

Romans

Proper Functioning In The Church - Part 2

January 24, 2016

I. The proper functioning of the Church

A. Romans 12:3-8 . . . 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. [4] For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, [5] so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. [6] Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; [7] if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; [8] or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

B. Review:

1. Last Sunday, we looked at Romans 12:3, and the essence of what we learned is that it is God who determines our place, our function, and the level of our function within the church. Our responsibility is to humbly accept the place God has chosen for us and cheerfully function according to His will – for it is in this way that the body of Christ works together in unity for the good of all.
2. Also last Sunday, I reminded you that to be holy in a God-pleasing, God-worthy way, we must cast off those ways in which we have been conformed to the world and take on new ways of thinking – which is vital to living the Christian life as described in the rest of Romans.

C. Prayer

II. God has given gifts and abilities for the proper functioning of the church

A. Romans 12:4-5 . . . For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, [5] so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1. In using the analogy of the human body to describe the Body of Christ, Paul gives us a real world picture of the form, function, and unity of the church, which is mystical in nature rather than physical. For a more detailed description of this analogy, read 1 Corinthians 12.
 - a. To keep these verses in their context, I want to remind you that Paul leads into this analogy by warning us not to think more

highly of ourselves than we ought. And he instructs us to use sound judgement as the means of counteracting any temptation to conceited thinking.

- b. However, the need for sound judgment does not stop with putting an end to thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, it is also needed to avoid the opposite pitfall as well, which is thinking less of ourselves than we ought.
 - (1) Self-denigration is just as destructive to the unity and common good of the church as self-conceit. And by self-denigration I mean thinking we are of no value to the proper functioning of the church.
 - (2) And the point here is that as with the human body, when each healthy, growing, and maturing Christian does their part, the church functions as God intends it to function.
- c. Paul addresses the two sides of this issue in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:15-21 . . . If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am [therefore] not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. [16] And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am [therefore] not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. [17] [Think about this] . . . if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole [body] were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? [18] But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. [19] If they were all one member [that is, exactly the same], where would the body be? [20] But now there are different members, but one body. [21] [Again, think about this] . . . the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [Each part needs the other parts to function properly.]
- 2. However, there is more to the need for sound judgment than each one doing their part and working together in unity. As we saw last week, we are to use sound judgment to discern our place and level of function in the place God has given us.
 - a. And why is this important? Because, even though we are members of one body, we are not all equal in function. And though we each have an important contribution to make to the proper functioning of the body, some contributions are more important than others.
 - b. For example, the palm and digits of a hand must work together in order to grasp and hold certain things. However, losing your little finger is less important to grasping than losing one of your

other fingers. Yet losing any finger is far less important than losing a thumb. Why? Because the thumb is an opposable digit which is essential if the hand is to grasp and hold things.

- c. The point here is that God gives each member of the church a specific place and function. And as has been made clear, not all have the same place and function. Among those who do have the same place and function, not all are given the same degree or level of function. And among those who have a different place and function, some function in a place and at a level that is more important than others.
 - d. And yet, those members that are more important cannot perform the functions of those that are less important – which is why we need each part, and why we treat each part with respect, give attention to their needs, and protect them from harm.
3. Again, to try and keep all this within its context, I want to remind you that the first reason for sound judgment is to prevent self-conceit, because it is a destroyer of unity and the enemy of the common good. But as we have just seen, sound judgment is equally necessary for taking our place and properly functioning within the church. This is not always easy because –
- a. We are independent yet mutually dependent. We are individuals, yet we are members one of another – united by the fact that we are in Christ and He is in us. And as individuals we are responsible for our spiritual well-being, yet as part of a body we are responsible for the body's spiritual well-being.
 - b. Working this all out and keeping it worked out over a number of years requires the use of sound judgment and discernment, because it is in using our God given gift, taking our God appointed place, and functioning at our God assigned level that makes the kind of contribution to the church that enables it to work together in unity, accomplish the common good, and fulfill the will of God.
4. At this point I want to take a few minutes to talk about the unity we have because we are all in Christ Jesus and He is in us.
- a. You see it is not our gift, place, and function in the church that is the reason we are members one of another. We are members one of another because we are all one in Christ, all saved by the same Savior, all submissive to the same Head, all serving the same Lord, all sharing in the same baptism, all filled with the same Holy Spirit, and all reconciled to the same God (Note: Ephesians 4:1-7).

- b. The fact is, it is this spiritual dimension, this mystical reality that unites us in one body and makes us members one of another. This is why we can go anywhere in the world, meet a genuine child of God, and quickly feel a deep sense of unity and comradery.
 - 5. Which raises the question: “How do we maintain this unity?” Again, sticking to the context, we see that we maintain this unity by the use of sound judgment aided by a holy life, a transformed mind, the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, humility, love for one another, and the practical application of God’s word to ourselves first and then to others.
- B. Romans 12:6a . . . Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:
 - 1. Based on Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, we know that God has given a variety of gifts to the church. But that is not what Paul is talking about here in vs 6 when he says we have gifts that differ.
 - a. The phrase, “we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” is in reference to those who have the same gift, such as prophesy or teaching, but different levels or degrees of function.
 - b. In other words, though there are those in the church who share the same gift, they do not all share the same level or degree of function. Some function at a lesser level of ability, some at a greater level, and some in between – and this is what makes them different.
 - 2. In identifying that there are differences among those with the same gift, Paul states two truths and infers one truth.
 - a. The first truth is that the difference among those with the same gift is the result of the amount of grace God has given each one. Or in other words, the amount or degree of the gift God has given.
 - b. The second truth is that we are to exercise our gift according to the amount of grace or degree of function received.
 - (1) In other words, you are to function within the boundaries of your God determined limitations when exercising your gift – which requires humbly accepting both the gift and degree of function God has given you rather than seeking what seems greater but is not God’s will for you.
 - (2) And as we talked about last week, we need to use discernment, and if needed, the help of other more mature Christians to discover the degree to which God has gifted us to function.

- c. The implied truth in vs 6a establishes the principle that God's people have both the ability to discern their gift and the ability to discern the level or degree to which they are to function in the use of their gift. In other words, barring the entrance of pride, we are able to know our place in the church. To that implied principle I add that if we lack the ability, due to being new to the faith, we can seek out mature Christians to assist us in discerning the degree to which we are to function within the church.
 - 3. One word of caution here. We ought to fear misusing our gift due to pride, and we ought to fear wasting our gift from lack of use.
 - a. Misusing your gift due to pride not only sets God against you (James 4:6), it also brings spiritual sickness and disunity into the church – which is as foolish as making yourself sick or taking drugs that make your body malfunction.
 - b. To waste your gift from lack of use incurs God's judgment, as made clear by Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).
 - 4. Before moving on to the rest of vs 6b-8, I want to remind you that the ability to rightly discern our gift, place, and degree of function in the church is built on the foundation of pursuing holiness worthy of God and a transformed mind. This makes sense because growing from being a new believer to this kind of spiritual maturity is both the natural flow of the Christian life and the natural desire of those who have received God's saving grace.
- C. Romans 12:6b-8 . . . if prophecy, [then] according to the proportion of his faith; [7] if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; [8] or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
- 1. There are two things I want to point out about this list of gifts.
 - a. First, it is not a list of offices, such as Elder or Deacon or Apostle. It is a list of abilities that are to be used in doing the work of the church, regardless of your position in the church.
 - b. Second, based on other scriptures, we know that the list here in Romans 12 is not a complete list of the gifts God has given.
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 adds the following gifts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gift of healing, the effecting of miracles, the distinguishing of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.
 - (2) Ephesians 4:11 adds apostles, evangelists, and pastors – which in many cases represents offices within the church.

- c. With this in mind, let us look at each gift listed here in Romans.
- 2. if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;
 - a. Over the years, the church has commonly taught that the gift of prophecy covers more than foretelling future events or receiving direct words from God to pass on to a particular person or group. Based on scripture, and especially OT scripture, prophecy includes performing miraculous deeds for the good of those served, publicly exposing evil behavior by governments, religious leaders, and various groups of people, warning people about the consequences of sin, calling people back to godliness, and proclaiming the truth of God that needs to be heeded. In other words, the gift of prophecy covers a wider range of activities than just future telling.
 - b. For example, we read in Acts 15:32 that Judas and Silas were prophets who encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.
 - c. An example of NT foretelling is found in Acts 21:8-11 where we read that a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea and foretold Paul's imprisonment because of Jews who opposed him.
 - d. In our day, it is probable that people like AW Tozer and Francis Schaefer had the gift of foretelling, while a man like Paul Washer has the gift of declaring the stark truth about sin, unholy living, and the consequences of ungodliness.
- 3. if service, in his serving;
 - a. It is possible the reference here is to a single gift, but it may also be a reference to service in general – which is an integral part of many gifts.
 - b. Either way, an early church example of service is found in Acts 6:1-3 . . . Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. [2] So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.[3] "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.
- 4. or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation;
 - a. According to Acts 13:1, there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers.

- b. What the exact difference is between certain kinds of prophets, teachers, and exhorters is not so clear, because they all seem to teach. But some say teaching prophets present a stern message, teachers appeal to the mind, and exhorters appeal to the conscience and feelings.
- 5. he who gives, with liberality;
 - a. The idea in liberality is giving with lavish generosity.
 - b. There are two truths that we are wise to remember in relation to this gift.
 - (1) First, giving is never to be done in an effort to gain the praises of others (Matthew 6:2-4). That is selfish giving.
 - (2) Second, we are able to give liberally because giving for the right reasons and with the right attitude will be generously repaid by God, who will make sure we have what we need (Luke 6:38, Matthew 6:33).
- 6. he who leads, with diligence;
 - a. Diligence speaks of giving careful attention, taking proper interest in, and persevering in the task.
 - b. Leaders have power, and that power can be used to hide certain bad behaviors that the leader gets involved in. And those bad behaviors get in the way of leading with diligence.
- 7. he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
 - a. Paul says this another way in 2 Corinthians 9:7 . . . Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
 - b. One reason we need to remain cheerful when being merciful is because those who need mercy are often the troubled people or troublesome people who are difficult to work with, and who may or may not turn their lives around because of the mercy received. And yet, they still need mercy just as we need God's mercy. Surely we need to be wise in showing mercy, yet we are most like God in showing mercy when we give cheerfully in spite of the outcome.

III. Conclusion – a summary from

- A. 1 Peter 4:10-11 . . . As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. [11] Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.