

I went to the Apple Store in Christiana Mall a couple of weeks ago. Correction: I went to the temporary Apple Store that faces the Christiana Mall parking lot. A new, improved Apple Store was taking shape inside the mall. Just down the Mall from the new, improved Apple Store, I had a look at the new Microsoft Store. It was nowhere as exciting as the Apple Store. I thought it was more about video games, a few laptops, and some smart phones than the coolest stuff on the planet.

I also like Best Buy in Concord Mall. You can get most if not all Apple products there. There's usually a buzz in the store. Of course, it's much bigger than the Apple Store. They have the Geek Squad ready to solve all your computer mysteries. They sell PCs and TVs and video games. They sell Samsung and Apple and Toshiba and Hewlett-Packard products. You have to go to a checkout counter to buy your tablet or computer.

In the Apple Store you have true believers. Everyone speaks the same language, wants the same stuff, shares the same excitement, and they are young. At Best Buy the people are just shopping. They are suburban soccer moms, who seem as bewildered by the digital revolution as by their teenage kids. They need the Geek Squad.

That's how the secular world thinks. Is that how you choose a church? Is the right church the one that just feels right with the least inconvenience to your busy life? Is the right church the young church with a buzz and the coolest music, or is it the old church with the venerable hymns? Are you one of those people who say they are not into organized religion? Maybe you are a church hopper, always looking for the right singles group or children's program or preaching. You shy away from commitment to a local congregation the way young men today shy away from marriage. The coming storm is going to sweep all that away like a tin cup in a tornado.

### **Transformation**

I'd like to defy all such thinking about the Church that I just described with this inescapable challenge: You disrespect Christ, if that's how you think about the Church, because Christ loved the Church so much that He gave up His life for the Church. Last Sunday, we reflected together on Romans 12:2: **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. Do not conform** means to resist. **The pattern of this world** means anything in this world that pushes you away from Christ and His Church. I can't think of a more flagrant way of conforming to the pattern of this world than to treat the Object of our Lord's affections like a computer store?

The Church is God's elect people. He chose us to carry forward His purpose in the world, to extend His mercy to every nation on earth. It's not about your feelings and convenience. They are secondary in this global carrier of God's purpose, this anchor of flesh and blood, your flesh and blood, "that God has sunk into the soil of creation."

Do you remember the other half of Romans 12:2? **Be transformed by the renewing** (the renovation) **of your mind.** Going from being the fixer-upper that you are to the dream house God has in mind for you to be means changing fundamental attitudes and taking up new perspectives on just about everything you ever thought about the Church.

### **Members of One Another**

Romans 12:3-8 invites those changes. This passage radically challenges the attitudes toward the Church that we absorb from our unraveling culture. It says that you

are as integral to BVBC as eyesight or good legs are integral to a healthy body. This way of thinking about the Church will renovate your mind. Let's look more closely at what the scripture says here.

Verse three starts with what sounds like moral advice for individuals. **For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.** The gist of this moral advice is clear: Don't get too big for your britches.

However, Paul was not offering moral advice for individuals. He was talking about the Church. We know that from verses 4-5, **Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.** It is in one of his favorite figures of speech.

The last seven words of verse 5 carry the weight of those verses: **each member belongs to all the others.** You and I belong to each other the way the bow and violin belong to each other – not to meet each other's needs but to create something neither can do alone. That's why Paul said in verse three **not to think of yourself more highly than you ought.**

You think too highly of yourself when you say, "I don't need these people." You think too highly of yourself when you say, "I'll get the spiritual buzz I need for the week and get out the door as fast as I can." You think too highly of yourself when you say, "I don't have anything to offer this church. It has everything." False humility isn't pretty.

This little colony of heaven is not about you, but you do have some unique contribution to make in order to sustain this congregation and make it thrive.

### Getting Specific

The apostle wrote about the unique contribution you make in verse 6. **We have different gifts.** What does that mean? Have you ever said that a person has a lot of charisma? The word "charisma" means charm. A charismatic person charms other people into loyalty and getting things done. The word translated in verse six as **gifts** is "charisma." Paul was saying that God makes you charming in a specific way that brings other people closer to God.

Verses 6-8 identify several of these charming ways of drawing people closer to God. There are many others. **If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.** **Prophesying** means preaching at its best. Preaching at its best brings the eternal word of God to bear on the present needs and circumstances of those hearing the preacher.

Verse 7: **If it is serving, let him serve.** A few of you know Zenia Jones. She and her husband were pastors in Newark, NJ. Many a Sunday night, Zenia drove her Jeep on to the mean streets of Newark in order to feed the hungry on behalf of their church. Zenia told me that she never even locked her Jeep. People knew who she was and she was there to serve the hungry, and they took care of her Jeep so that nothing ever happened to it.

On the second Thursday of the month I walk by the children's rooms near my office, and I see Jack and Peggy Lober and Carolyn Benton and Carol Beth Founds and other grandparents taking care of pre-school children, many of them babies, some of them crying inconsolably for long periods of time. They free young moms to have two

hours of adult conversation and the chance to know Jesus Christ and grow in their faith.

**If it is teaching, let him teach.** At the end of September, when Pastor Francisco Beltran preached, I walked around the dynamic classrooms of BVBC. I walked by the second grade classroom. Winnie Jones, (80 years plus and counting) was teaching. I was stunned. 25 seven year olds were quietly working. I came back by 20 minutes later, and they were all sitting quietly in rows, while Winnie told them a Bible story. I wanted to make her Teacher of the Year in the State of Delaware.

**If it is encouraging, let him encourage.** Many of you never knew George Yost. He was the self-appointed, unauthorized official greeter of this church for decades. He stood outside every Sunday in his green golf hat. When he saw you coming across the parking lot, he might break out in song: “Oh what a beautiful morning . . .” Most Sundays, I shook hands with George, and he would pull me close to him, put his hand on my shoulder and pray: “Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for Pastor Bo, Carole, David, Kristen, and Joy. Bless, help, and strengthen them. In Jesus’ name, amen. Does that cover it? Forward, ho!” Hundreds of people found encouragement from that man.

**If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously.** Do you remember seeing a number on TV that you could dial, and \$10 would automatically go to help earthquake victims in Haiti? That was a good thing. But don’t call it generosity. It might have cost you a café latte and pastry, which you didn’t need anyhow. If you want to renovate your mind, give routinely to the ministry of this church. If you really want to renovate your mind, give ten percent of your income here.

**If it is leadership, let him govern diligently.** We are blessed with leaders on the board and Property Committee and Finance Committee and Nominating Committee. But have you noticed how beautiful the islands in the parking lot are? Nature doesn’t do that by herself. 50-60 different people make them beautiful, and Dorothy Wysong pulls them together to make our landscape lovely. That’s leadership.

Jill and Simon Shute had a son who was mentally ill and who died a couple of years ago. When he could no longer live in their house, he had nowhere to go except to an institution. The Shutes went to work and formed the Delaware chapter of the National Association of Mental Illness. Today, there are homes throughout Delaware where mentally ill people who qualify can live in a neighborhood and make a contribution. That’s leadership.

**If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.** My dad in the last years of his life was suffering from terminal cancer. I never heard him complain, and I did see him encourage other people. He once visited another man with cancer and asked him how he was doing. He said, “Oh, Mr. Seth, I’m not doing so well. I’m dying of cancer.” My dad said, “So am I. Why don’t we talk and pray.” And they gave hope to each other. That’s how to show mercy.

### **Take the Plunge**

The Church does not entertain people so they will come to church instead of going to the beach. It’s not trying to curry favor with the world to prove how hip we are. We with our different gifts bear witness to the mercy of God toward sinners. I’d like to talk about the mercy of God toward sinners.

My father-in-law used to eat at a restaurant near where he worked on Maryland Avenue in center city Baltimore called Gerben's Café. They had a slogan at Gerben's: "The customer is always wrong." They had a thriving business.

Doesn't the Church say something like that? To become a member of the Church a person has to say, "I was wrong! I was wrong about God, and I was wrong about myself." The Church is not for people who finally got good enough to get in. It's for people who realize they are bad enough to get in. Jesus said, "**It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners**" – Mark 2:17. If you don't get that, you don't get the Church.

It's sinners who appreciate the mercy of God. It's sinners who are delighted to find other sinners with whom they can appreciate the mercy of God together. It's sinners who are floored to learn that they have been included among the elect and charged to carry forward God's purpose in the world. It's sinners who make the best church members, because they still have the smell of hell on their clothing, and they know they need each other to stay close to Christ and not go back there. It's sinners whom God gives unique, charming powers for helping other people stay close to Christ.

That takes us back to the headwaters of Romans 12:1: **I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy.** The letter to the Romans tells the story of God's mercy to man. **God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** – Romans 5:8. Romans 5:10: **When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** – Romans 8:32. That is the gospel, and the gospel is God's way of extending mercy to ever-widening circles of humanity.

If you have any sense that the mercy of God is meant for you; if you have any hunger to say thank you to Him in some deep way; if any stirring of devotion, any desire to please Him, then **offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual worship.**

As one who leads the way, I say to you, "Offer your body to God as a living sacrifice. Reaffirm the offer of your body to God as a living sacrifice. Don't be afraid of failure or hypocrisy. Be afraid only of being so mired in the mundane that you no longer lift up your eyes to the horizon and aspire to be what God calls you to be."

If you do that, you need to know that the Church is the canary in the coalmine that validates your devotion to God. To say, "I love Christ but not the Church" is empty. Christ died for the Church (Ephesians 5:25), and He calls for us to make sacrifices for her as well.

One powerful symbolic way of doing that is to become a formal member of BVBC. If you are interested, let us know on the Connection Card. We'll get you together and talk about what it means to be a member and what it costs to be a member.

Another powerful way of showing your devotion is to use the charm that God has placed in you to draw people to Christ.

The kingdom we pray for is coming. Let's make ready for it.