

Romans 12:3-8 (NKJV)

3 For 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.

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

6 Having 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.

We looked at verses 4 and 5 last week.

There are a couple of observations I wanted to add before moving on.

First we must notice that the instructions are given so that we will avoid **wrong views of ourselves and our importance**. There is so much said in our day about an inordinately positive self-image. It has largely come as a result of the belief that there is no God. Since man is out here on his own with no meaning and no future, we must understand how he can maximize his time here. He ultimately must view himself in a very positive fashion. After all, he must serve as his own god, his own judge, his own provider, so he will need to have a very high regard for himself. Essentially this self-esteem preaching has become a religious exercise. It is an expression of idolatry. And we cannot buy into it as believers.

We **as believers** must **also** have a self-image. We all see ourselves in a mirror.

We have a self and we all must think **something**. But what Paul tells us in Romans 12:3-8 is **God's will** for a Christian's self-image. We are to see ourselves as having value. But it is not primarily intrinsic value. It is not primarily the value of being the human we were born as. It is not built in. It is a **received** value. It is something that we were given by grace. It is something handed to us apart from anything we would deserve.

Boasting is excluded.

And the value does not exist in a vacuum. Our value is to be **experienced** as our usefulness to the body of Christ is **exhibited**. If we separate ourselves from the body of Christ there is no way to get a proper regard for our usefulness. The lone

Christian, according to our passage this morning, is like a foot trying to live out its own life. Think about that. How utterly useless an existence would the foot have? That is what our passage is telling us.

The Christian view is that we were **created in Christ** to be a **small** part of a **big** whole. We are not independent. We are inter-dependent. Our strength is not in our autonomy but in our interdependence. Our usefulness is not measured by how well we take care of ourselves, but how well we take care of our fellow members. And our great hope for significance is not found by looking inside of ourselves. It is found by first looking up to our God and second looking out to the needs of our members.

Maybe you had your crack at trying the world's model for significance. Well if it made you feel miserable that is good. A standard that is so untrue cannot work for a believer. We were created for better things, higher things. So if you have been trying to find value by **looking inside yourself**, or by gauging how many people are **impressed by you**, you can pretty well give that up. If you have been looking to popular opinion, living for the approval of peers to see if you have value, to see if you measure up, just give it up. If you are a believer, your value comes by grace and it is experienced by faith. It comes as a gift and is appreciated by action.

That is what we see in our text.

And oddly enough our identity does not consist of trying to be something **we are not** in order to be significant. In fact, our text forbids it. We are to be exactly who God has created and recreated us to be. We do not need to pretend. We do not have to hide. We don't need to be skinny, attractive, smart, athletic, ambitious, or any of the million things that the world evaluates people by. No. We may have what might seem to us to **be meager gifts**, but they were given to us specifically by God, not for me, but for the Church He has put me in. If He took the time and effort to pick it out, who am I to criticize it? Think about that.

It is called a gift. If God were to hand you a sweater and He were to tell you, I would like you to wear this sweater whenever you are cold. I made it for you and I want you to have it. Do you really think you would criticize that sweater? No, you would be glad because you would know every time you put that sweater on that you are doing exactly what your Lord would want you to do. You would know it was His will.

And if you knew God gave a different sweater to a brother or sister of yours, would you criticize it when they put it on? You wouldn't if you loved the Lord of the sweater. Your heart would be thankful that they too were given this lovely

gift from God. And would you think you were better than your brother or sister if you liked your sweater more than theirs? That would be utterly stupid.

Don't you see that is the essence of what we are talking about in our text? The Christian has a world view and a self-view that starts and ends with God. Our value comes from what we have been given. And as we use what we have been given we experience our place in this world. We see ourselves as God sees us. And we learn to appreciate our place because we are a small servant of a great Lord.

And notice too how the church is described. The church is not described as a machine. It is described as a living organism. A machine can be turned off and it is in as good of a state as it was when it was running. It can exist with no activity and then suddenly there can be lots of activity. My chainsaw does not need the carburetor when it is off. It needs no gas in the tank. It can sit in my mini-barn until it is time to use it and it is just fine.

That is not true of an organism. If an organism has no movement, it isn't just in off-mode. It is dead. If the heart isn't pumping and the lungs aren't breathing it is in a very serious state. Well the church is described as an organism. Many of its parts are vital to its survival. The hand won't be working and the feet won't be walking if the heart isn't pumping. Do you understand **that** is how the church is described? What that means is that if you are a believer and God planted you in this church, this church is dependent upon the part that God has called you to play. And that part will not be played as you focus on you. It will only be played as you focus on God and His people.

There are at least two points to get from that.

- 1- Your part is important, no matter how you might view it. And
- 2- Your part is essential for the body to operate as it should. If you are not carrying out your part you can rest assured that other body members are suffering without something they could surely use.

Keep in mind too that Christ placed His church wherever He placed it for a reason. He wants it to display His fingerprints to the world. Scripture tells us that the world will know we are Christians, not by our love for God, but by our love for each other. God wants to show off what He does in this world and the church is His billboard. It shows what happens when He gets a hold of a bunch of people. Now we need to look at ourselves and ask, are we doing the things that display that Glory to the world. I think it was Martyn Lloyd Jones who said that "if we are not manifesting activity for which the body was created, there is something wrong with us."

Now let's look at our text.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:

OK, we start off with difference. And this difference is a **good** difference. It is a **God ordained** difference. God wants us to play different parts in His plan. Isn't there something cool about that? Mark helped me replace a spring in my shotgun. The spring I bought is essentially the same as the spring that went bad. The part is the same. One wore out. The next one fits and does the same job. And if I bought 50 more they would all be the same. (I don't think Carla would think much of it though.)

But that is not true of the members of the body. We are all crafted to play a differing part. We are specifically designed and assigned to play a part that no one else is designed to play. Isn't that remarkable? And that part to play has been assigned to us all by the grace of God. He took people who were useless to His plan and He made us useful. He took people who could do nothing in His service and gave us a part to play. If you are ever tempted to say that you as a believer have no value, keep in mind that you are believing a lie. It is possible that you are not living out your usefulness, but by faith you could be. Our problems never come from how we are designed, they come from our unwillingness to submit to the head.

So we see we have a gift or gifts. They differ from everyone else's. They are given to us intentionally by God. And they are given to us even though we could never deserve them.

And what is the next thing Paul says?

let us use them:

Do you know why he said that? Because **he needed** to say that. Our flesh always looks at everything and asks, what's in it for me? But the odd thing about the gifts is they are not given **to us for us**. They are given **to us for each other**. In fact having a gift will often cost you personally. Suppose you have the gift of encouragement. You will likely get calls in the middle of the night by people who need encouraged. And the gift of teaching? You'll be asked to teach. You'll be expected to teach. The gift of prophesy... you'll be expected to say things people don't want to hear.

Paul knew what we are like. We need to remember what Christ did for us. We need to remember what is in store for us for eternity. Then from that perspective we will use the gift. It is in the light of God's mercies that we act in obedience to Him.

Are you reaching out to those around you? Are you going outside of your comfort zone and doing things for **the people you know** and **the needs that God brings to your mind**? That is where it starts.

Ask yourself this question. If others in the church were as committed as I am to the good of the body, would the church be better off or worse off? That might help us put our commitment into perspective.

Now let's move on in the text.

I am not going to do a full length study on the gifts. It is a worthy study but not one I want to venture into right now. We will just paint a broad stroke and try to make direct application to our lives.

Paul said- use the gift. And he starts with Prophecy.

if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

What is prophecy?

The quick answer is that prophesy is normally understood as foretelling and forth-telling. What this means is that often in scripture prophesy is foretelling some future event. But it is also simply conveying a message that God wanted spoken. Before we go further I think it is important to look at something. When Mike was preaching through Acts he preached a sermon about the New Testament change in the gift of prophecy.

In the Old Testament when the people needed to hear from God, God would speak through the prophets. He would often cause them to go into a trance like state and they would then receive God's message or speak God's message. Now keep in mind that it would have been very hard for the audience to test to see if this message was really from God. But they needed to act as if it was from God until they knew better. These words from God were sporadic and somewhat rare. They were very precious. They were absolutely necessary. And the message carried the absolute authority of God.

It is no wonder then that in the Old Testament if someone who **spoke for God**, if someone claimed **that kind of authority**, and it was discovered that they were wrong, that there was any error in what they said, that they should be put to death. Think about it. It would be in our day like someone who was writing **their own Bible** and presenting it as if God's authority were behind the message. It would be difficult to imagine a more serious offense against God than to lie in His stead. Those lies could be devastating to His people. When it came to those who spoke for God, there were no degrees. They were either on or off. They were

100% right in what they said representing God or they were 100% evil. So if they were discovered to be false, which would be discovered by them being wrong at any point of prediction, they were to be killed.

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament type of prophets. And he said that Christ was greater than he. And Christ said that all believers will be greater in significance in some way than John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:7-11 (NKJV)

7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Then Christ came to our planet and spoke the words of God. There has never been anyone like Christ who spoke the words of God all His life. He was essentially ON all His life. He represented God accurately every minute of His existence.

John 1:14-18 (NKJV)

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' "

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Then came the apostles and a few who were given the task of writing scripture. Again, when they spoke for God they were 100% correct. But they were not like Christ. They were just as likely to make a mistake **the day after** they wrote one of these encouraging letters to the church. We see evidence of mistakes that Peter made in his decision making in a letter by Paul. But when these men wrote

scripture, scripture tells us that it was God Breathed, that it was driven like a wind filling a sail on a large boat.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We are left with the question, what now? We see mention of prophesy. But how should we regard it in the New Testament church? Could one of us write a letter and demand that it be added to scripture because we wrote it prophetically?

Some people have thought such a thing. But no. Scripture gives insight into the significant change that prophesy takes on in the New Testament.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (NKJV)

19 Do not quench the Spirit.

20 Do not despise prophecies.

21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

In I Corinthians 14 we see this

1 Corinthians 14:29-33 (NKJV)

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Do you notice the significant change? The first passage I read said test all things. The second says let the others judge. This is different than how a person would receive a prophetic message in the Old Testament. You would have very little to judge the message by but what actually happened, by what the outcome was. But in the New Testament, there is an ebb and flow. You may have a person who stands up and starts prophesying, but then begins to say something that is not true or misses the mark. Then the next person who has this truth revealed to him would stand up and keep going. Notice that Paul did not instruct the people seated to shoot the one standing or to stone him outside the city. What Paul tells us shows us how the gift had changed. In the last days we have the full cannon of scripture. Now we have the ultimate authority on all things. So we are able to appeal to scripture to help the prophets conform their message to the

truth. At one point they may speak something directly revealed from God. Their next sentence might be something that comes from faulty reasoning about what they just said. And it is the job of the people seated to test all that. And they are to test it with the use of scripture.

Can you see the change from the Old Testament to the New regarding prophesy? Now lets move on to look at what Prophecy is and how it is used. Mike in his sermon wasn't sure and posed his opinion. But he stated it as such.

Martyn Lloyd Jones makes a distinction regarding prophesying in that he says prophesying doesn't have anything to do with studying. One does not need to study to prophesy. All one needs is to receive a message from God and convey it to hearers. Mr. Jones makes the point that this sort of thing can happen to people who don't even have the gift. Think about your own life here. Have you ever been in a conversation and you feel you were given the perfect thing to say to minister to a person? You sensed that it did not come from you. That was very possibly prophecy. I know as I preach there are times that I end up saying something I didn't study but feel compelled to say. It is possible that is prophecy. It is simply a message given to us from God to speak to another. Frankly, because of its abuses in some circles I would prefer that this is not the case. But my preferences are insignificant. This is what scripture says.

Much of this opinion about prophecy is inferred from I Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:29-30 (NKJV)

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

Paul was telling the Corinthians how to order their worship service. He told them how those receiving prophesy should handle themselves. He does not use words describing something one would discover or figure out. He uses words having to do with Divine revelation. This Greek word is used **often** in the New Testament and **always** refers to things that are not known and then are made known. It never refers to something figured out.

Now most often these revelations in I Corinthians were regarding local needs and directions and circumstances. This is not talking about the type of revelation that was written in scripture for everyone. Again, these things prophesied in I Corinthians were not be written down and added to scripture.

Another example was in the book of Acts when the Ephesian elders met with Paul and one of them prophesied to Paul about what was going to happen to him.

These are the kinds of messages that were often conveyed by people with the gift of prophecy.

In other passages about gifts, prophecy comes second in the list. The apostles come as the first gift. So we see that the gift has a great pre-eminence, but not absolute. Prophecy, when appropriately carried out, is important.

Let's look at some other passages that give us a little more information about prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:3 (NKJV)

3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

Look at this. When a person prophesies, when they preach that which they have been given to preach, this is the outcome. The messages that come from God to God's people have this effect. We need to notice that the effect is edification and exhortation even though the gift is not exhortation. The **means** of the gift is different from the **effects** of the gift. It is not unusual that God would want messages spoken that would edify the church. Even though the means that He conveys them is directly through divine revelation.

1 Corinthians 14:4-5 (NKJV)

4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

We see again that prophecy, messages given directly by God, build up and edify the church. Is that really any surprise. And I don't think it is a huge surprise that Romans doesn't mention tongues. We can see in I Corinthians that, unless used properly, the gift of tongues really does not do much for building up the church. It is a good gift, but it does not have the functionality of the ones listed in Romans. And it is much more likely to be abused.

God desires that when the Body is gathered together that there is **content for the mind**. And that is no wonder seeing that most of the spiritual work takes place in the mind.

Now look at the second portion of the verse about prophecy.

if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

In the Greek these verses are brief and to the point. They really say if your gift is prophecy, prophesy(siiii), ministering, minister, exhortation, exhort.

There is a sense that they are saying... Just do it. Do your gift. He isn't getting real philosophical about this. He is basically saying... do your job!

But look at the limitation here. It says prophecy in proportion to our faith. There are two interpretations of this verse that are the most common. And both of them could be true.

The first is that a prophet should limit his ministry to those things that he is sure about. He should only speak those things that he is certain by faith to have received by God. It is easy for flesh to enter in. Sometimes he may want to embellish a bit to get some things accomplished that he might think need accomplished. He might want to add some things that people might receive as words directly from God. But he is restricted from doing so. He is only allowed to say those things that he is sure he received from God. He can only prophecy as far as his faith will allow.

But there is also another interpretation. This one is more objective. This would emphasize the fact that the Greek actually says according to THE faith. Basically when interpreted this way it would mean that the prophet should only prophesy those things that are conforming to those things known to be true. They should stick to the bounds of known doctrine. And they must not go outside of the faith for any reason.

It is difficult to know which interpretation is best. Both are solid and are reflected other places in scriptures. So there isn't much danger with either interpretation.

We are going to quit here for today and take up the rest of the list next week.

I would encourage you to take a look at your commitment to Christ's body this week. Look at the needs you see. Is there any reason that you should not be the person to meet them? I believe that part of our giftedness comes in what we see when we look at people. Some of us might see the physical needs. Some of us might see the emotional needs. Some of us might see the spiritual needs. Some of us might notice how a person is thinking wrongly. Some of us might be encouraged by the example that some people provide. Whatever the case, I think we ought to regard it the same way housewives tend to deal with messes. They will tell their kids, if you see a mess, clean it up!

For us, if we see a need, we should do our best to meet it. Maybe that will mean putting a person who is expert at meeting the need with the person who has it. But most often it will mean us making it a point to initiate the process.

We don't need to be experts at this. I guaranty you that if Christ is in you and you start where you are, Christ will expand the use of your gift with each obedience. That is why He gave you the gift after all!