



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Don't Diss Members"

Romans 12:3-13

"Forget the Church: Follow Jesus" was the April 9 (2012) cover story of *Newsweek*. The cover shows a young Jesus dressed in 21st century hip clothes standing on a busy city street.

There is a recent trend, dubbed 'hipster Christianity,' which doesn't advocate abandoning church per se but, rather, doing church in radical new ways. A September 2010 article in *Christianity Today*, titled "Hipster Faith," said,

In order to remain relevant... many evangelical pastors and church leaders are following the lead of the hipster trendsetters, making sure their churches can check off all the important items on the hipster checklist:

- Get the church involved in social justice and creation care.
- Show clips from R-rated Coen Brothers films (e.g., *No Country for Old Men*, *Fargo*) during services.
- Sponsor church outings to microbreweries.
- Put a worship pastor onstage decked in clothes from American Apparel.
- Be okay with cussing.
- Print bulletins only on recycled cardstock.
- Use Helvetica fonts as much as possible.

Only a couple of those are tongue-in-cheek. The article also says,

Welcome to the world of hipster Christianity. It's a world where things like the *Left Behind* series, Jesus fish bumper stickers, and door-to-door evangelism are relevant only as a source of irony or nostalgia.

Whether our church is 'hip' or not is for you to decide. *I do use Helvetica font!*

What about urging people to “forget the church?” How does that square with the Scripture?

Not very well! For one thing, Jesus said He was going to build the church. I don't want to find myself abandoning the very thing Jesus said He was building!

Then there is the direct exhortation in Hebrews to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

The Christian life is a corporate life; it is life in a congregation of God's people. Yes, there is what is called the universal church, meaning that ultimately we are all part of the sum total of Christians from Pentecost to the rapture. But even a quick survey of the New Testament shows that there are always local churches - actual congregations, not just mystical connections.

The believer who is truly presenting his or her physical body to the Lord must find himself or herself involved with the members of Jesus Christ's spiritual body of believers on earth. Your ‘living sacrifice’ is lived-out among God's people.

That corporate living is the subject of our verses in Romans.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

Romans 12:5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Paul introduced a powerful analogy. The church is like a human body. The human body with its various members is a marvel of harmony, unity, balance, and cooperation. Each has its uniquely designed functions, and each carries out only its own functions. The lungs never try to digest food; the stomach doesn't decide to pump the blood; the heart refuses to

breathe. All are dependent and interdependent upon each other for there to be health, growth, and maturity in the whole body.

Individual believers are to regard one another as they do the individual members of their own physical body.

It isn't always like that among the members of Jesus Christ's spiritual body! Paul exhorts every Christian not to "think of [yourself] more highly than [you] ought to think." We hear a lot today about the problem of self-esteem. It seems from what Paul is saying that self-esteem is, indeed, a problem. The problem, though, is **high self-esteem!** We esteem ourselves too highly and we create problems with the harmony, unity, balance, and cooperation of the Lord's body.

Rather than esteem ourselves too highly we should "think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." God Himself sovereignly measures out your placement and empowering in His body. The boundaries of your service and ministry are proscribed by God; you, in "faith," are called upon to believe that your placement and empowering are perfectly suited both for you **and** for the other members of the Lord's body.

Paul now begins to discuss how you actually live-out your sacrifice among the members of the Lord's body. He discusses your differing *gifts*, and he discusses your common *graces*.

[Romans 12:6](#) Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...

Gifts are God's supernatural empowerings given to you to use as tools to build-up other believers with. Warren Wiersbe likes to say that the gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with.

You find lists of gifts in Romans twelve, in First Corinthians twelve, and in Ephesians four. While those lists are helpful, be careful not to limit God. God endows His beloved children with many combinations and degrees of giftedness. I've seen lists with as many as twenty-one spiritual gifts. The

exact number is not as important as the faithful exercise to build others up in their walk with the Lord.

Overall we simply want everything we do to be led by and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Here Paul lists gifts that *express* the Word of God, and gifts that *expand* the work of God.

The gifts that express the Word of God are prophecy, ministry, teaching, and exhortation.

Romans 12:6 ...if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;
Romans 12:7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;
Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation...

"Prophecy" is a gift that causes no small measure of controversy when you discuss it! It seems to me that there were, in the early church, both those who held the office of prophet, and those who exercised the gift of prophecy. Prophets, along with the apostles, laid the once for all foundation of the Church by speaking forth the inspired Word of God. Their office has ceased now that we have the completed Scriptures.

But Paul himself discussed and described at length the gift of prophecy, indicating in First Corinthians fourteen that it would be a continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout the church age in which we live. Its purpose is not to lay a foundation, but to "build-up" believers upon the foundation already laid down in the Bible. That's why he tells us to carefully judge the words of those who prophesy. We are to hold their edifying words up to the eternal Word of God, to receive it or reject it according to what we find written there.

The gift of prophecy is exercised today in many forms. Perhaps this is what Paul means when he says "let us prophesy according to our faith." Waking visions as well as certain dreams can be an exercise of the gift of prophecy. Some people receive a definite impression of words from the

Lord as an exercise of the gift of prophecy. Often the gift of prophesy involves God directing you at a particular time to a particular passage of His already written Word.

Paul next lists "ministry" as a gift. Ministry is service to the body of all kinds. This gift is manifested in all sorts of practical help that you give to other members of the Lord's body.

While I don't want to limit it's application, ministry in this context seems to be service to the body that allows prophecy, teaching, and exhortation to occur. Anything and everything that helps the Word of God to be expounded in these ways is seen as the supernatural gift of ministry.

For example we tend to put a high value on the teaching of the Word in our gatherings. Everything else that goes on is super-important, but it is subordinate to the Word being taught and heard.

"Teaching" the Bible requires a supernatural gift. It involves the God-given ability to give systematic and regular instruction in God's Word. Many believers are able to teach; but the gift of teaching involves more than imparting information.

"Exhortation" is another broad gift. Exhortation involves advising, pleading, encouraging, warning, strengthening, and comforting. If teaching systematizes and explains God's truth, exhortation calls believers to obey and follow God's truth.

The gifts that expand the work of God are giving, leadership, and showing mercy.

[Romans 12:8 ...he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.](#)

"Giving" expands the work of God as the funds received are used in various ways for the forward outreach of the Gospel, both locally and abroad.

"Leadership" is needed to guide the local church into the will of God so that the work of God can be expanded. Leadership is a supernatural calling, *not* a natural ability. We should always look for those whom God is raising-up rather than look through our own prerequisites.

How, exactly, is the leadership structured? If you study church history and systematic theology you'll find three major ideas regarding church leadership, or what is sometimes called church government:

1. Congregational church government involves the entire local congregation in at least the major decisions of the church.
2. Presbyterian church government comes from the Greek word for elder and involves a group of leaders, the elders, as making the decisions for the church.
3. Episcopal church government comes from the Greek work for overseer. It's a shepherd/sheep sort of arrangement, recognizing that Jesus is the Great Shepherd but has appointed under shepherds - we call them pastors - to lead the local church.

Calvary Chapel is a hybrid of all three, at least we are, but more heavily weighted towards episcopal. In reality, in any strict or hybrid form, a local church is governed by godly men the Lord raises up who meet together and seek His leading.

"Showing mercy" is, in this context, going to others in the body who are in some distress to show them God's love and concern. You see this especially in those who are called upon to do visitation among the sick and afflicted members of the Lord's body.

"Cheerfulness" can be translated *hilarity*. It is hilarity in the sense of Proverbs 17:22, which says, "A merry heart does good, like medicine..."

Paul looks next at our common graces in verses nine through thirteen.

[Romans 12:9](#) Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

In New Testament times the "hypocrite" was an actor, someone who played a part on the stage. We are not play acting in our relationships to one another. We must love enough to honestly minister one to another, hating and rebuking what is definitely evil, while clinging to and encouraging the good we see.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

In all of our contacts with one another we are to exhibit grace. We are to love and, even beyond that, to prefer one another.

Romans 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

This verse describes our on-fire desire to serve the Lord's body.

Romans 12:12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

Praise, patience, and prayer will mark your trials when you are presenting your body to the Lord as a living sacrifice and living-out that sacrifice in the church.

Romans 12:13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

The attitude here is one of being so concerned for the welfare of others in the Lord's body that you actively pursue avenues of benevolence and showing hospitality.

It is through **you** that the Lord is present ministering among the members of **His** body!