

Humility

📖 Romans 12:3-8

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Last time we looked at Romans 12:1-2. In 12:1 Paul deals with the importance of us dedicating ourselves to God. He begins with “Therefore” in order to show that he is making application of all that has come before. His plea “I urge you” is not a command which might imply legalism but an appeal to the will consistent with grace. Paul is coming alongside as a friend and encouraging us to dedicate ourselves to God. This dedication is not publicly walking an aisle as common in certain denominations but a private and individual offering of ourselves to Him. The basis for the dedication is that we have enjoyed “the mercies of God.” The dedication itself is expressed by the words “present your bodies,” body being used here of the total person. The call is for the dedication or presentation of our total self to God. What we are presenting to Him is ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice. By living sacrifice Paul means to contrast our sacrifice with the dead sacrifices of the OT. Christ has been crucified and risen and we have been co-crucified and co-risen with Him, Therefore we are spiritually alive and we are offering ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. By holy sacrifice Paul means set apart unto God as a pleasing aroma before God. This, Paul says, is our spiritual service of worship. The word spiritual means both logical and spiritual. Our dedication is logical because He first showed mercy to us. Our dedication is spiritual because it is energized by the Spirit.

In 12:2 Paul deals with importance of maintaining our dedication to God. There is a negative and positive aspect to maintaining our dedication to God. On the negative side, do not be conformed to this world. The word “world” is really “age” and refers to the spirit of this age. Do not be conformed to the spirit of this age. Every age has a particular spirit or mold into which it desires to shape us into. This spirit is ultimately directed by Satan who is described in the NT as the god of this world and the prince of the power of the air. Satan as a spirit has devised a world system that governs unbelievers and his desire is that this system fashions believers into its mold as well. We should be cognizant of his influence on the system that shapes our age and more than that, we should be defensively combatting against it in order to reject worldliness. On the positive side of maintaining our dedication to God Paul says, be transformed by the renewing of our mind. This requires a conscious and active involvement in the text of the word of God. Christianity has been referred to as a thinking man’s religion and that is quite true. Christianity begins with our minds being renewed and through this our speech and deeds

begin to be transformed so as to manifest the new life that we are called to live. Finally, Paul states that the purpose of being transformed by the renewing of our mind is so that we may prove what the will of God is, that it is good and pleasing and perfect. The word "prove" means "approve." God's will is that which is revealed in Scripture. It is God's will that we disapproved of as unbelievers so what Paul is calling for now that we are believers is the renewal of our minds so that we approve of His will more and more in every sphere of life. God is a gentlemen and He lets us consider and think through His will as expressed in Scripture so that we are convinced of its infinite worth. All this is descriptive of the maintaining of the dedication to God that is so necessary to live as we were re-designed in Christ to live.

Having encouraged us strongly to dedicate ourselves to God and to maintain that dedication we now come to Paul's first expression of that dedication in 12:3-8. The first expression of our dedication to God is conducting ourselves in humility. Humility is having a proper evaluation of oneself and not having an overestimate. It does not mean thinking that we have no value because we each do have value. Humility is having the proper estimate of our value. Humility is not natural or Paul would not have to teach it. In this context he teaches it in the context of proper *understanding* and *use* of spiritual gifts. In other words, if we understand spiritual gifts and the proper use of spiritual gifts then it will foster humility.¹

A few observations about spiritual gifts should be made before we move into this particular passage. First, a spiritual gift is not to be confused with a natural talent. A natural talent is something that one is naturally born with; a spiritual gift is something that one is spiritually born with. Natural talents are inherited from one's parents while spiritual gifts are inherited from the Spirit of God. Natural talents may be a propensity toward art or music or sports or mathematics or politics and these talents, to be sure, can be used for the glory of God or against it. Spiritual gifts are a propensity to give, to help others, to impart spiritual teaching or to administer a body of believers. There are further things that could be said but the basic point remains, a spiritual gift is not to be confused with a natural talent. Second, all believers have at least one spiritual gift and possibly more than one spiritual gift. But no believer has all the spiritual gifts. That is why, for example, one cannot test whether one is a believer or not by whether that person speaks in tongues. That is one idea that some people have that if someone is a believer God will give them the ability to speak in tongues in order to confirm to them that they really are a believer. That is a false doctrine because not all believers have any one spiritual gift. Besides, the purpose of the gift of tongues was for unbelievers as a sign of judgment and not for believers. But the main point is that all believers have at least one spiritual gift and possibly more than one but not one believer has all of the gifts. Third, some spiritual gifts have to be developed just like a natural talent and others are spontaneous. Teaching, for example, is a gift that has to be developed by the gifted person. It takes time to mature and this maturing comes through practice. However, the gift of tongues or prophesying are spontaneous gifts. They did not have to be developed although they could be controlled by the speaker. Fourth, the discovery of spiritual gifts is by growing in maturity and not by taking a spiritual gifts inventory or test. The reason many believers do not seem to know their spiritual gift is simply because of a lack of spiritual growth. Trying to bypass the necessity

of spiritual growth by taking a spiritual gifts inventory or test will actually mislead a believer. Spiritual gift tests are a psychological profile of personality and not an indicator of one's spiritual gift or gifts. If one follows the results of the inventory they may find themselves only frustrated because they are trying to function in a way they were not spiritually designed to function. Fifth, none of the lists of spiritual gifts are exhaustive and one may even argue that not all the lists combined are exhaustive. We may think of others. The lists aren't intended to be exhaustive but illustrative. Paul is illustrating the kinds of spiritual gifts the Spirit distributes. They are like the lists of the fruit of the Spirit. There is love and joy and peace and so on but being content is not on any of the lists and yet it may be a fruit of the Spirit. The point is that such lists are not exhaustive but illustrative and there may be other spiritual gifts beyond those listed in the NT lists. Sixth, the gifts may be placed in three categories: foundational gifts, sign gifts and building gifts. The foundational gifts are apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). Once the foundation of the Church was laid these gifts ceased to be given. The sign gifts are tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles and healing. These gifts were necessary to authenticate that the message of the apostles and prophets was from God. These gifts ceased once the NT canon was completed. The building gifts are teaching, evangelizing, helping, giving, administering, etc... Since the building of the Church is still occurring these gifts will not cease until the Church is completely built. I understand that cessation vs non-cessation is a big discussion but dividing the gifts in this way is the most satisfactory way of understanding the NT teaching on the gifts. Seventh, and most important, all the passages on spiritual gifts have one theme in common. They are to be exercised in love for the purpose of promoting unity in the Church. Any expression of the gifts that is not in love and does not promote unity is a misuse of the gifts. Finally, the fact that Paul had to correct several local churches on the doctrine of spiritual gifts points to the need for clear teaching on this topic. Since most local churches and denominations continue to struggle with the gifts there is a continued need to proclaim this important doctrine.

In Romans 12:3-8 we see primarily building gifts, though not exclusively; prophecy was a foundational gift, and none listed are sign gifts. If you have an interest in the foundational gifts and the sign gifts there are a number of lessons in 1 Cor 12-14 and in the series on the Book of Acts that deal with them and why this local church thinks they have ceased. We will not enter into the cessation vs non-cessationism discussion today but will focus our energies on the building gifts which certainly have not ceased. These gifts continue because they are involved in the building up of the Church to spiritual maturity, though each may not be manifested in every local church.

In 12:3 Paul begins to paint a picture of *what* the Christian life looks like. Note that he is not telling us *how* to live the Christian life. In Rom 6-8 he taught us *how* to live the Christian life. In Romans 12:1-2 he reviewed *how*. *How* are we to live the Christian life? By presenting ourselves to God so that we are living in dependence upon the Spirit of God. This is essential because we do not have the power to live the Christian life even though we have a new nature. The new nature gives us holy desires but only the Spirit can produce those desires through us. Therefore we must learn to depend upon the Spirit. That is *how* to live the Christian life. But what we find here is *what* the Christian life looks like. *What* does it look like when we present ourselves to God and depend upon the

Spirit of God? One thing it is going to look like in vv 3ff is humility in confining ourselves to our spiritual gift and not trying to function in other people's roles! Another thing it is going to look like in vv 9ff is genuine love for one another expressed in a number of ways. Another thing it is going to look like in vv 14ff is blessing others who do not bless us and so on and so forth. What Paul is doing is painting a picture in broad strokes of *what* the Christian life looks like so that we can detect the Spirit's work in our own lives. These are general patterns, not strict instructions; these are guiding principles, not tight legalistic structures. This is important to keep in mind because we are not under law as a governing principle but under grace and so the commands must be understood in a grace context. J. Vernon McGee says, "...Paul puts down great principles that are to guide the believer. The Holy Spirit is giving the believer a road map of life, showing the curves but not the speed limit. He identifies the motels and eating places which he recommends without commanding the believer to stop at any certain one. Detours are clearly marked, and there is a warning to avoid them. The city of Vanity Fair is named, and the routes of exit are clearly marked. The believer is told to leave without being given the exact route by which to leave—there are several routes."² His point is that these are guiding principles and not tight legalistic structures. Therefore the way humility, love and blessing others may manifest themselves are multitude and we should not just look for one specific thing.

The first guiding principle we are to detect as indicative of the Christian life is humility. Paul says, **For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.** This is quite a lengthy description of true humility. True humility is having a proper estimate of one's worth or value. Interestingly Paul starts by referring to himself as humble. He does this by citing that his role as an apostle and prophet was received by grace. He says, **For through the grace given to me. The grace given to** Paul was the spiritual gifts of apostle and prophet. **Grace** is *χάρις* and refers to some favor given apart from any merit. Paul was given apostleship and prophecy apart from any merit. It was on the Damascus road that the risen Lord appeared to him and he believed. It was also at that time that Paul was given the grace gifts of apostle and prophet. These were **grace** gifts that came with the gift of salvation. Since both gifts Paul received were revelatory gifts he considered himself as having a revelation debt. The only way he could be relieved of the debt was to make known to others what had been revealed to him. That is what he is doing here. **By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you that everyone among you is not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment.** There is a wonderful play on words here in the Greek language that would make this very memorable for a Greek speaker but the point is clear any way you cut it. There is a proper evaluation or estimate that each of us should place upon ourselves. That estimate should be one based on sound judgment. From the context one way to gain a proper estimate is by thinking about the source of our spiritual gifts, our place in the body of Christ and our function in the body. All these things must be kept in balance or else we tend to either overestimate or underestimate our true worth. Paul is chiefly addressing the tendency to overestimate our true worth.

The proper estimate of our worth begins at the end of verse 3 with the expression, **as God has allotted to each a measure of faith**. The word **allotted** means parted out or dealt out. God is the dealer and He has dealt out to each one of us **a measure of faith**. What does Paul mean by **a measure of faith**? Paul is not talking about an amount of faith that God gave to you when you were an unbeliever that resulted in justification. He is talking about an amount of faith that **God** gave you as a believer to view your spiritual gift or gifts in the proper way and use them accordingly. As Tom Constable says, "The faith in view in this verse and in verse 6 seems to refer to one's ability to view and use his or her gifts as abilities that God has given."³ In other words, the measure of faith is the ability to look at your gift as something that was given to you by God and is not innate to yourself. Therefore, it is not something to boast about but to use with humility. Viewing your gift or gifts as from God is the only way to have a sound estimate of your true value. That is because the gifts reflect God's gift and not our innate abilities. That is what it means when it says **God has allotted to each a measure of faith**.

In verse 4 he explains. Note the **For...** that is an explanatory *γάρ*. Paul is explaining here what he meant in verse 3. **For just as we have many members in one body and all members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another**. This is the first time in Romans that Paul mentions the **body of Christ** and to really understand spiritual gifts you have to have an excellent understanding of the **body of Christ**. This is really the issue so a few points need to be made. First, what is the Church? According to Eph 1:22 and Col 1:24 the body of Christ is the Church, the *ἐκκλησία* of God. The word *ἐκκλησία* really means "a gathering or assembly" and this is a much better translation than "church," which carries too much baggage. So the body of Christ is a gathering or assembly. Second, what distinguishes one as a member of this gathering? According to 1 Cor 12:13 the assembly is composed exclusively of people who are baptized by the Spirit. To be baptized by the Spirit means to be identified with a new association, in this case with other believers in Christ. Third, when did the assembly begin? According to Acts 1:5 the baptism of the Spirit was yet future. This means the assembly in this sense did not exist prior to Acts 1:5. According to Acts 11:15 the baptism of the Spirit first occurred in the past with Jews who believed. So the assembly must have begun somewhere between Acts 1 and Acts 11. The only logical place for it to have begun is on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Acts 2 is when the assembly which is the body of Christ began and it began with Jewish believers only. Then in Acts 8 Samaritans entered into the same body of Christ. Finally, in Acts 10 Gentiles entered into the same body of Christ. All who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are baptized by the same Spirit and enter the body of Christ.

What Paul is doing is using a metaphor to describe the body of Christ. The metaphor is between the physical body with its head and the body of Christ with its head. This is a picture designed to teach truth. Carefully observe that the design of the human body is not incidental, as evolution might argue, just a random form resulting from a purposeless chance universe over vast amounts of time. Instead the human body was designed by a Personal God for the purpose of revealing many truths, one of which is the assembly which is the body and Christ which is the head of the body.

In verse 4 his point is that our human body has **many members** or better “parts.” Paul is talking about anatomy. Anatomy is the study of the parts of an organism. When we look at our human bodies we have many parts. Each of these parts has a particular design which is fitted for a particular function. The parts do not all accomplish the same functions but are arranged into various systems that all work together in one body. Paul’s main point is that which we already know, that we have but one body but that this body has many parts and each part does not have the same function but a different function.

In verse 5 he applies this by analogy to the body of Christ. **So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.** Each one of us is a part of the **one body of Christ** and as such we are each parts of **one another**. I am a part and you are a part and all believers through the course of Church history are a part of this one organism. Each of us has a particular design which fits us for a particular function. Each of us do not accomplish the same functions but are put together to work together in one body.

Now if that is so and I am a part and you are a part and all other believers in this generation are parts and in every generation back to Paul and the apostles are all parts, all of the same organism, an organism transcending generations, being built together and developing spiritually over many, many generations, what does that do to your view of yourself? It humbles you. You see you are a part of something that is giant, something composed of millions of people just like your human body is composed of millions of parts, tiny, intricate parts that have amazing complexity and purpose, and you do too. Each of you is an intricate part that is amazing in complexity and has a purpose. But always remember that you are just one part. Paul doesn’t say you or I are the whole but that we are each a part of this multi-generational organism that is in the process of growing from infancy to maturity.

Now Paul doesn’t come right out and say it here as he does in 1 Corinthians but there he says that each part is essential to the proper function of all the other parts. That is known from the anatomy of the body. If some part is not functioning, then other parts suffer. That is also true in the body of Christ. That means that if you are not functioning in your spiritual gift properly then the rest of the parts of the body of Christ are going to suffer. So there is a mutual dependence among us. The closest Paul gets to saying that is at the end of verse 5 where he says that we are **individual members one of another**. He is saying that you and I and Charles Spurgeon and John Wesley and D. L. Moody and Irenaeus and Jerome and Isaac Watts and all other parts are not a part of separate organisms but of the same organism and therefore not separate from them but **members one of another**. We benefit from them and that is why cessationism is not a big deal to me. It is not a big deal because even though certain gifts ceased centuries ago the benefits of those gifts have not ceased. That resolves the cessation vs non-cessation issue. Each generation benefits from the expression of prior generations gifts and adds their own in the body’s development. It is just like the human body. We know there are certain organs in our bodies that as adults have very little if any necessary function, for example, the appendix. But as children that organ is important because it functions to increase our immune system when we are in a frail stage of

development. So it is with the gifts. Some were necessary in the early church but not necessary today, but obviously their expression then still benefits us today and contributes to what we have become.

Now if you are a part and I am a part and we are not the same part but we are parts of one another with a function to fulfill in the same organism, why does it not seem to work well? Because one part has one function and it is trying to do another. Or one part has a function but it is not functioning. That means bad health friend. That is why the church is in bad health. Some parts are trying to do the function of other parts and some parts are not functioning at all. Oh that every believer would function as God has designed him to function, in his own spiritual gift. That is humility and that is the way it should be. You, if you are trying to do everyone else's spiritual gift you are going to get tired and you are going to quit. That is because you are just one part but you are trying to act like you can do the function of many parts. You need to quit doing that. You, if you are not doing anything are not exercising your spiritual gift and you need to start functioning in the body. You need to start doing your part and be content in your part. That is the way it should be.

Note that is exactly what Paul says in verse 6, **Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:** In other words, each and every one of us is to function in our gift. We all have different gifts. We don't have the same gift. Why do we have different gifts? Because God chose to do it that way. He is the one who allotted to each of us a gift. Note how Paul puts it, He did this for us **according to grace.** He didn't give you your spiritual gift because of your merit or because he looked at you and saw you had a natural talent from birth and said, "I'd like to plug him in here at this point because I can use that." No, you miss the entire point. I am not a teacher of spiritual things naturally, I am a teacher of spiritual things supernaturally, that is the whole point. And I assure you that it is most important to recognize that my gift is given according to some measure as verse 3 was saying, some measure of my ability to appreciate the gift as something sourced in God and to dispense of it with that sober estimate. I have no ability in and of myself. The ability to impart spiritual truth is a free grace gift of God. He is the one who is building the body of Christ, a body that is being built over many, many centuries. Therefore, only He knows what is needed in the body at a particular time for its proper development. That is the way I look at the body of Christ and my place in it and I suggest that you look at it that way too because that is what the Bible teaches. The body of Christ is not one generation of believers but every generation of believers and it is moving from infancy on the Day of Pentecost to maturity on the Day of the Rapture and thus a gift or gifts may be given at one time and not another in the exact same way that certain hormones and chemicals are released in our human bodies at different times in our development from infancy to maturity. It is not the same at all times and we do not always need some chemical but there are times that we do. It is a part of development. We may not understand all of it but we should recognize it. That is the body of Christ, friend, it is a multi-generational organism undergoing development from infancy to maturity. And only God knows what developmental stage this organism is in and what is necessary and so He outfits each of us with some spiritual gift to serve a role at that point in the development. Now if that

is not humbling I don't know what is. It means I can't determine any more than you can what spiritual gift we have. It was determined solely by God and for His purpose.

Now we can talk about all these gifts mentioned here. But again, these are just illustrative, these are just a few of the gifts, this is not all of the gifts. It is not really Paul's point to describe all of the gifts. His point is that we humbly exercise our gift within the one body. Therefore I will say very little about them but encourage you to move to maturity so that you come to understand your gift and exercise it and stay in it and not try to do everybody else's gift.

The first is **prophesying** and this is receiving direct revelation from God. That gift was being given while the NT was being written but now that it is written it is no longer being given. It was a foundational gift and necessary during that stage of the Church's development but it is no longer necessary and so it is no longer being given. Then we see **servicing** and this is serving others in material needs. There are believers that have material needs and you may be gifted to meet those needs. If you are, make sure it is done properly in a humble way and in the proportion that you recognize your gift is given to you by God and not something self-enabled. The third is **teaching** and this is explaining the Scriptures to others. It's not prophesying because the prophet received new revelation from God but the teacher is only explaining that revelation to others. The fourth is **exhorting** and that is a difficult word but it means to come alongside of others and encourage them. All these must be done recognizing that those doing them are just parts in a much larger organism and serving one particular function and that the other parts are important too. Everyone needs encouraging and that is the meaning of this gift. The fifth is **giving** and here Paul begins to add a few 'how to's'. He says, giving **with liberality**. The Greek word is "simplicity or with a single eye" and what it means is to give with only God in mind, with only one purpose, and that purpose is not to be seen by others but to be seen by God. It also means to give without thought of return. That is a wonderful way to give, it is to give freely and that is what true giving is all about, it never expects return. It just gives with a single eye. The sixth is **leading** and this is to be done **with diligence**. The Greek word for **leading** basically means "to be at the head of" or "to rule." It is one who exercises leadership. Not all Christians are gifted to lead. Those who are should lead **with diligence**. The word means "haste," it means get to it with swiftness and vitality. Get on the move if you are a leader and don't sit around. The seventh is **mercy**. By **mercy** Paul is speaking to those who have the gift of ministering to the sick and the homebound. Do you minister to them? This is not something me, the pastor-teacher, is to always do. I may do that but that is not my gift. When I am viewed as the one who is supposed to carry out that function you are saying I am supposed to do a function I am not fit for. Do you see what I am saying? Do you see that each of you is a part and that each of you is to function in your part? Too much of Christianity says, "That is what the pastor-teacher does." No my friend, that is not what the pastor-teacher does. That is what those of you who have the gift of **mercy** do. If I do that then I am doing your function and that is why things do not get done well. God has made me just one part and He has made you one part too. I am important and you are important too. So do your part and I will do mine and then the body will function correctly! That is how it is supposed to work. He says to show mercy **with cheerfulness**.

We get the word “hilarious” from this Greek word. This means that when you visit the sick and homebound you have a smile on your face and flowers in your hand. Why? Because you are there to lift their spirits. That is why you are there and that is a very great and important gift.

But the main point is not to explain all the gifts. Again, only a few are mentioned here and they are used only for illustration. The big point is to challenge; have you presented yourself to God and are you maintaining that presentation so that you can come to understand that you have a spiritual gift, and that with that gift you are one part of the one body of Christ that is a multi-generational organism that God is building and in that body you have a function, a part to play in the building up of that body until the day of Christ Jesus? Are you fulfilling your function? Are you infringing on other people’s functions. It is important to only function within your gift. Learn your gift through spiritual growth and function within that area. That is what is necessary for the church to be a well-oiled machine.

¹ Romans 12:3-8 is one of the three major passages on spiritual gifts, the others are 1 Cor 12-14 and Eph 4:7-16. The most extensive passage on spiritual gifts is 1 Cor 12-14. In these three chapters Paul wrote to correct the Corinthians *understanding* and *use* of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. The church at Corinth was highly gifted in that they had something most churches did not have; all the gifts distributed among that local church (1 Cor 1:7). This was commendable and a great advantage. However they gave certain gifts, like speaking in foreign languages, preference over the others because they thought the ability to make such utterances indicated superior spirituality. Paul destroys that idea with several lines of argument. For one he shows that speaking in tongues, while valuable, is less valuable than prophesying, teaching and helping others. Two he shows that love is greater than all the gifts since some gifts will cease but love will never cease. Three he finally shows that while tongues has a place it is very limited and requires many other factors to be valid, such as interpretation, and is therefore not as valuable as other gifts that do not require so many other factors to be valid. In short, Paul corrects their understanding of the gift of foreign languages by limiting its proper use and disconnecting it from an indication of spiritual superiority. The resounding note of 1 Cor 12-14 is using the gifts in love in order to edify and build up the saints. Second, in Ephesians 4:7-16 Paul wrote to address the problems of unity between Jew and Gentile at Ephesus. This church was divided along the Jew/Gentile line and Paul taught that spiritual gifts were given to break down that barrier and bring about unity. He states that Christ gave gifted people to the Church in order to build up the body of Christ so that we all grow to a unity of doctrine and knowledge and maturity that is found in Christ, who is the head of the body. Proper spiritual growth, like proper physical growth, depends on certain factors. Proper spiritual growth depends on the proper use of the spiritual gifts in love. Third, in Romans 12:3-8 Paul writes to protect against arrogance. His argument is that we are all one body and at the same time all distinct parts of the body. Each part of the body is necessary for the proper function of the whole. Therefore we should be content with functioning within our own particular gift and not try to take over someone else’s gift.

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Volume IV: Matthew Through Romans*, p 729

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:3.