

# A Healthy Church

Romans 12:3-8

I believe many in the Church love to quote the beginning of Prov. 29:18 in an abnegation (*the act of renouncing or rejecting something*) of personal responsibility.

**Proverbs 29:18a (KJV)**

*Where there is no vision (prophetic), the people perish (fall apart) ...*

Well contraposition (*the logical equivalent*) applied to this verse then dictates that;

“where there are no people (workers), the vision (ministry) perishes”.

A believer’s consecration to God and their transformed lifestyle is demonstrated in the exercising and application of their spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.

I direct your attention to Romans 12, in a theme that I call “God’s Plan for a Healthy Church.”

I’m not suggesting that these 6 verses contain everything that God has in mind for building a healthy church. That would take more time than we have to today and more scripture than we’re going to read.

However, in the passage I’m going to read are found 3 principles that are absolutely essential for a healthy church body. If you don’t have these you won’t have a healthy church.

**Romans 12:3-8 (NKJV)**

I love the Church as Jesus established it to be. All my life has been associated with the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ. Yet I realize not everyone has that same affection for the church.

Maybe for some when the word “church” is spoken, you think of a building or you think of a denomination, or you may even think of some hurtful experience that you’ve had at one time or another in your life. But I think of the church as people who truly love God and genuinely love one another.

I, as Pastor, see that happening all the time in the church.

I’m not at all suggesting that our church is perfect. I know that mistakes are made, that there are errors and omissions. Yet, I really believe that when they’re made they’re not from a wrong motivation. I believe that as a body of Christ we are trying to be the Church of our Lord.

The actual meaning of the word “church” in the New Testament is a combination of two Greek words “out of” and “to call.” So it is literally “the called out ones.”

The church as a group is called out of the ways of the world and their lifestyles. If you are part of the church, God has laid His hand on our shoulder and said, *"I choose You."*

There's not a single one of us that are part of this church that God didn't want to be. There's not a one of us that he said to the angels, *"I'm kind of 50-50 on this person. I'm not sure I ought to give them an invitation."*

Now I'm not arguing the merits or de-merits of Calvinism or Armenianism. If you don't know the definitions or differences, I will give you a quick synopsis.

1. John Calvin 1500's espoused a doctrine of justification by faith alone. Grace + Predestination.
2. Jacobus Arminius espoused - no predestination but possibility of salvation for everyone.  
Grace=change=salvation.

I'm a combination of these, however that fits together. CalvinArmenian? I have the view that God chose me and I elected to respond to God's call.

We are chosen of God, called out of the world and called to serve Christ. Not only to serve God but to one another.

I think one of the perils of the contemporary church is that we somehow think that salvation is only an individual matter. Only between us and God. We fail to realize that the compelling of scripture includes a view of salvation which is both personal and corporate.

That is we're called of God but we're also called to one another.

Because God is at work building a community/family in the world. Through that community of family and church God is wanting His glory to shine out from us to others.

In fact Jesus began His call to persons by not ever calling one person alone. Notice when He started calling people he didn't just single out one person first. Why? I think because that one person would forever have had an insufferable ego.

First ones Jesus called to follow Him were some brothers who were working. Then later when He called, for example, Matthew the tax collector to join the community.

Notice that Matthew couldn't say to the Lord, *"I sure want to follow you. I think you're the greatest but I can't deal with those other guys that you've got with you. They've hassled me for being a tax collector. What I'm going to do is follow you but I'm going to stay home and watch you on TV."*

When Jesus calls, you have to get involved, get your hands dirty, in serving the church.

The living church where people are different from you, compliment you, contradict you, encourage you and sometimes criticize you. But that's the church, the community that God is building. God's calling us out of isolation into fellowship with one another.

There needs to be more sermons on the difference between an audience and a church.

Right now you're really only an audience.

You're listening to me but the real work of this church is not necessarily what happens on Sunday morning but what the church does all week long. All during this week this body, this church has been functioning. We've got to have a view of the church that has far greater depth and dimension to it than just coming and parking ourselves in a chair or pew for a few hours a week.

That's great to do that but that's not being IN the church.

See, an audience gathers for an event, to watch a star or a group of stars. I'm not a star. You're not gathered here to watch me perform an oration of scripture, hopefully you're not.

My role as I understand it from the Bible is more in an athletic term, I'm the coach of the team. You're the players and it's you that's doing the action and I'm supposed to be on the sidelines and cheer you on.

An audience gathers together and pays its money and feels that it has the right to cheer or boo because it's not responsible for the actions on the stage.

Church is not a place we go TO but rather something we are IN.

We should tell the children, we're going to where the church meets on Sunday and Wednesday. We should deliberately avoid the phrase, *we're going to church*, because the building isn't the church. We're simply going to where the church meets because we are the church.

John Wesley once wrote to an inquirer who was asking about salvation. He said, "*Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Then remember you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion.*"

Unfortunately many who attend church feel more like the poet who said, "*To dwell above with saints we love, oh, that will be glory. But to live below with saints we know, well that's another story.*"

In our verses today Paul speaks John Wesley's understanding that the Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion. Paul outlines for us 3 vital principles of a healthy church.

## **1. Is that each of us have an appreciation of our own worth in the body of Christ.**

He puts it first of all negatively in self-inspection. That we are not to think more of ourselves or think of ourselves more than we ought but to think with sober judgment.

I think there are probably 3 positions of self-evaluation. The middle position is to think with sober judgment. One extreme is to be high minded and the other extreme is to be low minded. Paul says we need to stay away from the extremes.

First the extreme of high-mindedness and an exaggerated sense of self-worth.

Exaggerated sense of self-worth is looking for a place to shine instead of a place to serve. Sober judgment is looking for a place to serve.

As Pastor I am always offering people an opportunity to serve. I'm saddened at how many of them politely pass with varied excuses.

The church is also in danger of being influenced by people like Diotrephes in 3 John verse 9. Where it is said of him, "Diotrephes who likes to put himself first."

The temptation to use a role in the Church as a means of self-gratification remains a real one that all servants of God need to resist.

Sadly many Churches have these, non-teachable, non-flexible, high-minded, know-it-alls. I call them "been in the ways". When you get a person who's high minded, real damage is done in the body of Christ. And there cannot be a healthy church if the people are high minded.

Neither can there be a healthy church if people have an under estimated sense of self-worth. Such a person might often be negative in that they do not feel themselves up to an opportunity and therefore see it as an obstacle.

Jesus tells the story about the 3 divisions of gifts (5 talents, 2 talents and 1 talent). I believe Jesus has given more 1 talent deposits to people than he gave 2 and 5 talent deposits. I look at the body of Christ and I see most people are operating on just 1 talent. There's not too many 2 talent people. Even fewer 5 talent people.

But the great danger is to look at our 1 talent and say, "*God didn't give me much*" so we don't do anything with it because we think it's not much and we get defensive. We say let somebody else do that. There are other people in the church that are more qualified.

In a small church like ours we always face the danger that there are persons who say, "*I'm not needed*". If you say that, that's not true. And honestly, that's non biblical, it's contrary to scripture.

We're all needed to make the body of Christ complete and make operational all the ministries that the Lord has designed for this church.

### **1 Corinthians 12:15-26 (NKJV)**

Paul tells us not to be high minded nor low minded but to be sober minded.

We are to have a realistic estimate of our value and worth to the body of Christ. He tells us that we are to do this in accordance not only with the grace that is given to each of us, but we're to also do it according to the measure of faith that has been given to us.

So if we're going to have an individual contribution to the body we want to look for 2 things.

1. We want to look for what God has Graced us with or a contribution to offer.
2. And secondly, we want to look at what our measure of Faith is.

I remember preaching my first sermon. I hardly looked once at the audience. I read it at about 100 miles an hour and thought I must have been up there at least an hour's time but only about 15 minutes had elapsed by the time I sat down. I didn't have much faith in my abilities but I used what little was there.

People ask if I ever get nervous preaching. Of course I get nervous. First of all it's an awesome responsibility the calling to Preach. Secondly by nature I'm more of a solitary kind of a person. I have to force myself to get out of that isolation by faith and develop the gifts God gave me over the course of time and that's the way it is with everything.

You'll never be active in a ministry or make a contribution unless you exercise and develop that faith that is already in you.

I believe that our contribution to the body of Christ really springs out of 2 things.

1. Sometimes it springs out of an inner sense of *"This gives me great satisfaction. I feel called. I feel equipped. I feel natural in doing this. I feel the Lord would have me to do that."* That's a wonderful way to minister when you really feel like God has laid it on you and given you the grace to do it.
2. But the second way we also get called to ministry is we find ourselves where there is a need and we're simply there and we need to do it. We need to develop faith for that as well.

When my Dad had a sudden heart attack, someone needed to fill the position of authority and leadership and Pastor to this congregation. I prayed *Lord can't someone more experienced do it? Lord I am not equipped for this.* But the need was there and I was there, so by faith I did.

The body of Christ is often that second way.

Sometimes we think, if I'm going to minister in the church, I need a voice from heaven, goose-bumps on my flesh, I need the organist playing softly and the angels are speaking saying, Go do this. We often look for all those wonderful self-affirming great feelings. If we got that, then we know we've been called by God.

However, a great many times God doesn't work that way at all. He just puts something in our path... An opportunity, a need. We must use and develop the talent and faith God has already entrusted in us for those times.

We as a church are trying through the various ministries to make a dent for God in this world to bless one another and bless this world and reach out to the need. It takes all of us doing that... ALL of us. That's why we're always asking for help. We're putting a need in your path and saying consider this. Have faith for this. Serve God here.

We need to offer back to God the talent we have by faith.

God has not called us to be critics. He's called us to be construction workers. The fact is you have something to offer the church that nobody else can. That's yourself.

Do you have sober judgment that says God has given me something unique to contribute to this body of Christ?

That's the first thing needed in the healthy church. My next two points won't take as long.

## 2. Is utilization of our individual uniqueness.

Not only an awareness of our worth to God and to the body but also that we're unique.

Paul says it very clearly in verse 4 and we all know that it's true...*"These members do not all have the same function."* We're not all the same but we form 1 body.

In fact, Paul goes on to say we all belong to one another and he lists for us 7 unique gifts which strengthen the body – prophecy, service, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leadership (which is administration), and mercy. Of course there are many more that could be added to this list but this list of 7 is representative. These are the kind of things that unite the body of Christ to one another in relationships and health.

All of us will find ourselves filling in a different role in the church. Each role needed for a healthy church.

One of my favorite parts of scripture is Acts 5. Peter is going along and people are not only getting healed in ordinary ways like hands being laid upon them and anointing with oil but there's so much faith when Peter is around that people are being healed by being in his shadow.

Now I wonder how John and the other apostles felt that they didn't have a shadow ministry. I just wonder if they said sometimes, *"Not fair, we're being short changed by God. Peter's now got the shadow ministry and if we're to keep our place of high minded in the body of Christ we've got to have a shadow ministry like Peter. So let's quit what we're doing and go into our prayer closet and fast and pray until we get the shadow ministry also."*

You may say, Pastor that's stupid, but no it's not.

Look at the ministry in years past in charismatic circles on people being slain in the spirit or falling under the power. There were some people who had that as a genuine gift. Then other people come along and they didn't have that ministry. So they got into the pushing ministry. They couldn't be content to pray for people and have them stay standing up; you had to knock them down.

It's because we don't appreciate our uniqueness. I hold it as being authentic. Let God be God and do what He wants through you.

I have had people tell me that they pray that my Fathers ministry would be given to me. All I thought was, how ignorant they are.

We do wrong to people if we try to make Martha's out of Mary's and Mary's out of Martha's. It's that very difference which, when it's all added up, makes the unity so special, so unique. Many very different members make up the body as a whole. Which brings us to the last point.

### **3. The third mark of a healthy church is a strong bond of unity.**

We take that individual sense of worth that God has given us and that individual uniqueness and bring it all together and we're bonded to one another in a body called the church.

We're not meant to be just sanctuary seat participants and just come and see a show and leave. We're meant to be connected all during the week.

The most important ministry that occurs in this church doesn't occur when we all meet together.

I'm not devaluing the ministry that's occurring now but I'm just saying the vital ministry where our needs are touched are often on the one to one basis. There's a strong bond of unity that must be there.

Understand that there's a great difference between unity and union.

Right now we have union in the sense that we're all together in one place at one time. But that doesn't mean we have unity. Just because you get people together doesn't mean you've got unity. Some of the most divisive people to my own ministry were the most faithful attendees of services. They were together with me in location but never in spirit or thought.

The Lord wants unity in the body and how does a body get unity? The body, the members, the parts must be responsive to the head. Who is the head of the body, the Christian body? Obviously the Lord. What's the Lord want to do?

As I look at the gospels there is mainly 4 things Jesus really wants to do through the Church.

- We're to be reaching out in evangelism.
- We're to be serving human needs.
- We're to be making disciples through teaching and fellowship.
- Were to bring glory to God by our lives.

We become united as we cooperate with the direction of the head, Jesus Christ.

That belonging to the body is essential. It's not an elective. You can't say I haven't decided whether I'm really going to be committed to the church. If you're a Christian the very nature of that means you're going to be committed. Not just to the church as an idea but the church as a local concrete expression of Christ himself.

The parts of the body are meant to serve each other and thereby in serving each other their own needs are met.

A body is not unified by artificial connection. You make a body by duplicating the original cell. And the original cell in the body of Christ is Jesus.

Christ in you and Christ in me unifies us in duplicating Jesus love for the lost.

**Matthew 9:35-38 (NKJV)**

I want you to join me even as you've already done but even with more intensity to be part of the building of the body of Christ in this Church.

*Father, we come to you today and we pray specifically for this church which you have called to be a light in this community and a witness for you. We realize, Lord, that there are many ways in which we fall short. Our faith is in you. It is you who are the perfect one. We simply want to offer ourselves anew to you.*

*This is your church, Lord. No one owns the church. You have title to it. We as a body together want to express your mind and your heart and your will for this world.*

*Help us, Lord, if we've been sitting on the sidelines watching the action to get into the playing field, into the arena and to become participants in the body.*

*Help us, Lord, not to undervalue our gift to the body not to presume that we have nothing to offer because others may be more talented.*

*Help us to discover and be confident in that uniqueness which is ours.*

*Help us to develop something far deeper than a surface relationship with You and each other.*

*Help us Lord to discover that deeper commitment which survives differences and discord to find that there is a greater bond of unity that is over all. The unity in you.*

*Teach us, Lord, how to love. That we indeed may be that example which you look for: "By this shall all men know you're my disciples if you love one another." We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.*