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Romans

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, Romans 12:4

Using the human body as representative of the different offices of the church, Paul will draw out a comparison for us to more readily accept our station within the body. He begins with "for" and so shows that this verse is tied to, not separate from, the preceding verse. In that verse, he spoke of the grace he received and the grace each member of the church has also received "as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

Based on this, he notes now that just "as we have many members in one body..." so does the church. Paul will use this same thought several times in his writings, such as in Ephesians 4 and 5, but he will use it in the most expressive and telling way in 1 Corinthians 12. To get a fuller picture of Paul's thoughts here in Romans, take time to read that passage and see how he speaks about the body there. He has surprising insights for those who might "think of himself more highly than he ought to think."

Within the church, like within the human body, no two parts are the same, although some may have the same function. For example, the left hand functions with basically the same role as the right hand, but each is used to perform that function individually in order to meet the needs of the body. Eyes, feet, and elbows likewise mirror each other, but we're given more than one in order to meet the body's needs. Then there are the greater distinctions. There are external

organs and internal organs. There is the skeletal system and the epidermis. The list goes on and on. Each part of the body, selected by God to meet a particular need and to perform a particular function. As Paul say, "not all have the same function."

If you are a foot and not a hand, do you feel less important than the hand? Again, take time to read 1 Corinthians 12 today and you may find that being a foot isn't so bad after all.

Life application: The pastor of a church will only be as effective as the other members of the church. If the person who cleans the bathroom does a crummy job, it will reflect on the pastor. If the pastor does a crummy job in his preaching, there won't be any members coming around to use the bathroom. The church is structured like the body and each part needs to properly perform its task, not with boasting, but with humility. With Christ as our Head, let us exalt the Head.

...so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Romans 12:5

Using the previous verse as a reference, Paul says, "so we..." Just as there are many members in one body, and just as the members have their own unique function which differs from the others, so it is with all those in Christ. There are many in Christ and yet each has a unique role. We could argue that there are lots of pastors, but each pastor has a specific flock. Or even if the pastors are in the same congregation, they will minister at different times and to different individuals for different reasons. There may be many door greeters, but each door greeter greets different people and does so in a unique way.

No matter what the member does, all are members of "one body in Christ." In Ephesians 1:22, 23 we are told that Christ is the Head. This doesn't mean He is literally the head as if one is looking at a person's head. Rather, "head" is speaking of His leadership and preeminence. With Christ in this position, every member

(many) comprises the body in an individual role which is uniquely united to all others; we are "members of one another."

In Christ, the saying is true that "No man is an island." We are bound to each other under the headship of Christ and have importance and value. However, far too many allow their role to be more like a fingernail than a finger, finding it sufficient to be attached to the body, but only of use in a minimal way. Being a member of Christ's church indicates that we should put forth effort in order to exalt the Head.

Life application: We all have talents in our secular employment which can probably be transferred to our Christian walk. Is it right to satisfy ourselves and others outside the church with these talents while keeping them hidden from the body of Christ? Be willing to share your abilities within the church for the building up of others and the glorification of God.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; Romans 12:6

Paul now takes what he has said concerning the body and he breaks it down into individual "gifts according to the grace that is given us." Before reviewing the verse, a general analysis of gifts as given in the New Testament should be listed. The reason for this is that each list is given from a different outlook.

The first is this list found in Romans 12:6-8. Seven specific gifts are noted and these are simply a wide range of gifts which are given as either a calling on the believer's life or a temporary impartation, but they are not assigned to any specific person.

The second list is seen in 1 Corinthians 12. They are not specifically gifts of Christ as noted in the coming Ephesians list, but are manifestations of the Spirit. In other words, they are not necessarily a calling for life-work, but are temporary

occurrences for the edification of the body. However, towards the end of the chapter offices such as that of the apostle and the teacher are seen.

The third list is recorded in Ephesians 4. This list is that of individuals in their specific calling.

Seeing the difference can help us from a breakdown in doctrine. The purpose of the list needs to be considered and the gift itself needs to be viewed in that context. Gifts, regardless of whether they are general callings, manifestations, or specific offices are "according to the grace that is given us." It needs to be noted that the "calling" gifts overlap in a great way with non-Christian vocations. In both Christian and non-Christian venues there are speakers, there are those who do administration, there are teachers, there are exhorters, etc.

Therefore, these gifts are formed from the makeup of the individual, whether Christian or not. Because of this, the use of the gift for the body is what makes it of value to the body. There are teachers all over the world, but they don't use their God-given gift for the body. There are even teachers who are Christians who don't use their gift for the body. Paul's list here is speaking of those who take their God-given gift and apply it for Christian use.

On the other hand, there are the "manifestation" gifts such as healings and tongues. These are not callings, but are temporary impartations to meet particular needs or situations. Once again, it should be noted that there are those who claim such gifts in a variety of other religions. Some eastern religions, for example, speak in "tongues" in the same way modern Charismatic groups do - with garbled, nonsensical noises. There are only three logical explanations for these type of "tongues" in churches then. They are faked by the speaker, they are inspired of Christ, or they are of other-than divine origin. The same is true with faith healers. There are charlatans within and without the body, fooling and deceiving for recognition or profit.

The subject of "manifestation" gifts needs to be very carefully handled and all such gifts must be taken in the context of prescriptive passages in the Bible. Using descriptive verses from Acts to justify such gifts will inevitably lead to confused theology and the misuse of these same "gifts." In the coming list in Romans, because of the nature of the gift, mentally inserting the term "let us use" prior to reading each gift will help keep that gift in the intended context. Paul's list now begins with "prophecy."

Prophecy is the uttering forth of God's word. It can be in writing or verbal. No true prophecy will ever contradict Scripture. Prophecy can be reasonably divided into "foretelling" and "forth-telling." Foretelling involves speaking forth God's word under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit and which reveals God's intent for a situation, insights previously unknown, the revelation of future events, etc. It is God directly speaking through a person in the communication of His word. This type of prophecy ended with the word "Amen" at the close of the book of Revelation. It was something used up to and through the apostolic age and which ended after that; God has spoken.

Forth-telling prophecy is the speaking of God's word as it has been revealed. It is preaching, teaching, and exhortation in what has been received from God as revealed in the pages of Scripture. As noted above, like foretelling, forth-telling will never contradict the written word. Extreme care must be taken by preachers and teachers to carefully and competently explain God's word to His people. Doctrine does matter. In the end, the gifts listed in the Bible must have the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ. This includes the forth-telling of God's word.

Life application: One of the most sensitive matters found in the church is the subject of "gifts." The reason for the sensitive nature isn't because it is confusing, but because believers are confused. Context and right-evaluation concerning gifts will lead to the sound interpretation of what gifts apply, when they apply, and to whom they apply.

"...or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;"
Romans 12:7

Adding to the list from Romans 12:6, two more designations of service are named in this verse. The first is ministry. The word translated as "ministry" is diakonia. This is the word from where we receive the title "deacon." A deacon in the church fulfills an office of ministry and it is also a designation of that office.

Unfortunately, the sense of being a deacon is often elevated to something other than its original intent which is humble service of any kind. Greek etymologists find the original meaning of "deacon" to be derived from the words "through the dust."

In other words, the deacon is one who serves, and as he scurries about in his duties he kicks up the dust around him. But there is also the biblical connotation that man was made from the dust and so the deacon is the servant of all men. It then would be an office which resembles Christ as the Servant, going so far as to wash the dusty feet of His dust-made creatures. It is to be considered an office of humility and service, not authority and power. He is to be Christ's courier of service to the people of the world and for the body of Christ.

However, the term as used in Romans 12:7, although aligning with this analysis, is probably intended more for the office of the ministry rather than the designation of that office. Stated differently, it is not specifying a title, but speaking of the overall effects of ministering; that of service. Those who hold the gift of ministry, let them minister.

The second office is "teacher." The Greek word didasko literally implies, to "cause to learn." Hence it involves the instruction and imparting of knowledge and information so that others will grow through that instruction. In the New Testament, the word didasko is found in three separate noun forms, one verb, and in the form of two different adjectives which total over 200 uses. Of these, almost every instance is speaking of instruction in the Word of God. This then is certainly what Paul is referring to here - the right instruction for the proper application of Scripture.

Albert Barnes notes that "the churches in New England had, at first, a class of people who were called teachers. One was appointed to this office in every church, distinct from the pastor, whose proper business it was to instruct the congregation in the doctrines of religion." This has continued in large part since that time, but it shows that the original believers who came to America had the intent not only of bringing their denominational faith with them, but also ensuring that the word was taught in the expectation that the faithful were not just blind adherents to the denomination, but were people who were expected to know why they believed what they believed. Those who hold the office of teacher, let them teach.

Life application: Are you gifted with the ability to minister to others? Then minister in a manner and form which is honoring to Christ. Have you been gifted as a teacher? If so, before you teach, read and take to heart James 3:1. Understand that your job is of the highest importance for the continued doctrine of those you teach. Being negligent in such a high calling will have negative effects beyond your own judgment, but can also lead others into sad avenues of confusion.

"...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Romans 12:8

Paul's list of services is complete with verse 8. In this verse are four gifts which can be offered by those within the church. The first is "he who exhorts." Exhortation is different than teaching. Teaching is tied to doctrine within the faith whereas exhortation is tied to the practical application of the faith. Teaching then leads to exhortation. One must be properly taught the faith in order to properly practice the faith - orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. As this is considered by Paul as a separate function and gift, it implies that it is a different office.

Thus in a church there are counselors. Some churches have marriage counselors, financial counselors, etc. These are not really teachers in doctrine, but rather are those who teach in the related practice. They should be grounded in the doctrine

and then they should be able to give instruction to others in how to apply the principles.

Often, these offices will overlap somewhat and a lead pastor should be able to combine them in ways which will make the most beneficial use of the imparting of the word of God, particularly in sermons. A sermon that doesn't include an analysis of the Scripture isn't really a sermon. However, there should also be encouragement within the sermon about the application of the analysis. Thus exhortation is a valuable asset, not only for specific circumstances in life, but in general applications of how to live life. Those who hold the gift of exhortation, let them exhort with zeal.

Next Paul speaks of "he who gives." The term is *metadidous* and some feel this actually bears the notion of distributing the money possessed by the church. This is considered because the other gifts are more office-centered rather than individually expressed gifts. However, others disagree and state that it is speaking of the giving by individuals. The latter is more probable. Though the other gifts are offices within the body, they are possessed individually and expressed in the office. The same is true here.

Each person who gives is a part of the office of finances, but their giving is an individual expression. To support this, Paul says that those who give should do so "with liberality." The term is *haploteti* and it denotes sincerity, simplicity, or purity. Giving is to be done with all of these thoughts in mind. We should be sincere in giving, not hoping for some type of return. We should also be simple in our giving; to give without complication. A good way to explain this is to give "without strings attached."

Our gift is for the church and when the gift is given, it is no longer to be wielded by the giver. And it should be given with purity. Our hearts should be grateful for the opportunity to give and the gift should come without the giver having been pressured. For those who are able to, and who are blessed with the gift of giving, let them give with liberality.

The next gift concerns leading. And what a gift this is! Whether in the church or out of the church, true leaders are usually easily identifiable. There have been many presidents, but few were natural leaders. There are those who can discern the structure of human interaction and use it in marvelous ways to accomplish great feats.

Within the church, such people may work behind the scenes and yet make great advances for the furtherance of the church through their leadership abilities. This is the sort that leads with true humility and doesn't lord his ability over others, but understands that he is a participant with a unique skill. There are lead pastors who are great leaders and there are lead pastors who understand the quality of great leaders, even if they don't personally possess that quality. Either way, the effective use of leadership is a great asset and an immense blessing for a church.

The person who is so gifted is instructed to use his leadership abilities in a tireless, careful, and attentive way. When so handled, the aims and goals of the church will always be the prime target and the devoted focus of the leader. He who leads, let him lead with diligence.

Finally, Paul finishes the list with "he who shows mercy." There are those who have physical ailments and who need care lavished upon them. There are those who are weak in the faith and need grace and building up rather than condemnation and accusation. There are those who have addictions and who need help with them, not scoffing because of them. They don't need a demeaning attitude from others, but empathy and direction. A miserable drunk who comes to church has come because he is a miserable drunk. Without mercy, he will only stay a miserable drunk. With care, affection, mercy, and prayer, he can become a valuable asset in the church. Showing mercy requires tact and it also requires the ability to not be snookered. For the person who is able to show mercy, let him do so with cheerfulness.

Life application: No one person is fully proficient in all of the gifts mentioned by Paul, but each of us can strive to become more competent in every office. For

those with a particular gift, it is only right that they step forward and exercise it, not for self-glory, but for the glory of the Lord.