

For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to **think** of himself more highly than he should **think**. Instead, **think** sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. ⁴ Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵ in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. ⁶ According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's faith; ⁷ if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let me ask you a very personal question (please don't feel obligated to raise your hands)—but when you post pictures of yourself on Instagram, do you use its “perfect face” filter, Facebook, Tik Tok’s “skinny app”—do you always use a photo filter? Appearance-altering features of these apps, also known as “beauty filters,” are so common today (Snapchat reported that 90% of its users use a beautifying filter). Who wouldn't want rosier lips, whiter teeth, larger eyes, and smoother skin? Presenting one's ideal “self” to the world is a temptation many confront today. But researchers are beginning to see a link between these cosmetic enhancing apps and a downturn in mental health—what they call “body dysmorphia.” For example, 94% of participants in one study said they felt enormous pressure to conform to their selfie-filtered image. And almost that same percentage said the self-image they project on social media is seldom true of their actual lives. As a result, they don't feel beautiful or as if they have enviable lives.

This trend is symptomatic of a more widespread and much deeper problem in our society today. And that is, “What is a human being, and what is an authentic self?” What and who am I, and what on earth am I here for?

Paul, in this Romans text, is going to answer that quandary. He's giving us a biblical view of humanity—we need God's saving grace, and last week he told us we need God's sanctifying grace—and this week, he will say to us that we need serving grace.

Big idea: The fully surrendered life (body and mind) is able to discern God's will in all things: moral behavior, sensible self-identity, and an aptitude for service to others.

The fully surrendered believer (body and mind) can discern the will of God:

1. By discerning between right and wrong, foolish and wise choices.

Rom 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God is.” So, last week we said that a fully surrendered body-life coincides with, or really begins with, a mental life that is renewed in God’s Word—the Bible.

But time in God’s Word doesn’t just correct how we think. It helps us to *see that the way we thought and desired was sinful, ignorant, and utterly unproductive.*

Look at how Peter puts it: 1 Peter 1:13–16 “Therefore, with your **minds ready** for action (that’s a military metaphor which requires countless hours of training and drills), be **sober-minded** (if you’ve ever had the misfortune of seeing a drunk guy in a bar fight—then you know that a drunk mind does not have an accurate assessment of his capacity) and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (now, that’s what it means to have a sober mind). ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be **conformed to the desires** of your **former ignorance**. ¹⁵ But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.” Ultimately our goal is to be *like God* in terms of our character and conduct. We desire what God desires, we value what he values, and we do what he does. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 5:1, “Be imitators of God.”

Illus. I had the chance to take my boys back to my boyhood home in Goochland, VA last May for graduation. When I graduated from High School, I left that place, shook the dust off my feet, moved West to Seattle, and I never looked back and never wanted to go back. I mentioned before that I had an interesting experience driving my boys back to that old house in the country. I expected to feel a sense of loathing for all the trauma and loss I associated that place with. But instead, something else happened to me. As I drove up in that driveway, I could release it all and let it go. It was a baptism, and I drove out of Goochland, having washed it all away. But what I didn’t tell you is that all the good memories of that place and my childhood came flooding back: we spent our summers wearing cutoff shorts, no shoes, no shirt, no problem. We spent our summer days swimming in the creek, exploring the woods, shooting at birds and bottles with our BB guns; catching fireflies in jars in the front yard; and playing endless backyard football games with our neighbors till it was so dark we couldn’t see the ball anymore (pro-tip: once you start catching the ball with your face, then you know it’s time to go inside).

And most of all, last but most definitely not least, are the memories of the relentless drills of country Kung-fu. Inspired by watching Kung fu marathons on WRLH channel 35 starting at 6 pm on Friday nights running till midnight—we contrived all kinds of Kung fu training methods. This involved dodging bricks and other objects, like darts, while blindfolded. It involved catching arrows in our bare hands (they were practice tips, not the broad heads), laying on our backs, shooting arrows straight into the sky, and waiting without flinching for the arrows to land in our general vicinity.

At any given moment, my brother and our friends would test each other with a random punch—to see if we were ready, to see if we had developed the reflexes to block the shot.

At the time, we thought it was the right way to train—but of course, it was ignorant and downright stupid, to say the least. At the time, we were “preparing”—getting ready, quickening our reflexes, stealing our minds for the big day, the big dance when someone would inevitably cross us, at school, at football practice, or in the neighborhood—and we would be ready with a reflexive, automatic response to destroy that person with country Kung Fu.

Now, as a grown adult, who now knows better, I can’t imagine going back and thinking that the way I used to train for “readiness” would still be a good thing to do. It was a life of former ignorance, preparing us for nothing, conferring no ability, skills, or readiness.

And in our former way of living before Christ, there was a way we thought was right. At the time, no one could tell us, “Hey, that’s just ignorance. The things you desire, the things of this world you’re pursuing and have set your hope on, are like vapors of smoke escaping through the fingers. That’s not going to prepare you to be ready for the big Day—when Christ returns to bring the saving grace promised to those who believe. And to bring his wrath and judgment to those who’ve rejected his Word.”

Both Peter and Paul tell us to focus on mental and bodily activities that contribute to our transformation into the image and character of Jesus.

A renewed mind in God’s Word can discern between right and wrong, good desires and evil desires, and between wise and foolish actions.

I want to take some space to see how Paul addresses this with the Galatians:

Galatians 5:16–26 “I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh...Now the works of the flesh are **obvious**: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of

anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things (that is, the person’s life is controlled and characterized by this) will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” **Two significant observations about this passage:**

I counsel you *not* to take a vice and virtue list like this—and turn it into a punch list, an excel spreadsheet where you track which your vices and virtues across your day or week. What Paul says here is that these behaviors are the byproducts of a soul that is being nourished on worldliness and carnality—which fuel our selfish and sinful desires. Or a heart that is long-nourished on the Word, walking in step with the Holy Spirit—producing in us holy desires, attitudes, and conduct.

Secondly, both the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit should be obvious. Now, for the person who reads a vice and virtue lists like this, and it does not seem evident that these behaviors are works of the flesh, then I would submit to you that person is not walking by the Spirit—not renewing their minds in the Word of God which has a renovating, reforming effect on the mind.

Being confused about what counts as works of the flesh or the byproducts of a Spirit-filled, Word-filled life is just an indicator that you are not living the Spirit-filled, Word-filled life.

The fully surrendered believer (body and mind) can discern God's will—able to distinguish between right and wrong, foolish and wise choices.

The fully surrendered believer (body and mind) can discern the will of God:

2. Through an accurate self-assessment. Rom 12:3 “For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to *think* of himself more highly than he should *think*. Instead, *think* sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.”

Paul uses the word “think” four times in this one verse. Here are the cognates:

***phroneo* (x2):** “to develop an attitude based on deliberate thought; the formation of an opinion; to give careful consideration” now it’s the same word that Paul uses when he says in Phil 2:5, “your attitude (*phroneo*) should be that of Christ.”

hyperphroneo “to think of oneself in an inflated, grandiose way that is out of sync with reality.”

sophroneo “to think in a sound or sane manner; prudent, reasonable, sensible thought.”

In his thought-provoking book *Strange New World*, pastor and scholar Carl Trueman captures how academics and activists have transformed how we in western culture define human identity, which sparked the sexual revolution, which has opened the floodgates to radical individualism and individual self-expression. He marks several culprits...

The pursuit of the authentic self: in today’s strange new western culture, the authentic self is not based on any intrinsic design or external authority but instead on the basis of inner feelings and desires. The notion that value, meaning, purpose, identity, and function are externally conferred upon us—bestowed upon us confirmed by our biological design—is heresy today. And so, Trueman notes, the highest pursuit of the modern person is discovering their true, inner authentic self, which is determined not by extrinsic authority, confirmed by intrinsic design features—but is determined by what I feel and what I desire.

This leads us to the second problem in our culture...

The expression of the authentic self: Well, if the authentic self can only be discovered by getting in touch with my truest feelings and deepest desires rather than an exterior decree confirmed by internal design parameters, then my highest aim is self-expression. My highest, most noble pursuit in life is that my expression of myself matches my inner feelings and desires.

The sexual revolution: While we typically think in terms of the 1960’s countercultural sexual revolution, this mindset has deep roots in Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche and is popularized in the writings of that sexual wanderer, Oscar Wilde. The sexual revolution is aptly named—for it is a culture-wide insurgency, a mass revolt against the sexual norms reflected in natural law and commanded in the Bible. It is the denial of a fundamental code of sexual behavior that is codified in both our physical bodies

and the authoritative commands in the Bible. This has resulted in what Trueman calls the social imaginary—the person who thinks, acts, and interacts according to the authority of their imagination—whatever they imagine themselves to be.

This radical individualism could not be more opposite of the godly and biblical vision of individuality that Paul here embraces and advocates. Not only that, but it is also *hyperphroneo*—it is the arrogant, boastful assertion that I am the decisive and final arbiter of all this morally pure, socially healthy, and acceptable (for me). And there is no authority either external to me in a written Word or internally present in my body.

And I'm here to tell you that our current cultural *hyperphroneo* is bunk, and it's bonkers. I mean, not only is it false. It's madness and has led our culture to praise that which is morally insane and senseless and to damn those godly values which are morally rational and proper.

The fully surrendered believer (body and mind) can discern the will of God—what is right and what is wrong; and can discern who and what they are through an accurate self-assessment.

The fully surrendered believer (body and mind) can discern the will of God:

3. With respect to our individual contributions to the body. Rom 12:4– 8 “Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, ⁵ in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and ***individually members of one another***. According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith; ⁷ if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.”

If what Carl Trueman outlines in his book *Strange New World* is true about our culture, and I think it beyond the peradventure of a doubt, then what is the antidote to such a skewed and irrational view of a human soul?

Now Paul gives us a countercultural vision of human individuality. Our individuality exists for the good of God’s holy family. It’s not the denial of individuality or personhood. Every person is distinct and unique. Each of us has our own mind, inner life, and a lens through which we see the world. But that individual-ness is to be in service to the building up of the body—as one member contributing to the whole.

Paul gives us a biblical worldview of personhood. Contrary to the radical individualism that has gripped our culture, we do not find our authentic selves in our feelings or desires. Instead, it is grounded in God’s creational design and his decree for our lives: We are human image-bearers made, male and female, in the image of God. We were designed to flourish in heteronormative monogamous sexual relationships. Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is a mysterious picture of Christ and the Church, which is why Revelation repeatedly refers to the Church as “the bride of the Lamb.” He says we are to mutually submit to one another: The husband submitting to his wife by self-sacrificial love and leadership. The wife submits to her husband, honoring him and supporting him.

Paul says individually, we are members of one another. Individuals, yes. But we exist for the good and the edification and health of the greater body.

1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and **individual members** of it.”

Look at what he says to the Ephesians 4:16 “From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of ***each individual part***.” **Contrary to the** blasphemous and self-important *hyperphroneo* of our day—God designed us as individuals to discover and develop our

uniqueness and distinctiveness—not in some empty exercise in self-expression, but for the good of the whole family, the entire body built up like a holy temple in Christ.

Now next week, we're going to talk very specifically and practically about how to discover your spiritual gifts and uniqueness in the body of Christ. I'm going to help you see that these gifts are intended for the good of the body until Christ returns. We'll talk about what they are, how they function, and how to discover, develop and deploy them in the life of the Church.

Let's recap by way of some questions that will help you to apply this message:

Would you say that you can discriminate between moral and immoral behavior? Wise and foolish choices.

Have we renewed our minds in the Word such that our *minds are ready* for action—conformed to wise and sensible thinking instead of our former ignorance?

Would you say that the works of the flesh, which lead to death and hell, are apparent to you? Or are you still debating over what is sinful and what is permissible? What is pure, lovely, and praiseworthy versus unholy, unhealthy, and unproductive thinking?

Do you have a biblical assessment of who and what you are? Are you able to discern yourself and where you fit in the body of Christ?

And do you think of your individual “self” as created by God in *service to the body—to the family of God*? Have you found yourself giving into the false view and the madness of our age regarding what a human being, a “self,” is? If so, I encourage you today to embrace the Word embrace the truth of nature as you seek to discover and develop a biblical and healthy self-perception.