

“NOT THINKING TOO HIGHLY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:3-5

Prayer:

Holy Father, as we come to your Holy Word again this morning, grant us divine assistance and wisdom that this is not an exercise in gaining knowledge, but of gaining wisdom and making progress in holiness, and all of this for your glory and our benefit. In Jesus name, Amen.

Introduction.

Here we go. Roll up your sleeves, get ready for action.

For the next four chapters Paul is going to tell us what it means to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, presented to God as our spiritual worship. Paul is going to flesh out what it means to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, what it means to discern what the will of God is, those things that are good and acceptable and perfect.

No more indicative mood, no more just facts and information, now comes the imperative mood, what we should do with the facts. From what is true to what should be true.

Romans 1-11 gave us the Gospel. Romans 12-15 gives us what a life shaped and molded and controlled by the Gospel looks like. A life lived in response to the mercies of God, to the abounding, undeserved daily grace of God. His mercies are new every morning giving us the grace to live according to the Gospel.

After everything God has done for us in Christ, how can we hold anything back from him?

For by the grace given to me.

Why should we listen to Paul? The Christians in Rome could easily ask, “Who is this Paul that he should talk to us like this? We have never met him in person. Why should we listen to him?” Sort of like, “Who died and left him in charge?”

Why is Paul any different from other great minds and influencers in history? Some scholars think Paul was a genius of the caliber of Plato, Aristotle, Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, William Shakespeare, Beethoven. History is full of brilliant, creative, original thinkers.

All of those great minds can be surpassed and many have been surpassed by greater minds that have come along in history. The world of ideas keeps changing, evolving, growing. Human ideas can always be transcended, risen above.

Paul is different, Paul was not just born and lived and died and left behind some good thoughts. Paul was called out by the transcendent God, and Paul was set apart as one who transcends history. We don't listen to Paul because he was brilliant or creative or original.

We listen to Paul because he has the authority of the living God. We listen to Paul because he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and what he has written in the Bible is the inspired Word of God. When Paul speaks in Scripture, God speaks.

Paul's writings are not theories or philosophy, not great concepts, not ideas, not even really good ideas, they are authentic revelation from God. Human ideas can always be transcended. Transcendent truth cannot be transcended. It is eternal.

This is why I emphatically declare to you every week, what you are about to hear is nothing like everything else you have heard all week. This is different. This is *the* eternally true, trustworthy, inerrant Word of the living God. It is transcendent truth.

When Paul says, "Through the grace given to me I speak" Paul declares what he says is not his own words or wisdom, but it has been given to him by God, it is a divine gift given to him as an apostle of God. Remember how he started his letter:

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

Paul is not just Paul, he is the Apostle Paul speaking with apostolic authority, as God's ambassador. Paul reminds the Christians in the church in Rome, and us, God has given him authority and for that reason we must listen to his voice, just as we would to the voice of God. We are duty bound to obey Paul, because not to is to reject God Himself. Don't dismiss it. If you do you do so at the peril of your eternal soul.

How to think.

Romans 12:3 I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment (thinking).

Paul is speaking to everyone in the church in Rome, and to everyone reading this letter. Young and old, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, you and me.

Here is the first answer to the question, how does a transformed mind think? What does a renewed mind think about? A transformed mind thinks differently than an untransformed mind, a mind still conformed to the ways of the world, the ways of the flesh, of our fallen nature.

He tells us two things, first the negative, then the positive, how not to think and how to think.

Don't be conformed to the world and how the world gets us thinking about ourselves. The spirit of the age is to think about yourself a lot, like all the time. Be self-centered, be selfish, compare yourself with others. Measure yourself by the world's standards.

The world tells us in order to have good or healthy self-esteem we must think more highly about ourselves, so that we don't get mired in the mud of low self-esteem.

The gospel the world preaches is the gospel of self-esteem. Parents, teachers, counselors, pastors are all supposed to help us all get more self-esteem.

If you can just feel better about yourself, about your looks, your job, your family, your abilities, how you compare to someone else, then you will be happy and content. That is a hopeless hope. That just leads to pride or self-pity.

Low self-esteem is just another way of thinking too much or too highly about ourselves, and using others as the measure or standard.

We need to beware of faulty thinking about ourselves, whether we are at home, at work, at church, in a council meeting or board meeting or on the golf course, or hanging out with friends or playing cards.

The problem with self-esteem is it's all about self, we try to derive esteem from within ourselves.

We all know people who boast and brag about their abilities or accomplishments, or about what they will do someday, how smart or strong they are. And we all know people who think the worst about themselves. "I am a nobody, I can't do anything, I should have done better, you are so much better, smarter, stronger, than me."

If you compare yourself with others, one of two things will happen and both are bad. You will either become puffed up and proud, seeing yourself as superior, or you will become bitter, dejected, depressed, seeing yourself as inferior. There will always be greater and lesser people than yourself.

Prideful thinking and lowly thinking both grow out of comparing ourselves to others. That is the wrong measure, the wrong standard. The answer is not to foster pride, thinking more highly of ourselves, nor despair and wallow in pity, thinking more lowly of ourselves.

If we get our eyes off ourselves and look to God and what He has done for us in Jesus, and see the greatness of God's love and salvation, then we will forget about ourselves and live for Him.

How can we do a sober, accurate self-evaluation? How can we see ourselves as we really are? If not more highly, how highly? What is sober judgment or sober thinking? By changing our standard.

According to faith.

Romans 12:3 Each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (allotted, given).

What does the measure of faith mean? Faith is the standard by which we measure our own self-regard, it is the awareness that our grace and our faith and our gifts are free gifts of God. We owe God everything, we have no reason to boast or compare.

What do I have that I have not received? My mind, my ability, my calling, my skills and strength, they are all from God, for God, through God and to God. Apart from Him I have nothing and I can do nothing.

Faith is a gift from God and God gives varying measures of faith to each of us. This takes away all grounds for boasting, why would you boast about an undeserved gift. And it makes comparing ourselves to others senseless. What each of us has is from God. (Peter and John).

And no this doesn't mean our faith doesn't grow or increase. The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. That is a good prayer, it acknowledges Jesus is the one who gives it to us.

II Thessalonians 1:3 We ... give thanks to God for you, brothers, ... because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Pray, ask, strive, work hard, knowing that faith is an expression of God's gracious gift to us. All we do, we do because of Him and through Him and by Him.

We see this fruit in the apostle Paul's life as he grows and matures in his faith.

I Corinthians 15:9 I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am.

Ephesians 3:7-8 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

I Timothy 1:13-15 I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

I Corinthians was written around 55.

Ephesians was written around 60.

I Timothy was written around 63.

As Paul grew in faith and in his awareness of God's grace, he thought less and less of himself. His mind is being transformed and renewed by sober judgement, in the knowledge that everything he has is undeserved grace, and that he is living his life and using his gifts by the faith given to him. Why are we to think less highly of ourselves? Because we think more highly of the grace of God.

God determines what to give us. That measure whether great or small, strong or weak, thirty, sixty or hundredfold, ten talents, five talents or one talent, is of God and is our place in His purposes.

Trust the wisdom and grace of God to assign the perfect portion of faith and gifts and purpose for each one. Rejoice in what God has done for you and rejoice in what God has done for others.

Our differences are God's doing, they are not meant to be compared or judged, they are not to be a source of pride, or superiority or inferiority. No boasting or despairing.

We are all different in so many ways and we all can see that. The issue is *how* we see those differences, the *way* we see what we see. Is it with pride or bitterness?

When grace floods your life it transforms you and renews your mind. It makes you more humble. It sees Christ, what He has done and is doing. It gives you peace of mind. He knows I am a sinner and He saves me completely. I can rest in Him.

This peace of mind sets you free, frees from envy, jealousy, coveting, judging, self-pity. It gives you power. Power to become like Jesus and to love others.

Faith that looks away from itself and boasts in Christ, prepares us to serve freely as members of each other in the body of Christ as we will see in the next verses.

The standard is faith, comparing ourselves to God and seeing ourselves as having value and worth entirely based on the grace and mercy of God. I am who God says I am and I have nothing to boast or brag about. It is all God. I point to Him. I give all the credit and glory and honor and praise to Him and Him alone.

Some people think all of this means that Christians are supposed to be long-faced, always wallowing in how big a sinner they are. We have a sober view of ourselves but we have a very positive view of ourselves in Christ. Because of Christ and we are filled with His Holy Spirit.

The smell of our sin does not out-perfume the aroma of Christ that is upon us (II Cor. 2:15).

I Peter 2:9-10 You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Implications and application.

A renewed mind thinks these thoughts.

We are created in the image of God.
We are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
We are robed in the righteousness of Christ.
We are filled with the Spirit of God.
We are all part of the plan of God.
It is all the gift of God, by the grace God for the glory of God.

That should give us confidence and boldness, to love God and love each other and serve God and each other, not with pride, but with joyful gratitude and humility. My boasting is in Christ alone.

As we celebrate our 125th anniversary, let us do so humbly and joyfully, giving God all the glory. All that we are and have and have done is purely His sovereign grace and goodness.

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for your generous gifts of grace and faith. Thank you for each of our faith. We ask you to sustain our faith, strengthen our faith, increase our faith, deepen our faith, help our unbelief and don't let our faith fail. Enable our faith to be the source of our living for you and serving you, so that in everything we do, you get the glory as the great Giver of every good and perfect gift. For Jesus' sake and in His name, Amen.