



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 12: 3-8

Romans

“Humble Service”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans 12:3-8, the apostle Paul writes:

“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.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

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;

if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for the time we have to gather together this morning, to be here on the Lord’s Day with the Lord’s people, with your book open before us, and given the opportunity to study this text, consider it, and by your grace, to live by it. We’re in that portion of Romans, Father, where Paul is exhorting us;

where he is applying the great doctrines of the previous 11 chapters. It is beyond our ability to understand that doctrines that Paul has presented apart from your grace.

Thankfully you've given us the Spirit of God, and you've given every believer a new heart, a new nature, and so we have the capabilities to understand, and we have the teacher, the Holy Spirit, who illuminates our thinking and gives us understanding. But it's also equally impossible for us to do the things that we're commanded to do in our own strength, but by the Spirit's help, by his enablement, we can do that. And so Father, we pray for his ministry in us this morning; that our hearts would be open to it.

That he would guide our thinking and that he would move our volitions, our wills, to apply and do the things that we see in this text. That we would live lives of faithfulness to you; that we would live out the righteousness and the doctrines that have been set forth so magnificently in this book, and that we would be living examples of Christ to the world; so Father, enable us to understand the text that we will consider this morning and then to act upon it.

To live the kind of lives that we are to live: lives that please you: lives that are beneficial to one another; lives that further the ministry of this assembly and carry the name of Jesus Christ wherever we go. We are his representatives, Father. Help us to remember that, and to take very seriously the calling that we all have, the position that we have in Jesus Christ. We pray that you'd build us up in the faith, that you'd strengthen us. This is a time of the week in which we gain nourishment, a very spiritual nourishment.

A very important time of the week, and so may we see it as that. May the Spirit of God move upon us; may Christ deal with us this morning, and as a result of our time together, make us more like him. We have spiritual needs, Father, that are great. We have material needs that are great. We look at the names on the prayer requests in the bulletin and there are many. There are many needs, Father, and we pray for those individuals. We are dust, Father, and we're reminded of that in so many ways.

We're reminded of that as we look at these prayer requests. We're reminded of it as we look at those around us who are in need. And eventually, Father, you remind each one of us of that through the afflictions of life that we must go through – none of us will escape. And so, Father, we come before you with that understanding

of ourselves, an understanding that you certainly have. You know that we are weak. You know that we're frail.

Strengthen us, and help us to know that, that we would look to you always for our enablement, and that we would seek to glorify you. You've given us so much. You have blessed us so abundantly, and we thank you for that. Help us to keep that in mind, and to live in light of the grace and the mercy that we have received. Bless us to that end this morning, and bless the classes that meet afterwards, the Sunday School classes. Thank you, Father, for raising up faithful men and women to teach in this assembly.

You have done that from the beginning of this church; you have blessed us with individuals who sacrifice of their time, and who have the right perspective, who desire to serve you and to minister your Word to your people. People who understand that that is where we gain our spiritual nourishment: that we must preach the Word, and preach it faithfully. We thank you for those who do that.

Who take the time out of their busy weeks, where they labor five days a week, sometimes more, and then put time into the lessons that they teach. We pray that you give them special grace and the ability to communicate, and may their words take root in the hearts of your people, young and old alike. May that be the consequence of our time together this morning. May we enjoy our time of study and worship together. We pray that you bless us now as we sing our final hymn.

May it be used of you to prepare our hearts for worship and study and thinking together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Centuries ago, the English preacher and poet John Donne wrote the famous line, “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...” That's true. Mankind is joined by a common ancestor. We are all sons of Adam, and we are all dependent on one another. It's not good for man to be alone. And yet the world is fallen, fragmented, and at war with itself.

It is only in the church that the world is made whole again. That's what Christ has done. In Revelation chapter 5, heaven sings that “By his death he purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He made them into a kingdom and priests.” That's what it means for Christ to be the Savior of the world –

not that he saved every single individual who has or ever will exist, but he has joined all kinds of people into one nation, one spiritual continent.

How can a people from so many different tribes and tongues be one? How can so many different kinds of people stay in harmony, and live and work in unity? Paul answers that in our text, in Romans 12:3-8. It's a text that follows naturally from the preceding verses, verses 1 and 2, which begin what is sometimes called the practical section of the book of Romans. That's not a good description of it; all of the book of Romans is practical. Doctrine is practical just like the foundation of a house is practical.

But in these verses Paul applies the doctrines of the previous chapters to our daily lives. One of the major doctrines of this book is the righteousness of God. It is a gift received by faith. Every believer has received that righteousness. Every believer in Jesus Christ has been reckoned righteous by God and is fully and completely accepted by God. But those who have a righteous standing with God must also live as righteous before men, must live out that righteousness in the world, and that is what Paul urges in chapter 12.

He began in verses 1 and 2 with the general exhortation for believers to present their bodies as living and holy sacrifices to God. In the remaining verses he gives specific instructions on how to do that. First, in verses 3 through 13 Paul gives us instruction on how to behave toward those in the church. Then in verses 14 through 21, he gives instruction on how to behave towards those outside the church. Right behavior begins with right thinking.

Paul began the chapter exhorting believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. One of the fundamental characteristics of a renewed mind is humility. We cannot have right relationships with people unless we have a proper understanding of ourselves. We cannot behave properly toward others, whether they be those in the church or those outside the church – we cannot behave properly toward them if we are arrogant.

We cannot be united as a church if we think of ourselves as islands, as only individuals, and superior to others. And so Paul gives a strong exhortation here to be humble. He gives it on the basis of his authority as an apostle. That's the meaning of his words here in verse 3: “Through the grace of God given to me I say.” His

apostleship was of grace; he made that point back in 1:5. His apostleship was a gift of God. It was due to divine grace, not to personal merit on his part.

So he begins his exhortation with an expression of humility, but still, what he says is not just the good advice of another Christian. It is the authoritative word of an apostle, and what he has to say is not just for a few individuals. It is for all Christians. It is to everyone among you. And what he says is “no one is to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.” In other words, there is no place for individualism in the church. There is no place for spiritual pride in the church.

Paul wrote this letter to the Romans from the city of Corinth, where he had seen the problems that arise because of pride. The Corinthians church was a very proud church, a carnal church that Paul had to deal with, so he'd seen pride. He'd seen the effects of it. He'd seen how it divided the body there, and how it frustrated the ministry, and that is Paul's first concern here in verses 3 through 8: the ministry of the church in the use of its spiritual gifts.

To function correctly we must have unity in the church, and to have that unity we must first have a proper evaluation of ourselves and a proper evaluation of others – our fellow Christians. And so Paul, perhaps on the basis of his experience in Corinth, saw the urgency of this problem, but I think that even if Paul had not been in Corinth, and even if Paul had not witnessed these specific problems in that church, he would have given this advice anyway, because Paul was a student of human nature.

Every theologian is a good student of human nature, and if he or she does not understand human nature, he or she will not be a good theologian. Paul was; he knew human nature and he knew that it is the natural tendency of people to exalt themselves. James Denny wrote, “To himself, every man is in a sense the most important person in the world.” Paul understood that. He knew that human nature wasn't any different in Rome than it was in Corinth or Jerusalem or anywhere.

We are all part of the same continent. We are men and women who have the same human nature and the same frailties, and so to overcome that, to overcome this problem of pride, of arrogance, of the sense of superiority, or that we are the most important individual in the world, we need right thinking. We need to think, Paul says, “so as to have sound judgment.” That's the way to have a proper evaluation of oneself and of others.

And the way to sound judgment is by measuring ourselves with an objective standard, and God has given that, Paul says. He has allotted to each a measure of faith. Now, that expression, “measure of faith,” has been interpreted in different ways. Paul will speak about spiritual gifts in a moment, and the proper use of them, and so this expression could refer to differing measures or amount of faith that God has given to various individuals to carry out the various services that he has given to them.

Some have been given a greater measure of faith, and a greater capacity for service, than others. In light of that, we should properly evaluate ourselves, and not think too highly of ourselves, but not think too lowly of ourselves, either. Now, that is true, and there is support for that from 2 Corinthians 10:13, where Paul warns the Corinthians against boasting beyond our measure, but within the measure God has apportioned to us.

But it seems more likely that Paul here is referring to saving faith, the faith by which we believe. That is the way he consistently uses the word “faith” throughout the book of Romans, of justifying faith, and he is referring to faith not in terms of the quantity or the amount given out so that we can exercise our spiritual gifts, but as a standard of measurement. According to the British commentator Charles Cranfield, that is the primary meaning of the Greek word that Paul uses here for “measure.”

It is an objective standard, and God has given this standard of saving faith to every Christian. All of us have saving faith. All of us have basic Christian faith equally, so it can be – because we all have it and we all have it equally – it can be the measure by which we evaluate ourselves. Now, Professor Cranfield interprets the measure of faith as being the object of faith, which is Christ, so Christ is the standard by which all Christians gain sound judgment.

We look at our lives in light of his, and we measure ourselves in light of him, and of course, that is true, and that is our standard for conduct and for life. But faith itself is also the standard, because when we consider the way we enter into union with Christ through faith, then we realize that it’s all of grace. Faith is the opposite of works. Righteousness, the great theme of this book, is a gift. We don’t achieve it, we receive it. Salvation is not about merit, it’s about mercy.

God gives salvation freely, so we simply receive that great gift of salvation by faith. In fact, he gives faith freely; faith itself is a gift. Justifying faith, saving faith is

the gift of God according to election. When we realize that, we realize that there is no room for boasting in ourselves, no basis for arrogance in ourselves. We can take absolutely no credit for who we are as children of God, or what we will do as children of God, for the gifts that God has given to us as his servants.

Our spiritual gifts are just that; they're gifts of God. Paul referred to his apostleship as “the grace given to him” – a complete gift on God's part to Paul. Now, that gives perspective when the person understands that. When Paul was dealing with the Corinthians, dealing with their pride, he made that very point in 1 Corinthians 4:7. He wrote, “Who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive, and if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Of course, we have received everything that we have – every breath you take, you're receiving as a gift from God. And since a person can't take credit for a gift, then that should eliminate all boasting on our part. Understanding faith and what it means prevents a person from thinking too highly of himself or herself. It also prevents a person from thinking too lowly of himself or herself, as though he or she has nothing to offer, has no ability for service.

When we see God as the giver of all things, the giver of our faith, the giver of our gifts, we recognize that we do have gifts. We have a new heart, a new mind; we have new abilities and we have special gifts in which to serve him, new and real capabilities. And every believer has been blessed in that way. Every believer in Jesus Christ has at least one spiritual gift, with the spiritual capability to serve the saints.

Knowing that should give us real perspective, a real understanding of our self that should make us zealous for service, because we can actually serve and serve effectively. So faith is the standard by which we measure ourselves. This is what we need to go back to and consider in order to get sound judgment. Let me illustrate. The meter is the basic unit of measure for the metric system. The word “meter” is based on the very word that Paul uses here for measure, which is *metron*, the Greek word *metron*.

The meter is 39.37 inches long, and in order to preserve the exactness of measurement, a platinum bar that length is in the Bureau of Weights and Measures just outside of Paris. That bar is the standard, so if there is a dispute somewhere in the world about the exact length of the meter, if that should arise, then a person can go to

that location, go to Paris, go look at the meter that's there. That's the standard, and they can judge by that what is the actual length.

Well, in the same way, we gain sound judgment, we gain right perspective, we gain the true measure of ourselves. If there's any doubt or any question, if we wonder who we really are, we go measure ourselves by the standard, and we'll see how far short we fall. But the standard is here; the standard is that which God has allotted; it is saving faith. There we will see, as we consider that, reflect upon it, that the faith receives, and all that we are, all that we have is of grace.

There is no basis of thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We should be humble, and in verse 4, Paul gives the reason why humility is so necessary. The church must function in unity. That is only possible if we are humble, and if we respond to one another with humility. To illustrate the importance of this, and the importance of the unity in the church, which comes about by humility, Paul draws an analogy between the human body and the church.

“For,” he says in verse 4, meaning here is the reason the standard has been given; here is the reason humility is necessary, “just as we have many members in one body, and all members do not have the same function,” and then he goes on to explain that the church, too, has many members, many parts. The body has many parts, and those parts have many functions. Some of those are obvious, some of those are seen, but many, perhaps most, are not obvious, are not seen. They're hidden from our view.

We don't recognize them or think much about them, but all of these parts must work together for the health of the whole. And it is the same for the church. “So we who are many,” Paul writes in verse 5, “are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” The church is made up of all kinds of people. The church in Rome, this great cosmopolitan city, the capital of the empire, was filled with all kinds of people.

All roads led to Rome, and every kind of person in the empire was there, and probably many from outside the empire were there, and the church no doubt reflected that complexion of the city. It was a church that was basically divided between Jews and Gentiles, the basic division of the human race, and within that division there were all kinds of people. There were all kinds of social classes represented; there were slaves and free men alike, all kinds of people. So there was diversity in the church.

But Paul says they were all members one of another. They all belonged to each other. That is our relationship to one another as Christians. It's different from the relationship that we would have with our coworkers at work; different from the relationship of fellow students at school; even your natural family – different from that. Because we are in Christ, we are members one of another, joined to one another. Members one of another – that's a close connection that he gives here.

Dependent on one another like the parts of the human body are dependent upon each other – can't be separated. And God has equipped us so that we can be a blessing to one another. He has given us spiritual gifts that we are to use in service to the church. In verse 6, Paul states that they differ, and that they differ according to the grace given to us, so there are varieties of gifts. God delights in variety. We can see that in nature around us.

And we see it in the very things we take for granted, that we really give very little thought to, but just consider the world for a moment, how God made it, and how God didn't make it. God didn't make the world with one color. He didn't make everything green. It's not all gray. There is a variety of colors that God has given to the world. He has made it in a variety of shapes. It's not all flat. He's filled the world with colors, and shapes, and climates, and plants, and animals, and people – great variety.

And in the same way, he's filled the church with variety. With all kinds of people whose lives, and insights, and experiences have much to offer each one of us, and he gave the church a variety of gifts because there's much to do, and there are many ways to do it. God doesn't want us all to have the same gift. That's one implication of what Paul says here about different gifts. God doesn't want us all to have one gift, and do one thing. He doesn't want us to engage in the same function.

So we shouldn't be envious of another for the gift that he or she has, but pleased with the very gift that God has given us, or the gifts that God has given to us. Our gifts have been specially given to us. They are designed specifically for us, and what we are to do, and the function that God has given us. He's given them individually. They are according to the grace given to us. Now, as we've said, everything that we have is by grace. Everything that you have is a gift.

Some people have a keen mind. Some people have a winsome personality. Others have great energy to do work. Paul is not speaking of those kinds of gifts here;

he's not speaking of human excellence. He is speaking of spiritual gifts, and a spiritual gift is a special capacity for spiritual service to the church, given by the Holy Spirit, given by grace. The knowledge of that fact should help each one of us to understand ourselves.

To have sound judgment about ourselves; about who we are, and about what we're to be doing, the function that we're to have in this world in the short amount of time that God has given us. We have abilities that, when acted upon, when put to use, those activities will lead to accomplishment. If you act upon the gifts that God has given you, if you use them, you will be a success. You will accomplish what God wants you to accomplish.

Now, there's nothing to boast about in that – in your gift, or in the accomplishments that you will have. There's nothing to boast about in that, because it's all a gift of God. It all comes from him, and we don't boast in gifts. Paul makes it especially clear that it is a gift; that this is of grace, that it is God's doing, in 1 Corinthians 12:11, where he also speaks of gifts. And he writes there that the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to each individual, to each Christian, just as he wills.

It's according to his will, not according to ours. It has nothing to do with personal achievement or merit. It has nothing to do with who we are or what we've done. Nothing in Christianity does. It's all about grace. Why was Paul an apostle? God didn't need Paul. Why did God save Paul? It wasn't because Paul was seeking Christ and Paul was doing good things for the Lord.

Paul was on his way to slaughter Christians, to blot out the name of Jesus Christ, when Christ himself stopped Paul in his tracks on the road to Damascus and brought him to himself, arrested him, spiritually. So why did he make him an apostle? He had good apostles. He had 12 of them. Why didn't he use James to write this book to the Romans? Why was James martyred so early? Why did he choose Paul? Well, Paul told us why – by grace, because God willed to do it.

Paul couldn't boast in that; we can't boast in grace. Well, we boast in it in the sense that Paul did, in that we give all the glory to God, but there's nothing in us that calls for boasting. Achievement and merit have nothing to do with Christianity. It's all about grace. So again, the gifts give no cause for boasting. They are reason for humility and thankfulness and zeal in the service of the Lord. But because they are gifts, and they come from God, we are to do that – be zealous.

We are to take them seriously. We are to use them wisely and earnestly. In the remaining verses Paul gives us some of the gifts. Not all of them – there are – I don’t know the exact number, something like 20 gifts, and I say I don’t know the exact number because there may be more than that. There may be more than the lists that are given indicate. But here he gives us seven of the gifts. They fall into two categories, those of speaking, and those of serving.

First, Paul lists prophecy. Paul held this gift in high regard. Prophecy was one of the foundational gifts of the early church. In Ephesians 2:20, he states that the church has been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Prophets were the mouthpiece of God, the agents of revelation. Prophecy is not preaching, as some of the Puritans believed. In fact, one of the early Puritans, William Perkins, wrote a book about prophecy is preaching, but they are not the same thing.

Preaching is the exposition of Scriptures. Prophecy is revelation. That revelation included predictions of the future, but it was also information revealed for the direction and the edification of the church. It was essential in the early days of the church when the canon of Scripture was still being formed, was still in the process of taking shape. Prophets gave direction to God’s people. Agabus is an example. He was one of the prophets of the early church.

And in Acts 11 we read that he came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and he prophesied a great famine over all the earth. A famine was coming, and by prophesying that, God through Agabus forewarned the church and gave the church opportunity to prepare for that. This is very different from the so-called prophets of today, who speak in vague generalities like the Delphic oracle. She was the prophetess in ancient Greece at the sacred shrine in Delphi, just northwest of Athens.

And people would come to her – maybe kings or generals – and they would ask for some oracle, some vision of the future to help them decide the decisions that they were making. And so she’d give some prognostication, some prophecy, in very vague terms that could be interpreted in a multitude of ways, so that whatever happened it could be interpreted as having been fulfilled. And that’s what we see in our day and age.

A decade ago, the magazine *Christianity Today* did a feature on a group called the Kansas City Fellowship, which is part of the Vineyard Movement, which gained a great deal of popularity 10, 15 years ago. And the article focused on the leaders of

this group in Kansas City known as the Kansas City prophets. Their leader is a man named Paul Cain. One of his associates described how Mr. Cain receives his revelations. They come by mental impressions.

By physical symptoms – pain in his body corresponding to some pain that someone has in the audience to which he’s speaking. They come by the angel of the Lord visiting Cain in dreams, trances, or standing by him visibly and speaking to him, and sometimes they come by spiritual colors, different hues meaning different things, or by hearing, either audibly or inaudibly, internally. Well, the writer of this article attended a large conference in which Mr. Cain was the featured speaker.

And he describes him as a speaker; states that, surprisingly, he was rather inarticulate. His talk was rambling. He jumped from subject to subject, and gave what the writer called “vague descriptions of spiritual compromise in the church, the need for restoration, and what the church should look like.” His prophecy of the future was that signs and wonders will continue to increase. The church will do greater works than Jesus did.

The church will be unequalled in power, purity, and unity, with unity that includes Catholics, Baptists, and evangelicals. He described a vision of an army of children that will parade down the streets, healing whole hospital wards, and television broadcasts that will report only good news, because all of the sports arenas in the cities will be filled with people hearing the gospel. Well, he went on to give other prophecies that the writer called “indecipherable.”

At the end of the article the writer commented that the people involved with this, the people of the Vineyard Movement and the Kansas City Fellowship, frequently pleaded that the prophecies should be judged by their fruit. And so with that in mind, he concluded his article, “One thing is certain: the Vineyard and KCF” – Kansas City Fellowship – “cannot continue the way they have been going without some of the promised dramatic changes coming to pass, and soon.”

Now, that was over ten years ago, and the world hasn’t gotten any better, and the hospital wards haven’t been emptied. That’s not Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy – and that’s really a redundant statement – prophecy has ended. There’s no need for it. The canon of Scripture is closed. Revelation is complete. We have the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures for guidance, and they are sufficient.

And if a Christian will apply himself or herself to knowing the Word of God, apply himself or herself to prayer and seeking God’s wisdom, just as James tells us to do, we’ll live a wise and fruitful life. We don’t need modern-day prophets to give us direction – they don’t exist. So the Bible is concluded, revelation is concluded, and that is sufficient. In Paul’s day, prophecies were to be examined, not taken at face value. In Moses’ day, prophecies were to be examined, and not taken at face value.

Deuteronomy 18 explains that. The reason was there were false prophets in that day, as there have been in every day, including ours. And so Paul writes that a person must prophesy “according to the proportion of his faith.” “Faith” here is the same word as in verse 3, but the meaning is different here. Here, it means the standard of faith in the sense of Christian truth. I say that because the word “faith” here has the definite article. It is “the faith,” meaning Christian truth, Biblical doctrine.

This is the standard by which we’re to judge those who speak. One of the modern-day prophets was a man named William Branham, who was the mentor of this individual Paul Cain. Branham was a man who associated himself with the “Jesus only” Pentecostals, and that is a group that denies the Trinity. It’s a moralistic heresy that believes that there’s one God, but one person of the Godhead who manifests himself in three different ways, but it’s a denial of the Trinity.

Well, no genuine prophet would deny the truth of God. This was the standard that Paul sets for those who would speak. Are they who speak orthodox in their theology? They must be judged according to the doctrine of Scripture. That is a check on heresy. It is how we test the spirits. Prophets had to be orthodox in their beliefs, and that is correct, the correct standard for all who speak God’s Word, who profess to proclaim God’s truth.

Now, in verse 7, Paul moves on to another gift, second gift, that of service. This is a general term, and became the normal way of describing the work Christians do for others. Serving is the word from which “deacon” is derived; it is the word *diakonia*. As Dr. Johnson explains, that is a word that is derived from two words: *dia*, which means “through,” and *konia*, which means “dust.” So the meaning of this word is “through dust,” which suggests the kind of activity associated with it.

It would include almost any work, other than a ministry of utterance, of speaking, so it is often a behind-the-scenes type of ministry that doesn’t involve a lot

of public recognition. The ability to do that kind of service, to be a servant, is a gift of God. It goes against human nature. It should not be shunned as insignificant. It is a great blessing to God's people. No church can function without people doing that service, doing that work.

In addition to our deacons here at Believers Chapel, we have a number of people in the congregation who have this gift. People who, whether they realize it or not, are exercising that gift as they work faithfully in the tape or the radio ministry. They work in the mercy ministry, fixing meals for people, taking them to them. Working in the nursery – we could give a list of ways in which people carry out this kind of gift that keeps the church functioning.

Now, we all need to be servants, but some are particularly gifted to serve in this way, and it is an important, important ministry for the function of a church. The third gift listed is teaching. “He who teaches,” Paul says, “is to be active in his teaching.” Teachers differ from prophets in a significant way. Prophets were inspired by God. Teachers are illuminated by God, enlightened by God. Prophecy is revelation. Teaching is explanation.

The role of the teacher was particularly vital in the early church because many Christians had little or no education. Many of these people were slaves; they didn't go to school. They didn't know how to read or write, and there were very few books to be read anyway. Very few people possessed a book; maybe the synagogue had the book, or the church had some manuscripts, and that was all. The ordinary church member learned the Bible and learned Christian doctrine from the teacher.

So it was essential that a teacher work diligently at teaching. It's the same today. If the teaching ministry of a church is weak, that church will be weak. It will be immature. It will be susceptible to error, to false prophets, and then to apostasy. The importance of the gift of teaching for the church is witnessed in the fact that some of the very last words that Paul spoke regard that.

You can be sure that the final things that an individual says before he or she dies, the things that are really on his or her mind, are what are particularly important to that individual, and Paul's words to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 show what really weighed heavily on his mind as he realized that very soon he would be leaving. He wouldn't be here to minister, and so what he says to Timothy is very simple: preach the Word. Preach the Word.

So teachers must be busy doing that, and preparing to do that, so that they will do it well. That means that they must spend most of their time in their studies, laboring over the Bible, reading the books that will help them to understand and teach well, which is one reason it is so necessary to have people with the gift of service; people who can get out and help, and allow teachers to prepare. So the gifts are not unrelated to one another – they serve one another.

They are inextricably connected, and they must function together for the ministry to function well. The gift of encouragement or exhortation is the next on Paul’s list, in verse 8; he who exhorts is to be at work exhorting, or encouraging. Now, this word has a broad range of meanings, from exhorting to comforting to consoling. It can be done from the pulpit by exhorting people to live the truth of the gospel – in other words, to apply the doctrines to the way we live.

It can occur in private through counseling and giving direction, or in conversations from one friend to another, giving comfort, giving encouragement, consolation. One of the great examples of this in the New Testament is Barnabas. His name means “son of encouragement.” After Paul’s conversion, he came to Jerusalem, but he found people unwilling to meet with him. They were all afraid of him, and rightfully so. Paul, or Saul, had been the great persecutor of the church, and they wouldn’t trust themselves to him.

But in Acts 9:27 we read, “Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles.” He came alongside Paul at a time of need; he encouraged him and he helped further his ministry. That is such an important ministry in the church, to help heal the wounded and bind up the brokenhearted; to strengthen people, give direction, and encourage them along the way of faith.

That’s the Lord’s ministry, and the Lord carries out that ministry through those who have been specially gifted by him to help individuals with encouragement, exhortation, consolation, counsel. The fifth gift is the gift of giving, of sharing a person’s resources with those less fortunate. We are all responsible to give. The Lord praised the widow for giving her mite. But those with this gift sometimes – and not always – but sometimes are those who have been blessed with large resources.

They are to use those in the Lord’s service, and the way Paul says that this is to be done, the way giving is to be done, is with liberality, with generosity. Now, that can also mean simplicity, in the sense of single-mindedness of motive and purpose,

and that is probably Paul’s meaning here. He uses it this way in many other places. The idea is giving must not be done with an ulterior motive of gaining influence, or gaining recognition, or pride. In other words, it should be disinterested giving.

It should be giving that’s uninfluenced by selfish motives, and so we should give with the right attitude, and we should all give generously. Well, next Paul says, “He who leads is to lead with diligence.” Paul uses this word elsewhere of the leaders of the church, so generally it applies to the elders; they’re not to become slack in their work. They have to give an account to God for the way they minister to the people, the way they shepherd the sheep, and so they’re not to be slack.

They’re not to be discouraged; it can be discouraging. The author of Hebrews indicates that in Hebrews 13:17, where he encourages the congregation to be supportive of the elders so that they can do their work with joy, and not with a sense of labor. So you are to support the elders in what they do, in various ways; one way is to be praying for us constantly. We certainly need that.

Finally Paul writes, “He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness;” again, this is a broad term in terms of application, from helping the poor financially, to visiting the sick, or caring for the elderly; a variety of ways in which mercy is to be applied. In this fallen world, there will never cease to be a need for mercy, for people to take care of the helpless. And the way to do that, Paul says, is “with cheerfulness.” Not with grim determination, but with joy.

A person is a great blessing who walks onto a hospital ward – which is not a pleasant place to be – and comes into that place with cheerfulness. With a smile, with a joyful heart, but I think more to the point is with a cheerful word – with a word of grace, a word of hope and encouragement from God’s Word. This is the way mercy is to be exercised. These are some of the gifts that Paul lists; there are many others, as I said. He doesn’t give all the gifts.

But what is very clear from the list here is that there is so much more to Christian ministry than preaching. The church needs servants. It needs people doing all kinds of works of service for God’s people. Really, all of the gifts are gifts of service. The purpose of spiritual gifts is given in 1 Corinthians 12:7 – they are “for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 14:12 – they are “for the edification of the church.” Every Christian has at least one gift. They are not for personal edification.

We don't have a gift to build ourselves up; we have a gift to build others up, to bless others, to build them up in the faith, and in so doing, produce unity in the church so that the church will function properly. No man is an island; every man is a piece of a continent. The church can't afford to lose one clod – “one clod be washed away,” and Donne said, and it's an appropriate term to use, because the reality is we're all clods, and so we need each other.

We can't afford for one not to be participating, to be washed away, so to speak. We are, as Paul said, “individually members one of another.” We are joined to each other. So if life seems a bit unfulfilling, a bit routine, kind of daily, maybe it's because you're neglecting the fellowship of the saints – not spending time with other Christians, not worshiping with them, not ministering to them. You need to find your gift, and you need to get busy using it.

That's God's desire for you. That's his design for each individual in the church. What a sad thing for a person to come to the end of his or her life – and every one of us will come to the end of our lives someday – and to look back over one's life and say, “I lived for myself. I didn't live for others. I lived as an island.” It's not God's intention for us. We're to serve one another. But before a person can serve Christians, he or she must become a Christian.

Must find himself or herself in Christ; must realize that he or she is lost and in need of the Savior, and believe in him. Christ died for sinners. He died in their place so that all who believe in him would be saved. May God help you to believe, and give you the desire to serve faithfully his people and him. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the instruction that Paul gives, and the reminder that he gives us that all that we have is a gift – a gift of grace. May we realize that, and in realizing it, take the true measure of ourselves. We are all of grace; everything we are, have, and will be is a gift from you. We thank you for that. Keep us humble, and give us a desire to serve, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.