

## **Romans 12:3-8**

### **“One Body, Many Members, Varied Gifts”**

IDC Sunday AM

**Big Idea**: The gospel creates a community marked by humble hearts and active service.

The gospel creates a community — we saw this in the previous passage, where Pastor Matt explained that those who are in Christ together are called to offer ourselves as a collective sacrifice.

This passage picks up on that theme, explaining a little more about how we are to live as a redeemed community. In light of Romans 1-11. In light of God’s mercy in the gospel through Jesus Christ, how do we now live?

There are a few themes that run throughout this passage, to help us answer that question. The first is that **God is the distributor of grace**. Just as in the gospel we are receivers—we deserved nothing from God except shame and judgment, God freely gave us grace and mercy in Christ. In the same way, God continues to distribute grace in this passage—“measures of faith” (3) – “gifts” (6). God is still distributing grace in the church.

Another theme is the idea of **fittingness, or appropriateness**. Several times Paul says we are to live according to that grace that we have received.

God distributes, we receive, and then we live in such a way that is appropriate to his design and calling.

2 exhortations for living in God's redeemed community:

### **1) SEE YOUR PLACE IN THE CHURCH RIGHTLY (12:3-5)**

Paul's first concern for the redeemed community is that we do not think of ourselves too highly.

Paul knows that pride is a **persistent** sin, and it is a **destructive** sin. It's hard to get rid of and it does a lot of damage, especially in the context of the community.

Pride is persistent because even among those who have been humbled in the gospel can and do still struggle with it.

The Christian is one who has been humbled—humbled enough to know we cannot save ourselves and we must look to someone else to save us.

(ILL) No pride when Ezra's got his foot stuck between the bars in his crib...he just needs help!

But prideful people don't call out for help. Only those who have been humbled do.

So the redeemed community are those who humbly rest on the mercy and grace of God for their salvation, knowing that we have nothing in ourselves that can save us.

AND YET, even the redeemed community must beware pride. Even those who have been humbled can become puffed up.

Pride is persistent, and it is also destructive.

Paul's spent 11 chapters expounding the glory of the gospel, and now in chapter 12 he looks at the church and says, "*now here's how you live in light of that.*"

But he begins with a warning: don't think too highly of yourselves. (ILL: Like a big "Beware of Dog" sign, but there's actually a big dog there) Why? Because he knows that pride undercuts the gospel that formed the community and it undercuts the ability of that community to walk in that gospel.

**The gospel says,** "Lay your life down for others"

**Pride says,** "You're more valuable than others. Protect yourself."

**The gospel says,** "Love one another as Christ has loved you."

**Pride says,** "Love yourself above all."

**The gospel says,** “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

**Pride says,** “Others should submit to my greatness.”

**The gospel says,** “Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others...like Jesus showed you.”

**Pride says,** “Make sure your interests are taken care of...they’re probably right anyway.”

Pride is the great destroyer of the gospel community. Paul knows this, so he exhorts the Roman believers first and foremost to resist pride by seeing their place in the church rightly.

So Paul gives them 2 reminders to help them see their place in the redeemed community rightly—to not think of themselves too highly.

First, he reminds them, “you are a recipient of grace”

### **(a) You Are a Recipient of Grace (3)**

---

#### **Romans 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> 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.

Paul speaks first as one who has himself been the recipient of grace. He did not earn his role as an

Apostle, nor his status as a believer in Jesus Christ. Paul was always acutely aware of his status—he was saved by grace, just like everyone else.

And from this position, he encourages “every one among you”—“all y’all”—a good reminder that an inflated self-perception is not the exclusive property of visible leaders...we are all open to this sin.

“not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think.” — I love this phrase. Because it some ways it’s so challenging, but in other ways it’s not very helpful at all, right? How highly “ought” I think of myself?

(ILL) It’s like if you’ve ever offered to make someone’s coffee who puts cream and sugar in their coffee (like normal people do, coffee snobs). And you ask them how much cream or sugar they want, and they say something like, “Oh you know, some. Just not too much.” → not helpful!

This is kinda like that. He’s not saying consider yourself roadkill. He’s just saying, don’t think higher than you should.

Now what that doesn’t mean is that you should start walking the halls measuring yourselves up against other people — “I’m probably a 7, maybe 7.5. He’s a 5 so I’m okay to think of myself higher than him. Ooo,

but there's a missionary...he's definitely 8.25." —  
that's NOT what we're doing here.

Oh, but friends how often is this the trap we fall into? How often do we relate to one another the way all the applicants for a single job opening view one another in a group interview—sizing one another up...measuring...scheming...posturing. This is not the way of the gospel!

And it's exhausting!

Instead, we are called to think of ourselves with sober judgment. The antidote to thinking too highly of oneself is not to think too lowly of oneself. It's to think of oneself correctly, accurately, truly.

But what is the standard? How do we know how highly to think of ourselves? He tells us—“each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Now, there's a good bit of disagreement about the best way to understand this phrase.

Some argue that faith in Romans almost always means 'saving faith,' and since there aren't different levels of saving faith, should see “faith” as referring to “the faith.”

In this case, we measure ourselves according to our common faith in our common gospel, which is from God.

The phrase basically turns into, “Think of yourselves in light of the grace of God in the gospel.”

I do think we should do that! BUT I think a better understanding hinges on the word “measure.” Paul is not primarily referring to quantity (faith units?), but of a certain allotment of faith. A certain distribution.

(ILL) Think about it like this. If I have a plot of land, and I want to distribute it, I can cut it into all kinds of different shapes and sizes and give it to different people. They all share in the land, but they have a different section of it. It looks different for each of them. One person may have some good farmland. Another might have a good rock quarry. Another may have some good pasture land, etc.

Something like that is going on here. We should think of ourselves as those who have received from God a distribution of faith.

Not of a different kind, or not even really of a different amount, but of a different shape. A unique shape.

Now, how does that help us think of ourselves rightly? Two ways:

One the one hand, as recipients of grace, we are guarded from pride, because everything we have is from God.

But on the other hand, because he has given us grace, we ought not think of ourselves as worthless. He has chosen in his goodness and grace to give you a measure of faith—because he loves you!

(APP) Which of these is harder for you to believe?

The second reminder Paul gives us to see our place in the church rightly is,

### **(b) You Are a Member of a Body (4-5)**

---

#### **Romans 12:4–5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

So Paul uses a very simple analogy:

a body is one body,

but it has many members, many parts.

Those parts do not all have the same purpose

(Paul uses a very similar analogy in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4)



There are really three elements to this analogy that Paul brings out in verse 5: diversity, unity, and dependence.

**Diversity** — he says we are many; we look different, come from different places, have different experiences, and different giftings. There's a plurality and diversity among us.

**Unity** — these different parts form a whole, and that whole has a unifying center—Christ

Now this is especially important for us as a local church to hear. There are so many competing “centers of unity” out there. So many things that tempt us to think, “If we could just rally around x, we'd be good to go.” But they are all imposters. I'm not saying they are bad things, necessarily, though often they are the idols of our own hearts. But whether they are sinful or not, I'm saying they are dangerous grounds to unify around as the redeemed community.

So things like age, income level, and social background cannot unify the church. Possessions, hobbies, race, social acceptability, education level, neighborhood—none of these things can unify the church.

Christ, and Christ alone, is the unifying center of the people of God. It is his body that we belong to, and in which we are given the privilege of playing a part.

**Dependence** - But Paul wants us to see that as recipients of different measures of faith, we are put in a unique position. We all bring something to the table, but none of us has it all.

(ILL) Take my earlier example of a plot of land, and now think of a puzzle. If I have all the pieces and divvy them up, everyone brings something to the table, but no one is the full picture.

In the same way, we are all partaking in the same faith, but none of us is complete without the other.

That's what the church is like: there's a unity, and there's a diversity—and together those create a dependence on one another.

We NEED one another. But not only do we need one another, Paul says we belong to one another. We are members of Christ's body, but also of one another!

That means I have an interest in you and your faithfulness, and vice versa. Every impulse in me that says, "That's none of your business!" is a lie from Satan, who wants nothing more than use to know nothing of what it means to be the body of Christ.

## Many members – One body (Christ's) – together

So that's where we start. First we must see our place in the church rightly.

Second,

### 2) USE YOUR GIFTS IN THE CHURCH FAITHFULLY (12:6-8)

#### **Romans 12:6-8 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> 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.

There is one body, there are many members, and there are varied gifts. That's what Paul says in the rest of this passage.

The root of this particular word for gifts is the word for grace. These are grace-gifts.

But they are not all the same. We all have them, but they are not all the same. What is the same is that we are called to use them faithfully.

(APP)

So Paul wants to show them, to give them a few examples about what it looks like to use these gifts faithfully in the context of the redeemed community.

There are other similar lists (1 Cor. 12, 1 Pet. 4), but they aren't the exact same as this one. That means a couple things. First, that means these are representative lists, not exhaustive ones. Second, it means if you don't see yourself in any of these, that's quite alright. Find out what God HAS gifted you to do by his grace and do it!

Finally, let one more note on the gifts: just because you are not gifted in a particular area does not absolve you from obedience in that area. It may just mean you are not especially inclined or wired by God to do a thing. That's okay, but in those areas that we are all called to be obedient, "That's not my gifting" is not a legitimate excuse (e.g., serving, acts of mercy).

What it does mean is that we have people in this church who are especially equipped by the Spirit of God to do the work of ministry, and because we are one body, we *need* to lean on them for those gifts.

It also means you have been gifted by God to serve his people and his kingdom in a particular and powerful way.

Let me ask you this: are you using your gifts faithfully?

Prophecy | Service | Teaching | Exhortation | Giving |  
Leadership | Acts of Mercy

## 7 OBSTACLES TO LIVING AS THE REDEEMED COMMUNITY

- 1) Not receiving the grace of God in the gospel
- 2) Downplaying your own need for both the gospel and your brothers/sisters (i.e., entertaining a lofty view of oneself)
- 3) Trying to live the redeemed life apart from the redeemed community, the church
- 4) Trying to unify the church around anything other than Jesus
- 5) Trying to be a part of the church without “belonging” to other members
- 6) Failing to use your gifts to serve Christ’s church and Christ’s kingdom
- 7) Failing to receive and celebrate others’ gifts