

Serving the Savior pt 2

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Bible Text: Romans 12:1-8

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Romans 12. Let's turn there together on this Sunday night and we'll continue where we started last Sunday night. The Apostle Paul, as we talked about in the last meeting on this text, has just expounded the most exhaustive treatment of the doctrine of salvation, soteriology, that is salvation by grace through faith. Sometimes we call it the doctrines of grace. He unfolded such rich and glorious truths about God's unmerited favor, those complex and overwhelming yet deeply joyous truths about God's calling of certain ones to salvation; God's predestination of certain ones; God's election of certain ones and how we yield to the sovereignty of God but at the same time we know that all men must repent and believe the Gospel. As he unfolds all of those things, we know when we get to chapter 12 that he makes a significant shift. Now he starts giving practical admonitions because his point is, you don't just learn great doctrines to learn them, you learn great doctrines that you might be changed and you might live differently. But now let me just challenge you just for a moment, you probably will know the answer to this: but as Paul ends this long section on doctrine, particularly the doctrine of salvation, the doctrines of grace, and then he gets to practical application, what area of application is first and foremost on his mind? The local church. The local church. Not the family. It's not the individual Christian. It's the local church. He begins in chapter 12 immediately talking about how we are to serve and labor together. You see, the local church and I want to be careful, I don't want to be overstating it, I just don't think that I can though, the local church is the centerpiece of the universe as far as knowing and serving and glorifying God. I can prove that because the local church will one day be part of the universal church and will be with God forever but your family won't be there, not in the form of the family. You'll not be husband and wife in heaven but the church will be there in heaven. Your children will be there but not necessarily as your children, they'll be brothers and sisters in Christ but the church will be in heaven. You see, they are wonderful God ordained institutions that only last for time but God's ordained the church to last for time, secure through the tribulation, reign with him in the millennial kingdom and be with him for all eternity in the new heaven and the new earth. The church is the centerpiece of all that God's doing and I believe it's a masterful work of Satan to entice, if you will, or deceive pastors to preach through the Bible and the majority of their preaching is on how the Bible works in your everyday life. Now that's true but it's only true in the context of you living your life in concert, in symphony with and in harmony with your local church family.

You just can't separate it out. I know I could call a pastor's name because every one of you would know him and I thank God for the good he's done but his sermons are over and over and over and over and over how the principles of the Bible change your everyday life. While that's not untrue, you have to really jump out of context over and over and over again to make it just applicable to individual life. It's about corporate body life. That's what the majority of the text is about. It doesn't matter, you pick the epistle and Paul will start with rich doctrine and then he will get to application and then the application, he'll be weighted on his application of church body life. Why is that again? For the one millionth time from this pulpit, it's because the church is the place he's ordained to show forth more of his wisdom, power and beauty than anything else on earth. By the way, your family may change. Your children may grow up and leave home. I kind of hope they do. It's kind of sad when they stay around forever. Well, God's got some purposes sometimes for that, by the way, but that's not typical. Your spouse may go on to glory apart from you. But even if you are left by yourself, you've still got the body of Christ. You still have the church. It's still there. That's why Jesus said, they were telling Jesus at that dinner, "Hey, your mother and your brothers are out here to see you," as if that got special clout and he said, "Who are my mother and father and my brothers and sisters? All who do the will of God are my mother, father, brothers and sisters." His point was not to diminish the specialness of the immediate nuclear family, it was to say that there is a bigger thing going on here. So I just think, I don't want you to miss the fact that as soon as Paul gets through 11 chapters of exhaustive, rich doctrine and if God sustains me, I'm going to preach through Romans one day but it will probably take me ten years so I want to be careful there, but when you get to chapter 12, when he starts application, he jumps right into local church life.

Let's look at it together. Romans 12:1-8, "Therefore," that is based on the first 11 chapters and the glorious truths that you've learned there,

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but [keep on being, that's the way the Greek reads] keep on being transformed by the continual renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 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 [you could say of "the faith" or] 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.

Now we've talked about first of all, in verses 1 and 1 of this chapter, he talks about a once for all dedication of self. We talked about there being a point of dedication. He said, "present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice." Based on the mercies of God, based on the fact that it has humbled you and changed you and given you new life and new joy, to know how God has saved you through his Son Jesus Christ. Based on that reality, based on the gratitude you have now, commit your bodies, a point of dedication, commit your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God. So give yourself completely to God as a once for all dedication. He's not suggesting that while you're down here housed in this fallen humanity called your body, that you'll be able to do this perfectly but it ought to be the intent. I like to say that is the new purpose and pattern of your life though you may not ever, well, you will not ever reach perfection at it. But it is the new you.

Then the product of that dedication, this is the second sub point was: do not be conformed to this world. We pointed out how you're not to be focusing on being different than the world. Let me say it again: your focus is not to be, to try to be different from the world. Your focus is to be committed to be true to God and then you will be different from the world. It is a trick of the enemy to get you to react against the error of the world because every time you do that, well, let me check that, every time I've ever seen that a person is focusing on not being like something in the world, they overcompensate and go extreme in the other direction and they're just as bad over here as they were over there. The person says, "Well, I'll not go to the movie theater." That might be a pretty good conviction by the way, there's not much worth seeing but if they make such a big deal out of that, they become proud about it and make an idol out of it and they've got a proud idolatry over here, "I don't go to movie theaters but they go." This sin over here was as bad or worse than that one over there. So you don't focus on not being like the world, you focus on being pleasing to God and that will as a natural byproduct, make you not be conformed to this world. But that's the order of things.

What's the process of all this happening? He says in verse 2, "be being transformed." Perfect passive imperative phrase there. It means a continual action is to be happening and I've spent some amount of energy talking about how you are in the continual process in your Bible study, in your meditation on the word, in your small group Bible study time, in your sitting under the preaching of the word of dislodging and rejecting and kicking out old viewpoints, old conclusions, old attitudes, old concepts and old convictions that violate God's word and then plugging in the new ones. I don't care if you're 98 years old, you must keep doing that. It's a continual process of renewing the mind so that it will have a transforming effect on your lifestyle.

Now, secondly, not only a dedication of self, once for all commit your lives as a living sacrifice to God, let this continual process of not being conformed to this world renewing your mind and you might be a changed person for the glory of God be working in your life to the end that, he continues there, verse 3 of chapter 12, "For through the grace of God," oh, this is the second main point, by the way: the demonstration of service. The demonstration of service, II. Verse 3, "For through the grace of God given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to

think." Immediately he's talking to Christians in the context of living, working, serving, fellowshiping with other Christians and he says first of all, he says something about himself. He says, "By the grace of God given to me now I'm going to give you orders and exhortations." What does Paul mean by the grace of God given to me now do this, this and this? What he means is this: I have been saved by grace not of anything I did and I am in the office of apostle whereby I have authority to guide you and lead you and that didn't have to do anything to do with me. Paul humbly recognizes what he is before God in his standing and the calling and office he holds in service as an apostle is all unmerited favor and grace. So he says, "I want you to know," Paul says, "I get the fact that everything I'm about as a Christian is an unmerited favor and gift from God. It has nothing to do with me being special in any way." So he says, "By the grace of God given to me, I tell each one of you not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think." So sub point number 1 here is: an attitude of humility. That's the starting point. That is the glaring deficit in so many local church congregations, it's just a good dose of Holy Spirit Gospel humility, that ever present Spirit that's willing to defer to another, that's willing to let another have their way, that says, "If it's not clear in Scripture, I don't have to have my way anyway." Just a spirit of humility. I just as your pastor have to commend you. That's very prominent in this church and has for a number of years now and it's a reason why there's been a sweet, sweet peace and unity in our fellowship for a good number of years now. It is just an attitude of Gospel humility.

Now, there's a difference between fleshly imitation humility and true Gospel humility. You can put on a form of humility that's really full of pride whereby you want to show forth how humble you are and how world denying and self-denying you are. Look, be just what you are where God has put you and just give God the glory. Don't try to put on something that's not real to you. I had a brother just today talk about the old truck that I drive. It's kind of rough, to be honest. I may wash it this year, I'm not sure yet. It stinks. It smells like dirt, it really does because when I'm not preaching, I'm playing in dirt usually in some form or fashion. It has 150 somethings thousand miles on it. I've got things to fix on it right now but I'm not driving that old truck to demonstrate that I'm humble. I'm driving that truck because I raised three daughters and married two of them in a really big church and paid for that wedding and I told all three daughters, "If you get scholarships and get your college paid for, I'll buy you new cars and all three of them did it." You add that up and when you add that up, you drive old vehicles. You just be what you are where you are. By the way, I'm getting close to getting another one though. God willing, I'm getting close. But my point is just be what you are where you are because Jesus Christ has saved you and you're just humble and grateful you got in on it.

So he says, "Don't think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think." But then he says continuing, "but think so as to have sound judgment." That's an interesting phrase "sound judgment." He says, "Considering our task and significance, think on how it's all of God, how he called you to this." Sound judgment means you judge your importance based on the truth of God's word. Now, when you base what you are on the truth of God's word, it leaves you quite humbled. As I've told you many times before, I'm not trying to wound your self-esteem, I'm trying to obliterate your self-esteem. I want you to have Christ-esteem. I want you to know that since Christ chose to save this unworthy wretch,

since Christ chose to redeem me on the cross, it's hard to say that without pausing and thinking, "Oh my goodness. Oh my." Since Christ sent the divine Spirit of God to regenerate my heart and enable me to repent of sin and placed faith in Christ, since the Spirit lives in me and I'm sealed unto the day of redemption and glorification, since it's all of him, sound judgment would say, "I'm just glad I get to be here. I'm glad I get to serve God in one of his true local churches." That's sound judgment.

So God leaves no room for us to think more highly of ourselves than that. We're brought forth in iniquity. The Bible says, "In sin we were conceived in our mother's womb," the Bible says, Psalm 51. "We are dead in our trespasses and sins" before Christ apprehended us, Ephesians 2. John 15:5, "Apart from Christ we can do nothing." Not some good things, nothing. 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul summarizes his life and it's a summary for us, "All that I am, I am by the grace of God." Don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think and then by God's grace, now when I use the word "grace," I know there are some clever definitions and they all have some good in them but what I'm saying is grace means God has done for you and enabled you to perform some things that you could not do for yourself or be enabled to perform. Both your position before God is saved and your service for God in his church is all of grace. It's given to you. You didn't earn it, merit it. It's not inherently something of what you are. It's all grace. Both your position and your performance.

So I'm placed in God's family by grace and by grace God has given me a special spiritual gift. I like to say, a spiritual gift mix. Everyone's spiritual gift is like a snowflake, it's very unique. It's a certain percentage of this, a certain percentage of that and it's not just little cookie cutter definitions for your spiritual gift. You may have parts of four or five spiritual gifts. You may be real heavy in one spiritual gift but everyone is different but whatever you were given, it was a gift of grace. Then he says in this verse, verse 3, God gives you a measure of faith to administer the gift. Even the strength and the ability to perform the gift is a gift. Alright? So Paul says, "Why would you think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think?" A. T. Robertson, the southern Baptist Greek scholar says that this idea of having sound judgment and evaluating your worth means just to be in your right mind. He says conceit here is treated as a species of insanity. He says for a child of God to get full of himself, he's acting insane. He's out of reality. He doesn't understand anything.

Now when we exercise our gifts in the Spirit it does not matter if anyone notices us at all. I read a little humorous story about a government official who was entertaining some folks and he was entertaining one high class, sophisticated lady and whatever the officers helper for the banquet, I forgot what the classification is called, what the title was called, he had this lady sit on the left-hand of the host which was not the place of honor, not on the right hand of the host and she spouted off and said to the general or the government official, "I see that your executive here doesn't know how to seat your guests." He retorted, "Well, I found through the years that those who matter don't mind and those who mind don't matter." That's something we need to be reminded of. "Well, I didn't get to teach that class." What does it matter? What does it matter? "I wasn't asked to serve as a deacon." Well brother, serve as a deacon here and nobody is going to know who you are,

you just work and serve. "Well, I wasn't nominated for this." What does it matter? Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. You faithfully serve God and the places of responsibility will find you. It's always been that way. Always been that way.

I thank God for so many of you. You've never had "worldly type positions" in the church but for 10, 20, 30, approaching 40 years, you've just faithfully been here. You have faithfully served. You have faithfully given because you've walked in a Gospel humility. You're a blessing. Our goal of serving in the church is marvelously expressed in this little anonymous poem. It's a little corny maybe but it makes a good point. It says,

"Others may be stained glass of rainbow hue,
But I would be a window pane for the sun to shine through.
A clear glass, a clean glass is what I would be,
Unconcerned with temperament or personality.
I would have the sun shine through me so that my friends would say,
Oh, not what a lovely pane but what a lovely day."

It's good, isn't it? That's what you want. Not that someone would notice your service, that someone would be enamored with your Christ. That's what Paul is getting at. I think it's very interesting that you will again note that chapter 12 where you're exhorted to walk in humble service like this only comes after the weighty, thorough teaching of the Gospel of salvation and that's the real key to healthy, mature church life. People have to be so preached and taught of the glories of salvation that they love Jesus and just want to serve him because if you try to do it any other way, it's a rat race, it's a dog chasing its tail and it doesn't work.

Well, an attitude of humility and then he goes right into an attitude of community. That's B in our outline, II., an attitude of community. Look at verse 4, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function." Now, he uses the human body as the analogy for the local church family or local church body. We often use the phrase here "body life" and that's why because the Bible uses that analogy of us being like the members of a physical body.

Now verse 5, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." So he's saying here that you have this unique community spirit. By the way, this is radically unique. This is not like the community spirit of the social club in town or the service clubs in town or the athletic team in town or the band boosters. That can be fine and that can have a community and a bonding spirit. This spirit is different. Are you hearing me, church? This is not just another form of nice, getting along together folks. This is a God-wrought, Spirit-enabled unity and he says it's a united diversity. You all have different gifts, you do different ministries but you're all interconnected and have an interdependency one to another. Have that attitude of community.

Being related to Christ, listen now, being related to Christ automatically establishes my relationship to others in the body of Christ. You didn't come in and say, "I'm going to try and connect here." No, no, no. God saved you and you connect. That's the way it works

and in Acts 2, the Bible says, "And the Lord added to their number." Not they decided I'm going to add and join up. No, no, no. God adds you to the church. Certainly you have to make the decision to cooperate with God's Spirit but God adds you. We have a little joke that we sometimes say among ourselves in the staff and maybe to other brothers in the church and they'll say, "Well, I'll just tell you what, I quit." Now they mean that tongue in cheek. "I'll just quit." I'll say, "Brother, you can't stop what you didn't start." You don't have a vote in this. "Well, it's hard pastoring and people don't love me all the time and we've had problems." Well, we've had ours here but do you know what? God didn't tell me to pastor while it was fun. You can't stop what you didn't start, brother. And if God placed me here as a preaching pastor, I'm going to stay until God moves me. Now, he might show that by your vote tonight. You may all vote tonight and majority votes and I'm out. I mean, God may do it that way but if God put you somewhere, you stay and be faithful for the Lord. He automatically establishes your relationship with others in the local church when you establish a relationship with him. So this is a spiritual body where there is an interdependence and we all enjoy reciprocal relationships. John Donne wrote in a little poem one time, "No man is an island." That is very true in the local church.

Think of how in debt we are to other individuals in the body of Christ. We're served by faithful hundreds who exercise their gifts in a thousand different ways. I pastor this church but I am phenomenally indebted. I know I'll embarrass her but Miss Martha is sitting back there. Miss Martha poured Jesus into my girls in a play school and so many of you kept them in the nursery and sang Scripture songs and quoted verses with them. And faithful staff members through the years, just walking in the hallway exhorting them about the things of God. My daughter brought this guy home with her the other day from college. I don't know what to think about that. And before he left, a couple of our men went up to him and said, "I know who you are and I'm keeping up with you. Don't make me have to drive to Chattanooga." I like that. "Well, I don't want people in my life like that." Well, go find a social club, this is church where we take care of, look after, shepherd one another.

We were talking at lunch today about how if your neighbor knows you spank your children, they can turn you in and you could possibly have your children taken away. Honest to God's truth. When I was a little boy, the neighbors were expected to spank you for your parents. Amen? Do you remember those days? "Now, if he acts up, you just spank him good and I'll spank him again when he gets home." What happened to that day? That's why we're so warped and messed up I guess. How did I get on that? What am I talking about?

I'm talking about the body of Christ caring for each other, looking out after each other, being involved in each other's lives. Now look, I didn't vote for that. I didn't sign up for that. God signed me up. I'm stuck with you and you're stuck with me. We're stuck with each other unless God does something different. I have no patience with these church hoppers, just hopping to this church. One guy wrote a book, "Stop dating the church." Just go date one for a while and try it on and if that doesn't fit your fancy, just go date another one and just hop around. Look, find a true church that's glory of God focused, Christ honoring and Bible saturated and purposing to live out the principles of the word

of God and latch onto that and dive into that and bind to that and say, "I'm here and I'm not leaving unless God through clear Scripture shows me something is out of whack and I ought to go." Stop dating the church. I'm going to say it, don't treat the body of Christ like your whore. She's not, she's to be precious and cherished and loved and protected and die for her if need be. I'm going to tell you, there are going to be some church hoppers if they make it to heaven who answer to God for their hop skipping around and just playing church here and there.

But how indebted we are to the faithful hundreds. Somebody kept your child, your grandchild, your great-grandchild, in the nursery. Somebody organized staff and developed all the upkeep on all the buildings and facilities. Somebody has taught your child at camps and retreats and Sunday school and church training. Over and over and over we could go. Somebody cooked the hot dogs and cleaned up afterwards when your child heard the Gospel clearly for the first time. How indebted we are to one another, amen? I want to tell you, that is precious to me. The souls of my children and my grandchildren are precious to me. That's why I don't need any nonsense in this church ministry. I don't want my children to learn up how to play creative stuff in church. I want my children to know God and I can say by the glory of God as my girls have grown up, I see strong and clear evidence of a true and mature devotion to God and the things of God, not because they are coerced because their daddy is the pastor but because they found the same God their daddy knows. I want that for your children and so many of you have experienced that too.

Well, not only an attitude of humility and an attitude of community but we ought to be active in opportunity. That means the opportunity of serving and ministering to one another. Active in opportunity. Look at verse 6, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly," and then he starts with prophecy. Now, he's describing spiritual gifts here but he's not describing them that you might understand the specifics about the gifts. He's actually just giving just sort of a brief, broad category of what the gifts might look like. I'm not for giving some real hard and fast precise definitions of each spiritual gift. That's not what the text emphasizes in any of the three places where the Scripture gifts are listed. It's just not that simplistic so these are major categories that may have a variety of subdivisions in them, alright?

First of all, prophecy in verse 6, the last part, "if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith." The scholars tell us that it's likely and I believe it's most likely, actually what he's saying, "prophecy in agreement with the faith." Did you hear that? Prophecy means, and he's not talking about receiving divine revelations from heaven. Only a few people had that gift in the founding of the church before the Canon of the Scripture was completed. We're not going to come in here on a Sunday meeting and me having studied the finished counsel of God preparing all week to preach to you and somebody jump up and say, "I have a word from God. Everybody listen." Do you know what I'm going to say? "Sir," most likely ma'am, "you be seated. The elders will talk to you after the service and hear what you think God has said." That's never happened here but that's the way we would handle it if it did happen. Prophecy here means you're to prophesy according to the faith. As Jude said, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." It means the body of

truth God has finished and given to us. I'm not looking for another word from heaven, I've got the completed word from heaven until the Word returns, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let me go on. The second one is service. He says in verse 7, "if service, in his serving." This service could be translated ministry or practical help since interesting he has serving in between prophesying according to the faith and teaching. In fact, I think it's probably the point that the preaching of the word ministry always requires some associates and some assistants. You see this in Paul's ministry. Everywhere that Paul went, he had two, three, four associates. He had more than that but he kept at least one with him it seems like all the time except for on some rare occasions during imprisonments and things when he couldn't practically have anybody. I understand that well. We have had seasons here when we didn't have hardly any staff and I was the go-to guy for everything. I'll tell you, I don't want to do that again. It's a very, very difficult thing so I think he gives some people serving ministry supports to the ministry of the word and he says, "If that's what you are, then get with it. Be faithful to it." As a matter fact, all of this is imperative. Every one of these is as if Paul is saying, "If that's your gift, get with it. Get with it. Go on. Don't hold back. Serve. Go. Go. Get with it." "Well, I'm going to pray about it." You know, some of you need to quit praying and start working. You're kind of like, who was it, I can't remember the story. I'll go on.

The third one is teaching. Teaching. "Or he would teaches, in his teaching." The idea of teaching here is making things plain. Now, every preacher is a teacher but not every teacher is called to preach and that's what he means here. Aren't we blessed, I am abundantly but some pastors would be insecure about this, we have dozens and dozens and dozens of men in this church who are very able expositional teachers. I glory in that. It's a wonderful thing and how wonderful a gift that is. Jesus was a teacher along with being a preacher. Paul was a teacher along with being a preacher and so this is a wide and blessed field that may be with children, it may be with students, it may be with senior adults. In 1,000 ways the word may be taught. Now listen to me, but always under the office of prophecy that is making sure everything is according to the faith. We have not, we do not, we will not have teachers going off on their own tangents. Not because you're not wise and able, it's because the preaching pastor primarily and the elders in general have a biblical command from God, now listen, here's the command in Titus to elders, to guard sound doctrine. Look well, look well to the church and the affairs of the church is what the Bible is would tell pastors to do.

It means we need to keep a watch over and a guidance over. Why? Because it says you'll give a higher account. If you teach something wrong in your class, you will give an account but I will give a higher account for you teaching it. Do you understand that? There is a humbling, sobering responsibility and I'm convinced pastors don't tremble enough about the awesomeness. Look, your eternal soul depends on the truth being properly delivered and that responsibility lands heavily on the elders and heaviest on the preaching elder. I take that very, very, very seriously. So even though honestly I mean this, I could turn scores of you loose and just say, "Hey, teach what you want to teach." I wouldn't do that. I would rather say, "Sure you have some freedoms but we want to oversee and guide in everything that's taught." Now unfortunately and this is true in the

majority of churches, pastors don't have any choice. If they tried to be a real pastor and oversee the teaching in the church, people would rebel because actually they've got a lot of little churches out there with their own pastors which does not please God. You don't have that spirit because you've got a mature Gospel humility but we had it here one time. Those people left.

Verse 8 gives us the fourth gift here, "or he who exhorts, in his exhortation." Now the gift of exhortation is that one who can encourage folks to put shoe leather in the teaching or preaching that they've heard. They kind of come alongside and put their arm around somebody and say, "Let's do this. Come on. I'll help you. I'll encourage you. Come on, you can do this. Come on, you can do right." If you do biblical counseling, you do this all the time. You tell them the truth and you say, "Come on now, you can do it. God will give you the grace to do it. Now your attitude is wrong and I love you but look, you can get this right. Come on, let's go on for the glory of God. Let's get this fixed and go forward." So imperatively he's saying over and over, "Get with it. Go. Do this."

Then he has giving in verse 8, "he who gives, with liberality." I do think that this does include financial giving. There are some people who just have a unique joy in giving generously to God's work. I don't know where that comes from they just do. As a matter fact, it's up to them to help pace the rest of the church. Did you know that? There's just a sense in which some people when they get out in joy and support God's work, it kind of gives the rest permission to do what they kind of wanted to do anyway. But some folks they just do it. They do it. We've got men in this church that literally come up to me and say, "Pastor, do we need anything?" And I know and I don't say much because if I said it, they'd write a check right there and give it to me for the church. That kind of spirit is in the church and Paul says, "If that's your spirit, be ready and be willing to go for it." When God gives you that opportunity or when it's the right time. It's not always the time to do that but when it's the time, we ought to do that. Now, I think it involves more than finances but it certainly includes finances.

"He who leads," he says in verse 8, you could say "manages" here. We have people who just God uses for leadership in the church. He said, "do that with diligence." In other words, be faithful. Be mature in the way that you lead out in things. You might be an elder, a Sunday school teacher, a division director, a staff member, children's worker, children's church worker. Whatever it is, lead. Get with it. Go. Do it. That's what Paul is saying.

Now mercy, well thank God. Thank God there are people with mercy. I need those kinds of people around me. The last part of verse 8, "he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Isn't that kind of interesting? Actually the word "cheerful" means "hilarity." Here is what he means: if you just have a propensity to want to care and encourage that brother or sister who is suffering or struggling, he says, when you find that opportunity, consider it a treasure to get to do it. Cheerfulness, it means consider it a precious and unique gift that I get to help to take care of that person. In other words, greet every opportunity for a merciful deed as a great find that makes you very happy. I say again as your pastor, I'm deeply blessed by the unrelenting testimonies of those who are hurting saying, "I'm

telling you, you just can't believe how my small group took care of me and loved me and cared for me and encouraged me." Brothers and sisters, if we don't have that, we're not Christians. I commend you because that's unique but really you're just normal. Do you get that? You're just acting the way Christians are supposed to act, it's just that most churches have a lot of folks that don't act like Christians. Now, we've got some that can do better, don't misunderstand me but I see that and it is such a blessing.

Once again, this listing of spiritual gifts that Paul is saying, "Get with it. Start serving. Take advantage of those opportunities out there." These are not hard and fast defined lines. These are just the seven areas, if you would, that cover the main lines of service and activity in the church. No one gift is restricted to one person and each person has more than one gift.

Now real quickly I'm going to give you something that in numerous sermons and numerous times I've given you. "Pastor, how do I know what to do in the church? How do I know where my service is?" Real quick. Are you listening? Number 1: is there a need that God has made you aware of? Now, starting in your small group, that's the way we're organized to take care of each other, is there a need God has made you aware of? I don't care what it is. Now, don't worry about it being your spiritual gift. That's not where your focus is. Your focus is on what needs to get done. Is there a need God has made me aware of? James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Number 2: will you do it? Will you do what Paul says? There ought to be a decision point, line in the sand, "My body is a living and holy sacrifice unto the Lord to the end of honoring and glorifying and serving my Lord in my local church body." Will you do it?

Number 3: does the leadership affirm you doing it? Now, your immediate leadership would be your small group leader. You're to honor your small group leader and why is that? Because they kind of keep watch over the whole thing. You say, "Do you know what? I think I'll perform this ministry in this area of my class." Well, it could be that two other people are already planning to do that so your small group leader will say, "That's wonderful. That's a great attitude but I really need you to do this over here." So don't be arrogant and independent spirited and you're not but if that slips in, get rid of it and just ask your small group leader, "Can I do this area? Can I perform this ministry?" They might pass out with joy and when they get back up, they'll talk to you about it.

1 Corinthians 14:32 is a good contextual reference because it's in the context of Paul teaching spiritual gifts to the Corinthian church. Listen, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets." In other words, God doesn't come over you and give you a word and an empowerment to do a certain gift and you have to do it because the Spirit is subject to the prophet, that means you. In other words, God is saying, "The spiritual gift in you is under your control. It doesn't control you." Did you hear that? Your spiritual gift is under your control, it doesn't control you. In other words, you don't have a union card. You don't come to Brother David and say, "In small groups, here's what I do. You see it on my union card and that's all I do right there." No, you come to Brother David and say,

"What do I need to do? What needs to be done? If it doesn't fit my spiritual gift, I'll do it until somebody with that gift starts doing it." Amen?

Do you know why? Are you listening to your pastor? Do you remember what my first job at Grace Life Church was? How many would say, "I remember what your first job was at Grace Life." Raise your hand. My first job was carrying sheet rock up stairs in the old auditorium. Tuesday night work night, I wasn't a church member, I just showed up to work and the pastor said, "You showed up to work. Here, carry those sheets of sheet rock up the steps." Me and Jonathan Edwards, my college roommate, carried those sheets of sheet rock up the steps and that sheet rock is still up there, I guess, unless Brother Bill has torn it down and done something else, it's still up there. I want you to know that my spiritual gift is not carrying sheet rock. My spiritual gift is preaching and teaching.

Now listen, I have a bathroom in my office. I'm the only one, I think Brother Tom had one in his old office and then we moved you so we you don't have one anymore. I'm the only one. I have my own personal bathroom and with a wheelbarrow and a pick ax and a shovel, I dug the ditch through the concrete that ran the water to the bathroom. Did you know that? Don't you feel wonderful about your pastor now? Do you know why I did it? It had to get done. Money was tight. We were trying to build this thing and get it going. We bought that skating rink building and me and Bob Pittman who was the senior pastor dug that ditch. Now you know Bob Pittman. I love Brother Bob Pittman but if you're going to work with Brother Bob, you're going to do most of it. I mean, that's just the way it works. I'm teasing but I remember digging that ditch out. I don't have the spiritual gift of digging waterline ditches through concrete floors but it needed to get done.

Do you know what I did? I did 1001 things in student work that did not crank my tractor. Back in those days, Pam and I did all the cleaning afterwards and there sweet folks always to help but there wasn't the kind of hired custodial staff that we got later. We did it all. Why? Because it needed to get done. Do you know what? Listen, do you know what God was doing and I still need some of this and you still need some of this, God develops your character before he places you in your final place of service and you need the character development of being a servant in ways that don't quite fit your gift so that when you do get into that area of your giftedness, you handle it rightfully and with a humble spirit and a God glorifying spirit.

So for eight years here, you call him up and ask him, if Bob Pittman told me something to do, I said, "Yes Sir. That's what I'm going to do." He had an office upstairs. I often ran up the stairs and got his coat before we went somewhere because he needed his coat. That's why I don't have much patience with these young guys that are full of themselves and full of ego because I know I needed that and we all need that and God will put you in places of service that don't quite crank your tractor, don't quite fit you because you need to learn to do what God's church needs. Then when you show God you'll do that, then he'll give you those places that match your giftedness that will be a great blessing and a reward to your heart and life. By the way, will be the greatest blessing to the body of Christ. Listen, are you listening to your pastor? Your gift is not about you. Study the Scriptures. Every time the gifts are taught, it's to the end of blessing those in your church, not you. Your

gift is not given to bless you, it's given to bless others. I just want to be transparent. You know I love to preach and teach. God has called me to do this but there are some times on Sunday if I preached and taught, I want to go jump off the bridge. It just wears you out. It's exhausting. It's weighty. And you may feel worn out sometimes. I know brother Noah Wright used to serve here and used to say, "I've never seen an overworked Baptist. I've seen some underpowered ones but never seen an overworked one." And that's probably true of a lot of us. It's not always a blessing. It's not always going to fire you up. It's not always going to be exciting. It's the body of Christ. It's for the glory of God. That's worth it. That's what Paul's saying. "Get on with it. Find out what area you can serve in and get on with it."

All right, I was going to give you 4 things. Number 1, was there a need that God has made you aware of? Number 2, will you do it? Number 3, does the leadership affirm you doing it? Number 4, just do it. Just do it. In the old world when the king wanted to spread his edict, he would have couriers. Often they would run from post to post, station to station, if you will. Then of course, they used horses. And word got back, I forget which king of England it got back to but word got back to the king that a number of his message carriers were stopping off at the taverns and were quite negligent at getting the message out so the king passed a decree that, "Any of my messengers found in taverns when they are supposed to be carrying my messages will be hung." It solved the problem rather quickly and so they would put on the king's edict and these guys got to be instead of called runners they got to be called the post because they were the guys who stood at the post and the guy brought them and then they went to the next post. Haste posthaste. Have you heard that before? Haste posthaste and then they'd have a little phrase out beside it, "for your life." You'd better show the king you didn't stop, you didn't delay and you didn't fiddle around, you got with it. Your life is on the line.

Well, Paul's not saying our life is on the line. Jesus has saved us and we are his forever and we're kept but there is a sense in Paul's imperative tone here that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ after 11 chapters of the glories of pure salvation, how can you have any last attitude than haste posthaste. Get busy serving in the body of Christ. Now, if you're already serving, praise God. Thank God for you. If you're not, Lord, is there a need you've made me aware of? Will you do it? Does the leadership affirm you doing it? Just get with it.

Let's stand together, alright?