

Romans
Gifted to Serve (Part 1)
Romans 12:3-8
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I read an article this week about the human body written by a woman with a PhD in biomedical sciences Anne Marie Helmenstine. This is what she wrote. I was fascinated by this. “Ninety nine percent of the mass of the human body is made up of only six chemical elements,” (ninety nine percent) “oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. Since sixty-five to ninety percent,” she writes, “of each body cell consists of water by weight, it's not surprising that oxygen and hydrogen are major components of the body.” Oxygen accounts for about sixty five percent of the mass of the human body. Carbon is found in every organic molecule in the body and accounts for about 18.6 percent of the total mass of the human body. When we exhale, of course, we exhale carbon in the form of carbon dioxide. Hydrogen is a component of the water molecules in the body along with most other compounds as well. And so, it's the third most abundant element in the human body. Nitrogen is a component of the proteins, nucleic acids, and other organic compounds. It's about three percent of your body's mass. Calcium is, of course, a major component in the skeletal system. It's found in your bones and your teeth. It accounts for about 1.5 percent of the body's mass. Obviously, not your bones, but the calcium within your bones. And then, phosphorus is found in the nucleus of every cell. About one percent of the body consists of phosphorus. The author identifies a number of other elements that make up the final one percent of your body's mass, but I was struck, as I read that, with the reality that God took those basic elements – primarily six of them - and He made from those elements our incredibly complex bodies - with all their members, with all their organs, with all of their cells. And every element and every member of your body is absolutely important and essential for your body to work. Thankfully, God has built in some redundancies so you can lose a little bit here and there and the body still functions. But, all of it's essential. If just one trace element wasn't in your body to the extent that it ought to be, it creates devastating results on the health of your body. In Romans chapter 12, Paul wants us to know and to understand that exactly the same thing is true for the body of Christ. That He has designed the body of Christ with all of the parts necessary for it to function for the overall health and strength of the body of Jesus Christ.

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We find ourselves in the fourth and final major section of Romans. I've entitled it, "The Gospel Applied: The Transforming Power of the Gospel of Grace." It runs from chapter 12 verse 1 through chapter 15 verse 13. Here, Paul ends this letter - as he often does - by applying the truth very practically. Now, as we begin this last major section of Romans, I'm going to give you an outline. Make sure you note this: it is a preliminary outline. I reserve the right, as I get in deeper study, to tweak it and change it as we go along. But this will give you an idea in the big picture of where we're going in this section as Paul applies the gospel.

First of all, in chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, you have "A Gospel Response to God." And we've seen that He deserves your body and your mind as living sacrifices to Him. Secondly, we'll see, "A Gospel Response to Service" (Chapter 12 verses 3-8) - the passage we'll look at this morning. Thirdly, "A Gospel Response to Believers." How do we respond to the believers in our lives? (Chapter 12 verses 9-13). "A Gospel Response to Enemies (Chapter 12 verse 14-21)." "A Gospel Response to Government" in chapter 13 verses 1-7. "A Gospel Response to the Law" in chapter 13 verses 8-10. "A Gospel Response to the Flesh" in chapter 13 verses 11-14. And then finally, "A Gospel Response to the Issues of Conscience." Or, we could say, to Christian liberty in Chapter 14 verse 1 through chapter 15 verse 13.

Now, if you take a look at that list, you have a fairly good idea of where Paul is going as the rest of this letter unfolds. We've examined the only right response to God in light of the gospel, and that is a life of total commitment to God - body and soul.

This morning we come to the second gospel response that, in the application of the gospel, is required of us and that is: a gospel response to service, chapter 12 verses 3-8. Let's read it together. Romans chapter 12, beginning in verse 3.

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. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 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, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who

exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

After dealing with our response to God, Paul begins now to explain the implications of the gospel in our lives with our service in the church to the body of Christ. Now, that is fascinating to me. Have you ever thought about this? Paul says, “I want you to present yourselves as a living sacrifice to God. That's what the gospel demands.” And then, this is where he begins in explaining what it means to present ourselves as a living sacrifice. This is where it begins. I find that fascinating because we tend to think that if we're going to be radically, totally committed to God - if we're going to be a living sacrifice - it means we need to accomplish something radical, something extraordinary. But for most Christians, total commitment to God is neither radical nor extraordinary. It is rather very, very ordinary. It means using your spiritual gift in the life of the church. You say, “I want to be a living sacrifice to God.” The gospel demands that. It deserves that. Well, here it is. This is where it begins. Commit yourself to serving Christ by serving His church. I was struck with the fact that that's what our Lord told Peter, right, in John chapter 21. “Do you love me?” Peter says, “yes. I love you.” And what does Jesus say? “Then, shepherd my sheep. Feed my Lambs.” In other words, express your love for Me, Jesus says, by loving My people. If you want to love Jesus Christ, that's where it begins. Now Paul's point in this paragraph is simply this: God has gifted every Christian to serve, so we must think about our gifts, our spiritual gifts, accurately and we must use them responsibly. That's where he's going. You need to think about them accurately and you need to use them responsibly. So, let's look at this passage together.

Paul here gives us two instructions about our spiritual gifts in the church. The first instruction - and I've already hinted at this - is simply this: think about your spiritual gift accurately. Think about your spiritual gift accurately. That's the message of verses 3-5 that we need to look at this morning.

Now, I want to ask a series of questions and let the text answer them for us as we sort of unpack what Paul is expressing here. So, let's begin with this question: what does this paragraph address? The simple answer is spiritual gifts. The context here makes it very clear. In fact, look at verse 6, “we have gifts that differ.” And then Paul follows that statement in the middle of verse 6 down through verse 8 with a list of spiritual gifts. So, the theme of this paragraph then is

clear and obvious and that is: spiritual gifts in the life of the church. The Greek word for gifts is the word charismata. It occurs 17 times in the New Testament - 16 times in Paul's writings and 1 time in 1 Peter 4 verse 10. Literally, this word charismata means, "a grace gift." It's talking about the source of the spiritual gifts that we received. They are from God as an expression of His grace. Now, this is referring - this concept of spiritual gifts, or charismata - refers specifically to the spiritual gift (listen carefully, Christian) that you have already received. Notice verse 6, "since we have gifts." We have gifts already that, "differ according to the grace" that has been given to us in the past. At your conversion - and this becomes clear in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul talks to all Christians and says everyone has a gift. And, he says you already have them. What that means is - since they were different ages in Christ, right? - it means they all receive them, then, at the moment of conversion. So, every one of us has received a spiritual gift from Christ (and by the way, Ephesians 4 verse 7 says it is Christ's gift we have received) to serve Him. And that has been given through the Spirit. So, it's Christ's gift, Ephesians 4:7, but it's given through the work of the Spirit.

Listen to these verses that underscore every single Christian has received this Grace gift to serve in Christ's church in His body. Look at verse 3, "God has allotted to each a measure of faith." And, we'll look more at that in a moment. Look at verse 6, "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." If you go to 1 Corinthians, as I said, it becomes very clear that everyone has one. 1 Corinthians 12:7, "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills. And then in 1 Peter 4:10, Peter says, each one has received a charismata - a spiritual gift to serve.

So, Christian, you have received a spiritual gift. You received it at the moment of your conversion. Now, what is a spiritual gift? I don't want to assume anything this morning, so let me define it for you. This is my favorite definition: a unique capacity for service that God has given to every true Christian that he did not possess before salvation. A unique capacity for service that God has given to every true Christian that he did not possess before salvation. What I want to underscore with that definition is that your spiritual gift is not a natural talent that you were born with. Now, you can exercise a spiritual gift through a natural talent. For example, a person who is a naturally gifted communicator may have received the gift of teaching as well. Or, someone who has a talent at carpentry - who thinks in 3D images and can work in those ways / has a gift

with their hands - they can use that natural skill to exercise the spiritual gift of helps. But your spiritual gift is not a natural ability it was given to you at the moment of salvation. So, this paragraph then - to go back to our question - is about serving in the church using your spiritual giftedness.

Let's come to a second question: why does this matter? The answer is: because it's a command of Christ Himself. Look at verse 3, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you." Notice, first of all, the little word "for" that begins verse 3. That obviously connects it to those two magnificent verses before that we have been studying. So, here is the first example of how to sacrifice your body and mind to God. You want to be a living sacrifice? Then have a humble, wholehearted commitment to serving His people in the church using the giftedness you've received.

But I want you to notice the next expression because here's how we learn why this really matters. Notice Paul says, "through the grace given to me I say." Now, "through the grace given to me," refers to the grace Paul had received to become an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul saw, and we should see, any opportunity of ministry and service as a gift of God's grace. In fact, look at what he says in verse 6, he says, "we have gifts that differ," notice the same expression, "according to the grace given to us." Having this perspective makes such a difference.

You know, I was reminded this week of one of the famous scenes in Mark Twain's famous novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. And you remember that scene - the fence scene. Tom convinces his friends that painting the fence - a duty he'd been assigned by his Aunt Polly - was this wonderful, marvelous thing and that if they could only have the privilege, they would love it. And so, he gets them to paint the fence and they pay him for the privilege of painting the fence.

Let me ask you a question: do you see your service in this church as a duty? As a duty that ties you down, that keeps you from doing other things you really would like and want to do? Or do you see it as the privilege it is - that you and I don't deserve to serve Christ and His church, it is a gift of His grace? I'm reminded of that every week. I get to do for a living what so many people would love to do. It is a gift of God's grace that I get to spend 30 hours of my week in the scripture studying in order to teach you on Sunday. It's a gift of God's grace that I get to bathe my soul in that week, after week, after week - that I can stand up here and teach you. I don't deserve this. And you don't deserve the role you have in the church either. It's a grace gift.

Paul says he received the grace of being an apostle. Notice go back to chapter 1 verse 5, he underscores this. He says, through Jesus Christ our Lord, “we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake.” It’s grace. He says, “I only have this role because of grace.” You think Paul deserved to be an apostle? Have you ever read, like, his life before Christ?

Look at Romans chapter 15 verse 15. He says the same thing. He says,

But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul got it. He understood that his role as an apostle was an expression of God's grace in his life.

And so, go back to chapter 12 when Paul says, “through the grace given to me” he is, in reality, addressing us with the authority of Christ’s apostle. This is the command of Christ, our Lord, through His apostle. That's why this passage matters.

A third question we need to consider is this: who does this concern? To whom is this passage addressed? And I understand I have used “who” when I probably should have used “whom” but it sounds better, in this case. Who does this concern? Every Christian - every single Christian. Verse 3, “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you.” Now in English, that's pretty strong. But in Greek, it's especially emphatic. Paul doesn't express it the way he usually does. Literally, he says this: “to all the ones being among you.” There's no stronger way to say, “I'm talking to every one of you without exception.” What Paul says here is for every genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Do you say, “yes, I'm a follower of Jesus Christ?” Then, listen up. This is Paul's expression aimed at you. The clear implication here is that every Christian has a spiritual gift and, therefore, has a responsibility in the stewardship of that gift. Who does this concern? Every Christian.

A fourth question gets to the heart of it and that is: what does this command? What does this paragraph command of us? Look again at verse 3, “For through the grace given to me I say to

everyone among you.” It really has two commands. Here's the first one - “not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.” And here's the second command - “but to think so as to have sound judgment.” Now, one of the reasons Paul likely began with this is, if you've ever read 1 Corinthians, you know that in the early church in the first century, certain gifts were especially desired. And where was that the biggest problem in the New Testament era- what town? What city? Corinth. Well guess what - Paul most likely wrote the letter to the Romans from Corinth and so this is at the forefront of his mind.

Now what's interesting about this verse, verse 3, is that in Greek, there is a very complex wordplay. It's hard to express in English but in verse 3, within just ten Greek words, Paul uses the Greek word for “think” four times in different forms. Let me just show you in English. First of all, you have “to think highly.” That's the first one. Then you have just “to think” two times in verse 3 separate from that. And then, notice the expression “sound judgment.” That is literally in Greek “to think sanely” or “to think soundly; to think rationally.” So, you have four times in ten Greek words something about thinking and the root word for “think” in each of those cases doesn't refer to the process of thinking but rather to the way a person thinks or the way a person views something.

Specifically, here, Paul is telling us how we should not and how we should think about ourselves. First of all, negatively - don't think too highly of yourself and your gift. Verse 3, “I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought,” or “than is fitting” or “than is appropriate,” “to think.” Now, the word translated “think highly” is literally, it's the word “to think” with what became the English word “hyper” stuck to the beginning of it. So, it's literally “to hyper think.” Or, we could say, “to think above” or, “to think beyond.” You get the idea. To think beyond how you should think of yourself. Or to think above yourself. - above how you should think of yourself. Okay? Now in context here, Paul is not talking about the general way that we see ourselves. He's not just dealing with pride in some general sense. Rather, he's dealing with how we view our spiritual giftedness because one of the ways that all of us can be tempted is to think more highly of our giftedness than we ought to think. That's exactly what was happening in Corinth.

In fact, turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and notice verse 20, “But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’” Now,

what's going on here? Here's the eye, a visible member of the body saying, "you know what? I'm the one, I'm the one who has the gift that really matters. We could do without you." Okay?

or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

What's he talking about here? He's saying when you look at the more public, visible parts of the human body, those are the ones that get all the attention. You probably spent no time worrying this morning about how your liver looks or how your kidney looks but you spend a lot of time dealing with your face. Why? Because it's the most important part of your body? No, because it's the most visible, the most public. And yet, where is the most necessary element? The things that keep us alive are not the visible, the public, the obvious. What keeps us alive? It's the things that are hidden, that are unpresentable, that frankly are pretty ugly if you see pictures of them. That's really what's important. And God has structured your human body that way. The same thing is true with the body of Christ. He's saying, "look you people who have these public sort of gifts - teaching gifts, for example, or in Corinth, the tongues gifts - you think that's really important? Listen, the church can get along without you, but it can't get along without the organs that keep it functioning - the less public gifts that really keep the thing functioning (the heart, kidneys, the liver). That's what he's saying. So, we're frequently tempted (this is the point) to consider our giftedness as superior in kind. That's the point of this passage in 1 Corinthians 12. In Corinth, they look down on all the non-tongues gifts. Everybody wanted to speak in tongues in the first century church in Corinth because it was public and showy. And Paul says, "listen the church can get along without you, but it can't get along without those gifts that keep the thing functioning. So, get a true perspective."

I think the same temptation can happen at a teaching church like ours, if we're not careful. There can be a tendency not to properly value the serving gifts. Well, guess what? People like me are a dime a dozen but the people who really make this church function, who can't be seen, they're the ones who keep the life of the church actually supplied. That's the point. Paul says, "don't think too highly of your spiritual gift." That's the negative side.

Now, look back in Romans chapter 12, and let's look at the positive side. Think accurately of yourself and your gift. Verse 3, "but to think so as to have sound judgment." "To have sound judgment" is literally, in the Greek text, "to think sanely or sensibly." In fact, the same word is used in Mark chapter 5, verse 15 of the demoniac being in his right mind. That's the expression. Paul's implying, and this is interesting (and there's another sermon here maybe a sermon series here), but he's implying that to be carried away with an overestimation of yourself, to be drunk with pride, is to be insane. It's to be out of your mind. Instead, he says, we are to have a sober, clear-headed, objective, accurate assessment of ourselves and our giftedness. Now this is an important balance because, notice what he says here in verse 3, true humility about your giftedness is not having a negative assessment of your gifts, but a reasonable or sane one. It's not thinking that your gifts are unimportant and unhelpful. That was the problem also in Corinth. This was the other side of that. One side is to think too highly of your gifts. The other is to say, "boy, I wish I had that other gift. That's what I really wish I had," and to think lowly of your giftedness. Go to 1 Corinthians 12, again. Look at 1 Corinthians 12, verse 15. Go back to verse 14, "for the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says," (So here's the other side of it) "the foot says," (kind of the Eeyore approach here to spiritual gifts)

"because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?

There're some pretty interesting pictures there? Imagine someone walking around and their whole body is a liver or an ear or an eye or a mouth. Come to think of it, I've never, never mind.

I'm not going there. This is the point: this is God's design and it's by design. We're frequently tempted to consider our giftedness as insignificant when we compare it to others. Maybe you're tempted to do that, "boy, I wish I could teach, or I wish I could do this or have that gift, or whatever," and you look at your own as insignificant. That's not humility. Humility is not denying the presence or importance of spiritual gifts. It's not downplaying the real gifts God has given you. The truth is: that is often pride inside out. You know the person who says, "well, I just don't have any gifts?" Sometimes, that person really believes that - and that's a problem. But often the one who says that really wants other people to say "oh no, you have wonderful gifts! You're such a blessing!" It's false humility begging for a compliment. Don't think too highly of yourself. Instead, Paul says, think accurately, sanely, sensibly about yourself and your giftedness. It's okay to say, "God has gifted me in this way." It's okay to say, "this is God's doing. I don't take any credit for it. But this is a reality in my life."

So, that's the command. There's a negative side - don't think too highly. There's a positive side - think sanely, rationally about the giftedness God has given you.

Now, how does that happen? How does that happen? How can we get there? How can we avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think and how can we think about our giftedness sanely, reasonably, sensibly? Well, Paul provides two key strategies here for thinking accurately about your spiritual gift. Let me give them to you. These are really helpful.

First of all, remember, your unique ability to serve is a gracious, sovereign gift of God. Whatever gift you have, you didn't have anything to do with it. God, as an expression of His grace gave it to you. Look at verse 3, "think so as to have sound judgment," (a sane mind or thought about your giftedness), "as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." Now, let me just admit to you that that expression, "as God has allotted to each a measure of faith," is a difficult one and commentators have spilled a lot of ink on it, but let me simplify it for you. The key issue is the word "measure" because that word "measure" in Greek, as in English, can mean one of two things. It can mean the instrument for measuring - the ruler that you use or, in the case of something like this, the standard. The word "measure" can also be the quantity that you measure out - in this case, spiritual gifts. So, those have led to two primary interpretations of this expression, "a measure of faith." Paul could mean, first of all, "think of yourself in light of the

standard of your shared faith in Jesus Christ. As you think about your giftedness, think about yourself in light of the standard, the ruler of the shared faith you have in Jesus Christ.” Every believer has the same (if this is what Paul was teaching, it would be like this), every believer has the same measure of saving faith which God measured out to him. That's the only standard by which you should be evaluating yourself. And when you use that standard, you discover that, you know what, we're all the same and we have no cause to exalt ourselves above others. We are all the equal objects of God's undeserved grace by His triumph in Jesus Christ at the cross. Now, that's true. The scripture teaches that but I don't think that's what Paul means here because, when you consider how he uses similar expressions to this, “measure of faith,” it's more likely he means this: he means, “think of yourself in light of the individually measured out gifts God has given you - the “measure of faith” He's given you.” That is, the capabilities, the different capacities that God has given to you. The point (I think is what Paul is saying, and, if this is what he's saying, then) the point is this: don't lose sight of the fact, notice those words, “as God has allotted to each” the capacities that He has. That's the idea. God has measured out to each of us the gift that we have and the fact that each of us is a part of the body, has been sovereignly placed in the body to fill a particular function, should motivate us to fill that role.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says, listen, the members of the human body and the body of Christ can vary in function. You know, their eyes, their ears, their, you know, livers, their etcetera, can vary in strength, that is, the strength with which you have that gift - the quantity, if I could put it that way, of that gift and in honor but God has decided those differences through His Spirit. Listen to 1 Corinthians 12:18. I read it just a few moments ago when we were in 1 Corinthians 12 but listen to it again. “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” This is God's doing and if you can keep that in your mind, if you can keep 1 Corinthians 12:18 at the forefront of your service, then you will have a sane evaluation of yourself because you will remember that whatever unique abilities you have, whatever opportunities you have to serve, that is a gracious gift of a sovereign God. He decided how each member of the body would be placed just as He desired. So, you know 1 Corinthians 4, “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?” That's the point.

There's a second strategy here for thinking rightly about our giftedness - not only this idea of remembering that we have received the gifts we have as a sovereign gift of God but secondly, remember that you are only one member of Christ's body and your role is to serve the other members. That's verses 4 and 5. He begins in verse 4 with the illustration. He's talking about our physical bodies here. "For just as we have many members in one body." If we could sort of count all the parts of your bodies, there would be many of them. And that's what Paul is using here as a picture. He uses this image of a human body often to illustrate both the unity and diversity of the church. Again, listen to 1 Corinthians 12:27. Here, he's talking about Christ's body. He says, "you are Christ's body." There's the unity. We're all belonging to the same body, "and individually members of it." There's the diversity. Now look at verse 4 again. He says, "for just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function." That's just a truism. You understand that about your body. They all have different roles to play. God placed many different members in your physical body because they're different functions are all necessary to the overall health and functioning of your body. Again, 1 Corinthians 12. We read it just a moment ago. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing be?" You need all those members for your body to function properly. That's also true with the body of Christ. That's what he's saying.

This picture of the church as a body with many members reminds us of several realities. First of all, it reminds us to appreciate the diversity of strengths and gifts in the church. Aren't you grateful that not everybody in the church is a mouth like I am? How poorly this body would function if we were all mouths. Appreciate the diversity of strengths and gifts in the church. Secondly, don't overvalue your own role. You are one member of Christ's body. And thirdly, this reminds us of our duty to the rest of the body.

I think one of the greatest problems in the church today is the grave danger of individualism. James Montgomery Boice called it, "hyper personalized religion." He called it "the religion of Jesus and me only." Listen, the Bible knows nothing of such selfish religion. You are a part of the body of Christ. You are one member of the body of Christ and Christ does not expect you to think of yourself as this lone wolf Christian functioning by yourself. Genuine believers belong to Christ and that means they belong to Christ's body along with all the other members.

Is that how you think of your faith? If you want to think accurately about your gifts, you have to remember the crucial importance of the other members and their function as members in the body. And that you are there, listen to this, you are here to serve the rest of these people. Just like your thumb is there to serve the rest of your body. It's not an entity in and of itself. It has a purpose to serve and benefit the rest of the body. That's why Paul uses this image. That's why our Lord uses this image and Paul adopted it. Notice verse 5, he's used that illustration now in verse 4 of the human body and now he applies it in verse 5. "So, we who are many, are one body in Christ."

Now, it's an interesting turn of phrase here. In other places, Paul says, "we are the body of Christ" Here, he says, "we who are many are one body in Christ." You see the difference? "We are the body" / "We are one body in Christ." He's stressing here this inherent unity among true believers and it's a unity that's achieved in Christ by our common union to the life of Jesus Christ. Charles Hodge, the great theologian who wrote one of the best commentaries on the book of Romans says this, "Believers are one body, i.e. a living organic whole, not in virtue of any external organization, but in Christ, that is, in virtue of their common union with Him." 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that at the moment of your conversion, think about this, you weren't just saved and forgiven at the moment of your conversion, 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "for we have all been immersed by the Spirit into one body, that is the body of Christ." That happened at the moment you were saved. You were made a part of the body of Jesus Christ. Members of Christ's body are all in Christ and what that means practically is there is a necessary interdependence. Look at the rest of verse 5, "and we are individually members of one another." We depend on one another. We are different from one another, but we are all necessary to the body and to each other. Listen, if you don't think that way as a Christian, there is something desperately wrong with your faith. If you don't think you need these people, if you don't think you need what happens in the context of the church, you have an ill-conceived picture of the Christian faith. You are one member of the body of Christ and we are to be interdependent on one other. Your physical body is an organic unity and every member of your body belongs to all the other members and the same is true in the Church. I mean, think about your body for a moment. What if one of the members of your body, let's say, your big toe decided, "you know what, I am just too busy to get involved. I'm just going to attend and get whatever I can for myself but I'm going to continue to be engaged in my own pursuits." Listen, it is just as illogical when it comes to the

members of the body of Christ. Your part matters because it's how God designed the body that is the church as well. In fact, turn to Ephesians chapter 4.

Ephesians chapter 4 is a passage about what life in the church is to be like. And I want you to look at verse 15. Ephesians 4 verse 15, "but speaking the truth in love" literally, "truthing in love." This is how the body grows. There's the truth combined with love. "We are to grow up," (that is, the church. We're not talking individuals here), we're talking about the church is "to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." So, you now, you've got Christ is the head and the rest of us are His body. Now watch how Christ accomplishes the growth of His body. How do we as a whole grow? Verse 16, from Christ "the whole body" (you're part of that) "being fitted and held together," notice this, "by what every joint supplies." And then, if that wasn't enough, he says, just in case you missed it, "according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Listen, the body of Christ only functions in the way God designed when you're doing your part - when you're using the giftedness God has given you so that every part of the body functions the way God designed.

So, let me ask you: do you think Biblically, accurately about your spiritual gift? Do you see it and your service in the church as the first expression of being a living sacrifice to God? Is that how you think about your service in the church? Do you see your service in the church as a grace that God has given to you? Do you understand that using your giftedness in the context of the church is a command of Jesus Christ your Lord? Are you tempted to think too highly of the gift you have or too lowly (think of it as unimportant)? Do you have a sane perspective about your giftedness? Do you remember that your capacity to serve in this church is a sovereign, gracious gift of God? And do you remember that you are only one member of Christ's body and that the other members matter and that your role is to serve them? This is where the gospel begins to be applied. May God help us to do it. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this profoundly helpful passage. Thank You for the reminder. Lord, we live in such an individualistic age. Thank You for the reminder that, as Christians, that's never how we are to think of ourselves. We are part of, a member of, Christ's body and we are to fill our role certainly as a duty, as a stewardship, but we are to see it and understand it as a grace - an expression of Your grace to us. Father, thank You for the many in this church who understand

these things and who week in, and week out use their giftedness for the health and benefit of this body - that as each part supplies, we grow together. Lord, I'm sure that there are some here this morning for whom some of these truths are new and, perhaps even convicting. Lord, I pray that You would help them to see this as a command from You and may they take the stewardship and the responsibility, the grace that has been given to them seriously. Lord, thank You. Thank You so much for this great truth of how the church functions, for how this church functions. Lord, I do pray, as well, for those who may be here this morning who are not part of the body of Christ because they've never repented and believed. They've never believed in the Light as we read from John 12 earlier this morning. Lord, may they believe even today and become a part of the body of Christ. For it's in His name we pray and to His glory. Amen