

One Body, Many Members --- Romans 12:3-6

May 24, 2020

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

Introduction

Our study in this particular section of Romans comes at a good time in the life of our church body as we go through this great trial for our country and our church. There are two foundation themes that undergird this portion of Scripture, namely humility and unity. They are both highlighted in the picture of the body of Christ that is one and yet is made up of diverse members that function in a wide variety of ways.

There are a number of important small words in these verses that are easily overlooked. One of those words is “for” found at the beginning of verses 3 and 4. “For” is important because it connects this whole section beginning in verses 1 and 2 that spoke of offering self a living sacrifice and renewing our minds. This section intertwines and builds on each other. Another small, important word that is repeated is the word “one”; “*we have many members in **one** body, we are **one** body in Christ, members of **one** another.*” So dying to self, renewing our minds, humility, spiritual gifts and the unity of the Church are all tied together.

Last week we considered an overview—a kind of systematic theology concerning pride and humility. I told you that in reality we have no reason to think highly of ourselves apart from Christ. I found a helpful passage of Scripture concerning humility.

While Paul was addressing the church in Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 said, “*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the*

world and the despised God has chosen the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29so that no man may boast before God. So for the most part, we are not many wise, mighty, noble, but we are foolish, weak, and base, so that no one may boast. So just remember this passage when you are struggling with pride.

Paul addresses pride before he continues to focus on a most vital topic in his flow of thought in the book of Romans, namely the Church and the operation of spiritual gifts producing unity in the Body of Christ. This morning I simply want to introduce to you the unity of the Church in the context of the diversity of spiritual gifts and that will be our focus for the next few Sundays.

Review

We considered verse 3 last week which emphasizes the need for humility. In verse 3, Paul mentions the word “think” twice and “having sound judgment.” These references look back to verse 2 where Paul exhorts believers to renew their minds in order to be transformed and to know the will of God. We renew our minds by consistent exposure to the Word of God. A consistent renewing of our minds in the Word of God should constantly enforce a humble spirit within us.

We saw that we are instructed in Scripture to have an accurate, biblical, self-evaluation. In light of what Paul wrote in the first 11 chapters of Romans, believers, apart from Christ, should not have high thoughts of self. I told you that this obviously touches on the whole concept of self-esteem. Christians find their identity in Christ. In Christ, I am a child of God; I am a part of the body of Christ; I am a citizen of heaven, and I am in the kingdom of Christ.

The first three chapters of Romans describe in great detail the nature of every human being apart from Christ as utterly pagan, self righteous and/or religiously bankrupt. But Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-25, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

Again . . . to have sound judgment concerning self is to apply the Gospel to your person. Apart from Christ, you are a rank rebel. In Christ (and as you lose your life for His sake), you are a child of God, a subject in His kingdom and a part of the body of Christ.

This mindset centers around humility. We considered that Paul never lost sight

of who he was before Christ intersected his life on the road to Damascus. He will even write to Timothy towards the end of his life.

1 Timothy 1:15-16 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 16Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

We saw that if you have not been humbled by the Gospel, you have not encountered the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. Humility is a key characteristic of believers. It is not about you; it is all about Christ.

We took some time to consider what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:5, “**GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**”

Peter literally writes “*God / against the haughty / arrays Himself.*” Those who display an attitude of haughtiness and arrogance toward others, and think they are a cut above everyone else, and have no patience with those who do not quite meet up to their own standard, God is against.

The picture is God dressed in battle array. He has put on His battle armor in order to resist the proud. When you are haughty or when you are unforgiving and ostracize others; or when you are bitter against someone and act proudly against them, God is against you.

If you did not listen to last week's sermon, I want to strongly encourage you to do so because it lays an important foundation of humility upon which all that follows is built. This morning, as we begin, let's re-read our text for this morning so that you will have the entirety of it fresh in your thinking.

One Body, Many Members

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

A key statement in this section is found at the end of verse 3, “. . . as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” That is a vital statement because it looks back at what Paul has said about humility and it looks forward to the subject of spiritual gifts and unity in the Church. First, it supports Paul's exhortation concerning humility. I told you last week that there are no great men and women; there is only a great God who uses men and women. You are a believer because God has so ordained that to be the case. You have nothing to boast about concerning your salvation. You were drawn by His grace, given faith and repentance, and were given new birth by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, you are given a gift to minister to the Church, not from your own ability, but by that which the Holy Spirit has given to you. The Holy Spirit has allotted to you a unique combination of gifts and a certain measure of faith to operate those gifts in order that you may humbly serve in the Church.

So we do not to think more highly of ourselves than what we ought to think because it is God who has given faith for salvation, and has allotted to us faith for serving in the Church. This reasoning is reiterated in 1 Corinthians 4:7 where Paul says in a similar context “*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*” So “*as God has allotted to each a measure of faith*” is a key statement because it reiterates the need for humility.

Second, this statement about allotted faith looks forward to the unity of the Church and the giftedness of believers in the Church to minister to one another. This speaks of the primary role of the Church in God's perfect will for you as a believer. The highest calling that you have as a believer on this earth is to minister to the Body of Christ. It is in the Church that we gather in order to be built up to go into the world and make disciples. That is your primary task for while you are on this earth. That is of first importance in God's will for you.

So before Paul goes on to speak of relationships both in the Church and outside of the Church and with the government, he first focuses our attention on a right evaluation of self and to remember that it is God who has allotted to each one faith. Paul knows that none of us will ever minister to other believers within the fellowship of the Church if our pride is in the way. He also knows our tendency to think that our gifts are more valuable than others.

This attitude of humility undergirds unity in the Church. You are to understand that the Church contains many members. We do not have all of the same gifts, and the gifts that you have are not because you are so special but because the Holy Spirit has given it to you.

John Murray says, "It is called the 'measure of faith' in the restricted sense of the faith that is suited to the exercise of this gift, and this terminology is used to emphasize the important place which faith occupies not only in our becoming members of this community but also in the specific functions performed as members of it."

So part of a genuine humility has to do with understanding the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has given you, and then to use your giftedness for the glory of Christ. This is exactly where the remainder of this paragraph is going. After teaching us in verses 4-5 that the Church is made up of many diverse members and that these members possess different spiritual gifts, Paul continues in Romans 12:6-8, "*Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, (you could say: according to the proportion of his faith) in his serving; or he who teaches, according to the proportion of his faith in his teaching; or he who exhorts, according to the proportion of his faith in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*"

So Paul begins to turn our thoughts to the Church in verses 4-5, particularly, the unity of the body of Christ in tandem with the diversity of the all the members.

4For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

It is noteworthy in light of the connection between humility and spiritual gifts mentioned here in Romans, that Paul addresses similar themes in his letter to the Corinthians. Selfishness and pride were rampant in Corinthian gatherings. In the first four chapters, Paul confronted the pride of the Corinthians that had manifested itself by divisions being prevalent in the Church. They had taken their eyes off of the centrality of Jesus Christ and the Gospel and had begun to exalt themselves. Paul warns that some of the Corinthians had become arrogant and unwilling to repent.

Arrogance and selfishness were underlying roots of sin that Paul was endeavoring to pull out. The problem of pride runs throughout 1 Corinthians manifesting itself in a variety of ways. In the climax of his solution in chapter 13, Paul says that the remedy against arrogance and pride is love. He makes a point in showing in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 that love is the opposite of everything that is associated with arrogance. Verses 4 and 5 say, "*Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act*

unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,”

So as we begin to look at what Paul says about spiritual gifts, it is important that we keep in mind that there is a consistent problem of being self-centered even in the use of spiritual gifts. In many of his letters, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts in the context of having to deal with arrogance, and selfish ambition to exalt self instead of ministering to each other. There is much confusion about the gifts in the Church today and I believe the significance of spiritual gifts has been neglected. The Church on a worldwide scale is acting much like the Corinthians did at a local level in that the emphasis is on the showy gifts. There is a lack of focus on the purpose of the gifts for edification and the building up of the body.

Before we move into verses 4 and following, I want to give you an overview of what the Bible teaches concerning spiritual gifts and the unity of the Church. We will delve deep into each gift as we go on, but I want to give you a framework and some hooks to hang your thoughts on. I want to consider spiritual gifts in general by asking and answering a number of questions: What are spiritual gifts? Who is the source spiritual gifts? What are the purposes of spiritual gifts? How do we determine what we believe concerning spiritual gifts?

As we come back together next week, we need to get our minds off of COVID and what everyone else thinks about it, and we need to focus on how each one of us can minister to others.

What are spiritual gifts? Just to give you a kind of text book definition, a spiritual gift is “an ability given to a believer that is empowered or energized by the Holy Spirit and is used in the ministry of the church.” This would differentiate between a spiritual gift in contrast to an individual's talent that may be used in the Church, such as music, but is a result of an individual's natural ability.

Who is the source of spiritual gifts? The Source of Spiritual Gifts is the Holy Spirit who gives according to His will. He has placed you specifically in the body according to His design to fulfill a specific function.

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

It is incredible to realize that the Spirit has gifted each one of you uniquely to minister to the body in a way that builds up those around you. You play an important role in the health of Grace Community Fellowship. I believe this is an emphasis that is missed in the whole discussion of whether or not some of the

miraculous gifts have ceased. We miss the thrust of the significance that each individual plays in the body.

What are the Purposes for spiritual gifts? I was thinking this last week that it is unfortunate that a subject that is designed by God to promote the unity of the Church has, in many instances, been used for the grounds of disunity. The primary purpose for spiritual gifts is for edification, building up the Church, and to promote unity.

Edification as a purpose for spiritual gifts is seen in Ephesians 4:11-16. *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”*

This passage is rich for determining the purpose of spiritual gifts. Spiritual Gifts are for: equipping, building up, unity in the faith, knowledge of Christ, stability in doctrine, speaking the truth in love, growth of the Body, and being built up in love. This all happens only as each member functions properly. All for the work of service in making disciples outside of the Church and for building up on another inside the Church.

When I was a youth living in Texas, the Houston Oilers football team acquired Earl Campbell, who was an incredible running back. He became a one man football team so much so that the big joke was that they should change the name of the team to the Houston Earlers. They only had two plays: Earl to the left or Earl to the right. As good as he was, one man cannot carry the whole team to a championship. And the same is true in the Church. All have a role to play.

Gifts are others oriented. 1 Peter 4:10 states, *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

Gifts are never given for edification of self alone. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

Spiritual gifts are given for edification and the common good of the body that the Church may be involved in reaching the lost and serving one another. Another vital purpose for spiritual gifts is the unity of the Body of Christ.

Facilitating unity in the body is another purpose for spiritual gifts. By functioning in our gift, we grow in our understanding that we need each other. When we approach this subject with an attitude of humility, we see that none of us are an island. Any of us may think that we are an island at times; but, in reality, we are not.

When people act on the false belief that they do not need the Church, they not only show their misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches about the Church, but they also rob themselves and others of the strengths that each one can provide to help out spiritually. The context of Paul speaking about spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4 is the unity of the body.

Ephesians 4:3-7 *“ . . . being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. 7But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”*

1 Corinthians 12:11-13 *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 12For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

Jesus prayed for the unity of the Church in John 17:17-23, *“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. 18As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. 22And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.”*

Jesus' desire for the Church is oneness, unity. We as a local church can manifest this best by striving to operate in our giftedness for the sake of others. We show our dependence on each other and concern for each other as we minister to one another.

What happens when the Church is unified? Jesus said, *"that the world may believe that Thou didst send me."* One of the greatest evangelistic tools that we have to impact the world is when they see a bunch of people acting categorically different than the world. The world is out for self, me, I, number one. But here is a group of people who are striving to love each other more than they love themselves. Just do a search in your bible software some time using "one another" and you will find that the Church is all about "one another." Over and over the emphasis in Scripture is benefiting others as the primary goal: love one another, be devoted to one another, serve one another, be patient with one another, be kind to one another, and forgive one another.

We are all to be involved in ministries that we may not be gifted. Just because you do not have a particular gift does not mean that those without that giftedness are not responsible to be working in that area. There are several examples of this in the Scriptures.

For example, although the gift of service is mentioned in Romans 12:7, *"...if service, in his serving."* But Galatians 5:13 says, *"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."* We are all called to be serving one another even if you do not consider yourself as gifted to serve. There are some who will be far more proficient than others. Proficient servers are examples to others are to be working towards.

Another example of this is seen in Romans 12:8 where the gift of exhortation is mentioned—*"he who exhorts, in his exhortation."* 1 Thessalonians 5:11 commands us to exercise this gift. *"Therefore encourage/exhort (same word) one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing."*

A final example is seen in the gift of evangelism. Although Ephesians 4:11 states, *"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers"*, the Great Commission commands all in the church to go and make disciples—to evangelize.

In the Scriptures, you can find a command to everybody within the Church that corresponds with each of the gifts. Those who have a specific spiritual gift will have a heightened ability in that area which demonstrates to others how they

are to operate in that area.

Spiritual gifts are for edification and building up and for promoting unity in the body. We operate our gifts for the benefit of others and we ourselves benefit from them. Spiritual gifts are unique abilities given by the Holy Spirit for the ministry of the Church.

I want to close by considering how to determine what we believe about spiritual gifts. The truths of Scripture, biblical doctrine, biblical theology provide the basis for our experiences, not the other way around. Experience does not determine our theology. The truth concerning spiritual gifts is founded on the clear teachings of Scripture, not on one's experience.

Following is an example of experience determining theology. In 1982, a medical missionary, Dr. Percy Collett, claimed that he was caught up in the third heaven in the same way as the Apostle Paul. Collett claims that he was able to speak face to face with the Holy Spirit.

Collett said everything that God created on earth is in heaven (dogs, cats, horses). Only these are perfect animals, i.e. dogs don't bark. He also claimed that you do not need plumbing in heaven. You can go to the Banquet House and eat all you want and no plumbing is needed. Collett states there is a "Record Room" which is an immense area where all the idle words spoken by Christians are being retained until after Christians give an account of them, or are judged, at which time these will be emptied into the Sea of Forgetfulness. He also says there is a "Garment Room" where angels are sewing our robes. And finally there is even a Holy Ghost elevator along with many other astonishing sights.

By what authority are we to evaluate the claims of Collett? When experience is put before the revealed Word of God as authority, these kinds of experiences are self-validating. In other words, they do not have to match up with God's Word. For many, simply because Collett claims to have had this experience is enough proof.

But this is utterly wrong thinking. Experience must be tested by the Word of God. The Apostle Paul, when conveying his being caught up to heaven, said in 2 Corinthians 12:3-4, *"And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted (or able) to speak."*

Paul said that he heard things that he could not express in human concepts and

words, nor was he even permitted to do so. Collett says that everything heaven is the same as earth only better. His experience does not match up to the truth. The main point is that the Word of God is our authority to determine truth, not experience.

Colossians 2:18-19 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

Our understanding of spiritual gifts comes from the Word of God not experiences people have had. We have the total revelation from God in the Bible. We have the clear teaching concerning Jesus in the inspired Word of God. So we know for sure that if someone's experience is contrary to the clear teachings of the Word of God, the experience is wrong; the Bible is not wrong.

Another instance of an experience-based explanation is taken from a Christian Talk Show. A guest said, "My ministry is based entirely on my life verse Matt 19:26 which says, 'With God all things are possible.' God gave it to me because I was born in 1926."

The host was so excited that he looked up his birthday 1934. The problem was that there are only 32 verses in Matthew 19. He unflinchingly flipped over to Luke 19:34 that said, "The Lord has need of him." The statement was followed by applause. But just then the host's wife responded with, "But this verse refers to a donkey." This instance validates again that the source of authority concerning any point in doctrine, and especially in our study of spiritual gifts, is not someone's experience but rather the clear teaching of the word of God.

We have some great days before us as we study what God has revealed to us in the next Scripture.

Romans 12:4,5 "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Next week we will look at humility and unity.