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Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Today's epistle is from Romans 12. My appreciation for the book of Romans grows by leaps and bounds. Not only does it contain the wonderful news that Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law on our behalf, and that we are therefore justified by God's grace received in faith, but it also contains some of the most uplifting statements ever uttered about how we should view ourselves and others, directives often overlooked. Let me quote from it again, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...For I say, through the grace given to me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought..."

"Not to think of oneself more highly than he ought...", one more biblical exhortation to humility.

As archaic as it may seem to many, I believe intensely that the world needs Jesus and the complete Gospel more than anything else, and as much as ever before. Jesus has never failed. But his followers through the centuries have done so much to fail. G.K. Chesterton is known for having said, "Christianity has not been tried and found to fail; instead it has never been tried." Many blame the subservience of church leaders at the time of Constantine for having corrupted and distorted Christianity, and there is some truth to that, but that does not deserve all the blame. Over the centuries, we have lost so much of our credibility, and counter-productive attempts have been made to regain it.

Why have Christians collectively failed? I feel that more than anything else, it is our collective failure to practice the biblical virtues. Whether it was power-hungry church leaders in the middle ages who engaged in war and political corruption, the Inquisition, the so-called holy wars, or modern megachurch pastors and televangelists who are wantonly greedy, all of this has contributed to weakening the credibility of the Gospel.

If we want to regain our lost influence and credibility, we must live the biblical virtues and stop compromising with sin. One of the most important virtues of

scripture is HUMILITY. Dozens of scripture passages exhort us to humility. Including today's reading from Romans.

We hear multitudes of people outside the church and in the more liberal churches talk so much about "equality." Unfortunately, most of them don't really understand what "equality" really means. I feel that one very potent, effective way to promote equality is through the practice of humility. Or as Paul said in today's reading, "not to think of oneself more highly than he ought." Humility is more easily said than done, and it is very difficult for most people. We need God's grace to transform us in this regard, and the power of his Holy Spirit to sanctify us toward the practice of the biblical virtues. It is no secret that some of us have more wealth, more education, a higher IQ, and better homes than others. I am preaching as much to myself as to anyone else. But those of us who have a higher IQ, or have more than others, must not think of ourselves as superior. The person with an IQ of 130 should think of oneself as though he or she had a lower IQ, and to regard those with less intelligence as equals. Those who live in spacious homes must not regard those who live in old mobile homes as inferior. Above all, those of lower estates are just as much God's image as those of exalted estate. We all have human needs and human emotions. There is a natural desire for people to see themselves as superior to others, but we must nail our carnal natures to the Cross of Christ and live in submission to the Word of God.

Again, many who regard themselves as highly egalitarian do not understand what equality really means, and often practice class discrimination and do not treat most others as their equals. This can be highly subtle. A pastor of a church that I formerly attended once had disparaging remarks about the charismatic movement, as did many mainline church leaders. He remarked that the charismatic movement appealed chiefly to so-called marginal people. My experience would bear that out, but I felt that its appeal to the marginalized was a strength rather than a weakness. The charismatic meeting that I attended for three years consisted chiefly of working-class people, millworkers, janitors, and a few Native Americans. These people felt very much at home in these meetings. Many mainline church leaders denounced the charismatic movement as not being intellectually respectable. This, in my opinion, was class discrimination and a lack of humility. In other words, they were saying, "I'm intellectually respectable and they are not." This shows that discrimination can be very subtle. Class

discrimination, though the news media rarely or never denounce it, is as wrong as any other form of discrimination.

Jesus once said that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without approaching it as a little child. Not surprisingly, some secular humanists have denounced Jesus as “anti-intellectual” for this statement. These people have it all wrong! Jesus was not preaching anti-intellectualism. This would have been a form of exclusion! God loves intellectuals as much as anyone else, or at least I hope so! What Jesus was actually preaching was merely that intellectuals must humble themselves, just as everyone else must do. Those of high estate, including the wealthy, the successful, and others who have excelled must be humble, and treat others as their equals and not think of themselves as superior.

Later in Romans 12 we read, “Have the same mind toward all. Mind not high things, but condescend to those of low estate.” The term “condescend” now means almost the opposite of what it meant in the days of King James. It now means to treat others as inferior, but it formerly meant “to deal or associate with others of lower estate, deign.” By “deign” I don’t mean someone from Denmark but D-E-I-G-N, to associate with those whom one would consider beneath one’s own dignity. That’s what “condescend” used to mean, and what it means in Romans 12. Those that would consider beneath our dignity are neighbors for whom Christ died. They are equal to us as God’s image. God loves them. Many of them have made decisions that made their lot worse. We are to respond with compassion and love, not judgment and condemnation. And to be humble in how we view ourselves.

Today’s reading from Romans tells us also not to conform to this world, but to be transformed. It is no secret that our major cultural outlets, including the news and entertainment media and Hollywood are heavily dominated by secular humanists who are highly hostile to God and the Gospel, and constantly attack Christian values through their widespread promotion of obscenities and various forms of immoralities. We need a critical, analytical mind in evaluating the cultural institutions through the lens of scriptural faith and virtue. We are called to be distinctively different.

Hebrews tells us that it is impossible to please God without faith. This will offend many unbelievers, but it is God’s unalterable truth.

And, once again, our supreme model is our Savior Jesus Christ. Today's reading from John presents a very human, submissive Christ, who, though equal to God as God Incarnate, was subject to the merely human Joseph and Mary. Who, according to Philippians, did not regard Equality to God as something to grasp and assert but emptied himself out as a servant.

Today's recessional hymn is entitled "Christ is the world's true light." I really believe that! We have a very precious, inestimable gift and treasure in the Person of Christ, something that we need to share with the world. May we reflect his glory and purity!

TRINITY