

Serving Sunday: Gifted by Grace to be Used for Good

Romans 12:3-8

Last week we had the opportunity to install a new elder here at WBC. I tried to help us see that, according to the NT, church leadership matters for the advancement of the Great Commission throughout the world. As people are saved and churches form, the right leaders need to be set apart to shepherd and guide those churches toward the fulfillment of Christ's mission for them.

So, what is Christ's mission for His church? Of course, we could summarize it with Matthew 28:18-20. The heart of this commission is to make disciples or followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We baptize those followers to show their initiation into the fellowship of believers and then we teach and instruct those who are followers to obey all that Christ has commanded. So, what does a healthy, maturing disciple of Christ look like? We've tried to summarize the major aspects of discipleship in our mission statement here at WBC. This is what we are aiming for. *Woodhaven Bible Church exists to make followers of Christ who worship God, connect with one another, and serve the church and the world.*

In that statement you will find 3 actions that disciples of Christ are continually performing in order to grow to maturity in Christ. All three of these are necessary parts of your discipleship process. First, disciples worship God. Disciples must continually come together with other believers to hear God's Word and praise Him in worship. This happens every Sunday morning. Second disciples who are growing are not living in isolation but they are connecting with other believers. They don't just show up for the service on Sunday. They are actively involved in the lives of other believers. They speak the truth in love, apply the Word of God, and practice the one another commands in the NT. Third, beyond connecting with other believers for fellowship, maturing disciples actively use their gifts to serve the church body and the world around them by sharing the gospel.

Worship. Connect. Serve. These are the 3 key actions of discipleship and we have set aside this morning to focus on the 3rd one of these, serving. I'm sure you noticed in your bulletin the two inserts. The bigger one lists the serving teams and the smaller one is a little response card where you can express your interest in getting more info on a team. This doesn't sign you up to serve, but does give the leader a chance to get in touch with you and talk about next steps. We have

organized things this way to try to make it easy on you to find a place to exercise your gifts, under the right leadership, to bless the body of Christ. As you consider one or two of those teams, because you aren't limited to one, I want to let Scripture motivate us and direct us in our serving.

Turn with me to Romans 12, the passage Dom read a few minutes ago. Most of you are quite familiar with the first two verses of this chapter. Look with me at them. Of course, these two verses are a transition point in the book where Paul goes from the theology of the gospel to the very clear ethical and moral actions and attitudes that result from God's mercy in our lives.

The biggest things that happen are that we offer our entire selves as living sacrifices to God and our minds are constantly being renewed by the Word of God. In other words, we no longer think the way we used to. We no longer view the world, the church, ourselves, and others as we once did. This massive change in offering our bodies and renewing our minds finds primary expression in how we think of serving in the church and this is shown because Paul goes right into how we serve in the church in verses 3-8. This is where we will be this morning and in this passage I want to give you **3 Attitudes that Will Help you Use Your Gifts more Effectively in Christ's Church.**

1. I'm Not That Important (v. 3)

You can see at the beginning of verse 3 that Paul is explaining how the renewed mind of verse 2 works itself out in our perspective and view of ourselves. The renewed mind causes us not to think of ourselves too highly.

Now, I'm hesitant to use the word pride to explain the perspective Paul is giving here because I know that we all hear the word pride and immediately dismiss that we are prideful. But, let Paul adjust your thinking about pride here. A mind that has been transformed by the mercy of God does not have too high of an opinion of itself.

It's quite easy for us to live as if we believe we are more valuable and more important than we truly are. Let's take our work, our jobs. It's very easy to just naturally think, "Well, I deserve more money, I deserve more influence, more responsibility, a higher position. This company better not lose me. This company

will lose out if I go elsewhere. Things won't go as well. This company will fail without me, and if they don't fail, they will struggle without me."

If you think of self-assessment as a scale, all of our scales tend to be weighted toward self. We come into the church believing we are so important. This attitude is a service killer. This is a unity killer. We need to learn to rightly assess ourselves. Look further in verse 3. To have sober judgment is to be sensible. To have sound thinking. Your thoughts accord with reality. Sometimes this word is translated self-controlled and this contributes to the virtue Paul is calling for here. He's essentially calling us to be prudent, to have practical wisdom, to see life and situations from the correct point of view.

Paul is obviously warning us about a high opinion of ourselves but he's also not calling for a low opinion of ourselves. Pride and low self esteem come from the same place, both are self-focused and self-oriented. Instead, Paul says that we are to let God's mercy and the gospel renew our minds so we can think rightly about ourselves and see that all we have is a gift of grace. Look at the end of verse 3. When someone is lifted up in pride concerning his or her importance in ministry, it shows that they really don't understand the gospel of grace. They are not recognizing the implications of God's grace. God has given us all that we have received and so to truly serve the church we cannot come with the attitude that I am a big deal. But, we also have to carry the second attitude at the same time.

2. I Am That Important (vv. 4-5)

While you and I aren't to overestimate our importance, we do have to rightly assess our importance. Clearly, we are made in the image of God and so each person has value. But here Paul tells us we have importance and value because each member plays a role in the body. Look at the metaphor he sets up in verse 4.

The human body is truly amazing. I got a book this week called *The Body: A guide for Occupants* and it's a hilarious look at our bodies and how they work. Let me read some of this to you: *"The body is often likened to a machine, but it is so much more than that. It works twenty-four hours a day for decades without (for the most part) needing regular servicing or the installation of spare parts, runs on water and a few organic compounds, is soft and rather lovely, is accommodatingly mobile and pliant, reproduces itself with enthusiasm, makes jokes, feels affection,*

appreciates a red sunset and a cooling breeze. How many machines do you know that can do any of that? There is no question about it. You are truly a wonder.”

There’s a reason Paul uses the metaphor of a body here. Our bodies can do amazing things and yet, stop and think about how many different parts have to work together for you to walk to the coffee pot and pour a cup of hot coffee without burning yourself. Some are seen, some are unseen, but each is important. Each has to know its place and fulfill its role. The hand could try to get all the glory because it grasps the coffee pot and is visible, but the hand can’t do a thing without the blood vessels bringing it oxygenated blood and without the brain sending signals. Diversity of roles makes unity of action possible. Paul says that the church functions just like a body. Look at verse 5.

Here’s the beauty of this body we call the church. We are one body in Christ. We are vertically united to Christ into His body. And yet, we are also horizontally members of one another because of our vertical union. We talk fairly regularly about our union with Christ, and it is a key teaching of the NT. It’s a result of the gospel’s work in us. Yet, our union with Christ means we are also united to those around us in the body. We need one another to function.

“Only as we become acutely aware of the truth that we are in fellowship with every other believer – like it or not – will we seek to work out the implications of that fellowship in loving concern and care for each other.” – Jerry Bridges

You are important because we are important and we have a mission to accomplish together. And this leads us to our last attitude.

3. My Gifts Are Needed Today (vv. 6-8)

I want you to feel and see an urgency to this illustration of the body. Listen to Paul expand on this in 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. It’s a long passage but a clear message. There are a number of potential problems in our approach to serving within church life that this body illustration can help us avoid. There can be a temptation to envy the service of others and think, why can’t I do that? Envy is a contentment killer if there ever was one. And if you won’t utilize your gift because you don’t have a different gift, you are hurting both yourself and the whole body! On the flip side there can be a sense of pride because of the particular way God has gifted you. You can forget that God gifted you to use your gift for the good of

others and for His glory and you can start sort of stepping in front of God to fill up the picture.

To avoid these dangers, we need to hear the urgency of Paul's words in verses 6-8 in light of the illustration of the body. Listen as I read.

Now, you have to see that all of these gifts are by grace. Look again at the beginning of verse 6. All gifts are grace, they are not earned. It's by God's grace that we aren't gifted in the same way. It's by God's grace that you and I are limited in a variety of ways. None of us have all the gifts. We need each other and we should remain humble because we aren't gifted in every way.

And, God by His grace will actually use you to accomplish His purposes if you will get involved. He uses weak and broken people like you and me to advance His mission around the world. All this requires of you and I is a sense of urgency and a commitment to act. Look again at verse 6. Paul lists all these gifts here, not so we can catalogue them and analyze them, but so that we can use them. This isn't a complete list. God has gifted with variety. The point is that if we have it, use it.

So, consider all 3 of these attitudes. All are necessary. Serve with humility and recognize that you aren't that important. Serve with care and concern as a part of the body because you are an important part of the body and serve with urgency because you and your gifts are needed. Let's pray.