

<b>Series:</b> Romans	<b>Reference:</b> Romans 15:18-21	<b>Title:</b> Self Image	<b>Date:</b> 2.5.17
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
How we view ourselves in Christ dictates our priorities which lead to what we do to bring glory to His name. Paul saw himself as a Priest bringing the living sacrifice of the Gentiles to the alter of God. How do we view ourselves in order to participate in the calling God has upon our lives to the nations?			

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

Close your eyes for a moment - picture yourself in your minds eye. How do you view yourself? Are you nice to be around? Pleasant? Successful? Powerful? Do people like you? Are you lazy? A procrastinator? Are you considerate? Kind? Rude? Dishonest? Are you just a robot trudging to work, then home to sleep & repeat?

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins said, “Whatever you hold in your mind on a consistent basis is exactly what you will experience in your life.” Which I take to mean that how I view myself dictates my reality. If I think of myself as successful, I’ll be successful. If I view myself as loser, I’ll be loser.

Is that really true? Well, yes & no. If I am 5’4” & 125 lb., without an athletic bone in my body, visualizing myself as an Eagles nose guard will do no good. Plenty of people have failed dreams; those who’ve imagined themselves successful, yet never found success in life. But there’s some truth to what Tony Robbins says, otherwise he wouldn’t make 30 million dollars annually - although I’d caution how much we buy into his message. There’s something about the fact that If I feel confident then I present myself confidently. If I feel self-conscious I come off as unconfident. But that’s common sense.

But viewing yourself in a right healthy manner in line with what is true about yourself is a helpful thing. *Last week we ended with Paul’s view of himself when speaking of God he said...He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit <sup>17</sup>Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.*

In Paul’s minds eye he’s a priest bringing the offering of the Gentiles before God. We know the priest entered the Temple & made sacrifice for the people. Paul’s equating himself with that priest & the Gentile nations as the sacrifice which bring pleasure to God. Self-image is important. Tony Robbins and other self improvement gurus teach you to see yourself as something in order to be able to sell yourself, be successful & move forward. Paul saw himself as a great priest of the Gospel of Christ, bringing people to God’s alter as a living sacrifice to him. But it wasn’t just a power of positive thinking trick, this ministry was given to Paul by God himself.

Imagine if you viewed yourself in a similar way. A priest in service to Christ, introducing those who don’t yet know Him to the King of kings! Because a priest is a bridge builder between man & God; a mouthpiece of the divine Word. What if you felt every mundane

moment of your life wreathed of divine importance! Every little thing pregnant with Christlike purpose & potential.

Last week I shared how I went to Lampung & felt like I didn't know anything until I realized how much God had prepared me? God has prepared & empowered us all for the work of the ministry. He's commanded us to be ready to give account of why we believe...<sup>1</sup> Peter 3:15, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.* And he's empowered us with the Holy Spirit, and even when we find ourselves in trouble he says in Mark 13:11, *do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*

But like CS Lewis said, *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."*

That quote can be applied to the notion of salvation, however I think it can also be applied to our Christian walk. So often we journey along not viewing ourselves or the plan God has for us in the way that He would have us view it. We're distracted making mud pies in the slum, when there's so much more joy out there to be had. It's like we've been playing video games in our parents basement until we're 35. When all the while the adventurous world turns outside our doors.

We've believed the lie that our video games bring more adventure than anything else we can experience in reality. So we forgo the joys of love & intimacy. Or a glass of red wine because we're satisfied with Miller Light in the basement. We exchange the light of the sun for the glow of our TV screen. And we certainly don't even get close to living the risk which is a life of faith. Hudson Taylor once said, "Unless there's an element of risk in our exploits for God there's no need for faith."

Kim & I were speaking this week in our kitchen. she said she's praying for a heart of evangelism. That she's far too easily satisfied to just never talk to people about Christ. Since it's much nicer to be liked, and to bring Jesus into a conversation means I may not be. To not ruffle the feathers, or only do the things which fit the cultural narrative is all too tempting - but Christ calls us to witness, and our experience of Him should fuel the fire to do so.

You've heard me say before, everything's spiritual. And if we truly believe that, then keeping your house neat, and loving your neighbor well become acts of worship. Going to work or walking next door to borrow sugar is your mission field. Taking a walk & listening to the birds is like listening to a choir. Giving to a need becomes an act of praise. A meal becomes an exaltation of God's providence. Kissing & loving your wife well become reflections of the church & its relationship to Jesus. A conversation becomes a prayer. It's like having the golden touch, everything you touch turns into

something divine. Every interaction means something. You're ambassadors, and suddenly your life is filled with a greater purpose - and you learn to speak of Jesus, and what He alone has done in you! Like Paul in the next few verses...

*<sup>18</sup>I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— <sup>19</sup>by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.”*

Paul brags on what Christ has done through him in three things 1) Gentiles came to faith, 2) signs & miracles accompanied his ministry, and 3) he's preached the entire 1,400 miles from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which is in the present-day Serbia/Croatia area. In sandals mind you.

1400 miles is almost the distance of the Pacific coast trail from Mexico to Canada up through California. 1400 miles is a little more than half the Appalachian trail which is 2200 miles long spanning fourteen states from Georgia to Maine. Kim & I backpacked the John Muir trail this summer, a fraction of that distance at 240 miles.

Paul was devoted to his calling! The Gospel changes people, when it truly gets a hold of you, it becomes everything. Not just for you, but also for others around you. But Paul takes no credit in all he accomplished. Christ did it through him. People change when the Gospel gets into them.

John Wesley was an uptight intellectual pastor & missionary until he got scared in a storm on a ship from America to England where he noticed a bunch of Moravian Christians peacefully praying throughout the trip.

When he returned to England he wrote, *“I went to America to convert the Indians; But O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say to die is gain...I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it...O who will deliver me from this fear of death?”* He realized at this point that his religion was based on his works, his intellect & what he could do to reach God. It was a personal religion that served well to comfort him, but had no use in a great time of need. His religion was worthless, ethereal & unreal; it had no teeth. Exactly what Paul's been preaching in Romans.

Back in England he was invited to a Moravian gathering & wrote of the experience, *“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”*

This was John's conversion experience; it changed him. His preaching. Priorities. Everything. Over the next 50 years he road horseback 250,000 miles across that countryside preaching over 42,000 sermons on salvation by faith & published 233 books. His sermons where no longer the strict Methodist teaching of intellectualism, but where filled with the Grace & Love of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit & notions of forgiveness & reconciliation to God!

When he was refused the pulpit at his own dead fathers' church for lack of acceptance to his message, he promptly went to the graveyard & stood on his fathers' tombstone & preached 8 full nights on salvation by grace. Afterwards he went home and told his dying mother what had happened, they say she died with a smile on her face. At the age of 86 he preached 100 sermons in 60 towns in 9 weeks! But he didn't only preach. He involved himself in legal & prison reform, the abolition of slavery, civil rights & popular education. His last act was to write a letter to William Wilberforce who was fighting in the Parliament to abolish slavery. The Gospel was centrally important to Paul & John Wesley, and both would give credit to Christ for all that was done through them.

I stand in awe of such great men of faith. Some of these guys do so much, but all credit is always given to Christ - maybe they know something we don't. I'm more like the Little Leaguer who put all his sixty pounds into a swing, barely connects & the ball dribbles out to the pitcher. But through a series of fumbles, errors & overthrows I somehow get to home plate & score! And what do I say? "That's the first home run I ever hit in my whole life!"

We step to the plate for Jesus, barely tip the ball, but he arranges for us to get all the way to home plate - and we take all the credit! But not these guys! If Paul had been someone else, he would've been insufferable. He had a lot to brag about - being stoned almost to death then getting up & walking back into the city! Walking 1400 miles to preach the Gospel. Imprisoned. Shipwrecked. John Wesley, 250,000 miles on horseback, 233 books, 100 sermons in 60 towns in 9 weeks at 86 - that takes devotion - but we have to remember that credit goes to the empowerment of Christ in them.

They didn't see these things as something to brag about, rather this was simply life in Christ for them. Paul made this very clear to the Galatians: "*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (6:14). He also told the Colossians that Christ "*is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy*" (1:18). Christ was simply everything to Paul.<sup>1</sup> And that's why he saw the need to take this message to places unknown...

*<sup>20</sup>It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. <sup>21</sup>Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."*

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 289–290.

Paul's heart was to take the Gospel to every corner of the globe; to all nations; all people groups. Notice Illyricum was all the way up in what we now see as the Serbian/Croatian area, far from Jerusalem - he was taking the Gospel to all the Gentile people groups who'd never heard. He's much like CT Studd who said, "*Some wish to live within the sound of a chapel bell; I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell!*" Paul, we can say he had a specific calling on his life. However, he's also made it clear throughout all his writings that this is also a corporate general call of the church from the Scriptures.

In all this rhetoric about unreached people groups in our study of Romans, it could almost feel like another church planted in America is not needed - that we should only be focusing our efforts on those unreached of the world. That if you're not a missionary going to the unreached you're not really living the Gospel. I would NOT say that to be true however. We're called to be both about all those nations, but also about our neighbors.

For instance, if we plant a church in an unreached people group we hope that they grow & evangelize their own people. Paul expected the same for the church in Rome, Corinth, or Philippi. The church is always called to evangelize our own neighbors. And sometimes churches become outdated, irrelevant, myopic, and they need to die off & be reborn in a culture in order to have further impact. So, church planting in America is still needed, but the issue is there's a great imbalance in the work going on among unreached people groups, and also a great lack of biblical understanding of our call to reach them.

For instance, 81% of the world's Muslims, Hindu's & Buddhists don't even personally know a Christian. 87% of our giving goes to work among already Christian people groups. 12% goes to people groups within reach of the gospel, but have not yet responded. 1% goes to work among unreached people groups, which is about 42% of the world's population. For Muslims alone, there are about 3500 people groups in the world, 2900 of which are unreached. David Platt has rightly said, "A soft drink company has done a better job getting brown sugar water to the nations than the church of Jesus Christ has done in getting the Gospel to them."

I think McDonalds at one point wanted a restaurant within 10 minutes of every person on earth or something ridiculous like that! What if the Church had a plan for a church available to every 1000 people on the earth?

I remember while in Indonesia, I became painfully aware that the local church in Bandar Lampung which was made up of Chinese & Javanese Christians had no desire whatsoever to evangelize the Muslim Lampungese which surrounded them. As a matter of fact they vehemently opposed it in many cases.

That was due to fear of what Muslims would do if they approached them. A very real well founded fear for all Christians across the Muslim world. Since reprisals for evangelization efforts were often swift & violent. Thousands of churches had been

burned in Indonesia, thousands of Christians killed & abused. But the call on the Church is to deny ourselves, not to react in fear, but in faith.

That is why for the Christian Church we want to welcome the foreigner, despite the very real threat that some of them would have nefarious intent - we love our enemies, and we want to bless those who curse us. And we want to bind up the broken hearted, and feed the poor, even when it means risk for us - because like Jesus said on the Cross, "Forgive them, they know not what they do." And as it says in Matthew 10:28, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.* We serve a God who brings life.

I was blessed to meet a man this week, I'll call him Jim for security reasons. He's a Syrian born Christian & heads up an organization which oversees & partners with 30 churches in Syria. He travels back & forth there to encourage, train, and provide for their needs in their frontline ministry. As you can imagine, after all that has happened in Syria in recent times, and with Christians being murdered, or run out, there may be little desire in the Christian churches to reach their Muslim neighbors with the Gospel.

Jim felt they needed some encouragement, so he put together a gathering of churches in Damascus. Led by their pastors, thousands of Syrian Christians gathered praying 'Korean style' (explain). Then one pastor at the mic started praying for all their Muslim neighbors, everyone fell silent. He went on for a very long uncomfortable & awkward 5 minutes interceding for the salvation & blessing upon on the same people who instilled such fear & killed so many of their family members. Slowly though, people started to understand, they're Christians, they love their enemies & pray for those who persecute them. They slowly began to join in, until the whole place was filled with a cacophony of voices interceding for the Syrian Muslim world. They were developing a heart for the nations as they swam in the middle of these unreached peoples - not building just on the Christian foundation, but taking the Gospel where Christ was not yet known.

Jim also reports now that many Muslims in Syria are leaving Islam, becoming disillusioned; choosing agnosticism or atheism since they see what Islam does, and how it hurts, subjugates & kills. But many are coming into the church to explore what it means to follow Christ - the problem is that 60% of Christians have fled Syria, and the remaining 40% are having trouble fielding all the people!

Six:Eight was planted since at the time there was no place a t-shirt & shorts wearing person who'd never experienced high church liturgy could go on the Main Line. We were seeking to reach a forgotten crowd of people. I think we've done well at that, and as we continue to do so, we also want to extend our reach out to the unreached of the world in prayer, giving, and encouragement. We don't want to build on someone else foundation, and we hope that "those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

So, let's pray to that end.

### Questions for CG Leaders

1. If Paul views himself as a priest bringing the offering of the Gentiles to God, how do you view yourself?
  1. Is it a positive or negative image?
  2. What is your passion?
  3. What is most important in life?
2. Look over the verses on the following page & discuss how we're to view ourselves in light of our relationship to Jesus.
3. How important is it for you to get credit for what you do in life?
  1. Do you see Jesus working in & through you?
  2. If not, how would you like to see that happening?
4. How do the following two verses make you feel?
  1. **1 Peter 3:15**, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*
  2. **Mark 13:11**, *do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*
5. When you listen to CS Lewis say, *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased...."*
  1. How does that make you feel? Are you the kid in the slum, or at the beach?
  2. Do you feel like you haven't fully given yourself over to living a risk filled faith?
  3. Have you considered your own calling in Christ? If so, what would you say it is?

# Who I Am In Christ

*"How can two walk together unless they agree?" Amos 3:3*

You need to know who you are in Christ so that you can live an abundant life with Jesus. The more you *agree* with God about your identity in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your God given identity. Learn to see yourself as God sees you. Accept what God says about you and become the whole person you are meant to be. Understanding who you are in Christ will give you a strong foundation to build your life on. Your identity doesn't depend on something you do or have done. Your true identity is who you are in Christ. When you are in Christ you are a new creation, the old has passed away. It's time to stop living out of who people say you are and take hold of the truth of God's word.

- I am loved - 1John 3:3
- I am accepted - Ephesians 1:6
- I am a child of God - John1:12
- I am Jesus' friend - John 15:14
- I am a joint heir with Jesus, sharing His inheritance with Him - Romans 8:17
- I am united with God and one spirit with Him - 1 Corinthians 6:17
- I am a temple of God. His spirit and life are in me - 1 Corinthians 6:19
- I am a member of Christ's body - 1 Corinthians 12:27
- I am a Saint - Ephesians 1:1
- I am redeemed and forgiven - Colossians 1:14
- I am complete in Jesus Christ - Colossians 2:10
- I am free from condemnation - Romans 8:1
- I am a new creation because I am in Christ - 2 Corinthians 5:17
- I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved - Colossians 3:12
- I am established, anointed, and sealed by God - 2 Corinthians 1:21
- I do not have a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and a sound mind - 2 Timothy 1:7
- I am God's co-worker - 2 Corinthians 6:1
- I am seated in heavenly places with Christ - Ephesians 2:6
- I have direct access to God - Ephesians 2:18
- I am chosen to bear fruit - John 15:16
- I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house - 1 Peter 2:5
- I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God by which I share His nature - 2 Peter 1:4
- I can always know the presence of God, He never leaves me - Hebrews 13:5
- God works in me to help me do the things He wants me to do - Philippians 2:13
- I can ask God for wisdom and He will give me what I need - James 1:5
- I have been justified - Romans 5:1
- I am assured that God works all things out for good - Romans 8:28

This list is not exhaustive, there is so much more! Simply choose to believe what God says about you. Try reading the above list every day for a month, preferably out loud. The more you know who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will reflect your true identity; "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:2. To walk with Jesus you need to know and believe who you are in Him. Understanding your identity in Christ is crucial to your walk with Him. The best way to renew your mind and experience transformation is by knowing, thinking, and speaking who you are in Christ. Train yourself to say the same things that God says in His word about you.