prodigal God*, or his study on Galatians. Martin Luther's study on Galatians. Memorizing many of the verses we've been studying in these sermons posted on our site, the *Who Am I In Christ* verse list, etc. We're not at a loss for resources - we have 1st world access.

When we understand our wholeness, then we can take the next step & **abandon all defensiveness**. Within the confines of healthy Christian Community we can let down our guard. The intensity of competition, out-of-control desires, overpowering false felt needs, aren't governing the interactions of the faithful who offer their bodies as living sacrifices, aren't conforming to the patterns of this world, and are being transformed by the renewing of their minds. Assault & withdrawal don't have their place in such a community, or at the very least, aren't tolerated at any great level. They don't become the cultural norm, the everyday practice - they're the anomaly.

When Christ reigns, not just as Savior, but as Lord, wholeness rules our hearts & we're open to being known & knowing others for who they are. No longer do we feel the need to practice evasiveness, self-justification, deceit, secrecy, or manipulation. In short, the desire to *look good* in front of others is diminished & killed off! **A great place to see what**

this kind of person looks like is to study chapters 5-6 of Matthews Gospel. Or, read our *Mature Christian Profiles* paired with the Six:Eight Values. The Sonship Course also has a great outline of a mature Christian.

This leads us into the third element, **love predominates**. When believers in Jesus submit themselves to his Lordship, allow spiritual formation to root & flourish & drop defensiveness, pretense evaporates like water droplets on a hot skillet. Integrity & fidelity reign - the fertile soil in which love can grow. And those who experience salvation in Jesus, become disciples, leading to their place in the church body. Speaking in generalities & abstract philosophies about the greater 'Body of Christ' across the world allows us an 'out'. I want to avoid the propensity towards that speech, we're speaking practically of the local church. Direct influence with immediate neighbors. In our interactions as the Body, love is to be a witness to the world that we belong to Jesus.

And this is where Paul defines it for us, at least in one place. Firstly, we'd all be carrying out tasks in the body with grace & power supplied by God as seen in vv3-8 of **Romans 12**, *³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

That's not an exhaustive listing, but it reveals God's mind to empower us as we consider ourselves not only *part of* the local Body of Christ, but also *belonging to it!* A realistic humble people, with unique gifting to contribute to the building of Christ's kingdom through the ministry of this local expression of Jesus. It's not the picture of the individual going to church, getting 'fed' & going home to do their own personal ministry. It's the picture of a body working together doing ministry as a unit. Loving each other. Loving the world as a witness for Jesus.

Then Paul outlines qualities exhibited by those collective bodies professing Jesus in vv9-21 - too lengthy to read, so I'll paraphrase as Willard has done in his book & you can check our work later this week in Community Group. These people would...

1. let love be completely real
2. abhor what is evil
3. cling to what is good
4. be devoted to one another in family-like love
5. outdo one another in giving honor (competition of loving others well!)
6. serve the Lord with ardent spirit & all diligence
7. rejoice in hope

8. be patient in trouble
9. be devoted constantly to prayer
10. contribute to the needs of the saints
11. pursue hospitality
12. bless persecutors & not curse them
13. be joyful with those who rejoice & sorrowful with those in sorrow
14. live in harmony with each other
15. not be haughty, but fit in with the lowly
16. not see themselves as wise
17. never repay evil for evil
18. have regard for what's right
19. be at peace with everyone so far as it depends on the person
20. leave revenge for God
21. provide for needy enemies
22. wouldn't be overwhelmed by evil, but overwhelm evil with good

A list which defines, at least in part, what the local church looks like as individuals submit themselves to Christ, find wholeness, drop defensiveness & allow love to dominate relationships; Transforming families, children, marriages, local community & the world - remember, Jesus changed everything with 12 guys.

Finally, this drives into our fourth & final element of transformed relationships in Christ. We become **people who extend themselves in blessing & redemption** devoting our lives to the service & betterment of others. An ongoing task which won't be exhausted until Christ returns (Mt 24:14, 28:18-20) & includes our Gospel witness. It's marked by a people who care in practical goodness to those in need. Remembering though, we can become paralyzed, angry & frantic with all the opportunities & issues presented to us through news & social media. So, we focus our minds, hearts & deeds mostly on those with which we can touch & talk - geographical neighbors.

We're limited in this task, remembering the Holy Spirit's with us. *As it says in John 14:26, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Even in very difficult times when you're lost for words the Advocate will intercede on your behalf - the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Ro 8:26-28)*

Drinking in Jesus through the spiritual formation process, we overflow him to others - placing yourself under the water spout, being a vessel of his Spirit, being filled with his Word & God overflows in & from you to others. *John 4:14b ...the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Or, John 7:38, Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*



We could continue quoting verses, but the fact remains, people who submit themselves fully to Christ in worship, refuse to conform to the patterns of this world, allow their minds to be renewed by God, become a people who realize they're whole, who put away defensiveness, allow love to dominate & become redemptive gracious people to others. Giving local communities a glimpse, however imperfectly reflected, of heaven on earth.

Let's progress towards that together!