

## 2. One body, many members

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's bow our heads together and I'll lead all of us in some moments of prayer. Jesus said this to his friends, his disciples, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.

But he also says, in the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Dear Lord Jesus, we know that these great sayings of yours are all deeply true.

And we thank you so much that you leave us a quality and a kind of peace such as the world gives to nobody. And yet we know also that in this world we do have tribulation.

You have overcome it. You have overcome its power. And yet we still have to exist in this world until we're able to be with you fully and finally. So we thank you, dear Lord Jesus, for the peace that you give us.

And we pray that you will help us more and more to experience it in the midst of this world's tribulations. We're so conscious, dear Lord, of great trouble in many parts of the world.

[ 1 : 26 ] Many countries which are experiencing great sufferings in a way that we're not in this country. Many Christians who are experiencing the consequences of political strife and warfare and sometimes genocide.

Sometimes hunger and famine. Sometimes floods. Sometimes. We're conscious of these things, dear Lord Jesus. And we lift up our hearts and minds to you.

And do pray for those in other parts of the world who are suffering and struggling. And we pray for ourselves, too, that you will help us to be deeply thankful for all that you have given us, all that we're able to enjoy in this country.

And we pray, too, that the most important piece of all, the piece that you have forged between God the Father and ourselves, is something that we will come to understand and appreciate more deeply.

We thank you that being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Please, therefore, Lord Jesus, write this piece on our hearts. Help us to know it.

[ 2 : 40 ] And help us, as we experience it, to hold out the gospel about you to other people. We do pray that you will bless our church and the other churches in this city as we seek to extend the gospel to many.

We pray that many will come to hear and gladly to submit to you as their Lord and Savior. We ask it for your dear name's sake.

Amen. Amen. Well, friends, let's turn to Romans chapter 12. And we continue in our short series of four sermons from the early verses of Romans 12.

I'm not quite sure at this stage whether we're going to get through the chapter in this next two or three weeks. But we'll see how we go. I want to speak this morning or this afternoon on verses 3 to 8.

Last week we had verses 1 and 2. So I think I'll just read verses 1 to 8. Today. So Romans chapter 12, page 947 in our big Bibles if you have one of those.

[ 3 : 44 ] And Paul has been explaining the gospel in the first 11 chapters of Romans. He's been speaking about the way in which God has had mercy upon the human race.

And that unfolding or description of the mercy of God is what lies behind verse 1 of chapter 12. So chapter 12, verse 1.

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

[ 4 : 50 ] For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. Amen. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us now. Well, now, last week, I'll just say this for those who weren't here last week.

Last week, we looked at the first two verses, and that's what the sermon was on. And I described last week the first two verses as being the fountainhead of all Christian ethics, or, if you like, all Christian living.

In these first two verses, just have a look at them with me again, if you will. In the first two verses, Paul, first of all, appeals to his readers by the mercies of God. So he's reminding his readers in first century Rome, and of course this is true for us today, that it's the mercies of God.

[ 6 : 18 ] The mercy that God has expressed to us in sending Jesus Christ to be our savior. The mercy expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's all that that forms the basis for the transformed living of Christian people.

So Paul is saying, God has done all this for you in his mercy. Therefore, let us respond accordingly. In two ways. Body and mind.

So first of all, by presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. And that's what Paul talks about there in verse one. And secondly, in verse two, by having our minds renewed.

So that they are no longer conformed to the standards of this world. The empty and godless standards of this age. But are increasingly transformed so that we come to know and understand God's will and God's mind.

Now that's the territory, more or less, that we explored last week. And this week, I'll attempt to take in verses three to eight. In which Paul begins to unpack some of the implications of verses one and two.

[ 7 : 23 ] Now, verses three to eight are only the beginning of Paul's unpacking of verses one and two. He's going to go on unpacking verses one and two right the way through the next two or three chapters.

Until about halfway through chapter 15. But today we have our first bite of a cherry, so to speak. And I want us to see what the Apostle says to the Romans and to us in verses three to eight.

So let me set out Paul's teaching here under three headings. First, in verse three, we have an apostolic command. Secondly, in verses four and five, we have an apostolic illustration.

And thirdly, in verses six, seven and eight, we have some apostolic applications. Okay, well, let's click on our seatbelts and off we go. First, verse three, we have an apostolic command.

Now, verse three, when you first look at it, doesn't look quite like a command. But there's a strong hand inside the velvet glove in verse three. Look at the way he starts. For by the grace given to me.

[ 8 : 29 ] Now, that really means because I have the authority of an apostle. That's the grace given to him. You may remember back in chapter one of Romans, verse five, Paul says, through whom, through Christ, we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations.

So when we get here to chapter 12, verse three, the grace given to me means the God given authority to speak as an apostle of Christ. But that's not all.

Look at the next phrase. By the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you. Now, what does that remind you of? Isn't it reminiscent of the way that Jesus himself used to speak?

Verily, verily, I say unto you. I say to you. And Jesus spoke like that when he was wanting to be particularly emphatic in his teaching. And Paul, I think, is reflecting that use of words there.

So that first phrase in verse three is really very strong. Paul is saying to the Romans, I'm speaking to you, not just as your mate or your buddy, but as an apostle of Christ.

[ 9 : 33 ] And I'm speaking to every last one of you. No exceptions and no exemptions. So listen up. So what is the apostolic command here in verse three? It's a command for each Christian to assess

himself or herself realistically and not to think that he's a swan when he's only a farmyard goose.

Look with me at Paul's exact words in verse three. I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Now, why should Paul feel that he has to say that to the Roman Christians? After all, he had never been to Rome. He didn't know the Roman church. He says several times, I'm longing to see you and I'm trying to organize my diary so that I can get to you.

But he'd never been there. He knew various members of the Roman church, but he hadn't been there. So it can't have been that he had a particular Mr. Big Boots or Mrs. Big Head in mind that he was aiming this comment at.

Surely the answer is that Paul the Apostle knew the human heart only too well. He knew, to go back to verse two, that one of the ways in which our minds need to be transformed is in the way that we think of ourselves.

[ 10 : 52 ] Because our self-assessment is so often overinflated. J.B. Phillips' translation of this verse says, don't cherish exaggerated ideas of your own importance.

It makes you grin, doesn't it? But we know we're like that. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of your own importance. Now, Paul has to say this to the Romans and to us because so often we do become big heads and bossy bootses.

And our culture today, it seems to me, doesn't help us in this regard. Let me give one or two examples. One example is the way that we try to kid ourselves that our children and our schools are far better than they were a generation or two ago.

It's late July, isn't it? And it's going to be early August in a week or two. And the exam results are about to be published. Scottish hires and A-levels and all that sort of thing. And every year we hear on the national news that the results in the public exams are even better than they were last year. So every year we get higher and higher percentages of pupils passing their exams with grade A's and grade A stars and so on. And quite frankly, don't we rub our heads in disbelief?

[ 12 : 03 ] Because we know, don't we, from the workplace and just from using our eyes and ears, that many modern school leavers have rather less skill in basic academic disciplines than their parents did or their grandparents did.

It's as though somehow we're kidding ourselves into thinking that we're all so bright and gifted. It comes out in sport. Think of test match cricket, for example.

A couple of generations ago, if a top cricketer scored a century in a test match and was interviewed afterwards, he would tend to say something like this. Yes, I did have a spot of good fortune today. The pitch was good and the sun shone and the bat just seemed to connect with the ball. Whereas today the top cricketer is interviewed and he says, Well, yes, of course, I was on terrific form. I was on top form and I showed everybody why I'm amongst the top five batsmen in the whole world. He doesn't put it quite like that, but that's really what he's saying. I think we have to ask, is our culture creating an entire generation without a proper sense of inadequacy?

[ 13 : 05 ] Now, Paul is writing here about Christians in the churches. And he knows that if people think too highly of themselves in the Christian fellowship, it can cause real tensions and troubles.

And I've seen this in Christian fellowships over the years. So, for example, imagine a church where a member is appointed to be the minister's secretary or the church administrator.

And somebody else in the fellowship who thinks that they're better qualified for the job is overlooked and becomes jealous. Or perhaps there's a person who thinks that he ought to be appointed an elder or deacon in his church.

And somebody else, perhaps somebody rather younger or much newer to the congregation, is appointed instead. And the first person says, Well, what's wrong with me? Haven't I got more wisdom and maturity than this pipsqueak?

If we don't learn to think of ourselves with sober judgment, to use Paul's phrase, we may well become jealous of other people and then trouble can be caused.

[ 14 : 12 ] But if we learn to assess our abilities with sober judgment, we'll avoid these problems. I think the truth is we can come unstuck in two ways. We can think too little of our abilities and think that we have nothing to offer.

And that can paralyze us and keep us from playing a proper part in the life of the church. That's not uncommon. Now, Paul is not talking about that here. But it does happen to some Christians.

But it's the other end of the spectrum that Paul is highlighting here. The danger of having an inflated view of our own importance or our own abilities. But we'll only be able to play our part really well in the life of the local church if we don't think too highly of ourselves.

Let me suggest this. If you ever feel grumpy or browned off at something that's happening in your local fellowship, ask yourself, am I feeling personally slighted?

Am I feeling that I'm not being recognized for the rather fine Christian that I surely am? It's a trap that all of us can fall into and it leads to trouble.

[15:21] It leads to strained relationships. This surely is why Paul says in verse 3, I say to everyone among you, no exemptions, everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought.

This is an apostolic command. And Paul includes it because the churches will flourish and be much happier if we all learn to be sober in our assessment of ourselves. If we're really going to grow up, we have to learn to grow down.

It's the first step in having our minds renewed. We begin to chip away at our inflated egos and then we begin to see ourselves more accurately and honestly. Well then secondly, we have an apostolic illustration of all this in verses 4 and 5.

Let me read those two verses again. For as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.

Now these verses arise straight out of verse 3. The more soberly we learn to think about ourselves, the more truly and appropriately we learn to think about other people in the church.

[16:33] As we get ourselves out of the center of our vision, we begin to notice and appreciate everybody else in the church. So in verses 4 and 5, Paul uses a picture which he uses elsewhere in his letters as well.

And that's the picture of the church as a body which has many parts or members. And the point of this illustration, it's a brilliant illustration, the point is that there is one body and there's a diversity of parts or members.

And the different tasks performed by the various members of the body all enable the one body to function at its best. I think of this in terms of your own human body, your flesh and blood body.

If you hit your head on a low doorway, I've got one or two low doorways in my house, I remember 19 times out of 20 that it's there. Every now and again, I keep hitting my head.

And when you hit your head, you get a sudden pain in your head. And what do you do? You put your hand to your head and you rub it, don't you, like this, to ease the pain. So your hand is helping your head. The two things are working in unison.

[17:38] Or if you notice that your toenails need cutting, then it's your hand which takes the nail scissors and does the job. And thus your hand is helping your toes. So the different parts of our body help each other.

And thus the whole body works as a unit. Your toes don't get jealous of your fingers because your fingers are more useful and capable than your toes.

I mean, you wouldn't say, I wish I had fingers on my feet and toes on my hands because I'd get along a lot better like that. It'd be ridiculous to talk like that because it wouldn't be true. Your body functions at its best when every part fulfills its proper role.

So what does Paul mean by this illustration? He means let each member of the Lord's Church find out what kind of contribution he or she can best make to the good of the whole church.

And then let him roll up his sleeves and do it. So Paul is saying assess yourself with sober judgment. If you're an ankle, don't imagine that you're an elbow. If you're an ear, don't fancy yourself as an Achilles tendon.

[18:45] Find your role and then step into it. And then the whole body will function at its best. There'll be harmony. There'll be cooperation. There'll be mutual respect.

Sometimes, of course, in the church, we need to help each other to find the right role. So for example, you might know a woman in your church who for years has been desperate to teach in the Sunday school.

But you can see, and other people can see, that she's simply not a teacher. Now, you can really help her if you go to her and very lovingly and very gently say to her, Sister, don't fret after being a teacher.

You're not a teacher. Face it. But you're brilliant at catering and hospitality. Everybody knows that. Why not join the church's catering team and you'll really find your niche?

But if nobody ever speaks to that woman like that, she may remain frustrated and unhappy for years and jealous of the teachers and wishing she was one when actually there's something else for her to do where she could really do very well.

[ 19 : 50 ] So verses 4 and 5 here encourage us to look at the church, our local fellowship, all its members, not just at ourselves, which is our natural tendency, but to look at everybody.

And as we learn to look at the church, we begin to appreciate the many tasks and many different roles that different people fulfill. And we begin to be amazed and thankful at the way the whole thing somehow pulls together.

Caterers, welcomers, teachers, musicians, cleaners, evangelists, administrators, counselors, encouragers, youth leaders, creche organizers, church officers, people who look after the church's money, people who look after the church's buildings.

And so the list goes on and on. You could probably literally find a hundred things there. Every Christian person has a role and function in the Lord's church. It's a glorious privilege to be a little toenail in the body of Christ.

Most of us are never going to be greatly noticed. You don't get many Calvins or Billy Grahams to the pound. Most Christians serve the Lord in very quiet ways. But if we belong to Christ, we are members of the most wonderful body in the world, which is the Lord's church.

[ 21 : 07 ] To be the humblest and littlest member of the Lord's church is better than belonging to the House of Lords or the Royal Society or the Athenaeum or any other supposedly exalted human institution.

So that's the apostolic illustration here in verses 4 and 5. Now thirdly, we have some apostolic application in verses 6, 7 and 8.

This is where Paul takes the command which is laid out in verse 3 and which is illustrated in verses 4 and 5. And he now shows us some examples of how to put this into practice.

And the thrust of this section really comes in verse 6. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. That's the thrust.

Let us use these gifts. We all have different gifts, Paul is saying, but let's not be lazy armchair Christians. Let's get up out of the armchair and use the gifts that the Lord has graciously given to us.

[ 22 : 06 ] Imagine for a moment that you're a man and it's your birthday and your wife comes to you at the breakfast table with a parcel wrapped up in birthday paper and you unwrap your birthday present.

And it's a black and decker drill. And she looks at you with the sweetest look on her face and she says, that's for your Saturdays, my darling.

In other words, it's not to be kept locked up in a cupboard. It's to be used for the improvement of our home and for the subsequent enrichment of our marriage. So the point of verse 6 is gifts are to be used.

And then Paul gives us a sample list of gifts. This is by no means an exhaustive list. You probably know that Paul gives another list in 1 Corinthians 12 and another one in Ephesians 4 and Peter the Apostle gives us a small list of gifts as well in the fourth chapter of his first letter.

None of these lists claims to be a full list of all the gifts that God gives his people. They're simply sample lists. gifts. But let's notice the word grace there in verse 6. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

[ 23 : 20 ] That means that every gift that we possess is a gracious gift given by the Lord. It's given by grace and therefore we have no grounds for boasting about it.

There are no prizes for gifts. So when we rightly understand the gracious origin of gifts, we become thankful and not proud. So let's look very briefly at these seven sample gifts that Paul writes about here.

They fall into two groups. There are gifts of speaking and gifts of serving. Now there are three gifts of speaking here. Prophecy, verse 6.

Teaching, in verse 7. And exhortation, in verse 8. Now I haven't got time to say much about these three and good commentaries on Romans will open them up for us.

But let me just put it like this in words which I've borrowed from somebody else. Prophecy says, this is what God says. Teaching says, this is what the word of God means.

[ 24 : 22 ] Exhortation says, this is how the word of God applies. So the prophet declares the word of the Lord. The teacher takes the revelation of God, the words of the Bible, and opens them up and begins to explain them to other people.

And the exhorter has the ability to take the teaching and then press it home so that it changes the way the listeners think and behave. Now I think these categories of teaching and exhortation we understand quite readily.

And in a decent church, there'll be plenty of teaching and plenty of exhortation. Prophecy is a slightly more difficult one to get a handle on because we know that the canon of scripture, the 66 books of the Bible, is closed.

We're not at liberty to add to the canon. And therefore, we're rightly suspicious of anyone who claims to bring some new revelation from God which goes beyond what the Bible teaches. And yet, having said that, we do come across people sometimes who have an unusual ability to apply the Bible's teaching to the life of a nation or to a particular problem or blind spot in a church or nation. And we might say of such a person, his preaching is prophetic. Not in the sense that he's claiming to bring some new revelation, but in the sense that he's able to make striking applications of the Bible's teaching to the particular life of church or nation.

[ 25 : 45 ] But laying that question aside, what is Paul's point? His point is, if you are gifted as a Bible speaker, use your gift don't hide it away like an unused Black & Decker drill.

It's been given to you to help other people in the church. Some of you will know that my main job in life is to run a training course for Bible teachers and preachers, which is called the Cornhill Training Course.

And what we're trying to do in our work is to find a crop of students each year who have ability as speakers. We take them and we try to train them and mold them and then we launch them out.

Because the churches so much need people who can teach the Word of God pointedly and accurately. Think of the developing world where there are many churches, especially in parts of Africa and Asia, who have lots and lots of new Christians, but not many teachers.

And they very much need people who will use gifts of teaching, exhortation, and so on. But then we also have gifts of serving. And there are four that Paul mentions here.

[ 26 : 50 ] First of all, in verse 7, he simply says, service. That's the first one. Then in verse 8, there are three more. Contributing, leading, and then doing acts of mercy.

Now these are all gifts, just like the gifts of speaking. So service, well the Greek word there is diakonia, from which we get our word deacon, literally deacon's work.

And in Greek, diakonia, if you're a deacon, you probably know this, but diakonia literally means going through the dust. You've got to get down on your hands and knees and you've got to go through the dirt, because you're serving people in some lowly capacity.

That's a deacon's job. He's a through-the-dust person. Then there's contributing. Some Christians have money to spare, over and above what they need to put bread on their own tables.

So Paul says here, let such folk contribute generously. Get out the checkbook, write a figure, then add a nought on the end.

[ 27 : 51 ] Multiply it by ten. That's the sort of thing he has in mind. Then in verse eight, there's leadership. He says, not to be done with a droopy and reluctant spirit, not like a weary willy or a tired tim, but rather with zeal, enthusiastic, heartwarming leadership.

And then finally, he mentions acts of mercy, which really means looking after those who cannot look after themselves. Mercifully caring for those who are weak or destitute. Well, friends, I must stop there.

But in these few verses, verses three to eight, we have some of the basic ingredients of a healthy, enthusiastic, active church. Just think of the fellowship that you belong to.

A right, sober estimate of ourselves, that's the first thing. An estimate which cuts ourselves down to our proper size. Then an appreciative view of the congregation as a body, with many contributing parts.

And then finally, an active, enthusiastic rolling up of our sleeves and using whatever blackened decca the Lord happens to have placed in our hands. Now, any church which seriously puts these six verses into practice will be a church that is worth belonging to.

[ 29 : 04 ] Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. dear God, our Father, we do thank you for these words of the Apostle Paul, which we receive as your very message to us.

And we thank you for his deep understanding of the church, his love for the church, and his appreciation of the needs of the church. And we do pray for all of ourselves who are here today. For any who are not yet Christians, please bring them to Christ. Christ. And for those who are Christians, we pray that you'll help all of us to find our role, to discover how we can best serve the cause of the body of Christ, and then give us energy and zeal and commitment as we do the things that you have called us to.

And we ask it so that the name of Christ should be lifted up and covered with glory. Amen.