

Romans 12:3-8 Sermon Manuscript

“How to Serve Others Like Christ”

I find it amazing from time to time when I stop and think about how one little-teeny tiny part of your Bible affects your whole body. Take a nerve or a tooth. If you get a bad tooth that is infected, that is going to affect your whole body. Even though it's a small part of the body, you can't sleep, you can't eat, you are in constant pain. Some of you can relate to that. My dad is as tough as nails, and he tries to avoid the hospital like the plague. However, there was one time I remember my mom telling me my dad had such a painful toothache, he couldn't fall asleep and he was forced to go the hospital to get immediate treatment. When your teeth are not functioning as it should, it affects your entire body negatively. Similarly, when a member of the body of Christ, the church, is not functioning as it should, when it's not acting the way Christ would act, it affects every other member of the body of Christ negatively. And this passage is going to show you what it looks like to serve others in the church like Christ did...specifically what serving others in the body looks like when it comes to the different gifts has given to each person.

We saw last Sunday that the proper Christian response, that the most rational and reasonable response to all of God's mercies shown to us is to present our bodies as a living, holy, and pleasing sacrifice unto God because all of life is about worship which is why Romans 12:1 says that offering up our bodies as a sacrifice is our spiritual (or reasonable) service of worship. The question is not whether you worship at all, but who do you worship? Do you worship yourself or do you worship God? And assuming the answer to that question for all of us is that we worship God, verse 2 of Romans 12 then shows what it looks for ourselves to offer up our whole being as a living sacrifice to God. It is to not be conformed to this world and its sinful patterns and ways of thinking and living but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And that renewal comes primarily through filling your life with the Word of God because we act based on what is in our minds. Who we think about God, what our worldview is, what morality and ethics should look like, how a Christian is supposed to act. All of that is revealed in the Bible. And we stopped at verse 2.

However, the apostle Paul not only gives us the blueprint for how we should conduct our life here on earth individually, but also how we are to conduct our lives as a living sacrifice in relation to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ in the church. And so come to the part of Romans where we talk about spiritual gifts in the church. What does it look like to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice when it comes to using the spiritual gifts that God has gifted us with? Verse 3 *“For through the grace given to me I say to each one among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound thinking, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”* Just as the Apostle Paul thought of himself as the least of all the saints because of the grace shown to Him by Jesus in rescuing him from his sin, so we are not to think we are more special or better than anyone else because we were all in the same boat. And how are we to rightly assess ourselves? It's not difficult but simple. It's in Galatians 6:3 which says, *“if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing deceives himself.”* We're nothing. We are but dust. I'm not saying we are nothing in the sense of we have no intrinsic value to God. For God to endow us with His image and likeness makes us valuable in His sight

because we reflect Him. But that's precisely the point, all of what sets us apart from mere animals in being made in the image of God is that it is all a gift from God. We didn't earn it or deserve it. Salvation is a gift just as much as being created in the image of God is a gift.

Unbelievers are characterized by wrong and depraved thinking, but we as new creatures are called to renew our minds and have right and sound thinking, verse 3 *"as God has allotted to each a measure of faith,"* which is to say as God has given to each of us a standard of faith. Faith is the standard and rule of the Christian life. We must see ourselves in light of those who are recipients of the faith to believe in God's grace. God has granted not only you the faith to believe and to live out the life He wants you to live. He also however has given everybody else who is in Christ in the local body of the church the faith to believe and live the life He wants them to live. Yes, salvation is individual where God saves each and every individual sinner. But salvation also has a corporate element where God unites saved individuals with each other, making up the body of Christ, which is the church. And that's the point he's getting at it verses 4-5. *"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..."*

2000 years ago, those in the medical field and life science may not have known as much as we know today about the human body, but they sure knew enough to know that each part of the human body was different and served different functions and yet they needed each other to keep the body functioning and living and breathing. And God wants you to think of your involvement here in Bethel Baptist Church like being a functioning member or body part of the body. God didn't save you as a leg to go off as a single leg hopping around disattached from the body. No he saved you as a leg to be a part of the whole body of Christ. That's why I'm very weary of people who say, "I love Jesus, or God is in here" and they refuse to be a part of a local church. As one of my pastors used to say, "You can't claim to love Jesus and hate His bride at the same time."

And just like how God grants us the gift of faith to believe in Him, so God grants or gifts us spiritual gifts to help each other and make up for each other's weaknesses. Verse 6 says *"but having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..."* I want to point out that the list of gifts you see here in verses 6-8 is by no means an exhaustive list of gifts as in if you don't see your gifting listed here, the gift that you have is not actually a gift. I want to also point out that although typically the way you are gifted tends to be what you also delight to do or at least like to do, it doesn't always match up all the time. You might be gifted in an area that a church maybe needs, but it might not be your favorite thing to do every single time. So just because you are not thrilled to do whatever you are gifted at doesn't mean that God can't use that gift or is not prompting you to use that gift. Anyways, the first gift he lists is prophecy. Now there are brothers in Christ that hold to a different position than I do saying that the gift of prophecy is still active today, but I disagree and do not believe that the gift of prophecy is active today as it was in time when Paul wrote the book of Romans. Why? Because I understand prophecy to always be an authoritative revelation of God that the prophet or prophetess proclaims to the people. Prophecy involved both foretelling (predicting the future) and forthtelling, speaking God's message to current times and current people. Either way, both ways were divinely revealed by God as an authoritative message.

When the New Testament was still being written, God gave the sign gifts to the apostles and prophets to authenticate the identity, message, preaching of those commissioned by Jesus. Those sign gifts were things like speaking in tongues, miraculous acts like raising the dead, and prophecy. But as the New Testament was nearing its completion, you will notice that the gift of prophecy is less and less mentioned. In fact, you see an absence of the sign gifts in the later epistles like 1 and 2 Peter, or the pastoral epistles like 1, 2 Timothy and Titus. In the book of Acts, early on in the church we see a lot of displays of these authenticating sign gifts because people needed to know whether these apostles were the real deal or not and the canon of the Bible was not yet completed, but later on in the church, the apostles and prophets were replaced by pastor and teachers and preachers of the word.

No longer was there a need for the gift of prophecy or prophets because we have as 2 Peter 1:19 says *"the prophetic word made more sure, which is a lamp shining in the dark place until the morning star arises in our hearts."* Ephesians 2:20 also makes it clear that the church's foundation was the apostles and prophets because they were given revelatory, authoritative messages from the Lord to establish the church. But after that foundation was laid, there was no need any more for apostles and prophets. But all prophecies had to be in accordance with the faith, which faith is I believe used here to refer to all that is consistent with sound doctrine or all the theology that the Christian faith consists of. Proclaiming a prophetic word was serious. In the book of Deuteronomy if a prophet said, "thus saith the Lord" and it didn't come about, they would be stoned to death because it was not in agreement with the faith. But true prophecy would always be infallible, meaning it would be without error.

So even though the gift of prophecy is not active today, yet preaching the gospel and the established and written Word of God is. Preaching God's Word would be the closest thing to prophecy today because I am preaching the prophetic word that is telling us what's going to happen in the future. But if I am to utter and proclaim the Word of God to you, I better be in agreement with the faith, with what the Word of God actually says. Because the temptation for preachers of the Word like me is to be lazy and just give a half-hearted approach to sermon preparation and just preach generally about what it says without saying the precise meaning of what it says. That's why I went to the Master's Seminary because I knew if I stood up here to proclaim the meaning of God's Word, I would do a horrible job at it because I'm not trained. I would be mishandling the word of truth and doing you a disservice and dishonoring God's Word. I knew that the seminary would do a very good job training men to be precise in how they handle God's Word and that is the reputation of that seminary...it teaches men to be like theological snipers to hit the target of the meaning of God's Word.

Verse 7 *"or service, in his serving, or he who teaches, in his teaching..."* The word for "service/serving" comes from the word diakonos, which is where we get the word "deacon" from. The office of deacon in the church which is the role that Dave Conlee, Derek Wood, Barb Nafziger, and Shelly Griggs is one literally of service or serving. And God says, if you have that gift of service, devote yourselves in serving! The temptation and the tendency is to give a minimum effort approach to serving and just treat it as a check list. Same goes with teaching, if you a gift of teaching like the elders who teaches for example in Sunday School, then they are to do it with all their might and devote themselves to it. The temptation would be to treat teaching as a check list instead of an act of worship to Jesus Christ. And Paul goes on in verse 8 *"or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with generosity; he who leads, with diligence; he*

who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." There are people with the gift of exhortation. I knew some people like that. They just have a way of coming alongside of you and encouraging you to keep striving in the faith and being obedient to Jesus. I think Barb you have this gift. You're a yes woman and you have a way of being encouragement to others even in situations where things are dicey awkward or difficult. Or Deborah with her encouraging notes that she gives to me after sermons. Some believers don't this gift of encouragement because they are more like drill sergeants when it comes to admonishing people "Hey knock it out, stop your foolishness, cut it out, what are you doing?!!" Does that describe you? If so, well you probably don't have the gift of encouragement, but that's ok because God has gifted in a different area where you can excel at.

And there are some of you who have a gift of giving where you just keep on giving and giving to the church. God says to you keep on being generous and don't let your giving spirit become stingy. For those of you who leads, like small group leaders, lead with diligence as the temptation is to not lead with diligence but lazily or sloppily. And for those of you who have a gift of mercy, show cheerfulness because when you are showing mercy to those who shoot themselves in their own foot or who are in need, the temptation would be to feel resentful and blame them for using up your time, energy, and resources when it was their fault in the first place. Some of you might just have one gift...some of you might have multiple gifts. But none of you have all the gifts that God could give. And therefore because you are strong in some areas but weaker in other areas, that's why you need to have your weakness be filled by others who are strong in areas where you are weak. God gifted me in the area of public speaking and preaching, but not so much in mercy and service and giving and other gifts. I need the others to fill up what I am lacking because if the church consisted of just duplicate Terus, that would be so annoying. It would be like body consisting of multiple mouths all over going "wah wah wah wah...." gross.

But do you know the one person who possessed all these gifts? No, not the apostle Paul. It's Jesus. Jesus possesses all the gifts in the church imaginable because He is the one who dispenses these gifts through the Holy Spirit!! Only Jesus excels at literally everything in life. He is the ultimate prophet of God who proclaims the absolute authoritative message of eternal life. Everywhere He went, He spoke with authority and it was binding on everyone's souls. His gift of prophecy was in agreement with the faith because it is the embodiment of faith itself! Jesus exhorted others perfectly to the extent that He would literally change the world through this man and others. You remember the apostle Peter? After he denied Jesus three times Peter thought his life was over, that he thought he utterly failed as a disciple of Jesus and betrayed Him. He went back to his life of fishing despondent, depressed. But then Jesus showed up at the shore and He couldn't believe his eyes and Peter ran to His Lord and Master. They have some lunch by the fire and Jesus looks at Peter in the eyes and says, "Peter do you love me?" The first words Jesus said to Peter after His resurrection was not "Shame on you Peter, you are so pathetic and worthless, how could you ever think to betray Me!!!" No, no, no. It was the tender words of a brother thrice repeating "do you love Me?" and getting Peter to realize he does in fact love Jesus. And on that basis, Jesus says go and strengthen your brothers."

Jesus gave of His resources perfectly more than anyone else in the history of the world. Jesus gave His time, energy, and soul to His disciples and to those who were ill and plagued by demons. Night and day Jesus tirelessly gave to undeserving crowds who sought His power. And

ultimately Jesus showed the ultimate demonstration of generosity when He gave His very self on the cross to pay the eternal debt of sinners. Christ Jesus our Lord led His disciples perfectly with the utmost diligence, empowered by the Holy Spirit and Jesus' leadership was the ultimate example of serving others and created an eternal following of those who would deny themselves and take up their own crosses and follow Him. Jesus perfectly showed mercy to those who were demon possessed by casting them out of perverse men when He could have allowed the demons to continue to torment its captors. Jesus showed mercy to the hungry crowds who were following Him and He didn't show mercy with a bitter or resentful attitude unlike His disciples. Remember His disciples when it came to feeding the 5000? The disciples saw the huge crowds and said, "Lord just tell them to go home...there's no way we can feed them" and Jesus said to them "you give them something to eat," in other words, don't you have mercy on the crowds? And the ultimate display of mercy that Jesus showed was when He was hanging on the cross and said to the wicked Romans and Jews who put Him to death, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." "Father, have mercy on them."

Hearing that, you might say "well that was Jesus and I'm not Him!" That's the point...we are not like Jesus and so we need to be more like Him! We don't use our gifts perfectly to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ the way He perfectly did. But that is the goal right? That is why we must stay connected to the head of the body which is Christ. We are His body, but Christ is our head. Colossians 1:17-18 says, *"And He is before all things, And in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."* And as our head, as the very source of the life of the church, we need to keep looking to Him so that we would become more like Jesus. *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."* So my fellow brother or sister in Christ, whatever God has gifted you in whether it's as 1 Peter categorizes it a primarily speaking gift or a serving gift, keep looking at how Jesus excelled in that gift and follow in His footsteps and you will begin to excel more and more in that gift and you will find God will be using you more mightily for His kingdom in that way.

And for those of you who are not even a part of the body of Christ because you are not in Christ to begin with...know that Jesus Christ died for you not only to save you from your sins, but to make you join His body, called the church, so that your giftings would complement and make up for someone else's weaknesses and their gifting would make up for your weaknesses. Jesus loves His bride and He desires us, the bride of Christ, to be spotless and blameless and pure when He comes to take us home with Him. Just like how a bride prepares and adorns herself with beauty and presents herself in purity to her husband for the wedding day. And like how a man pursues his love interest to woo her, so Christ pursued sinners all the way to the cross to die for them. You can be reconciled back to God, wiped clean of all your sins, if you turn from all your idolatrous lovers and embrace the love of Christ for you. Romans 5:8 *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Join the body of Christ, join the bride of Christ in awaiting for His return.