



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Grace of Church

June 21, 2020

Romans 12:5-8

Clint Pressley

⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the 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.

(Pastor prays)

There is no other organization on the earth that even comes close to the local church. We have almost nothing in common but our need for grace and no central bond except that of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the glory of the church is the unity we share in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And it's the cross of Jesus that makes us members one of another! In addition to that, each person who is a member of the body of Christ is given to the church on purpose. You were redeemed by Jesus and brought to this local church on purpose. The differences between us is by design so that it might be clear to the watching world that there is something else that binds us! If you look around and you feel different from the people at your church, that's by design. The more different we are, the more intensely we love and the more God is honored in our church.

That seems to be what Paul is getting at in Romans 12:3-8. We dealt with part of this last week being one body with many members who are unified at the cross of Christ. Now in verses 6-8, Paul gets to action. He's calling the individual members to action, to do their God-given part to build up the body to strengthen the church. He's calling individual members to use the gifts that God has given you for good and not for evil, for unity and not division and for God's glory and not selfish gain. In this passage Paul gives us a list of seven spiritual gifts. This is not an exhaustive list. There are four other lists. They are in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and also in verses

28-30. There's another list in Ephesians 4:11 and yet another in 1 Peter 4:11. This list is here not so you can reflect on what gift you might have but, instead, so that you might be motivated so you can help build and strengthen the body of Christ at Hickory Grove. Because...

Grace Brought Us Together and Grace Will Make Us Strong.

To get at these two verses I'd like to put the seven gifts in two categories of *speaking* gifts and *serving* gifts. And I'll use those two categories to see how you and I can honor Jesus at Hickory Grove. The two points are to *say* what's going to honor Jesus and to *do* what's going to honor Jesus. Saying and doing.

Say what's going to honor Jesus

Let's take a look at it. There are three primary speaking gifts in this passage. In verse 6 there is prophecy. In verse 7 there is teaching. And in verse 8 there is exhortation.

Let's look at prophecy. This is direct revelation from God. Old Testament prophets spoke for God and in the early church, before the Bible was complete, that's how God directly revealed himself. In fact, Paul says in Ephesians 2:20 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, God directly revealing Himself according to the faith. Now we have that record of God's direct revealing in the Bible, so the closest thing we have today to the gift of prophecy is reading the Bible and explaining it. It's why we do church like we do and preaching like we do. Christian preaching is communicating the revealed truth of the Bible that penetrates our hearts, convicts our souls, honors Jesus and builds up the church. Today God speaks infallibly when the Bible is read intently. If someone says they have a word from the Lord for you, they need to be quoting the Bible so that we are sure to say what's going to honor Jesus.

Teaching is the next speaking gift. In the church context, teaching is the teaching of the truth of the Christian Gospel. The Bible teaches us that God is good and holy and created everything including mankind, all of us in this room. You were created in the image of God. That image of God within you and me has been disfigured by our own sin to the degree that we are separated from God. Jesus Christ, who was fully man and is fully God, lived perfectly, earning righteousness that you and I can't do. Then Jesus took the wrath of God in the place of sinners. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus died on the cross for us. Then God raised Him from the dead, He ascended into heaven; and He sits at the right hand of God and rules the entire universe. We can never work our way to Heaven, but the work of righteousness has been done in Christ. The work of salvation has been done in Christ, so what is left for you is to *believe*. To

believe means turning from sin, knowing that it is wrong, and turning to Christ, believing that Jesus saves.

In so many churches the Gospel is either lost or assumed, and it has weakened our witness and watered down our commitment. Ray Steadman says there are several ways you can teach. He thinks half of all Christians have this gift, so here are a couple of ways to teach. The first is by precept. That is to take the revealed truth of the Bible and then show what to do with it. It is taking the doctrine with devotion and then adding dedication. Another form of teaching is by example. This is one of the primary things a father does. His kids watch and learn and his life becomes a textbook that should and must point to what it means to follow Christ. So you can be like Paul when he said “follow me as I follow Christ.” A third way to teach is through life experience. You teach by how you handle situations, arguments, work, crisis, tragedy, success, pain, being falsely accused, and repentance. Does your life experience point to the Gospel? The last form of teaching that I want to speak about today is your personal testimony. Your testimony should include what your life was like before Christ and then your need for Christ; and how you repented and believed and what is happening now in your own sanctification.

So there is prophecy and teaching, but it's the third speaking gift that is so often neglected and so desperately needed. It is exhortation or encouragement. The Greek word, *parakaleō*, appears 107 times in the New Testament. It means to beseech, comfort, entreat, console. And when you read verse 8, Paul says, the one who exhorts in his exhortation. Let the person who has the gift of getting alongside to help her out really do it! Let him stand by his friend and really help! To understand what encouragement *is*, we need to be clear on what it is *not*. It is not flattery. It is not being upbeat or outgoing. It does not mean being an extrovert. It's not Norman Vincent Peale's idea of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, or his heir apparent Robert Schuler's *Possibility Thinking*. Those two books are devoid of the Gospel.

The Greek word here is *parakaleō*, but the Romans translated it into *advocatus*. It's where we get the word “advocate” or “lawyer.” When you are in trouble, you call on someone to help you, an advocate or encourager. The greatest example of this gift found in the New Testament is the man named Joseph who was such an advocate that the early church named him Barnabas meaning *the son of encouragement*. I want to give you just a couple of ways that he advocated for people. The Bible says that he was an advocate for the church. In Acts 4 you see Barnabas gave over and above to such a degree that Ananias and Saphira tried to copy him in hypocrisy. He was thought so well of for his generosity. Do you advocate for the church? He also

advocated for new converts. In Acts 9, Saul is radically saved but nobody wants to be close to him. But Barnabas vouches for him, stands by him, includes him and brings him into the fellowship. Do you advocate for other people, people in other groups? Barnabas was also an advocate for the marginalized. Up to that point, Christianity felt like a Jewish sect and Barnabas, in no small debate, pushed to accept Gentile believers. And Barnabas was an advocate for second chances. At the end of Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas are getting ready for another trip. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark, who had abandoned them in the past. Paul didn't. Barnabas stood with John Mark who would grow up and write the Gospel of Mark! With our words we strengthen, challenge, advise, restore and point people to Jesus. Grace, grace brought us together and grace will make us strong. Say what's going to honor Jesus.

Do what's going to honor Jesus

We've looked at the *speaking* gifts; now let's look back at the *action* gifts. Let's look at verse 6 and the first part of verse 7. ⁶*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving;* Service. Here is the word *diakonia*. It's where we get the word "deacon." Notice how it is written in verse 7, *if service, in our serving;* this is a call for action that's not dependent on an invitation. This is the difference between initiative and intention. There's a southbound highway that's paved with good intentions, and so often in the Christian Church that's where we end, good intentions. This is not "let me know if you need anything." This is seeing a need and, in the name of Jesus, meeting that need. Who has God called you to serve in the name of Jesus? Don't intend, initiate. Do something!

Now let's look at the last three. The first is given in verse 8. ⁸*the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity;* Contributing in generosity is more than you feel like you are comfortable with. Do you have enough to eat? Do you have clothes to wear? Do you have a place to live? It's to joyfully give to strengthen the Gospel ministry of the church; like Barnabas in Acts 4, the son of encouragement. The next is leading. In verse 8 it means to manage, organize or administer and to do that with zeal, enthusiasm: *the one who leads, with zeal.* It's the idea of standing in front of others, to be the first one. It's the old illustration of the difference between a thermostat and a thermometer. A *thermometer* can tell you what the temperature is. But a *thermostat* works to adjust the room to the right temperature and knows what the temperature ought to be and works to get it there! That's leadership.

The last action gift for the good of the church is acts of mercy. *the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness*. This act of mercy is most likely be going into the room of someone who is very sick and close to dying and doing so with the deep assurance and joy in the Lord. The miracle is that Christ, through His spirit, enables us to engage in acts of mercy with a cheerful heart. Here is the evidence of the Grace of God. He has supplied our church with enough people who have enough gifts to build up the church and fulfill our Gospel calling. It's all done in grace. Grace brought us together and grace will make us strong. Say what's going to honor Jesus, do what's going to honor Jesus for the glory of His name and the strength of the church and the hope of the world.

(Pastor prays)