

Ministry of Spiritual Gifts, Part 1

Romans 12:3-5

45-90

Let's open our Bibles to Romans chapter 12 verses 3 through 5 for tonight. The passage, which perhaps is not as familiar to us as the proceeding one in verses 1 and 2, but after tonight, I trust will be indelibly impressed upon all of our hearts. Romans chapter 12, and in order for us to really understand the sense of verses 3 through 5 and even on into just the beginning of verse 6, I want us to begin at verse 1. Follow as I read.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your spiritual worship. And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may approve what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith; for as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.”

We'll stop at that point.

The ministry is committed to us. And the work of the kingdom depends upon our usefulness, our faithfulness, our commitment. We who are the redeemed, we who have received the mercies of God, indicated to us in the first eleven chapters, we who have been captured out of darkness and brought into light, we who have been freed from the bondage of sin, we who have become the children of God and saints of the Most High, we who are the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, to us is committed the task of being the hands and feet and voice of Jesus.

Now in order for us to do that, we have to begin at verses 1 and 2, don't we? First of all, we offer ourselves in the single supreme act of worship that any believer can do as a living sacrifice, offering to the Lord our whole soul, body, mind and will, as we discussed in our look at verses 1 and 2. Now this is the basic requirement that God lays down for every believer. It's no different for you than it is for me. We're all in the same place when it comes to Romans 12:1 and 2. God wants our life, as they sung so beautifully a moment ago, offered as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Him, which is the basic act of spiritual worship. That is the entrance into usefulness. That's where we begin to be used by God. It is worship, the offering of ourselves, then it is service. That's the divine order.

Now when it comes to this service, as we read in the text from verses 3 through 5, we want to recognize that though there is unity at the level of commitment, there is tremendous diversity at the level of service. And verse 4 and 5 emphasizes that. Like a body that has many members, so the body of Christ has many members, and verse 6, they have differing gifts. We all stand on the same common ground in the unity of commitment. But from there on out there is tremendous diversity,

tremendous diversity. We are as diverse in terms of our service as we are diverse in terms of our own personal identity. There are no two Christians alike. There are no two of us who can serve the Lord alike. There's tremendous distinction and distinctiveness in all of us.

And if you notice verse 3, it says the grace that was given to Paul that made him an apostle, he now uses to speak to every man that is among us, not to think more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. Now there's a... There's the idea of diversity right there. We are to think of ourselves according to how God has apportioned to us the measure of faith, and it's different for everyone.

And then verse 5 reminds us that every one of us are distinct. There is only one body but everyone a different member. And verse 6 again, we have differing gifts. So the primary focus of these verses is to demonstrate to us that though we all enter the place of usefulness with the same utter and total self-sacrifice, and in that there is complete uniformity, from there on there is great diversity, great diversity. And that's what the apostle Paul wants to emphasize.

Now let me just introduce our thinking from another angle. There can be no genuinely effective service, genuinely reciprocated service — that is, service in which we are blessed — unless we have first offered ourselves as a living sacrifice. Now what this tells us is that the offering of living sacrifice kind of attitude to God, where I give up all that I am for His service, is not mystical, it is not falsely pious, it is not monastic, that is almost monkish, but it is tremendously pragmatic. It is greatly practical because the intention of offering myself to God is so that I may become immediately useful to Him. That's the point. And so we look at it then from both sides, offering yourself to God is not something so mystical it's unrelated to ministry.

In fact, let me say it as simply as I can. If you tell me you've given yourself wholly to God and I see no effective ministry, then I don't believe what you tell me. On the other hand, if you tell me you're serving the Lord but I see no total commitment to Him, I don't believe that either. It's an either-or proposition. Service to God has meaning and reciprocal blessedness only when it is the outflow of total commitment. And total commitment is only total commitment when it produces effective service. The two go together. There are a lot of people who would want to make themselves, along with everybody else, believe that they have made a whole life commitment to Christ but when you look at their life you don't see any fleshing out of that commitment, you don't see any ministry, any meaningful ministry, any God-blessed ministry. You don't see them driven with a passion to serve, but rather they appear to be driven with a passion to indulge their own needs and desires.

On the other hand, you find people who are very, very busy, but when you get behind the scenes you find them very uncommitted to the realities of spiritual dedication. I received a letter today from a man who said, "Please meet with me and please pray with me." He said, "I've driven my wife away because I taught her by example how to be a Sunday saint and live any way you wanted all week long. And then when things started to fall apart in our marriage and I tried to call us to prayer and Bible reading, she thought it was another one of my facades." He said, "I have outwardly lived as a Christian, been active in the church, and the rest of the time lived a lie."

Well, that's not acceptable to God. That's not the kind of service He's looking for. There can be results from... How can I say it? There can be results from a carnal life. It's true. There can be results when you're serving God quote-unquote without really being committed to Him, when you're doing it because you like to see yourself doing it, or you feel good doing it, or others think well of you when

you do it, or there even a desire in your heart to do it. There can be results. And the reason is this, because the truth is so much more powerful than your limitations. But the results are not going to accrue to you in terms of blessedness. In other words, you can...you can be used by God even in the midst of your non-commitment if you speak the truth because the truth is so much more powerful than your ability to limit it, but you will not receive the benefit. You will not be blessed. And furthermore, you will short-circuit what could be done, what could be done. I mean, the message is so powerful, God can get it through a clogged vessel, but think how much more wonderful if the vessel was clean, was clean.

I mean, I know there have been times in my life when I have taught the Word of God and maybe it's been a prideful motive, and the Word of God has accomplished great things, but not what it would accomplish — and I've learned this — when my life is as it ought to be and my motives are right.

Now would you notice that nobody is left out of this. Verse 3, "I say through the grace given to me to everyone," to everyone. And then you notice in verse 4, "As we have many members in one body and all members have not the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and everyone members one of another." And again he doesn't let anybody out. Every one of us who has come to Jesus Christ is called to make a supreme dedication to Him, as we saw in detail last week, out of which is to flow a life of service unique to us. If we say we're dedicated but there's not that life of service, our dedication is questionable. If we... If we function on the outside but the dedication is on the inside, our service is very limited and accrues no blessing to us.

Now we're talking to everybody here, me and you and everybody else. We're all in the same situation. And I hope that when we finish sort of looking at this text, and we'll take part of it tonight, part of it next time, but I hope that as we finish looking at this text, if we don't accomplish anything else, I would like to think that we will never be able again to successfully patronize ourselves with the idea that we are totally committed to God but there's not any meaningful service going on. And I know that's true of our church and let me tell you something, folks, it's probably not the case of you who are faithful. But I know there are people in this church who believe they're committed to the Lord, but if you look at their life and try to see where that actually comes out into service, it just isn't there. It just isn't there. And if we do nothing else but eliminate that illusion that you can be committed to Christ with no basic ministry, with no basic service, with no passion for using the gift God's given you, then we've done service to all of us.

People say, "Well, I realize that I'm really dedicated to the Lord but right for now I'm busy with my job, I'm busy working, I'm busy shopping, I'm busy hobbying, I'm busy recreating, I'm busy vacationing, I'm...I'm busy resting, or whatever." And there is a time for all of that. But dedication works out in service, that's what Paul is saying. The person who is doing that kind of self-deception, I hope, doesn't survive this passage. I know it's really dragged me through.

Now let me just go back to this thought that we saw in verses 1 and 2 for one more kind of initial concept. You will never know your gift. People always say, "Well, how can you know your gift?" I get asked that question a lot. How do you know your gift? You will never know your gift and you will never really know its potential until you have lived out Romans 1 and 2. Because if you're not at the point of total dedication, whatever you're doing in terms of function and whatever you're doing in terms of service is not revealing to you the full definition or potential of your gift. You understand that? Because you're not operating at the level of total commitment.

I mean, it's sort of like the human brain. They estimate that maximally people are using the maximum amount of their brain are functioning at about 11 percent of their brain capacity. That means there's another 89 percent that isn't even being used. And so when we say, well, we understand the limitations of the human mind or when we give certain tests to people and assume that that therefore gives us the final word on how much capacity they have, we're really far from being right. The human mind has tremendous capacity beyond what we attain. And a lot of that has to do with our approach to life and so forth.

But in a spiritual dimension the same thing is true. You have many Christians who are trying to define their gift while only having about an 11 percent performance capacity to decipher, to figure out what it is. And if the truth were known, if they ever came to Romans 12:1 and 2 and lived out that life, they would probably totally redefine their gift, because they would begin to see it in its fullness.

I want to tell you just as a personal testimony. I don't like to do this but I reach back into my own life because I think you look at me and think that I'm some kind of other creature than you are because I get up here and do these things and you sit there and say, "I've read that chapter all my life and I didn't see that there." And you think I've got some special input from heaven. Let me tell you, I used to ask myself when I was in seminary how I could just get out of seminary, let alone ever spend my life teaching the Word of God, writing books and writing commentaries. And when I came to Grace Church I came with fear and trepidation wondering how I could keep sermons going. And I figured that I would surely run out of things. It was difficult for me going through seminary because I would second-guess my own capabilities. But as I began to see God wanting more and more of my life and as I began to let go of things in my life and totally give over my life to Him then the expansion of the capability that the Spirit of God gave to me was ever increasing. And I want you to know that it isn't that I have some great intellectual capability, it isn't that I'm some kind of unique creature that doesn't have all of the same factors that you do, it is simply the fact that once you make the commitment to be everything God wants you to be and once you say I'll do that whatever the cost, then you begin to see an expanding capability that the Spirit of God reveals in your life and now you begin to see your gift for what it really is.

And I think a lot of folks have trouble trying to figure out what their gift and ministry is because they've never gone through Romans 12:1 and 2, right? So they're struggling with a very limited amount of data to deal with. So we start by the dedication of self. And if you weren't here last week, you need to get that tape and think that one through.

You know, the greatest saints in the church's history, I mean, you go to the bookstore and you buy their biographies. And I buy their biographies and I read them and I pour over them. And I've done it since I was a kid. And I read the stories of these great men of God, great saints who changed the course of the world, who impacted the history of the church, who won, you know, cities and nations and continents for Christ and who built great institutions and great churches and schools and wrote great books. And you read about them and you remember them and you honor them and you assume that they're in another category, that they're way out there somewhere. And the truth of the matter is, the difference is they learned the meaning and the value of Romans 12:1 and 2. They learned to live that way.

I mean, you take, for example, a man like Jonathan Edwards. I don't know if you know all of the factors of the life of Jonathan Edwards, a great man of God, used in this country to literally change the nation, profound preacher whose sermons were so powerful that he read them without inflection

in his voice for fear that he might cause someone to come to Christ emotionally rather than really having thought through the message. And so he just read it mechanically all the way through. And it is said that sometimes when he read it people were screaming for mercy half way through because of the power.

Now what is it about a man that makes the difference? Well, maybe you don't know this but Jonathan Edwards made some resolves. One of them was this: "Resolved," and he wrote this, "to live with all my might while I do live. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, to improve it in the most profitable way I can. Resolved, never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another. Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge. Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."

Now these were just a few of the things he resolved. And they made the difference.

If you were to attend a post-communion service in a Church of England church, it would be very common for you to recite these words at the close of that communion with the people in the congregation. They say this: "And here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto Thee." That's the distinction. That's what makes the difference.

Now having begun there, let's enter into verse 3. We said we want to commit ourselves and that's the key to being effective in our service. Our usefulness now depends on three things. And that's what we want to talk about tonight and next week. Our usefulness depends on three things: proper attitude, proper relationship, proper service. We have to have the right attitude, the right interaction or relationships, and the right service to be maximally useful to God.

Now what is the proper attitude? What is the attitude in the heart of one who is totally given over to God? It's an attitude of humility. That's the proper attitude, humility. This is introduced in verse 3. Let's follow it. "For I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

This is so rich, folks, I don't know if I can extract out of here all that is here by any means, but I want you to really grasp the tremendous statement that he makes. For, he says, and the "for" there is a transition; only the dedication spoken of in verses 1 and 2 can lead to this proper attitude. In other words, he's really moving through to service. The whole issue here is if you have, verse 6, the gift of prophecy then prophesy. If you have the gift of ministry, then minister; the gift of teaching, then teach; the gift of exhortation, then exhort; the gift of giving, do it with liberality. Whatever it is, if you have it, do it. All he's trying to do is work his way up to service. Service begins with dedication for dedication is behind humility. The right attitude is the result of a self-surrender. If I've given everything I am to God, then I'm nothing left. That's the attitude of humility. It flows out of selfless abandonment to the will of God.

Now to make his point he warns against the wrong attitude. "I say, through the grace given unto me." I love that statement, the grace given unto him. What kind of grace is he talking about? Well, he's not talking about saving grace, although he did receive that. That was experienced by all believers. All of us has received in Christ saving grace, no question about that. That's not what he has in mind. It is

the grace specifically that called him to be an apostle. It is the grace of God that ordained him to a position of authority, the position of an apostle. He had received from God the call to preach. He had received from God the apostleship as Christ Himself had come to him and confronted him and called him into the ministry. He repeats this over and over again. So he was an apostle by grace. And that's what he's saying. I'm saying this to you through grace given to me.

Now why didn't he say I'm saying this to you as an apostle of Jesus Christ? The answer is, in a verse on humility you don't pull rank. That's the point. So what he says is, look, I want to pull rank but I want you to know that my rank has nothing to do with me, it has to do with God's what? God's grace. So there's humility even in the way he refers to his apostleship. Very consistent. It says, "I say to you now, I'm speaking to you as one who has authority and that authority given to me by Christ Himself was given not because I was worthy." O, far be it from that. In fact, he says to Timothy, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor and injurious but I obtained mercy and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. "And this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am (What?) chief." So he says I was made an apostle by mercy. I was made an apostle by love. I was made an apostle by grace. But nonetheless I am an apostle and I'm speaking to you as an apostle.

What is that to say? That's to say this is authoritative. I'm saying to you... I'm saying it as an apostle by grace but I'm saying it as an apostle with authority — here it comes — not to every one of you — rather, we need to look at that phrase — to everyone that is among you. Nobody gets off the hook, all professed Christians at Rome in the church and all professed Christians anywhere, I'm saying to all of you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly. Now that is an absolutely marvelous statement, marvelous statement. It's an unforgettable statement.

There is a Greek verb "to think." It's the verb *phroneō*. He uses a form of it four times in that one statement. Four times the root of the verb he uses is *phroneō*. Another way to translate it would be this: I say through the grace given unto me — and this will bring out the four uses of the word — to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think with sober thinking. Four times. Or, not to be high-minded, above that which he ought to be minded, but to be so minded as to be sober minded. Or to say it another way, not to overestimate one's self beyond a true estimate but to estimate one's self with a proper estimate.

Now that's a fairly clear, I hope. But what does it mean to think soberly? And that is a marvelous word. It means to be in one's right mind. It is to be in one's right mind. You see, conceit is treated as a form of insanity. If you... If you don't think about yourself the way you ought to think, you're insane, you're out of your mind. I mean, if you're living an illusion about who you really are and what your capability really is and what your gifts are, if you're living out an illusion, you're insane. You need to think soberly. You need to be in your right mind.

So, we are warned not to over-estimate, *hyperphroneō*, to think proudly. And this is the sin of exaggeration. He says, I'm telling you, don't think more highly than you ought to think. Don't overestimate your value. Don't overestimate your gifts. Don't think you're the world's next leading evangelist if you're not. Don't overestimate yourself. There's a very ugly sin contained in exaggerated self-esteem. And the Bible says the Lord hates a proud heart. And Peter, writing in 1 Peter, really talking to people who were in leadership, says, be clothed with humility for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, humble yourselves therefore unto the mighty hand of God, He'll exalt you in His own time.

So, it is basic to the text that he says don't have an exaggerated opinion of your abilities. Don't have an exaggerated opinion of your gifts, but rather than thinking more highly, think soberly, *sōphrōn*, *sōph*, the word for wise, think wisely, think sanely, think rightly, be in your right mind, don't think too high. Now watch this one. But don't think what? Too low. Think right. Don't go around saying, "O, I am a worm." And when somebody says, "Man, you can really minister." "O, it was... It's nothing, it's absolutely nothing. O, I'm nothing, I am abased." That is a mild form of bragging. You want somebody to say, "O, you're wonderful, you're wonderful," and inside you're saying, keep it up, I love it, I love it, see. Don't think too high, but think high, not just too high. Be in your right mind. Recognize your limits. Keep a proper measure of your gifts.

We're not trying to advocate some kind of silly, false humility. But it is pretty silly to think you're something when you're nothing. Galatians 6:3 says, "If a man thinks himself to be something when he's nothing, he deceives himself."

So, you know, one of the things you want to learn in your area of spiritual gifts is this, don't have an exaggerated opinion of what you can do, of your gifts. Think realistically, wisely. There's no room for exaggerated self-esteem, whether it comes in boastfulness, I'm one of the greatest, you know, and you can found your own Bible college with your own name and all of that. Don't have an exaggerated opinion of yourself. On the other hand, don't come along with all that false modesty that says I'm nothing, I'm a worm. And you really want people to build you up. Both of those are unacceptable.

Now some background here might help. In the early church, and we realize it mostly from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14, but in the early church there are some problems with people who were longing to have the showy gifts, right? I mean, we're very much aware of that as we read 1 Corinthians. And you need to kind of be ready to interact with 1 Corinthians. You can turn over to chapter 12 and sort of keep your finger or a piece of paper there so we can go back and forth a little bit before we're done. But in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, at the end of the chapter, verse 31, the apostle says, "You are coveting the showy gifts." He says to the Corinthians, "And I want to show you a more excellent way and that is to live by love," and so forth.

"You are coveting the showy gifts," I think is a very excellent translation of that. You've got an exaggerated opinion of the gift you think you ought to have. And you're trying to elevate yourself beyond what God has really called you to do. Maybe like Diotrephes, who loves to seek the pre-eminence. This was not only common in Corinthians as...in the Corinthian church as a problem, but as we see from Diotrephes; people wanting to have the pre-eminence was common there as well. And we can assume that in Rome there may have been the need to deal with the same issue that there shouldn't be people going around trying to be teachers all the time.

James deals with the same issue. He says in James 3, "Stop, so many of you being teachers, for theirs is a greater condemnation." In other words, be warned that you need to settle for the gift God has given you. Don't underestimate it, but don't overestimate it either.

Now to sort of sum up our thinking, I tried to think this through and I hope it works right, there would be, wrong attitudes toward the gifts could be summed up in five categories. First of all, using a prominent gift boastfully, that would be wrong. That would be thinking more highly than you ought to think. That's the pompous use of a genuine gift. God has given you a certain gift and you conceitedly

use it. You want the whole world to know that you're good at what you do and God blesses you and you continually blow your own horn, talk about yourself, promote your own causes, so forth and so on. In fact, you have the feeling that you're superior to everybody else and you're like 1 Corinthians 12, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. In other words, it's that idea that you sort of stand alone in importance, using a showy gift boastfully.

Another sinful attitude is depreciating the value in false humility. Knowing you have a prominent gift, knowing it is a very unique and God-blessed gift, knowing it is an effective gift, but playing the game of false humility and wanting people to sort of pat you on the back and build you up and stroke you a little bit. That also is an unacceptable attitude. That's... That's something, I think, we have plenty of.

I had to deal with this early in my ministry when people would come to the door and say to me, "Oh, what a wonderful sermon. Oh, you know, I really enjoyed that, or I was saved." And you say to yourself, "Now what am I... How am I going to react to that? Am I going to say, "Oh, it was nothing, it was absolutely nothing, it was just not what it ought to be, I'm ashamed of it, Oh, pray for me, dear sister?" So I just learned to say thank you, that's all, and deal with the issue of pride in my heart, not make my problem somebody else's problem. If I can't handle that, then that's my problem, not somebody else's problem.

So, what I need to say is thank you very much. That's all. Thank you very much. I appreciate your graciousness to me. I appreciate that God has used me in some way. That's enough. That's enough. And if you don't say anything, that's okay, too. It isn't that I need you to say that, it is that I appreciate you saying that. And then I have to deal with the consequence of it. And what I have to deal with is the fact that I might hear in my mind, "You know, she's right, great stuff." That's my problem, not yours. You feel free, believe me. I'd rather have to deal with the issue than never have to deal with the issue, you understand?

There's a third wrong attitude toward a gift and that is, not only using a prominent gift boastfully or in false humility depreciating the value of a prominent gift, but, thirdly, counterfeiting a prominent gift. In other words, you don't have one but you parade as if you did, trying to be what you're not. Like in 1 Corinthians 12 where the foot wants to be the eye, right? In other words, there's dissatisfaction with what you are and if you can't do this and you can't be used in that way, you're just going to, you know, fold up your tent and steal away into the night like an Arab. No, that's unacceptable.

Are all apostles? First Corinthians 12:29, are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But you are coveting the showy gifts.

You see, in the early church there was a tendency to want those things. I mean, and even today it sometimes as hard to just say, "Well, I have a gift that isn't as demonstrative, I have a gift that isn't as publicly seen, I have a gift that's a quiet gift of serving, of assisting, of helping, of showing mercy, of meeting need, and nobody knows about it and I wish I could get out there and sort of be in the parade a little more." That's wrong. And there are a lot of people today who are seeking gifts they don't have and parading supposed gifts that are only counterfeits, that's all. That's a wrong attitude.

Another wrong attitude is, fits right in with that one, is failing to use an inconspicuous gift out of

jealousy, and that ties right in with it. There are people who seek a prominent gift and falsify it and they usually do that because they're discontent with the gift they have and jealous of someone else's gift. That's wrong. If I can't be this, then I'm not going to function. If the foot says if I'm not the eye, I'm not going to do anything. No, no, it's unacceptable.

So, what are wrong attitudes, then? One, would be to use a prominent gift boastfully. Two, would be to depreciate yourself in false humility when your gift is being used. Three, would be to counterfeit a prominent gift and parade as if you had it when you don't. Another would be to fail to use an inconspicuous gift because you're jealous of other folks and so you've just set it aside thinking it's not worth anything. So you have the sins of overestimation and the sins of underestimation, don't you?

But there's a fifth wrong attitude, and that's the attitude of failing to use your gift at all, just turning it off. And that's really what he's dealing with here. And that's why starting in the middle of verse 6 he says, "If you have the gift of prophecy, then prophesy. And if you have the gift of ministry, then minister. And if you have the gift of teaching, then teach; and the gift of exhortation, then exhort. And if you have the gift of giving, then give with liberality. And if you have the gift of ruling, then do it with diligence. And if you have the gift of showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness."

In other words, whatever your gift is, what? Use it. Use it. Don't play games with your ego. Don't overestimate yourself and boast. Don't underestimate yourself and say, "Well, I don't need to do anything, who am I? I'm nothing anyway, my gift is minimal." They... Those kind of attitudes devastate the body of Christ, they devastate it. Don't think more highly than you ought to think but think wisely, not more, not less; a balanced estimate of our gifts.

I suppose people have defined humility in a lot of ways. But most people think humble people are sort of meek, quiet, out of the way, invisible, who have...you don't know anything about them so you assume the best. You know? Oh, that's such a humble person, never says a word. That may not be humility, it could be just flat stupidity. I mean, they just... They don't know anything, they have nothing to contribute. You understand that. Humility is not obviously overestimation, nor is it underestimation, it is right estimation. It is being able to say, "Yes, God has gifted me. Oh bless God, He's given me a way to serve Him for His glory. I thank Him that you recognize that. I bless His name." Paul is not afraid to say I am an apostle of Jesus Christ by grace. And I'm not afraid to say God has given me gifts of communicating the Word of God by His grace, not by any of my own deserving or any of my own earning at all, but simply only by His grace. I recognize that, you recognize that, we must deal with that honestly without pride, but without false humility either.

And some of you perhaps are looking at a gift that seems so minimal and yet is so vital. As 1 Corinthians 12 said, some of those less beautiful organs are more necessary. I mean, you might have a nice nose, you could do without it. You've got an ugly heart, you can't do without that. So we want to put the estimates maybe where God puts them instead of where we put them.

Now, how can you rightly recognize your gift? Go back to verse 3. How do you rightly recognize it? You look and you measure your gift according as God has dealt to everyone the measure of faith. Now this is a very important statement. Whatever gift you have, who gave it to you? Who gave it to you? God dealt it to you. Literally the word is "who God measured out the measure of faith." Whatever gift we have, God measured out to us. I tell you, that is a tremendous thought. I did... I don't function the way I function in the Lord's work because I went to seminary. I function better because I went to seminary, but if I hadn't gone to seminary I would have had the gift that God gave

me, right? It was given sovereignly by Him by His Spirit. So I have whatever I had because it's a gift from Him. I want to do all I can to refine and sharpen those tools, but those gifts are His gifts to me.

Now that makes my life a stewardship, doesn't it? That tells me how important it is to give myself totally to Him. He has given me a gift to use for His glory in the advance of His kingdom. He's given you a gift to use for His glory in the advance of His kingdom. If you're ever to see the maximal potential of that gift, if you're ever to see all that God can do with that gift, then you start by giving your whole self to Him. And then you will see what will happen to that gift. It's His. He gave it. He'll maximize it by His own sovereign design.

Now when I read a statement "according as God has dealt to every man," that tells me some very important things that I need to remember. Number one, no gift should ever be what? Sought after. No gift should be sought after. They are sovereignly given by God. They are sovereignly given by God.

In 1 Corinthians, that very familiar and helpful verse, verse 11, I'm sure you're familiar with it, 1 Corinthians 12:11. "All these (talking about all the various gifts) works that one and the very same Spirit (here comes the statement) dividing to every man severally as He will." The Holy Spirit divides the gifts as He wills, as He wills. Verse 7, "The manifestation of the Spirit (that is the gift) is given to every man." There's a divine source to all the gifts.

By the way, in 1 Corinthians 12:11, the word "severally" is the word *idios* from which we get the word "idiot." An "idiot" is, basically it means "unique." It means that there's nothing like him. The only one is what it actually means, the only one, one of a kind. And that's the way we've been given our gifts. The Holy Spirit has dealt out to every man one of a kind as He will.

So, the first thing that I learned from verse 3 then, the implication that strikes me so strongly, is that if God is the one who deals these out and measures them out according to His own sovereign will, then I am not to be seeking after a gift. That's totally foreign to the Scripture. Nowhere is that taught.

Secondly, if the Lord has given these gifts and dealt them out to every one of us, then no gift should be unused, right? No gift should be unused. Why? It's given by God for His own glory, for the purpose of advancing His kingdom, advancing His church, praising His name. And that's in verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 12, "Now God has set the members." God set every one of them in the body as it has pleased Him. And every one of them is there because it pleases Him. And whatever your gift is, it is pleasing to God that He gave you that gift. And He wants to use that gift, marvelous thought. So don't depreciate that gift. Don't second-guess God on that gift, and for the sake of His own glory, don't let that gift fall into disuse. So important, no gift should be unused and no gift should be sought. Why? Because God has measured them out as gifts of His grace for the purpose of His glory in His kingdom.

Now how has He measured them out? Look again back at verse 3. "He has dealt to every man the measure of faith." He has measured out the measure of faith. Now you can just look at it in the very simple way. You have a measure and you have a cup, let's say, that contains so much. One person gets so much in his cup, it's of one size. Another a different one, another a different one. In other words, the measure for everybody is different. He measures it out for each of us distinctly, one of a kind. It's an incredible thought. As I've said so often, we're spiritual snowflakes. There aren't any two

of us alike. I mean, and we say, "Oh, well, you know, I know a whole lot of folks who have the gift of teaching, or a whole lot of folks who have the gift of helps," and yet each one of them is utterly unique, utterly unique. That's because each of us has uniquely measured out to us the measure of faith.

Now what faith is he speaking about? Not saving faith because saving faith isn't measured out different to everybody, is it? I mean, saving faith is the same faith. It's totally putting my trust in Jesus Christ. That isn't the context here either. Well, what is it? It is basically the kind and quantity of faith that it takes to operate our gift. For example, if I have a gift of teaching and preaching, then God gives me the faith it takes to use that gift. He gives me — to take the word "faith" and broaden it a little — the spiritual insights and the spiritual sensitivities and the spiritual capacities and the spiritual comprehensions to use that gift.

And that's why, for example, I look at someone who has the gift of showing mercy and who is very sensitive and who can listen to someone and listen and listen and listen and there's just a wonderful warmth of spirit. And then they minister that gift of showing mercy which basically is toward people who are in great need, as we'll see next week. And I watch that happening and I say, "Oh, what a blessed thing it is I see."

I look at people that God has given us in Grace Church who have a tender heart toward people who are hurting, whose whole ministry is directed to reach out to those kind of people. And then I look at people, for example, who have a passion to see the lost come to Christ and all they want to do is go out and evangelize, and evangelize and evangelize and I look at that and I say, "Bless God that those people have that ability." And I look at myself and I say, "But my passions are different than that. Mine is to understand the Word of God." And that's where God has given me the capacities and the insights and the comprehensions. In other words, the faith measured out to me is the measure of faith to operate the gift that God has given me. He didn't give to me a certain gift and not the capacity to operate it.

You understand that? He didn't give a gift and then limit it sovereignly and put us in a place of unbelievable frustration. You see one with the gift of preaching or gift of teaching needs the spiritual capability to maximize the gift, the ability to understand the Scripture, the ability to put the Scripture in a way that other people can understand it, to dig into the Word and find out the meaning that's there. The one who has the gift of mercy needs to have the spiritual insight to hear a hurting person and to see beyond the words to the pain in the heart. And that's the faith that goes along with the gift. So when you receive a gift, you receive the necessary spiritual capacity to make it function. Isn't that terrific to know that?

So, he says, "Look, have a right estimation of your gift, a right estimation of your spiritual capability that goes with it. And then when you have a right estimation of it, and you know what it is that God has gifted you to do, and you know that He's given you the faith to do it, then you can be humble about it because you know it isn't you, it's Him, right?" We have what we have because it was given us by God. We certainly aren't going to gain anything by boasting about our gift, we'll lose our effectiveness. We're not going to gain anything by false humility. We're not going to gain anything by depreciating our gift. We're certainly not going to gain anything by not using our gift. And, I mean, some people will use all kinds of excuses for not using it. We must use our gift.

You say, "Well, John, how do I know my gift? I mean, I want to do it. You've got me all revved up

here, I'm like the guy who jumped on his horse and rode off madly in all directions. How do I know my gift?" Now hang on, I'm going to give you nine things fast. Are you ready for this?

Number one, present yourself a living sacrifice. Okay? Number two, know you're gifted. Number three, pray for wisdom, James 4. Number four, seek nothing. Number five, examine your heart's desires. What do you desire to do? Number six, did I leave one out? Present yourself a living sacrifice, know you're gifted, pray for wisdom, seek nothing, examine your heart's desire, number six, seek confirmation. Don't force the issue. If everybody keeps telling you that's not your gift, believe them, believe them. Seventh, look for the blessing of God. Look for the blessing of God. Number eight, serve with your whole heart. Serve with your whole heart because you're never going to know the fullness of your gift unless you're totally abandoned to its use. And number nine, when you think you begin to see what it is, go for it. In other words, cultivate the gift as it begins to be obvious to you.

Now let me just run over those and then I'm going to say something that I hope will help you put it together. Present yourself a living sacrifice, know you're gifted, I mean, know that it's there, that God has gifted you. Three, pray for wisdom, then seek nothing, examine your heart's desire, seek confirmation, recognize the blessing of God, wholeheartedly serve and cultivate the gift when you see...begin to see it.

Now listen to me, when you've done all that, you will probably find it impossible to label your gift. Did you get that? That's right. I've been at this a long time. You ask me what my gift is, I can't tell you. All I know is I do what I do. And sometimes I preach and sometimes I teach and sometimes I exhort and sometimes I try to unfold the wisdom of the Bible. And you can put that all together and my gift is called "John MacArthur." That's all I know.

I know other people who preach and teach and exhort but it doesn't come out like mine comes out. You understand what I'm saying? When you've done all of that, the only issue that matters by the time you've gone through those nine is you'll be at it and you'll have a general idea of what it is you do. I mean, I mean, I know generally the areas of giftedness that God has blended together to make me what I am, but I don't believe that we can over-simplify and say, "Yes, all of those 48 people have the gift of teaching, all of those 63 people have the gift of showing mercy, and it's all cut and dried. I don't see that at all. You have a gift and it's a blending of all the categories of giftedness into a uniqueness that makes you like nobody else, like paint on a palette.

You've seen the artist. He's got all the paints there, all the colors and he starts to blend them and mix them and that's what God did when He made you in terms of your spiritual service. He took a little of this, a little of that and painted you and you've got some dominant areas that are blended together with other areas to make you what you are. And so I want you to understand that when you've gone through the whole checklist and you come out at the end, you may find it difficult to have a clear definition of what it is because it's blended together so wonderfully in you that it will be hard to divorce from your own identity. So you have to have the right attitude, an attitude of humility.

And then I want to talk to you just briefly about the right relationship because we know all this so well. Verse 4 and 5, "As we have many members in one body," like... He's talking about the physical body, look at your body, you've got many members, you've got a head, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, teeth, arms, legs, fingers, toes, all the internal organs, that's what he's saying. You have many members in one body and all members don't have the same — office is not the best translation of *praxis*, it's the word function. It's the word practice. And here he borrows his beloved analogy of the body, doesn't

he? He loves it, to illustrate the relationship of believers. We are one body and yet many members and they all work together. Isn't it marvelous? I mean, I don't even think about it, but my hands will do exactly, impulsively, instinctively and instantaneously what my mind rather casually thinks for them to do. Isn't that amazing? I mean, yours is doing the same thing. I'm not saying I'm different. It's just amazing how the body works together.

And in verse 6 he says, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another." We're all hooked up in a spiritual body as a human body works together. We share common life, common gifts, common ministry, common resources, common joy, common sorrow, common everything.

Now that emphasizes our unity. We're all one. We're all one. We're all one. And yet we're all diverse. We're all diverse. We're all diverse. Isn't that marvelous? Now if you have a body that has one member that says I'm not going to function, you've got a problem. And that's what he's saying. Everything in the body has to work together. Everything in the church has to work together. If you've got parts of the church that aren't functioning, the whole body suffers. The whole body suffers. The keynote is diversity.

Listen, you are so diverse and I am so diverse that if we don't do what we were gifted to do, it cripples the body. You see? It cripples the body because there's only one of us. I mean, I only have one of each. I have only one right ear and only one left ear, only one right eye and only one left eye, even where there's pairs of limbs, I have only one of each side. And if that one doesn't function, there's nothing to take its place. I don't have something else to do what it does. The function is lost. And so, unified diversity is the mark of the church as it is the mark of the body.

Just to close, I want to read you some things that I was delving into this week as I was reading again for, I don't know, third or fourth time, the book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*," by Paul Brand, who is a very outstanding surgeon that works with a leprosarium in the south, a very brilliant doctor who is well respected across our country. And he has written some marvelous, marvelous things about the analogy of the human body and the body of Christ. Just listen to this. I don't normally read things, but this is so powerful I can't resist it.

Doctor Brand describes the diversity of the body's cells like this:

"I am first struck by their variety. Chemically my cells are almost alike, but visually and functionally they are as different as the animals in a zoo. Red blood cells, *dices*, resembling Life Saver candies void...discs, rather...resembling Life Saver candies voids through my blood loaded with oxygen to feed the other cells. Muscle cells which absorb so much of that nourishment are sleek and supple full of coiled energy. Cartilage cells with shiny black nuclei look like bunches of black-eyed peas glued together for strength. Fat cells seem lazy and leaden like bulging white plastic garbage bags jammed together. Bone cells live in rigid structures that exude strength. Cut in cross section, bone resembles tree rings overlapping strength with strength, offering impliability and sturdiness. In contrast, skin cells form unguating patterns of softness and texture that rise and dip, giving shape and beauty to our bodies. They curve and jut at unpredictable angles so that every person's fingerprint, not to mention his or her face, is unique.

"The aristocrats of the cellular world are the sex cells and the nerve cells. A woman's contribution,

the egg, is one of the largest cells in the human body, its ovoid shape just visible to the unaided eye. It seems fitting that all the other cells in the body should derive from this elegant and primordial structure. In great contrast to the egg's quiet repose, the male's tiny sperm cells are furiously flagellating tadpoles with distended heads and skinny tails. They scramble for position as if competitively aware that only one of billions will gain the honor of fertilization. The king of cells, the one I have devoted much of my life to studying, is the nerve cell. It has an aura of wisdom and complexity about it. Spider-like, it branches out and unites the body with a computer network of dazzling sophistication. Its axons, wires carrying distant messages to and from the human brain, can reach a yard in length. I never tire of viewing these varied specimens or thumbing through books which render cells.

"Individually they seem puny and oddly designed but I know these invisible parts cooperate to lavish me with the phenomenon of life. Every second my smooth muscle cells modulate the width of my blood vessels, gently push matter through my intestines, open and close the plumbing in my kidneys. When things are going well, my heart contracting rhythmically, my brain humming with knowledge, my lymph-laving tired cells, I rarely give these cells a passing thought.

"But I believe these cells in my body can also teach me about larger organisms, families, groups, communities, villages, nations. And especially about one specific community of people that is likened to a body more than 30 times in the New Testament. I speak of the body of Christ, that network of people scattered across the planet who have little in common other than their membership in the group that follows Jesus Christ. My body employs a bewildering zoo of cells, none of which individually resembles the larger body. Just so, Christ's body comprises an unlikely assortment of humans. Unlikely is precisely the right word for we are decidedly unlike one another and the one we follow from whose design come these comical human shapes which so faintly reflect the ideals of the body as a whole from God.

"The body of Christ like our own bodies is composed of individual, unlike cells that are knit together to form one body. He is the whole thing and the joy of the body increases as individual cells realize they can be diverse without becoming isolated outposts."

And he just demonstrates out of the body all the diversity beautifully. Then he goes on to talk about unity and the terms are so graphic. Just listen to this.

"What makes all the cells work together? What ushers in the highly specialized functions of movement, sight, consciousness through the coordination of a hundred trillion cells? The secret to membership lies locked away inside each cell nucleus, chemically coiled in a strand of DNA. Once the egg and sperm share their inheritance, the DNA chemical ladder splits down the center of every gene, much as the teeth of a zipper pull apart. DNA reforms itself each time the cell divides, two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, a hundred and twenty-eight, each with the identical DNA as it splits out.

"Along the way cells specialize but each carries the entire instruction book of 100 hundred thousand genes. DNA is estimated to contain instructions that if written out would fill a thousand 600-hundred-page books. A nerve cell may operate according to instructions from volume four and a kidney cell from volume twenty-five, but both cells carry the whole compendium.

And then he notes, "The DNA is so narrow and compacted that if all the genes in all my body's cells were put together, they would fit into an ice cube. Yet if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back more than 400 times. The DNA provides each cell's sealed credential of membership in the body. Every cell possesses a genetic code so complete that the entire body could be reassembled from information in any one of the body's cells. Just as the complete identity code of my body and hairs and each individual cell, so also the reality of God permeates every cell in His body, linking us members with a true organic bond. I share the ecstasy of community in a universal body that includes every man and woman in whom God resides."

Isn't that marvelous? Just as DNA resides in every cell in your body, so the living God, who is the compendium of all truth, resides in every cell within His church. We're different, verse 6 says, we have differing gifts but we have the common spiritual DNA in the presence of the living God.

Now I want to close with this. Dr. Brand writes,

"At the Central Railway Station in Madras, India, lay a beggar woman more pitiful than the others I saw there. She had positioned herself alongside the stream of passengers hurrying to catch their trains. Businessmen with brief cases passed by her as did wealthy tourists and government officials. Like many Indian beggars, the woman was emaciated with sunken cheeks and eyes and bony limbs, but paradoxically a huge mass of plump skin, round and sleek like a sausage was growing from her side. It lay beside her like a formless baby, connected to her by a broad bridge of skin. The woman had exposed her flank with its grotesque deformity to give her an advantage in the rivalry for pity.

"Though I saw her only briefly, I felt sure that the growth was a *lipoma*, a tumor of fat cells. It was part of her and yet not, as if some surgeon had carved a hunk of fat out of a 300-pound person, wrapped it in live skin and deftly sewed it on this woman. She was starving. She feebly held up a spidery hand for alms, but her tumor was thriving. Nearly equally the weight of the rest of her entire body, it gleamed in the sun exuding health, sucking life from her. Fat cells, the Madras' beggar's tumor was composed entirely of an orgiastic community of fat cells. In our figure-conscious western world, the word 'fat' connotes a lack of discipline and unnecessary aggravation of cells that should be reduced.

"From the surgeon's vantage point, however, as he draws a knife across the skin, exposing oleaginous layers of fat cells, the evil connotation is balanced by a sense of the value of fat."

He goes on then to describe the value of fat. You have fat cells and in the center they hold one little tiny molecule of nutrition. And when the body needs it, they release it. "Each fat cell," he says, "is a storehouse containing a yellow globule of oil which crowds out the cell nucleus. Most of the time the cell lies dormant while the body eats enough food to fuel its need. Come famine, people with plenteous fat cells will be able to sit by while others starve. That is the most strategic function of fat."

But this, "Sometimes a dreaded thing occurs in the body. A mutiny results in a tumor *lipoma* such as the one attached to the Madras beggar. A *lipoma* is a low-grade benign tumor. It derives from a single fat cell, skilled in its lazy roll of storing fat that rebels against the leadership of the body and refuses to give up its reserves. It accepts deposits but ignores withdraw slips. As the cell multiplies, daughter cells follow its lead and the tumor grows like a fungus, filling in crevices, pressing against muscles and organs, occasionally a *lipoma* crowds a vital organ like the eye, pushing it out of

alignment or pinching a sensitive nerve and surgery is required.

"I have removed such *lipoma* tumors. Under a microscope they seem composed of healthy fat cells, bulging with shiny oils. The cells function beautifully except for one flaw, they've become disloyal. In their activities they disregard the body's needs. And so, the beggar woman in Madras gradually starved while a *lipoma* that was part of her was engorging itself.

"A tumor is called benign if its effect is fairly localized and it stays within membrane boundaries. But the most traumatizing condition in the body occurs when disloyal cells defy inhibition, they multiply without any checks on growth, spreading rapidly throughout the body, choking out normal cells, white cells armed against foreign invaders will not attack the body's own mutinous cells. Physicians fear no other malfunction more deeply; it is called cancer."

Now the illustration is graphic. There are rebellious cells in the body of Christ. Some of them are benign in the sense that they ultimately don't seem to be killing the church, they just engorge themselves and take in and take in and take in and never give out so that the church becomes emaciated and it can't function while they, all they want to do is get fatter and fatter and fatter. Their whole approach to things is: what are you going to do for me? What are you going to give me? What can I receive? And they take it in and take it in and take it in and never give it out and the church is weakened and weakened and weakened and weakened.

And then there are those cells that are mutinous to the point where they literally kill the church because they rebel overtly against it. The church is always in danger of both kind, the lazy fat cells that basically starve the church of its usefulness, its power and its resources; and the evil cancerous cells that eat at its very life.

We don't want to be either, do we? We want to be the living, healthy cells that function for the glory of God and the health of the body of Christ. Let's bow in prayer.

We want to express to the Lord, I think, tonight first of all our thanks for what He's done for us, in bringing us into His service. Secondly, we want to ask Him to refresh in our hearts the commitment to use the gift He's given us. Would you do that silently in your own heart? Thank Him for what He's given you and renew your commitment to use it for His glory? Not to be a mutinous cell who will not give out what he so willfully takes in, certainly not to be a cancerous one that rebels against the body of Christ.

Lord, we would all desire to be what You want us to be. Start with giving ourselves as a living sacrifice and then the use of our gifts for the growth of the church, in Christ's name, amen.

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