

(This is written to give you good things to enjoy, because look again at what Paul told Timothy (1 Tim 6:17-18)! I think he was thinking of us at the time: **17 Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be conceited and not to put their hope in the uncertainty of wealth, but in God, WHO RICHLY PROVIDES ALL THINGS TO ENJOY. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and ready to share...**) The following ice breaker is just a starter for your group. The message comes after the second bar. Please enjoy!)

CROWD BREAKER: Think of this week's news. Do you know anyone working in Afghanistan? In government? In the armed services. Take a moment to share and pray. Pray for the oppressed. Pray for the Christians under persecution. Pray specifically for the persecutors, that each become a "Philippian jailer" by visitation and revelation and be baptized. —The scribe

Note: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP. The purpose is to unite, not divide; to fearlessly proclaim the freedom the gospel brings. Any part of these notes might be appropriate as a crowd breaker for your own group. The goal is to create memories from Sunday that will serve for a long time. BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study. This study is also a great devotion, taken slowly through the week.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions raised by Pastor Mark's message from this Sunday. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.**

What changes when the Word comes before any other media, social, news or otherwise? What happens when we live out our priorities by our own choices?

Part 1. How to live:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

What does that even mean? What is the difference between “doing” a sacrifice and “being” a sacrifice? What do you think the Romans are thinking, reading this for the first time? What are you thinking? If you’re a living sacrifice, how much of YOU is left? How do you do this?

2And do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Is this possibly an answer to the last question? How does that work? How do you “prove” God’s will? What do “the patterns of this world” look like? What might work better?**

Mark says, “Our society is seeking to divide. We need to say, ‘No.’ We need to focus on what God is focusing on, and He is focusing on unity. Especially in the church.” Practically, what works for you in this?

Mark continues, “More and more people are saying, ‘Is your God real? Is Jesus real?’ And the way the Church handles some of these things, the way the church loves each other and serves each other becomes the distinguishing characteristic.” Who else said that? (Hint: John 13, beginning, “...A new commandment I give to you...”)

Part 2. How to live as a member of God’s body:

3For 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. **How does this work? How do YOU think soberly about your own gifts? What is the measure of faith? If it’s only “faith as a seed” ...what is the potential? What does it take to reach potential? (Hint: Look back at the first verse.)**

4For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. **How do you recognize that each has a unique and special gift? If you have had children, describe how you learned that each child was unique and different. Does this help?**

Take a moment and look up 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

12The body is a unit, though it is composed of many parts. And although its parts are many, they all form one body. So it is with Christ. 13For in one Spirit we were all baptized

into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given one Spirit to drink.

14For the body does not consist of one part, but of many. **15**If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16**And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17**If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

18But in fact, God has arranged the members of the body, every one of them, according to His design. **19**If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20**As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you." **22**On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23**and the parts we consider less honorable, we treat with greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with special modesty, **24**whereas our presentable parts have no such need.

But God has composed the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, **25**so that there should be no division in the body, but that its members should have mutual concern for one another. **26**If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Talk about the detail Paul includes here. Talk about the importance Paul ascribes to this idea. Why do you think that is? What do these passages make you think? What is Paul saying about diversity? How does this solve the controversies that are being argued today?

6Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; **7**or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; **8**he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Take a moment to talk about each of these "gifts." How do they ALL become supernatural in God's hand? Who is inspiring each? Now look up Paul's conclusion in 1 Cor

12:27-31 **27**Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it. **28**And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, and those with gifts of healing, helping, administration, and various tongues. **29**Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30**Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? **31**But eagerly desire the greater gifts. **Match these gifts with those Paul mentioned in Romans 12. What is the conclusion in verse 31? Is any gift fully developed from the beginning? Why is your own desire important? Why "eagerly"?**

Part 3. The mark of a true Christian:

In first Corinthians, Paul's next chapter, Chapter 13, is the "love chapter". Look at his next word in Romans 12.

9Let love be without hypocrisy. **Why does love follow his discussion of diversity in the body. How is the church measuring up in this department?**

Look how Paul offers practical ideas here: Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. **10**Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving

preference to one another; **11**not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; **12**rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; **13**distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. ***How did he do? Take time to look at each suggestion. Can you think of other ideas? What strikes you from this list?***

Paul thought of other ideas: 14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ***Is this easy? Or difficult? What makes it difficult? What did Jesus say about this? (In terms of your enemies? How much choice did Jesus give us on this?)***

15Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. **16**Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. ***How does this work? How does this fit into Mark's idea of "honoring one another? What strikes you from this list? Why does Mark call this "...the mark of a 'TRUE' Christian"?***

Paul thought of other ideas. How did he do this time? 17Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. **18**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ***How are we doing on this level? What are the roadblocks to living peaceably with all?***

Paul is not done. Look at the rest of his list": 19Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. **20**Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. ***A teacher friend said when a student was misbehaving, and showing disrespect, that student became his target for a kinder response. Invariably, the student would become that teacher's friend. Mark said, "I'd hope my actions will win this person over." Why would that work, according to what Paul says here? Remember in Chapter 2, Paul said, "It's the goodness of God that leads to repentance." How does that fit here? Think of ways to work this out. How do you KNOW when evil is overcome with good?***

What needs to change? What does the Holy Spirit need to do in your life to make this work? How can we pray for each other as a group? How do we navigate these days and the days ahead?

What is your biggest takeaway? Take time to share. What is the next step? Take time to pray for one another. Be blessed.

Follow the Truth wherever He leads you. He has a Name: Jesus. What is your next step? —the scribe